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ROSH HASHANAH IN SCRIPTURE

כג, כד דִּבֶּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לֵאמֹר: בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ, יְהִי־לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן--זִכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה, מִקְרָא-קֳדָשׁ.

G-d spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: in the seventh month, on the first of the month, it shall be a day of rest for you. A remembrance of the sounding of the Shofar, a holy convocation

כט, א וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ, מִקְרָא-קֳדָשׁ יְהִי־לָכֶם--כָּל-מְלָאכֶת עֲבֹדָה, לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: יוֹם תְּרוּעָה, יְהִי־לָכֶם.

“The first day of the seventh month shall be a sacred holiday to you on which you shall do no laborious work. It shall be a day of sounding the Shofar [ram’s horn.]”

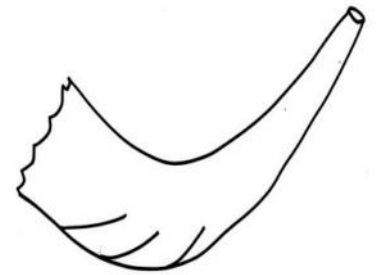
ROSH HASHANAH FACTS

NO LIMITS

Of all the months, Nissan and Tishrei in particular are of great significance. For Jews in particular, the month of Nissan is important because the Jewish people came into existence as a nation during that month when they left Egypt during the Exodus. For this reason the month of Nissan is referred to in the Torah as the “First month”.

For the entire universe, the month of Tishrei assumes extra importance because the human race, the focal point of the universe, came into existence on the Sixth Day of Creation, which coincides with the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei.

Therefore, the first day of Tishrei is considered the birthday of the universe, and the New Year. Originally man was placed in the world on this day free of sin, with unlimited potential, and a clear awareness of his Creator. In parallel with this, we are bidden to devote this day to free ourselves of sin through repentance, commit ourselves to realizing our boundless potential and acknowledge our Creator in countless ways.



ROSH HASHANAH: UNITY

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

Why does the individual say “we sinned” in plural?

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

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

Rosh Hashanah: Not the New Years You Thought It Was

If Rosh Hashanah could be summed up in a few words, those words would be; love, potential, and life. Let's take a look at each of these words and reflect on their meaning in the context of Rosh Hashanah.

Love

If you have heard anything about Rosh Hashanah, what you have probably heard is either that it is the “Jewish New Years” or that it is the Day of Judgment. Well, I'm here to tell you that while both are true, they are also very misunderstood. Let's consider the notion of judgment. The truth is, the prospect of judgment is very uncomfortable and nobody likes to be judged. We don't like to be judged by a boss, a teacher, and certainly not by our peers. At the same time, there is a very beautiful dimension to judgment. Think about parents and children. Parents are concerned about, and judge, a whole range of items related to their children. Parents are concerned about their children's grades in school, what kind of lunch they have, what kinds of friends they associate with, what websites they frequent, and a lot more. From the child's perspective, this can seem a bit intrusive, but the truth is, there is only one reason why parents are so interested in virtually every detail of their children's lives: it's because they deeply love their children. In fact, one of the most devastating things a parent can do to a child is not to judge. Why? Because a parent who isn't interested in what their child is doing is sending a message that says clearly “I don't care about you.” A child who hears such a message will inevitably draw the conclusion that they are not worth their parents attention, and that, is about the most destructive message a child can absorb.

On Rosh Hashanah, when we say that God “sits in judgment” what we are saying is that God loves us: He cares about each and every one of us, He cares about who we are, how we live, and whether or not we are actualizing the potential He gave us. That the creator of the universe actually cares about “little ‘ol me” is a remarkably empowering and life-giving idea. The reality that we confront on Rosh Hashanah is one that highlights the intrinsic value and preciousness of every life in the eyes of God.

Potential

On Passover we celebrate the Exodus from Egypt, on Chanukah we celebrate the defeat of the Greeks and the miracle of the oil. Did you ever wonder what we are celebrating on Rosh Hashanah?

Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the creation of the first human being. The Jewish year begins with focusing on the awesome nature and potential that exists within each of us. When you look at the world around you, it's clear that God is not only quite powerful, but very, very creative. That being the case, God could have launched Mankind with a family, a village or a whole planet filled with people: why did He begin with just one person? Jewish tradition teaches that God began with one person to teach us about the fantastic potential inherent in each of us. Each of us has the ability to have an impact on the entire world and each of us is capable of making a world of difference. As we stand at the threshold of a new year we ask ourselves some simple questions: “What can I do in the coming year to actualize more of my potential?” “How can I contribute, even in a small way, to making the world a better place?” “What can I do to make a difference in someone else's life?”

Every Rosh Hashanah represents a vote of confidence from God in our individual, personal potential. Every Rosh Hashanah also presents us with a fresh opportunity to unlock more and more of that great God-given gift.

Life

Throughout the Rosh Hashanah prayers, we ask God to “Remember us for life” and “Inscribe us in the Book of Life.” When we greet one another we say “May you have a good year, and may you be written and sealed for a year of good life and peace.”

Our prayers for life are meant to be understood at face value—we want to live—but they also have a deeper meaning. Consider this: I once met a Holocaust survivor who said, “I would choose to go through all those years in Auschwitz again rather than spend one day of my life as a Nazi.” That is an incredible statement, and what it means, I believe, is this: one can be alive, strong, and healthy yet be “dead” at the same time. A life lived in the boots of a Nazi, or under the flag of Al-Qaida or Hezbollah, is a life utterly drained of all meaning. You see, there are certain choices that we make, and certain courses of action that we pursue, that have the ability to infuse life with “life,” and there are others that drain life of everything God intended it for. On Rosh Hashanah, we not only ask for life, we strive to be people who embrace the kinds of values, ideals, and choices that will fill our days with life: With meaning, with goodness, with spirituality—with life!

FACING G-D ON ROSH HASHANAH

A rather puzzling piece of Talmud gives three descriptions about how each and every one of us passes before God. The Mishna says, “On Rosh Hashanah all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him like “*Bnei Maron*.” What does this mean? The Talmud offers three possible interpretations of the unusual phrase “Bnei Maron”:

1. All people pass before God like sheep being lead through a narrow door and counted one by one for tithing.
2. Individuals pass before God as if they were on a very steep and narrow mountain pass where one must carefully walk single file.
3. Every person passes before God like the soldiers in King David's army, walking single file on their way to war. (Rosh Hashanah 18a)

Each interpretation teaches us a way to prepare for this most significant day.

1. Like sheep: counted, worthy, loved.

In a world teeming with billions of people, does God really care about me and all the details of my life? In the big scheme of things, I'm just a small speck of dust. God surely has more important things than to examine my life and judge me.

Being compared to counted sheep comes to uproot the notion that God doesn't really care about my life. Something that is counted is considered important, valuable. God cares about you specifically. He is creating every molecule of your being; He is not only aware of you, He cares about you. He is rooting for you. You are not just a dot in the masses of humanity. You are God's child whom He loves, as a father loves his child.

2. Like a mountainous pass, all alone, with nowhere to hide

The only way to traverse this narrow pass is by walking totally alone. There is no room for anyone else. On Rosh Hashanah, standing before God, there is only you. There are no friends to [hide behind](#), no society to get lost in, no excuses to rely on. It's only the real you, all your decisions, the potential left dormant, the tremendous dreams that were in reach but left unfulfilled. We hide behind a litany of excuses and layers of deception that distance ourselves from our true inner selves. We think everyone else is doing it, or the converse: no one else is doing it, so why should I be expected to? We think we're doing just fine since everyone tells us we're fine. But on Rosh Hashanah there is no one else; it's just you. It's the moment you need to confront who you really are.

So spend a few minutes and ask yourself: What excuses do you rely on to exempt you from unleashing your potential and becoming truly great?

3. Like King David's Soldiers, with a unique mission

King David's soldiers were known to be the mightiest. They were not a just mass of people; each soldier had a unique mission that contributed to the army. On Rosh Hashanah God recreates the world and determines the annual allocation of resources. He judges each of us based on our unique mission and how it's affecting the nation. Where do we stand with our mission? Are we clear on our specific purpose? How driven are we to accomplish it?

“HE IS NOT ONLY AWARE OF YOU, HE CARES ABOUT YOU. HE IS ROOTING FOR YOU.”

What do we need from the Almighty this year in order to accomplish it?

On Rosh Hashanah we will be standing before the CEO who has unlimited resources and he wants to hear our proposal that has the good of his company in mind. Now is the time to get the clarity about what we are committed to accomplishing this upcoming year and to evaluate how well this fits into what God wants from you.

An effective tool is to think about five of the most pleasurable moments you've experienced in life, moments when you felt most alive? Step back and see if you can articulate a common theme. Then ask yourself: What specific goals am I committing to this year to fulfill my personal mission?

This is a time for quiet introspection and reconnecting with your dreams and aspirations. Don't give up on them; the Almighty knows you can achieve great things and He's rooting for you.

Three Main Themes

The Rosh Ha-Shanah Musaf prayer consists of nine sections. Some of these sections are essentially prayers, but they are called “blessings” because each of them contains a blessing to God at the end of each section. The first three sections are the same as those recited every day in the Shemoneh Esrei prayer (however, they contain some variations for Rosh Ha-Shanah and the ensuing Ten Days of Repentance). The third blessing, known as Kedushat Ha-Shem (Holiness of the Name), begins with **You are holy**, and concludes with **The Holy God**. During the Ten Days of Repentance, it concludes with **The Holy King**.

Besides the first three and the last three sections, the Musaf prayer on Rosh Ha-Shanah also contains three special sections:

- a) **Malkhuyot** (Verses of Kingship): attesting to God’s past, present and future and ultimate Kingship;
 - b) **Zikhronot** (Verses of Remembrance): dealing with God’s attribute of remembering all the deeds of mankind, good and bad, and his examination of them all on this Day of Judgment;
 - c) **Shofarot** (Verses of Shofar): discussing God’s Revelation through the shofar blasts at Mount Sinai, and His future Revelation through the shofar that heralds the advent of the Messianic King.
- Each section consists of an opening prayer related to the particular topic, a selection of relevant Scriptural verses and a concluding prayer and blessing.

Kingship

To do or not to do....

We begin the special silent prayer of Rosh Hashanah by declaring God our King. The prohibition of worshipping a foreign god is often understood to prohibit Jews from subscribing to idol worship, paganism, and the deities of other religions. Today, this prohibition may not seem relevant. The Talmud, however, explains that the commandment does not refer solely to idol worship, but also to giving credence to other negative influences. Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, one of the great spiritual guides of the past century, further explains this concept. He suggests that harmful desires do not always present themselves to us as such. It is true, there are pleasures in life which we know are plainly wrong. But there are also influences and desires that present themselves as the voice inside us that has our self interest in mind. It may be the voice that calls us to get ahead in business at the expense of other core values. Or it can be the voice that masks our jealousy with the need not to “fall behind.” When faced with a moral or ethical dilemma it may seem like there are two legitimate paths to greatness. The second path, however, is often akin to a “foreign god”; it is the alternative force that pulls us away from God and His commandments. When we declare God’s greatness on Rosh Hashanah, we recognize that this allows one to focus on what is truly important in our lives and our core values. This is the message of Malkhuyot, kingship.

“God is King.” What does that have to do with me?

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

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

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

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

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

Remembrance

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

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

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

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

Shofar

When the Shofar is blown on Rosh HaShana, three different types of noises are sounded. The first is a "teki'ah." This sound is one long continuous burst. The second sound is called a "shevarim." It consists of three shorter blasts. The third sound is the "teruah." The teruah is a set of nine short bursts of sound, a staccato blast. The Gemora in Rosh HaShana tells us that these later two sounds are meant to sound like crying: ". . . drawing a long sigh. . . uttering short piercing cries." The Ben Ish Chai writes that these sounds are meant to contrast with the tekiah. The tekiah, he explains, is a sound of triumph and joy, while the shevarim and teruah are sounds of pain and suffering. Because of the opposing feelings they represent, when one blows the shofar, he is not to connect the tekiah with the others, by blowing the sounds with the same breath.

Why do we have both sounds of joy and sounds of sorrow emitted from the Shofar? The Ben Ish Chai explains by means of a story. A man had a ring specially made for him. Upon this ring, he had engraved the words "This, too, will pass." If he were troubled and in pain, he would look at his ring and remember that the suffering would eventually end. This thought comforted him. During times of happiness and comfort, he would gaze at the ring as well. He would realize that his wealth and good fortune could change for the worst in an instant. Good times are not forever. He would recognize that there was no reason to become conceited and haughty over circumstances which were beyond his control and could turn adverse without any warning. This ring reminded the man that all in his life had to be put in perspective, and that one should live his life neither complacent nor despondent.

The tekiah, the first sound, is a sound of joy and happiness. Immediately after we hear the long exultant blast, we hear the shevarim and teruah. These are both sounds of sadness, pain and suffering. The stark contrast between these sounds is intentional. We are supposed to remember while listening to the shofar that we cannot forget G-d during times of contentment, and we cannot let our egos swell from our achievements. Success can quickly turn into failure. Only with G-d's help did we prosper, and only with G-d's help will we continue to do so. However, upon hearing the sorrowful sound of the Shofar, we should not think that in times of suffering G-d has forsaken us. We should not become depressed and despondent. Right after these blasts, we sound a tekiah again, to signify that G-d is there, and in His mercy will help us return to a state of jubilation again.

- 1) *When do I most feel that my life is meaningful?*
- 3) *Are there any ideals I would be willing to die for?*
- 4) *If I could live my life over, would I change anything?*
- 5) *What would bring me more happiness than anything else in the world?*
- 6) *What are my three most significant achievements since last Rosh Hashanah?*
- 7) *What are the three biggest mistakes I've made since last Rosh Hashanah?*
- 8) *What project or goal, if left undone, will I most regret next Rosh Hashanah?*
- 9) *If I knew I couldn't fail, what would I undertake to accomplish in life?*
- 10) *What are my three major goals in life? What am I doing to achieve them? What practical steps can I take in the next two months toward these goals?*
- 11) *If I could give my children only three pieces of advice, what would they be?*
- 12) *What is the most important decision I need to make this year?*
- 13) *What important decision did I avoid last year?*
- 14) *What did I do last year that gave me the strongest feeling of self-respect?*
- 15) *When do I feel closest to God?*
- 16) *Do I have a vision of where I want to be one, three and five years from now?*
- 17) *What are the most important relationships in my life? Over the last year did those relationships become closer and deeper or was there a sense of stagnation and drifting? What can I do to nurture those relationships this year?*
- 18) *If I could change only one thing about myself, what would that be?*
- 19) *If one thing would change about my spiritual life, what would it be?*



