

# Hasdai Cresces, Repentance and Joy – Proto-Chassidism in Crescesian Philosophy

By Rabbi Dovid Markel

Hasdai Cresces (1340–1410) was an important anti-Maimonidean philosopher and the teacher of Yosef Albo the author of the more popular philosophical work of Ikarim.

Cresces' philosophy is often overlooked as opposed to his student who wrote with clarity and was written with the layman in mind, his work is highly obscure and directed towards the philosophically bent.

While his main bone with Maimonides was primarily due to the fact that he cast aside Aristotelian philosophy, and by extension many Maimonidean principles—as a student of Kabbalah, there are many proto-Chassidic concepts that are couched in his philosophical jargon.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the fascinating proto-Chassidic ideas in his Ohr HaShem is his fascinating perspective on the day of Rosh HaShanah and repentance in general.<sup>2</sup>

By extension of his elucidation of the concept of divine providence, he enters into a discussion that certain places and times are more inclined to this divine intimacy.

Cresces explains—using Biblical and Talmudic evidence—that the place where G-d is most revealed is the Land of Israel and the Holy Land and the time when G-d's Divine Providence is most revealed is the month of Tishrei.

As confirmation that Tishrei is a month where there is stronger Divine Providence, Cresces applies the verse (Yeshayahu 55:6) “Seek the Lord when He is found, call Him when He is near.” On this the Talmud (Rosh HaShanah 18a) declares that this applies to the time between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.

It is due to this intimacy with the Almighty—in this time—that the month of Tishrei are days of joy, says Cresces.

It is pertaining to this thought that Cresces expresses a formulation that seems straight out of a chassidic work.

For, one can ask, how can Tishrei and especially these ten days be considered days of joy, when they begin with the Day of Judgment, continue with repentance, and culminate with fasting?!

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<sup>1</sup> See W. Z. Harvey, *Kabbalistic elements in Crescas' Light of the Lord*, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, (1983 Pg. 75-109).

<sup>2</sup> Ohr HaShem 2:2:6

On this he writes: “It is proper that as a derivative of accepting G-d’s rule that there be happiness and rejoining, for one leaves foreign rule to be protected in His shade.”

With this he explains the verse (Nechemia 8:10) that is stated regarding Rosh HaShanah: “Go, eat fat foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord, and do not be sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Leaving negativity and coming to G-d is the greatest joy. It is because of this that when a person repents and fasts—says cresces—that they should be exceedingly joyous.

“Because there is joy in separating from the negativity, it is proper that the commencement of this be joyous, when he leaves sins and enters into the path of repentance...which culminates in fasting.”

In Cresces’ philosophy there is nothing more joyous than accepting the yoke of Heaven and repentance and leaving sin. Indeed, this thought is reminiscent of many a Chassidic thought pertaining to Rosh HaShanah and repentance.