

THE 'NEW' OF THE NEW YEAR

by Rabbi Dovid Green

This week's parsha deals with the period of time just prior to the death of Moshe. It was a scene like that of a father giving his last instructions to his beloved children. He gave his final plea to the Jewish nation to heed his instructions and follow the ways of HaShem's Torah.

To paraphrase from the book *Lilmode U'Lilamade* on the weekly Torah portion: (J.E.P.-Feldheim Publishers)

Return while there's still time

Moshe informed the Jewish people that even if the time will come when the majority of the nation will abandon the ways of the Torah and calamities will therefore occur, they can still return to their Father in Heaven through the means of repentance. Repentance consists of several stages. One must declare the past negative behavior as wrong and unproductive. One must actively take on correct behavior, setting ones goals in a new, positive direction and then resolve not to go back to the old negative habits.

This can often be a difficult and lengthy process complete with challenges and the inevitable "three steps forward, two steps back". One must focus on one aspect of ones personality at a time and refuse to give up when faced with slow progress. This applies to those well off and those who are not, those who are young and those who are no longer young. One's position and stage in life has no bearing here as we learn from Rabbi Yisroel Salanter.

Rabbi Salanter once went to a shoemaker in his town in Europe to have a pair of shoes repaired. Since it was already nearing the end of the day he felt that the lack of light might cause the shoemaker difficulty. Rabbi Salanter therefore suggested that the shoemaker wait till the next day to start on the job. "Do not despair" came the shoemakers reply. "I'll just light a candle. As long as the candle is lit, it is still possible to do the repairs".

Rabbi Salanter saw these simple words as significant and took them to heart. Upon his return to the yeshiva he repeated the shoemakers words to his students, while shedding his own Torah "light" on them. The lesson he wanted passed down reads like so: As we learn Torah commentary we see time and again that the human soul is compared to a candle. The shoemaker has given us a beautiful parable. One must never resign oneself to spiritual despair. As long as the candle burns, one can effect the necessary repairs. No matter what "time" of life one starts from, as long as the Jewish soul flickers, it is possible to return the Torah's path.

What greater message for us at this time with the eve of Rosh HaShana being this coming Sunday night. Let's put a truly "new" face on our New Year.

It says in the Gemorah, tractate Yoma: "Great is (the effect of) repentance as it brings healing to the world".

Have a great Shabbos and a productive year full of good physical, mental, and spiritual health.

J.E.P. is the Jewish Education Program which offers ongoing introductory classes for Jewish adults and children. There are many branches. For more information find the one nearest you.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter was the founder of the system of ethical studies which was adopted as a regular part of the curriculum in yeshivos world-wide. He lived in the 19th century.

Thanks to Mrs. Miriam Green for writing this week's dvartorah.

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