

**SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE**

NISABIM/ROSH HASHANAH  
Haftarah: Yeshayahu 61:10-63:9

SEPTEMBER 12, 2015 28 ELUL 5775

Minha & Arbit 6:53 PM -Candle Lighting 6:53 PM  
Going Forward Mincha will be at candle lighting on Friday evenings  
Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday evenings

**Shabbat**

Class with Rav Aharon 8:00 AM – Latest Shema 8:59AM  
Shahrit 8:30 AM, Torah 9:45 and Musaf at 10:30  
Rabbi Avraham Ben Haim will be giving the morning Derasha

Kiddush this week is sponsored anonymously  
in honor of and appreciation of our Rabbi David Bibi  
and in appreciation of all he does for the Synagogue and Community

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer  
Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/  
Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's program at Bach at 5:00PM –  
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:00

Class with Rav Aharon at 5:45PM  
Minha 6:15 PM - Seudat Shelishit 6:45 PM  
Rabbi David is scheduled to give the class  
Birkat HaMazon 7:35 PM Arbit 7:40 PM – Shabbat Ends at 7:52  
HATARAT NEDARIM FOLLOWS ARBIT AT 8PM ....  
And filling out the Prozbul .... Everyone should attend ... Men and Ladies, please join us.

SUNDAY MORNING 7:15 and Shahrith at 8AM

ROSH HASHANA Sunday Night Candle Lighting 6:49PM ... Mincha 6:45PM  
ROSH HASHANA Monday Morning 8AM  
Shofar 11:00 AM apx  
Minha followed by Tashlikh 6:30 PM  
Arbit 7:30 PM  
Candle Lighting After 7:50 PM

ROSH HASHANA Tuesday Morning 8AM  
Shofar 11:00 AM apx  
Minha 6:40 PM / Arbit 7:35 PM / Holiday Ends 7:47 PM

Our intent is to begin regular tefilah at 8AM each morning of Rosh Hashana and get to the Amidah by 9AM. Torah reading will be at about 10AM and we will try to limit each day's olim. Musaf and Shofar at 11AM and we want to get out way before 1PM. Please keep these times in mind. They only work if everything is sold in advance, so please help us out.

**DAILY MINYAN**

Selihot 6:15 AM

Wednesday, Thursday 6:55, and Friday at 7:00AM  
Wednesday is Som Gedalia – Fast begins at 5:14

To make a payment or donate on line  
Please visit

<http://www.benaiasher.org/donate-online/>

# **SELECTED HONORS TO PURCHASE IN ADVANCE**

**Updated Friday Morning September 11**

**These items remain**

## **FIRST DAY**

Carry the Haftara Case \$ 800

Gelila Wrap the Torah \$ 500

## **SECOND DAY**

Carrying The Second Torah \$1500

Carry the Haftara Case \$800

Raise the Torah Hagbah \$500

Gelila Wrap the Torah \$500

Mashlim with Kaddish \$ 1500

**Note that items in red have been sold**

**Every item so far has been purchased as a gift for someone else**

**We would love 100% participation**

**Everyone should try their best to buy something**

**About half our budget comes from High Holiday Donations**

**WE NEED YOU NOW !!!!**

**Please help us by reserving an honor**

**Even if you will not be with us, please purchase for a friend**

**Please speak with**

**Hal Waldman, Ely Altarac or Albert Yusupov to bid**

**Or email [SephardicCongregation@gmail.com](mailto:SephardicCongregation@gmail.com)**

**Or give Rebetzin Ida a call!**

**WE HAVE LESS THREE DAYS TO ROSH HASHANA**

**PLEASE REPLY BACK .... FIRST COME FIRST SERVE**

## **1st Day Rosh Hashana**

Parnasa of Rosh Hashana evening service \$2600 – Bobby and Hindy for Shaya

Opening the Ark on Rosh Hashana – \$2600 – Leon and Karen Sutton for Bechor  
Yadgarov

Carrying The Torah \$1600 Hal for Albert

Carrying The Second Torah \$ 1500 Hal for Bobby

Carry the Haftara Case \$ 800

Rimonim for all the Torah's \$500 Richard Soleymanzadeh - "for any children that  
have never done it or haven't done it recently. "

Raise the Torah Hagbah \$ 500 – The Lemberger Family for Sam Shetrit

Gelila Wrap the Torah \$ 500

Mashlim with Kaddish \$ 1800 Albert Yusupov for Bobby

Haftara with Kaddish \$ 1800 Bobby and Hindy for Meyer Abittan

Parnasa of Rosh Hashana Day \$2600 - – Leon and Karen Sutton for Robert Krauss

Parnasa of Rosh Hashana Mincha \$1000 David and Chantelle for Jonah & Moses

Parnasa of Rosh Hashana evening service \$2600 Hal for Dr. Kahn

## **2nd Day Rosh Hashana**

Opening the Ark on Rosh Hashana \$2600 – Leon and Karen Sutton for Ely Altarac

Carrying The Torah \$1800 Albert Yusupov for Hal Waldman

Carrying The Second Torah \$1500

Carry the Haftara Case \$800

Rimonim for all the Torah's \$500 Richard Soleymanzadeh - "for any children that have never done it or haven't done it recently. "

Raise the Torah Hagbah \$500

Gelila Wrap the Torah \$500

Mashlim with Kaddish \$ 1500

Haftara with Kaddish \$ 1800 Albert for David Bibi

Parnasa of Rosh Hashana 2<sup>nd</sup> Day – \$2600 Bobby and Hindy for Chaim Abittan

Parnasa of Rosh Hashana Mincha – The prayer for financial success \$1800 in honor of Ida Abittan to be opened by one of her children or grandchildren by Rob and Marilyn Corwin

## **Yom Kippur – Selected Honors**

Open the Ark for Kal Nidre –\$1800 – Bobby and Hindy for David Bibi

Sefer Kal Nidre - \$5200 Jack Azizo and Family

Each of the additional Torahs brought out with Sefer Kal Nidre 2-12 @ \$ 1500 ea

One Torah Anonymous for Bob Krauss @ \$1500

Mrs. Halio for Shaya \$1500

All the Rimonim for all the Torahs \$ 1500

Parnasa of evening service – \$2600

Opening the Ark on Yom Kippur - \$ 1800 Rabbi David for Bobby Mizrahi

Carrying The Torah \$1800 Rabbi David for Albert Yusupov

Carrying The Second Torah \$1500 Rabbi David for Hal Waldman

Carry the Haftara case \$800 Ely Altarac for Ari Waldman

Rimonim for all the Torah's \$500

Raise the Torah Hagbah \$800

Gelila Wrap the Torah \$500

Mashlim with Kaddish said in memory of a loved one - \$1500 Bobby and Hindy for  
Albert Yusupov

Haftara Yom Kippur Day \$1800 Bobby and Hindy for Abie Abittan

Parnasa Yom Kippur 2600 Bobby and Hindy for Hal Waldman and Baruch Kahn

## **Yom Kippur – Mincha and Neilah**

Opening the Ark Mincha on Yom Kippur - \$ 1500 Richard Soleymanzadeh - "for the eldest member present at the time"

Carrying The Torah \$ 1500

Carry the Haftara Case \$800

Rimonim for the Torah and Haftara Case's \$500

Raise the Torah Hagbah \$600 - David Schwartz for Alan Ostrovsky

Gelila Wrap the Torah \$ 400 - David Schwartz for TBA

Maftir Yona \$3600 Albert Yusupov for Sam Yusupov

Parnasa Yom Kippor Mincha \$ 1800

Opening Ark Neila – \$3600 Hindy for Bobby.

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**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,  
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us!  
 212-289-2100 – Mincha– The most important  
 tefilah of the day –Give us 11 minutes and we'll  
 give you the World To Come!**

### Editors Notes

Last week I gave a class on taking an accounting in anticipation of the New Year; of examining the prior year, where we started, what we did and where we are going. This morning I was thinking about my year beginning with Mikhayla and Daniel's wedding, the joy of grandchildren playing and laughing with me, happily partnering with Chantelle in so many different projects, appreciation of the opportunity to teach Torah almost every day, spending some great time with my mom, partaking in the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party of my friend David Golden, sharing in so many semachot, babies, bar mitzvahs and weddings and planning for their future with our children. Concurrently I realized I am only beginning to deal with the loss of my dad who was such an important part of my life. Looking forward, I wish there were 48 hours in a day, but there aren't so I need to better utilize my time and take a piece out of each day to take better care of myself, physically and spiritually. And spend more time with my family. This year I guess my goal is to find some balance.

What was your year like? Where were your successes and joys? Where did the sadness come from? What can you do to correct failures? How can you grow spiritually? What commitments can you make? Did you make your resolution list? Did you begin?

Anything is possible.

### **How Does an Apple in Honey Assure Me a Sweet Year?**

**The Jewish Voice – September 12, 2015**

Atem Nesavim HaYom. We always read this portion right before Rosh Hashana. You are standing here today. This can mean that after hearing the Tochacha – the 98 curses last week, Moses is telling the people not to worry, you are all still standing here. Or perhaps it's a warning to us; reminding us that we are at the Day of Judgment where we are standing before the Heavenly Judge's bench. If that's the case, what can we do to help win the case?

A couple of years ago, I was out shopping in the days before Rosh Hashana when I noticed two yeshiva boys in their suits and white shirts with their mom. The mother pulled a set of small bowls off a shelf into her wagon and one boy asked why they would need such small bowls. The mother responded that they would be good for the simanim - the special foods we serve on the night of Rosh Hashana.

The other boy laughed and asked, "Ma, what do you think? That this is Pesach? Ma, it's not the Seder! Why such a big deal over some foods that we don't want to eat anyway? Do you really think it matters?"

I couldn't mind my own business. The mother was a bit aggravated. She went one way and the boys went the other way. So I went over to speak with them.

The truth is that their question is very valid. Just imagine for a second getting a speeding ticket in some small town in upstate New York or New Jersey. You arrive at this small town court. The cop who wrote you the ticket is there and the judge asks you how you plead. You try some guilty with explanation excuse and then the judge cuts you short, asks the cop a few questions and tells you if you're done he will decide the verdict.

### Try Telling it to the Judge

You tell him to wait one more minute. You pull out from your bag a jar of honey and some sliced apple and as you dip the apple into the honey you state aloud, may it be the will of your honor the judge to sweeten my verdict just like this honey sweetens the apple and you eat the apple, relishing each bite in front of the court.

Odds are that the judge will either throw you into a cell for a few hours charging you with contempt or ask that you be taken to the local hospital for observation.

Rosh Hashana is supposed to be the day of judgment. And as we learned in school as children, G-d takes out the scale. On one side go our sins and on the other go our merits. If we are worthy, we are judged positively and if not then we're in for some trouble.

How can eating a pomegranate or some blacked eyed peas increase our merits? How can eating a gourd or some dates help destroy our enemies? How can an apple in honey sweeten our judgments? How is it possible through these foods to change sins into merits? What's going on here?

Is There Such a  
 Thing as a Good Omen?



Is there such a thing as a good omen? And on Rosh Hashana is it the food or the prayer? And if it's the prayer then why do we need the food?

The Talmud tells us about omens. If someone wants to know if they will be judged for life then on the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur he should light a candle in a draft free room. If the candle burns then fine, if the candle goes out, he better get some more life insurance quickly.

If he wants to know if he will merit a good parnasa or livelihood, he should take a chicken. He should feed it and if after a while it gains weight than all is good. But if it loses weight, he should get on the phone and call the bankruptcy attorney because tough times are ahead. And there are more.

The Talmud then warns not to try any of these at home. "Perhaps he will not see it and worry and as a result he will experience misfortune".

### A Reason to Be More Confused

Then Abaye goes on to say that what does work is eating pumpkin, fenugreek, leeks, beets and dates. These are good omens. He doesn't mention any yehi ratzons, nor prayers. Eat those foods he suggests. And if you were confused when we started, you should be even more puzzled now. How can we begin to understand what is going on here?

The Arizal suggests that the person who lit the candle and sees the candle go out goes into depression. Perhaps the "Satan" blew it out just to mess with your mind. Sadness is a tool of the other side as it disconnects us from Hashem. Recall our forefather Jacob who in mourning for the loss of Joseph for 22 years lost his Ruach HaKodesh – his connection with G-d. Abaye in his brilliance suggests that if depression can disconnect us and damage our Mazal then joy can do the opposite. And these special foods should bring us joy.

In Parashat Ki Tavo we read of 98 chilling curses. Why are we subject to curses? The Torah tells us it's because we didn't serve Hashem with joy and a good heart. We are commanded again and again to be happy and to serve Hashem with joy.

These foods which make up the simanim of Rosh Hashana can be sweet but sometimes sour. If we taste them and appreciate them; If we taste the sweetness and forget the tart; If we are thankful of the world G-d gave us and are happy with Hashem then Hashem is happy with us. If we are satisfied and happy then there is no place for sadness, anger or jealousy. Satisfaction and joy have the power to change us and change our lives.

### The Benefits of Regarding Hashem as Our Father

If we are happy with Hashem and look at him as a father then Hashem will look at us as his children. A child who does something wrong and comes to his parent admitting his sin, feeling bad not only for doing something wrong but for embarrassing his parent and truly tries to never do the same wrong again in essence converts the sin into a merit. The father cherishes the child and the entire act becomes part of a victory tale.

On Rosh Hashana, Hashem's behavior towards us mirrors our own behavior. If we are happy with the world and satisfied; If we share and care; If we look towards G-d as a parent, then he looks at us as a child.

### The Power to Change Our Mazal

Eating those foods, appreciating them, being satisfied with them and enjoying them really has the power to change our Mazal. We really can turn a sin into a merit. They have the power to change the scale by literally converting the sins on the left side of the scale into merits on the right side.

The key lies in our own hands. The key lies in our own attitudes. On this Rosh Hashana as you sit with your family and taste these foods stop and smell the proverbial roses. Go around the table and ask everyone to focus on what they have to be thankful for. Focus on the glass half full. Commit to being satisfied and fighting jealousy and anger.

Don't forget that what we project finds its way back to us. May we project love and unity, satisfaction and appreciation, and may we be blessed with a year of health, happiness, peace and prosperity. Amen!

Tizku LeShanim Rabot,  
David Bibi

### Mind sets and attitudes to aid Rosh Hashana Prayer

**Rabbi David Ozeri & Rabbi David Sutton**

1. "Hashem is our King" this is the theme of all our Rosh Hashana prayers. We want the whole world to know that as well.

2. We as servants of Hashem must be humble towards G-d and people. (The shofar is bent to remind us to bend ourselves) All our requests are for gifts and donations, we have no Demands.

3. We aren't asking for a raise (last year's health happiness and more). We lost our lease and nothing can be taken for granted (Like someone coming in for a raise and the boss planned on firing him).

4. Not only are we asking for future success we appreciate everything we received last year (one can have that in mind at "Modim"). You can't ask for more without first saying thank you.

5. Strengthen your belief in the power of prayer, especially during these ten days. Respect prayer (no idle talk in Shul or talking during Hazara etc...). If you don't respect something it doesn't help you.

6. I view myself as part of Klal Yisrael (the Jewish people). We are one body. I realize I can't stand on my own merit. Become a person that the Jewish people need and that is a merit for a good judgment.

7. Prepare in your mind a New Year resolution (an area in religion that you will strengthen yourself in) so you are considered a penitent person. Preferably this should be taken on before the Musaf prayers.

8. All the requests that I have are so that I can use them to serve Hashem better (for G-ds sake). Charge it to the company account.

9. Think of all the success and tragedies that happened in the past year and realize that they were all decided last year on the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kipur. Rosh Hashana can be a day of turnaround (i.e. Iyov lost it all and Sarah and Hana were remembered for children).

10. Mixed emotions - Fear and Faith: In order to really count on Hashem and have Bitahon one must first realize the severity of the situation. I am in trouble (even though all seems well) because I am being judged on the upcoming year. Hashem is the only one to count on.

11. Be easy going in shul and at home - The way you act towards others and the way you judge others is the way Hashem acts towards you. Take advantage of opportunities to give in to the demands of others.

12. Rosh Hashana is the day that commemorates creation - Notice Hashem's "design and purpose" in all of creation (Rabbi Miller zt"l style).

13. Be on your best behavior on the holiday (Make believe the building inspector is on the building site, everything must be done according to the building code).

### FROM THE SABRA REPORT Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion about Israel

**The Sabra Report is a newsletter intended to stimulate conversation about Israel by recapping major events & providing historical context. Our conversation points are meant to encourage discussion amongst friends and family. Each week three topics for discussion are [presented]. To subscribe, please visit [sabrareport.com](http://sabrareport.com)**

### Shabbat soccer in Israel about to be ruled offside THE TIMES OF ISRAEL STAFF, SEPTEMBER 8TH 2015

Recap:

Soccer games in Israel's top leagues, as well as recreational and youth leagues, have been ruled illegal on Shabbat.

The Context:

- An Israeli Judge ruled that requiring players to play soccer on Shabbat violated Israel's Work and Rest Hours law.
- Only economy minister Aryeh Deri is capable of overriding the ruling though the move is highly unlikely since Deri is also the leader of Shas, an ultra-Orthodox political party.
- Club managers insisted that teams play on Shabbat but players, some religious and others not, refused, stating that playing on Shabbat infringed on family time.
- Museums, public swimming pools, restaurants and theaters open on Shabbat.
- UPDATE: Israeli soccer will go ahead as scheduled this weekend after the Israeli attorney general announced that he sees no reason to enforce a law that had been ignored for decades [9].

*Conversation Points:*

- *If the soccer ruling were upheld, would all other private and public services eventually be deemed illegal on Shabbat as well?*
- *What is the appropriate balance between religion and state?*

ED: Irving Safdieh asked us to mention the SabraReport and encourage subscribers. When considering this news item, it's interesting how we balance our opinions as American Jews who cherish separation of religion and state and appreciate how it has guaranteed and preserved our rights in this country, while as Observant Jews who support Israel, many of us would hope for a State where Shabbat is respected and upheld. I remember as a child passing Ocean Grove on Sunday and seeing the chain that restricted access for automobiles. In Ocean Grove, driving was forbidden on Sunday.

Perhaps when discussing with our children, we could imagine setting up a small private gated community made up of 100 observant families similar to our own family, where the community makes up the rules for what is permitted within the community. What would we restrict and what would we allow?

### **Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading Nitsavim- Teshuva and Benei Israel seals a covenant with Hashem**

- 1- Moshe gathers Benei Israel on the day of his death to enter a covenant with Hashem
- 2- The purpose of the covenant is so we should remain acting like Hashem's nation
- 3- A warning to stay away from avoda zara
- 4- A day will come when we do teshuva and Hashem will gather us and return us to Israel
- 5- Blessings that will come when we do teshuva and return to Hashem
- 6- Hashem reassures us that the Torah is not in the heavens or seas but rather is close and attainable for us to learn
- 7- Hashem again tells Benei Israel that if we follow the mitsvot we will have life and goodness and if we don't there will be death

### **What to think about when the shofar is blowing**

1. De'orayta Mistvah- I am fulfilling a mitsvat asseh from the torah of blowing the shofar
2. Thoughts of teshuba- The shofar is meant to awaken our sleeping hearts and arouse us to do teshuba. Thus it is proper to do "hirhoor teshuba" while hearing the shofar (i.e.; think about our sins and have remorse and a desire to fix them). Think Hashem help me to do teshuba. Feel bad about your sins. Think Hashem I want to come closer to you. Think about the things we were weak in (it is good to take a few minutes before Rosh Hashana to identify the items we were weak in and write them down).
3. Crowning the King- We are crowning the king. A shofar is blown when a king is crowned. Think about a coronation ceremony with everyone gathered to give the king honor. Think about the honor that is being given to our king right now with everyone in shul on the day of judgement singing praises of Hashem's name.
4. Matan Torah - Think about matan Torah. A shofar sound was heard during matan Torah.
5. Akedat Yitshak- The shofar reminds Hashem of the akedat Yitschak. After Hashem told Abraham that he need not sacrifice Yitschak, Abraham saw a ram nearby and sacrificed it to Hashem. And since a shofar comes from a ram's horn the blowing of the shofar reminds us of akedat yitshak and is meant to

arouse Hashem's mercy as a result of the great mitsvah of the akeda.

6. Crying- Shofar is a crying sound. I think this is symbolic of the remorse we are supposed to have over our sins.

Note: I heard that for the first 30 tekiot (the ones before the amida) one should focus his thoughts mainly on the fact that he is fulfilling a mitsvah de'orayta and not be distracted with the other kavanot.

### **EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN**

**"You are standing this day, all of you, before G-d" (Debarim 29:9)**

The Shabbat on which we read Parashat Nisabim is usually the last Shabbat of the year, and this perashah is read just before the Day of Judgment. The perashah begins by reminding us that in a few days we will all be standing before Hashem. All of us, no matter what stage of life we are in. All ages, no matter what your philosophy of life is. Every ethnic group. Any person who as of yet has not motivated himself should now awaken and return with repentance to Hashem. Teshubah is very powerful, and Hashem receives it with love and desire.

In the Sefer Mateh Ephraim, and quoted in the name of the Arizal, he says that it is customary to shed tears on Rosh Hashanah even if it falls on Shabbat. If a person doesn't cry on Rosh Hashanah, it's a sign that his soul is not good and perfect. This statement seems to be frightening. What can we do?

It is told that when the Kotel was captured during the Six Day War, there was a soldier who was brought up in an anti-religious kibbutz. At the moment when he and his comrades realized that they had captured the Kotel, they began to cry. They all started to cry, even the soldier from the kibbutz. When he was asked why he was crying, because after all, according to his opinion there was no importance to this holy place, he answered, "I am crying because I am not crying!"

Maybe this thought can help us cry this Rosh Hashanah.

May Hashem place into the hearts of all His people, love of Hashem, to prompt us to observe His will as if it is our own. May we merit a good writing for a year of light, hap[pines], and a year of redemption. May Hashem accept the shofar blowing and prayers of the entire nation, and may we witness the revelation of Hashem's Glory on this earth, Amen. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**When we think of teshubah, repentance, we usually think of sins that we did or misvot that we neglected. Indeed that is the basic level of**

**repentance, to wipe out all sins from our records. However, there is another concept that we should focus on, especially during these days.**

There was a great Rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, known as the Netziv, who once invited his family and friends to a festive meal. He explained that he had just finished composing a very complex book, and that called for a celebration. He then told his family that when he was a young boy he was a playful child, not interested in studying. One day, he heard his father tell his mother, "Maybe our little son would be more successful as a tradesman rather than a scholar." The young boy burst into his parents' room and cried out, "Give me one more chance and I'll apply myself to my studies," and the rest was history. The Rabbi then concluded by saying, "Imagine if I had become a tailor, a pious Jew who learns every day for a while, and after 120 years went to the Heavenly court. I would think that my judgment would be based on what I did as a tailor, but the Heavenly court would show me this book that I have just finished, and would ask me, 'Where is this work that you could have done?' That is why I am celebrating today - because I will be able to say that I did what was my potential."

We see from here that it's not enough to just consider what we do or don't do. We should ask ourselves, "Are we living up to our potential?" We have so much talent and capabilities. We have to exert ourselves a little more in the service of Hashem. In these days of teshubah let us re-examine our lives, our accomplishments and our goals, and let us see where we can make a difference. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR Exposure to Wrongful Behavior- Its More Dangerous Than You Think**

In Parashat Nisavim we read Moshe's final exhortation to Beneh Yisrael before his death. In this address to the people, Moshe expresses his concern that some members of the nation may resort to idolatrous worship, and he warns them of the catastrophic consequences of this sin of idolatry.

The question immediately arises as to why such a warning was necessary. The Sages refer to the generation of the wilderness, the generation which was led by Moshe Rabbenu, as "Dor De'a" – the "Generation of Knowledge." This generation was the wisest and most knowledgeable generation since the beginning of time. They grew up eating the Manna, the bread sent down each morning from the heavens. They ate at God's table, so-to-speak, each and every day. They were surrounded by the miraculous clouds of glory; they entire existence was supernatural.

What's more, they spent the entire day learning Torah from Moshe Rabbenu. These people were far removed from the vanities of the world. After all, what vanities were accessible to them in the barren, desolate wilderness? They lived an entirely spiritual existence, with God's presence palpably in their midst, drawing wisdom directly from Moshe Rabbenu, the greatest of all prophets.

And yet, just before his death, Moshe warned them...not to worship idols!

Imagine a Rabbi who is invited to speak to the fifty leading Torah sages in the world. They are all assembled in a room, and this Rabbi is asked to speak. He gets up and declares, "My dear colleagues, I want to urge all of you not to worship Buddha!"

During generation of the wilderness, most of Beneh Yisrael were on or near the level of prophets. They were greater than today's leading Sadikim. Why was Moshe concerned that they would worship idols?

The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Nachmanides, Spain, 13th century), in his commentary to this Parasha, explains that Beneh Yisrael were at risk because they were exposed to idolatry. As Moshe Rabbenu says to the people in introducing his warning, "For you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we journeyed among the gentiles whom you passed through, and you saw their despicable and repugnant things, the wood, stone, silver and gold that is with them..." (29:15-16). During their stay in Egypt, and then during their sojourn in the wilderness which brought them near foreign nations, Beneh Yisrael saw idolatry. They were exposed to it. And exposure to sin is dangerous, far more dangerous than we tend to think. Once we see it, even if it initially seems "despicable and repugnant," as Moshe described, we become desensitized, and we may eventually adopt an accepting attitude toward it.

The Torah in the Book of Bereshit (26:35) tells us of Esav's marriage to idolatrous women, and the anguish this caused his parents, Yishak and Ribka. Some commentators noted that it appears from the Torah's formulation that Esav's marriage caused more grief to Yishak than to Ribka. Ribka had grown up in the home of idolaters, and was therefore accustomed to it, to one extent or another. This exposure to pagan worship as a child made her less sensitive to it, and thus she did not react to her son's marriage with the same revulsion as Yishak did.

Esav got married at the age of forty – over half a century after Ribka left her family and married

Yishak. And yet, her exposure to idolatry as a young child still had an impact. Even after many decades of living together with the Sadik, Yishak, the effects of her childhood influences were not completely abolished.

As great as Beneh Yisrael were at the time of Moshe's death, he still had reason to fear. They had seen idol worship with their own eyes, and this could very easily lead them to accept it and, ultimately, embrace a pagan lifestyle.

Moshe's warning to Beneh Yisrael is thus a stern warning to us about the pernicious effects of exposure to sinful behavior. Many people take a cavalier attitude to the inappropriate material seen on television, assuming, wrongly, that it's just entertainment and will not affect them or their children. Nothing can be further from the truth. Seeing sinful behavior – as is prominently broadcast on the television, internet and other media – can have a disastrous effect upon a person, particularly on children, but even on adults. What we see has an impact, desensitizing us and gradually altering our values and sense of right and wrong.

In particular, I find it baffling that parents give their children computers with internet access in their rooms. What are the parents thinking? It is no secret that the internet contains vast amounts of repulsive material. Do these parents not care what their children are exposed to? How could they be oblivious to the dangers lurking on the internet?

Obviously, we cannot live in a hermetically sealed bubble. We need to be aware of what's going on around us in the world, and we should be knowledgeable of the news. But we must use discretion in determining what we allow ourselves and our children to be exposed to. And, we must ensure to place ourselves under positive influences, joining Torah classes and groups that perform Mivnot, so that these influences will neutralize the negative influences that are so pervasive. This will ensure that we and our children will grow and develop spiritually in spite of the sinful influences that abound, and succeed in our efforts to draw ever closer to our Father in heaven.

### **Rabbi Wein SELICHOT**

The custom of reciting special penitential prayers before Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is an ancient one. It certainly dates back to the time of the Geonim in Babylonia, if not even earlier. The custom of the Sefaradim is to recite these prayers beginning with

the entire month of Elul until Yom Kippur. The custom of the Ashkenazim is to begin the recitation of these prayers the week before Rosh Hashana and to continue their recitation also until Yom Kippur.

These prayers have been layered over centuries though the format that is currently used in most synagogues has been pretty much established since the seventeenth century. Tens of scholars and poets have contributed to composing the liturgy of these prayers, within which much of the history of the Jewish people and their exile has been recorded.

Since the prayers are almost all written in a poetic form, their vocabulary and structural format is often times difficult for the average Jew to fathom and appreciate. Nevertheless, these prayers have become hallowed in Jewish tradition and have stood the test of time in a tireless and amazing fashion.

The choice of which prayers were to be recited was really a democratic one – with the people reciting the prayers themselves choosing which prayers to recite – and a practical one dictated by the printers who produced these special prayer books. The printers were interested in space on the page and as a result some of the greatest and most poignant prayers were never included in the printed version. Some were too long or too short or too unwieldy to fit neatly fit onto the printed page.

Jewish tradition treated this anomaly – the luck of the draw, so to speak – as being heavenly inspired and not just random human choice. Because of this belief in a supernatural hand guiding the ritual of selichot, this prayer service has remained static for most of the last five centuries.

The rebirth of the Jewish people in the State of Israel over the past decades has forced us to take a new look at the format and contents of these penitential prayers. There has been much experimentation regarding the traditional service here in Israel. There are those who feel that our return to national sovereignty in our ancient homeland dictates a new look at the words that we recite. We have seen that in the kinnot recited on Tisha B'Av, new prayers have been inserted to commemorate the tragedy and disaster of the Holocaust of World War II.

There also exists an entire special prayer service to mark Israel Independence Day and also Yom Yerushalayim. Even though these additions to our established prayer services are not yet fully adopted by all sections of the Jewish world, it is fair to say that they have secured some sort of place of permanence within religious Jewry. However, there certainly is a

built-in resistance to any sort of change, be it addition or subtraction, in the established format and ritual of our time honored services.

A new format for the selichot services has recently been published and here in Israel. It is entitled Selicht Eretz Yisrael. It was edited and revised by a number of scholarly rabbis of the national religious Zionist movement. It uses modern Hebrew and has eliminated much of the prose and style of the prayers of old. It has considerably shortened the surface itself and contains new prayers, composed to be more relevant and understandable in current Israeli society.

After perusing this work, I decided for myself to stick with the old format and its contents. Of course I realize that this is partially a generational thing and that people of my hoary age are very reluctant to accept change to long-held and time-honored traditions, rituals and habits. Yet, I must say that the new version is an almost heartless work. There is very little emotion in modern Israeli Hebrew as it is spoken and written. And it certainly lacks the overlay of tradition and the innate feeling that one has knowing that one is praying not only to the God of one's fathers but using the same words that his father and grandfather did in faraway places and under different circumstances.

To me the old selichot, archaic and obtuse as they may be are the proper introduction to the days of judgment and mercy that are upon us. The new version will undoubtedly gain in popularity amongst certain sections and perhaps later generations of Israeli society. But it does not yet speak to me or for me.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Why Judaism?**

This week's parsha raises a question that goes to the heart of Judaism, but which was not asked for many centuries until raised by a great Spanish scholar of the fifteenth century, Rabbi Isaac Arama. Moses is almost at the end of his life. The people are about to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land. Moses knows he must do one thing more before he dies. He must renew the covenant between the people and God.

Their parents had entered into that commitment almost forty years before when they stood at Mount Sinai and said, "We will do and obey all that God has declared" (Ex. 24:7). But now Moses has to ensure that the next generation and all future generations will be bound by it. He wanted no-one to be able to say, "God made a covenant with my ancestors but not with me. I did not give my consent. I was not there. I

am not bound." That is why Moses says:

It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with whoever is not here with us today. (Deut. 29:13-14)

"Whoever is not here" cannot mean Israelites alive at the time who were somewhere else. The entire nation was present at the assembly. It means "generations not yet born." That is why the Talmud says: we are all *mushba ve-omed me-har Sinai*, "foresworn from Sinai."<sup>[1]</sup>

Hence one of the most fundamental facts about Judaism: converts excepted, we do not choose to be Jews. We are born as Jews. We become legal adults, subject to the commands, at age twelve for girls, thirteen for boys. But we are part of the covenant from birth. A *bat* or *bar mitzvah* is not a "confirmation." It involves no voluntary acceptance of Jewish identity. That choice took place more than three thousand years ago when Moses said "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with ... whoever is not here with us today," meaning all future generations.

But how can this be so? There is no obligation without consent. How can we be subject to a commitment on the basis of a decision taken long ago by our distant ancestors? To be sure, in Jewish law you can confer a benefit on someone else without their consent. But though it is surely a benefit to be a Jew, it is also in some sense a liability, a restriction on our range of legitimate choices. Why then are we bound now by what the Israelites said then?

Jewishly, this is the ultimate question. How can religious identity be passed on from parent to child? If identity were merely ethnic, we could understand it. We inherit many things from our parents – most obviously our genes. But being Jewish is not a genetic condition. It is a set of religious obligations. The sages gave an answer in the form of a tradition about today's parsha. They said that the souls of all future generations were present at Sinai. As souls, they freely gave their consent, generations before they were born.<sup>[2]</sup> However, Arama argues that this cannot answer our question, since God's covenant is not with souls only, but also with embodied human beings. We are physical beings with physical desires. We can understand that the soul would agree to the covenant. What does the soul desire if not closeness to God?<sup>[3]</sup>

But the assent that counts is that of living, breathing

human beings with bodies, and we cannot assume that they would agree to the Torah with its many restrictions on eating, drinking, sexual relations and the rest. Not until we are born, and are old enough to understand what is being asked of us can we give our consent in a way that binds us. Therefore the fact that the unborn generations were present at Moses covenant ceremony does not give us the answer we need.

In essence, Arama was asking: why be Jewish? What is fascinating is that he was the first to ask this question since the age of the Talmud. Why was it not asked before? Why was it first asked in fifteenth century Spain? For many centuries the question, "Why be Jewish?" did not arise. The answer was self-evident. I am Jewish because that is what my parents were and theirs before them, back to the dawn of Jewish time. Existential questions arise only when we feel there is a choice. For much of history, Jewish identity was not a choice. It was a fact of birth, a fate, a destiny. It was not something you chose, any more than you choose to be born.

In fifteenth century Spain, Jews were faced with a choice. Spanish Jewry experienced its Kristallnacht in 1391, and from then on until the expulsion in 1492, Jews found themselves excluded from more and more areas of public life. There were immense pressures on them to convert, and some did so. Of these, some maintained their Jewish identity in secret, but others did not. For the first time in many centuries, staying Jewish came to be seen not just as a fate but as a choice. That is why Arama raised the question that had been unasked for so long. It is also why, in an age in which everything significant seems open to choice, it is being asked again in our time.

Arama gave one answer. I gave my own in my book *A Letter in the Scroll*.<sup>[4]</sup> But I also believe a large part of the answer lies in what Moses himself said at the end of his address: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your children may live" (Deut. 30:19). Choose life. No religion, no civilization, has insisted so strenuously and consistently that we can choose. We have it in us, says Maimonides, to be as righteous as Moses or as evil as Jeroboam.<sup>[5]</sup> We can be great. We can be small. We can choose.

The ancients with their belief in fate, fortune, moira, ananke, the influence of the stars or the arbitrariness of nature, did not fully believe in human freedom. For them true freedom meant, if you were religious, accepting fate, or if you were philosophical, the consciousness of necessity. Nor do most scientific

atheists believe in it today. We are determined, they say, by our genes. Our fate is scripted in our DNA. Choice is an illusion of the conscious mind. It is the fiction we tell ourselves.

Judaism says No. Choice is like a muscle: use it or lose it. Jewish law is an ongoing training regime in willpower. Can you eat this and not that? Can you exercise spiritually three times a day? Can you rest one day in seven? Can you defer the gratification of instinct – what Freud took to be the mark of civilization? Can you practise self-control – according to the "marshmallow test", the surest sign of future success in life?<sup>[6]</sup> To be a Jew means not going with the flow, not doing what others do just because they are doing it. It gives us 613 exercises in the power of will to shape our choices. That is how we, with God, become co-authors of our lives. "We have to be free", said Isaac Bashevis Singer, "we have no choice!"

Choose life. In many other faiths, life down here on earth with its loves, losses, triumphs and defeats, is not the highest value. Heaven is to be found in life after death, or the soul in unbroken communion with God, or in acceptance of the world-that-is. Life is eternity, life is serenity, life is free of pain. But that, for Judaism, is not quite life. It may be noble, spiritual, sublime, but it is not life in all its passion, responsibility and risk.

Judaism teaches us how to find God down here on earth not up there in heaven. It means engaging with life, not taking refuge from it. It seeks, not so much happiness as joy: the joy of being with others and together with them making a blessing over life. It means taking the risk of love, commitment, loyalty. It means living for something larger than the pursuit of pleasure or success. It means daring greatly.

It does not deny pleasure. Judaism is not ascetic. It does not worship pleasure. Judaism is not hedonist. Instead it sanctifies pleasure. It brings the Divine presence into the most physical acts: eating, drinking, intimacy. We find God not just in the synagogue but in the home, the house of study and acts of kindness, in community, hospitality and wherever we mend some of the fractures of our human world.

No religion has ever held the human person in higher regard. We are not tainted by original sin. We are not a mere bundle of selfish genes. We are not an inconsequential life form lost in the vastness of the universe. We are the being on whom God has set his image and likeness. We are the people God has chosen to be his partners in the work of creation. We are the nation God married at Sinai with the Torah as our marriage contract. We are the people God called

on to be his witnesses. We are the ambassadors of heaven in the country called earth.

We are not better, or worse, than others. We are simply different, because God values difference whereas for most of the time, human beings have sought to eliminate difference by imposing one faith, one regime or one empire on all humanity. Ours is one of the few faiths to hold that the righteous of all nations have a share in heaven because of what they do on earth.

Choose life. Nothing sounds easier yet nothing has proved more difficult over time. Instead, people choose substitutes for life. They pursue wealth, possessions, status, power, fame, and to these gods they make the supreme sacrifice, realising too late that true wealth is not what you own but what you are thankful for, that the highest status is not to care about status, and that influence is more powerful than power.

That is why, though few faiths are more demanding, most Jews at most times have stayed faithful to Judaism, living Jewish lives, building Jewish homes and continuing the Jewish story. That is why, with a faith as unshakeable as it has proved true, Moses was convinced that "Not with you alone do I make this covenant and this oath ... but also with those who are not with us today." His gift to us is that through worshipping something so much greater than ourselves we become so much greater than we would otherwise have been.

Why Judaism? Because there is no more challenging way of choosing life.

[1] Yoma 73b, Nedarim 8a.

[2] Shavuot 39a.

[3] Isaac Arama, Akedat Yitzhak, Deuteronomy, Nitzavim.

[4] Published in Britain as Radical then, Radical now.

[5] Hilkhot Teshuvah 5:2.

[6] Walter Mischel, The Marshmallow Test, Bantam Press, 2014.

## AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

### Preparing For Yom Hadeen/Rosh Hashana

The main Avoda of the Judgement Day is focusing on "Hashem Melech", The King. That Hashem created the universe & He runs it all. He is the only one that has any power & only He can do anything for us.

EMUNAH is what we are working on gaining clarity for Rosh Hashana.

Rambam: "I am Hashem your G-d"(10 Commandments), this is the Mitzvah to gain Awareness & Belief in Hashem.

This is most fundamental & supersedes even admitting our sins (which we don't do today) in front of the Heavenly court.

The great Purpose in life, to constantly improve, is something that Hashem is urging us and weighing.

"Hashem imparts wisdom to the wise person" (not the jester) because He sees that this wise person will make the best use of this gift. So, we want to put ourselves in this position for the Great Day of Judgment, Yom Hadeen.

"Asher Bara Elokim Laasot", "...That Hashem created to do". The words 'to do' seem superfluous since it was already stated that "Hashem rested from all of the work that He did". R' Miller explains that the words "to do" come to teach us the great purpose of life, to be a doer, to make something out of ourselves through constant improvement.

Hashem, our Father, Avinu Malkenu, is waiting on Rosh Hashana to hear our commitment to improve. We can say, "Hashem, we are going to utilize the coming year to love & fear Hashem.

To do everything to serve Hashem. I am going to make something out of myself".

When Hashem hears our commitment for the New Year, He says: "My child, I see that you are committing to improvement, I commit to giving you another year of life and blessing". "Hashem imparts wisdom to the wise".

Step 1 to Teshuvah: Realizing how much Hashem has done for you.

Step 2: Thanking Him