



## **Shabbat Parashiot Nitzavim-VaYelech September 9, 2023 – 23 Elul 5783**

The Torah readings before the High Holidays have a focus on repentance. Many people, if not most people, find repentance to be an uncomfortable subject. Why? Because if we talk about repentance, we must be bad people or guilty of something. This feeling comes from the fact that the majority of people think about repentance only when confronting a sin they have committed. Most people (probably) think about repentance during the High Holidays because they have little choice. The rest of the year, avoidance of thinking about repentance is the norm. Rabbi Sasson writes, “this reflects a superficial understanding of repentance.”

The first step of Teshuvah (repentance) is Charatah (regret). One must regret or feel guilt for a wrong or sin they have committed. Without remorse, Teshuvah really does not exist. Rabbi Kook (1865-1935; first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel) writes, “Teshuvah does not come to embitter a person’s life, but to make it more pleasant.” Rabbi Sason explains: Of course, Teshuvah includes facing up to one’s sins. The Hebrew word “chet” (sin) means “to stray off of the proper path.” The more appropriate translation of “Teshuvah” is “return” as opposed to repentance.

The question then is, what does it mean to do Teshuvah? It means to return to “humanity’s” normal healthy state, which existed with Adam until Adam strayed, and from which we stray even more. Teshuvah (return/repentance) is not “creating” a new reality, one that may be incorrectly believed to be better. Teshuvah is returning to a “G-dly normal,” as difficult as it is to define. That return, when done honestly should bring a person happiness, and any bitterness will be erased.

Good Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Nathan W. Langer