

# Take Us Back

השיבנו ה אליך ונשובה חדש ימינו כקדם “G-d return us to You and we shall return; renew our days as in the days of old.”<sup>1</sup> We just chanted these words along with Cantor Cohen when the Torah was returned. Tonight we will recite these words twice along with Marc when we conclude the Book of Lamentations. What are we nostalgic for? It is clear on Tisha B’Av, when we mourn the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as in our daily liturgy, that we are mourning the lack of a central place of worship for all Jews. Similarly, each time we return the Torah, as we just did, we are mourning the fact that we need to say goodbye to the Torah until the next time we are privileged to read from it.

The nostalgia is absent from the Hasidic reading of this verse, however. In Kedushat Levi, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev’s commentary on the Bible, he writes מאי כקדם, what is the significance of “as of old?” His conclusion is based on a passage from Deuteronomy, ועתה ישראל מה ה אלקיך שואל מעמל כי אם ליראה

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<sup>1</sup> Lamentations 5:21

G-d demand of you? Only this: to fear G-d.”<sup>2</sup> He continues "אין "ועתה" אין  
אלא תשובה; “There is no ‘now’ except to indicate a moment of  
repentance.

The return (נשובה) thus is not a return to a physical locale or time-  
travelling back to the past. Rather, it is an act of repentance designed to  
bring us back to G-d. Kedushat Levi continues, כל אדם ואדם מישראל מחויב  
להאמין באמונה שלימה שבכל רגע ורגע מקבל חיות מהבורא ברוך הוא  
“Every Israelite is obligated to believe with complete faith that at every moment  
he receives vitality from the Blessed Creator.” Why? כי בעת שעושה  
תשובה, מאמין שהוא כעת בריה חדשה, “for at the moment that he repents, he  
believes that he has become a new creation.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus in returning to G-d, we ourselves become renewed. Through  
doing the hard work of changing our behavior for the better, we become  
a different person. That’s not to say we can’t regress but rather that we  
strive each and every day to renew ourselves, becoming better people.

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 10:12

<sup>3</sup> Kedushat Levi on Eicha

Tomorrow evening, when Tisha B'Av concludes, we will begin a seven week counting, similar to the counting of the Omer. This time, however, instead of counting to the giving of the Torah, we will be counting to the Jewish New Year of 5779. It is a great time to intensify our process of introspection, to see what we can be doing better and how moment-by-moment we can revitalize and renew ourselves. The hardest thing as we get older is that (we believe) it becomes harder to change, or who we are becomes more ingrained. The lesson of Kedushat Levi is to peel away that cynicism, believing that we are truly a different person, with infinite potential at each moment.

Between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashanah we will read seven Haftarot from the latter portion of Isaiah called the *שבועה דנחמתא*, the seven Haftarot of consolation. The message ingrained in these Haftarot is to believe that there is always the opportunity for change and for renewal, even when it feels remote and like a pipe dream. As the Talmud teaches us, <sup>4</sup>אמר ריב"ל (למשיח) אימתי אתי? מר אמר לו היום עם תשמע לקולו<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 98a based of Psalm 95:7

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked the Messiah, “When will you come.”

He responded, “today, if you will listen to His voice.”

Today let us listen to the hidden messages we often gloss over or miss. May we look for the signs as to what we are meant to do today to make a difference or to change our behavior for the better. May we also look for opportunities to do Teshuva, not only in the sense of righting a wrong but equally as important to look for opportunities to modify our behavior and our thoughts for the better, so that we will be happier and feel more fulfilled. In so doing, may G-d take us back to Him, bringing us close in joy and gladness.