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## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday, September 10, 2021 ~ Parsha: *Vayelech*

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

This Shabbat is *Shabbat Shuvah*, the Shabbat of repentance. *Shabbat Shuvah* is the name that tradition ascribes to the Shabbat that falls between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. It derives its name from the first words of the *Haftarah* for this day,

*“Return O Israel, to the Lord your God...”* (Hosea 14:2).

The words of the *haftarah*, as well as the entire philosophy of this special time in of the year help us remember that repentance is always possible. God’s mercy encompasses us all and we can begin again in the new year if we really want to. *Shabbat Shuvah* is another opportunity to think about these ideas right before the holiest day of the year.

I hope the following story, taught by Rabbi Shmuel Reichman helps you to understand the true power of this season. It is time to return to our families, our community, and our God. No matter how far we think we might have strayed, our tradition promises that they are waiting patiently for our return.

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An old man sat on the train as it rumbled peacefully along the countryside. He was enjoying the view and the quiet atmosphere of the train car, until at one stop, a young man got on the train and sat across from him. The man was sweating visibly, gripping his knees, and occasionally stealing nervous glances out the window. Concerned, the old man asked if there was anything he could help with. The young man looked at him, sizing him up, before apparently deciding to trust him.

“I’m not sure that you can help me, but I guess I may as well share. I grew up just a few miles from here.... In fact, my parents still live there. My parents blessed me with an incredible childhood- love, support, and every opportunity I could ask for.

Unfortunately, I gave them the exact opposite in return. I was ungrateful, selfish, rude, and oppositional, causing trouble wherever and whenever I could. I eventually left them, deciding to strike it out on my own, free of them. They were heartbroken, and tried for years to reconcile with me. I ignored their every effort, working to build a new life for myself. I began making connections and cutting deals, slowly building a life for myself that looked nothing like the honest, giving, value-based life that my parents lived. I cut any corner I needed to if it would get me ahead, using people in ways that I should have been ashamed of.

“However, things did not go as planned. Eventually, everything fell apart. Those who I considered ‘friends’ were quick to abandon me as soon as our friendship stopped benefiting them. My financial plans turned sour, with my shady deals being exposed for what they were. I borrowed, I begged, but things just kept taking turns for the worst. I soon found myself friendless, penniless, and feeling completely alone and abandoned. With nowhere to turn, I contemplated ending my life.

“Then, I thought of my parents. How they had spent years writing to me, pleading with me, saying how much they love me, before eventually giving up. ‘No,’ I thought to myself. ‘There’s no way they would take me back. How could they, after everything that I’ve put them through?’ I debated back and forth for weeks before finally mustering up the courage to pen them a letter. In it, I apologized for what I’ve done, explaining how low I’ve sunk, and begged them to take me back. I then made a deal with them. On Tuesday, I would take the train that passes right by their home. If they were willing to accept me once again, they should hang a white flag on the tree in front of their house. And if not, I would keep riding the train. I would understand that I had simply gone too far, that they no longer had a place for me, and that I was completely on my own.”

The young man, now crying, looked up at his older seatmate. “We’re two minutes from their house. I can’t bear to look,” he said, as he broke down completely.

The old man nodded with compassion and kindly assured him that he would look out the window and check if there was a white flag. The young man whispered his thanks, as he sat with his head in his arms, softly crying.

Two minutes later, the old man gasped. The young man, unable to look, frantically asked what was going on. “Is there a flag hanging?” he asked, with an air of panic to his voice. The old man just slowly shook his head, gazing out the window in awe. The young man finally gathered up the nerve to look, and his entire body was flooded with warmth. There wasn’t a flag hanging in the tree, the entire tree was covered in white flags.

L'shana Tovah - I wish you and our entire community a healthy and happy New Year

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner