

Quantum Tshuvah

By Rabbi Jay Yaacov Schwartz LMSW

Dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Aaron M. Schreiber Zl

The period of the *Aseres Ymei Tshuvah* (Ten Days of Repentance) the ten calendar days which bridge *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, are identified by the *Rambam*(Laws of *Tshuvah* Chapter 2:6) as the most expedient days of the year to heed the shrill corrective voice of the *shofar* and recalculate our deeds and ways. As we ourselves, or others (spouses, Rabbis, children ,friends), call attention to our poor choices in behavior or attitude , we strive to correct our path and proceed ahead ,while we absorb and deal with the cost of our past indiscretions.

However, a deeper look into the *tshuvah* process yields much deeper and even somewhat shocking understanding of how this process truly works.

A recent work entitled “Quantum Physics and Jewish Law, & *Kabbalah*- Astonishing Parallels “published posthumously by Rabbi Aaron M. Schreiber zl (see Dr. Gerald Schroeder’s review of this volume in the *Jerusalem Post*) notes the parallels between the process of *tshuvah* and the principles of quantum physics.

Rabbi Schreiber zl cited (pg 14-16) expert physicist Richard Feynman author of QED (Princeton University Press 1985) saying that Subatomic or ‘quantum’ matter exhibits strange and paradoxical behaviors. According to Quantum Physics theory ,subatomic particles ,including photons of light, can travel backwards in time and even meet other quantum matter that had gone out of existence prior to the time of the meeting a capacity that no scientist can truly explain. “

Rabbi Schreiber also cited Neils Bohr ,one of the primary architects of Quantum physics , who characterized the antirational reality of sub atomic life “if someone says that he can think about Quantum physics without becoming dizzy ,that shows only that he has not understood anything about it.”(ibid)

This uncanny truth, the ability to view life and matter as ,on some level , completely free of the shackles of time is the key to the deeper meaning of repentance in Jewish thought. As Rabbi Dr.Schreiber draws this analogy to quantum science, the true power of *tshuvah* is not merely to redirect our actions moving forward but actually to uproot and remake the past, to enable us, in quantum like fashion, to revisit and recreate our former reality.

This identical message, notes Rabbi Schreiber, is reflected in the writings of Rabbi Dr. Joseph B Soloveitchik, who wrote extensively about the confluences and distinctions between Torah teaching and modern science and philosophy.

Rabbi Soloveitchik wrote

“The concept of *Tshuvah*, whereby one can erase and even elevate previous sinful actions, suggests that there exists an alternate reality where one can transcend time and causality through the exercise of free will. The name of G-d(which connotes the attribute of Mercy) is YKVK This means He was ,He is, He will be , and signifies that He conflates past, present and future and transcends time” Our ability

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to evoke the mercy of Hashem through our words and deeds empowers us to use this capacity to literally soar above our normal spatial limits.(see Yom Kippur Machzor ed.A. Lustiger New York 2007 pg viii)

Rabbi Nachman of Breslev whose primary work Likutey Mohoran became famous in the Chassidic world as a book written for those who desire *tshuvah* also stresses the importance of liberating oneself from the constraints of time in order to address all past deeds and events. He argues that to become a Baal Tshuvah one must begin again new everyday and perhaps many times in a single day .He advocated for his adherents and for himself to serve Hashem in a youthful manner by starting completely new each day,by imagining oneself as brand new entity , in the spirit of the phrase "*Hamechadesh bchol Yom tamid maaaseh breshis.*" "*He who renews each day His entire Creation*" (see *Likutey Halachos Orach Chaim Aleph Vol 1 halacha 2*) In his famous collection of stories (Rabbi Nachman's Stories Breslov Research Institute 1983 p. 364) in the celebrated tale of the Seven Beggars, he characterizes the blind beggar (who represents the mystery of Creation itself or Avraham the first Jew) as the one who says " I am extremely old, but I am completely young . I have not yet begun to live ,but nevertheless, I am very old". This underscores that we must approach the world and especially the Jewish people as having the capacity to transcend apparent limits and ingrained patterns , as well as the ability to achieve constant renewal.

Using this methodology of *tshuvah* ,past failures and especially grievances with ourselves and with Hashem can be retroactively reexamined and transformed.

The method of *tshuvah* also highlights what some ironically suggest is one of the greatest of Moshe Rabbenu's achievements on behalf of the Jewish people i.e. breaking of the *luchos* given to him by *Hashem* (see Rashi Dvarim 34;12 in his commentary to final words of the Torah, *Leyney Kal Yisroel* and *Shabbos* 87b) By breaking the betrothal gift between *Hashem* and the Jewish people, Moshe was in effect "moving the clock backwards" so that the sin of the Golden calf would precede the "marriage" of Hashem to the Jewish people, thereby freeing them from the full severity of that grievous offense. The power of *tshuvah* ,as Moshe demonstrated, was the capacity not only for forgiveness ,but to undo the past and to rewrite its history. Maybe this is why many *Tzadikim* had the custom to preach about the connection between the last words of the Torah and its first word ;*Breseh* which literally means a new beginning. By breaking the *luchos* and rewriting the past, Moshe taught that *tshuvah* can repair and create a brand new reality in which past misdeeds literally disappear or are transformed into merits (see *Yoma* 86b)

As we approach 5770 perhaps we can incorporate this important lesson rooted in Torah and confirmed by modern Science that we truly have the capacity to feel unencumbered by our past patterns and that we have the ability to reconfigure ourselves into a renewed self ,all the way down to our "subatomic" parts. That is to say , to take a quantum leap forward in our capacity for Torah knowledge, repair of character , and the ability to envision grand new hopes of redemption for our families and all the Jewish people.

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