

# WE NEED A SECOND CHANCE

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Legend has it that George Bernard Shaw sent Winston Churchill two tickets to his latest play, with a note saying,

“Here are two tickets to my new play. Bring a friend, if you have one.”

Churchill replied,

“I’m sorry, I can’t make the first night, but I will try to make the second night, if there is one!”

It is a common practice in the world of theater to observe the reactions of the public on dress rehearsal night and to make the changes which may be deemed necessary. The playwright and the producer will thus have a chance to re-write a repartee or improve the dialogue of a particular scene. But it has happened, on occasion, that a play did not survive its first representation and was removed from the repertoire.

On Yom Kippur, we too, have the opportunity to rewrite the script of our life, to re-assess our goals and strengthen our determination to become a better person.

By engaging in a process of self-examination and self-evaluation, we will acknowledge the errors that have hindered our pursuits during the past year and make the needed corrections which will enable us to attain the goals we have set for ourselves. Yom Kippur is thus offering us a second chance to begin the new year with a fresh start and a renewed spirit.

The story is told of an angry reader who stormed into the office of the daily paper, one day, and asked to see the editor of the obituary column.

“Look at this article.” he said to the editor, “is it not a disgrace?” and he showed him the pathetic mistake which had crept in the last issue of the paper: they had printed his name in the list of the persons who had recently passed away.

“You can see for yourself,” said he, “I am still very much alive! I therefore demand an apology in to-morrow’s issue of the paper!”

The editor thought of a way of appeasing the anger of the visitor and then answered,

“Sir, I understand your feelings of dismay, but as a general rule, we do not like to make retractions. I’ll tell you what we shall do: we will include your name in the birth column of tomorrow’s issue and give you, so to speak, a fresh start and a new life!”

We must find the courage to acknowledge that we have made mistakes in the year past and that we are prepared to correct them in the year ahead. We must be willing to redress the wrongs we have committed and initiate a new process of spiritual re-birth. Our biblical prophets have assured us that God will help us “straighten that which is crooked” to use the words of Isaiah, *vehaya he-akov le-mishor*.

We must find the courage to remain steadfast in the face of adversity or failing health and pursue our goals till they are fulfilled. That is why we ask God on this day: “Avinu Malkenu, our Father, our Mentor, renew unto us a year of good!” *H’adesh aleinu shanah tovah!*

As we say when we return the Torah Scroll into the ark:

*Hashivenu Adonay elei-kha...* Turn us unto You, o Lord, and we shall return. Renew our days as of old.

If we make the initial effort, we believe that God will sustain our will and help us complete our task. We shall then be able to realize our goals because God helps those who help themselves.

Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to the same principle in a very graphic way.

“Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step.”

Our first resolution, of course, is concerned with ourselves and our family, our parents - if we are so blessed - our spouse, our children and our grandchildren. They all need our understanding and our support, and we need to feel their love and affection.

May this Yom Kippur mark the beginning of a new kind of relations with the members of our family and our fellow human beings. We pray that Providence may provide us a new chance to fulfill our responsibilities toward them and to feel more deeply the love that exists between us.

Just as we need a second chance at many crossroads in our life, humanity also needs a second chance too. So many tragedies and acts of wanton violence have taken the lives of innocent people in this, our country, but also in the Middle East, in Asia and in Africa. Our hearts are heavy as we mourn with the families who have lost a dear one. That is why we all need a second chance, so that we may do now what we failed to do the first time, to restore justice and peace, compassion and goodness in our world.

Let us close our eyes for a second, and visualize all the worthy resolutions we would like to make today and say “yes” to them, as did our ancestors gathered at Sinai when they said *na-aseh ve-nishmah*, we shall do and we shall understand. Making sure that the resolution to act comes before the resolution to think, because when we say we shall think about it, we often mistake the thinking for the doing, and we seldom accomplish anything.

We know that second chances are not lacking, what is important is for us to seize them when they present themselves.

“We're given second chances every day of our life” writes Andrew Greeley. And if “we don't take them,” we have no right to complain because “they're there for the taking.”

On this Day of Atonement, it behooves us to remember our failings and to resolve to correct them. And then, we can be sure that the divine promise will be fulfilled as prophet Ezekiel so aptly proclaimed in the book which bears his name:

“Say to the House of Israel: Thus said the Lord God: Not on account of your merit will I act, o House of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have caused to be profaned among the nations to which you have come. I will sanctify My great name...And the nations shall know that I am God... when I manifest My holiness before their eyes through you. I will take you from among the nations and gather you from all the countries and I will bring you back to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean: I will cleanse you from all your idol-worship and from all your fetishes. And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a

heart of flesh; and I will put My spirit into you. Thus I will cause you to follow My laws and faithfully to observe My rules. Then you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers and you shall be My people and I will be Your God.” (Ez. 36:22-28)

This most beautiful chapter of our Bible, sums up the whole spirit of the High Holidays.

I wish to conclude with a special prayer.

Dear God, we thank you for Your love and support, for Your compassion and care for us at all time, for the privilege to give a second chance when we have failed. We are grateful for all the opportunities you have provided for us in the course of our existence, and the favor You are granting us today, to make good resolutions and do what is right in Your sight. Amen!

