

Dear Chavraya,

We are coming so close now to the Days of Awe, also known as the *Aseret Y'mei T'shuvah/the Ten Days of Turning*. There is something expectant in the air and in our selves. Striving to return to wholeness in all the facets of our lives, this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Nitzavim-Vayelech* is a beautiful source of comfort and encouragement. The key word in this season is *t'shuvah*, from the verb *lashuv*, to turn. In turning, we are able to return and reclaim that which has been lost in relation to ourselves, to others, and to God. We are not stuck in the places we would like to move on from. The process of *t'shuvah* begins within by acknowledging our challenges and shortcomings, hurts caused and experienced, as well as the good we do, even as we pray for the strength to continue doing good. *T'shuvah* is made real in the world of deeds when we act on that inner awareness.

In *Parashat Nitzavim* there is a passage called *Parashat Ha'tshuvah*, the portion of *t'shuvah*. It reflects a dance of return between people and God, each reaching out to the other. As we take the first step, *and you will return all the way to God, your God.../v'shavta ad Hashem Elokecha...*, God responds in kind, *and then God, your God, will also turn back again.../v'shav Hashem Elokecha....* The simple word *ad/until* means that once we set our course we can keep going all the way, until we are home, until we are in the place that we want to be. A small word of great encouragement, *ad* reminds us just to start the process of return and we shall find momentum and strength that will carry us on, that we shall be met half way, by God and by others who are seeking and reaching out to us, by life.

In the process of returning to where we want to be, Moses reminds us that the Torah is accessible to each of us, that it is not far off in heaven or across the sea – not beyond our reach. Rather, *the Word is very near to you/ki-karov elecha ha'davar m'od, to carry it out with your mouth and with your heart*. So too, our own inner teaching, the torah of our own lives and the wisdom gained from living, is very near, waiting for us to embrace it and share it. Amidst the complexity of life, *t'shuvah* challenges us with its simple truth, that a word spoken from the heart can begin the way of healing and of making right. A most beautiful commentary on the way of turning that we call *t'shuvah* is the old Shaker hymn, *Simple Gifts*.

*'Tis the gift to be simple,
'tis the gift to be free,
'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
It will be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
'Til by turning, turning we come round right*

Each with our own gifts, and turning to do, together we shall come round right.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor