

The Rosh HaShanah Prayer Service Companion

No matter what style of service you run, the Rosh HaShanah Prayer Service Companion will help add insight and inspiration to your services. Machzor commentaries, stories, and discussion ideas follow the order of the Rosh HaShanah services. The Companion references the corresponding pages in the standard English - Hebrew ArtScroll Machzor for each component of the tefillot and is indicated, for example, by AS: p. 118.

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Opening Remarks:

The service should begin with some opening remarks from the leader of the services, either at Maariv or Shacharit. To make the greatest impact, time these comments for whenever you expect a strong showing of participants. First provide an overview of the basic sequence of events that will take place in your program, and then offer a glimpse at the insight and inspiration the participants can hope to expect from your program. The opening remarks should focus on what is familiar to the participants, but with a twist that will show them that this isn't the same old High Holiday service they're used to.

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., Twerski on the Machzor, pp. 25-26 – The Jewish New Year is less about partying than it is about introspection and growth.

How different Rosh HaShanah is from the secular New Year! We assemble in shul, and, in a solemn albeit festive manner, pray to Hashem, our King, for another year of life and good fortune. In contradistinction, on December 31, many people celebrate the end of the year by becoming intoxicated, and at midnight they exclaim, "Happy New Year!"

For many people, one day is like another, and in pursuing their frenetic lifestyle, they rarely pause to reflect on what their lives are all about, and on what are their goals and ultimate purpose. As the new year approaches and the calendar changes, they are aroused to think, What! Another year of my life is irretrievably gone! What do I have to show for it? Am I happier than I was a year ago?...Am I better off financially than I was a year ago?...Do I have reason to expect that in the new year I will be more successful?...These are depressing thoughts. One cannot declare, "Happy New Year!" when one is depressed. Therefore, they drink to intoxication to forget their depression. Only then can they say, "Happy New Year!" On the following morning, they may awaken with a pounding headache, with no recollection of the "glorious happiness" of the previous night.

In contrast, Rosh HaShanah is preceded by the month of Elul, a month of introspection and soul-searching. We recognize the errors we may have made, and we pray for forgiveness. At candle-lighting time or during Kiddush, we thank Hashem for sustaining us throughout the past year.

We then go to *shul* (synagogue) and find that the Rosh HaShanah *tefillah* (prayer) is spiritually uplifting. We look forward to God's blessing for the coming year. In this atmosphere, we turn to each other and say, "*L'Shanah tovah tikateivu* – May God inscribe you for a good year." Having utilized our time in shul wisely, we joyously go home for a festive Yom Tov meal with the family, and the following morning, we return to shul for solemn *tefillah*.

Yes, there is indeed a marked difference between Rosh HaShanah and New Year's Day.

Aish UK's High Holy Day Q & A – Is the New Year about instant gratification or meaningful eternity?

Every culture celebrates the New Year differently. For us it's about taking stock of the past, thinking deeply about the present, refocusing for a better, more fulfilling year to come...

And eating. Ideally with family and friends. Eating is an opportunity. We can just fill our stomachs, or we can charge ourselves up with the energy to achieve meaningful things.

When we make time to share ideas about deeper issues in life – like where we're going and who we're trying to become – we upgrade the meal into something memorable.

Rosh HaShanah is about celebrating the creation of the world and the unlimited potential of human endeavor. It's about who we really are. And it's about the Big Picture.

Rosh HaShanah, 'Day of Judgment,' commemorates the day man was created, and transports us back into the Garden of Eden. We become 'new beings' and have the same choice as Adam: instant gratification or meaningful eternity? Where are our priorities?

Adam 'hid' from God, who called out to him: "Where are you?" That question still reverberates within each one of us today. And we have the privilege of answering it again as every New Year begins.

Yes, there is some discomfort involved. But Jewish living challenges us to rise above our comfort zones to face the most important questions of our lives. What do we really value in life? How would we like to see the ideal world? Are we living for it? What are our dreams? Our playing small does not serve the world.

On Rosh HaShanah we dream...of what we really, truly want, and who we can become. It is on that basis that our year ahead is judged. Perhaps it touches our "deepest fears," but it can also be the greatest thrill as we come face-to-face with the self we could really be.

Rosh HaShanah is the opportunity to stop and evaluate, recalibrate and refocus. It's a precious gift to connect to our deepest selves. It is true re-creation – the ability to transform ourselves.

Rabbi Benjamin Blech, "It's A Wonderful Life," from aish.com – The classic movie is a metaphor for how we should approach Rosh HaShanah.

It's a wonderful life.

At least that's what a movie by that title, considered a classic of American cinema, wants us to believe. George Bailey, the hero of the film powerfully acted by James

Stewart, finally decides upon suicide as his only recourse to solve his financial problems. Because he has a \$15,000 life insurance policy he feels he's worth more dead than alive. Acting on his desire to help his family he's ready to jump off a bridge when the angel Clarence intercedes not only to save his life but to make him realize that it is really worth living.

The way the angel accomplishes this incredible transformation from a man anxiously seeking his own annihilation to a person perceiving the true value of his existence and the ultimate meaning of his life contains a powerful Rosh HaShanah message.

How should we fulfill our obligation to better ourselves as we reach the 10 days of repentance on the Hebrew calendar? Many of us emphasize focusing on our sinfulness. It is a time to seek out our flaws, to seriously consider our failings. And of course that must be part of our personal stock taking.

But that cannot be the whole story. If we spend our time only in self-condemnation, we stand in danger of losing sight of the ways in which we have been successful. If we stress only the ways we've gone wrong, we won't ever be able to notice our accomplishments. We need to first become aware of the positives in our lives.

This point explains the sequence of the days, book-ending our spiritual journey from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur we fast. We beat our breasts in confession of all of our sins. We cry out to God, "Who are we? What are our lives? We come from the dust of the earth, and we return to the dust of the earth." It is recognition of how much we have failed, how far we have come from reaching our fullest potential. Yom Kippur is a necessary restraint to our egos. Before we can feel fully reconciled with God, it is essential for us to demonstrate our understanding of our imperfection.

But it is not Yom Kippur that begins the process of our purification. The 10 days of repentance start with Rosh HaShanah for good reason. Rosh HaShanah doesn't mark the first day of creation, but rather the last – the day on which the first human beings were created. Just as a host fully prepares for his guests before they enter his home, so too, the Midrash explains, God filled the earth on the first five days of creation with everything people might need before He brought them into being. Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day to endow them with a sense of their uniqueness and spiritual stature. It is we who were created in the image of God. Realizing this is a necessary prelude to leading a life worthy of our divine origin and our sacred nobility.

So on Rosh HaShanah we begin getting closer to God by reminding ourselves that we are Godly, that we have a pure soul. On Yom Kippur we conclude the journey by acknowledging that we have not yet achieved all that of which we are capable.

Rosh HaShanah asks us to remember how much we are worth to God, to our families, to our friends, and to the world. We feast as an expression of the joy we

find in our life. And that understanding must precede the Yom Kippur emphasis on our failings that prompt us to fast and to cry over our imperfections.

To lead our lives only from a Yom Kippur perspective is to insure discontent and despondency. To be overwhelmed by a constant feeling that we are failures is to invite the pernicious desire to end it all. Why bother going on if we can never do anything right, why continue the struggle if we are doomed to always losing the battle? Suicide is the response chosen by those weighed down by a devastating sense that they accomplished nothing in their lives. It goes against God who as the ultimate giver of life decided that we still have a positive role to play here on earth.

In the film, after suffering a financial setback of \$8,000 that puts his small saving and loans bank at risk, George feels his life is worthless. Despite the serious consequences this entails, if George would have framed his life as a balance sheet of accumulated good versus the mistakes and bad things he has done, he would have been able to put events in a more balanced perspective and not judge himself so harshly.

In business, your losses can wipe out your balance sheet. But in the cosmic balance sheet of one's life, sin does not wipe out the positive gains. You are not your business or profession.

When George bitterly wept that he wished he would never have been born, Clarence, with his angelic power, showed him what the world would have been like if his wish really came true. He showed him his life's balance sheet. George never realized how many people he had affected during his lifetime. He had no idea how different his community, his family, his friends, his neighbors, and indeed the world would have looked had he never been on earth.

When George comes to realize how many lives he has touched and how much of an impact he has had on so many others, he can at last acknowledge the truth of his brother's toast that he is "the richest man in town."

There are countless "Georges" among us. There are all too many who deserve to be recognized as successes when we consider the ripple effects of their deeds translated into the achievements of others. And perhaps most relevant of all, in the time of our own introspection, as we feel ourselves burdened by the sins of our failures, we ought to make room for the contentment and peace of mind that comes from knowing that God also weighs the good we inspire in all those around us.

Perhaps the most powerful irony associated with "It's a Wonderful Life," is the message implicit in its reception when it was released in 1946. The movie was a box office failure leading critics to say that Frank Capra, producer and director, was past his prime and no longer capable of producing a major motion picture. What an incredibly mistaken evaluation for a film that today is ranked by the American film industry as one of the top 10 classic movies in its genre ever made. What appeared

at first glance to have been a failure is in retrospect one of the most outstanding successes. Isn't that the whole point of the film itself?

As we reflect upon the meaning of our earthly existence before the High Holy days, keep in mind that sometimes it takes years for the beauty of our own lives and its significance to be fully recognized.

Section I. The Festive Meal

Part A. Simanim (AS: pp. 96-99)

From time immemorial, Jews have dipped apples in honey on Rosh HaShanah evening. However, the other simanim have taken the back seat in many Jewish homes. What is the significance of the other symbolic foods eaten on Rosh HaShanah? See Morasha Class Rosh HaShanah III, Section I for insights into the concept of the simanim and the symbolism of apples and honey. Below is a summary of ideas found there:

- The Talmud records the custom of bringing certain symbolic foods to the table on Rosh HaShanah as good omens. Shortly thereafter, in the period of the Geonim, the practice arose to recite specific benedictions over these foods; these short blessings connect the Hebrew name for a particular food with a wish for good tidings, based on an allusion to the blessing in the Hebrew names of the foods.
- These symbolic foods are a way of starting off the year on a positive note, and they serve the purpose of focusing our attention on the meaning of Rosh HaShanah even during the meal.
- The specific custom of eating apples and honey on Rosh HaShanah, besides being a portent for a sweet New Year, also alludes to the receiving of the Torah at Sinai and the blessing Yitzchak gave to Yaakov on Rosh HaShanah.

Rabbi Menachem Meiri, Chibur HaTeshuvah, pp. 265-266 – Simanim serve to focus us on the meaning of the day even during the meal.

In order to arouse themselves to focus on God and to place the awe of Him in their consciousness without sinning, they developed the practice of placing gourd, fenugreek, leek, cabbage, and dates on the table. This was done corresponding to that which was cited in Tractate Horiyot and Tractate Kritot: "Now that you have determined that omens are significant, at the beginning of every year every person should ..."

And in order not to mistake this practice for sorcery, God forbid, they would pronounce upon these things words that highlight forgiveness and awaken feelings of repentance. When they said that an omen is significant, they meant that it could affect a person just by him being aware of the omens placed before him, even without

explicitly reciting prayers over them. That is why at first they would simply look at them during the meal. However, because the Sages were concerned that people might become preoccupied with satisfying their appetites and become distracted from focusing on the spiritual importance of the day and the awe of judgment, therefore they began to recite special prayers over these foods in order to raise people's consciousness.

They began to say on the gourd that our merits should be mentioned, on the fenugreek that our merits should increase, on the leek that our enemies should be cut off ... and also on the beet (*silka*) that our sins should be removed (*yistalku*), and on dates that our sins should be removed. The intent is, as we explained, that since engaging in eating makes one forget the meaning of the day, therefore one should see these foods and gain awareness by virtue of them. In that way the omens would strengthen a person's consciousness and be inspirational.

Part B. Selected Customs

Round Challah

Aliza Bulow, "Why Round Challah?" from aish.com – The round shape of our challah is another way to symbolize the significance of the start of a new year.

All year long our challah is braided, but it is round for Rosh HaShanah. What does the challah's shape teach us about this special time of year?

Rosh HaShanah is a holiday filled with physical doorways into the spiritual world. The blasts of the shofar are the prime example of this (see: Symbolism of the Shofar). But there are many others as well. All year round, we dip our challah in salt before distributing it; during the High Holiday season, many use honey so that we may have a sweet year. For the same reason, many make a sweeter challah dough as well.

We also begin the evening Rosh HaShanah meals by dipping apples into honey and reciting a prayer for a good and sweet year. Some continue with a Rosh HaShanah "seder," sampling many different foods and reciting a prayer that contains an allusion to the food's Hebrew name.

Every Jewish custom is significant on a very deep level. Some have levels that we can access; others are beyond our grasp. Even the shape of the loaf of challah can teach us something deep about the holiday on which it is consumed...

Round challahs are unique to the High Holiday season. Some say they represent a crown that reflects our coronation of God as the King of the world.

Others suggest that the circular shape points to the cyclical nature of the year. The Hebrew word for year is "shana," which comes from the Hebrew word "repeat."

Perhaps the circle illustrates how the years just go round and round. But Rosh HaShanah challahs are not really circles; they are spirals...

The word “shana” has a double meaning as well. In addition to “repeat,” it also means “change.” As the year goes round and round, repeating the same seasons and holidays as the year before, we are presented with a choice: Do we want this shana (year) to be a repetition, or do we want to make a change (shinui)? Hopefully, each year we make choices for change that are positive, and each year we will climb higher and higher, creating a spiritual spiral.

The shape of the Rosh HaShanah challah reminds us that this is the time of year to make those decisions. This is the time to engage in the creative spiritual process that lifts us out of the repetitive cycle, and directs our energies toward a higher end. Have a sweet new year!

Section II. The Shacharit Service (AS: pp. 135-383)

The Shacharit service for the High Holidays shares some elements of a regular weekday or Shabbat prayer service, while other parts are unique to these days. It may be useful to offer some background about such concepts as the Shema and silent Amidah, even if they are standard to every prayer service. Additionally, changes to the Amidah that highlight the significance of the day should be pointed out. And finally, Avinu Malkeinu, since it may be known to the participants and is a meaningful prayer, is another good juncture to share insights.

Part A. Shema (AS: pp. 290-293)

One cannot overstate the significance of the Shema in Judaism. In the words of the Shema, we find the most profound and forceful proclamation of belief in God and the Torah. The Shema is so fundamental to our world view that children learn to recite it as soon as they can speak. The following story is a dramatic illustration of this.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky, Parshat Terumah, from www.torah.org – The Shema is a rallying call for Jews.

During World War II many young Jewish children were harbored by a myriad of monasteries throughout Europe. At the end of the war, the Vaad Hatzalah sent representatives to the monasteries to try and reclaim the orphaned children to their heritage. Many of the children who found refuge did so at a young age, and they had but a few recollections of their birthright.

When Rabbi Eliezer Silver, who was the Rabbi of Cincinnati, Ohio and a very influential member of the Vaad, came to a particular hermitage in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, he was met with hostility. “You can be sure, Rabbi, if we had Jews here we would surely hand them back to you immediately!” exclaimed the monk in charge. “However, unfortunately for you, we have no Jewish children here.”

Rabbi Silver was given a list of refugees and was told that they were all Germans. The monk continued, “the Schwartzes are German Schwartzes, the Chandlers are German Chandlers and the Shimmers are German Shimmers.”

Rabbi Silver had been told that there were definitely close to ten Jewish children in that hermitage and was not convinced. He asked if he could say a few words to the children as they went to sleep. The monk agreed. Rabbi Silver returned later that evening with two aides, and as the children were lying in their beds about to go to sleep, they entered the large dorm room.

He walked into the room and in the sing-song that is so familiar to hundreds of thousands of Jewish children across the globe he began to sing “Shema Yisrael Ado...” unexpectedly – in mid-sentence – he stopped. Suddenly from six beds in the room the ending to that most powerful verse resounded almost in unison. “Hashem Echad!”

He turned to the priest. “These are our children. We will take them now!” The children were redeemed, placed in Jewish homes, and raised as leaders of our community.

Rabbi Boruch Leff, Forever His Students – We start life and end life with the Shema.

We begin life with the Shema. From our earliest days, our parents said it with us as they put us to sleep in our cribs. We were trained to say the Shema as soon as we were able to speak (as per the law in Rambam, Talmud Torah 1:6). We say it (at least) twice daily in our prayers. And in the end, we die with the Shema on our lips.

Rabbi Tzadok Hacoheh Rabinowitz, Tzidkat HaTzadik 4 – The Shema is recited moments after reaching the age of being commanded to perform the mitzvot.

The first mitzvah that a person is obligated in when he becomes bar mitzvah is reading the Shema in the evening [when it is dark] ... [This teaches that] at first, when one is in a state of darkness a person must accept God’s kingship, even in the darkness and childishness and without [seeing God’s] actions. Then eventually he will come to fulfill it from a wealth of clear understanding which is like the light of day.

Part B. Amidah – Silent Prayer (AS: pp. 296-305)

Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner with Lisa Aiken, The Art of Jewish Prayer, p. 11 – Verbalizing our prayers helps to create a deeper relationship with God by making His reality more concrete to us.

One of the tenets of Jewish prayer is that it is not enough simply to “think” a prayer, or to have a certain feeling in one’s heart toward God. Jewish prayer requires that

people actually say the words that they think or feel. Why do we have to verbalize prayer? Why can't we just feel something in our hearts and communicate it to God through our thoughts?

When two people have a relationship with each other, one of the greatest challenges of the relationship is in communicating effectively with each other ... In the same vein, it's not enough for us to worship God in our hearts. We must also communicate our thoughts and feelings verbally, or they cannot enable us to develop a deeper relationship with God. When we say what we feel, God becomes more of a reality for us, and we show a deeper level of sincerity about the relationship. No normal person speaks out loud unless someone is listening. Our verbalization concretizes for us that God really hears what we say.

Verbalizing our prayers helps us to pray better in another way as well.

Ibid. – Verbalizing helps us to concretize our thoughts.

Once we verbalize our feelings, they attain a reality that is much stronger for us than had we not committed these feelings to words ... When we say something, the power of our words crystallizes our feelings in a way that demands inner clarification. Until something has been committed to words, it can remain a nebulous feeling. Our relationship with God requires that our inner feelings become clear to us and that we use words to express our feelings to connect with Him.

Prayer is not recited aloud, yet it is not enough to merely meditate the words of the Amidah.

Siddur HaRav, Sha'ar haTefila 18c-d – When you're close, you don't have to shout.

“His right hand embraces me” (Song of Songs 2:6) refers to the Amidah. It can be compared to someone who speaks to the king and whispers secrets in his ear; he speaks to him of very deep secrets. In such a case he certainly nullifies his own existence and doesn't feel his existence, since he has come so close to speak in the ears of the king... This is the meaning of “His right hand embraces me.”

The sense of proximity to God overshadows our own existence as we are overcome by being in the presence of the Almighty. The silent prayers reflect the special intimacy with God that we enjoy during prayer.

Zachreinu L'Chaim (AS: pp. 310-311)

Rabbi Chaim Freidlander, Rinat Chaim pp. 1-3 – We ask for God to “remember us for life” in the blessing related to Avraham Avinu, because we want God to see the traits of Avraham inherent in us.

As Rosh HaShanah approaches, we become acutely aware of the fact that it is *Yom HaDin*, the Day of Judgment, in which we will have to submit an accounting of all

our deeds during the year that has just passed. Our deeds will be scrutinized and evaluated, and this evaluation will decide our fate. We know all too well that our merits are few, our good deeds far from perfect. By what merit can we expect to be judged favorably?

The Tur (Orach Chaim, Hilchot Rosh HaShanah 582) states: “Our Sages enacted to add the supplication of ‘Remember us for life,’ to the blessing of *Magen Avraham*, The Shield of Abraham, [during the High Holidays and the Ten Days of Repentance]... ‘Remembrance’ is mentioned regarding Avraham, as it says (Tehillim/Psalms 105:42): ‘For He *remembered* His holy word to Avraham, His servant.’ Therefore, they enacted to recite ‘Remember us for life’ in the blessing of *Magen Avraham*.”

The simple explanation of this connection is: since the word “remembered” is associated with Avraham Avinu (our father), therefore, in the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, the blessing of *Avot – Magen Avraham* – we mention that God “*remembers* the kindnesses of the Patriarchs.” And our Sages enacted that during the Ten Days of Repentance this should be followed with another remembrance, “Remember us for life.”

Let us elaborate upon this thought further. God’s beneficent “remembering” of the people of Israel favorably is rooted in His promise to Avraham Avinu at the Covenant between the Parts (Bereishit/Genesis 15), which guaranteed the eternal existence of the people of Israel. As it says in Vayikra/Leviticus (26:42-44), “And also My covenant with Avraham I will *remember*...and notwithstanding all that – even when I bring upon them these calamities (Rashi) – when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not have despised them, nor rejected them, to completely destroy them [or] to annul My covenant with them.” This means, quoting Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (Strive for Truth, Vol. II, part 3, p. 63): “Every member of *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) possesses a point of inwardness which can never be extinguished... This derives from the promise given to Avraham Avinu at his covenant with God... This means that “the holy point” of attachment to Hashem will never cease to exist in the hearts of the people of Israel throughout all the exiles. God will never allow them to fall into spiritual annihilation and its consequence – physical annihilation, God forbid.”

We proclaim that God “remembers the kindnesses of the *Avot* (Patriarchs),” which actually means the legacy of our Patriarchs – especially of our first forefather, Avraham Avinu – and their virtues that are imbued in us as their spiritual heirs. This merit, which is actually theirs, causes us to be favorably remembered by God. That is why it is so proper to attach the supplication of “Remember us for life” to the plea of “Who remembers the kindnesses of the Patriarchs”; the covenant of the *Avot* and their merit should stand in good stead for us to be remembered for life.

Uvchen Tein Pachdecha (AS: pp. 334-335)

Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts on Rosh HaShanah, from www.yutorah.org – We're asking for recognition, not revenge.

We pray to God: “*uvchen tein pachdecha Hashem Elokeinu...*” and so, too Lord, our God, instill Your awe upon all Your works; let all creatures prostrate themselves before You; let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker.” We hope and pray that the entire world comes to recognize God’s rule.

Any judgment God metes out to the enemies of Israel is not revenge for its own sake, rather a means by which “to perfect the universe through the Almighty’s Sovereignty.” The purpose of the judgment is to reveal in a clear manner, that only one Force created this world, runs it, and will bring about its redemption. When every living being arrives at this realization, the world will reach its ultimate state of perfection. *Veyeda kol pa’ul ki ata pe-alto veyavin kol yetzur ki ata yetzarto*: “Let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker, let everything that has been molded understand that You are its Molder.”

We pray not only for the Jews to recognize this, but for Germans, Arabs, and all other enemies of Israel that that they too should accept the Kingship of God. Accepting the Kingship of God does not imply that the evil people will die.

Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, On Repentance – Why pray for fear? Because the fear of God, rooted in the recognition of His complete control over the world, frees us from all other fears.

An eminent psychiatrist once told me:

“Had I the authority to do so, I would eliminate the High Holy Day prayer that begins with the words, ‘Place Your fear...’ Fear is the major cause of the various mental illnesses that beset mankind. In order to preserve one’s mental health, one should be free of fears. There is certainly no reason why anyone should ever pray for fear,” he confidently pronounced.

His words actually helped me understand the true nature of this prayer, and this is what I told him:

“Everyone seems to be beset with fears of all kinds. Some are afraid that they will not succeed in their careers; others fear that they will lose their wealth or status, or that they will fail to achieve sufficient status. Many people fear sickness and bodily weakness, as well as a host of other possible problems and difficulties. Man is constantly plagued with all sorts of often insignificant fears. I am not a psychiatrist, but I do know that there is one fear that can eradicate all others – it is the fear of God! That is what we request in this High Holiday prayer: We pray that this most significant ‘fear’ will free us of from all the others that adversely affect our lives.”

Udvarcha Emet Vekayam La'ad (AS: pp. 336-337)

Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts on Rosh HaShanah, from www.yutorah.org – God will always accept our teshuva.

Rosh HaShanah is the first of the Ten Days of Repentance – *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* – for it was on this day that Adam and Chava transgressed and immediately repented...We mention on Rosh HaShanah “*udvarcha emet vekayam la'ad* – Your word is true and endures forever.” The idea of teshuva acceptance which we find regarding Adam and Chava, is a concept which will remain for eternity. God will always welcome us back, especially during these ten days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. It is our fervent prayer that on this auspicious day, we succeed in returning to God as the first of the world’s creations did – this is one of the fundamental aspects of Rosh HaShanah.

Part C. Avinu Malkeinu (AS: pp. 384-389)

Avinu Malkeinu is a widely known prayer, particularly for the last stanza which is sung in a tune familiar to most of those who attend High Holiday services. As such, attendees will be interested in hearing explanation and insight.

The origin of the Avinu Malkeinu prayer is from the following Talmudic story:

Talmud Bavli, Ta’anit 25b – Rabbi Akiva was the first to use the formulation of “Avinu Malkeinu” as a prayer to God.

It is related that Rabbi Eliezer once [during a drought] stepped down before the Ark [in synagogue] and recited the twenty-four blessings for fast days, but his prayer was not answered. Rabbi Akiva stepped down after him and exclaimed: “Our Father, our King, we have no King but You; our Father, our King, for Your sake have mercy upon us,” and rain fell.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Koren Rosh HaShanah Machzor, p. 448 – Avinu Malkeinu is a prayer that asks God to regard us with the compassion of a father before the justice of a king.

It was the genius of Rabbi Akiva to juxtapose two ideas – God is our King and we are His subjects, yet God is also our Father and we are His children – and with utter simplicity pray that God see us with the love of a parent before considering our lives with the detachment of a king.

The Nobel Prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr, who devised complementarity theory in quantum physics, the principle that you cannot chart simultaneously the position and the velocity of a particle, said that the idea came to him when his son confessed to having stolen an item from a local shop. He found that he could think of him with love as a father, and with justice as a judge, but not both at the same time.

Rabbi Akiva's insight is two-fold: (a) God does see us simultaneously as both children and servants, and (b) our prayer is that He relate first and foremost to us as His children. The story of the physicist highlights the first insight because it is impossible for humans to relate to anything in two different ways simultaneously, whether it's a particle or a child (though certainly God has no trouble doing either). Bohr therefore applied the human perspective of parenting to his physics research. Rabbi Akiva teaches us that God is beyond this human limitation and thereby enables us to pray and appeal to God's sense of compassion as a father even at a time of judgment.

Chatanu Lefanecha

Moshe Bogomilsky, "Who Sinned?" from www.chabad.org – We're all in the same boat.

Our Father our King, we have sinned before You – Rosh HaShanah Confession.

Why does the individual say "we sinned" in plural?

A passenger on a boat once noticed another passenger drilling under his seat. In astonishment, he bellowed, "What are you doing?" The other responded, "Mind your own business. I'm drilling under my seat. I paid my fare, and this is my seat." The man said to him, "Fool, don't you realize that if water comes in under your seat, we are all doomed!"

The Talmud says that all Jews are responsible one for another. The reason for this is that the Jewish people are like one body. Thus, the Jew who transgresses affects the entire Jewish nation. Likewise, when a Jew does a good deed it has a good effect and benefits the entire Jewish people.

Ki Ayn Banu Ma'asim

Rabbi Jacob ben Wolf Kranz (Maggid of Dubno), from Aaron Levine's *The New Rosh HaShanah Anthology*, p. 171 – We ask for much, knowing that we have little to offer in return.

A retail merchant who dealt in fabrics made his way to his wholesale supplier to buy the goods he needed for his business. The wholesaler instructed his workers to wait on the merchant and to bring him all that he ordered. Standing in the middle of the warehouse, the merchant bellowed all sorts of orders and requests.

"I want 1,000 yards of that cloth, 2,000 yards of the blue velvet, 3,000 yards of that white silk," he shouted, and on and on he went, requesting many other items. When it came time to reckon up the price of the goods and to pay the bill, the merchant took the wholesaler to the side and, very embarrassed, whispered in his ear: "Listen, I can't give you any money for this right now. Please allow me credit until I can pay you."

So it is with us, said the Dubno Maggid. We shout out all sorts of requests to God in the Avinu Malkeinu prayer. We want forgiveness, health, a good life, wealth, redemption, and many other things. But when it comes down to the last verse (to

pay the bill, so to speak), we whisper: “Our Father, our King, be gracious to us and answer us, though we have no worthy deeds (with which to pay You for our large order); please grant us charity and kindness, and save us.”

Section III. Torah Readings (AS: pp. 402-411)

The rituals surrounding the Torah reading, such as the removal from the ark, kissing the Sefer Torah, and the calling up of Aliyot, will be familiar to those with any synagogue exposure. This is a good time for some “no-fear participation” and some familiar tunes.

Part A. Day One

The Torah reading for the first day of Rosh HaShanah is taken from Bereishit (Genesis) 21.

Rosh Hashanah Aliya Summary from www.Chabad.org

Day One of Rosh Hashanah (Bereishit/Genesis 21:1-34; Bamidbar/Numbers 29:1-6):

General Overview: On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, the Torah reading focuses on our Patriarch Isaac’s birth. The reading begins with the words, “And God remembered Sarah.” According to the Talmud, God “remembered” Sarah, and chose to bless her with a child, on Rosh Hashanah. The reading also discusses Ishmael’s expulsion from Abraham’s household due to the negative influence he posed for Isaac, and the treaty between Abraham and Abimelech, king of the Philistines.

First Aliyah: At the age of ninety, previously barren Sarah miraculously gave birth to a son, who, as per God’s instruction, was named Isaac. Isaac was circumcised when he was eight days old.

Second Aliyah: Sarah was overjoyed by the tremendous miracle. “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children,” she exclaimed. Abraham made a huge feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. Sarah noticed that Ishmael, Abraham’s eldest son born to him from her maidservant Hagar, was behaving inappropriately. She demanded from Abraham that he expel both Ishmael and Hagar from the household. God instructed Abraham to hearken to Sarah’s words, for “your progeny will be called [only] after Isaac.”

Third Aliyah: Nevertheless, God promised Abraham that Ishmael’s descendents, too, will be made into a nation, for he, too, is Abraham’s seed. Abraham expelled Hagar and Ishmael; they wandered in the desert and eventually ran out of water. Ishmael was about to perish from thirst when an angel “opened Hagar’s eyes” and showed her a well of water from which to give Ishmael to drink. Ishmael grew up in the desert, became a skilled archer and married an Egyptian woman.

Fourth Aliyah: At that point, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, approached Abraham and requested to enter into a treaty with him, whereby neither party will harm the other for three generations. Abraham agreed, but first reprimanded Abimelech concerning a well of water which he had dug which was stolen by Abimelech's subjects. Abimelech proclaimed his innocence, claiming to have been unaware of the situation. Abraham took sheep and cattle, and gave it to Abimelech as a symbol of their treaty.

Fifth Aliyah: Abraham then set apart seven ewes from the flock. Abraham told Abimelech to take those seven ewes as evidence that he, Abraham, dug the well. Abraham planted an orchard and established an inn in Beer Sheba and proclaimed the name of God to all passersby.

Note: If the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, then the same reading is read; however, it is divided into seven aliyot (sections) instead of five.

Maftir: The maftir reading details the various sacrifices offered in the Holy Temple on Rosh Hashanah, along with the accompanying wine libations, oil and meal offerings.

Theme 1: The Power of Prayer

The Torah reading describes the events surrounding Sarah's birth to Yitzchak (Isaac). The Haftarah presents a similar theme in relaying the events surrounding Hannah's giving birth to the prophet Shmuel (Samuel). The Talmud tells us that both women were "remembered" on Rosh HaShanah.

Rabbi Moshe Zauderer, The High Holiday Handbook, Prayer Module 5 – The Torah reading for Rosh HaShanah highlights prayer as an expression of reliance on God.

God remembered Sarah as He had said He would . . . Sarah became pregnant, and she gave birth... (Genesis 21:1-2)

Until the age of ninety, Sarah had been barren. Rebecca (wife of Isaac) and Rachel (wife of Jacob) were similarly barren. Clearly, these were not coincidences. Midrashic literature reveals one facet of God's decision to delay their childbearing: Why were the Matriarchs barren? God desires to hear the prayers of righteous people. (Midrash to Genesis)

Rabbi Nissim (1290-1375, Spain) explains the intent of this Midrashic statement: By withholding a child from each of the Matriarchs, God brought them close to Him. Through their numerous prayers to God, they bound themselves to the Creator. Prayer is an expression of dependence on God.

Though the Matriarchs understood their total dependence on God, the real feeling of need evoked the tangible expression of this dependence, which would otherwise have remained theoretical. By withholding their needs, God provided a catalyst for

greater devotion to Him. Sarah's exuberant reaction to Isaac's birth ("God has made laughter for me...for I have born a son..." Genesis 21:6-7) expressed her profound reliance on God.

The Rosh HaShanah prayers express our own reliance on God. By appealing to God to judge us favorably, we tangibly acknowledge that God determines the outcome of our endeavors.

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Jonathan Schwartz from www.rabbanan.org – The Torah reading stresses our need to see God's hand in our lives.

Three questions:

1) We read of God's involvement with Yishmael, the saving of his life. In effect, God took a bad seed and strengthened him. Why is THIS of all things, the selection from which we read today, the birthday of the world? Why not Shema? Or the *Aseret HaDibrot* (Ten Commandments)? Why Hagar?

2) Why does God perform a miracle to create a well for Hagar, someone who so strongly despised Sarah Imeinu and all the good she stood for?

3) Why doesn't the Torah reading end with Hagar & Yishmael, but rather ends with Avimelech & Pichol signing a "peace treaty" with Avraham Avinu as they rob him blind. What are we to learn from this section & its connection to the previous section of Hagar & Yishmael?

The Chatam Sofer notes that in a given moment, we cannot understand why God does that which He does. We need to know that He is there and running the show. This is God's attribute of *Hester Panim* (lit. hidden face). This is why He told Moshe, "*V'Roeita et achorai u'panai lo yeirau,*" You will see My back, but My face you will not see.

Perhaps this is the lesson of this morning's Torah reading at the well, as well. As Hagar sat at the nadir of her existence, she wondered, "From where will my help come?" The answer was simple, *vayiftach et eineiha* – He opened her eyes. As the Midrash explains, Rav Binyamin tells us that we are all blinded until God opens our eyes. The Sfat Emet quotes his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, as noting that God didn't have to create a new well to save Yishmael; the Be'er had been there forever. The saving of Hagar did not come about because of a new creation – it came as a result of a new reality – that Hagar realized that Hashem was already working with her to create positive outcomes from the situation.

While Hagar needed an Angel to make that idea a reality to her, Avraham heard it from Avimelech and Pichol. Even two adversarial secularists of Avraham recognized

Elokim imcha b'chol asher ata oseh, God is with you in all that you do. They knew that it was God who created Avraham's success. We need that reminder as well. It begins with the recognition that we are given the right tools, we are endowed with the right motivation, and we must merely make the bridge and carry out the mission.

Hence the reading – and the whole essence of Rosh HaShanah – *V'yeida kol pa'ul ki Ata P'alto v'yavin kol yatzur ki Ata Yitzarto*, Let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker, and let everything that has been molded understand that You are its Molder – to see God's back as Moshe did and know Hashem is on our side, and to reassess and set priorities accordingly.

Theme 2: Judgment in the Present State

Fortunately for us, God judges us on Rosh HaShanah as we appear before Him on that day, as we learn from the Torah reading for the first day of Rosh HaShanah. We do not mean to imply that all we must do is simply put on a good face for Rosh HaShanah. Rather, what it means is that if we sincerely get in touch with that part of us that wants to get closer to God, then He will deal with us according to that present reality, even though He knows that it might not last.

Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16b – Yishmael was judged in his present state.

Rav Yitzchak said that a person is only judged according to his behavior at the time of judgment, as it is stated, “God has heeded the voice of the child in his present state” (Bereishit 21:17).

He is judged according to his actions at this moment and not according to what may happen in the future (Rosh HaShanah 16b). The angels accused Yishmael saying, “Master of the World, how can You provide a well of water for someone whose descendants will kill Your children in the future through thirst?” God answered them, “Right now, is he righteous or evil?” They responded, “Righteous.” He said to them, “I judge him according to his present actions,” and that is the meaning of “in his present state.”

Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts for Rosh HaShanah , p. 57 – One should strive to reach a high spiritual level on Rosh HaShanah regardless of whether or not such a state will endure throughout the year.

We find one of the major foundations of teshuvah (repentance) in God's reply to the angels' question [as to why Ishmael should be saved], which our Sages most certainly wanted us to consider at the time of the Torah reading. The Sages wanted to teach us the principle of “in his present state.” Even if one's deeds are not of the highest caliber during the rest of the year, one should make every attempt to improve one's ways during the days preceding the Day of Judgment in order to

receive a favorable verdict. This is so even if one suspects that he is likely to stumble after Rosh HaShanah and not remain on the same spiritual level. A person is judged “in his present state,” and not according to his future actions. Therefore, if a person raises his spiritual level to a higher than normal plane on Rosh HaShanah he will receive a favorable judgment.

Part B. Day Two: The Binding of Isaac

The Torah reading for the second day of Rosh HaShanah is about the *Akeida*, the binding of Isaac. The shofar that we blow on Rosh HaShanah is an allusion to these events.

Rosh HaShanah Aliya Summary from www.Chabad.org

Day Two of Rosh HaShanah (Bereishit/Genesis 22:1-24; Bamidbar/Numbers 29:1-6):

General Overview: The Torah reading for the second day of Rosh Hashanah discusses the Binding of Isaac. On the day when we are judged by God, we invoke the merit of our Patriarchs, and their willingness to sacrifice all for God’s sake. The reading concludes with the birth of Rebecca, Isaac’s destined soul mate.

First Aliyah: God commanded Abraham to take his son Isaac to the Land of Moriah, and offer him as a sacrifice on a mountain (eventually to become known as the Temple Mount). Abraham rose early in the morning, took along Isaac and necessary provisions, and set out for the Land of Moriah.

Second Aliyah: On the third day, Abraham spies the mountain from afar. He leaves behind his two servants and proceeds together with Isaac. In response to Isaac’s question, “We have the fire and the wood, but where is the sacrificial lamb?,” Abraham responds, “God will provide for Himself the lamb...”

Third Aliyah: They arrived at the place which God had designated. Abraham built the altar, bound Isaac, and placed him on the wood pyre atop the altar. As Abraham stretched out his hand to take the slaughtering knife, an angel appeared and ordered him to desist. “Now I know that you are God fearing, since you have not withheld your only son from Me!” Abraham offered a ram which was caught in a nearby thicket in lieu of his son, and named the area “The Lord Will See.”

Fourth Aliyah: God promised Abraham great blessings as a reward for passing this difficult test. “I will make your descendents as numerous as the stars in heaven!” Abraham and Isaac returned home to Beer Sheba.

Fifth Aliyah: After these events, Abraham was notified that his sister-in-law, Milkah, had given birth to children. One of these children, Bethuel, was the father of Rebecca, Isaac’s future wife.

Maftir: The *maftir* reading details the various sacrifices offered in the Holy Temple

on Rosh Hashanah, along with the accompanying wine libations, oil and meal offerings.

Rabbi Moshe Zauderer, The High Holiday Handbook, Prayer Module 6 – A test from God brings potential righteousness into actualization.

...God tested Abraham...Take your son, the only one you love – Isaac – and...bring him as an offering on the mountain I will designate to you... (Genesis, Ch. 22)

Nachmanides (1195-1270, Spain - Israel) provides a fundamental perspective on God's purpose in testing man. The concept of God testing man is based on man's absolute free choice. God tests man in order to create an opportunity for him to actualize his potential to act righteously and thereby earn the greater reward for righteous actions, rather than for righteous thoughts alone. For this reason, Divine tests are for the benefit of the person being tested, rather than for God, who knows the moral character of the individual being tested.

Divine tests are solely for man's benefit. Through them God creates opportunities for man to exercise his free will and actualize his potential to act righteously. What are the benefits of Divine tests? There is the obvious benefit of earning reward for effort. In general, our most precious possessions are those that we have worked for.

Nachmanides explores another benefit from Divine tests. Thoughts of moral improvement do not make us righteous people. Many people think of themselves as righteous, but until they act on these thoughts, their righteousness is elusive.

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Ibid. – The Akeida demonstrated that Abraham's devotion to God was rooted in loyalty more than logic.

The Talmud examines the special nature of this test: The test of the Binding of Isaac is analogous to a human king, who was confronted with many battles. On each occasion he dispatched his mighty warrior, who repeatedly vanquished the king's opponents. Once, the king was challenged by a very difficult battle. The king said to his warrior, "Please accept the challenge of this most difficult battle, in order to satisfy people's arguments that all your prior victories were hollow ones." Similarly, God tested Abraham many times, each of which he successfully passed. God requested that Abraham accept the challenge of the Binding of Isaac in order to refute any possible claims that his earlier successes were hollow. (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 89b)

What are God's "battles," and how is Abraham God's warrior? How could people claim that Abraham's earlier successes were "hollow victories"? How would the Binding of Isaac refute such claims?

God has granted man free choice to obey or to ignore His will. This world is the arena that will decide whether God will be recognized or neglected. Abraham had assumed the role of reintroducing mankind to recognition of God's existence and will for mankind. His life had been a battle to disseminate religious truth, which included debunking idolatrous practices, such as human sacrifice. The success of Abraham's religious movement was strengthened with each victory, either in his own moral development and/or his success in publicizing his religious beliefs.

There was one issue, however, that connected all of Abraham's victories prior to the Binding of Isaac. Abraham could rationalize each test. Whether it was allowing himself to be cast into a fiery furnace to die for the truth that he had come to recognize, or the physical risks of performing circumcision, Abraham could intellectually justify each occurrence.

With the command to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to God, God was testing Abraham's intellect. The intellect could not fathom a command that defied everything that Abraham had previously understood about God and his own role in spreading knowledge of God's existence to mankind. Not only was Abraham being told to terminate his role in the fulfillment of his entire life's goal, but also, the commandment itself defied God's teachings against human sacrifice. How could Abraham justify performing such an act to his followers and the rest of mankind? Without any reliance upon his intellect, what could guide Abraham to make the given journey to Mount Moriah?

God tested Abraham for a level of trust that would not be weakened even in the event that human intellect could not fathom its logic. A relationship with God that is based on pure logic will ultimately be limited to those situations where logic demands obedience to God. Where human intellect fails to comprehend the logic of a commandment, God's will is ignored. The focus is shifted from obedience to God to obedience to one's own will. By testing Abraham with a commandment that defied logical explanation, God solidified a relationship with Abraham that would remain intact even when it defied human logic.

God, through Torah, has revealed a great deal of comprehensible information about His relationship with Creation. The Torah does call upon the Jew to be knowledgeable of the origins of human history, Jewish nationhood, and God's commandments. We need not and, indeed, should not rely on irrational belief for our religious practice. However, as rational as we must be, there are limits to the power of human logic. The finite mind is incapable of fully grasping the infinity of God. By unhesitatingly performing God's unintelligible commandment to sacrifice his son, Abraham achieved a level of commitment to God unconditioned by his own comprehension. He showed that his obedience during previous tests was not grounded on pure logic, but in a pure loyalty.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand, “The Tenth Test Validated the First Nine” from Torah.org – The Akeida showed that Avraham was able to pass his devotion on to his son.

Avraham is told “*Kach Nah et bincha et yechidcha asher ahavta et Yitzchak*” – please take your son, your only son, whom you love – Yitzchak. The Talmud [Sanhedrin 89b] comments on the expression “nah” [please], that God came to Avraham and told him, “I have tested you with many tests, and you have withstood all of them. But I need you to undergo just one more test so that it not be said that the first tests were insignificant.”

How could anyone say after the nine tests that Avraham already underwent that “the first tests were insignificant?”

Rav Yosef Grossman quotes Rav Schwab as giving the following answer to this question: People would say, “Avraham, no matter how great you are and no matter how much you achieved in your lifetime, if you are not successful in passing the tradition over to your children, then what came before is insignificant.” Now God was giving a test to Avraham that would be a test not only of his own dedication, but also of the dedication of his 37-year-old son, Yitzchak. If Yitzchak would tell his father, “Dad, I am not buying into this; this is not for me; this is your religion, not mine,” then in effect, Avraham’s valiant success in passing all his other spiritual tests would have been insignificant.

Avraham Avinu is not only about personal perfection. Avraham Avinu is about creating a legacy that he passes on to his children and his children’s children. Avraham Avinu was not only successful in creating a religion but in passing it on to his offspring. Had he been unsuccessful in this last test, the value of his success in passing all of the previous tests could indeed be questioned.

Rashi in Lech Lecha cites the idea that each letter in Yitzchak’s name was symbolic. The Tzadee alludes to the fact that his mother was 90 years old when she bore him. The Chet refers to the fact that he was circumcised on the 8th day of his life. The Kuf symbolizes the fact that his father was 100 years old when he was born. Finally, the Yud symbolizes the fact that his father Avraham withstood ten tests.

Rav Yosef Grossman asks how the Yud referring to the ten tests of Avraham relates to Yitzchak. It seems to relate to Avraham, rather than to Yitzchak.

The answer is that Yitzchak validated all ten tests. If not for Yitzchak cooperating willingly at the Akeida, others could rightfully consider the first nine tests insignificant. Therefore, the Yud is an appropriate part of Yitzchak’s name. He had a crucial role in confirming the validity of all of the previous tests that his father withstood.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Miracle of a Child – Avraham must wait many years to finally have the son promised him by God.

There is a mystery at the heart of Jewish existence, engraved into the first syllables of our recorded time. The first words of God to Abraham were: “Go out from your land, your birthplace, and your father’s house... And I will make you a great nation...” In the next chapter there is another promise: “I will make your children like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, so shall your offspring be counted.” Two chapters later comes a third: “God took him outside and said, ‘Look at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.’ Then He said to him, ‘So shall your children be.’” Finally, the fourth: “Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.”

Four escalating promises: Abraham would be the father of a great nation, as many as the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky. He would be the father not of one nation but of many.

What, though, was the reality? Early in the story, we read that Abraham was “very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.” He had everything except one thing – a child. Then God appeared to Abraham and said, “Your reward will be very great.”

Until now, Abraham has been silent. Now, something within him breaks, and he asks: “O Lord God, what will you give me if I remain childless?” The first recorded 26 words of Abraham to God are a plea for there to be future generations. The first Jew feared he would be the last. Then a child is born. Sarah gives Abraham her handmaid Hagar, hoping that she will give him a child. She gives birth to a son whose name is Ishmael, meaning “God has heard.” Abraham’s prayer has been answered, or so we think. But in the next chapter, that hope is destroyed. Yes, says God, Ishmael will be blessed. He will be the father of twelve princes and a great nation. But he is not the child of Jewish destiny, and one day Abraham will have to part from him.

This pains Abraham deeply. He pleads: “If only Ishmael might live under Your blessing.” Later, when Sarah drives Ishmael away, we read that “this distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.” Nonetheless, the decree remains.

God insists that Abraham will have a son by Sarah. Both laugh. How can it be? They are old. Sarah is postmenopausal. Yet against possibility, the son is born. His name is Isaac, meaning “laughter.” Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.” Finally, the story seems to have a happy ending.

Ibid. – The Akeida teaches us to not take existence for granted.

After all the promises and prayers, Abraham and Sarah at last have a child. Then

come the words, which, in all the intervening centuries, have not lost their power to shock.

After these things, God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you."

Abraham takes his son, travels for three days, climbs the mountain, prepares the wood, ties his son, takes the knife and raises his hand. Then a voice is heard from heaven: "Do not lay a hand on the boy." The trial is over. Isaac lives.

Why all the promises and disappointments? Why the hope so often raised, so often unfulfilled? Why delay? Why Ishmael? Why the binding? Why put Abraham and Sarah through the agony of thinking that the son for whom they have waited for so long is about to die?

There are many answers in our tradition, but one transcends all others. We cherish what we wait for and what we most risk losing. Life is full of wonders. The birth of a child is a miracle. Yet, precisely because these things are natural, we take them for granted, forgetting that nature has an architect, a history, an author.

Judaism is a sustained discipline in not taking life for granted. We were the people born in slavery so that we would value freedom. We were the nation always small, so that we would know that strength does not lie in numbers but in the faith that begets courage. Our ancestors walked through the valley of the shadow of death, so that we could never forget the sanctity of life.

Ibid. – Judaism is a child-centered faith.

Throughout history, Jews were called on to value children. Our entire value system is built on it. Our citadels are schools; our passion, education; and our greatest heroes, teachers. The seder service on Pesach can only begin with questions asked by a child. On the first day of the New Year, we read not about the creation of the universe but about the birth of a child - Isaac to Sarah, Samuel to Hannah. Ours is a supremely child-centered faith. That is why, at the dawn of Jewish time, God put Abraham and Sarah through these trials – the long wait, the unmet hope, the binding itself – so that neither they nor their descendants would ever take children for granted. Every child is a miracle. Being a parent is the closest we get to God – bringing life into being through an act of love.

Today, when too many children live in poverty and illiteracy, dying for lack of medical attention because those who rule nations prefer weapons to welfare, hostage-taking to hospital-building, fighting the battles of the past rather than shaping a safe future, it is a lesson the world has not yet learned. For the sake of humanity it must, for the tragedy is vast and the hour is late.

Part C. Haftarat (Readings from Prophets and Writings) (AS: pp. 416-425)**Rosh Hashanah Haftarat in a Nutshell from Chabad.org****Day 1:**

I Samuel 1:1–2:10

The *haftarah* for the first day of Rosh Hashanah describes the birth of the prophet Samuel to Elkanah and his wife Chanah, who had been childless for many years. This echoes the story discussed in the day's Torah reading, about Sarah giving birth to Isaac after many years of childlessness.

During one of her annual pilgrimages to Shiloh, the site of the Tabernacle, Chanah tearfully and quietly entreated God to bless her with a son, promising to dedicate him to His service. Eli the high priest saw her whispering, and berated her, thinking that she was a drunkard. After hearing Chanah's explanation, that she had been whispering in prayer, Eli blessed her that God should grant her request.

Chana conceived and gave birth to a son whom she called Shmuel (Samuel). Once the child was weaned, she brought him to Shiloh and entrusted him to the care of Eli.

The *haftarah* ends with Chanah's prayer, wherein she thanks God for granting her wish, extols His greatness, exhorts the people not to be haughty or arrogant, and prophesies regarding the Messianic redemption.

Day 2:

Jeremiah 31:1–20

The *haftarah* for the second day of Rosh Hashanah talks about God's everlasting love for His people, and the future ingathering of their exiles. In the last verse of this hauntingly beautiful *haftarah*, God says, "Is Ephraim [i.e., the Children of Israel] not My beloved son? Is he not a precious child, that whenever I speak of him I recall him even more?" This follows one of the primary themes of the Rosh Hashanah prayers, our attempt to induce God to remember us in a positive light on this Day of Judgment.

Jeremiah begins by affirming God's love for the Jewish people. "With everlasting love I have loved you; therefore I have drawn loving kindness over you."

Because of this love, God assures His nation that they have a very bright future awaiting them. "I will yet build you up, then you shall be built forever, O virgin of Israel; you will yet adorn yourself with your tambourines, and go forth in joyous dance." Jeremiah then describes the ingathering of the exiles, when all of Israel will be returned to the Holy Land: "You will again plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria . . . Behold, I will bring [Israel] from the land of the north, and gather them from the ends of the earth . . . a large assembly will return here. Weeping with joy

they will come, and with compassion I will lead them . . . I will turn their mourning into joy, and will console them and gladden them after their sorrow.”

Jeremiah then describes the heavenly scene, where the silence is broken by the sound of bitter weeping. Our Matriarch Rachel refuses to be consoled, for her children have been exiled. God responds: “Still your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears . . . There is hope for your future; the children shall return to their border.”

Section IV. Shofar (AS: pp. 430-439)

Before blowing the Shofar, create the mood by offering some insights that will add a whole new meaning to this familiar section of the Rosh Hashanah service. By explaining the different sounds that will be heard, describing the deeper meaning of the mitzvah, and stirring up the congregants with an inspiring story, the Shofar-blowing will be much more moving than any they have previously experienced.

Part A. Shofar Blasts: Tekiah, Teruah, Shevarim

Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf, Survival Kit, p. 70 – Each of the three shofar sounds is designed to evoke a particular feeling.

The blowing of the shofar consists of three sets of three different notes. Thus, the minimum number of shofar blasts one is required to hear is nine; however, the accepted manner of blowing actually results in many more sounds. Each of the three notes (Tekiah, Teruah, Shevarim) is designed to evoke a particular idea and feeling.

Tekiah (long note):

This note calls us from the routines of day-to-day living, from a dissipation of our creative energies, to refocus on who it is we truly want to be. The Tekiah challenges us to feel the power and the potential of our innermost selves – a part of ourselves we may have lost touch with over the year – and then dares us to commit ourselves to the pursuit of our awesome potential.

Teruah (short note):

This note is more comforting. It softens us, allowing us to integrate the thoughts and feelings of the day. The Teruah says: before you rush headlong into the new year energized by your rekindled convictions, pause for a moment. Let the sense of inspiration settle in. Let it fill your soul.

Shevarim (medium note):

This is an anxious, longing note. Feel the tugging, the yearning to somehow start again, this time accomplishing what we want in life. On the simplest, most basic

level the sound of the shofar is the muffled cry of an injured soul. A soul crying for freedom. Free to be its own uninhibited self. The homing signal in every Jewish heart.

Rabbi Shraga Simmons from www.aish.com – The shofar sound helps us get in touch with our inner self.

A child cries when he sees something wrong with the world. An innocent belief that things could be better. We should never lose that child's cry. The child we once were... That's the shrill, broken voice of the shofar.

As the shofar calls us from the outside, we hear it resonating from within. Yes, we may have strayed over the years, fallen out with a few people, not enjoyed the best family relationships, but we still care. We're still good. Something deep inside us wants more meaning.

The shofar produces three distinct sounds:

1. Tekiah – one long, straight blast.
2. Shevarim – three medium, wailing sounds.
3. Teruah – 9 quick blasts in short succession.

Tekiah is the sound of confidence and truth. We set our values straight and remind ourselves that ultimately, God runs the world. Shevarim is the sobbing cry of a Jewish heart – yearning to connect, grow and achieve. And Teruah is an alarm clock, shaking us out of our apathy to act and care.

The shofar brings us clarity, alertness, and focus. It connects us to our deepest selves. So we're not fooling anyone when we declare our grandiose visions or our part in a glorious history. Because Judaism is belief in God, but also very much belief in Man.

Somewhere deep inside us is that child longing for perfection; that voice telling us we can make the world a better place...

This Rosh HaShanah, when you listen to the shofar, close your eyes... And hear who you really are.

Part B. Themes

Avudraham, Machzor, Rosh HaShanah – A summary of ten ideas to focus on during the shofar blasts.

Rav Saadiah wrote ten explanations why the Creator, Blessed be He, commanded us to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah:

1. Rosh HaShanah marks the beginning of God's Creation of the world and His rulership over it. Just as it is customary to sound trumpets and cornets at the

inauguration of a new king to publicize the beginning of his reign throughout his kingdom, so do we proclaim God's sovereignty on this day.

2. Rosh HaShanah is the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance, so the shofar is sounded to publicize...the opportunity for those who want to repent, to do so.

3. To remind us of [receiving the Torah] at Mount Sinai...to reaffirm that which our forefathers accepted upon themselves by saying, "We will do, and we will understand."

4. To remind us of the words of the Prophets, which are compared to the blowing of the shofar..

5. To remind us of the destruction of the Temple...

6. To remind us of the Binding of Yitzchak...

7. That when we hear the shofar blasts we will have profound awe [of God].

8. To be reminded of the final Day of Judgment...

9. To remind us of the Ingathering of the Exiles...

10. To remind us of the Resurrection of the Dead and to [awaken] our belief in it...

Rabbi Shmuel Hain, "Rosh HaShanah: The Call of the Shofar," from Rosh HaShanah-to-Go 5770 – The most difficult obstacle to overcome is our own past.

The shofar serves as the wake-up call to repent: "Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator." Psychologically, perhaps the most difficult obstacle to overcome when embarking on the path of spiritual growth is one's own past. During this initial stage, our minds are flooded with memories of past failings and iniquities casting self-doubt on our very capacity to change. Only by overlooking our flaws and previous sins during this precarious stage in the process of repentance can we succeed in improving our ways.

When we fulfill the commandment of shofar on Rosh HaShanah, signaling the start of the period of repentance, we must be excited by the prospects of a new year and not overwhelmed by our past transgressions. Perhaps that explains why the liturgy of Rosh HaShanah is bereft of vidui, selichot, etc. The Machzor discourages the confession and enumeration of sins, as well as the beseeching for forgiveness for those transgressions on Rosh HaShanah, because that would be self-defeating at this critical, initial stage of teshuva. Dwelling on past transgressions at the moment of inspiration to forge a new path can be demoralizing.

Part C. Stories

The Dubno Maggid, The Story of the Magic Bell – The shofar is not a superstitious charm; it works by virtue of the thoughts that it awakens within us.

A poor farmer had a wealthy uncle who lived in the city and who once invited him for a visit. Thrilled with the invitation the farmer wasted no time setting out for his rich uncle's home. When he arrived he was greeted warmly and led immediately into a large dining hall with a long table.

As they spoke and shared stories about family, the uncle picked up a brass bell and clanged it. Immediately, a troop of servants emerged from side doors with trays of appetizers. The farmer had never seen such enticing food in his life. The servants returned to the kitchen quarters, and the two relatives continued the conversation. Shortly thereafter, the uncle clanged the bell again and the servants reappeared, taking away the old trays and bringing out new ones with the first course. The farmer's eyes bulged. He had never seen such enormous quantities of food and such dedicated service.

This pattern continued throughout the evening. Each time the uncle rang the bell, an entourage of servants answered his call, removing the old food and replacing it with the new. And with each clang the poor farmer was more dumbstruck.

When it was time to leave, the farmer thanked his uncle heartily and made a stop at a local store before rushing home. When he arrived he woke up his wife and excitedly told her. "You'll never believe what I did."

"What?"

"I spent our last penny!"

"You what?!!"

"Don't worry. I spent it on something you will thank me a million times for buying. Here, look." And he took out of his pouch a brass bell just like his uncle's. "This," the farmer said, "is a magic bell." His wife looked at him as if he was crazy. Undaunted, the man said, "You'll see, all I have to do is ring it and, immediately, servants will come out and serve us the most exquisite food which we can eat till our hearts' content."

Of course, the servants didn't appear. The bell possessed no magic. It only worked when used as a signal to servants already waiting in the wings. We are reminded of this story, when we think of the shofar that is sounded many times on Rosh HaShanah. Some people think like the farmer, that the sound of the shofar itself will do everything for them. They think that they may continue to go about their business, there being no need to change their way of life and daily conduct; the shofar sounded in the synagogue will surely bring them a happy New Year.

But, like the bell in the story, the shofar is but the sound of a summons. It has a message: “Wake up, you sleepers, think about your ways, return to God.”

Perhaps this is why, immediately after the shofar is sounded, we exclaim: “Happy are the people who understand the meaning of the sound of the shofar; they walk in Your light, O God.”

Rabbi Eliezer of Komarno, Nachlei Binah p. 317 #632 Tehillim Ben Beiti, From the Depths of the Heart – Sometimes, a single note can say it all.

I have heard from my father, the Holy Komarno: One time a Jewish peasant boy came to the big town to celebrate Rosh HaShanah. He didn't know how to pray. He could not even read the letter Alef. He only saw that everyone was traveling to the synagogues to participate in the holy prayers. He thought, “If everybody is going to town, I must go too!”

He arrived at the town synagogue with his father and watched the congregants crying and singing together, swaying to and fro. He turned to his father and asked, “Father, what is this all about?”

His father turned to him and said, “The Holy One blessed be He sits enthroned in the heavens, and we pray all year long to Him. We especially pray during these two days of Rosh HaShanah when the whole world is being judged, and each person is being judged for the rest of the year.”

The son responded, “Father, what am I to do since I do not know how to pray?”

His father quickly said to him condescendingly, “All you have to do is be quiet and listen to the other Jews praying. That is enough for you.”

“But Father, if I don't know what these people are saying, how is that going to affect God's decision? How is being silent going to help me?”

His father became unnerved and blurted out, “Listen, you should be quiet, so no one will know you're an ignorant peasant!”

The son stood still for a couple of minutes as his father and the rest of the congregation continued praying, and then the young boy stood up and spoke loudly.

“I am going to pray to God in the way I know best. I will whistle to God as I whistle to my flock of sheep.”

He began whistling the sweet calling as most shepherds know. His father was enraged. The boy continued whistling with all his might, not caring what other people thought.

Now, it happened to be, that this particular Rosh HaShanah, all the heavenly gates were shut, and suddenly, because of this pure whistling of the heart, all the gates burst open. The prayers of Israel were finally heard.

So too, the shofar – we recognize that we lack the words to express our true heartfelt prayer. Instead, we “whistle” them through the sound of the shofar.

Section V. The Mussaf Service (AS: pp. 444-593)

There are two sections to focus on in the repetition of the Mussaf service. The first is the powerful prayer of Unetaneh Tokef with its themes of Divine judgment and teshuva, tefillah, and tzedakah. Key phrases should be highlighted for their meaning, such as *kivnei maron* and *mi yichiye*.

The second section of Mussaf is the triple-headed theme of the Mussaf Amidah itself: *Malchiyot* (God's Kingship), *Zichronot* (God's Awareness), and *Shofarot* (the Shofar). This can be explained in general at the start of the Chazzan's repetition as well as expounded upon in more detail at the beginning of each section.

Part A. Unetaneh Tokef (AS: pp. 480-485)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Rosh HaShanah Machzor*, pp. 564-567 – The four “movements” of Unetaneh Tokef: the scene, the stakes, the outburst of faith, and the fragility of life.

No prayer more powerfully defines the image of the Days of Awe than does *Unetaneh Tokef*. The language is simple, the imagery strong, the rhythms insistent and the drama intense.

It is structured in four movements. The first sets the scene. The heavenly court is assembled. God sits in the seat of judgment. The angels tremble. Before Him is the book of all our deeds. In it our lives are written, bearing our signature, and we await the verdict.

The second defines what is at stake: Who will live, who will die? Who will flourish, who will suffer, who will be at ease, who will be in torment? Between now and Yom Kippur our fate is being decided on high.

Then comes the great outburst of faith that defines Judaism as a religion of hope. No fate is final. Repentance, prayer and charity can avert the evil decree. Life is not a script written by Aeschylus or Sophocles in which tragedy is inexorable. God forgives; God pardons; God exercises clemency – if we truly repent and pray and give to others.

Finally, there is a moving reflection on the fragility of human life and the eternity of God. We are no more than a fragment of pottery, a blade of grass, a flower that fades, a shadow, a cloud, a breath of wind. Dust we are, and to dust we return. But God is life forever. By attaching ourselves to Him we may [attach ourselves to Infinity].

The Story of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz

Background to Unetaneh Tokef from www.ou.org

The prayer entitled “Unetaneh Tokef” is attributed to a Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany, who lived about one thousand years ago. The story behind this *piyut*, a prayer-poem, is sad and poignant, and may shed light on the prayer itself.

The Bishop of Mainz summoned Rabbi Amnon, a great Torah scholar, to his court and offered him a ministerial post on the condition that Rabbi Amnon would convert to Christianity. Rabbi Amnon refused. The Bishop insisted and continued to press Rabbi Amnon to accept his offer. Of course, Rabbi Amnon continued to refuse. One day, however, Rabbi Amnon asked the Bishop for three days to consider his offer.

As soon as Rabbi Amnon returned home, he was distraught at the terrible mistake he had made of even appearing to consider the Bishop’s offer and the betrayal to God. For three days he could not eat or sleep, and he prayed to God for forgiveness. When the deadline for the decision arrived, the Bishop sent messenger after messenger to bring Rabbi Amnon, but he refused to go. Finally, the Bishop had him forcibly brought to him and demanded a response. The Rabbi responded, “I should have my tongue cut out for not having refused immediately.” The Bishop angrily had Rabbi Amnon’s hands and feet cut off and then sent him home.

A few days later was Rosh HaShanah, and Rabbi Amnon, dying from his wounds, asked to be carried to shul. He wished to say the Kedushah to sanctify God’s Name and publicly declare his faith in God’s Kingship. With his dying breath, he uttered the words that we now know of as the Unetaneh Tokef.

Three days later, Rabbi Amnon appeared in a dream to Rabbi Kalonymous ben Meshullam, a scholar and poet, and taught him the exact text of the prayer. Rabbi Amnon asked that it be sent to all Jewry and that it be inserted in the prayers of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur for all time.

The prayer portrays God as a Shepherd over His flock, counting and examining each sheep one by one as it passes under His rod. So does He review the flock of humanity one by one, determining each individual’s fate for the coming year.

But the individual human being is not just a helpless sheep! Rather, he or she can contribute to their verdict by altering their behavior towards God and Man, specifically in the areas of sincere Repentance, Prayer from the heart and Charity given with a cheerful spirit.

Kivnei Maron – Judged Like Sheep

Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 18a with Rashi – There are three possible definitions for *Bnei Maron*.

What is meant by the expression “*Bnei Maron*”? Here it was translated as “*Bnei Amarna*.” Reish Lakish explained, “Like the heights of the House of Maron.” Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, “Like the soldiers of the House of David.” Rabba Bar Bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, “All of them are judged at the same time.”

“Like *Bnei Amarna*.” Like sheep counted for tithing, filing past in single file through a small opening, two cannot fit through together.

“Like the heights of the House of Maron” – where there is a narrow path, and there is not enough room for two people to travel alongside one another, and there is a steep valley on either side of the path.

“Like the soldiers of the House of David” – “Like *Bnei Maron*,” i.e. like soldiers in the king’s army. *Maron* is an expression of mastery and lordship; such is the way one counts soldiers as they march out to battle one after the other.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 413 – The overall message is one of personal accountability.

The three analogies are wonderful, and the message is clear: at the time of judgment a person stands before his Creator completely alone, totally solitary – he has no plaintiff or witness, for “He is the Judge, He is the Witness, He is the One taking him to court.” He has no one else upon whom to transfer the responsibility [for his actions] or to blame for his failings. At the moment he stands before his Creator in judgment, it’s as if there is no one else in the world except for him. He alone is responsible for all that he did or did not do.

The three understandings of *Bnei Maron* reflect three different perspectives by which God judges us:

- Like sheep – what level are you on?
- Like climbers – what level are you on vis-à-vis where you were? Are you improving or not?
- Like soldiers – are you developing your unique capabilities and talents, or are you ignoring them?

Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz, “What God Judges Us For on Rosh HaShanah,” www.westmountroutes.com, based on a lecture by Rabbi Zev Leff – We are like sheep passing before the shepherd to see if we belong to Him.

Why does a shepherd count his sheep? There are many reasons. First of all, he wants to see if they are all there. Maybe some of them ran away and are no longer part of the flock. Even if they are there, he wants to see if they are healthy. He also wants to see if they have his brand, and are readily identifiable as to whose sheep they are. Similarly, God is looking to see if we are still part of His flock, or if, God forbid, we have run away from Him, and are not part of the flock. And if we are part of the flock – how healthy are we? What good deeds have we done in the past year? What character traits have we displayed in the past year? What kind of ideologies and beliefs do we have? Are we strong in our mitzvah observance, do we do a lot of good deeds? Do we learn Torah? Are we strong in our belief? God scrutinizes each and every one of us to see how healthy we are. More than that, do we wear His brand?

Ibid. – We are like climbers going through a narrow passage.

Theoretically, two people can be in the exact same state of being. Both of them can have the exact same number of good deeds, the same number of bad deeds, they can have the exact same character traits, exact same levels of belief in God, lead similar Jewish life-styles, but one will receive a favorable judgment and one will receive a negative judgment. How could that be if they are exactly the same? The answer is that God does not expect us to do good deeds, learn Torah, pray – *and remain stagnant*. He expects us to grow constantly. A human being is called a *mehaleich* – a mover; whereas angels are called *omdim* – stationary, who stand in one place. Angels are created to be who they are, and that is what they are. Animals are similar in this concept. The Hebrew word for animal is *beheimah*. The Maharal explains the word to be a contraction of two words: *bah* and *mah* – meaning, whatever it is, is there. They don't change or grow – except physically. The animal is spiritually programmed; and whatever it is born with, that is what it is. But a human being has to grow and constantly move. Life is analogous to climbing up the downward escalator. If you stand still on the escalator – you will go down. So too is life in this world. You cannot stand still and stagnate – you must constantly be growing. If you stand still, you go down. If you make a little effort, you stay in the same place. If you make a lot of effort, you can move ahead and grow.

Therefore, on Rosh HaShanah, God does not merely judge us in terms of where we are, but He also judges us vis-à-vis where we were. So if this year, we have two people standing on level 37, but last year one was on level 47 and the other was on level 27, they will be judged differently, as one is going up, while the other is going down. One will have a positive judgment because he is progressing, while the other will have a negative judgment because he is regressing. *In Judaism, the main thing is not where you are on the ladder, but what direction you are moving on the ladder!*

Ibid. – We are like soldiers reporting for duty.

The third aspect of the judgment is like soldiers. A person can be on a nice level, and is climbing, but there still is another aspect of the judgment that he must pass. Judaism tells us that each and every individual is created with unique talents and abilities in order to use them productively in this world. God put each and every one of us in this world in order to accomplish certain goals, and He invested us with the potential to be able to achieve that purpose. It is a person's responsibility to reach his potential in life. *In the Mussaf prayer, the text says that God judges "the deeds of each person and his tafkid" – his mission, his purpose.* So what is the difference between deeds and purpose? The answer is that deeds represent all the mitzvot of the Torah that each and every one of us must do – prayer, charity, etc. We are all required to inculcate within ourselves the same mitzvot, the same moral values, etc. But each person in addition to that, has things that are unique to him – talents and capabilities that only he possesses. A person is expected not only to do what everyone else is doing, but to develop his talents and capabilities, and use them in service to God. So this third aspect of judgment sees if we are developing our unique talents and abilities or if we are ignoring them. You might be doing what everyone else is doing, but you are not developing your unique identity.

Rabbi Yehuda Mendelson, "Prelude to Our Judgment on Rosh HaShanah," from The Jewish Observer, September 1993 – Judgment helps to motivate us to rise to our best.

God's judgment on Rosh HaShanah, however, is not just an unwelcome ordeal we are forced to contend with, but rather the essential prerequisite for repentance and atonement. Rosh Hashanah must come first, for only when man recognizes that he will face judgment does he muster the wherewithal to raise himself above the mundane. Only the impending verdict blesses us with perspective and motivation.

Permit an analogy: At the end of medical school all students must pass comprehensive examinations. Imagine that a student contrived a scheme for passing the examinations without opening a book or mastering any of the course work. Even if he were to receive his degree and licenses, he would not be a doctor. He would be a fraud. The purpose of the final examinations is to suffuse the medical school experience with an awareness of the coming judgment. Ideally, it is the very process of living each day of his medical school career in anticipation of the ultimate judgment that transforms the student into a person with the requisite knowledge to be a doctor. The looming examinations serve their primary purpose during the years of study, and – after the daily rehearsals for judgment – the few hours of actual testing at courses' end only confirm the gains achieved over the years.

Similarly, God judges us so that we will live a life infused with judgment. He has great expectations of Man, and our constant awareness of those expectations sets the tone of our Jewish consciousness. Truly, the High Holy Days are not a hurdle, but a touchstone of the very foundation for a proper approach to life all year.

Story:

Solomon Alter Halpern, The Prisoner and Other Tales Of Faith – On Rosh HaShanah we are each given our job in the service of the king.

A long time ago in the time of King Solomon, there was a boy named Shama who grew up on a small island in the Red Sea. His father was stationed there to signal the approach of ships to the distant mainland by flashing mirrors in the day and by fires at night. Shama had not been to the mainland since he was small. He did not know any people apart from his parents and the few sailors who brought their supplies.

But the time came when a relief arrived and the family was taken to Eilat.

There, Shama saw many new things. There were sailors and fishermen, porters and shipbuilders all working very hard in the hot sun, while other men in clean clothes did nothing but supervise them.

The same day, his father took him along to the splendid residence of the governor, to whom he had to make a report, and Shama wondered why the king gave power and riches to some men and hard work to others.

The next day the family set out for Jerusalem, where the father had to report at court. Just before they came to the Dead Sea where they were to board another boat, they met a gang of many men who were chained together and forced to drag huge blocks of stone. His father told him that these were the king's prisoners, building a new fortress, and Shama was frightened of a king who punished people so hard. He wished that his father and he did not have to go to his court – who knew what might happen to them if he got angry!

But when they had arrived in Jerusalem his father insisted that he must come along, saying, "This might be your only chance of ever seeing the inside of the palace." So Shama was washed and dressed in his best, and was even allowed to go with his father to the public audience in the throne room where everything glittered with gold and rare stones. But when the king entered, he noticed the boy, and when he found out who he was, commanded that he come before him.

Shama was trembling when he was being led to the foot of the steps flanked by gold lions, but Solomon spoke to him kindly: "My son, you have just seen our country for the first time, and I want you to tell me what was the strangest thing of all you have seen." When Shama hesitated, Solomon continued, "Do not fear! Tell me truly, for he who wishes to be wise must hear everyone."

Shama mustered all his courage and said: "Your Majesty, I have seen many of your servants. Why do some of them live in palaces and others have to work so hard on the ships – and others still wear chains and do very hard labor in the desert? Would it not be more just to treat them all alike?"

Solomon smiled at the boy and answered: “You are right and brave to ask what puzzles you, for only by asking can you learn. All the men you saw are working for me, while I myself am only another overseer, for we all work for God and for each other. But I and my ministers have to give each man the work he can do best. The sailor would not be able to be a governor, and the governor would do a poor job on a ship. We also have to give each man what he needs, and the governor must have a palace so that the people and he himself should realize his importance and responsibility. As for the prisoners, they are men who disobeyed orders and have to team and show the others that they cannot avoid serving their king and their people. Do you understand it now, or is there anything you want to ask?”

Seeing the king so kind, Shama asked: “And why did my parents have to spend all these years on a rocky island, and I also, when others can live at home? Have we done anything wrong to deserve this?”

“Your father,” replied the King, “is a brave and loyal man who has done a hard and important task willingly and well. Now he goes home to the farm his brother has been looking after and takes with him this purse of gold to reward his long and loyal service. But you who ask so cleverly and bravely shall stay in Jerusalem and receive all the teaching you have missed. In five years we shall see what task can be entrusted to you.”

ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE

Like Shama, we come into this world and see many strange and frightening things. We see some people ill and others well, some rich and others poor, and we get frightened about what may happen to us.

But on Rosh Hashanah, we come before the King of Kings and learn that these things come not by accident, but by His judgment. On Rosh Hashanah, God assigns each of us his special task that cannot be done by anyone else, whether it be one of power and responsibility like the governor’s, or the hard and lonely work of Shama’s father, or just the daily labor of ordinary men. We only pray that we shall not be like the prisoners who do the king’s work against their will.

But God is merciful as well as just, and if we ask Him, He will help us to find our faults and to remove them. And when we really try to do better, He forgives our past mistakes and helps us to carry out the task He sets for us.

Mi Yichiye - Who will live...

Netivot Shalom, Vol. II Rosh HaShanah, 1:1-3 – On Rosh HaShanah, everything in creation is assessed for its purpose in the Divine master plan.

In the actual essence of the day we have to clarify something. From the language of the Sages that “all creatures pass before Him single file like sheep,” it seems that the Day of Judgment includes both Jews and non-Jews, people who have free choice

and creatures that do not have free choice. This is also implicit in the word of the poem Unetaneh Tokef, “You shall count, calculate and consider, the soul of all the living; and You shall apportion the fixed needs of all Your creatures and inscribe their verdict”...

We have to understand how the concept of “Day of Judgment” applies to something that has no free choice. Furthermore, we find that even “the Angels will hasten, a trembling and terror will seize them – and they will say, ‘Behold, it is the Day of Judgment, to muster the heavenly host for judgment.’” How does it make sense for angels to be judged? Do they have free choice to do as they wish?...

This is the concept of law and judgment on Rosh HaShanah. Since this day was the conception of the world, meaning that it is the renewal of creation, therefore everything in creation has to stand in judgment. There is a Heavenly judgment as to whether each part of creation has fulfilled its purpose and goal that God assigned to it when He created the world, based on the deep secrets of creation known to Him. God assesses whether the good of the world outweighs the bad, or Heaven forbid, the opposite. If everything is going against His will, there would be no purpose for the world to continue. The depth of this judgment certainly applies to everything in creation, even those creations that have no free will, whether they have caused the world to come closer to the Divine intent for which it was created or not...

From everything we said above, the day of Rosh HaShanah is not called the Day of Judgment so that the wicked are to be punished, because that would only apply to things with free choice. Rather “Day of Judgment” refers to every created thing, whether its continued existence is justified or not.

Part B. Teshuvah, Tefillah, Tzedakah (AS: pp. 482-483)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Koren Rosh HaShanah Machzor, p. 811 – How do we define Teshuvah, Tefillah, and Tzedakah?

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, pointed out that the usual translation of these words is inaccurate. *Teshuvah* does not mean penitence; *Tefillah* does not mean prayer; *Tzedakah* does not mean charity. The word for penitence in Hebrew is *harata*, meaning remorse for the wrong we have done. *Teshuvah* means return. It tells us that every sin is a form of being lost; we are not where we are meant to be. *Teshuvah* means coming home.

The word for prayer, in the sense of request, is *bakasha*. *Tefillah* comes from the verb meaning “to judge.” *Lehitpalel* means “to judge oneself.” In *tefillah* we are both subject and object, the doer and the judge of what we do. It is this capacity for self-judgment that makes us capable of moral growth.

The word for charity is *gemilut chasadim*. *Tzedakah* means justice, or justice and charity combined. There is no word for this in English. In Judaism we give, not out of charity but out of justice.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “God’s Alarm Clock,” from aish.com – Relating to ourselves, others, and God.

Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are when we number our days. Asking to be written in the book of life, we think about life and how we use it. In this context the three key words of the “*Unetaneh Tokef*” prayer are fundamental: *teshuvah* (repentance), *tefillah* (prayer) and *tzedakah* (charity). *Teshuvah* is (primarily) about our relationship with our self. *Tefillah* is about our relationship with God. *Tzedakah* is about our relationship with other people.

Teshuvah means not only “repentance” but also “returning” – to our roots, our faith, our people’s history and our vocation as heirs to those who stood at Sinai more than 3,000 years ago. *Teshuvah* asks us: Did we grow in the past year or did we stand still? Did we study the texts of our heritage? Did we keep one more mitzvah? Did we live fully and confidently as Jews? *Teshuvah* is our satellite navigation system giving us a direction in life.

Tefillah means prayer. It is our conversation with God. We speak, but if we are wise we also listen, to the voice of God as refracted through the prayers of a hundred generations of our ancestors. *Tefillah* is less about asking God for what we want, more about asking God to teach us what to want. A new car? A better job? An exotic holiday? Our prayers do not speak about these things because life is about more than these things. It is less about what we own than about what we do and who we aspire to be. We speak about forgiveness and about God’s presence in our lives. We remind ourselves that, short though our time on earth is, by connecting with God we touch eternity. *Tefillah* is our “mobile phone to heaven.”

Tzedakah is about the good we do for others. Sir Moses Montefiore was one of the great figures of Victorian Jewry. He was a wealthy man and devoted much of his long life to serving the Jewish people in Britain and worldwide (he built the windmill in Jerusalem, and the area of which it is a part – Yemin Moshe – is named after him). Someone once asked him how much he was worth, and he gave him a figure. “But,” said the questioner, “I know you own more than that.” “You didn’t ask me what I own but what I am worth. The figure I gave you was how much money I have given this year to charity, because we are worth what we are willing to share with others.” That is *tzedakah*.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Koren Rosh HaShanah Machzor, p. 811 – Judaism has a message of hope.

Avert the evil of the decree. In these four Hebrew words lies the difference between a hope culture and a tragic culture. In ancient Greece, there was a belief that once a decree had been sealed there was no way of averting it. Every act taken to frustrate it merely brought it closer to fulfillment. That forms the heart of the tragedy of Oedipus and Laius.

In Judaism every decree can be averted by sincere repentance. That is the significance of the story of Jonah and the people of Nineveh. Jonah came and announced the decree: In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed. But the people repented, and the decree was annulled. There is no fate that is final, no destiny that cannot be changed. Therefore, there is always hope.

Greece gave the world its greatest tragedies, those of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides. Israel was and remains the supreme culture of hope.

A Story about Tzedakah

Jonathan Rosenblum, Think Again: Why we weep for Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, from www.jpost.com (Nov. 25, 2011) – The founder of Starbucks learns a lesson in Tzedakah.

Howard Schultz, the founder of Starbucks, was once brought to see the dean of the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem, Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, along with a group of prominent businessmen. They had not been told of his Parkinson's, and instinctively averted their eyes when he entered the room. Soon they heard a bang on the table and Rav Nosson Tzvi commanded them, "Look at me."

"I know you are all busy men," he continued, "so I'll be brief. What is the most important lesson of the Holocaust?"

He proceeded to describe the situation of the Jews arriving in Auschwitz and other death camps, after having been packed into cattle cars for days, without water or facilities of any kind, and then being separated from their loved ones. When the lucky ones reached a barracks, they were given one blanket for six people. They could choose to share it or each one could try to grab it for himself.

They chose the former. "The greatest lesson of the Holocaust," he concluded, "is the triumph of the human spirit. Now, each of you return to America and share your blanket with five others."

Hayom Harat Olam

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, The Book of Our Heritage, Vol. I, pp. 37-38 – We mention creation to remind ourselves that Rosh HaShanah is a day of renewal.

In many communities, the prayer *Ha-Yom Harat Olam* ["Today is the day of the world's creation"] is recited after the *berachah* at the end of each of the three special sections of the Rosh HaShanah *Mussaf*. We mention the world's creation to remind ourselves that Rosh HaShanah is a day of renewal. The prayer is repeated three times as an allusion to the three renewals that the world has experienced: the six days of Creation, the period after the Flood, and the day of the giving of the Torah.

Part C. Introduction to Mussaf: Malchiyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot

(AS: pp. 500-521)

i. Structure

The Mussaf service is divided into three sections, Malchiyot (God's Kingship), Zichronot (God's Awareness), and Shofarot (the Shofar). Each of these sections contains an introduction followed by verses from Tanach and then a blessing in the form of a request.

Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 119 – The three central components of the Rosh HaShanah prayers.

The Rosh HaShanah prayers are found in the Rosh HaShanah *Machzor* (festival prayer book). They are divided into three main sections, each focusing on one of the primary themes of the day. As we progress through the prayers, these meditations help us achieve a mental and spiritual state conducive to real change and self-improvement.

Based on Rabbi Josef B. Soloveitchik, Harerei Kedem 1:26 – The structure is: principle, verse, request.

Each berachah has an introduction that states the principles discussed in each berachah. Then each berachah has a middle section where the verses are recited. Then there is a third section with a request that the theme of the berachah come to fruition.

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, The Book of Our Heritage, Vol. I, pp. 32-33 – How the sections of Mussaf are structured with their berachot and verses.

In the *Mussaf* service recited year-round, the Men of the Great Assembly established an order of seven blessings, whereas in the *Mussaf* of Rosh HaShanah, nine blessings were established. The first three and last three follow the same pattern as *Mussaf* of the rest of the year with only minor textual variances...The middle three blessings recited on Rosh HaShanah are called *Malchiyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot*, as a reflection of their contents.

The theme of *Malchiyot* – the first special section inserted into the *Mussaf* – is included in the blessing that refers to the sanctity of the day. Since the sanctity of Rosh HaShanah is intrinsically connected to establishing God's sovereignty over all Creation, it was not deemed necessary to establish a separate blessing. *Zichronot* and *Shofarot*, however, are separate themes and as such, special blessings were added, bringing the total number of blessings in the Rosh HaShanah *Mussaf* service to nine.

These nine blessings correspond to the nine *azkarot* – mentions of God's Name – in the prayer of Chanah (Shmuel I:1-2:10), for the Talmud (Berachot 29a) records

that both Sarah and Chanah were granted Divine remembrance on Rosh HaShanah. Thus, corresponding to the nine times that Chanah mentioned God's Name in her prophetic prayer of thanksgiving, we recite nine blessings containing God's Name.

In the section of *Malchiyot*, we acknowledge God's creation of all existence, His sovereignty over the entire world, and our eternal acceptance of His dominion.

In the section of *Zichronot*, we proclaim our faith that He is both Creator and One Who providentially and constantly cares for all that He has made, reviewing all of man's actions and rewarding and punishing man accordingly.

In the section of *Shofarot*, we express our acceptance of the yoke of Torah as if it were once again being given amidst thunder and lightning and mighty shofar blasts. We also express our anticipation of the final salvation that will be marked by the sounding of the shofar of *Mashiach*, praying that our *tekiot* (shofar blasts) should ascend before God and serve as a source of merit before Him.

The sections of *Malchiyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot* share a common form. Each opens with an introductory prayer, followed by ten Scriptural citations that are relevant to the theme, followed by a closing prayer and a blessing. The ten verses cited within each section also share a common form: three verses are cited from the Torah, three from the Prophets, and three from the Writings, concluding with another verse from the Torah.

ii. Source

The source for reciting the Rosh HaShanah prayers is found below and also includes blowing the shofar:

Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Rosh HaShanah 16a – The verses recited during Mussaf on Rosh HaShanah, interspersed at specific times by the sounding of the shofar.

[God says] Recite before Me verses about Kingship, Remembrance, and the shofar.

Verses of Kingship in order to make Me King over you;

Verses of Remembrance in order that I shall remember you in a good light.

With what shall you accomplish this?

With the shofar.

The three central themes of the Rosh HaShanah prayer service focus us on the key ideas that will help us relate correctly to the spiritual energy of the day, as described above.

iii. Theme

Maharsha, Chidushei Agadot, Rosh HaShanah 32b (see also Rabbi Yosef Albo, Sefer Halkkarim 1:4) – Malchiyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot correspond to three principles of Jewish belief: the existence of God, the Divine origin of the Torah, and the concept of reward and punishment.

It is clear that Malchiyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot parallel three central principles of Jewish belief, namely belief in God, the Divinity of the Torah, and reward and punishment. Malchiyot, “So that you accept my Kingship upon yourselves,” and all the verses that go into the Malchiyot section express the existence and uniqueness of God. Zichronot, “So that our memory should rise before Him favorably,” and all the verses that go into the Zichronot section express the concept of reward, the opposite of which is punishment. The Shofarot section expresses the idea that the Torah was given by God with the sound of the shofar, as the verses state.

Part D. Elements of Mussaf in Detail

i. Malchiyot (AS: pp. 500-511)

Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 119 – Introduction to Malchiyot (Kingship).

One of the central themes of the Rosh HaShanah prayers is the emphasis on recognizing God as the King. Since there cannot be a King without a people and God created man, His “nation,” on Rosh HaShanah, it is on that day that He was, so to speak, crowned as King. In order to impress upon ourselves on this Divine “coronation day” the fact that God is King with all attendant rights and privileges, we repeatedly refer to Him as King in our prayers. This is the message of the section known as Malchiyot, Kingship, which consists of verses from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings about God’s Kingship.

Rabbi Nosson Weisz, “Why Judgment?” from aish.com – Rosh HaShanah is our opportunity to tell God that we want the chance to grow spiritually in the coming year.

Jewish tradition maintains that God informed us about Rosh HaShanah to allow us to have some input into how this new Kingdom is to be fashioned. The purpose of Creation is to allow man to actualize his spiritual potential. As I stand before God on Rosh HaShanah, He is waiting to hear from me about what I plan to do to actualize my spiritual potential in the coming year.

If all that issues from me is my desire to live on in prosperity and good health for another year, I am actually informing God that I do not require the renewal of His Kingdom at all. I am perfectly happy with the world just as it is. But God did not intend this world to be a comfortable place where I merely keep living on and on. He created the World to Come as the place of enjoyment and living the good life. The sole reason for the existence of this world is to provide man with a place in

which he can work. If my main interest in being in this world is to live well and enjoy myself, I don't need to be here at all.

On the other hand, if I sincerely resolve to invest my energy [really the Divine Energy that I am asking God to renew, and out of which I am fashioned] in the coming year into developing my spiritual potential, not only do I need this world to be recreated, I also need it to assume the particular shape that will maximize my ability to work efficiently, and develop as much of my potential as possible.

Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, From the Ner Le'Elef Booklet on Sefer Devarim (Deuteronomy) – What does it mean that God rules? What kind of ruler is He?

Malchiyot: Accepting God as our King is a central part of the Rosh Hashanah davening throughout. Firstly, such acceptance implies our unambiguous commitment to fulfilling God's Will. Rejecting any law is tantamount to saying that we only accept all the other laws because we choose to do so. Rejection of one law is tantamount to rejecting God's entire yoke and making us the arbiters of what we will and will not do. We therefore start out, as we did with the Sinai experience, accepting unconditionally that God is our Ruler and we are His servants.

The Gra points out that there are two words for ruler in the Hebrew language: *moshel* (ruler) and *melech* (king). The former is a ruler by force, imposed upon His subjects; the latter is a voluntary acceptance of God's rule. To all plants, animals, and even celestial beings, God is a *moshel*. Lacking any choice, these beings are programmed to accept and obey God's Will. Only humans are in a position to reject God (and be imposed upon in the end) and therefore only humans are capable of turning God into a *melech*. Therefore, God's Malchut (kingship) only came into being with the creation of Man.

For those nations who do not choose to believe in God and accept Him, God remains a *moshel bechol hagoyim* – He rules over all those nations anyhow. But, with those nations who choose to turn Him into a *melech*, He has a special relationship.

Rosh Hashanah is that day – the day when we decide how God is going to look on earth – the day on which we were created, i.e. the very first day when we could turn God into a *melech*. In a sense, God needs us – each and every one of us – for it is only we who can turn Him into a *melech*. When we speak of God as our King, we do not do this out of fear but rather out of love and joy. It is true that “being judged” is scary and having to commit to change is scarier still. But, beyond a certain point, that fear or awe is counter-productive, for it cannot raise us to the level of God-recognition which the day requires. In fact, the joyous meals, singing in the davening, simanim, etc. all point to the fact that it is only love, and not fear, which is the great tool that we must use on this day. Hence, Sefer HaChinuch tells us that when we blow the shofar, we should remember the *love* for God that Avraham and Yitzchak had at the Akeidah.

Discussion

Aish UK's High Holy Day Q & A – All the prayers say the same thing: “God is King.” What does that have to do with me?

In the modern world, the notion of a king may seem somewhat outdated. However, calling God King has little to do with power or control. The Hebrew word for political control is “moshel.” “Melech” – king – represents a different aspect altogether.

It's like a conductor enabling a symphony orchestra to function harmoniously with each musician playing his or her own unique role. Sub-atomic particles comprise the atom, atoms form molecules, molecules cells, and a group of cells can produce the miracle of human life. Each limb, each cell has a role to play without which the whole would be incomplete.

This is how Judaism envisions the perfected Messianic world. We can achieve far more as an organic whole than we can as separate beings. Each nation has a role to play in this “body.” Each community is a vital limb.

Each family, every individual, can contribute something of unique and infinite value. When we realize that everyone and everything has its place in the world, we no longer hate. We embrace difference rather than fear it. We are not threatened by others but see them and ourselves as irreplaceable partners in the grand concerto of humanity.

Accepting God as King on Rosh HaShanah is to wholeheartedly commit to this vision and our place in it.

ii. Zichronot (AS: pp. 510-517)

In Zichronot, we impress upon ourselves the seriousness of the day by openly acknowledging God's creation and absolute mastery of the universe. God has complete knowledge of human events, thoughts, and actions. Since He remembers everything anyone has ever done or thought, the basis of His judgment is just. We affirm that God revealed His plan for the world from the earliest times.

It should be noted that Zichronot focuses on the positive aspects of God's memory, because, as the Talmud states, on Rosh HaShanah we are not only especially careful to act properly, we also avoid self-incrimination by not even mentioning anything about sin (Rosh HaShanah 32a). This is the source for the custom not to eat certain nuts on Rosh HaShanah for the numerical value of the word for nut, *egoz*, has the same numerical value as the word for sin, *chet*.

Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 119 – Zichronot (Remembrances)

God's knowledge of human events, thoughts, and actions is the second theme of the Rosh HaShanah prayers. This section, called Zichronot, “memories,” describes

God as the One Who “remembers the Covenant” that he made with the Patriarchs. He is the One Who “remembered Noah” in the midst of the flood, the One Who “knows all the deeds of humanity.” Verses from the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings that describe God remembering everything are included.

Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts for Rosh HaShanah, pp. 204-5 – In calling upon God to remember certain events, we are asking Him to activate the merit of those events in His dealings with us.

When referring to “remembrance” as applied to God, we must realize that we are merely borrowing a term from our own experience to aid our understanding. Thus, when we mention reminding God of the covenant that He made with our forefathers, we realize that He always “remembers” it. Instead, we are referring to God’s presently activating this idea that is in His constant memory and putting it into action by applying the efforts of our ancestors’ meritorious acts in today’s world...

[In our prayers] we say, “For it is You ... Who eternally remembers all forgotten things” and “There is no forgetfulness before Your throne of glory.” From this we understand that God always remembers everything, but we immediately add, “May You mercifully remember today the Akeidah (binding) of Yitzchak (Isaac) for the sake of his offspring.” This means that while God perpetually remembers everything, nevertheless on Rosh HaShanah He decides to act on the basis of this memory so that the Akeidah will be a mitigating factor enabling a favorable judgment for His children.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler and Rabbi Aryeh Carmel, Strive for Truth! Vol. II, pp. 99-100 – We tend to forget our sins, but God will remind us of them.

We mistakenly think that when we forget an idea, the idea no longer exists. Actually its impression still exists in our brain, but it is no longer close to consciousness. When we concentrate on recalling a forgotten idea, it may return to consciousness.

Subconscious forces are at work in bringing an idea sometimes to the foreground, sometimes to the background of our mind. Knowing nothing of these mechanisms, we just call the process “forgetfulness.”

Sometimes an idea is sent off to the background of our mind because it holds no importance for us. Our character traits may have led us to attribute little importance to the idea and thus relegate it to the background. A fact may be present to our conscious mind, though we are no longer aware of the steps which led up to its being there. We know immediately that “two times two equals four,” and do not need to go through the steps by which we teach children this elementary fact: “Here are two apples; now if we add two more apples, how many are there,” and so on.

Similarly, when we read a book, we do not need to identify first the consonants, the vowels etc. The word, or sometimes even the sentence, registers in our brain as a whole. This is because the habit of reading has so engrained itself on our mind that we do not consciously have to go through the particular steps in the process.

FORGETFULNESS

In the course of time we forget our troubles. “Time heals all.” This is because in his heart of hearts a person knows that his material problems are not all that important. They may have loomed very large at the time, but once the heat of the moment is over, one is prepared to be comforted.

The death of a loved one is different: Love is a spiritual matter, and one would think that no consolation would help. This is why our Sages tell us that it is only by divine decree that the dead one is forgotten by the heart.

One of the subconscious activities of the *Yetzer Hara* (the self-destructive force that draws us away from God) is to hide from us the gravity of our sins and so prevent us from regretting them, and so possibly coming to repentance. People tend to forget their sins, but God will remind us of them soon enough. Even the smallest of sins are still there within us. We direct our attention away from them and this is what we know as “forgetting.” Happy is the one who is aware of the gravity of his sins and the extent of his liabilities so that forgetfulness has no power over him.

Ibid. – God analyzes our motivations down to the minutest detail.

An idea may be composed of many tiny parts, each of which is indiscernible on its own, just as in physical perception we see a hand, but in reality we are faced with innumerable microscopic cells. A person’s motivation in doing a certain mitzvah may be almost perfect, but there may be a tiny admixture of an unworthy motive. This may be almost indiscernible, but it still forms part of the motivation of the act, and will one day be revealed by God, and for this too every person will be held to account.

Why? Because we could have discerned it. Had he only learned character development properly and set himself to acquire the “sense of-truth,” had he worked hard to improve his character, he would have succeeded in creating in himself the “microscope” which would have enabled him to discern anything unworthy or corrupt, even to the tiniest degree. A person can sanctify God’s name not only in his actions but also in every portion of his actions, even those not normally accessible to observation.

[On Rosh HaShanah], when we say “There is no forgetfulness before Your heavenly throne,” we mean that God’s judgment will bring into account even those infinitesimal portions of our motives in which we are expected to sanctify God’s name.

“...And nothing is hidden from Your eyes”: These are the eyes of God which “survey the whole earth.” As the Zohar says, these are the “witnesses” which testify to human deeds. God’s eyes testify to the smallest and least obvious.

“Human beings see by the eyes,” and for human scrutiny it is difficult to discern that small admixture of evil. But “God sees by the heart,” and to this scrutiny even the smallest point is visible.

Ibid. – God will remember every ounce of good that we did as well.

Since our spiritual vision has such difficulty in perceiving the ultra-small, God gave us the Torah, which can aid us to discern what would otherwise be beyond our reach. Torah is the absolute truth and its judgments penetrate to the ultimate verity.

[On Rosh Hashanah we say]: “Who recalls good remembrances for those who bring Him to mind.” That is, God is prepared to remember for a person even an infinitesimal amount of good that he may have done. But only for “those who bring Him to mind.” That is, who try to remember Him, and who try to recognize the smallest points within their own soul and to bring them out into the light – which is what we mean by “remembering.”

One who does this to the best of his ability, and brings even the smallest point before God, attempting to rectify it as part of his service of God, is in effect “remembering” God – and in return God will “remember” him.

Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, From the Ner Le’Elef Booklet on Sefer Devarim – God uses His perfect “memory” to factor in our past in order to allot us our portion for the year to come.

Zichronot: Malchiyot is our action as we explained above, as only we can turn God into a Melech (King). Zichronot is God’s response. Zichronot is the means to God’s Hashgachah Pratit (Divine Providence). The idea of remembering is the connecting of the past to the present – of providing continuity. If I cannot remember my past, I have no connection with it; I lose my personal history, and time becomes individual packages with no continuity. Without memory there is no ability to build, to use the past as a springboard to go forward. Not only that, but memory of the past is incomplete and choppy – certain things stick out while others fade away. Beyond that, a person’s actions and attitudes may have impacted on his broader environment in umpteen ways – his family, his friends and his community. Per force our memories are incomplete.

God, however, is different. He is above time, and therefore past, present and future are all the same for Him. God does not forget, and asking Him to remember cannot be taken at face value. His remembering means His taking all of history into account, all of the hidden patterns of the past, present and future. He has a perfect grasp of the context and influence of every event, every thought, feeling and action which we might have had, understanding all its ramifications not only on us

but on our environment around us. On Rosh HaShanah, though, God uses His perfect “memory” to factor in our past in order to allot us our portion for the year to come.

The *pesukim* (verses) that we bring for Zichronot are all positive – they all recall the good “remembering” that God has done in the past, like the remembering of Noah when he was in the Ark and blessing him with a new beginning.

Discussion

Aish UK’s High Holy Day Q&A – Why is Rosh HaShanah called “The Day of Remembrance”?

When a person suffers from severe memory loss, they have no context for anything. Life just becomes an incomprehensible, disjointed series of unconnected events. Chief Rabbi Professor Sir Jonathan Sacks notes there is no Hebrew word for history. Yet the word for memory – “zachor” – or its derivatives, appears dozens of times in the Torah. What’s the difference?

History (his story) happened to someone else in the past. Memory is mine. Who I am right now. Memory shapes the way I look forward. Our lives are a continuous chain of memories. When we introduce ourselves, we recount memories so people understand who we are. In interviews, we recall our finest moments.

The Rosh HaShanah service is divided into three main sections: Malchiyot – about God’s kingship, Zichronot – focused on ‘memories’ of the great moments in Jewish history, and Shofarot – the impact of the shofar. Malchiyot depicts the unity of that perfect world. Zichronot, memories, are the context defining who we are in that world. When we recall our collective memories before God, we position ourselves as another link in the Jewish people’s voyage through history. We see our lives in the context of our ancestors standing at Sinai committing to live for a perfect world. We continue the legacy of those Jews who died in defense of a better world.

The memories of Zichronot are beyond nostalgia. They lift us out of the smallness of our limited lives, raising us to see ourselves as part of the unraveling tapestry of the great Jewish journey.

iii. Shofarot (AS: pp. 516-521)

Based on Ritva, Rosh HaShanah 16a – The verses relating to shofar serve the purpose of elevating our prayers.

When the Talmud states, “With what shall you accomplish this? With the shofar,” it is not referring to the blowing of the shofar, rather to the verses cited in Mussaf. As the Tosefta states, the verses relating to shofar serve the purpose of elevating our prayers. These verses concretize the requests in Malchiyot and Zichronot.

Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, From the Ner Le'Elef Booklet on Sefer Devarim – The Shofarot are the reenactment of the creation of God's kingship through the soul of man.

Shofarot: The Shofar helps us achieve the ideas of Malchut and Zichronot mentioned above. Firstly, the Shofar's shrill cry wakes us up. There is much more to the Shofar, however, as the shofar is what connects to the deepest part of us, linking us up to the goodness of God's remembering and bringing it into our lives through our inspiration to do teshuva. When God gave the Torah at Har Sinai, there was the sound of a Shofar. That sound was coming from God, and it was really the words of the Torah at a higher, deeper plane, before the words had been broken up into their individual sounds. This was a very high level, an intermediary between the Heavenly Torah and its final form on earth. The Shofar strikes a chord deep into our Neshamah; it resonates with a very high point of our souls – a part which remains pure and was never involved with sin. In fact, each shofar blast is referred to as a *neshima*, a soul cry. The Shofar is really a cry directly to our *neshamot* – to the hidden parts of our true spiritual selves.

We mentioned under Malchiyot that only man can turn God into a melech. It was at the point that God blew the Neshama into man, *Vayipach be'apav nishmat chaim*, that God became a King. At the point of God's *neshima* (blowing) which translated into the *neshama* (soul) of man, the possibility of God's Malchut began. The root of the Shofar sounds of Rosh Hashanah go back to that point – they are the *neshimot* that reenact the creation of God's Malchut through the soul of man. On the same day that God blew the neshamah of life into man, we partake of the only mitzvah that requires blowing. Just as God blew from within Himself, so to speak, so too we draw from within the deepest parts of ourselves to produce the Shofar sounds.

The very high, clear notes of the *tekiyot* (shofar blasts) represent this *hashpa'ah* (influence) at a very elevated, abstract level. This *hashpa'ah* needs to be broken up into our *middot* (character), represented by the *shevarim*, and further broken down into our actions, represented by the *teru'ot*. In practice, we absorb this *kedusha* (holiness) in different ways – sometimes from intellect into actions without yet managing to affect our character (*teru'ot-tekiyot-tekiyot*) and other times by beginning to work on our *middot*, with a delay before we begin implementing this in practice (*tekiyot-shevarim-tekiyot*).

The shofar helps us access the higher levels of our soul, which were not involved in the sin, in order that we can use these levels of purity to filter down to the impure aspects of ourselves as well. This is the idea of the shofar mixing up the Satan. Commonly, we translate the Hebrew word *me'arbavin* as to confuse. However, the Sefas Emes says that what it means is to mix the negative parts of ourselves (the Satan) with those that are pure, negating the evil with the higher, more powerful good. This power of the shofar is affected because it combines with the day itself, which, being the day on which man was created, elicits the potential of the First Man as he was before the sin and before good and evil were mixed together.

VI. Tashlich (AS: pp. 630-645)

See Morasha Class Rosh HaShanah III, Section I for insights into the custom of Tashlich. Below is a summary of insights found there:

- The Tashlich prayer service performed next to a body of water is a symbolic act of casting our sins away. As such, it is also a statement to God that we are essentially good, that our sins are merely external trappings.
- Tashlich is yet another Rosh HaShanah custom that focuses us on the Akeidah.
- The preference to have fish in the water expresses our hopes for a blessed year and can serve to inspire us to do teshuvah.

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, The Book of Our Heritage, Vol. I, pp. 40-41 – Tashlich symbolizes the heart’s intention to cast away sin and also serves to recall the merit of the Patriarchs.

After *Minchah*, the *Tashlich* prayer is recited [the “casting away” of sin]. It is customary to do this near a source of water - by the banks of a river or at the seashore. If there is no such source of water, *Tashlich* can be recited near a spring, cistern, or reservoir that contains rainwater. The following verse (Michah/Micah 7:18) is recited: *Who is a God like You, Who bears iniquity and ignores transgression for the remnant of His chosen people! He does not retain His anger forever for He desires to be benevolent. He will again show compassion and will subdue our sins and cast all of their transgressions into the depths of the sea!*

This is followed by additional verses of compassion from Scripture. Some communities add a special prayer composed by R. Chaim David Azulai [the Chida]. It is then customary to shake out one’s pockets and the folds in one’s clothing three times so that they are emptied, symbolizing the heart’s intention to cast away sin and to be totally cleansed of transgression. A Scriptural allusion for this practice can be drawn from the verse (Nehemiah 5:13) that states: *I too have shaken out my cloak, saying, Thus shall God shake out all those who shall fail to abide by this promise.*

Tashlich also serves to recall the merit of the Patriarchs; the Midrash teaches us that when Avraham took Yitzchak to be sacrificed [on the day of Rosh HaShanah], Satan appeared to them in the form of a wide river. Avraham and Yitzchak entered the water until it reached their necks, whereupon Avraham said: “Master of the world! The waters threaten to destroy us. If either I or Yitzchak dies, through whom will Your Name be unified?” God immediately scolded the river and they were saved (Yalkut Shimoni, Parashat Vayera). It is therefore customary to recite *Tashlich* near a source of water, to recount our forefathers’ merit in having offered their lives to fulfill God’s commandments.

If the first day of Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbat, in Ashkenazic communities, *Tashlich* is said after *Minchah* on the second day; among Sephardic communities, *Tashlich* is always recited on the first day.

Dovid Frankel, “Tashlich’s Subtle Message: The Antidote to Wallowing in Self-pity,” from www.aish.com – Tashlich helps us to scrape away the cynicism, repudiate the negativism and snap out of our disenchantment.

The yearly tradition begs the question: What’s up with Tashlich? We go out to a river, lake or pond and say a brief prayer followed by the token “throwing in of our sins.” The kids accumulate stale bread for weeks to be able to have lots of “sins” to throw in. Kind of strange if you think about it. Judaism isn’t about symbols and rituals; it’s a lot deeper than that.

The answer is very simple yet so refreshing. Man is good. Man is beautiful. Man is extraordinary. At the very essence, the human being is pure and holy. Created in God’s image with the capacity to soar to the heights of Godliness, we aren’t sinners, but rather we sin.

Unfortunately, throughout the travails and temptations of daily life, we “acquire” many sins and transgressions. They come to us in times of despair or acts of arrogance. We purchase them in fits of anger or digest them in moments of weaknesses. We might own them. We might carry them. And we might even relish some of them. But they never become us. They never become who we are. And they definitely aren’t what we really want to be.

They are always a separate entity that can be disowned, disavowed and cast away at any time. The symbolic act of throwing away our sins brings that message home in a dramatic, concrete manner.

Tashlich is the biggest antidote to wallowing in self-pity. When we think about our habits we throw up our hands in the air and tell ourselves, “It’s been years! There’s no way I can change now.” Or “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” Tashlich teaches us otherwise. Yes we can change. We can improve because we are at our core holy and pure – a spark of the divine.

The good struggle is to scrub away that superficial coating of sin. Scrape away the cynicism, repudiate the negativism and snap out of our disenchantment. As long as we can grasp the immeasurable greatness and potential of our souls, then nothing can stop us. If we would only begin to comprehend that the love God has for us is unfathomable and limitless, then and only then, can we truly begin our journey to complete and credible repentance.

Epilogue. You Don't Have to Wait for Rosh Hashanah

Rabbi Moshe Bamberger, Great Jewish Speeches, *HaMelech: Rabbi Aharon Perlow of Karlin*, ArtScroll, pp. 195-196 – Approaching God in teshuvah can be done at any time.

Rabbi Aharon Perlow (1802-1872), the Chassidic leader of Karlin, was named after his grandfather, Reb Aharon “the Great” (1736-1772), the founder of the Karliner dynasty. The second R’ Aharon of Karlin was a master of prayer. As was the customary practice of the Karliner Rebbes, he prayed in a loud, thunderous voice and swayed back and forth.

R’ Aharon would lead the prayers on Rosh Hashanah morning. One year, as he was about to shout the opening word, “HaMelech,” the King, he fainted! He was revived by the Chassidim and continued the prayers. Following the service, his Chassidim asked him why he fainted. R’ Aharon offered the following explanation for his behavior.

The Gemara in Gittin (56a) describes an incident that took place at the end of the Second Temple era. Jerusalem was under siege by the Romans, and the living conditions in the city were becoming increasingly intolerable. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, the most prominent sage in Jerusalem at the time, attempted to meet with the Roman general, Vespasian, and entreat him to spare the lives of the Jews. In order to get past the Roman guards, he arranged to have himself transported out of the city in a casket. When Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai saw Vespasian, he greeted him, “Peace upon you, king, peace upon you.” Upon hearing this greeting, Vespasian responded angrily, “I should kill you for two reasons: First, because you addressed me as a king, which I am not; secondly, if you truly believe that I am the king, why have you not come until now to plead before me?”

[The Rebbe continued:] As I was about to recite “HaMelech,” proclaiming God as the King of the Universe, I was reminded of this Gemara. I recalled the words of Vespasian, who, upon being called ‘king,’ expressed his wonder that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai did not visit him sooner. It occurred to me that God must wonder the same thing when we address Him as “HaMelech,” the King, on Rosh Hashanah. If we are sincere, and really consider Him as our King, why have we waited so long to come before Him? Why have we not repented until today? When this question entered my mind, I was so frightened at the thought of not having a proper response, that I fainted!