

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES

Short Quotes from Various Tzaddikim - Week 90

To join our Whatsapp group for daily messages, contact us at 845-641-2648

רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

Teshuvah means "return."

It is the return to G-d,

The return to health,

The return to our soul,

The return to the universe,

The return to a mended planet,

The return to happiness,

The return to home.

RABBI YAACOV DAVID SHULMAN

In all of our great attempts at building and developing ourselves, success is never apparent at the outset.

We never lose weight on the first day of a diet. We never build muscle on the first day at the gym. No one ever built a fortune by saving that first dollar. No one ever finished Shas after the first daf. But it has to begin somewhere.

The changes we make are tiny and incremental; they're imperceptible and invisible to the naked eye. But they are as real in the world as they are in us. The compounded effect of our avodah changes us and shapes the world around us.

RABBI RAEL BLUMENTHAL

Every soul, no matter how distant from G-d, has a spark of purity that is always waiting to be ignited.

Teshuva is the process of rekindling that divine light.

RABBI LEVI YITZCHAK OF BERDITCHEV (1740-1809)

Teshuva is not just about returning to Hashem; it is discovering that Hashem never left you.

ALTER OF NOVARDOK, RABBI YOSEF YOZEL HOROWITZ (1847-1919)

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As we approach Yom Kippur, I was debating which quote to send, which sentiment to express, which thought to convey that can lead us into this paramount and holy time. After much research and countless options to choose from, I was left in a quandary.

Do I focus on the concept that we have no need to fear leading into Judgement Day? Do I quote the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who assures us that "G-d's love for us is infinitely stronger than anything we may have done to weaken it." Or perhaps Medrash Tehillim, which states, "Don't be afraid of judgement, for the judge is your Father." Or as Rabbi Akiva similarly teaches, "How fortunate are you Yisrael, before whom do you purify yourselves, and who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven."

Do I relay the comforting and promising story told over about the Defender of Yisrael, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev? (submitted by a very appreciated member of The Narrow Bridge) How Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was always very calm when Yom Kippur would coincide with Shabbos (as it does this year). He explained that the only time one can write on Shabbos is to save a life; therefore, he was certain that Hashem would only inscribe us in the book of life, in the book of peace.

Do I comment on how we are perfectly imperfect? Do I select from the myriad quotes speaking of how we are not expected to be flawless? How, as Rabbi Daniel Agalar said, "Hashem doesn't ask to see perfection; He asks to see progression." Or how Rabbi Dovid Hoffman explains that is precisely because of our inborn imperfections that we are capable of attaining levels loftier than the angels; pointing out that we actually thank Hashem for creating us with imperfections, as the blessing states, "Borei nefashos rabbos v'chesronan - Who creates many souls and their imperfections." Or am I to quote the words of sympathy and hope from the Maharil, Rav Yosef Leib Bloch, who empathizes, "The Torah consistently records for us the faults and transgressions of even the greatest of our ancestors. This is to console us and teach us an important lesson: no matter how high a level a person may be on, he has natural tendencies that try to bring him down. It is normal to have faults." Or as Rabbi Efrem Goldberg beautifully writes how the Torah "does not address a utopian society" but rather "it speaks to a real world, and in our real world, we are going to fail and make mistakes" and that "the process of failure and repentance is part and parcel of human life."

Do I mention Hashem's infinite understanding, compassion and mercy? How He knows us better than we know ourselves. Maybe I am to quote Rabbi Yaakov Klein, who offers words of comfort, so eloquently positing, "Intimately familiar with the myriad difficulties hardwired into the human condition, Hashem responds to our plea, 'Zachor ki afar anachnu - Remember that we are dust,' with empathy and understanding. Standing in our place and feeling our brokenness and pain, when Hashem judges us, He judges us favorably." Or as Rebbe Nachman guarantees, "The Holy One forms 'paths in the sea' in order to suppress our sins and bring forth our righteous deeds." Or possibly one of my personal favorites, words of reassurance from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who writes, "More than Yom Kippur expresses our faith in G-d, it is the expression of G-d's faith in us."

Do I close out the Ten Days of Repentance with one last quote on the powerful effects of teshuva? Do I refer to the passionate imagery painted by the holy Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook who poetically declared, “The flame of remorse that comes from a motivated spirit and is passed on through the torch of the light of teshuva is a holy fire, a fire filled with light and warmth, a fire filled with life.” Or how repentance is the prime example of a “descent for the sake of the ascent.” As the Kotzker Rebbe taught, “Sin may distance us from Hashem, but teshuva brings us closer than we ever were prior to sinning.” Or how Rabbi Simon Jacobson tells us that in essence, teshuva is simply the return to who we were always destined to be, stating, “Teshuva literally means ‘return,’ which implies that you are not leaving something, you are coming back home. It is not simply going away from bad behavior, but it is going back to your true self, your Divine soul. It’s not damage control; it is returning to the essence that was always pure - your neshama.”

Do I note that in all our attempts to grow and build, to correct and repair, we mustn’t overreach, but strive for incremental improvements? Do I quote one of the various Tzaddikim that teach us to keep it slow and steady, to set realistic, attainable, and sustainable goals? How the actions that seem minor to the naked eye, have unimaginable ripple effects on High. How the smallest step in the right direction can be the greatest step of our lives.

Do I emphasize that there is no need to overcomplicate or overthink our prayers on this unique and intimate day, that we are to simply let our hearts do the speaking? Do I retell the tale of the simple farmer who attended the Yom Kippur services with his illiterate son. This child, unable to read a single word of the liturgy, had with him only his whistle that he would ordinarily use when watching the cattle. He was exceedingly fond of this whistle which he used frequently at home. During the Neilah prayer, which marks the climax of the Holiday, the boy took out his whistle and blew it. The Baal Shem Tov jumped up and congratulated the Jews: G-d had opened the gates; the Rabbis, with all their prayers and their learning, could not prevail with G-d, as had the young herdsman in his ignorance, by his simple desire to serve G-d.

Do I call to mind the incredible power of unity, through which we can guarantee a year of bliss and joy? How countless Sages and Tzaddikim teach us that when we judge others favorably, Hashem judges us favorably, when we give others the benefit of the doubt, Hashem gives us the benefit of the doubt. As the Baal Shem Tov interprets Dovid HaMelech’s words “Hashem is your shadow” to mean that the way we act below triggers a corresponding action from Above; that by forgiving others, we are forgiven. Or possibly the beautifully impactful and thought-provoking message I saw this week on Emuna Daily quoting the following story told over by Rabbi Eli Deutsch: Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, head of the great Mir Yeshiva of thousands of students, was once asked by one of the young men during the High Holiday season, ‘When one prays, what should he or she have in mind?’ He responded with just 2 words... ‘Someone else.’”

All that said, I considered the tumultuous and turbulent year our nation faced... While we experienced incredible blessings, we have also faced incomprehensible pain. As a nation, we have displayed our resilience and tenacity. As previously quoted from Shmuel HaNagid, we have shown that “wounded lions still know how to roar.” Perhaps what we need most right now is some peace and serenity, to know that we are not alone, to know that Hashem has not only seen the pain, but that He has experienced the pain firsthand, to know that Hashem takes everything into consideration, and that the pain and suffering endured by so many of our brothers and sisters will not be in vain. There is much to be said, but perhaps it would be best to end off with words of solace quoted below from Rebbe Nachman:

“Our current exile atones for everything.”

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810)

May the entire Jewish nation be inscribed and sealed in the book of life, joy, and health. May all of prayers be answered for good, and may this year bring with it the ultimate and final Redemption.