

# Class #6 – Turn the Holidays on High Workshop with Chava

## Week ONE of TISHREI

### Tishrei 3

#### Rebuilding the Kingdom

Today begins the countdown to Yom Kippur. Today is the third day of the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*, which will culminate on this most awesome of days. This is possibly the most intense time in the Hebrew calendar when each individual is granted the power of a group of ten.

We are vested with this power because in these ten days, having crowned G-d as our King, we now undertake the task of rebuilding His kingdom—both in the spiritual realm “above” and in our world “below”—known in the language of Kabbalah as *Binyan HaMalchut*.

*Malchut* (“kingship”) refers to the tenth of the Ten *Sefirot*, the ten spheres or channels of Divine energy with which G-d created the world and which flow through every aspect of reality including our own souls. This means that to rebuild *malchut* we must rebuild ourselves—our own nobility, our own dignity, that very aspect of ourselves which was created in the image of G-d. By building our own *malchut*, we rebuild G-d’s *malchut* in the universe.

We know our *malchut* is in need of rebuilding when we feel afraid and insecure, because our personal sense of security and insecurity in life depends on it.

When children are raised in dysfunctional homes where their dignity is trampled upon, their *malchut* is eroded. They can grow up to be adults with great minds and great hearts, but they may be insecure adults who lack the courage for the suspension of self that is necessary to truly grow, because they feel they must fight for whatever scrap of dignity they can grab.

So the rebuilding of *malchut* in effect means the building of dignity, majesty, and security in a world that’s very insecure. And we are given special power during these ten days to do it. It is not as hard as we might imagine, because to build it all we need do is access the place in ourselves that was never wounded in the first place—the place of our Divine soul.

**Ask yourself:** Do you generally feel secure or insecure in life? Are you someone whose *malchut* has been eroded by life experiences?

#### *Exercise for the day:*

Describe the part of yourself that was never wounded—your Divine soul.

Do something Divine today, something that makes you proud and builds your *malchut*, your dignity.

# Tishrei

“Although *teshuvah* and pleading are always effective, during the ten days from Rosh Hashana till Yom Kippur they are especially potent and are immediately accepted, as it says, ‘Search for Hashem when He is present.’”  
(Rambam, *Laws of Teshuvah* 2:6)

## Tishrei 3

Third of the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*.  
Seven days left until Yom Kippur.

According to the Ramak, this day corresponds to *bod* (humility or splendor).

According to the Ari, this day corresponds to *binah* (understanding).

Mon. 9/21/2020

### Events

**423 BCE**—Today’s fast day mourns the assassination of Gedaliah ben Achikam, the Jewish governor of the Land of Israel for a short period following the destruction of the First Temple. Gedaliah’s killing spelled the end of the small remnant of a Jewish community that remained in the Holy Land after the destruction. After the assassination, the Jews fled to Egypt.

**5547 (1786)**—Yahrzeit of Rebbetzin Devorah Leah, daughter of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi and mother of Rabbi Menachem Mendel (Tzemach Tzedek). She gave her life for her father.

### Laws and Customs

**Fast day:** Mourning the killing of Gedaliah, we abstain from food and drink from dawn to nightfall; *Selichot* prayers are included in the morning service.

During the Ten Days of *Teshuvah* (beginning with Rosh Hashana and ending Yom Kippur) special inserts and additions are included in our daily prayers (in addition to Psalm 27 which is said from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Hoshana Rabba):

1. Psalm 130 (after *Yishtabach* in the morning service).<sup>1</sup>
2. In the *Amidah* service, we add phrases in the first and last two blessings (see Prayer Section), “the Holy King” in the third blessing, and “the King of Judgment” in the eleventh blessing (said only on weekdays).



## Returning to Pure Essence

In our earlier exploration of the meaning of *teshuvah* (see Elul 18), we defined *teshuvah* as having two levels—repentance and return:

**Repentance** means regretting a wrongful action, resolving not to repeat it, asking forgiveness, making amends.

**Return** means coming back to one's soul, one's Divine essence, to one's source in G-d.

The first level—which is what we should have been working on during the month of Elul—is only the means to achieve the second, which is our focus now, during the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*.

During these special days, we should be working to return to the quintessential self that we really are. *Teshuvah* (which literally means “return”) implies that there is a part of us that is always healthy and good and pure, as we say in the morning prayer, “The soul that You gave me is pure...” And no matter what damage had been done to us in life—to our sense of self, to our personal dignity—no matter what damage we ourselves have done, we can always return to the soul that remains undamaged, intact, pure.

The great 16th century Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordevero of Safed, better known as

the Ramak, suggests that the best way to return to our pure essence is to isolate ourselves for a period of time each day during the Ten Days of *Teshuvah* in order to meditate on the Ten *Sefirot*, which he calls the “Gates of *Teshuvah*.” In this way it is possible to enter a different “gate” each day, thereby connecting the soul with its root in a given *sefirah*, each of which serves as a channel for Divine energy into creation and, of course, into the soul.

**Ask yourself:** How much do you want to connect with the purest, holiest part of yourself? Are you willing to invest the effort and the time to make this possible?

### *Exercise for the day:*

Review the attributes listed on the calendar pages for each day of the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*.

Meditate today on the *sefirah* of *netzach* (“endurance”). In doing so, assess your level of endurance and your ambition. Is it being used for the proper things?

# Tishrei



"A person must see himself and the world as equally balanced on two ends of the scale—by doing one good deed, he tips the scale and brings himself and the entire world redemption and salvation. Therefore in the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, more than all year round, it is customary to increase charity and good deeds and the performance of the *mitzvot*."

(Rambam, Laws of Teshuvah 3:4)

## Tishrei 4

Fourth of the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*.  
Six days left until Yom Kippur.

According to the Ramak, this day corresponds to *netzach* (endurance or victory).

According to the Ari, this day corresponds to *daat* (knowledge).

TUES. 9/22/2020

### Facts

The word "depths" in the verse from Psalm 130 (which we recite in these days)—"Out of the depths, I call to You G-d"—has two meanings: 1) it can be read to refer to the depths of our heart and soul, or 2) to the depths above, the deepest levels of G-dliness.<sup>1</sup> When we call out from the depths of our heart we reach the depths of G-d's heart.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Ten Days of *Teshuvah* correspond to ten levels of depths, each day reaching deeper and deeper into the Divine, as we get closer to Yom Kippur.<sup>3</sup>



## The Personal Holy of Holies

Before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the pinnacle of the Yom Kippur service was the moment when the High Priest (the *Kohen Gadol*) would enter the Holy of Holies.

This was the only time of the year that anyone could enter this holiest of inner sanctums and only the High Priest was permitted to do so and only for a short duration.

It was such an intense moment that if the High Priest was not completely pure—if he had committed even one transgression for which he had not previously atoned—he would die immediately.

This was because the Holy of Holies was a place so pure that even one blemish was intolerable. An eye cannot tolerate even one small eyelash, because it is so sensitive. And the Holy of Holies was the most sensitive, purest place in existence.

If he died, the other *kohanim* would have to pull his body out by a rope that had been previously attached to him. But if he succeeded in his mission to obtain G-d's forgiveness for the Jewish people, he emerged radiating a special glow that is vividly described in the Yom Kippur prayers.<sup>1</sup>

Today we have no High Priest and no Temple. But the Holy of Holies still exists—in the depths of our own soul. On Yom Kippur we attempt to reach that purest part of our selves and to connect with G-d there.

We might not be able to stay in that pure place for a long time. It might be only a few minutes. But, as we know, the most special experiences last only a moment. We prepare for these most special times for hours, years, and even decades, and the effort of the preparation is well worth that split second they last.

**Ask yourself:** Have you prepared sufficiently for Yom Kippur to be able to make the most of the experience?

### *Exercise for the day:*

Begin reviewing the Yom Kippur prayers (see Prayer Section) in order to connect fully with the words when the time comes to enter your personal Holy of Holies.



# Tishrei

“One who doesn’t cry during the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*—his soul is not complete. When one cries, it is a sign that he is being judged above at that moment.”  
(The Ari)<sup>2</sup>

## Tishrei 5

Fifth of the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*.  
Five days left until Yom Kippur.

According to the Ramak, this day corresponds to *tiferet* (beauty, harmony and compassion).

According to the Ari, this day corresponds to *chesed* (loving-kindness).

WED. 9/23/2020

### Events

3894 (133 CE)—The great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Akiva, is taken captive by the Romans. His subsequent torture and execution is recalled in the stirring *Eleh Ezkarah* poem of the Yom Kippur afternoon service.

### Facts

There are two types of *teshuvah*: *teshuvah* out of fear and *teshuvah* out of love. The former only affects the present and on. The latter however has the power to transform the past; it actually transforms intentional sins into merits! (Talmud, *Yoma* 86b). That is the power of *teshuvah* that comes from love—not fear of punishment or guilt, but out of love to get closer to our Source.

*Tishrei* begins the six months of winter, which correspond to six levels of “reflected light,” the light generated by human initiative (“arousal from below”). This is alluded to in the name *Tishrei*, which begins with the three letters *tav—shin—reish*, in the “reflected” order of the *aleph-beit* (from end to beginning).<sup>3</sup>

In the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*, an individual has the power of a quorum (*tzibbur*). Obviously, a quorum is that much more powerful.

## Approaching the Source

We have now reached the midpoint of the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*. This is the period, say the sages of the Talmud,<sup>1</sup> of which the Prophet Isaiah (55:6) speaks when he proclaims: "Seek G-d when He is to be found; call on Him when He is near."

But isn't G-d omnipresent at all times and all places in the world. How could we say that now He is closer to us?

However, Isaiah is not speaking from G-d's perspective but from the soul's perspective. Chassidic teachings explain that this special time of the year is compared to the "source drawing near to the spark."<sup>2</sup> The "source" is G-d; the "spark" is each of our souls, which is called "the flame of G-d."

All year round the "source" is spiritually "distant," i.e., concealed, from the "spark." In the early days of *Av*, the "source" is at its "farthest" (most concealed) point; so far away that the spark can hardly sense its connection to the mother flame. In *Elul*—when Moses begins his final climb—the "source" begins to draw nearer, becoming more revealed. On each progressive day of *Elul*, the "source" draws closer and closer to the "spark." The closest point is on *Yom Kippur*, specifically during *Neilah* ("Locking

of the Gates"), the final prayer at sundown.

Thus, the Ten Days of *Teshuvah* represent a type of "coming home" experience.

When the source gets closer to the spark, the spark begins to feel the warmth and it is drawn toward the larger, mother flame. It's like when you put your hand closer to a flame, you start feeling the warmth.

This is the reason that in these Ten Days of *Teshuvah* there is more consciousness of G-d among Jews, even those who are not familiar with the meaning of the High Holidays.

**Ask yourself:** Are you feeling the warmth of the mother flame—the warmth of G-d—as the time draws closer to *Yom Kippur*? If not, why not?

### *Exercise for the day:*

Meditate on the verse from *Proverbs* (20:27): "The flame of G-d is the soul of the human being."

Identify some aspect(s) of your life that reflects the tug of your soul to its source.



# Tishrei

“The world is mistaken when it thinks that *teshuvah* is only for sins. True *teshuvah* is from the expression ‘and the spirit shall return to G-d.’<sup>3</sup> *Teshuvah* is a thirsty soul’s longing to connect to its Source. With this in mind, *teshuvah* becomes an exciting and joyous experience, rather than one just of bitterness and remorse, because there is nothing more gratifying than returning to your true self.”<sup>4</sup>

## Tishrei 6

Sixth day of the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*. Four days left until Yom Kippur.

According to the Ramak, this day corresponds to *gevurah* (discipline, might, or justice).

According to the Ari, this day also corresponds to *gevurah*.

THURS. 9/24/2020

### Events

**5725 (1964)**—*Yahrzeit* of Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson (1879-1964), mother of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Chabad Rebbe.

### Facts

“And Abraham drew near and said: ‘Perhaps there are fifty righteous (individuals) in the city... perhaps there are ten’ ”(Genesis 18:24;32). ‘Abraham drew near’ means he was ready to plead. He began with the number fifty, the entrance to understanding (which has fifty gates), and ended with ten, the last of all the grades. R. Isaac said: “Abraham stopped at ten as the number symbolic of the Ten Days of *Teshuvah* between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Reaching that number, Abraham said, as it were, ‘After this there is no more room for penitence,’ and therefore he did not descend further.”<sup>5</sup>