SELICHOS 1993
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In the Torah portion Nitzaveem we learn about two types of Teshuva. It says, "And you shall return to your heart." It does not say you shall return to G-d. It says you shall return to your heart. The second time we learn about Teshuva in the next sentence it says, "And you will return to the Lord your G-d." And G-d responds the same way when it says, "And G-d will turn your captivity and He will have mercy on you." Then it mentions again how G-d is going to turn to us, "And G-d is going to turn and gather you from all the nations." So we see that there are different types of Teshuva and G-d responds to us in two different ways, too. Why, though, should there be two different types of Teshuva?

Perhaps we can find the answer to this in the very first prayer of the Selichos right after the Ashrai where we learn where it says, "Like poor and needy creatures we are knocking on your doors." Notice it does not say knocking on your door but knocking on your doors. There is a beautiful Medrash which explains this in a parable. It talks about a king. The king had a servant that he wanted to reward and so he gave the key to the inner vault, to the inner door of his vault, a vault which contained great treasures. The subject, of course, was very pleased that the king had decided to honor him this way, but he turned to the king and said, "Sire, how is this possible? How is it possible that you gave me the key to the inner door but not the key to the outer door? How am I going to get into the vault?" The king looked at his faithful servant and he said, "You will figure out a way to do it. You will be able to do it." G-d, too, in a certain sense, has given a vault which has two doors and He hsa given us the key to the inner door but it is up to us to unlock the outer door. We have to turn to our heart.

The rabbis compare sin to sickness. Sickness is something which afflicts us and which causes us not to feel well in our body. Sin also is an affliction. It afflicts our soul and causes our soul not to feel well, which causes our soul to be overcome with all sorts of feelings of disgust and guilt and bad

conscience and depression and alienation. In fact, we all know that when we get a physical disease we actually get two diseases, not just one disease. We get the disease in question but then we also get another disease called panic. Norman Cousins wrote a lot about this. That is why hospitals today recognize that it is very important that they have a chaplaincy program. It is very important that they hire full time chaplains who can counsel and minister to their patients because patients can recover from the first disease that they have but then die from the second disease. In other words, the prospects of their recovery from their disease that they are told that they have is very good but because they panic they, in effect, are killed by their panic and the medicine and the treatments that they take cannot overcome the panic which exacerbates the disease. It is similar to a person drowning in water. If you will relax you will probably be able to float and learn how to swim, but if you panic and flail with your arms then you drown. Therefore, it is very important that panic be assuaged. That is why when people have a disease today the doctors are forced because of the different laws to tell the patients exactly everything that they have. In certain instances this is very bad because it causes panic in a patient. Doctors are afraid of being sued and this, in a way, flies in conflict with Jewish law. Jewish law says that you have to look at what is good for the patient and sometimes you should not tell the patient everything because if you tell the patient everything he is going to go into panic, and if he goes into panic he is going to destroy himself. That is, too, why doctors at the turn of the century changed the name of the disease of consumption. We read in 19th century novels how everyone is dying of consumption. All the heroes and heroines were dying of consumption. IN fact, some very great figures like Chopin died from consumption, but after 1900 we do not hear of consumption anymore. The reason for that is that the doctors did not cure it but changed its name to tuberculosis. We know that TB is a very virulent and bad disease. In 1900 if you told a person

he had consumption he would die of panic. If you told him he had TB he would say, "Oh, thank G-d, I don't have consumption. I am going to get cured." And he would muster the necessary courage to overcome his disease. The same thing is true today where people are no longer told they have cancer because it would scare them so they are told that they have a tumor and now people are afraid of being told they have a tumor so they are told they have an oncological problem and they say, "Oh, thank G-d, I don't have cancer but just an oncological problem," and they muster the courage then to overcome their problems.

So the very first thing that we must all do before we can return to G-d is to muster the necessary courage. We have to turn to our heart in order to muster the necessary courage in order to face our problems correctly and directly. We cannot lie to ourselves. It is true that we should not lie to others and that it is wrong to lie to others, but the worst lies are not the lies we tell others. The worst lies are the lies we tell ourselves. When we rationalize, when we try to cover up all our faults, when we will not recognize them ourselves then we are harming ourselves and can never do Teshuva. We can never do Teshuva because, first of all, we do not recognize our faults, and, second of all, the faults, themselves, and the errors that we cause and the hurts that we cause will stay in our own conscience and in an unthinking moment they will come up and slap us in the face and make us ashamed and make us guilty. Therefore, it is very important that we face the truth about ourselves, but people do not want to face the truth about themselves. A fellow came to me the other day who had been fired from 5 different jobs. He always had an excuse. It is true that on one of the jobs the boss let him resign, but he was, in fact, fired from 5 jobs and it was always somebody else's fault. He would not recognize that he, himself, had a particular problem. That will mean that he will be fired from many, many more jobs, too. In fact, there is a Russian proverb which says that if one person tells you you are drunk, keep going. If 2 people tell

you you are drunk, sit down. If 3 people tell you you are drunk, lie down. It is very important that we face up to the facts as they are presented to us. It is very important that we look at ourselves in the mirror with a critical eye otherwise we will never be able to amount to anything.

That is why it mentions here that before we can do Teshuva we have to turn to our own hearts. If we muster the courage then it says G-d will turn your captivity. What does it mean by captivity? It does not just mean physical captivity. It means also captivity of the lies which surround us. It tells us about the bonds which bind us because we are unwilling to face the truth. The trouble with lies is that you have to have a very good memory and you have to cover up one lie with another lie. You get involved in all sorts of situation where the anger cannot help but burst forth, and then, because you are trapped, you many times say and do things which are very hurtful to others because you are trapped or otherwise you direct your anger against yourself and you become very depressed. So it is important that we burst the bonds which tie us and this we can only do if we face the truth about ourselves.

That is, too, the rabbis tell us why it says, "And you will return unto the Lord your G-d and listen to His voice," because after you have recognized what your faults are and have assumed responsibility for them then you can return to G-d and listen to His voice. Then G-d can return and gather you from all the nations. G-d can make you into the person that you really should be, that you know that you could be.

We know that in the Selichos there are two main subjects. The first one is Adoshem Adoshem El Rachum V'Chanan. When the Jewish people sinned at the time of the golden calf G-d told Moshe Rabbeinu that if he would say this prayer that when the next time the Jewish people sinned they would be forgiven, and the next time that the Jewish people sinned was at the time of their listening

to the spies, their failure to enter into the land of Israel, and Moshe did say this prayer, and the Jewish people were forgiven. Why were the Jewish people sinning by not going into the land of Israel? Because they were afraid. They did not have the courage to look at the facts the way they were. They were satisfied in the desert. They had their physical needs filled. They could sit and learn Torah, but that is not what G-d wants us to do. G-d wants us to enter into the world even though it is a dangerous place, but we have to enter into the world without any illusions. In 1973 Israel had all the intelligence information they needed in order to make sure that the Egyptian and Syrian attack could be forestalled, but although they had all the information they refused to analyze it in the correct way because they thought it was impossible that Egypt or Syria could attack. It did not make any sense to them. Therefore, they juggled the data in such a way as to make sense to them. They did not face the facts they way they were. Today, too, Israel is facing fateful decisions, and Israel has to make sure, too, that they do not misread the facts, that they do not switch the facts around to fit preconceived ideas, that they must not because they are all tired of war and tired of the struggle feel that necessarily the Arabs are tired, too. We all hope for peace and we all hope that we will see the day when Jews and Arabs will live in harmony and complete brotherhood but we have to face facts the way they are. We cannot twist them and shape them in ways that will come out to a preconceived notion. It is very important now because Israel today could be looked on as a country who is tired and hsa given up on its convictions. After all, that is what the fall of the Berlin Wall meant. Russia was not willing to defend communism anymore. She was not willing to send her young men in to die for communism. True, they tried to reestablish fully was put down with just the loss of 3 lives. Russian soldiers would not fire on Russian civilians because they did not believe in communism anymore. They did not have anymore the conviction that they were doing the

right thing. Today, too, there are many in Israel who no longer believe in the Zionist enterprise. They no longer believe that Judaism is something that is necessary for the world and many of them are tired. If the Arabs think that the reason why Rabin shook hands with Arafat is because the Jewish people are tired and they, therefore, do not have the conviction and will to defend themselves, then we are in for a terrible, terrible bloodbath. We have to make sure that we face situations the way they are. If we can muster the courage to do what we have to do then we can rest assured that our people Israel as well as we as individuals will survive. We have to turn to our hearts, though. That, of course, was the brilliance and endearing quality and the great moral basis for Zionism. Young people in Europe knew that the ground was burning under their feet and they knew that they had to leave and they wanted to save the Jewish people. They turned to their hearts. Many of them did not know that actually they would later turn to G-d. They did not realize that that was part of the equation but they had to courage to try to save their people. G-d returned to that by turning their captivity. We, too, must never give up hope.

The second part of the main part of the Selichos revolves around its oldest passage and that is when we say, "The one who answered Abraham at Mount Moriah, He should answer us. The One Who answered Joseph in the House of the Cheesun, He should answer us..." Many times in life we are confronted with impossible situations. People do not know which way to turn. Abraham thought that he was called upon to sacrifice his. Actually he was only called upon to elevate his son. We do not know what the future holds for us. We know that G-d hsa caused us to act but, yet, even though when the situation is murky we have to assume responsibilities for ourselves and for our acts. That is why it says, "And you should return the second part to the Lord your G-d and you should listen to His voice." When we assume responsibility for ourselves then, of course, we can amount to something. Life is difficult. Life is not easy, but G-d has

assured us that He will help us, that if we will show the necessary courage He will release our bonds. He will make sure that the Jewish people survive everywhere. If we do not then, of course, those Jews who do not have the courage may perish and even Jews who do have courage many times because we do not know G-d's plans also perish, but the rest of us, too, must never lose our courage. Then we are assured that after we have come to grips with ourselves and after we have accepted the moral law that G-d has placed upon us and act in a correct way that G-d will gather us all and allow us all to enjoy a life of health and happiness, that He will break the bonds of sins which grab us because we lack courage to face these sins. Let us hope and pray that we will all face our sins with courage so that we will be able to assume the necessary responsibility for our actions which will assure G-d's help and which will bring about the coming of the Mashiach. Amen.