



A Day Of Atonement In A Modern World

By Rev. Gary Cristofaro



And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. (Leviticus 23:1)

What can we learn from the inherent sanctity of the days God set apart for Himself and His children? Should they be important to us today? Have you noticed that the cruelty of mankind has no limits? “There is a passion and drive for cruel deeds which only the awe and fear of God can soothe; there is a suffocating selfishness in man which only holiness can ventilate. Man is meaningless without God, and any attempt to establish a system of values on the basis of the dogma of man’s self-sufficiency is doomed to failure.” (1)

Awake to righteousness and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame. (1 Corinthians 15:34)

You might find it surprising that the Greek word Paul uses for “shame” is *entropē*. We have a derivative of this Greek word in modern physics. Entropy is the quantity of thermal energy that is *not* able to be converted into mechanical work. In other words, entropy is the amount of *disorder* in a system. It is the heat death spiral of the universe, the gradual decline into chaos. If we apply this physics definition to the original Greek word, we find something quite interesting. Shame can be considered as the decline into disorder.

The word itself is composed of two other Greek words. Both add to our understanding. They literally mean, “turning in” or “inverting.” Is this revealing? Is shame somehow connected to a turn inwardly?

In Paul’s Hebraic Greek world, shame is a *public* concept. It is not essentially an inner psychological state. It is the loss of reputation and respect. It may be accompanied by personal feelings of humiliation and chagrin, but it

presupposes *community* relationships. It is not the same as guilt, which in biblical terms is about the consequences of personal and corporate failure to meet a standard. So Paul can say, “to your shame,” because he is addressing *communal failure*. He is pointing out that the Corinthians have been preoccupied with internal matters rather than acting as a light on a hill. They have focused their energy inwardly and ignored the mission to display changed character to a world in desperate need. They have failed to fulfill their purpose. (2)

Notice Paul is not speaking to the world; He is addressing a community of believers. Have the issues that Paul was addressing in Corinth somehow disappeared in the 21st century? Not hardly! A period of introspection leading to repentance has not become obsolete but rather the need for communal repentance has only grown greater in our modern world.

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is meant for introspection and repentance for all of God’s children. But I often I hear members of the church claim we have liberty. Which begs the question; “Is liberty alone, regardless of what we do with it, regardless of good and evil, of kindness and cruelty, the highest good? Is liberty an empty concept – the ability to do what we please? Is not the meaning of liberty contingent upon its compatibility with righteousness? There is no freedom except the freedom bestowed upon us by God; there is no freedom without sanctity.” (3)

The internal focus of the church often manifests in a self-help or a personal prosperity message. As those grafted in to Israel we are called to be a light to the nations and to imitate Yeshua as a servant to Israel. It’s time for the church to return to its roots and obey the Father’s call.

Helping the poorest of the poor Jewish people return home to Israel is how we answer that call. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in Romans 15:8. “*Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers ...* Those promises included a land that they could call their own. As imitators of the one we call Master, it is our role to serve Yeshua’s brethren by rescuing them from the nations and return them to Israel. By humbly serving them we are fulfilling God’s call on our lives and restoring their hope for a better future.

1. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.169
2. *Spiraling In*, by Skip Moen, D. Phil.
3. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.170