

ALWAYS WITHIN REACH

by Rabbi Label Lam

And now Israel, what does HASHEM your G-d ask from you except that you should fear HASHEM your G-d to walk in all His ways... (Devarim 10:12)

Don't walk in front of me. I may not follow

Don't walk behind me. I may not lead.

Just walk beside me and be my friend.

And together we will walk in the ways of HASHEM. (Lyrics to a Jewish children's song)

What's being asked of Israel is a tall order. "Is fear of G-d such a small matter?" asks the Talmud. The answer is, "Yes, for the likes of Moses!" (Broshos 33B) The question remains what about the rest of us? Is the task too difficult for us to accomplish?

Perhaps the answer is locked away in the introductory words, "And now..." What do they add to the mix? How does that tiny phrase enhance the verse? Here the Talmud offers an important rule which may be the key to this verse and many others, "And now" always means teshuvah"- poorly translated as repentance. Why does "and now" imply teshuvah?

1-How many times do we decide to begin a diet of some sorts tomorrow? Are those lunges at change ever successful? We all know the answer. We all know the game. If someone is serious about doing something real the business starts now! "And now", not some future date.

Sometimes we like to look back at the golden years of our accomplishments with nostalgic pride. Back then we had courage... standards. Back then... What about now? "And now", not in the glorious past alone but a step of personal progress in the ever present. "And now" is that time real things are done.

2-There's another reason why it's so hard to address the present moment. Our minds are often preoccupied either with worries about the future or guilt about the past. All the while a lifetime of precious present moments may pass us by. Why do our minds work that way? The answer may be that we are preoccupied with the future just because we remain unreconciled with the past. Since there are so many open files and unresolved personal issues we intuitively sense that our credit may be low. Deep in our heart of hearts our worries may not be baseless. With so many of life's unpaid bills we nervously anticipate the notice from the bank.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle of Sherlock Holmes fame is said to have sent a letter to ten individuals with

the most unimpeachable character that he could find. He simply wrote, "Flee! The matter is known!" Within 24 hours nine of them had left the country.

Stated a little less whimsically, there are matters that we cannot run far or fast enough to escape, because each of us carries within the knowledge of who we really are and what we have done albeit beneath layers of rationalizations.

The only solution is to submit and to admit and that process is called teshuvah. Having reconciled the past in the the present tense the fears of the future begin to dissipate. The joyful present becomes the soup de jour. The person in a state of teshuva actively fulfills the mandate of each "now" and "now" again. "And now", and not the misery and guilt ridden burdens of the past. "And now", as opposed to the hordes of worries invading from the future. "And now", implies being in a state of renewed and active trust.

Imagine a father and son walking across a busy boulevard. The child needs only to hold tightly to his father's hand. He's not alarmed at the roar of the cars and trucks about him. Just the opposite. He's amused. His father is happily guiding him and protecting him as they navigate through traffic. To be a little ahead or behind is to be in mortal danger. The only safe place is there beside his father. That's more the essence of teshuvah.

And now, maybe we can understand the challenge of the verse, "And now Israel, what does HASHEM your G-d ask from you except that you should fear HASHEM your G-d to walk in all His ways..." Like that child in traffic, the only real fear is the fear of losing his father's hand. It may be a tall order but as the father's hand it's always within reach.

Have a good Shabbos

Text Copyright © 2003 Rabbi Label Lam and **Project Genesis, Inc.**
