

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

ROSH HASHANA/ HAAZINU

Haftarah: Hoshea 14:2-10, Yoel 2:11-27, Micah 7:18-20

SEPTEMBER 21- 23, 2017 1- 3 TISHREI

DEDICATION: Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor,
 Artistic Frame at 4:00PM – 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

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 out 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 candles 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

A few years ago, I was honored to spend Shabbat with former Brigadier General Rabbi Avichai Rontzki, the former Chief Military Rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces. He is also the rosh yeshiva of the Hesder Yeshiva in Itamar and a founder of that city in the Shomron. Rabbi Rontzki also wrote the highly acclaimed four volume army halachic guide Hitzim K'yad Gibor. As we spoke privately afterwards, we discussed politics and the press and his recent but unwanted publicity. More important though, the rabbi is a brilliant scholar and we discussed a message for Rosh Hashanah which probably applies to almost all of us.

The rabbi grew up in a secular family and found himself in 1973 as a commander in the army. We must remember that only six years earlier Israel had delivered a stunning blow to its Arab neighbors defeating them miraculously in the Six-Day War. The relationship between Israeli and Arab had changed forever. Even more so the image of the Jew had been transformed in the eyes of the world. The Israeli army's crushing victory had altered the image of a Jewish victim into a Jewish warrior.

The Israelis believed that they would find themselves at peace with their Arab neighbors for at least a generation or more. They supposed that they would not be bothered for 20 to 30 years after the Arab world saw the strength of their military. Yet at the same time only two weeks before Yom Kippur of that year the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir met with King Hussein of Jordan. The King informed the prime minister that the Arabs were preparing for war. And this was not the only sign. From the end of 1972, Egypt began a concentrated effort to build up its forces, receiving MiG-21 jet fighters, SA-2, SA-3, SA-6 and SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles, T-55 and T-62 tanks, RPG-7 anti-tank weapons, and the AT-3 Sagger anti-tank guided missile from the Soviet Union and

improving its military tactics, based on Soviet battlefield doctrines. What was happening seemed obvious.

And then, only three days before Yom Kippur, 600 family members of Russian diplomats were suddenly evacuated from Syria and Egypt. The Israelis certainly took note of this, but wrote it off as a mass vacation. Why? Human nature often allows internalized preconceptions to mask the stark face of reality. In the minds of Israeli leaders, there was no way the enemy would attack so even when the evidence pointed in the opposite direction, the facts simply couldn't be true. But unfortunately a few days later, on the Holiest day of the year, we found out that it was true and so many lost their lives, possibly needlessly. The Egyptians and Syrians both initially made threatening gains into Israeli-held territory. Then somewhat miraculously, the tide was turned. It was through this that the rabbi and his wife Ronit who he had met in his unit set together on the path to be chozer beTeshuba – to return religiously. The Rabbi went on to study at Machon Meir and Mercaz HaRav.

The rabbi went on and explained this fault of being blinded to the truth raises its ugly head time and time again. The brigadier general suggested that it was obvious to everyone (this was in 2014) that Hamas was building tunnels in Gaza. Weren't the dangers that the tunnels presented obvious? Yet the obvious was ignored.

As we approach Rosh Hashana and we are supposed to do an introspective search into ourselves, examining our faults and where we stand, it is prudent to be reminded of this error that so many of us succumb to. We let our own preconceptions stand in the way of truth.

Someone did a survey of subway riders. The question posed to them was as follows: "What percentage of people riding the subway would return a found wallet with cash to its rightful owner?" Most answered that it would be less than one in four who would return the wallet. When the same people were asked, "And if you found the wallet, what would you do?" Ninety percent declared they would return the wallet. Ninety percent were pretty sure that they were better than most everyone else.

This is the tool of the evil inclination. It whispers into our ear. "You are one of the good ones. You don't need to change. You don't need to fix anything. Let them start to become like you before you need to worry."

Rabbi Abittan would often state that the one thing which blinds us more than anything else is pride. Imagine the pompous man declaring, "I know what I know, don't bother me with facts". The rabbi once mentioned that the numerical value of honor in Hebrew – kavod – is 32. Coincidentally this is the same numerical value as the word – lev – or heart. And is the heart not the source of pride?

On Rosh Hashana, we hope to blow the shofar and have the sounds of the shofar enter into our hearts. We call the sounds a wake up call. The goal is to release each of us from our world of illusions. The goal is to wake us up from our preconceived notions. The goal is to get us to open our eyes and see the truth. The Shofar enters the heart and it breaks the 32, the 32 which is Kavod. Once we let go of our pride and once we stop holding so tightly on to our honor we remove the mask. That mask not only hides who we are. That mask prevents us from seeing.

This Rosh hashana when we hear the sound of the Shofar, may it penetrate into our hearts. May the sound help us to remove the layers. May the sounds break away the masks and allow us to see and know our true selves. Because before I can change and become someone new, I need to see who I am now. Before I can change, I need to realize what needs to be changed.

Looking forward to a new year and a new and improved me. Come join me on the journey.

Tizkeh VeTichyeh
David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Ha'azinu - The prophetic song of Ha'azinu
1- Moshe begins the song of Ha'azinu calling the heavens and earth as witnesses that Benei Israel is being warned with this song of what will happen if they sin.
2- Remember the events of the past (how Hashem punished the bad, and how Hashem took care of us)
3- Hashem will give us goodness and we will come to rebel against Hashem
4- Hashem will punish us
5- Hashem will punish us but at the end he will have mercy
6- And Hashem will punish the goyim that attacked us
7- Moshe concludes the song of Ha'azinua and tells it to Benei Israel. Hashem tells Moshe to go up to Har Nebo to see the land of Israel and that he will die on this mountain.

Some thoughts for a more meaningful Rosh Hashana

Mikveh

We have a minhag to go to the mikveh before Rosh Ha'shana in order to cleanse ourselves and accept upon ourselves the kedoosha this awesome day of Rosh Hashana. Ben Ish Hai in Parashat Netzavim brings down the kavanot we should have when dipping.

Dip # 1 - Tahara – Purity

Dip # 2 - Rectify Anger

Dip # 3 - To Sweeten the Judgment

Dip # 4 - To Remove the Weekday Garb & To End Last Year and its Curses

Dip # 5 - To Accept the Holiness of Rosh Hashana & To Begin the New Year and its Blessing

**Thanks to Saul Kassin who sent these kavanot around

Dinner

At dinner we eat things as a segula for a good year. And by some of the items we eat we say it is so that we can defeat or remove our enemies. It is helpful to have in mind when saying this that our main enemy is the yetser hara. And thus we can have kavana in asking Hashem to make it easier for us to defeat the yetser hara and that we should desire more to do Hashem's will. We can have kavana that Hashem should make it easier for us this year to want to learn Torah and do mitsvot.

After Dinner

Some siddurim (like the Orot siddur) have the mishnayot of Rosh Hashana in them. Many people try and read/learn these mishnayot on Rosh Hashana. It is a nice idea to read these mishnayot after dinner. This will assure that our night has some Torah learning it.

Walking to Shul

When walking to shul in the morning a nice idea is to think about all the things we are thankful for. Talk to Hashem (out loud). Say thank you Hashem for giving me parents. Thank you Hashem for giving me a wife. Thank you for my children. Thank you that they are healthy and happy and getting along with their friends and learning well in school. Thank you for giving me a year of life and a year of health... and we can think of this again in the tefila of nishmat. This will lay the foundation of hakarat hatov. This will give us a feeling of "katonti mikol ha'hasadim" as we say in the selichot, that we are humbled by all Hashem has done for us. And thus when we come before Hashem we come as a person who has no demands. Everything we get and ask for is the hesed of

Hashem who is giving us more than we rightfully deserve. Let us think about all Hashem has done for us this year!

Shachrit

Nishmat - As we are approaching nishmat it is helpful to stop for 30 seconds and think of all the things Hashem has blessed us with. If we have even one of the following items (the ability to see, the ability to hear, the ability to talk, the ability to walk, the ability to think and learn) we are very fortunate. All the more so if we have all these things! If Hashem blessed us with a spouse, if Hashem blessed us with a child, if Hashem blessed us with multiple children, if Hashem gave us a place to live... We are very fortunate! For any of these items alone we cannot begin to thank Hashem adequately. And this is the theme of nishmat. That we all are forever indebted to Hashem and cannot even begin to thank Hashem enough. If we can invoke that feeling hopefully this will make our tefila of nishmat more powerful. Further, our requests later in the tefila can have more impact and effectiveness if they are built on a foundation of hakarat ha'tov. This is similar to a parent who wants to give a child but when the child doesn't appreciate what he has and only asks for more the parent holds back so the child will realize all he is getting and taking for granted.

Amida - Melech Hakadosh- We are asking that everyone should realize Hashem is the King. Let us try and imagine what that would be like.

Amida- Ata Bachartanu- Hashem chose us as his nation. He gave us the Torah and he gave us the mitsvot. Think about what this means. Without the Torah there would be no Shabbat. No mitsvot to guide our lives. No community. No emphasis on family. Without Torah where would we be? What would our lives be like? Take a minute to think about this and it will help us to feel grateful while saying these words.

Modim- Same kavana as nishmat. One can stop for 30 seconds before beginning modim and think of 3 or 4 things he is grateful for.

Bidding

On Rosh Hashana we work so hard to get in the right zone for tefila. It is important to take notice that the more we look up out of our siddur and look around the room taking notice of the things going on around us the more this takes us out of that zone we are working so hard to get in to. This also applies very much with the bidding. If one is going to buy an aliyah that is great but if not let us not be distracted with who is bidding for which aliyah and how much he is

paying. This is valuable time that can be spent saying tehillim or reading through the upcoming Musaf amida in English to better understand what we will be saying.

Taking out the Torah

The aron is open. This is a precious time. It is an eht rason (a time of mercy). Let us not waste it schmoozing with the person next to us. When taking out the Torah we say the words "le'olam Hashem debarecha nisav bashamayim" twelve times. Literally it means "forever Hashem's word is established in shamayim". What does this mean? What should we be thinking when we say this? I heard from Rabbi David Sutton two kavanot we can have when saying this pasook. One that Hashem's evil decree should stay up in shamayim and not be carried out here in this world. The second is that Hashem's word, the words that created the world, nisav bashamayim, is still established in shamayim and is fueling the existence of the world to this day. We are acknowledging that without Hashem actively making everything in the world happen the world would cease to exist. To help us better understand this concept we can think of a moonwalk. Without the air being pumped into the moonwalk every second the moonwalk would collapse. Everything exists and is happening because Hashem is making it happen. These words are a statement of emunah!

Shofar

Let us have kavana that we are fulfilling a mitzvah from the Torah. It is also proper for one to think thoughts of teshuba while the shofar is blowing. The shofar is supposed to instill fear in us and awaken us to do teshuba.

Musaf – Making a kabala

Making a kabala. I heard from Rabbi David Sutton quoting the Pele Yoetz that one should try and take something on before Musaf of the Rosh Hashana tefila. The idea is that by taking on something new, even something small, we are looked at as a baal teshuva (someone who is working on getting closer to Hashem). So to be counted among the "baaley teshuva" one should try and take something on before Musaf.

Musaf – The amida

The musaf amida is very different than any other amida we pray during the year. It has a unique structure with 3 middle berachot (malchiyot, zichronot, and shofarot). Each of these berachot contain 10 pesookim related to theme of the beracha (i.e., 10 pesookim with the word melech). We blow the shofar at the end of each of these berachot. It is a

powerful amida. If possible one should try and look through the amida in advance to get familiar with what is being said.

After shul

All day long when we have a free minute thank Hashem. Thank him for the things he gave us. List them. Keep saying thank you. A parent wants to give his child more when he sees how happy it makes him and how grateful it makes him. And the opposite is also true. When a child doesn't say thank you for what you gave him and only asks for more it makes a parent not want to give. Let us be that child that Hashem wants to give to.

Also the idea of the day is that Hashem is the king. So maybe it is appropriate to pray during the day that everyone realize Hashem's greatness. Pray for ourselves and for the people around us that we should realize Hashem is the king. That we should all desire to serve him. That we should see with clarity his hand in our lives and that he is running the show. Let us pray that Hashem show himself in the world and everyone should know his is the king!

Some people have a custom to read the tehillim twice on Rosh Hashana. There are 150 psalms in each cycle making 300 psalms if you read it twice. 300 is gematria kaper (i.e. kapara). This is a nice custom too because we could be judged at any moment on Rosh Hashana and so it would be a shame if while we were being judged they were looking down from shamayim and instead of looking nervous over what our judgment will be we were sitting around wasting time with little concern of what the fate of our judgment will be. Hopefully Hashem will judge us while we are praying feverishly but if not at least while we are saying tehillim or doing a mitvah.

Lunch

Let us have extra kavana in our berachot. Let us be extra careful not to speak lashon hara on the table. How can we expect our mouths to have power in tefila if we use them against Hashem to speak lashon hara about his children? Also, the Ben Ish Chai writes that one should be extra careful not to get angry on Rosh Hashana.

Tashlich

Tashlich is composed of 3 parts. The first part is zohar. The 2nd is the miy kel kamocho. This is a pasook that mentions Hashem's mercy and that corresponds to the 13 midot of Kel rachum.... This pasook contains the line "ve'tashlich be'msoolot yam kol hatotam" which is where we get the name tashlich. And the last part is a beautiful prayer from

the Chida. It is a nice idea to take time to read this part in English (if you don't understand the Hebrew). It is really a special tefilah and we can learn from here a lot of foundations of what things we should be asking Hashem for when we pray to him.

During the day

Try and have fear of Hashem all day and to be cognizant throughout the day that we are being judged. Let us try not to have any light headedness. Think about remorse. Think that all the tragic things that happened this year, all the people that died, all the people that suffered, all the people that got cancer, all the people that struggled in business this year, it was decreed last year on Rosh Hashana! How could this thought not instill fear in a person! (Note, we should be scared, but then we should feel confident that Hashem will judge us favorably since he is merciful and he is our father).

We are asking Hashem to reveal himself. This is the main focus and request of the day. With this will come all the things we desire. If our father is the king and in power so we, his children, will have the things we need.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"Return, Yisrael, to Hashem, your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity." (Hoshea 14:2), Haftarah of Ha'azinu)

If a convicted person says that he will carry his trial as far as the king's own throne chamber, it means that he has no chance of acquittal in the lower courts. Since he is really guilty according to the law of the land, his only hope lies in the slim chance of obtaining a hearing from the king himself, who has the exclusive right to pardon even those whose guilt has been established beyond a reasonable doubt.

This, explains Rav Yaakov Kranz zt"l (quoted by R' Dovid Hoffman), is what Hoshea Hanabi is telling us here. "Return, Israel, unto Hashem, your G-d" – you must attempt to come only to Hashem with your repentance, for He alone has the power to accept your teshubah and forgive you. "For you have stumbled in your iniquity" – because your sins were too great for you to be worthy of acquittal in the earthly courts; only Hashem, in His infinite mercy can forgive your sins now. Even though they are so numerous ad grave, He will forgive you as long as you make the effort and approach Him. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"Hashem created you forgetful and you forgot your Creator." (Debarim 32:18)

There was once a person who owed many people money, and every time they asked him for it he would get under tremendous pressure and have no way to respond. One day, his friend saw his suffering and suggested to him that any time a creditor asked him for money he should act crazy as if he cracked from the pressure of his financial burden. This way, they would eventually leave him alone. Sure enough, every time one of his creditors approached him for money he would talk about the weather, the stock market, etc., and carry on as if he'd snapped. In no time, the word was out that he had lost his mind because of his financial burden and people start leaving him alone. One day, the original friend who gave him this idea approached him and told him that the loan that he had given him was due. This so called crazy fellow began to carry on like he did for his other creditors. His friend then replied, "I gave you the idea to do this and you're trying to pull it off on me?"

Hashem created a human being with the ability to forget his problems and worries. Without this, a person would be overcome with all of the burdens life has to offer. If a person forgets Hashem or his obligation to keep the Torah and misvot, he is acting like the fellow in the story, since he is using the very gift that Hashem gave him for his benefit against his Benefactor. Let's not forget this lesson. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Teshuba: A Revolutionary Idea Rabbi Meyer Laniado

The Jewish people brought a revolutionary idea into the world: the idea that we can choose our own path, choose between good and bad. In Greek and Roman mythology there is fate and destiny decided by the gods. Therefore one cannot choose or change. One's life has already been predestined by the 'three goddesses[1].'

Since we have free choice, we are responsible for our actions[2]. We cannot blame the 'gods' as would a pagan, or one's surroundings and upbringings, as does Western Society. We can only be honest with ourselves and God and admit. Only then can we be successful, as we say, mekhase phesahav lo yaslah, one who hides his misdeeds will not have success-but-umode veozeb, yeruham, one who admits and stops, will be treated with mercy, and therefore will be successful. The transgression of Adam, the first human, was intensified because he shifted responsibility for his actions.

Adam, the first human, instead of taking responsibility when he heard God's voice in the garden, decided to hide. God gave Adam a second chance, calling out to

Adam asking, "Where are you?" God knew where Adam was; the question served to prompt Adam to recognize and take responsibility for his sin. How did Adam respond? Did he take responsibility? No, he said: "I saw that I was naked, so I hid." He created an excuse, and God brought him to account when He said: "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree I told you not to eat from?" That was Adam's third chance as God asked it in a question, allowing Adam to take responsibility. Rather than taking these opportunities to confess his sin, he deflected responsibility, blaming his wife. This refusal to be accountable denied him the opportunity to do Teshuba, and thereby he was punished for his actions.

God was willing to forgive Adam, giving him three opportunities, only requiring him to admit to his wrongdoing. He should have prayed for forgiveness, or at least for a commutation of judgment. No one forced him to sin. He had knowledge of what was good and what was not. He had the ability to choose as God said: "Behold, the man [Adam] is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." If he did not have the choice, God would not have said 'lest'; the choice was his.

God is calling out to us now, asking us where we are. He is omniscient; He knows exactly where we are and what we have done, both our deeds and misdeeds, as we read in perashat Nissabim and say in our tefilla, veHanistarot ladonai eloheinu, the hidden things are in the realm of God[3].

God sees what is in our hearts and minds, He inspects our thoughts[4]. Therefore, we can only be honest before Him. Do not be afraid, our God is abrahamim, a merciful father, and we are His children. Like a father has patience for his son to make the right decisions, God is erekh apayim, patient, slow to anger, allowing us to rectify our actions.

God wants us to return [shub like teshuba] to the proper path. He wants us to make the right choices. He wants us to realize on our own that we need to change. If we do, then God will say: "I wipe away your sins like a cloud, your transgressions like mist-come back to Me, for I will redeem you[5]." For God's forgiveness, we first need to recognize and admit where we misstepped. Then, and only then, can we stand before our king, king of all kings, the supreme judge in judgment, present our case and plan to change the course of our lives through teshuba.

[1] Greek mythology

[2] Debarim 11:26, Debarim 30:15-19, Hilkhot Teshuba 5

[3] Debarim 29:28

[4] Yirmiyahu also made this point when he said that God judges righteously and investigates the kidneys [emotions] and the heart [mind], bohen kelayot valeb (11:20).

[5] Yeshayahu 44:22

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

**Will be distributed under a separate list
If you want to receive this article every week,
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

Rabbi Wein

Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of a reflective period in the Jewish calendar year. At one and the same time we look back at the accomplishments and failures of the past year and we also look forward to our lives and hoped for achievements in the coming good year now dawning upon us. The prayers of Rosh Hashanah represent this duality of outlook.

They also represent the constants in our lives and souls. The malkhiyot section tells us of God's ever present rule over his world and its creatures. It is this constant that surpasses time and space, calendars and timepieces. Life is too random and unstructured for human society to begin to understand and to cope with in the absence of this constant.

It is only because of this omnipresent constant that we retain the ability to glimpse the past and foresee the future simultaneously. We are all aware of the famous Hebrew quip that says that the past is gone, the future has not yet arrived and the present is but a wink of the eye. Yet the present is always with us with its demands and challenges. It is the constant reminder to us of God's eternal sovereignty, always omnipresent even if sometimes hidden.

The Lord ordained for us so many commandments so that in every step in life that we take we are reminded of His presence and sovereignty. We are never really alone in our existence in this world. This is one of the great sublime messages of Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is called, in our liturgy and rabbinic literature, the day of remembrance. God, so to speak, remembers us for good and for life and we remember our entire history from the binding of Yitzchak till today. The most painful of all conditions, as we are all so aware of today in our time is the disappearance of memory. The person we loved and cherished is gone even if the body of that person is still present and functioning.

If this is true regarding individual human beings how much more so does it apply to national memory? We ask God not to forget and forsake us but we are also bidden to remember our story and ourselves. Heaven, so to speak, holds up a mirror to us, and as we move, so does our reflection in Heaven.

If we are not diligent in remembering then we are prone to be forgotten as well. Rosh Hashanah is the tool to reinforce our memory of people gone and of past events, of family traditions and ancient customs and of the core events of Jewish history. On Rosh Hashanah the entire sweep of humanity is remembered and assessed. In a flash, the past becomes the present. That is the tremendous aspect of memory, for by being able to evoke the past we recreate it as part of the present. The *zichronot* section of the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah provides us with this gifted ability.

But Rosh Hashanah is also a holiday of optimism and of looking forward and ahead. We resolve to become better people, more humane and Godly in our attitudes and behavior. The echo of the shofar of Sinai that we hear, or our own sounding of the shofar, inspires us to strive to become a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. That echo has never diminished and the challenge it conveys has also never lessened. Rising to that challenge is the goal set for us in the new year. The sounds of the shofar remind us again of Sinai and its eternal covenant and strictures, Just as our past was governed by it, so too will our future be determined by its structure and parameters.

So too, to a certain extent, our future can be assessed and can become more predictable on Rosh Hashanah. The more we are able to hear the echo of the shofar of Sinai, as we strain to listen to the faint strains of the shofar of redemption, the better the new year will be for us individually and nationally. The shofar represents our trumpet call to national and spiritual greatness.

All of the verses of the liturgy of shofrot combine these two soundings – Sinai and redemption – in their message and import. The great army of God's eternal people is being summoned to arms, to face the challenges of the new year. We have to hear those shofar soundings in our souls and not only in our ears.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Moses the Man

That very day the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people ...For you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel."

With these words there draws to a close the life of the greatest hero the Jewish people has ever known: Moses, the leader, the liberator, the lawgiver, the man who brought a group of slaves to freedom, turned a fractious collection of individuals into a nation, and so transformed them that they became the people of eternity.

It was Moses who mediated with God, performed signs and wonders, gave the people its laws, fought with them when they sinned, fought for them when praying for Divine forgiveness, gave his life to them and had his heart broken by them when they repeatedly failed to live up to his great expectations.

Each age has had its own image of Moses. For the more mystically inclined sages Moses was the man who ascended to Heaven at the time of the giving of the Torah, where he had to contend with the Angels who opposed the idea that this precious gift be given to mere mortals. God told Moses to answer them, which he did decisively. "Do angels work that they need a day of rest? Do they have parents that they need to be commanded to honour them? Do they have an evil inclination that they need to be told, 'Do not commit adultery?'" (Shabbat 88a). Moses the Man out-argues the Angels.

Other Sages were more radical still. For them Moses was Rabbenu, "our Rabbi" – not a king, a political or military leader, but a scholar and master of the law, a role which they invested with astonishing authority. They went so far as to say that when Moses prayed for God to forgive the people for the Golden Calf, God replied, "I cannot, for I have already vowed, "One who sacrifices to any God shall be destroyed" (Ex. 22:19), and I cannot revoke My vow." Moses replied, "Master of the Universe, have You not taught me the laws of annulling vows? One may not annul his own vow, but a Sage may do so." Moses thereupon annulled God's vow (Shemot Rabbah 43:4).

For Philo, the 1st century Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Moses was a philosopher-king of the type

depicted in Plato's Republic. He governs the nation, organises its laws, institutes its rites and conducts himself with dignity and honour; he is wise, stoical and self-controlled. This is, as it were, a Greek Moses, looking not unlike Michelangelo's famous sculpture.

For Maimonides, Moses was radically different from all other prophets in four ways. First, others received their prophecies in dreams or visions, while Moses received his when awake. Second, to the others God spoke in parables obliquely, but to Moses He spoke directly and lucidly. Third, the other prophets were terrified when God appeared to them but of Moses it says, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11). Fourth, other prophets needed to undergo lengthy preparations to hear the Divine word; Moses spoke to God whenever he wanted or needed to. He was "always prepared, like one of the ministering angels" (Laws of the Foundations of Torah 7:6).

Yet what is so moving about the portrayal of Moses in the Torah is that he appears before us as quintessentially human. No religion has more deeply and systemically insisted on the absolute otherness of God and Man, Heaven and Earth, the infinite and the finite. Other cultures have blurred the boundary, making some human beings seem godlike, perfect, infallible. There is such a tendency – marginal to be sure, but never entirely absent – within Jewish life itself: to see sages as saints, great scholars as angels, to gloss over their doubts and shortcomings and turn them into superhuman emblems of perfection. Tanakh, however, is greater than that. It tells us that God, who is never less than God, never asks us to be more than simply human.

Moses is a human being. We see him despair and want to die. We see him lose his temper. We see him on the brink of losing his faith in the people he has been called on to lead. We see him beg to be allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the land he has spent his life as a leader travelling toward. Moses is the hero of those who wrestle with the world as it is and with people as they are, knowing that "It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it."

The Torah insists that "to this day no one knows where his grave is" (Deut. 34:6), to avoid his grave being made a place of pilgrimage or worship. It is all too easy to turn human beings, after their death, into saints and demigods. That is precisely what the Torah opposes. "Every human being" writes Maimonides in his Laws of Repentance (5:2), "can be as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Jeroboam."

Moses does not exist in Judaism as an object of worship but as a role model for each of us to aspire to. He is the eternal symbol of a human being made great by what he strove for, not by what he actually achieved. The titles conferred by him in the Torah, "the man Moses," "God's servant," "a man of God," are all the more impressive for their modesty. Moses continues to inspire.

On 3 April 1968, Martin Luther King delivered a sermon in a church in Memphis, Tennessee. At the end of his address, he turned to the last day of Moses' life, when the man who had led his people to freedom was taken by God to a mountain-top from which he could see in the distance the land he was not destined to enter. That, said King, was how he felt that night:

I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.

That night was the last of his life. The next day he was assassinated. At the end, the still young Christian preacher – he was not yet forty – who had led the civil rights movement in the United States, identified not with a Christian figure but with Moses.

In the end the power of Moses' story is precisely that it affirms our mortality. There are many explanations of why Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. I have argued that it was simply because "each generation has its leaders" (Avodah Zarah 5a) and the person who has the ability to lead a people out of slavery is not necessarily the one who has the requisite skills to lead the next generation into its own and very different challenges. There is no one ideal form of leadership that is right for all times and situations.

Franz Kafka gave voice to a different and no less compelling truth:

He is on the track of Canaan all his life; it is incredible that he should see the land only when on the verge of death. This dying vision of it can only be intended to illustrate how incomplete a moment is human life; incomplete because a life like this could last forever and still be nothing but a moment. Moses fails to enter Canaan not because his life was too short but because it is a human life.[1]

What then does the story of Moses tell us? That it is right to fight for justice even against regimes that

seem indestructible. That God is with us when we take our stand against oppression. That we must have faith in those we lead, and when we cease to have faith in them we can no longer lead them. That change, though slow, is real, and that people are transformed by high ideals even though it may take centuries.

In one of its most powerful statements about Moses, the Torah states that he was "one hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his strength unabated" (34:8). I used to think that these were merely two sequential phrases, until I realised that the first was the explanation for the second. Why was Moses' strength unabated? Because his eyes were undimmed – because he never lost the ideals of his youth. Though he sometimes lost faith in himself and his ability to lead, he never lost faith in the cause: in God, service, freedom, the right, the good and the holy. His words at the end of his life were as impassioned as they had been at the beginning.

That is Moses, the man who refused to "go gently into that dark night", the eternal symbol of how a human being, without ever ceasing to be human, can become a giant of the moral life. That is the greatness and the humility of aspiring to be "a servant of God."

[1] Franz Kafka, Diaries 1914 – 1923, ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg and Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken, 1965, 195-96.

Rav Kook on Teshuvah
Rabbi Itzchak Marmorstein
haorot@gmail.com

11) HA'OROT-OROT HATSHUVA: THE LIGHTS OF RETURN OROT HATSHUVA

"When one forgets the essence of one's own soul, when one distracts their mind from attending to the substantive content of their own inner life, everything becomes confused and uncertain. The primary role of of tshuva...is for the person to return to their true selves, to the root of their soul." (Orot HaTshuva 15:10)

Tshuva can be translated as 'return, penitence, repentance'.

The Torah's calendar now takes us into a profound time in which tshuva is central to the experience.

We recently began Elul, the sixth month of the year which precedes Tishrei, the seventh month. This is important preparation for the High Holy Days -Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur and the joyous Festival of Succot.

This month is equivalent to the sixth day of the week in which we prepare for the blissful immersion into Shabbat. Similarly now, we are encouraged to use this month as a cleansing process so that we can be our fullest selves in the presence of the Divine (and each other) during Tishrei (and always).

Elul was of particular significance in Rav Kook's life and practice. He was born on the 16th of Elul in 1865. He arrived in Jerusalem on the 3rd of Elul in 1919 to begin serving as the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. He passed away exactly 16 years later on the 3rd of Elul in 1935.

One of the main foundations of his life and thought is the reality and importance of tshuva for our personal, national and universal being. In 1925 his most well known book-Orot HaTshuva/The Lights of Return was published.

He explained in the introduction:

"I feel prodded by a mighty force to speak about tshuva and all my thoughts are focused on this theme alone."

The book is a 17 chapter tour de force in spiritual literature.

It has been widely read and continues to be in the 'religious Zionist' movement which Rav Kook, his son and students birthed in Israel. Many religious IDF soldiers carry a pocket size copy of it with them at all times. Rav Kook himself reviewed it closely every Elul as part of his preparation and tshuva process.

It is thus most appropriate at this time to read some excerpts from this masterpiece. I will continue to use the word tshuva rather than the less adequate English translations.

"Physical tshuva is related to all transgressions against the laws of nature, and those laws of morality and Torah that are linked to the laws of nature. Every act of wrongdoing must in the end engender illness and pain, and the individual as well as society is exposed to much suffering as a result of this.

After it becomes clear that the person, as a result of misbehavior, is responsible for their distress, they begin to give thought to correcting their condition, to return to the laws of life and observe the laws of nature, morality and the Torah." (Chapter 1)

It seems planetarily we are paying for our transgressions against the physical laws of life and nature.

Rav Kook continues to explain the different levels of tshuva: "The higher expression of tshuva comes about as a flash of illumination of the all-good, the divine, the light of the One who abides in eternity. The universal soul, the spiritual essence is revealed to us in all its majesty and holiness, to the extent that the human heart can absorb it.

Indeed, is not all of existence so good and so noble, and is not the good and the nobility within ourselves but an expression of our relatedness to the all? How can we allow

ourselves to become severed from the all, a strange fragment, detached like tiny grains of sand that are of no value?" (Chapter 2)

Here Rav Kook places tshuva in a cosmic context.

It is the return of the human to living in harmony with the cosmic principles and realities. The integration of the personal and the cosmic is a foundation of his (and the Torah's) perspective. We see this highlighted in the following pieces:

"The individual and the collective soul, the world soul, the soul of all realms of being cries out like a fierce lioness in anguish for total perfection, for an ideal form of existence, and we feel the pain and it purges us." (4:1)

"The highest sensibility in the soul of the people of Israel is the quest for universality. The people aspire for this by the very essence of its being, and this affects all existence. The desire for tshuva in its highest form is rooted in this hidden longing." (5:6)

"The soul of the people of Israel expresses itself in the striving for absolute justice, which, to be effectuated must include the realization of all moral virtues." (5:7)

The ultimate goal of the impulse of tshuva is to bring about a world of 'absolute justice...the realization of all moral virtues.' Nothing less. It is the full manifestation of our highest ideals in reality.

It is an expression of the highest freedom:

"Tshuva is the aspiration for the true original freedom, which is the divine freedom, wherein there is no enslavement of any kind." (5:5)

This is a powerful force in action:

"The desire for tshuva is related to the universal will, to its highest source. From the moment the mighty stream for the universal will for life turns toward the good, many forces within the whole of existence are stirred to disclose the good and to bestow good to all...

Tshuva is inspired by the yearning all existence to be better, purer, more vigorous and on a higher plane than it is. Within this yearning is a hidden life-force for overcoming every factor that limits and weakens existence." (6:1)

Rav Kook places tshuva in the context of the expulsion and return to the Garden of Eden:

"At the inception of creation it was intended that the tree have the same taste as the fruit. (Genesis Rabbah:5:9)

All the supportive actions that sustain any general worthwhile spiritual goal should by right be experienced in the soul with the same feeling of elation and thought as the goal itself is experienced...But earthly existence, the instability of life, the weariness of the spirit when confined in a corporate frame, brought it about that only the fruition

of the final step, which embodies the primary ideal, is experienced in its pleasure and splendor. The trees that bear the fruit, with all their necessity for the growth of the fruit have become coarse matter and have lost their taste. This is the failing of the 'earth' because of which it was cursed when Adam was also cursed for his sin.

But every defect is destined to be mended. Thus we are assured that they day will come when creation will return to its original state, when the taste of the tree will be the same as the taste of the fruit." (6:7)

'The day will come when the taste of the tree will be the same as the taste of the fruit.' No more separation between means and ends. We will be living back in the Garden of Eden experience.

What does mean for each of us individually?

In Chapter 15 of Orot HaTshuva we find this remarkable passage:

"When one forgets the essence of one's own soul, when distracts their mind from attending to the substantive content of their own inner life, everything becomes confused and uncertain. The primary role of tshuva...is for the person to return to to their true selves, to the root of their soul. Then we will at once return to G-d, to the Soul of all souls.

Then we will progress continually, higher and higher, in holiness and in purity. This is true whether we consider the individual, a whole people, or the whole of humanity or whether we consider the mending of all existence, which always becomes damaged when it forgets itself.

If one should envision that they sought to return to G-d without setting themselves in order, this would be a deceptive tshuva, through which G-d's name will be taken in vain.

It is only through the great truth of returning to oneself that the person, and the people, the world and all the worlds, the whole of existence, will return to their Creator to be illuminated by the light of life." (15:10)

The primary role of tshuva is for each of us to return to our true selves. For the creation to reach its fulfillment and for each of us to achieve our own fulfillment it is necessary to be who we truly are. What a blessing and gift, an indication of the love of the Creator for the created.

Each one of us is a unique spark of Divine Light.

In being our true selves, in harmony with our inner and outer beings, we are illuminating the Divine within us and shining it forth into the world.

May all humankind shine brightly.

Blessings from Jerusalem

Itzchak