

Yamim Noraim - Our Own Spiritual Preparation

Co-hosted with CCAR and URJ

Wednesday, August 18, 2010

There is much that we clergy do to focus on preparing our communities physically and spiritually for the Yamim Noraim. What about ourselves? What will we each carry in our heart and soul, to be leaders of integrity and inspiration in these days? Both as individuals and in our clergy teams, this teleconference call presents us each with an opportunity hear from esteemed colleagues about how we might prepare our hearts and souls for these coming Days of Awe—moments of transformation in our own prayer and in our team work.

Presenters:

Rachel Cowan: CCAR member; Executive Director, Institute of Jewish Spirituality; 1990-2003 she was Program Director for Jewish Life at The Nathan Cummings Foundation; written for Moment and Sh'ma and anthologies, including *Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition: Writings from the Bible to Today*; co-author of *Mixed Blessings: Untangling the Knots in an Interfaith Marriage*; selected as one of the 50 most influential rabbis by Newsweek Magazine, 2007.

Richard Levy: Past President of the CCAR; former Director of the School of Rabbinic Studies on the Los Angeles campus HUC-JIR; architect of the Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism, the Pittsburgh Principles; former Executive Director of the Los Angeles Hillel Council; author of articles and many books, including *On Wings of Awe*, *On Wings of Light*, and *On Wings of Freedom*.

Benjie Ellen Schiller: Professor of Cantorial Arts at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Sacred Music; Cantor at Bet Am Shalom Synagogue of White Plains; performer with Begeed Kefet, a philanthropic Jewish music ensemble with recordings featuring her arrangements and compositions; nationally known composer; faculty member of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality Cantorial Program; national fellow of the Synagogue 3000 project; member of the C.C.A.R. editorial committee for Mishkan Tefillah.

**Selections from *Shaar Ha-Tshuvah* from *Orchot Ha-Tzadikim*
(An Anonymous 16th Century Musar Text)**

When we realize the need for repentance, we need to impress seven things on ourselves:

Sixth, one must consider in his heart all of the good that the Blessed Creator has done with him from his birth until the present day, and be thankful for all this good. And [he must know that] he has not done so, but has transgressed His mitzvos. And he must weigh the punishment for the sin against the sweetness of the transgression and the reward of the mitzvah against the suffering in this world [that its performance entails], as our Sages have said (*Avos* 2:1): “Reckon the loss [suffering] of a mitzvah against its reward, and the reward [pleasure] of a transgression against its loss [suffering].”

הששי — צריך לחשב בלבו הטובות שעשה לו הבורא יתברך מעודו ועד היום הזה, והיה לו להודות עבור

הטובות, והוא לא עשה את זאת אלא עבר מצוותיו. ויש לו לשקל ענש העברה כנגד מחיקותה ושכר המצוה כנגד צערה בעולם הזה, כמו שאמרו חכמינו: “הוי מחשב הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה ושכר עברה כנגד הפסדה” (אבות פ”ב מ”א).

There are 20 fundamentals of *tshuvah*:

(8) Humility in deed. One must be given to responding with soft answers. If someone shames him about his early deeds, he should be still, or he should say: “I know that I have sinned.” And he should not fashion beautiful garments and ornaments, as it is written (*Shemos* 33:5): “And, now, put off your ornaments from you.” And his eyes should be constantly lowered, as it is written (*Iyov* 22:29): “And He saves him whose eyes are lowered.” The signs of humility are a soft answer, a low voice, and lowered eyes. These humble the heart.

השמיני — ההכנעה כמעשה; שיתנהג במענה רך. אם חרף אותו אדם על מעשיו הראשונים, ישתק, או יאמר: ידעתי כי חטאתי. ולא יעשה מלבושים נאים ותכשיטים, כמו שנאמר: “ועתה הורד צדיך מעליך” (שמות לג, ה). ויהיו תמיד עיניו שחות, כמו שנאמר: “ושח עיניו יושע” (איוב כב, כט). וסמני ההכנעה: מענה רך, וקול נמוך, ושחות העין. ואלו הענינים מכניעים את הלב.

(10) Correcting one's deeds with the object of his abuse. How is this realized? If he has been guilty of immodest gazing, he should go about with lowered eyes. If he has slandered someone, he should occupy himself with studying the words of Torah (*Arachin* 15b). He should seek to fulfill mitzvos with all the organs of his body with which he has sinned (see *Yalkut Shoftim* 42).

העשירי — להיטיב פעליו בדבר אשר זדה עליו. כיצד? הסתפל בעריות — יתנהג בשחות העינים; בלשון הרע — יעסק בתורה (ערכין טו ע”ב); ובכל איברים שחטא, ישתדל לקיים בהם מצוות (עין ילקוט שמעוני, שופטים, רמז מב).

They have said further (*Vayikra Rabbah* 21:5): “If you have heaped up bundles of transgressions, heap up against them bundles of mitzvos. Feet that are swift in running to sin — let them run to perform mitzvos. A mouth that has spoken perversely — let it speak truth, and let your mouth be opened in wisdom. Hands that shed innocent blood — open your hand to the poor. Haughty eyes — be humble and lower your eyes. A heart that devises wicked thoughts — lay up words of Torah and thoughts of understanding in your heart.”

ועוד אמרו חכמינו: אם עשית תבילות של עברות, עשה כנגדן תבילות של מצוות: רגלים ממהרות לרוץ לעברה — ימהרו לרוץ לדבר מצוה; פה שדבר סרה — אמת יהגה חכו ופיו יפתח בחכמה; ידים שופכות דם נקי — יפתח ידו לעני; עינים רמות — יהא דכא ושח עינים; לב חורש מחשבות און — בלבו יצפן אמרי תורה (ויקרא רבה כא, ה).