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Teschuvah

**The Zen and Jewish Path of Returning to G-d
IFR member Rabbi Brenda Shoshanna**

***"The precious ruby we have lost
Has fallen out on the road
Some say it is to the east of us,
Others to the west,"***

We are all searching for our precious ruby, for that which will make our lives complete. No one knows where to find it, some search here others there, in relationships, work, reputation, money, entertainment. We spend most of our lives seeking and struggling to find that which will bring meaning and wholeness to our lives. Then the month of Elul comes, the month of preparation for the Jewish holidays, when we are called to make Teschuvah, to return- and repent.

But, before we can return we must know where it is we must return to and where we are right now. How do we return? What does this strange call really mean? In Judaism HaMakom is called The Place, it is another word for the name of G-d. It is the place in which we can rest, be renewed, find our deepest Center and become whole.

In Zen practice we return daily. Zen tells us to sit down, face the wall, turn away from the endless distractions and attractions that accost us and return to our breath, to the moment, to the essence of ourselves. As we practice zazen, Zen meditation, first we Stop, then we turn, then we take our attention back and place it upon our own breath, our own lives, and whatever it is that is occurring within our own mind, body and soul. As we do this, the frantic searching quiets down. We can

not move. We must look within. Not only that, the more we sit, the more we realize that it is entirely possible that the precious ruby was never lost at all. It is only us, we have not been present or available to feel it shine.

In Judaism the month of Elul, preceding Rosh Hashanah is a very crucial time. During this month, G-d is closer to our lives, more energy is available to do the work of returning. Each mitzvah we do also has extra power to affect change. This time of return is also a time of testing. We are shown ourselves more clearly, so we know what it is that is in the way of allowing the precious jewel to shine.

The Torah guides us in the process of return. It asks a vital question, "Who can come to my holy mountain?" Then it answers clearly, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart." Teschuvah also means repentance, to purify ourselves. All of these words and phrases are really Jewish koans. A koan is a Zen question, giving to the student by the teacher that cannot be answered logically or rationally. The student must truly look into the question, grapple with it with his or her entire heart and soul and awaken a new part of herself to bring a true response. The process of repentance is a Jewish koan. How do we actualize it and make it real in our lives? It's one thing to beat our chest and beg for forgiveness, it's another to truly wash the slate clean and come to God and to one another with clean hands.

The Torah tells us to "Purify Your Heart To Serve Me Sincerely," which is another description of the process of Teschuvah. Once again, we must look deeply at what these words mean. What does it mean to purify, to serve, to be sincere, and who is the Me that is calling to you? When we truly answer these questions it will change the direction of our lives.

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Teschuvah

The Zen and Jewish Path of Returning to G-d

Rabbi Brenda Shoshanna

To begin to explore the true nature of repentance it is useful to see that there is no word for "sin" in Judaism. The word means error, or to miss the mark. This is a wonderful opening to realize that whatever errors we have made can be corrected. In fact, they are natural, inevitable in human life. In order to truly see what it is in our lives that have caused suffering and pain, both to ourselves and others, zazen, or Zen meditation is a great aid.

In the practice of zazen, we do not grab at intellectual understanding, or try to change our neighbors or even ourselves. Instead, we relentlessly face the truth of the moment and of ourselves. Whatever it is within that needs to be seen comes up to our attention. We see it and then return to the breath. We see it, feel it, taste and digest it, and then we let it go. We do not linger in misery over it, but learn what it has to teach and are naturally purified in the process. Our inner being knows what to do, and in zazen we allow it to take place.

One of the main aspects of repentance is to ask for forgiveness. All during the month of Elul we are to call anyone we know who we might have offended in the past year and ask to be forgiven. The Torah clearly tells us that, Prayer, Charity and Repentance will cancel the stern decree. But many do not know what exactly they must be forgiven for or how their behavior has affected another. They do not also see the depth of what charity means and how true prayer can illuminate it all.

A great aid, once again, is the practice of zazen. As we sit our prayer is different. It is not the prayer of asking for something for ourselves, or of begging for forgiveness, but of connecting, communing, becoming one not only with God, but with our deepest selves. Only then are we able to truly become one with those we live with and know how to offer charity that is real, that truly enhances the life of another. Only then are we able to directly see the pain our actions may have caused – and how this pain can be healed.

It has been said that all sin comes from separation from God – from each other and from ourselves. The process of teshuvah, repentance and return is a process of letting go of separation of finding our wholeness and unity once again, finding our precious jewel, realizing it has never been lost, only covered with misunderstanding and confusion, covered over by the walls we have created

between ourselves and God, between ourselves and one another and within our own self.

The Torah asks, where is God? The answer comes; God is wherever you let him or her in. The work of Teshuvah is to open our hearts, our minds, our hands to feel and see our oneness with all, so that we can give unreservedly, love unconditionally and become able to find God in each encounter in our everyday lives.

When Dogen, a great Zen patriarch, returned from China to Japan after many years of training in Zen, he was asked what he brought with him. His reply was, "I've returned with nothing but empty hands."

These empty hands are hands that do not grasp, cling or accumulate. They are open and supple, able to reach out to others, able to touch and feel, able to comfort and give. They are hands that bring real aliveness, real prayer and charity. They are the product of true repentance, which means truly emptying oneself so that one can allow the light of our inner jewel to shine through to all.

Happy New Year.

Discover the ways in which Jewish and Zen practice can heal your life in Jewish Dharma (A Guide to The Practice of Judaism and Zen), by Brenda Shoshanna, Da Capo Press, www.jewishdharma.com. We see how each practice enriches, illuminates and challenges the other and provides keys to the personal struggles we face each day. Brenda Shoshanna is psychologist, long term practitioner of Judaism and Zen, founder of the Mishkan, Center for Jewish and Zen practice. For more information, talks or workshops, contact Brenda Shoshanna (212) 288-0028, topspeakeryahoo.com. (www.brendashoshanna.com)

IFR Mission Statement

The IFR is a professional organization of rabbis united by a commitment to Jewish tradition and a desire to facilitate the Jewish spiritual growth and life cycle needs of all.

IFR provides a progressive, pluralistic forum, linking member rabbis in a spirit of friendship and a sense of community.

IFR provides support for members in their professional endeavors and offers continuing education. IFR encourages professional relationships with rabbis and other rabbinic organizations.

IFR President Rabbi Suzanne H. Carter

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קול הנשיאה



During the month of Elul 5759, myself and several rabbis began an email “blog” discussion of the difficulties *unaffiliated* rabbis were having throughout the United States and Europe.

Those of us who did not belong to a movement or rabbinic association connected to the traditional “Big Three” Seminaries found ourselves left out in the cold and with virtually no support from the rabbinic community in our local communities.

With the encouragement of Rabbi Lewis Bogage, on March 3 2000 I hosted a 3 day retreat in Delray Beach, Florida, inviting local South Florida and out of town rabbis.

In September 2000 with Rabbi Lewis Solomon as president, a non profit corporation was filed as a 501 C (3) and the IFR came into being.

Over the past 8 years I have found IFR members to be talented and committed individuals serving the wider communities as spiritual leaders, educators, and chaplains. It has been, and continues to be a privilege to work with all of you. Thank you.

Since the 2008-2010 board has taken over, we have updated our IFR logo and website with a fresh new look. After the High Holy Days, we will begin work on the 2009 conference which is scheduled for March 17-19 2009 at the Duncan Center in Delray Beach, Florida. It is our 7th IFR conference and our 5th IFR conference in Florida since 2000.

I encourage returning attendees and new members to make an effort to be there and meet your colleagues, some of whom will be presenters for our workshops, which begins with our keynote speaker, Rabbi Zev Wellins on Tuesday evening March 17th. I am looking forward to it!

I wish all IFR members and their families a healthy and sweet New Year

של חג שמח

Practical Elul

The time to set things right

Teshuvah is the theme of the month of Elul, for it is during Elul, the last month of the year that we “return” and restore our soul to its original form, the way we were born, in holiness and purity. In practical terms what can this mean to us rabbis and to the Jews whom we serve? Here are some ideas. We can ask our congregations and ourselves if anything here applies. If so, use the upcoming weeks, prior to Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur to set things right, “teshuvah-ishly!”

Is there a tool we borrowed that still sitting in the garage? Is there a pan or a dish we just had to have immediately, but it's taken us weeks to return? Or is it the telephone message we left unanswered, the card we never sent? The email buried far down the list. We know we should have responded but who has the time? Did we make a promise we did not keep? “I'll get back to you.” “This year we'll get together.” Are there things in our homes which require Teshuvah? Are there things in our hearts that await Teshuvah?

Is there a kind word waiting to be said? A word of encouragement to be given? Was I short tempered, cranky or mean spirited and now I need to make it right? Did I cut off my friend's telephone call? Did I chat on the cell phone when I should have been completely present for my child? What must I own up to and then promise to change?

Each Shabbat prior to Rosh HaShanah and the intermediate days of reflection concluding with solemnity of Yom Kippur, offer us the opportunity to think about these things. It is the month of Elul, where there are no other holidays or festivals to distract, we are given the blessed time to contemplate and then to act.

“*Ha shavat avay dah*” we can return a lost or forgotten object, we can return the kind word or the good deed. The “gimilut chassdim” that was lost or forgotten for a while. We are lucky. The *mazel* is with us. It's Elul, and a new year is coming. We have another chance to do the right thing and experience of a Teshuvah well done.

And to continue the Elul experience Rabbi Bart writes:

One moving event in my synagogue began three years ago and is now our minhag. I taught my Confirmation class (12 students) to become ba'aleii tekiah. On Rosh Hashanah they sit all over the synagogue. Rather than me blowing shofar, I call out the tekiot and all the students throughout the congregation blow the shofar simultaneously. It is very powerful and brings home the message of the shofar.

Another IFR members shares a participatory way to do Tashlich.

“I use fish crackers as the “bread” for casting away our sins but I couple this “fish” with actual sins to throw away. We use a child's swimming pool filled with water and I read out the list of sins. Each sin is listed separately on a slip of paper, and we have multiple copies of each one. Following the opening blessings the list is read. Then the children, and now even the adults, request a particular sin that applies to them. Then, with fish crackers and actual sins in hand, we cast them into the water. Congregants have said that this experience personalizes the Tashlich experience.

Below is the list we use:

Things I've done – Sins to throw away

I fought with my brother.

I fought with my sister

I fought with a friend.

I was impatient with my parents.

I was disrespectful to my parents or an older person.

I disobeyed my parents.

I was mean to my friend.

I did not clean my room.

I made a mess in the kitchen but didn't clean it up.

I blamed someone else for something I did

I would not help my mother or my father.

I did not talk nicely.

I broke a promise.

hurt someone's feelings.

I lied.

I did something but I don't want to say what it was.

TASHLICH PRAYER

G-d you are so great

You are truly awesome.

You forgive the wrong things we do

and the mistakes we make.

You don't stay mad at us.

You want to be good to us.

You show us your kindness

by squashing down our sins

**and throwing them into the deep blue
sea.**

Written by Alex (9 years)

Kislev IFR Newsletter coming soon...

Chanukah Around the World!

**Rabbi Barbara Aiello Editor
design by shosh**

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The IFR Board held their first board meeting electronically on May 1 2008.

Minutes are posted on the IFR website at
www.intfedrabbis.org/palmach.html

Welcome to new IFR members

Rabbi Gordon Fuller

Rabbi Eli Mallon

Rabbi Richard Polirer

Rabbi Ancel Salamon

Rabbi Renae Lee Toben

Ravenous Ravens

Thanks everyone for the encouragement that Rabbi Barbara and I received for our new food column.

They say that good food makes for good friends and good fellowship, so we ask everyone to consider making a contribution.

This issue of the newsletter is dedicated to the High Holidays, and traditionally foods prepared for the New Year are sweet and abundant.

Buon Appetito!

Rabbis Frank and Barbara

Kosher Deli Cole Slaw

Anyone from the metro New York area is familiar with Ben's Kosher Deli cole slaw. Here is a delicious version of their famous forshpeis. It goes great with pot roast or brisket.

- 1 bag shredded cole slaw mix
- ¼ cup vegetable oil (not olive oil)
- ¼ cup white vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper

Mix all dressing ingredients well in bowl until creamy. Combine with shredded cabbage, and mix well. Cover, and refrigerate several hours or overnight.

Grandma Ida's Taigelach

Submitted by Rabbi Rita Leonard.

"This is my Grandma Ida's taigelach recipe. It's a quick way of impersonating the more complex one".

2 large boxes mandlen (soup nuts)

1 cup honey

½ cup walnuts

½ cup cut up dried prunes (cut to about 3 pieces per prune)

In a large skillet put in the mandlen.

Pour 1 cup honey and cook on medium heat until honey is bubbling and soaking into the mandlen. Add more honey if necessary. Add walnuts and prunes and continue cooking a minute longer. Carefully mound mixture on a large plate, and let cool.

"When Grandma Ida made it she used sugar too, and I remember every holiday after the first serving the dish would be put into the fridge. When anyone was noshing, and found it, the sugar version would be hardened, and the candy would be difficult to break off. It became a classic in the family as being the candy one could break a tooth on. Thus, I recommend the honey version! Everyone I know who has tried this dish likes it."



Rosh Hashanna Seder

Rabbi Barbara Aiello – sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud, Serrastretta, (Calabria) Italy

In Sephardic Jewish homes there are several ways to prepare and conduct the Rosh HaShanah seder. These traditional foods and blessings represent a combination of my family's Sephardic traditions from Italy, Gibraltar and Morocco.

The Rosh Hashanah Seder offers an array of symbolic foods that symbolize our hopes and dreams for the new year. The seder is called **"Seder Yehi Ratzon"** The Seder of G-d's will ... we offer blessings and pray that it will be G-d's will that we are blessed with bounty, strength and peace in the coming year.

The Rosh HaShanah seder has its origins in the Talmud (Horayot 12a) where Rabbi Abaye writes about eating those foods that grow in abundance at this time of the year. We serve this abundance at our seder table as a symbol of prosperity.

To conduct the seder, you'll need seven bowls arranged, like a seder plate, and place them in the center of the table. Each bowl is filled with one of the following:

Dates

Pomegranates

apples and honey

string beans

pumpkin

spinach and scallions

fish head/ sheep's head (or head of lettuce)

The leader begins the seder by chanting the following:

Leader: "Seder Yehi Ratzon"

The Group Responds: "Seder Yehi Ratzon ... Baruch HaShem."

Dates – (Tamarim) Pass around the bowl and have each person take one date

Leader: "May It be your will, G-d, that all fighting will end. May we date this New Year with Peace and Happiness." **The Group Responds:** "Ken Yehi Ratzon" (all take a bite) **Leader:** Baruch atah Adonai, elohenu melech ah-olam, borei p're ha-etz. Blessed are you, Adonai, Ruler of the universe who has created the fruit of the tree."

Pomegranate (Rimon) **Note:** It's best if you prepare a pomegranate by peeling it and placing all the seeds in a bowl. If you can't find a pomegranate, a fig is a fine substitute. The point here is to have a fruit that is filled with seeds. It is said that the pomegranate was chosen for the Rosh HaShanah seder because it has 613 seeds... representing all the mitzvot. Pass the bowl around and have each person take a piece of pomegranate or one fig.

Leader: May it be your will, G-d, that in this new year we keep your commandments.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon" (all take a bite)

Apples and honey (Tapuah ba-d'vash)

In advance cut the apples and have honey ready for dipping. Pass around and have each person hold an apple slice dip and say:

Leader: May it be Your will, G-d, to renew for us a year that is as good and sweet as honey.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon (eat the apples)

Sing: "Apples and Honey for Rosh HaShanah"

String Beans – (Rubia o Lubia, in Italian "Fagiolino") **Note:** Rubia or Lubia are available in Chinese and Indian grocery stores. String beans are a fine substitute as are snow peas because all of these have many seeds. Boil the string beans or snow peas or you can serve them raw. Pass around the beans and say:

Leader: May it be your will, G-d, that we increase our merits." The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon

Leader: Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-adamah. Blessed are you, Adonai, ruler of the universe, who has created the fruit of the earth."

Sephardic RH Seder continued from page 7**Pumpkin or Gourd (K'ra)**

Prepare these by boiling, mashing and sweetening with brown sugar and honey. Or use a can of pumpkin pie filling. Pass it around and say:

Leader: As we eat this pumpkin, may it be Your will, G-d , to guard us. Tear away all evil decrees against us and remember the good things we have done in the past and will do in the new year.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon**Spinach or Beetroot Leaves (Selek)**

Boil the greens and have them ready in a bowl. Pass them around, each person taking a leaf.

Leader: May it be Your will, G-d, to banish all the enemies who might beat us.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon

Leeks or Scallions (Karti) These may be sliced and served raw. Pass these around the table.

Leader: May it be Your will, G-d, that "mazel" good fortune find us in the year to come.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon

Fish Head/ Sheep's Head/Head of Lettuce

Pass the head around with each person taking a piece.

Leader: May it be Your will, G-d, that we be

heads, not tails. Leaders, not followers, never

stragglers but at the head of what is right and

what is good in the year to come.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon**Sing "Hi Ne Ma Tov"**

With thanks to Rahel Musleah whose Sephardic Indian traditions form the basis of this seder.

Mark your calendar! It's official!

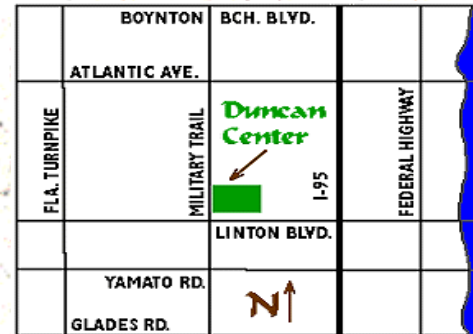
IFR Conference will be Tuesday March 17 -

Thursday March 19 2009 in sunny Delray Beach, Florida

Lets see how we have all "changed" and grown since 2006 & 2007!

Conference forms and information is located on our website at www.intfedrabbis.org in the protected portion of our website.

Early bird fees are available until February 2009.



Delray Beach Florida 2007



Delray Beach Florida 2006

