

GUT YUNTIF – GUT YAHR – SHANA TOVA AND FOR THOSE WHO ARE FASTING -TZOM KAL – AN EASY AND MEANINGFUL ONE.

THE THEME OF YOM KIPPUR, AS WE ALL KNOW, IS TESHUVAH – REPENTANCE. WE STAND BEFORE GOD THIS DAY SEEKING FORGIVENESS FOR SINS COMMITTED AGAINST GOD. OUR TRADITION ASSURES US THAT IF WE TRULY REPENT OF OUR SINS, GOD’S FORGIVENESS IS GUARANTEED. HOPEFULLY, WE HAVE ALREADY REPENTED AND ATONED FOR THE SINS WE COMMITTED AGAINST EACH OTHER. IF NOT, TONIGHT IS A GOOD TIME TO DO SO. TURN TO YOUR NEIGHBORS AND FAMILY MEMBERS WHO ARE HERE AND SAY – IF I HAVE OFFENDED YOU OR HURT YOU IN ANY WAY THIS PAST YEAR, PLEASE FORGIVE ME. TAKE A MOMENT TO DO THIS NOW. (PAUSE) YES, NOW.

WE SHOULD ALL BE FEELING A BIT BETTER – I HOPE THAT IS THE CASE.

SO, WHAT DID WE JUST DO? WE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WE MIGHT HAVE DONE SOMETHING WRONG – WE ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT – AND WE SOUGHT RECONCILIATION.

MAIMONIDES – THE RAMBAM – THE GREAT TEACHER OF THE ISLAMIC JEWISH WORLD IN THE 12TH CENTURY – TAUGHT THERE

ARE TWO ADDITIONAL STEPS IN REPENTANCE. ONE IS MAKING RESTITUTION AND THE OTHER IS PROMISING NOT TO REPEAT THE SIN OR OFFENSE. WITH REGARD TO RESTITUTION, I THINK RAMBAM WAS REFERRING TO TRANSGRESSIONS INVOLVING PRIMARILY MONEY OR PROPERTY. FOR MOST OTHER TRANSGRESSIONS, RESTITUTION IS PROBABLY MORE COMPLEX. BUT, THE MOST CHALLENGING ELEMENT IS PROMISING NOT TO REPEAT. I AM SURE WE ALL MEAN IT MOST SINCERELY, BUT WE ALL KNOW THAT DURING THE COMING YEAR, BECAUSE WE ARE HUMAN, WE ARE LIKELY TO TRANSGRESS AGAIN, MAYBE EVEN IN THE SOME OF THE SOME WAYS WE HAVE THIS YEAR. WHY?

BECAUSE MUCH OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS HABITUAL – WHICH CAN BE GOOD IF OUR HABITS ARE POSITIVE, USEFUL HABITS. BUT, WE ALL HAVE ACQUIRED WHAT WE CALL BAD HABITS – WE WISH WE COULD STOP DOING OR SAYING CERTAIN THINGS. WE WISH WE COULD CHANGE THE WAY WE REACT IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS.

HERE IS SOME GOOD NEWS - BASED ON WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED OVER MANY DECADES ABOUT HUMAN BEHAVIOR – I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT WE CAN CHANGE MANY THINGS ABOUT HOW WE BEHAVE – BUT, HERE IS THE KICKER – CHANGING OUR BEHAVIOR

IS VERY HARD WORK! IN FACT, CHANGING OUR BEHAVIOR MAY BE THE MOST DIFFICULT WORK WE HUMANS EVER UNDERTAKE. IT IS SLOW, SOMETIMES VERY SLOW, AND IT CAN BE PAINFUL.

I READ A BOOK THIS SUMMER CALLED THE CHOICE. THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN BY DR. EDITH EVA EGER, A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR AND THERAPIST. IN THE BOOK, SHE INTERWEAVES HER RECOVERY FROM THE TRAUMA SHE EXPERIENCED DURING THE HOLOCAUST WITH STORIES OF THE RECOVERY OF PATIENTS IN HER PRACTICE. THE POINT OF HER STORY IS THAT EVERYONE IS IN SOME KIND OF EMOTIONAL PRISON, NOT ONLY HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS. BUT THE GOOD NEWS, WITH HELP, WE CAN CHOOSE TO BE FREE. DR. EGER IS REINFORCING A VALUABLE INSIGHT THAT STEVEN COVEY MADE FAMOUS IN THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE. HERE IS THE QUOTE – BETWEEN STIMULUS AND RESPONSE, THERE IS A SPACE. AND IN THAT SPACE IS OUR POWER TO CHOOSE OUR RESPONSE. COVEY THOUGHT HE GOT THIS QUOTE FROM DR. VIKTOR FRANKL, ALSO A SURVIVOR AND THERAPIST. AND WHILE FRANKL MOST LIKELY WOULD AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT, IT DOES NOT APPEAR IN

HIS WORK. THE ORIGIN OF THE STATEMENT IS NOT THAT CRITICAL – UNDERSTANDING IT HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE OUR LIVES! BETWEEN STIMULUS AND RESPONSE THERE IS A SPACE. WHAT IS A STIMULUS IN THIS CONTEXT? WE HUMAN BEINGS HAVE MANY THOUGHTS AND WE EXPERIENCE NUMEROUS EMOTIONS EVERY SINGLE DAY. AND MOST LIKELY, WE REACT TO MANY OF THEM ALMOST AUTOMATICALLY AND IN REPETITIVE WAYS. SOMETIMES, THESE RESPONSES ARE VERY ADAPTATIVE – IT IS GOOD TO BE AFRAID OF WILD ANIMALS AND TO REACT QUICKLY BY FLEEING! BUT OTHER RESPONSES NOT SO MUCH. BE HONEST. WE ALL GET INTO ARGUMENTS, OFTEN WITH OUR SPOUSES OR LOVED ONES OR CLOSE FRIENDS ,AND THEN WONDER LATER WHAT HAPPENED. WE HAVE A NAME FOR THIS – OUR ‘BUTTONS’ WERE PRESSED. THAT IS THE STIMULUS.

DR. EGER POINTS OUT THAT THERE ARE ESSENTIALLY FOUR EMOTIONS – MAD, SAD, GLAD AND SCARED. THINK ABOUT THAT. ALL OUR EMOTIONS BOIL DOWN TO JUST FOUR! SO, THE MOST IMPORTANT STIMULI WITH REGARD TO OUR BEHAVIOR IS ONE OF THESE FOUR EMOTIONS – MAD, SAD, GLAD OR SCARED! IF IT SOUNDS SIMPLE, IT REALLY ISN'T. RECOGNIZING AND

ACKNOWLEDGING AND ACCEPTING WHAT WE ARE FEELING AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT IS NOT EASY.

THE SECOND PART IS THE RESPONSE. WHAT WE SAY OR DO AS A REACTION TO THE FEELING WE ARE EXPERIENCING. NOTICE, OUR REACTION IS NOT CONDITIONED BY THE WORDS OR ACTIONS OF ANOTHER PERSON – THE REACTION IS CONDITIONED BY THE FEELING WE ARE HAVING! REMEMBER FLIP WILSON – THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT! NOT REALLY – NO ONE CAN MAKE US DO ANYTHING – IF WE UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE REACTING MOSTLY ON THE BASIS OF WHAT WE ARE FEELING IN THE MOMENT. BUT THE KEY ELEMENT IS NEITHER THE STIMULUS NOR THE RESPONSE – IT IS THE SPACE WHICH OCCURS IN BETWEEN. MOST OF THE TIME, WE ARE NOT EVEN AWARE OF THE SPACE – OUR REACTION COMES ON SO QUICKLY FOLLOWING OUR FEELINGS. WE ERRONEOUSLY BELIEVE THAT THE FEELING ‘CAUSED’ OUR REACTION. BUT, THERE IS THAT SPACE. AND, THAT SPACE, AS QUOTATION CONTENDS, IS THE CRITICAL MOMENT IN OUR POWER TO CHOOSE OUR RESPONSE. WE ARE NOT DOOMED TO REACT TO EVERY STIMULUS, TO EVERY EMOTION, IN THE SAME WAY AGAIN AND AGAIN.

OUR CHALLENGE IS LEARN ENOUGH ABOUT OURSELVES AND OUR EMOTIONS SO THAT WE CAN EXPAND THE SPACE LONG ENOUGH TO CONSIDER A BETTER REACTION THAN WE MIGHT OTHERWISE. WHY AM I SHARING THIS TONIGHT? FRANKLY, ONE REASON IS THAT I FIND IT VERY POWERFUL AND I AM TRYING TO APPLY IT MORE EFFECTIVELY IN MY LIFE. THIS INSIGHT GIVES ME THE HOPE THAT I CAN CHANGE AT LEAST SOME OF MY BEHAVIOR. AND YOM KIPPUR IS PRECIOUSLY THAT – A DAY ON WHICH WE RECOGNIZE AND ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPT THAT SOME OF OUR BEHAVIOR IS EITHER HURTFUL, OR HARMFUL OR, AT THE VERY LEAST, INAPPROPRIATE. BUT IN ORDER TO ‘CONTROL’ OR CHANGE OUR BEHAVIOR – WE NEED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR EMOTIONAL PROFILE AND EXPAND THAT SPACE BETWEEN FEELING AND ACTION.

I BELIEVE WITH COMPLETE FAITH THAT EACH OF US HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE, TO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER. IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW OLD WE ARE, HOW SET WE FEEL IN OUR WAYS. IF THERE IS SOMETHING IN OUR LIVES THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE – MAYBE BECAUSE OUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS HAVE SAID SO – WE HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE, IF WE CHOOSE TO EMBRACE IT.

RAMBAM TEACHES US THAT OUR TESHUVAH, OUR REPENTANCE,
IS NOT COMPLETE, UNLESS WE AVOID REPEATING THE SAME
MISTAKES. IN THE SPACE BETWEEN STIMULUS AND RESPONSE IS
OUR POWER AND OUR HOPE FOR SINCERE, HEARTFELT AND
MEANINGFUL TESHUVAH. AMEN.