

It's An Inside Job: The New Year is Upon Us

Rabbi Deborah J. Brin

Hope

“Let every person meditate in his heart on all the deeds he has done. If there are some good deeds among them, let him take it upon himself to add to them; if his deeds were evil, let him regret them in his heart, and let him take it upon himself to repent of them, and let him prepare himself to receive the New Year in sanctity and purity. Let him look ahead and hope that the coming year will be good, for God conducts His world ever more beautifully.” *Reb Nachman of Breslov*

Attitude & Perspective

1. “I know that my suffering begins whenever my mind, for whatever reason ... becomes confused. ... It tells itself stories, alternatively angry (‘This isn’t fair!’) or pitiful (‘Poor me!’) or frightening (‘I can’t *stand* it if things aren’t different!’)... I continue to suffer, stumbling around in stories of discontent, until I catch myself, and stop, and allow myself to know, and deeply feel, that I am frightened or confused or disappointed or angry or tired or ashamed or sad — that “I’m in pain!” Then my own good heart, out of compassion, takes care of me. **It all happens when I am able to say to myself** (I honestly do use these very words), **“Sweetheart, you are in pain.** Relax. Take a breath. Let’s pay attention to what is happening. Then we’ll figure out what to do.” *Happiness is an Inside Job Sylvia Boorstein [bold added].*
2. “Make for me an opening as wide as the eye of a needle, and I shall make an opening for you as wide as the door of a chamber”. B.T. Yoma 38b
3. “If you believe that you are able to ruin things, then believe that you are able to fix them.” *Reb Nachman of Braslav The Chambers of the Palace: Teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav*
4. “There is nothing so whole as a broken heart.” *Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgensztern of Kotzk, better known as the Kotzker Rebbe*
5. “Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said, ‘in the coming world, they will not ask me: “Why were you not Moses?” They will ask me: “Why were you not Zusya?”’ *Martin Buber Tales of the Hassidim: Early Masters*
6. “Days are scrolls. You write on them what you want to be remembered.” Bahya Ibn Pakuda
7. Even when I walk in the midst of trouble, you are giving me life. Psalm 138:7
8. I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life! Deut. 30:19
9. "There is a design in living things. Their shapes, forms, ability to live, all have meaning. . . We must not let ourselves get caught up in the results of an overefficient society, rapidly moving at a rate and in a way that to most Indians represents panic." *Jemez Pueblo: On the entrance wall of the museum*
10. “The accomplished Zen cook is something of an alchemist . . . For example, anger is considered a poison when it is self-motivated and self-centered. But take that attachment to self out of anger, and the same emotion becomes the fierce energy of determination, which is a very positive force. Take the self-centered aspect out of greed, and it becomes the desire to help. Drop the self-orientation from ignorance, and it becomes a state of unknowing that allows new things to arise.” *Instructions to the Cook: A Zen Master's Lessons in Living a Life That Matters Bernard Glassman and Rick Fields*

Teshuvah/Repentance/Turning

1. “At this season, we face the fortunate imprecision of the meaning of *teshuva* – is it turning or returning? Are we moving forward to where we need to be, or trying to get back to where we once were?” *Personal communication, Rabbi Richard Hirsh*
2. Turn* us toward you, Yah, and we shall return. *Lamentations 5:21*
[*Rabbi Shefa Gold translates ‘hashivaynu ... v’nashuvah’ as turn, return and be turned]
3. “Sin constitutes a sort of spiritual pathology; just as many diseases of the flesh constitute physical pathology, as when the tissues cease to behave in a normal fashion and cells begin to grow wildly, so sin is a sign of spiritual pathology. The conclusion to be drawn from this supposition is of great significance in understanding repentance [t’shuvah]. If sin is a sickness, then it also has the characteristics of sickness. What is characteristic of sickness? Suffering.”
On Repentance Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik
4. The very first principle of t’shuvah is knowing that the process of repentance is a gift from God. “Among the Blessed One’s kindnesses to His creations is having prepared for them the way to rise from the pit of their deeds and to escape the trap of their offenses ...there is a sanctuary to which [they] can flee, the sanctuary of repentance ...it is within [their] power to emerge from the turmoil ...”
Rabbenu Yonah Gerondi Gates of Repentance
5. “Do not content yourself with asking forgiveness for the evil you may have done. This is not repentance; this is not what is required of you. Instead, you should regard the faults as something constructive, like the beginning of a new and beautiful story. Put more succinctly, come to grips not with your failing but with your past that gave birth to it.” *The Strife of the Spirit Adin Steinsaltz*
6. “There are three prerequisites for turning: eyes that see, ears that listen, and an understanding heart. If you have all three, you are ready to turn and be healed.”
(attributed to A.J. Heschel based on Isaiah 6:10)
7. “The sign of complete Teshuvah is when the same transgression comes to the hand of the transgressor ... and he/she avoids it.” *BT Yoma 86b*

The New Year

Rabbi Deborah J. Brin excerpted from “Rav Lach — You Have So Much! Erev Rosh HaShannah sermon 2016/5777 based on Dt. 3:23 – 27

“This Rosh HaShannah, as we prepare ourselves for the New Year and symbolically for all of the transitions in our lives, let us remember the lessons we have learned from Moses.

1. Be open to the unexpected opportunities that arise. Turn aside and look at the marvelous sights. Stop and look at the bush that is perpetually ablaze and never turns to ash.
2. Remember that Moses, who required Aaron to be his spokesperson, became remarkably eloquent and self-expressed, as he grew older.
3. At any moment be willing to implore God and the Universe for Divine Grace – that flow of unmerited positive energy for us and through us out to the world.
4. Climb the mountain. Go to a place where perspectives will change.

5. Yearning can give way to connection and acceptance. Drop the expectations of where we think we should be and notice where we actually are.
6. We have so much! [Rav Lach]. Things are not as they appear to be.”