

**THE PERSON****IN THE PARSHA**

Do You Hear Voices?

Do you ever hear voices?
I do, especially at this time of year.

It is now the period of time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This ten-day period is known as the ten days of Teshuvah, or repentance. During this time Jews become more contemplative, more serious, and more given to internal dialogue.

It is a time for each of us to look within, and to give special attention to those inner voices which call upon us to correct past mistakes, to redress past offenses, and to resolve to do better in the year to come.

When I say, "I hear voices at this time of year," I am referring, of course, to those inner voices.

There is another voice, which can be heard at this time of year, although not many of us are sufficiently spiritually sensitive to hear it. It is the voice of God.

For you see, the Talmud tells us that this ten day period is especially propitious for seeking out the divine and for hearing His voice. This is a time when God is to be found, when he is very near.

Chassidim employ the following parable to explain this unusual theological phenomenon. Imagine, the parable goes, a king who spends most of his year isolated in his royal castle. It would be no wonder that he would wish to become more familiar with his people, and with what they were all about.

Imagine further, the parable continues, that he would decide to disguise himself in ordinary clothing and travel about the countryside, visiting the common folk and becoming acquainted with their lives, their problems, and especially what they really thought of their king.

And so the king, totally unidentifiable, wandered through the countryside and

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visited his constituency. The king was now close, extraordinarily close, to many of his countrymen. Few, if any, realized however, that it was the king who was wandering among them, and that he was accessible in a very unusual manner.

We are placed on this world not to fulfill our selfish needs, but to help others achieve their needs

The Almighty himself now “wanders” among us, just as the king of the parable. During these ten days, the first ten days of the Jewish New Year, we have the opportunity to address Him in ways which were totally unavailable to us while He was in His royal castle, protected by guards and requiring appointments, usually impossible to obtain, often long in advance of when we needed them.

If we are aware of the presence of the Almighty in our midst, in this unique way, during this time of year, it is no wonder that we might just hear His divine voice.

And what would it say? What does the inner voice of our conscience say?

I think that these voices, divine or the better part of our human selves, have a threefold message; three messages that apply to every one of us, Jewish or non-Jewish, religious or otherwise.

The first message that I hear from the voice is a protest against my tendency, our tendency, to want gratification now.

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There is something within us that can't wait, that wants our pleasures now and our hopes realized immediately. But the inner spiritual voice, more clearly audible at this time of year, says, "Wait". This spiritual voice stresses the need to postpone gratification, to work long and hard toward distant objectives, to set long-term goals and to work toward them ambitiously. This voice transcends the present and orients us towards the future with an attitude of optimism and hope.

The second message objects to the word "me". It wants to counter the tendency we all have to be self-centered, to live a life based upon "me first". This second component of our inner voice encourages us to be concerned with others. To realize, as the sainted Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin

writes, that we are placed on this world not to fulfill *our* selfish needs, but to help others achieve *their* needs. The second message of the voice wishes to counter the culture of narcissism within which we find ourselves. It emphasizes charity, compassion, and social concern.

And the third message of the voice is such a simple one. It says, "Be happy". It recognizes our tendency toward depression, sadness, and despair. And it encourages us to celebrate life with joy, to cultivate that most important of biblical emotions, *simcha*. How succinctly, but how stirringly, the spiritual genius Nachman of Braslav put it: "It is a great *mitzvah* to be *b'simcha*, to be happy... always!"

These are the voices that I hear when I listen carefully during this time of year. Perhaps these voices are divine in origin. More likely they are simply being expressed by a part of me that intuitively knows what is right and how I should guide my life in the coming year.

But one thing is for certain: These voices are not auditory hallucinations. They are not signs of madness or insanity. They are signs of clarity and expressions of valuable inner truths.

I am sure, dear reader, that you too can hear these voices if you but allow yourselves to listen.

Do listen. Follow the messages of this inner voice. And enjoy each and every one of you, a happy and sweet, successful and peaceful New Year. ■



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