

# MONTH OF ELUL: THE POWER OF REPENTANCE

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

Elul, the last month in the Jewish calendar, is to be spent preparing for the upcoming High Holidays. Because G-d judges and "sentences" the entire world on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, it is only fitting that we try to correct our flaws and repent before that time. That way, when we come before G-d for judgement on these holidays, we will find favor in His eyes (assuming our repentance was sincere) and be judged for a good year.

The Talmud (Yoma 86b) writes "Rav Meir used to say Great is repentance, that because of an individual who repents, the entire world is forgiven, as the verse says (Hoshea 14:5) I will rectify their waywardness, I will love them gratuitously, for My anger has turned away from them."

How is it that an individual's repentance can have such extensive effects? How is the repentance of an individual so powerful that it has a worldwide impact? The commentators on the Talmud explain the roots of this power in different ways. The Maharsha explains that we see elsewhere in the Talmud (Kiddushin 40b) that a person should always view himself as if his sins and merits are equally balanced. That way, if a person does one mere Mitzvah, the scales tip in his favor and he is forgiven and judged favorably. The Gemora expands on this. The entire world, therefore, is composed of people whose sins and merits are equally balanced. All it takes to assure that the global scales tip in the direction of merit is one Mitzvah done by one person. One individual doing one Mitzvah can save the entire world. But how does this relate to repentance? The Maharsha explains that if a person sincerely repents, and repents out of his or her love of G-d, G-d changes the sins of the individual into merits. If an individual wholeheartedly repents, the previously balanced scales will most certainly tip in the direction of merit, both for the individual and the entire world. Any and every individual has the power literally to save the world. Repentance is the root of that power.

The Anaf Yosef explains this power of repentance in another fashion. Repentance has several components. Fasting, weeping, and confessing are all important parts in the repentance process (see I:34, I:28 ). When a person fasts and weeps as part of the repentance process, he has removed G-d's wrath from the world. Once G-d's wrath is removed, G-d no longer judges with His attribute of strict judgement. Rather, He judges with compassion and mercy. When G-d judges with mercy, He accepts repentance that is not complete. He accepts from many only a confession without the fasting and weeping that should accompany it. The person who sincerely repents causes the entire world to be viewed in a more favorable light, enabling many more to have their less than wholehearted repentance accepted. He causes the entire world to be judged with mercy, so that

the world's salvation is more readily coming.

The Anaf Yosef further explains that the verse quoted by the Talmud is now better understood in its entire context. The chapter begins "Return Israel unto Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity." The verse is telling us that we must return to G-d, we must repent with a complete heart as we have sinned. If we repent, G-d's wrath will be removed. "Take words with you and return to Hashem, say to him May you forgive all iniquity and accept good intentions, and let our lips substitute for bulls." G-d's forgiveness of those who do less than a complete repentance, who have good intentions, comes with mercy. That mercy comes after the wrath is gone. "I will rectify their waywardness, I will love them gratuitously...." Why does this happen? Because "... (for) my anger has turned away from them" as a result of those who have wholeheartedly repented.

May each and every one of us merit to save the world this Elul.

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This issue of YomTov is dedicated to the merit of Refa'el Yaakov ben Rachel, who should have a complete and speedy recovery.