

*Days of Selichot, 5765*

## A Letter for the New Year 5766 from Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh

*To all the sons and daughters of Israel, wherever they dwell, may G-d be upon you,*

As the New Year enters, we wish the entire Jewish people a *ketivah vachatimah tovah*. May you be inscribed and sealed for a good and sweet year, both materially and spiritually. May this goodness appear clearly and openly in your lives.

The upcoming year is the 5766th year since the creation of the world. It is commonly referred to as the year 766, תשס"ו, leaving out the thousands. This year will signify the spiritual mode of the Divine service of "returning [to G-d] from love" (תשובה מאהבה), as the numerical value of this phrase in Hebrew is 766.

The sages explain that when one returns to the Almighty from fear (be it fear of punishment or fear of other consequences of one's negative actions) then transgressions committed purposely are treated as accidents. But, when one returns from love of the Almighty, then negative actions are spiritually transformed into acts of merit. Chassidut adds that the merit in these re-interpreted acts is even greater than the merits in positive actions. So great is the power of return (*teshuvah*) from love that not only does it cleanse one's own self, but it even draws enough Divine light into reality so as to uplift that which one has made desolate by one's negative actions even entering into the sin itself and transforming/rectifying it.

Fear (even awe) shrivels us. Shunning the negative because of fear only serves us to escape that which is wrong, in order to save ourselves. But, the wrong itself remains as is and the situation remains blemished and continues to veil the Divine light that permeates all. The feelings of deflation and tension that accompany an attitude of fear lead us on a "shorter, but longer path." Our sins are indeed forgiven, but we remain unable to penetrate the inner core of our being and our environment, unable to rectify its very foundations.

On the other hand, when returning to G-d from love, we are filled with a positive attitude that spreads and contagiously affects everyone around us. We can no longer be satisfied with our own rectification and well-being but seek the same for all of reality (especially those parts that we have hurt by our transgressions). The expansive, calm, and patient nature of one who is motivated by love leads us down the "longer, shorter path." Though it is more difficult to attain, love allows us to penetrate the inner core of reality, revealing its intimate bond with the Almighty's Presence, and rectifies our transgressions from their very foundation, until our transgressions are transformed into merits.

The flame of returning to G-d from love rises of its own accord. The flame of love comprises three aspects: "And you shall love... with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your might." The Hebrew word for "flame," שְׁלֵהֶבֶת is equal in value to these three aspects: בְּכַל לִבְבְּךָ, וּבְכַל נַפְשְׁךָ, וּבְכַל מְאֹדְךָ. This flame also consists of the three types of essential love: Love of the Almighty, love of the Torah, and the love of the Jewish people (with the love of our holy Land serving as the all-inclusive vessel that can hold all three together at once, as explained in length elsewhere).

The aspect of love described as "with all of your heart" is itself the love of the Almighty that lies hidden in the heart of every Jew. This love is expressed in prayer—"the toil of the heart"—during which all of our emotions focus on the Almighty alone. Following the sages explanation

that "with all your heart" means including both inclinations, both our positive and negative emotions can be elevated to focus on Him.

With the aspect of love described as "with all of your soul," the love of the Almighty spreads to include the love of the Torah, in the study of which, we invest all of our mind and awareness. "Your soul" refers to the *sefirah* of knowledge (*da'at*), as in the verse "Even without knowledge [*da'at*], the soul is not good." Self-sacrifice in our everyday lives is expressed mostly in our commitment to the Torah and its commandments, like the Ten Martyrs—lead by Rabbi Akiva—who were "convicted for matters of the Torah," and sacrificed their lives for it.

The aspect of love described as "with all of your might," refers to love spreading so as to include your entire reality and *whatever*, or *whoever* passes through it. In this vein, the sages expound that: "With *whatever* measure G-d relates to you, you should verily acknowledge Him." By this same exposition regarding *whoever*, we come to love every Jew as part of "one nation in the land" (and thus, we include the love of the Land of Israel in this love). Indeed, only by committing to the well-being and rectification of all of reality can we come to the consummate return out of love, including the love of the entire Jewish people. Then we are able to implement another of the sages' interpretations: "'with all of your might,' meaning: with all of your wealth." By spreading our wealth in a charitable manner, providing for the needs of our fellow Jews, and sustaining their proper Torah-based way of life, we enact the Alter Rebbe's interpretation of the verse: "a person would give all that he has in order to live [i.e., in order to return to G-d]."

The path of love and loving-kindness advocated by Chassidut directs us to return to the Almighty from love; from the higher form of return that fully heals transgression: "And his heart will understand, and he will return, and he will be healed:"

- ♦ "And his heart will understand," refers to the love of the Almighty that is aroused in your heart by meditating on the Oneness of G-d in the first verse of the *Shema*.
- ♦ "And he will return," refers to the total investment of all of your soul, your mind, in the study of the Torah, as per the sages' prescription that one who wishes to return, "If he normally studies one page, should study two; if he normally studies a chapter, he should study two."
- ♦ "And he will be healed," refers to "with all of your might," dedicating all of your spiritual and physical energy and all of your material possessions to healing and rectifying your reality.

May we merit this year to spread the teachings of Chassidut, to fully return from our faulty ways, and misguided beliefs, as individuals and as a community, and renew our love for the Almighty, for His Torah, for His people, and for His land. Then, this year will indeed be the year of our "return [to G-d] from love" (*תשובה מאהבה* = 766), which will bring redemption to the world—the true and complete redemption lead by our righteous Mashiach. Indeed, "the Torah has testified: the Jewish people will return at the end of their dispersion, and they will immediately be redeemed."

With blessings,

Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh

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