



## From the Rabbi's Study

Some years ago, I read a most intriguing advert in the personal section of the Times: "J.B. – come home! All is forgiven! We love you."

I don't know if J.B. was a husband, a son. J.B. might have been a dog! What did he do? Why did he leave home? Where was he? Did they really mean it? The ad is most intriguing. Did he ever return home? I'll never know. But the concept is so relevant at this time, "Come home, all is forgiven." This is the message of the Yamim Noraim.

In Hebrew we call this Teshuvah, one of the greatest teachings of our faith. There is an opportunity for the sinner for redemption and rehabilitation.

To understand the concept of Teshuvah is to know that there are different kinds of sin. We recite the *Al Chet* and the *Ashamnu*, which contain lists of sins and transgressions. Are we guilty of every one of them? When we confess, it is in the plural, "We have sinned." If the sin exists in society even if we are not guilty of committing it, we are all guilty.

There are two basic kinds of sin. First are sins of commission, something that we do overtly. We have not committed murder, robbed a bank, kidnapped, committed arson or dealt in drugs. But in our human relationships we are guilty of sins of commission; we many have cheated or lied, been unfaithful or exploited, slandered or humiliated a human being. These are sins of commission, overt transgressions that are direct and tangible.

The other type of sin is that of omission, something that we fail to do, which cannot be punished in a court of law. We are all guilty of these actions; we have been neglectful, indifferent, apathetic. We are guilty of sins of omission when we do not speak out when there is injustice in our midst, when there is prejudice. We are guilty of sins of omission when we do not protest evil in the wider community – drugs, crime, corruption. We are guilty of the sin of omission when we are silent when it comes to exploitation in our workplace, our neighbourhood or school. We are guilty of the sin of omission if we do not reach out our hands to those who are in need. It was Dante who once said, "The hottest place in hell is reserved for people who in a moral crisis are neutral."

Our rabbis discuss sins of omission, which are very subtle. They quote from the Torah, "Thou shalt not steal from a poor person because he is poor." How can we steal from somebody who is destitute? The rabbis give the example of the "corners of the field" to which every poor person is entitled. If we fail to provide him with the corners of the field, then we rob from the poor for this belongs to him. This is a sin of omission. Robbing is not just taking but not giving.

Consider this, we are guilty of robbing from the poor when we withhold gifts which we should share with others, words of love that should be spoken to a wife or a husband that are never spoken, failing to pay attention to children and to parents, or finding time for a friend or a neighbour who is hurt and needs compassion. We rob the poor when we do not support materially or emotionally people who are in despair, when we can't forgive or when we're granted forgiveness, are reticent to accept it. Why is it that words of gratitude, praise and compliment stick in our throats? People are entitled to these things.

When we are neglectful, apathetic and indifferent, we are guilty of the sin of omission. As Elie Weisel once said, "The opposite of love is not hate, but indifference."

The shofar in Elul sounds the alarm and the warning. We must do Teshuvah. We must return, as we pray to Hashem this weekend, seeking purification and inspiration so that we do not commit again the sins for which we repent, the transgressions for which we seek atonement.

Hashem is calling to us, a wife, a husband, a parent, a child, a neighbour, an associate, a friend. "Come home, all is forgiven!" Despite our sins of commission or omission, we can start all over again. We can change. The door is open. Teshuvah, we have another chance.

Ruthie and I, together with the children, send you our warmest wishes for a *k'tivah v'chatimah tovah*. May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for good health, happiness and prosperity. May the year 5764 be *sh'nat chayim v'shalom* – a year of life and of peace for you and your families, for our community, especially for our people in *Eretz Yisrael* and the entire Jewish people.