

# Returning to Who We are Meant to Be

How excited I am to have my first Rosh Hashanah at Mosaic Law Congregation-and on my secular birthday nonetheless! Being with you at our spiritual home is a wonderful way to begin 5783.

*Return again, return again*

*Return to the land of your soul*

*Return again, return again*

*Return to the land of your soul*

*Return to what you are*

*Return to who you are*

*Return to where you are born and reborn again*

*Return to what you are*

*Return to who you are*

*Return to where you are born and reborn again<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> "Return Again," Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach

These words, written by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, which continue to be sung by his daughter Neshama, are what Rosh Hashanah is all about. Here we are, returning (engaging in Teshuva) once again at synagogue at the dawn of a new year, reflecting on who we are and who we are meant to be. As Rabbi Lawrence Kushner puts it, “Teshuva is the ever-present urge, possibility and gesture of returning our Source, the Holy One of All Being.”<sup>2</sup>

Just over two weeks ago, we read Parshat Ki Tetze. One of the 74 commandments mentioned there is השבת אבדה, returning lost objects to their owners. The Gerer Rebbe, in his book *Sfat Emet*, has a unique take on this commandment. He writes, “When one becomes adept at noticing what is lost, one cannot tolerate losses within oneself. Then one may truly be redeemed.”<sup>3</sup>

What *Sfat Emet* is emphasizing is not material objects which are lost but rather the lost, or fragmented, parts of ourselves. Each of us has things which are lacking, and rather than ignoring or dwelling on our

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<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, *I'm God, You're Not: Observations on Organized Religion & Other Disguises of the Ego* (Woodstock: VT, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010), pg. 102.

<sup>3</sup> *Sfat Emet*, Ki Tetze, 1878

shortcomings, Rosh Hashanah is a perfect time to work on restoring a sense of wholeness and completeness in ourselves. This also applies to those who are here with us in synagogue, who might appear to us to be ‘broken, wayward souls.’ In her commentary on Sfat Emet, Dr. Erin Lieb Smokler writes, “Welcome them. Root them. Give them a sense of belonging once again. Recognize your shared humanity and your shared vulnerability. Join in solidarity.”<sup>4</sup> She continues, “The community is only whole when it makes space for the broken.”<sup>5</sup> The goal of these High Holy Days, the Days of Awe, is not to strive towards an elusive perfection but rather, in Carlebach’s words, to “return to what you are, return to who you are.” This is our opportunity not to sweep our broken pieces under the rug but rather to embrace them as they are. That is my prayer for each and every one of us during these poignant 10 days of introspection, beginning with Rosh Hashanah and culminating with Yom Kippur. *K’tivah V’Hatimah Tovah*-wishing each and every one of you a sweet, happy new year.

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Erin Leib Smokler, Commentary on Sfat Emet, Ki Tetze, 1878.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.