

**VaYeLech                      And He Went                      The Triple Lesson of  
Repentance**

**Torah:**    Deut. 31:1-30

(1). **Four plus three equals victory.** I hate transitions where major re-adjustments have to be made and new challenges have to be faced – and that greatest of all shibboleths – the learning curve – The only permanent stability we can ever know in this life is His triple assurance: walk Himself with us, never leave, nor forsake (when the going gets rough). This call for a double, two fold response: be strong and take courage (positive) and do not be afraid or terrified (defensive). At Shabbat Shuvah, we need to return to our spiritual roots and let three plus four equal victory in our lives.

(2-4). 10-13. **A sabbatical seminar with a year long project.** Read this Law (Deut.) before whole community so they would learn to **fear** (know both the requirements and the consequences) and **observe** (fulfill rituals and festivals) and **practice** (apply principles in personal life situations). This was never done in Israel until the time of Nehemiah - Neh. 8:17)

**Haftarah:**    Hos. 14:2-10; Mic. 7:18-20; Joel 2:15-27

(5) Hos. 14:2 **Return and become an offering.** Repentance is neither bribing, nor plea bargaining, it is double returning for three plus two. Double returning means forsaking the place you should not be in, in order to return to the place you should be in. What does this place look like? It is three: Forgiveness, acceptance, praise, plus two: a rededication to **observe** and to **practice**. Our spiritual condition is the only feature of our lives which really concerns the Father of spirits – the rest are incidentals, which we determine to relate to so that our spiritual condition prevails and brings light and salt and the sweet scent of His presence to the changing circumstances of our lives.

(6a) Joel 2:21 **He will bless the ways and means** by which we earn our bread and prosper. First He will smash our enemy to smithereens and then He will restore the sources of our livelihood, when we return to Him and learn the triple lesson of repentance (Fear, observe and practice).

6b) Micah 7:19 Repentance has **an undefeatable game plan:** Return, stomp and toss, and walk.

**Brit Chadashah:**    Rom. 10:1-3 (L); 1-17 (F)

(7)10:4 **How do you get the point?** Return (believe – how? Fear, observe and practice) and be justified (made righteous without spot, stain or stink). Amen.

**Psalm 65** Jewish hero: **Nehemiah** (who returned to a desolated Holy Land with the only key to rebuilding – the Torah b' Moshe)

**To Shuvah or not teshuvah, that really is the question!** (II Cor. 7:11)

The quality of true repentance is not measured by the severity with which we attack our lives, on a holy crusade to pay for our stupidity by giving ourselves a good whooping. While I may admire the simplicity which prevails in Amish communities, I question their obsession with it. When I went to Bible School and seminary, I was told that many people lost their faith by studying too much, especially those who studied Greek. Instead of wasting my time, I was told that the believer's life ought to be as simple as possible: just believe the Bible and spend your time in as many services as you could fit into your week (and as many special meetings as you could fit into your year, along with as many special teachings as you could fit into your cassette player and as many Christian radio programs as you could find on your radio) and have absolutely no cultural contact with the world (including sporting events and public performances of any kind).

Now, I have gone to some pretty intense training programs and have survived some pretty tough and abusive attempts to break me and turn me into a zombie for the L-rd. No laughter, no colour, and certainly no critical thinking (philosophical speculation) – sort of the parroting version of: "Jesus said it, I believe it and that's good enough for me".

Well that kind of mental and social abuse has really got nothing to do with true repentance. I don't know how many strong willed young people I have seen broken and squashed until they could not stand it any more, and then turn on the abusive version of the faith they were forced to endure and want nothing more with the L-rd or the Bible. There was no real sin in their lives, there was no real desire to lapse into idolatry or fornication – they just objected to the confusion which equated conformity with holiness. Unless you learn to think and choose for yourself, you are not a disciple, you're just a spiritual groupie, living in a cultural ghetto until you grow up.

In my Torah meditation I talked about the triple lesson of repentance and I want to briefly describe how we can return (Shuvah) to a healthy, biblical teshuvah (repentance), one that will not beat us up and fill us with guilt and frustration – and one which will also not allow us to slip into a carnal lifestyle (lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life). But one which will equip us with the painful, but necessary task of koshering our lives and keeping them clean. True repentance desires to be clean, and growing towards spiritual fulfillment, it wants nothing to do with the abusive self beatings which leave us exhausted and cringing, full of self hatred and self loathing. Part of what true repentance does is to teach acceptance and empowering.

2 Cor 7:11 is the teshuvah reaction we need, whenever we have wandered away from the ways of the L-rd in our lives. Everything we do and allow into our lives needs to be the product of a biblically based conviction, where we are continually coming to terms with our own passage through the changing circumstances of our lives. We need to avoid the bullying where we need to be bruised in order to walk with the L-rd. We want fulfillment, freedom and a life centered around good strong spiritual disciplines – which are really just choices that have become habits, and which we will change and modify whenever they cease to serve our life's greatest task and mission – the straight and narrow.

My discipleship series: 5 -5 -5 (five beliefs for the head, five assurances for the heart and five disciplines for the life – with an additional five covenants for the generations) describes a (w)holistic approach to spiritual health and vitality. Some of us need to do some personal house cleaning this year. Some of us also need to learn not to quit smashing up the house and turning into a barracks. As we go through these ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, let us learn to practice true repentance.

Sometimes that is going to mean going through our lives with a baseball bat to drive our murder, theft, fornication, gossip and greed, or any other golden calves which are nothing more than different versions of spiritual cancer, choking our lives and filling them with horror and death. Sometimes that is going to mean learning to exercise your conscience and build your personal choices into healthy spiritual habits – where you do what you do and don't do what you don't do, because you have done your homework, not because someone else's convictions have bullied you into submission.

I go to movies, I read all kinds of literature and I like to dance and celebrate. You may not agree with my video collection or with the content of my personal library (of books or music), and maybe you may find my humour a little off the wall, and I can respect that. As long as you realize that in matters of conscience, it is conscience that matters, not conformity. There are three steps in repentance and only three: returning (to be forgiven and accepted), which leads to observance (festival cycle, kosher and the community imperatives of our shul and our movement, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile) and to practice (applying 10 -10 -5 to every response to every situation in the changing circumstance of our lives.

Repentance is not for the faint hearted, and it is certainly not for the bullies. Personal convictions need to be both personal and biblical – so some of you need to learn to loosen up, and chill, while others of you need to learn to do some house cleaning, where you build returning, observing and practicing into your lives. We should have some pretty good discussion at Havdallah tonight, at least I hope so. Shabbat shalom Shuvah. Amen.