

## Rabbi's Message September 2021

Dear Friends,

When we gather together on Monday night over Zoom to celebrate Rosh HaShanah, we will be reading, as we do every year, from the beautifully compiled Machzor (Machzor is the Hebrew word for “High Holidays prayer book”), Gates of Repentance (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* in Hebrew).

One of the things that makes this such a remarkable *Machzor* is that even while it clearly is the product of 20<sup>th</sup>-century minds, there can be no doubt that it stands on the foundation of centuries of Jewish tradition. One of the ancient themes that beats strong throughout the entire Machzor, of course, is that of repentance, or *teshuvah* in Hebrew. While this may come as no surprise, since repentance is perhaps the single most identifying theme defining the holidays (to the point where we call the days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur the “Ten Days of Repentance”), what you may or may not know is that even the name, “Gates of Repentance” dates back almost a millennium.

Though we're not sure as to when exactly he was born, we do know that 1264 C.E. was the year when Spanish Rabbi Yonah ben Avraham Gerondi passed away. During his lifetime, Rabbi Yonah is known to have written a great deal, but much of his work has been lost to history. That which does remain is largely related to the themes of ethics and repentance. Chief among his extant works is a masterpiece called Gates of Repentance (*Sha'arei Teshuvah*) the exact name adopted for our 20<sup>th</sup>-century Machzor.

Over the course of his book, Rabbi Yonah leads the reader through four gates, the first of which exposes a step-by-step journey that repentants must travel to find *teshuvah*. The second gate describes a handful of scenarios that might lead someone to seek *teshuvah*. The third gate describes ten types of commandments that the repentant must follow in order to show proper deference to God, and the fourth gate expounds on the concept of Divine forgiveness.

As we stand ready to enter the Ten Days of Repentance with open hearts and eager souls, I invite you to review Rabbi Yonah's prescribed path for us to take as we seek to do *teshuvah* now and in the future:<sup>1</sup>

- regretting/acknowledging the sin;
- forsaking the sin (see below);
- worrying about the future consequences of the sin;
- acting and speaking with humility;
- acting in a way opposite to that of the sin (for example, for the sin of lying, one should speak the truth);
- understanding the magnitude of the sin;
- refraining from lesser sins for the purpose of safeguarding oneself against committing greater sins;
- confessing the sin;
- praying for atonement;
- correcting the sin however possible (for example, if one stole an object, the stolen item must be returned; or, if one slanders another, the slanderer must ask the injured party for forgiveness);
- pursuing works of *chesed* (lovingkindness) and truth;
- remembering the sin for the rest of one's life;
- refraining from committing the same sin if the opportunity presents itself again;
- teaching others not to sin.

I look forward to seeing you on Zoom for our holiday services.

***L'Shanah Tovah Tikatevu***

*May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a good year,*

***Rabbi Dubin***