

TIMELY INSTRUCTIONS

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM is good and straight therefore He guides those who stray along the way. (Tehillim 25:8)

I'm sure most everyone has a positive and encouraging approach for Teshuvah.

I was thinking that we can learn about Teshuvah or how to instruct about Teshuvah from the ubiquitous GPS. How tenderly and patiently it recalculates and recalibrates again and again no matter how many times we are defiant. It points the best way to get to our destination. Teshuvah is about learning to listen to and trust those directives in life, implicit and explicit, that are intended to get us where we *need* to and ultimately *want* to go.

A few years ago a friend of mine intended to call me up on Erev Rosh HaShana and he realized immediately that had dialed the wrong number when a thick Russian accented woman answered the phone. He asked sheepishly, "Is this family Lam?" She responded with a forceful certitude like an opera singer, "I'm afraid you are a mistake!"

He then dialed the correct number and told me about the traumatic conversation he just had. How the woman had told him, how upset he was to discover that he was a mistake. Half joking and half serious, he related that until now he thought his parents really wanted him. It took me a few minutes to talk him back from the ledge and remind him that firstly *she* had made a mistake in her syntax and secondly there is a huge difference between making a mistake and being a mistake.

Sometimes people have been rebuked in such an overreaching way that they come to believe that they are a mistake and not that they made a mistake. This is a big impediment to doing Teshuvah. Every well-meaning and correcting voice is seen as a personal attack. It takes a while to build and rebuild that trust in others and that trust in self.

This brings us back to a most beautiful and comforting idea that I can't believe I was hearing it for the first time this Rosh HaShana. When we say "Avinu- Malcheinu"- "Our Father- Our King" we are affirming that Our Father is also Our King and Our King is also Our Father.

A father always wants the best for his child but sometimes he is not able to deliver it. He lacks the necessary power or influence to make certain things happen. There are external forces that thwart his desire to deliver for his child. In our case Our Father is Our King.

Sometimes a person has great admiration for the King. A King can do absolutely anything. However the King has other concerns and priorities beyond this lone subject but in our situation Our King is

also Our Father!

I realize that it is not always so easy to grasp this in a concrete way. I heard about a true incident that happened. A fellow was driving and listening to a Rabbi Avigdor Miller tape. He signaled to change lanes and was in the process of moving over when suddenly he heard a loud HONK. A van from out of nowhere sped by. He swerved back into his lane just in time to avoid a terrible crash. Had it not been for that loud HONK he and his car would have been in a devastating crash. The car was speeding so fast it was a good thing he had honked his horn.

A while later he realized that he had been distracted and he had missed an important part of Rabbi Miller's shiur. He played back the tape and was treated to a surprise. That loud HONK that alerted him was on the audio tape. Someone had HONKED loudly outside during the shiur, who knows how many years ago. And now, just at the right moment it saved his life. Avinu Malcheinu Our Father, Our King Thank You for guiding us on the way with **timely instructions**.