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## SHABBAT SHUVAH – SABBATH OF RETURNING

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Welcome to Bible study! This coming Tuesday will be Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) — a day of fasting and afflicting the soul. The whole day is to be one of prayer and confession of willful sins individually and as a nation and drawing close to God. We should be prepared to do special introspection and self examination and admit our sins. It is a day of cleansing from impurity in our heart and abandoning sin. The most important thing is to resolve to strive with all our strength with grief and weeping for a contrite heart and achieve true **teshuvah** –repentance for the past sins we have committed with the body and tongue that violate God’s laws ,statutes and judgments; and to increase personal good works. Obedience to God is the way of prosperity and health. These commands were created to give us peace and well-being when obeyed that lead to life eternal.

**Psalm 119:97**—David said, “O how love I thy law. It is my meditation all the day.” In years gone by on the Day of Atonement (fasting), two Bible study services were attended by brethren— one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Then we would fellowship with a few people and return home until sunset. After the sun set we would break our fast by going to a restaurant and enjoying a good meal together. In breaking a fast, my wife who is knowledgeable in fasting, breaks her fast slowly (not all at once with a full meal) and usually begins with a piece of fruit. Those of us not trained in fasting feasted heartily having not eaten all day. During those early days of learning, we really did not think of Atonement (Yom Kippur) as a day of prayer to rise early and reflect on the ways of teshuva and rectitude, pouring our heart out to God. Nor did we set aside specific times during the day and night for introspection and self examination really drawing close to God all day long confessing our sins and increasing our performance of good deeds and generosity. The goal is to bring about reconciliation between people and between individuals and God. It is the only fast day mandated in the Bible (Leviticus 23:27) and it speaks of “afflicting your souls”. Yom Kippur has the longest synagogue service of any day in the Jewish year. The first night, the synagogue service is inaugurated with a haunting prayer called the *Kol Nidrei* that is a declaration by which personal vows are canceled.

**Daniel 9:1**—“Daniel understood the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” Jerusalem had been taken into captivity in 604 B.C by Nebuchadnezzar. **Verse 3**—Daniel humbled himself in prayer and petition, fasting, sackcloth and ashes. *“O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have done wrong. We have been wicked and rebelled. We (the entire nation) have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.”* Daniel is not just praying for himself, but he is praying for everybody in the nation—all the Jews and all those taken into captivity in Babylon in this case.

This is a lot like the American people today who are not listening to the prophets and servants of God who are speaking in God’s name to all the people of the land and urging them to repent and return to God. They are too engaged in seeking the pleasures of this world and its fame and fortune – sports, music, movies /TV, romance novels, Hollywood idols, computers, and i-phones. I recently heard about *Fifty Shades of Grey* which is a 2011 erotic romance novel by British author E.L. James and a USA’s Today

best seller book list of fiction for 20 weeks in a row. It is the first installment in the Fifty Shades trilogy and has topped best-seller book lists around the world including the United Kingdom and the United States. The series has sold over 70 million copies worldwide and set the record as the fastest selling paperback of all time, surpassing the Harry Potter series. Critical reception of the book that traces the deepening relationship between a college senior and a young business magnate has been mixed to negative and attracted criticism due to its scenes featuring elements of sexual depravity practices involving BDSM. The book has been reportedly popular reading among teenage girls, college women and married women over thirty. Satan is getting a hold of our youth and young women by such publications and movies as this and Harry Potter, not to mention the TV episodes of vampires and werewolves! The Prince of the air, the devil, is stirring people up with thoughts leading to death and destruction. We all have to cry out to God for his mercy.

**News** – ‘Voters in *Washington* and *Colorado* passed ballot initiatives recently to *legalize marijuana for recreational use*. Colorado is one of the fourteen states with laws that have legalized medical use of marijuana despite the fact that marijuana is still illegal under federal law. In 2000 Colorado passed an amendment to the state constitution allowing patients to use medical marijuana under the supervision of a physician and in 2003 the Colorado legislature approved and the governor signed a bill reducing the sentencing for minor infractions of possession under certain amounts. Most of the marijuana available in the state comes from Mexico, California and Canada. Colorado used to be a conservative state, but it is changing. Governor Hickenlooper signed the measure that *legalized same-sex civil unions* reflecting a recent shift to the left in the political balance of power in the Denver statehouse. Colorado is one of the eight states that recognize civil unions or domestic partnerships in lieu of gay marriage. However, Colorado still bans gay marriage and is one of 30 states with a constitutional amendment that defines marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman. Washington State is one of the thirteen states as of August 2013 that legally recognizes same sex marriage.

Daniel was a captive prince in the land of Babylon who understood the number of days of captivity and saw the confusion and sins (transgressions against God) of his nation that was also taken into Babylonian captivity. They had departed from Godly precepts and laws. Neither had they listened to the prophets that had been sent by God to warn his people. Verse 7—“*Righteousness belongs to you, O Lord, but to us belongs shame and confusion of face*” (all Israel; where ever we have been driven captive around the world) because of unfaithfulness to God and worshipping of idols and human sacrifices. Today, America practices human abortion (murder) sacrificing over a million lives of infants yearly. As of August 21, 2012, U.S. statistics show more people are in prisons in the U.S. than in all other developed countries combined.

**Washington, Feb 4 2013 (IPS)** – “The research wing of the U.S. Congress is warning that three decades of “historically unprecedented” build-up in the number of prisoners incarcerated in the United States have led to a level of overcrowding that is now “taking a toll on the infrastructure” of the federal prison system. Over the past 30 years, according to a new report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the federal prison population has jumped from 25,000 to 219,000 inmates, an increase of nearly 790 percent. Swollen by such figures, for years the United States has incarcerated far more people than any other country, today imprisoning some 716 people out of every 100,000. In recent years, as a consequence of the imposition of very harsh sentencing policies, McFarland’s office has seen new patterns emerging of juveniles and very elderly people being put in prison. “Last year, some 95,000 juveniles under 18 years of age were put in prison, and that doesn’t count those in juvenile facilities. Overcrowding has become a massive issue, with the federal prison system as a whole operating at 39 percent over

capacity in 2011, according to CRS. The result has also been significant price overruns, with the Bureau of Prisons budget doubling to nearly 6.4 billion dollars even while hundreds of millions of dollars worth of unaddressed infrastructure problems continue to mount.”

God’s way is so much better than man’s way which leads to anger, chaos, corruption, sadness, misery, anguish, heartache, pollution, trash-ridden cities, garbage, war and death. God’s way of being obedient leads to joy, contentment, wholesomeness, love, peace, fulfillment, being a part of the solution not a part of the problem. All mankind needs to repent from the least of us at the bottom to the exalted leaders at the top. Everyone needs to turn back to God’s way that leads to life and real freedom. Such change does not happen immediately, it is a progressive growth. All mankind feels pain and God the Eternal in heaven sees our pain and knows that man brings greater pain on himself through disobedience and unrighteousness.

In **Ezekiel 18:4, 5-9 and 24** says, “Behold, all souls are mine. The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die, but if a man is just and does what is lawful and right... has withdrawn his hand from iniquity and executed true judgment between man and man, If he has walked in My statutes and kept My judgments faithfully—he is just; he shall surely live!” **Romans 6:23**—“For *the wages of sin is death (penalty)*, but *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” It is a principle like the law of gravity. God’s law can be ignored, but it is real; it is in effect and valid. God operates the Universe by the laws he has set in motion. The spiritual laws are in effect and just as powerful as physical laws.

The Son of God, Christ, came as a man to earth, lived a blameless life (without sin) and took upon himself the sins of all mankind and gave his sinless life (paid the penalty for us) and died on the stake so we could be forgiven, our life has been spared (given the way of salvation). However, we have to take action –have to repent. The Hebrew word for repent is **teshuvah**. This Sabbath day is called *Shabbat Shuvah* and one of the seven Sabbaths given a special name. In the Jewish liturgy this weekly Sabbath day between Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur is Shabbat Shuvah—the Sabbath of return. This Shabbat Shuvah falls within the Ten **Days of Awe** (Hebrew: **Yamim Nora'im**) when we are to scrupulously examine our deeds, and more significantly our misdeeds during the preceding year and repent. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur’s goal is nothing less than an ethical and religious reassessment of one’s life. Of equal concern, is the year that is about to begin. One who despises admonition will find themselves far from repentance. David said: “Teach me, God, your ways, guide me in your truth, and make my heart devout to fear your name”—**Psalms 86:11**.

I am challenging every one of you and especially married couples, to take a sheet of paper and make a list (within the next two days) and entitle it: Things I need to overcome (sins/weaknesses). Make two columns. In the left column, list the positive things that you plan to encourage, develop and do. In the right column, list the negative things you plan to eliminate in your life and stop doing. Ask yourself, “What have I done? Why have I despised God’s words? What are you are going ask God to help you to change? Idolatry? Swearing falsely without cause, or swear using the name of God in vain [which is tantamount to idolatry]? Perhaps smoking cigarettes or marijuana, quit a drinking habit, get rid of a bad temper or do you act in anger, waste time in idle talk, scoff, insult others, shaming them in public? Do you slander others, compare, criticize, complain, compete or fail to guard your mind against watching and reading things that are not pure in thought which will cause you to sin in body and mind? Are you brash, argumentative, or rude, envious or jealous? No major sins? How about the neglect of Bible study, which is equivalent to all, for one who distances himself from Torah, distances himself from serving God. It takes time to analyze, recognize and assess one’s inner self. What about the problem of “pride”? Christ said that a man who looks after a woman to lust after her

has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Stay clear from things that tempt you to yield to sin and cause self destruction. Develop strong, positive thoughts and habits. Write them down and follow a plan.

**Philippians 4:6-7**—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, *by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (let God know whatever concerns you)*. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Put into practice what you have learned, received and heard from the law of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. God is waiting for our prayers seeking him and he will help us. It is important to write things down. Research shows that those who write things down, remember and reach the goals that they have written down. Review your written list and check your progress. Decide what you would like to strive to change about yourself. Find what you most want to improve upon in your habits, behaviors and practices.

Benjamin Franklin, the American inventor, statesman, and publisher achieved success with Poor Richard’s Almanac. It was a best-selling yearly pamphlet in the American colonies continually from 1732 to 1758. “As a young man Benjamin Franklin quickly came to understand his own weaknesses and the weaknesses of those around him that led to their failure. He was a keen observer and quickly also learned those habits that led to success. In his twenties he set out to improve himself very systematically. He first ascertained the qualities that he found most important to cultivate, including Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity and Humility. He then devised a simple daily record and chose one of these virtues each week to focus upon. His record contained a matrix with a list of the virtues he wished to perfect in his life down the left side and across the top a list of the days of the week. He would then mark a dot or check in each box when he failed to meet his own expectation for the virtue he was seeking to practice that day. His goal was to have a week free of all marks showing success. Through repeated self discipline and efforts such as these to modify his own habits and behavior he became a man of great understanding.” Humility was the hardest quality on the list for him to develop. **“In reality, there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride.”**

**Galatians 5:16-21**—“Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the flesh (sinful nature).” These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict. “The *works of the flesh* are evident, which are sexual immorality, uncleanness and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” **Galatians 5:22-23**...“the *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” These traits incorporate, validate, back up and make clear God’s law and are aspects of that law in action and motion which expound, explain and magnify His law.

**Hosea 4:6**—“my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” This is lack of knowledge of the true God—his commandments, statutes, and judgments of wisdom that teaches how to live successful, happy and peaceful lives. One of the laws of God is to learn and practice self-control as individuals and as a society. **1 John 2:15 (KJV)**—“Do not love the world, or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the word of the Father is not in him. All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world.” Verses **16-17 (NIV)** —“For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of

his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man/woman who does the will of God lives forever.” This world is being destroyed and is dying.

**John 10:10**—Christ said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.” The abundant life is spiritual. It is not of man and the things of the world or money, it is the things of God’s Spirit that give true happiness and joy full and running over. **James 3:13-16**—talks about this fight that we have in the flesh and the influences of our evil human nature versus the wisdom of God. “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, sensual (unspiritual), and demonic (of the devil). Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find confusion (disorder) and every evil practice.” **Verse 17**—“*But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere, Peacemakers who sown in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*”

Wisdom is humble, yields to others, and is thoughtful and helpful to whoever needs help. It is an attitude of genuine giving and serving. The Boy Scouts of America motto is “do a good turn daily.” It takes watchful observation as well as creative action to be a person of service, giving, sharing and helping. We are to see to it that we are a blessing and benefit to others where ever we happen to find ourselves. **Psalms 18:35**—“*You have also given me the shield of your salvation: your right hand has held me up, your gentleness has made me great.*” God is gentle with those with whom he is working. He looks out for the bird sitting in her nest of eggs and cares for the little flowers that grow in the cracks of the wall. The world is full of places that have beauty which God has created with gentleness and wisdom.

John Muir was a deeply spiritual man who loved God and delighted in learning about things in nature. His family immigrated from Scotland to the U.S. and settled in Wisconsin on a farm. His father was a preacher who was extremely strict and did not “spare the rod” on his eight children. When John was eleven years old he could repeat the entire New Testament from memory and about two thirds of the Old Testament. He was an outstanding naturalist, an experienced farmer, shepherd, inventor, explorer, writer, and conservationist. He was called the prophet of the wilderness and an early advocate of preservation of wilderness in the United States. On all of his explorations he kept a journal of scientific and personal observations and also pencil drawings. He walked the California’s Sierra Nevada Mountains and Yosemite and in 1891 turned his full attention to the study of nature. He saw the footprints of God in the earth and taught the beauty of God’s creation. Glaciers and freezing particularly interested him, and his work contributed to an explanation of the process by which glaciers are formed. John Muir helped establish Yosemite National Park, and all or parts of Kings Canyon, Sequoia, and Mount Rainier National Parks.

**1 Peter 5:6**—“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” When God sees the time is right he will exalt you in his kingdom among his people. He has no partiality or favoritism. Pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape the judgments and all these things that are coming upon this world. May God help us all be prepared and be ready to stand firm. **1 John 5:3**—“This is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.” His commandments give us true liberty in life—true freedom! **Romans 5:5**—“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which he has given to us.” Love comes from God’s Spirit. He gives us his Spirit as

we pray and ask –he will not deny us. We have to ask in faith and continue to believe in him. The first fruit of the Spirit is love, the second is joy and the third is peace. The Feast of Tabernacles (Hebrew: **ziman -simcotainu**) is called “the season of our joy”. We are preparing for Tabernacles now by observing the annual holy days of Rosh Hashanna (Trumpets—warning) and Yom Kippur (Atonement—becoming at one with God) and going through the process of introspection, change and renewal in order to grow spiritually. We are asking God’s forgiveness to wipe us clean of our sins and transgressions in His sight and bring us to the season of our joy in him and rejoice for his salvation of our soul where everyone will be at peace with man and God. What a wonderful day of joy and thanksgiving it is going to be when we are at one with God in his coming kingdom with peace and no more war.

Be full of faith! Live in the faith given within us by Christ with all humility and enduring patience, meekness and self-discipline of mind and body. Resist “**lashon ha ra**”— the evil impulse of the tongue.

Today is Shabbat Shuvah and returning to God. We are to get on our knees and bow before God and admit our sins before him the one true God. **Hosea 14:1-3** “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words (bring your petition) and return to the Lord. Say to him: “Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we *may offer the fruit of our lips (the sacrifice of praise)*.” “Assyria cannot save us, nor can our strength in battle. Never again will we call the idols we have made ‘our gods.’ No, in you alone do the orphans find mercy and compassion.”

**Verses 4-7**—“The Lord says, Then I will heal their backsliding [waywardness of idolatry and faithlessness], and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them! I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily and send down his roots like a cedar of Lebanon. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the Olive tree, his fragrance like the cedar forests of Lebanon. Those who dwell under his shadow shall return. They shall revive as the corn [flourish like the grain] and grow like a vine. The scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.”

God says to Israel his people, your fruit—joy, peace and love –is found in me. **Verse 9**—“**Who is wise?** Those who are wise will understand these things. Who is prudent (discerning)? Let those who are discerning listen carefully—understand. The ways of the Lord are true and right, and the just/righteous walk in them, but the transgressors/rebellious shall fall in them.” It is Jesus Christ and God the Father that produces good fruit in men and women. Redeem the time. Return to God. Use the precious time given you to center your time and life in God and his Son. The days are evil and the days are short. Amen.