

Turning in *Teshuvah* - *Nitzavim*

¹Now it shall come to be: when there come upon you all these things, the blessing and the curse that I have set before you, and you **turn to** your heart among all the nations where YHVH your God has thrust you away, ²and **you return to** YHVH and hearken to God's voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your being, ³YHVH your God will **turn** your fortunes, and have compassion on you; God will **return** to collect you from all the peoples wherein YHVH your God has scattered you...⁶YHVH your God will circumcise your heart and descendants' hearts, to love YHVH your God with all your heart and with all your being, in order that you may live...⁸And you, (if) you **return** and listen to the voice of YHVH and observe all God's commandments that I command you today: ⁹YHVH your God will make you excel in all the doings of your hands, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your animals, and in the fruit of your soil, for well-being, indeed, YHVH will **return to** delighting in you, for well-being, as S/He delighted in your ancestors—¹⁰if you listen to the voice of YHVH your God, by keeping God's instructions and laws, what is written in this torah (book of instruction)—if you **return** to YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your being. (Deuteronomy chapter 30)

1) When there come upon you all these things, the blessing and the curse that I have set before you, and you turn to your heart...In truth, curse alone cannot be, because in every measure of justice/harshness (*din*) there is also a spark of compassion (*rachamim*). Yet even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them..." (Lev. 26:44). Even in the suffering of dispersion there is *tzedakah*, and in the worst disaster—a seed of liberation is within it. And precisely at the most difficult time there is a need to feel and to see that point of blessing that is contained within it, and to pay attention to understand the ways of YHVH. "And it shall be, when the blessing and the curse come upon you—you shall turn to your heart." (R. Yehudah Eiger in *Itturei Torah*)

- **Do you have an example of this from your own life - a moment of finding the "blessing" within the "curse," the "seed of liberation," of redemption, within a dark time?**
- **The teaching seems to suggest a process for discovering this—what might it be?**

2) And you, (if) you **return** and listen to the voice of YHWH: A teaching from Rebbe Shlomo of Radomsk: It is already written (in an earlier verse) "And you shall return to YHVH"—meaning that you've done *teshuvah*. If so, why does it need to say a second time, "You shall return/do *teshuvah*?" Because, before a person does *teshuvah*, s/he isn't even aware of his/her wrongdoing, and only after the first steps of *teshuvah* does s/he begin to grasp the impact of what s/he has done—what the transgression is, who was affected, etc. And then s/he goes up from level to level, and at each new level, his/her *teshuvah* increases and deepens. This then explains the repetition of the word *shuv*—turn—it points to the continual and deeper levels of *teshuvah*. (R. Joshua Sheinfeld in *Itturei Torah*)

- **How do we take the first steps of *teshuvah* before we even realize we've done something wrong? What is the process he is describing here?**

3) God will circumcise your heart and your descendants' hearts so that you will love Adonai, with your whole self—so that you may live:

Verses 30: 1-10 include the Hebrew verb meaning “return,” *shuv*, seven times. It is appropriate as we are in the month of Elul... the time of *teshuvah*. When there is repetition in Torah, it is not by accident... here it is to emphasize a point. Here, ***v'shavta ad*** (in verse 2) means ***turn around toward*** and ***tashuv el*** (verse 10) means ***return to***. This variation reflects two stages in the process of repentance. The first stage is a realization that our behavior is wrong and requires a change of direction. This is ***turning toward*** God. The second stage is coming into the presence of God as the result of one's new way of life, ***returning to*** God. (*Malbim*)

Looking inward and looking outward: that's what we do on Rosh Hashanah. We stop long enough to look at the world and the year that has passed. But we also take the time to look at ourselves. If we can understand who we are and what's expected of us, then we can begin to change, to return. Every change begins within; it must start deep within our hearts. When we open our hearts, circumcise them, we are able experience a greater Existence of Being. This is the true meaning of Teshuvah.

(Rabbi Sandy Roth)

- **How do you understand the word “teshuvah”? What do you feel you are “returning” or, or “turning” towards? What's God got to do with it?**