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Rosh Hashanah Eve 5769 - Return

Sing: Return again, return again, return to the land of your soul

Return again, return again, return to the land of your soul

Return to who you are,

Return to what you are,

Return to where you are,

Born and reborn again . . . (Shlomo Carlbach)

Return, *T'shuvah* – T'is the season.

T'shuvah, usually translated as repentance, literally means: turn back, return.

T'shuvah; turn back and examine your past year, review the ledger of your deeds, balance your book. The book of life that you have inscribed with your acts.

When we balance our checkbooks, we return to the last time we reconciled. We add in our deposits/credits and subtract our withdrawals, our debits. So too with our life ledger that is opened each year at these Holy Days. We come together tonight and over the next days to get our life balanced. We return to the results of our last audit. We subtract our mistakes, our failures, our misses and we add our accomplishments, our

successes, our acts of kindness. We return, to get back to basics, to get back to the core of our being.

Sing: Return again, return again

“Return to who you are!” Who are you?

A story: “There was a king in the Middle Ages who was wooing a woman. He wanted to persuade her to become his queen. They sat together on a couch and he told her about himself. He said boastfully, “I reign over a country that is enormous. I am in charge of an army and a navy that number tens of thousands.” She listened and moved a bit away from him on the couch. He went on, “I administer a bureaucracy that involves thousands of workers and I am consulted by kings from all over the world.” She listened and she moved a little bit further away from him on the couch. He said, “I am the head of a vast judiciary, and every day, hundreds of complex cases are brought to me to resolve.” She moved still further away from him. And then quietly he said, “I’m lonely and I’m scared and I’m overworked and I don’t know what to do with my life.” And when he said that, she moved closer to him and took his hand.”

“Return to who are you!” Who are you? Who are we?

We are strong; we are vulnerable. We are successful and we are failures. We are needy and we are independent. We are driven and we are lost. We are human; we are creatures created in the image of God and we are each of us unique, special – different from all others.

Say these Days of **Return** “Get back to the basics, to the core of your being.” We are not the things we have collected. Things come and go. Things are replaceable, Things can be duplicated. We are priceless! We are each unique, irreplaceable. These Holy Days call upon us to look inside, find ourselves, find the Godly within ourselves. Find our uniqueness; the blessings, the talents and skills that make each of us, who we are. Return to who you are: love and care for yourself and then you will be able to care and relate to others; your life ledger will be in balance.

Sing: Return again, return again

Return to what you are! What are you? What are we? We are Jews. We are children, parents, spouses. We are siblings, we are friends, we are co-workers, we are caring, giving human beings. We are here affirming the best of what we are. We are here celebrating a New Year, a new beginning, choosing to be part of a Jewish community. We are Jews and

proud about it!

A story: For Louis D. Brandeis, life at Harvard Law School was not easy, although it wasn't the curriculum that made his journey so difficult. For three years, students sat next to him uninvited at lunch each day. They said things like, "Brandeis, you're brilliant. You could end up on the Supreme Court if only you weren't a Jew. Why don't you convert? Then all your problems would be solved." Brandeis listened but never responded.

By his final year of law school, Brandeis's preeminence could no longer be denied. Jewish or not, he was invited to join the honor society. It was an electric moment – the first time that the exclusive society had accepted a Jew. On the evening of the official induction, the room was hushed; the atmosphere was thick. All eyes were on Brandeis as he walked to the lectern. Slowly he looked around the room.

"I am sorry," he said, "that I was born a Jew."

With that, the room erupted in applause. There was an explosion of shouting and cheers.

"We have convinced him," the members of the audience thought. "Finally, finally, he has seen our point."

Brandeis waited for the excitement to abate. When silence was reestablished, he began again, "I am sorry," he said, "that I was born a

Jew, but only because I wish I had the privilege of choosing Judaism on my own.”

Being a Jew is a privilege. It is a responsibility. It is a covenant. It is a covenant with those who came before us, with those who will come after us, with our fellow Jews here and everywhere and with God. Are we living up to the obligations of this covenant? Are we living up to our highest, our best, in the covenants we have with our parents, with our children, with our spouses, with our friends and co-workers? Of course not, we can each do better! I know I can. We are privileged to have these covenants in our lives. We turn back and review how we have done. We look inside, examining what we are, figuring out how we will grow and improve; then our life ledgers will be in balance.

“Return to where your are?” So strange! How can one return to where you are – you are already there?!?

Return to where you are – to where you really are. Get real! We all live with fantasies, we all puff ourselves up and we all put ourselves down. When we are teenagers we like to see ourselves as 20 or 30; thinking we know it all, can take care of everything. When we are 50 – 60, we like to see ourselves as 20 somethings, forgetting to slow down a little carrying loads much too heavy for us, literally and figuratively..

“Return to where you are!” Try to see yourself in the mirror, see yourself as others do. See where you are on the ladder of life, of self-improvement.

What have you accomplished? Where have you failed? Where have you succeeded? Where are you stuck? What is your purpose? Where do you find meaning?

A final story: Two construction workers have lunch together everyday. Everyday when they open their lunch boxes one of them says: “Oh no – ham and cheese again.” After weeks of hearing his fellow worker complain about ham and cheese, the other worker turns to him and says “If you don’t like ham and cheese tell your wife to make something else.” “My wife” responds the complainer, “I have no wife – I make my own sandwiches.”

Let us each “Return to where we are.” Let us each get unstuck, so that we can plan where we are going. What steps are we each going to take in 5769? How will we grow? How will each keep our ledger balanced?

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav taught, “The sun is very big, but if a person puts one small hand over his eyes, he can block out the entire sun. The purpose of this season is so that we can each learn how to remove our hand – so that we can each see the sun in its glory – and so that each of

us can see ourselves by its light.”

Let us all return to who we are: unique creatures created in the image of God; to what we are: Jews in a covenant; to where we are: on the road of purpose, of life. May we all see ourselves in a new light so that we may prosper in the New Year. L'Shana Tova!

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