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מקראי קודש

MIKRA'EI KODESH

Holiday Divrei Torah, Halakhot & Guidelines



Dedicated by

Mahyar Hakimian and Family

l'iluy nishmat

Yaakov Ben Moshe z"l

ז"ל יעקב בן משה

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Table of Contents

Sponsors & Dedications.....	
Halakhot of Rosh HaShana	2
I. Selichot.....	2
II. General Laws and Customs	2
III. Prayers	2
IV. Shofar.....	3
V. Asseret Yeme Teshuva	4
VI. Teshuvah - Repentance.....	4
Halakhot of Yom Kippur.....	5
I. Overview	6
II. Erev Yom Kippur	6
III. Yom Kippur and Repentance.....	7
IV. Prohibitions.....	7
V. Prayers	8
Preparing for Rosh Hashanah.....	10
Rabbi Ryan Levian	
Malkhuyot, Zikhronot, Shofarot: <i>Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow</i>.....	13
Yaakob Bitton	
A Good Year - and a Sweet One	18
Doron Hakimian	
Are These Days Really About Teshuva?	20
Rabbi Eliyahu Ebrani	

The King is in The Field	21
Jeremy Gorjian	
The Gift of Rosh HaShana	22
Ziv Livian	
Direction, Not Perfection.....	23
Jared Rahmanan	

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Halakhot of Rosh HaShana

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I. Selichot

Beginning the day after Rosh Hodesh Elul (the month before Rosh HaShana) and concluding the day before Yom Kippur, Selichot are recited early each weekday morning before Shacharit. These are special prayers designed to facilitate teshuva (repentance). It is inappropriate to arrive at the annual Day of Judgment, as the first day of the new year is called, without having prepared beforehand.

II. General Laws and Customs

Since Rosh HaShana is the beginning of the year (and commemorates G-d's creation of the world), it also is the Day of Judgment of humans. One's thoughts should focus on the Creator, acknowledging His kingship and His desire that we strive to improve ourselves spiritually and endeavor to make the world a better place for all in accordance with His will. We must be serious about these matters and not engage in lightheaded behavior. It is necessary to dress modestly.

- ❖ Although it is the Day of Judgment, we are to express our confidence that the Almighty will accept our prayers and repentance and inscribe us for a year of life. Thus, it is prohibited to fast on Rosh HaShana and the mitzvah of Simchat Yom Tov (happiness of the holiday) applies just as on the three festivals; there should be a festive meal both at night and in the day.
- ❖ During the evening meal,, we eat special foods with an appropriate prayer for each that, through their names or nature, prompt optimistic thoughts for the new year. It is customary to dip the hamosi in honey instead of salt and not eat "sour" dishes throughout Rosh HaShana.

- ❖ The berakha of sheheheyanu is recited in kiddush both nights just as on both nights of all yamim tobim. However, Shulhan Arukh states it is preferable to have a "new" fruit on the table the second night and direct the sheheheyanu toward it also. The reason is that there is a group of poskim who consider the two days of Rosh HaShana as one long day halakhically and according to them sheheheyanu should not be recited the second night for the day itself. Having a new fruit removes any doubt concerning the sheheheyanu. (Reciting an unnecessary berakha is a violation of our responsibility to respect G-d's name.)

In this particular case, however, in the final analysis, if one did not have a new fruit or another new item toward which the sheheheyanu could be directed, it is recited anyway, for it is not a true doubt.

- ❖ It is preferable not to sleep during the day of Rosh HaShana, but rather to study Torah. If one finds himself in a situation where he cannot concentrate on studying Torah and is idling away his time in gossip, etc., it is preferable to sleep.

III. Prayers

The amida of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur emphasizes the kingship of the Almighty and includes additions reflecting the vision of a world in harmony and peace fulfilling His will. It is customary to have assistants to the right and left of the hazzan during the prayers of these special days.

- ❖ **Additions to Prayers:** Hashem Hu Ha'elokim is recited before Hashem Melekh, Shir Hama'alot Mima'amakim after Yishtabah, Avinu Malkenu after the amida of shahrit and minha.

In the amida on Rosh Hashana, and throughout Aseret Yemei Teshuva (the 10 days from Rosh

Hashana to Yom Kippur), Hamelekh Hakadosh is said in place of Hakel Hakadosh and Hamelekh Hamishpat is said in place of Melekh Oheb Sedaka Umishpat. Several additional insertions are made in the amida as found in all mahzorim.

- ❖ If one forgot to say HaMelech HaKadosh and remembered within Toch Kedi Dibbur (2-3 seconds), then one should say HaMelech HaKadosh right then. If one remembered only afterwards one must start from the beginning of Shmoneh Esrei.
- ❖ If one forgot to say HaMelech HaMishpat and remembered within Toch Kedi Dibbur (2-3 seconds), then one should say HaMelech HaMishpat right then. If one remembered before finishing the amida (he finished reciting the second “yihyu leratzon” of amida, right before Oseh Shalom), one should go back to the beginning of Hashiva. If one remembered after finishing the amida, one must start from the beginning of Shemneh Esrei.
- ❖ If one is unsure of what he said, we treat it as if he forgot, because we assume that he was used to saying what he does normally. This is true even if he knows that he added the other additions like zochreinu lechaim and mi kamocha.
- ❖ **Torah and Haftarah Readings:** On the first day the Torah reading begins with Hashem's ‘remembering’ Sarah (with childbirth). A portion about Rosh HaShana is read from a second Sefer Torah. The haftarah is about Hashem's ‘remembering’ Hannah. The second day Torah reading is about G-d's test of Abraham with Akedat Yitzhak. The portion read from the second Sefer Torah is the same as the first day. The haftarah, from the prophet Jeremiah, is about Hashem's remembering, and love for, Israel.
- ❖ **Musaf:** The musaf prayer of Rosh HaShana includes three special sections reflecting the essence of the day. Each section comprises ten

verses from Tanakh and concludes with a berakha. The first section focuses on G-d's kingship (מלכויות); the second on His remembrances for judgment (זכרונות); the third on the significance of the shofar (שופרות).

- ❖ **Tashlikh:** In the afternoon of the first day the custom is to recite ‘Tashlikh’, a symbolic ‘casting away of sins’. It is preferable to recite it by the banks of a body of water but if a natural body of water is not available, it is acceptable to fill a pool. One who did not recite this prayer on Rosh HaShana should do so during Asseret Yeme Teshuva.

IV. Shofar

It is a Torah commandment to hear the shofar blasts on the day of Rosh HaShana. The shofar is associated with the coronation of a king and helps us focus on the importance of recognizing and accepting Hashem as our king. In addition, in the Books of the Prophets the shofar is associated with the signal of the city watchman who warns that the enemy is arriving.

On the Day of Judgment, the Shofar is the alarm that we are faced with an emergency; it awakens us from our slumber and calls us to repent. The shofar also recalls the ram substituted for the sacrifice of Yitzhak. It is also associated with the Giving of the Torah and the Ingathering of the Exiles.

- ❖ Women are not obligated to hear the shofar as it is a positive mitzvah governed by time. Nevertheless, they fulfill a mitzvah if they hear it.
- ❖ Children who have reached the age of understanding should be brought to synagogue to hear the shofar but only if they do not disturb others.
- ❖ The toke'ah (shofar blower) should stand. The toke'ah must have intentions that his blowing is for the mitzvah and that others may fulfill their obligation through hearing his blowing. The listener must also have intent to fulfill his obligation.

- ❖ Two berakhot are recited before blowing the shofar the first time: Lishmo'ah Kol Shofar and Sheheheyanu. One who has fulfilled his obligation of shofar earlier in the day and is blowing only for others may still recite the berakhot.
- ❖ The complete mitzvah comprises one hundred individual blasts. They are blown in eight series. The first series, before musaf, comprises thirty blasts. The other seven series comprise ten blasts each: three series in the quiet amida, three in the hazara and one in the kaddish after the amida. It is customary to blow a 101st blast, a teru'ah gedola, before Alenu.
- ❖ When Rosh HaShana occurs on Shabbat the shofar is not blown and it is mukseh. Although from Torah law the shofar should be blown even on Shabbat, the rabbis prohibited it, fearing it might lead to carrying on Shabbat.
- ❖ Hearing the Shofar on Rosh Hashana is a Torah Mitzvah (מדאורייתא מצוה). Therefore, the Shofar Blowers must know the Halachot well, and must have Yirat Shamayim. (Rabbi Ben Haim)
- ❖ Because the Gemara uses the word "פשוטה," ideally, the Shofar Blower should not go up or down at the end of the blast. He should try and keep each blast one straight pitch. (However, the Shofar Blowing is still Kosher if one does go up/down at the end of a blast). (Rabbi Ben Haim)

Timing of Each Sound (S"A 590:3; M"B 590:15):

- ❖ תקיעה
 - No maximum length.
 - Minimum length must be equal to (or greater than) the time it takes to blow the sounds in the middle.
 - Approximately 5 seconds (based on Rabbi Ben Haim's Psak).
- ❖ שברים
 - Must be very careful when blowing שברים (if blown for too long can potentially

become a תקיעה according to some opinions).

- Each שבר is maximum 1 second (based on Rabbi Ben Haim's Psak).
- In total, the שברים should ideally total (approximately) 2.5 seconds.

❖ תרועה

- No maximum length.
- Minimum length is equal to time it takes to blow all 3 שברים.
- Approximately 2.5 seconds (based on Rabbi Ben Haim's Psak)

V. Asseret Yeme Teshuva

The ten days from Rosh HaShana through Yom Kippur are singularly designated and dedicated to Teshuva. Although Teshuva is accepted any time, it is accepted even more readily during these days.

For the above reason it has been traditional that Jewish people give more charity and do more good deeds during these days. It is the time when they express their religious identity.

- ❖ Shulhan Arukh states that it is proper for those accustomed to eating bread baked by non-Jews all year long (known to be kosher, an item that is permitted to eat) to refrain from doing so these days. It is an example of a stringency accepted for these days.
- ❖ **Prayers:** During Asseret Yeme Teshuva a person should pray more carefully than usual. Six insertions and substitutions are made in the amida as found in all siddurim.

VI. Teshuvah - Repentance

Aspects of complete Teshuva:

1. Viduy — recognition of the sin and confession to Hashem. When done silently it is proper to specify the particular transgression.
2. Abandoning the sinful practice

3. Feeling of regret for having done the sin

4. Resolution for the future

- ❖ In making a resolution for the future, it is proper, often necessary, to devise a strategy to cope with temptation. It is appropriate to build a 'fence' around the transgression, that will prevent one from crossing the line, each person as fit to his/her situation.
- ❖ Just as one must repent for sins involving actions, so must one repent for any evil dispositions that he may have, such as an angry temper, hatred, jealousy, greedy pursuit of money and honor, gluttony, etc.
- ❖ Sins against one's fellow man are not forgiven by the Almighty until the sinner has received forgiveness from the injured party and repents.
- ❖ **Hatarat Nedarim (Annulment of Vows):** As the sin of broken vows is very serious, it is customary to make Hatarat Nedarim before Rosh HaShana, to clean the slate as much as possible. We also declare our intention not to vow in the future. Hatarat Nedarim is not a prayer but a declaration to the Bet Din requesting annulment of the vow, which is possible if the individual requesting is deeply regretful for having made the vow. If one did not make a vow Hatarat Nedarim is inapplicable.

Halakhot of Yom Kippur on the next page →

Halakhot of Yom Kippur

I. Overview

G-d created man and instilled in him free will so that man may choose to serve his Creator and abide by His commandments. The Torah provides the guidelines.

In general, abiding by G-d's will is defined a number of times throughout Tanakh. G-d praised Abraham because "he will instruct his children and household after him to observe the way of Hashem, to do righteousness and justice..." (Gen. 18:17-19). "What is it the Lord requires of you, only to do *mishpat*, love *hesed*, and walk modestly with your G-d" (Micah 6:8). "But let him who chooses to be praised be praised in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Hashem who does *hesed*, *mishpat* and *tzedaka* in the earth, for in these do I desire, declared Hashem" (Jer. 9:23).

Since "there is no man on earth ... who does not sin" (Kohelet 7:20), G-d granted Israel one day each year, the day of Yom Kippur, to facilitate repentance, to purify everyone and grant them forgiveness and atonement. He established this day because He does not desire the death of the sinners, neither physically nor spiritually, but their repenting and living. Indeed, He does not desire the destruction of the world but its flourishing. His desire is that all human society cease from all unethical and immoral behavior and return to Him. It is the responsibility of the nation of Israel to play a leadership role in accomplishing this. Of course, the decision to repent is in the hands of man, dependent on his exercise of his free will.

The prohibitions of the day of Yom Kippur, the fasting and other hardships, and the prayers, help us acknowledge the reality that we have sinned, that we have not sufficiently thought about our actions, that there is great need for improvement and that we deserve punishment. Most of our waking hours during the twenty-four hours of Yom Kippur should be devoted to prayer, introspection, repentance (*Teshuva*) and some time should be made for study of Torah.

II. Erev Yom Kippur

- ❖ It is proper for each person to ask forgiveness from anyone he/she may have wronged before Yom Kippur sets in.
- ❖ It is a mitzvah to eat well on Erev Yom Kippur.
- ❖ Some have a practice to make symbolic *kaparah* on Erev Yom Kippur (or during the few days before it) with chickens, one for each member of the family. Some give a donation to charity in place of chickens. Some, following Shulhan Arukh, which specifically and strongly stated that this custom should be eliminated because it looks like the way of idolators, do not engage in this practice at all.
- ❖ Minha is prayed early so that there should be sufficient time for all to eat and get ready for the holy day before sunset.
- ❖ After the final berakha of the individual's amida of mincha, but before reciting the amida's concluding portion, *viduy* (acknowledgment and confession of sins) is recited. It is not repeated in hazara.
- ❖ It is customary to kindle a remembrance candle or a light in or about the synagogue as a memorial for departed members of the family. Remembrance of the departed may serve as inspiration for the living.
- ❖ It is customary for men to immerse in a mikveh (or natural body of water) on Erev Kippur with thoughts of repentance and purification in their minds. When a mikveh is not available or it is impractical it is appropriate to intend such purification with a shower somewhat longer than usual. Although a shower is invalid for the law of a woman's fulfilling the mitzvah of mikveh after her period, immersing of men is not an actual law.

- ❖ Se`uda Hamafseket: The final meal before Yom Kippur must be completed before sunset, at which time the fast and all halakhot of the day begin. If one completes this meal early it is considered an early acceptance of the fast unless the person states (or thinks) that he/she does not wish to accept the fast yet. When one accepts the fast early, it is understood that all the laws of Yom Kippur take effect for that individual at that time.
- ❖ In the Mashadi community, the custom is for the women to make a berakha on lighting the candles on Erev Yom Kippur.
- ❖ Men wear a tallit for all Yom Kippur prayers, including arvit. One should try to arrive at the synagogue before sunset so as to be able to say the berakha on donning the tallit.
- ❖ The evening service begins with the chanting of *Lecha Keli*. Although the Torah is not read during the evening, the Ark is opened and the Torah is shown to the congregation, to increase the level of inspiration. Seven Torah scrolls are brought out and *Kal Nidre* is recited three times in the past tense and once in the future tense. It is preferable that this be done before nightfall. The berakha of *Shehebeyanu* (for the arrival of Yom Kippur) is recited before beginning arvit.

III. Yom Kippur and Repentance

Since Yom Kippur, the final day of the Ten Days of Repentance that begin with Rosh Hashana, is the time of Teshuva for each individual as well as for the community, each individual is responsible to repent and confess any wrongdoing on this day. The rabbis have formulated comprehensive texts of confession that are incorporated in the prayers of the day. These include *viduy hagadol*, a long list of transgressions. Although this list of transgressions includes some that most people undoubtedly did not commit, it is permitted to be recited by all, as it is considered a communal confession. Also, one may be responsible for a transgression that was committed by another due to having played a role

in causing it. The ripple effects of a transgression go far and wide.

- ❖ Teshuva and Yom Kippur secure atonement for sins between man and G-d only. For sins against one's fellow man there is no atonement until the penitent has compensated the injured party for any loss and gained his forgiveness. One must seek forgiveness from his fellow man even if he had only angered him with words.
- ❖ One being asked for forgiveness should not be difficult to appease but rather quick to forgive with a sincere heart. If the injured party is confident that the person requesting forgiveness is insincere, he is not obliged to grant forgiveness.
- ❖ It is proper that each individual specifically state at the beginning of the evening of Yom Kippur that he/she forgives everyone.
- ❖ Just as one must repent for sins involving actions, so must one repent for evil dispositions that he/she may have. These may include a tendency to anger quickly, jealousy, overweening pride, greediness, gluttony, etc.

IV. Prohibitions

All work that is forbidden on Shabbat is forbidden on Yom Kippur. The prohibitions specific to Yom Kippur are:

- ❖ a) Eating and drinking, b) washing the body, c) application of ointments to the body, d) wearing leather shoes, e) marital relations.
- ❖ Sick people and women who are pregnant, nursing or who recently gave birth (after the first three days) are not automatically exempt from fasting on Yom Kippur as is the case with the minor fasts. Exemption is based on there being at least a minor possibility that fasting would endanger life. Medical experts have stated that in normal pregnancies there is no danger in fasting, although in the later

months it may induce labor. A medical and halakhic authority should be consulted in individual cases.

- ❖ A woman in labor on Yom Kippur should eat.
- ❖ One who must eat or drink on Yom Kippur for medical or health reasons should do so in as limited a fashion as possible. Please approach a community Rabbi for further instruction.
- ❖ Washing the body on Yom Kippur should be limited to the fingers. *Netilat Yadayim* is up to the knuckles. It is permitted to wipe away the sediment from one's eyes in the morning. After using the bathroom, or if one has touched a covered part of the body, one should wash up to the knuckles. However, if a part of the body became very sweaty or dirty, it is permitted to wash in a limited manner, for the essential prohibition of washing the body is when done for pleasure.
- ❖ Leather garments other than shoes are permitted.

V. Prayers

- ❖ On both the night and day of Yom Kippur, the phrase *Barukh Shem Kevod Malkhuto Le'olam Va'ed*, is recited audibly upon reciting Shema.
- ❖ The Torah reading for shaharit is the portion that describes the Yom Kippur service in the sanctuary. Another portion about Yom Kippur is read from a second Sefer Torah. The haftarah is the portion from the prophet Yeshaya that criticizes superficial repentance on a fast day, describing true repentance and calling on the nation of Israel to comport ethically.
- ❖ During hazara (repetition of the amida) of musaf, the hazzan recites the *Avoda*, a description of the Yom Kippur service by the high priest in the days of the Temple. The Ark is opened for this prayer.
- ❖ The Torah reading at mincha is the portion exhorting Israel to refrain from immoral conduct, particularly sexual impropriety. The haftarah reading is Sefer Yonah, which deals in depth with the subject of repentance and G-d's compassion on all people, even sinners.
- ❖ The shofar is not blown during Yom Kippur proper; it is blown after sunset toward the conclusion of the day. The blowing of the shofar does not signal the end of the day, as the day continues until the "stars appear," approximately thirty-five minutes after sunset in the New York region.
- ❖ There are five *amidot* recited on Yom Kippur. In addition to musaf, *ne'ila* is recited after mincha. This is the "closing" prayer, also so-called in reference to the closing of the Heavenly Gates that are especially opened on Yom Kippur.
- ❖ The Aron HaKodesh is opened at the beginning of *ne'ila* and is kept open for the duration of this important prayer.
- ❖ Birkat Kohanim is not recited in mincha, but is recited in *ne'ila*. It must be said before sunset.
- ❖ At the conclusion of Yom Kippur *havdalah* is recited. The candle must be lit from a flame that was burning all of Yom Kippur and "rested." The berakha on *besamim* (fragrant spices) is not recited.

The Rosh HaShana Seder

Note: There are different customs as to when the seder is made (before or after Hamotzi), as well as the order of the simanim. If your family is having the seder **before** HaMotzi, then recite "HaEtz" & "HaAdama" at the correct time. When the seder is made **after** HaMotzi, skip the berakhah of "HaAdama" and **only** make "HaEtz."

1. תפוח בדבש - Apple & Honey

We take an apple, dip it in honey and say:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּחַדֵּשׁ
עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוּקָה מִרְאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַ חֲרִית
שָׁנָה

*May it be Your will, HASHEM, our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, that You renew for us a good and **sweet** year, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.*

Before eating the apple, we say: (this berakha is made on the date if your seder starts from there)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Blessed are You, HASHEM, our G-d, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

2. כרתי - Leeks

We take a piece of leek and say:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁיִּכְרֹתוּ
אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׂוֹנְאֵינוּ וְכָל מְבַקְשֵׁי רַעְתָּנוּ

*May it be Your will, HASHEM, our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, that Your enemies and foes and all those who wish us harm be **destroyed**.*

3. סלקא - Beets

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
שֶׁיִּסְתַּלְּקוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׂוֹנְאֵינוּ וְכָל מְבַקְשֵׁי רַעְתָּנוּ

*May it be Your will, HASHEM, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that Your enemies and foes and all those who wish us harm be **removed**.*

Before eating the beets, we say:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה

Blessed are You, HASHEM, our G-d, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the land.

4. תמר - Dates

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁיִּתְמוּ
אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׂוֹנְאֵינוּ וְכָל מְבַקְשֵׁי רַעְתָּנוּ

*May it be Your will, HASHEM, our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, that Your enemies and foes and all those who wish us harm be **ended**.*

5. קרא - Gourd

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּקַרַּע
רוּעַ גִּזְרֵי דִינֵנוּ, וְיִקְרָאוּ לְפָנֶיךָ זְכוֹתֵינוּ

*May it be Your will, HASHEM, our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, that the decree of our bad sentence be **torn apart**, and may our merits be **proclaimed** before You*

6. רוביא - Beans

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁיִּרְבּוּ
זְכוֹתֵינוּ וְתִלְבְּבוּנוּ

*May it be Your will, Lord our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that our merits shall **increase** and that You hearten us.*

7. ראש כבש - Head of Sheep (or tongue)

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנִּהְיֶה
לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב

*May it be Your will, HASHEM, our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, that we be as the **head** and not as the tail.*

8. רימון - Pomegranate

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנִּהְיֶה
מְלֵאִים מִצֻּת פְּרִמּוֹן

*May it be Your will, HASHEM, our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, that we be full of Mitzvot (performing Your commandments) as (the seeds of) a **pomegranate***

Preparing for Rosh Hashanah

Rabbi Ryan Levian

Stop and Think

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, one of the most important things a person can do is simply stop and think.

Look back at this past year. Where was I last Rosh Hashanah? Where am I today? What did I accomplish? Where did I grow? What did I improve? How much Torah did I learn? How much closer did I become to Hashem?

And then comes the most important question: **Where do I want to be next Rosh Hashanah?**

"Ki Karov Elecha HaDavar Me'od"

In Parashat Nitzavim, the Torah tells us that the mitzvah is not distant from us. It is not in the heavens and it is not across the sea. Rather: "Ki karov elecha hadavar me'od, beficha uvilvavcha la'asoto" - the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.

The Torah is telling us: **Don't convince yourself that growth is too far away.** Don't say, "It's too difficult for me," "That's for somebody more religious," or "That's not who I am."

Hashem tells us: **It's closer than you think.** You can grow. You can change. You can become greater. And Rosh Hashanah is the time to decide that you're going to.

How Much Did I Give to Torah This Year?

One area we should especially think about is our Torah learning. Hashem tells Yehoshua, "**Vehagita bo yomam valayla**" - Torah has to become part of our lives, day and night.

So before Rosh Hashanah, ask yourself: **How much did I sacrifice for Torah this year?** How much time did I give? How much effort did I give? How much did I support Torah? How much did I personally sit and learn?

Sometimes we don't realize how much we've accomplished. Imagine learning just ten minutes a day for 200 days. That's 2,000 minutes - more than 33 hours of Torah. Ten minutes doesn't sound like much, but ten minutes after ten minutes, day after day, becomes hours and hours of Torah. That is the power of consistency.

Kavata Itim LaTorah - Consistency

The Gemara teaches that one of the questions a person is asked is: "Kavata itim laTorah?" - Did you establish fixed times for Torah?

Notice the question. It's not only: How much Torah did you learn? It's: Did Torah have a fixed place in your life? Was there a time that belonged to Torah, a time that wasn't moved every time something else came up?

Maybe your kabbalah doesn't have to be enormous. Maybe it's five extra minutes a day. Maybe it's one additional shiur a week. Maybe it's listening to Torah in the car instead of wasting those ten minutes.

Maybe it's opening a sefer for a few minutes before going to sleep.

But make something kavua. And don't only focus on quantity. Focus on quality. It's better to spend ten focused minutes understanding something and walking away with one idea that changes you than to spend much longer learning without taking anything with you.

Ask yourself after learning: **What's the one thing I'm taking from this?**

Recognizing What Hashem Gave Us

Preparing for Rosh Hashanah isn't only about looking at what we gave Hashem. It's also about recognizing what Hashem gave us.

Think about this past year. How much parnasah did Hashem give you? How many mornings did you wake up? How many times were you able to walk into shul, speak, see, hear, spend time with your family, learn Torah and pray?

We experience so many miracles that we stop calling them miracles.

I remember when my wife was expecting our first child. I went with her to the appointments, and at one point the doctors started going through their long list of medical questions: "Do you have this condition?" "No, Baruch Hashem." "Any heart problems?" "No, Baruch Hashem." "Kidney problems?" "No, Baruch Hashem." Again and again.

As I sat there listening, I became emotional. Suddenly I realized: **Look how many things have to go right just for us to call ourselves healthy.**

We wake up in the morning and say, "Everything is normal." But "normal" itself is a tremendous miracle. Every day Hashem gives us our health again, another day of life, another day with our family, another opportunity to pray, learn and become better.

How much hakarat hatov do we owe Hashem?

Don't Say, "I'm Good the Way I Am"

One of the most dangerous things a person can say is: "I'm good the way I am."

Of course, we should recognize the good we've accomplished. But a Jew can never decide: This is where I'm stopping. If I'm alive, I can grow. If Hashem gave me another year, there is another level for me to reach.

Maybe this year I learned ten minutes a day. Can next year become fifteen? Maybe I went to one shiur a week. Can I add another one? Maybe I was good with my family. Can I become more patient? Can I improve my tefillah, my middot, or my shemirat halashon?

Every person knows the area where Hashem is asking him: Take one more step.

And again, the Torah tells us: It's not in heaven. It's not across the ocean. Ki karov elecha hadavar me'od - it's right in front of you.

Rosh Hashanah Is the Rosh

Rosh Hashanah is not simply the first day of another year. It is the Rosh HaShanah - the head of the year.

The head directs the entire body. In the same way, the Rosh Hashanah that we create can set the direction for the entire year that follows.

That's why we should try to start the year strong. Don't begin Rosh Hashanah with laziness. Don't make the first statement of your year, "I'll get there when I get there." Show Hashem: This year matters to me.

Get up. Go to tefillah. Pray seriously. Learn some Torah. Spend meaningful time with your family. Think about what you want from the coming year. And most importantly, decide who you want to become.

One Kabbalah

I think each of us should enter Rosh Hashanah with one real kabbalah.

Not ten things that will disappear after a week. One thing. Something small enough that you can actually keep it, but meaningful enough that it will actually change you.

Five more minutes of Torah. One additional shiur. A fixed seder that you don't miss. More concentration during tefillah. More patience at home. More care with your speech. Something.

Imagine next Rosh Hashanah looking back and saying: "I remember the Rosh Hashanah when I accepted this upon myself - and I kept it."

Small changes, when they're consistent, become enormous changes.

"I'm Ready"

That's the mindset I want us to enter Rosh Hashanah with:

Hashem, I'm ready.

I'm ready to grow. I'm ready to change. I'm ready to learn more. I'm ready to become closer to You.

I'm grateful for everything You gave me this past year, and I want to use what You've given me better in the coming year.

I'm not going to tell myself that growth is too difficult.
I'm not going to tell myself it's for somebody else.
Because ki karov elecha hadavar me'od - it's close. We
just have to decide to do it.

Bezrat Hashem, if we enter Rosh Hashanah with
gratitude for the past, honesty about where we are

today, and a real desire to grow tomorrow, Hashem
should see that desire and help us take the next step.

**May Hashem bless all of us and our families with
a Shanah Tovah U'Mevorachet - a year of health,
parnasah, happiness, Torah, growth, and closeness
to Hashem.**

Ketivah V'Chatimah Tovah.

Malkhuyot, Zikhronot, Shofarot: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

Yaakob Bitton

"Prince Ali, fabulous he, Ali Ababwa..."

Disney sure knew how to make catchy songs and spectacular scenes. To the backdrop of the deep, but melodic, voice of the inimitable Robin Williams (the Genie), Aladdin made his entry into Agrabah as ridiculous as he could. Drums, trumpets, dancers, camels, servants, exotic animals, all combining in an extravaganza to be noticed. And the Disney classic was making a very clever point: all this noise announcing Prince Ali was meant to hide the fact that he was no prince at all. A true prince would not need so much pomp.

The *Gemara* (Berakhot 58a) tells of a similar, but very different, story. The small village *Shillehi*, on the shore of the Tigris River, was overcome with enthusiasm. The king of Persia was about to visit the little town! One can only imagine the sense of anticipation and excitement. When the special day arrived, all residents lined up on the sides of the road to be able to witness the king. The great *Ray Sheshat*, who was blind, also went with the rest of the crowd. A heretic saw the old, blind rabbi waiting for the king and decided to mock him: "Whole jugs go down to the river to be filled. What is a broken jug doing there?" The "broken" jug would be *Ray Sheshat*, the blind man whose non-working eyes would not let him get a "fill" from the experience everyone else was about to have. *Ray Sheshat* told the heretic: "You will see; I can know much better than you what's going on."

The first troop passes. Trumpets, shouting, thunder. The heretic says: "The king is coming." *Ray Sheshat* says: "The king is not coming yet."

The second troop passes. Even louder. Even grander. The heretic says, "Now the king is surely coming." *Ray Sheshat* says: "The king is not coming yet."

Then a third wave passes—and everything goes quiet. Not a sound. And *Ray Sheshat* says: "Now the king is coming." And he was right. The king had arrived.



The heretic was stunned. "How could you possibly know?"

Ray Sheshat had learned from *Eliyahu haNavi*. As *Eliyahu* stood on the mountain, waiting for God, a wind came, strong enough to split mountains and shatter rocks—*Lo VaRuah Hashem* (לא ברוח ה'). God was not in the wind. Then an earthquake—God was not in the earthquake. Then fire—God was not in the fire. And then, after the fire, *Qol Demama Daqqa* (קול דממה דקה): the sharp sound of silence. That's when *Eliyahu* finally hears God's message. (*Melachim I* 12–19:11.)

Rosh haShana commemorates the creation of *Adam haRishon*: the first intelligent creature. The progenitor of a class of beings, *Bene Adam*, whose most important quality is the ability to operate through language. Each of us has an LLM in our brain. I cannot go inside the mind of another person and understand exactly what he

is feeling, sensing, or thinking; and yet, language permits him to convert those inner experiences into a sound (or writing) that I can then pick up from the air (or a piece of paper) and translate into an experience in my own mind; and this can start an entire process of communication between that person and me.

Language is what permits us to bridge our respective personal experiences in a comprehensible way. Language can help us expand our wisdom. With language, we can accumulate learning. It is language that permits us to condense observations and package them in little bricks that build on each other and create the structure of civilization. Without speech, we would not be human. God gave *Adam* a kind of life that the *Targum* described as *Ruah Memallela* (רוח ממללא)—we are a form of life that can speak.

But speech is limited. Not only is it *limited*; it is *limiting*. Language opens doors to certain realities, but also closes doors to other realities lying beyond. It illuminates, and obscures. There are areas of life that we cannot access just through words. There are experiences that escape articulation. There are concepts that, the more one wants to talk about them, the harder they become to grasp. Like *Ray Sheshat* noted, there are things that lie beyond articulation, for which speech is inadequate.

Naturally, when facing one of those moments when we realize language is insufficient, we resort to quiet. For example, when *Moshe* makes a comment to *Aharon* about *Aharon's* two dead boys, *Aharon* responds with silence: *VaYiddom Aharon*. (*Vayiqra* 10:3.) We also say in *Tehillim* (65:2) that, instead of trying to describe God with imperfect terms, which could be even offensive, we praise Him through silence: *Lekha, Dumiya Tebilla!* (לך דומיה תהלה). "To You, silence is praise."

When it is clear that language will be flawed, silence becomes the infinitely superior choice.

But is silence simply an acknowledgment of the inadequacies of speech, or is it an invitation to a higher mode of perception that is inaccessible through speech alone?

Is it even possible to access a reality that lies beyond the reach of language?

Meet the *Shofar*.

The *Shofar* emits a penetrating but monotonous sound. It is simpler than speech, and cannot possibly encode as much meaning as speech can. But it also functions

as a calling. And for it to be recognized as a calling, it needs to be heard by humans who have told each other, using words, what the sound of the *Shofar* should mean. It is a non-verbal sound, for verbal creatures.

If silence denotes the limits of speech, the *Shofar* is an invitation to

perceive that which lies beyond speech. In fact, the *Shofar's* most basic message is this: "if you choose to listen further, there is meaning here that words alone cannot express."

In *Tana"kh*, we find that there are three *Shofar* paradigms: the *Shofar* of **Har Sinay**, the *Shofar* of the **Yovel**, and the *Shofar* of **Le'atid Layo**.

At **Har Sinay**, we were made to acknowledge that we are all God's subjects. And we surely used language to get there. We agreed, with words, to become *Mamleket Kobanim veGboy Qadosh* (ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש) in exchange for becoming God's *Seghulla MiKol ha'Ammim* (סגולה מכל העמים). (*Shemot* 19)



But Who is God? What words can we use to describe the reality of our Creator? This is where language absolutely breaks down. Words are insufficient. And words were never able to take us there. When we had to experience the reality of God for a moment, speech was not going to cut it.

And so we all stood by—*VaYityašseyu BeTahtit baHar* (וַיִּתְּצוּ בַתְּחִית הָהָר), and were shocked into silence—*VaYeherad Kol ba'Am Asher BaMaḥane* (וַיִּהְרַד כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה) (אשר במחנה). (*Shemot* 19)

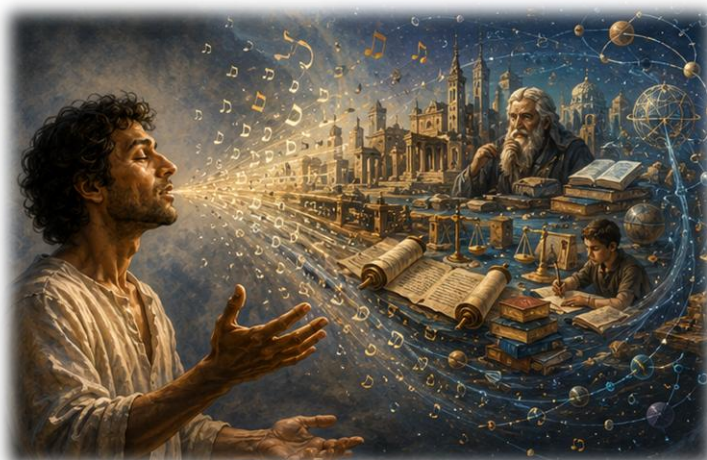
However, far from being the end of the story, that silence was meant to invite a new device. Something that could unlock higher channels of perception for us, and call us to experience a reality beyond speech. It would not be a word. It would be something beyond words. The sound that begins where words reach their limit. We needed *Qol baShofar Holekh veHazeq Meod* (קול השופר הולך וחזק מאד) to open the door to where speech alone could not take us. To invite us to **a post-linguistic reality**.

As a result of listening to the *Shofar* of *Har Sinai*, we were able to experience for a moment the infinite intensity of God's existence.

Second, the **Yovel**. Slavery is much more than chains. It is a state of mind. It is a mode of perceiving reality, and your place within it. It is the inability to feel agency for the direction of your life. An indentured servant who chose to remain enslaved permanently was allowed to do so, but only until the *Yovel*. Now, think of such a person, up to 49 years after starting the state of servitude. A man who has been a slave for 49 years cannot "talk his way" out of a state of slavery. No speeches, no words, can awaken this person from the deep state of unfreedom in which he lies. It would be

impossible to get to freedom through language. It is not about explaining anything. You can't just tell the slave, "Okay, you are free. Go!" It won't cut it. You need a sound that points to something beyond words.

Which is why the slave must hear the *Shofar*. On *Yom haKippurim* of the *Yovel*, there is a *Mišva* to blow the *Shofar* everywhere in *Ereš Yisrael*: *VeHa'ayarta Shofar Teru'a BaHodesh haShevi'i*, *Be'asor LaHodesh*; *BeYom haKippurim Ta'ayiru Shofar BeKhol Arsekbem* (וְהָאֵיִרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרִיעָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשְׂרִי לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים תַּעֲבִירוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּכָל אֲרָצְכֶם). (*Vayigra* 25:9.) It is at this time that anyone who had been a permanent slave is now expected to go back home. The *Shofar* will invite the slave to come beyond a life without autonomy and be receptive to a life of agency, responsibility, and accountability.



Third, **Le'Atid Layo**, the future. Language is great for explaining the past. It is also pretty good at describing the present. But language cannot predict the future. No matter how much one tries, I cannot—based on information I have

today—string words together in a way that tells me exactly what tomorrow will be like. That which is yet to come, *'Atid Layo*, also is esoteric. It is an area that is not accessible through speech.

Where language breaks down, we need a sound inviting us to listen to messages that extend past the reach of language. And, as expected, it is in such situations, when the future is uncertain, that we see the *Shofar* making an appearance in Jewish life. Every time *'Am Israel* is about to open a new chapter of our history, we

blow the *Shofar*. We did so during our first-ever conquest in *Yericho*, we did so more recently when retaking *Yerushalayim* in 1967, and we will do so *LiMot baMashiah*.

When the Jewish People walk into a new chapter of history, when we don't know exactly what the tomorrow we are walking into will look like, we surely have the past to guide us, but we are mostly marching into the unknown. And we can't really explain how we will get there or what this future will look like. Speech breaks down. And so we resort to the *Shofar*. We sound the *Shofar* to express the limits of language, but with an eye toward something beyond language.

In *Musaf* of *Rosh haShana*, we go through this very same pattern.

***Malkhuyot*.** Kingship. We utter *Pesugim*, beautiful *Pesugim*, about God's sovereignty. Anyone can say these words, but can we truly internalize them? Can words alone allow us to seriously comprehend God's kingship?

We stop. We understand that language has its limits. We stop, and we listen to the *Shofar*, hoping it will invite us to a reality beyond words. A reality similar to what we were able to experience at *Har Sinay*.

Malkhuyot are nostalgic. A reminder of a past when the *Shofar* inspired us to our highest perception of the divine. This is the *Shofar* of *Har Sinay*.

***Zikhronot*.** Memory. Human actions, and events in general, are not inconsequential. What happened yesterday didn't just vanish. Actions have consequences. Our choices have consequences. We say that God remembers everything. Another way to say the same is that every action has a consequence that etches its place in history for eternity. Nothing happens in this world that is not recorded. Everything I ever did is inscribed and becomes unerasable. God remembers it. All of it. Forever. And in this section, too, we recite various *Pesugim* about this.

But then, language breaks down. Because if the past has consequences, then is the present a consequence of the past? What does this mean about choice? If God recorded all our past choices, can our next choice be free? Are we, like that slave just before the *Yovel*, conditioned to remain enslaved to our past? Is there room for *Teshuva*? How can I ever change, if God remembers forever every little decision I ever took? It is etched in history, and unerasable, is it not?

Human autonomy is one of those realities that one cannot reach by words alone. It lies beyond the boundaries of what speech can express. We cannot understand it, let alone explain it. And so we mention *Zikhronot*. And then we stop. And listen to the sound of the *Shofar*.



This is the *Shofar* of the present. The one that should hopefully inspire us to look beyond *Zikbronot*. Beyond all that language that suggests to us nothing can be erased. Maybe some things can be erased. The sound of this *Shofar* invites us to tap into that inner power of free will. A power that we must marshal so our next choice is a free one. It is the calling of '*Aseret Yeme Tesbuva*. It is the *Shofar* of the *Yovel*. And also the *Shofar* of *Rosh haShana*.

***Shofarot*.** Finally, we remind ourselves that our nation has always used the *Shofar* before venturing into the unknown. We have carried the *Shofar* into battle, and through victory. The sound of the *Shofar*—the mystery of an unknowable future—is what terrified our enemies, like the inhabitants of *Yericho*, while at the same time giving '*Am Israel* hope. It's what reassured us that, although we can't quite explain it, there is a reality beyond the one that we can describe with and access through our words.

Yesha'yahu (27:13) tells of a great *Shofar* that will be sounded

BaYom Hahu: VeHaya BaYom Hahu Yitga' BeShofar Gadol (וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְקַע בַּשּׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל). *Le'atid Lavo*. We can talk and talk about the future. But all we would be doing is extrapolating the present. There is continuity. There is a future. Actually, not one future. Multiple possible futures. They are all possible. Because we have choice. Because God has choice. Futures. Plural *Shofarot*.

Aharit baYamim, and the future in general, defies speech. '*Ayin Lo Ra'ata Elohim Zulatekha, Ya'ase Limhakke Lo* (עֵין לֹא רָאִתָּה אֱלֹהִים זֹולַתְךָ יַעֲשֶׂה לְמַחֲכָה לּוֹ). (*Yesha'yahu* 64:3)

The future is not merely an extension of the present. There is always an element of novelty, a little something that God conjures *ex nihilo* (יִשְׁמַע), in every new chapter.



This is the *Shofar* of the *Mashiah*. It is the *Shofar* we carry with us in moments of historical uncertainty. It is the *Shofar* of the future. Or rather, the many *Shofarot* we carry with us to manifest one of the infinite number of possible futures.

A Good Year - and a Sweet One

Doron Hakimian

On Rosh Hashanah, we read one of the most dramatic stories in the Torah: **Akedat Yitzchak**.

Avraham is commanded to bring his beloved son Yitzchak as an offering. At the final moment, Hashem stops him, and a ram is sacrificed in Yitzchak's place. The story ends on a triumphant note, with Hashem blessing Avraham:

"And through your children shall be blessed all the nations of the world, because you hearkened to My voice."

It seems like the perfect ending.

But the Torah does not stop there.

Immediately afterward, Avraham is told that his brother Nachor has been blessed with child after child. The Torah even lists their names.

Why do we need this information? And why immediately after the Akedah?

Perhaps because hidden in this strange ending is one of the great lessons of Rosh Hashanah.

Rosh Hashanah is not simply two days of asking Hashem for what we want in the coming year. The word we repeat again and again in our prayers is **Melech - King**.

On Rosh Hashanah, we crown Hashem as King and remind ourselves that He runs the world.

Why does someone who tries so hard sometimes struggle, while someone else seems to receive everything so easily?

But Avraham does not complain. He does not compare. He does not question his relationship with Hashem because of someone else's blessings.

In effect, Avraham says: **Good for Nachor. His blessing does not diminish mine, and my struggle does not mean Hashem has forgotten me.**

But believing that Hashem is King means more than believing He created the universe. It means believing **He is still involved in it, and involved in us.**

The same Hashem Who directs the great events of history is involved in the smallest details of our lives: the person we unexpectedly meet, the opportunity that appears, the door that closes, even the ordinary events we might call coincidence.

And there is a more difficult part of emunah: the Hashem Who gives us the blessings we easily recognize is the same Hashem Who is present during the moments we struggle to understand.

Now imagine Avraham returning from the Akedah.

He waited decades for Yitzchak. He followed Hashem throughout his life. He left his homeland when commanded. He devoted himself to kindness. And now he had just endured the greatest test imaginable.

Then someone tells him: **"Did you hear about your brother Nachor?"**

Nachor had not lived Avraham's life of sacrifice or endured his tests. Yet Nachor was building a large family, seemingly with ease.

Avraham could have asked the question we sometimes ask ourselves:

Perhaps that is exactly why we read this on Rosh Hashanah.

We enter the new year praying for health, happiness, parnassah, children, success and peace. But we also acknowledge that we do not always understand why life unfolds as it does.

Eemunah does not mean we understand everything Hashem does. It means trusting that **our inability to understand His plan does not mean there is no plan.**

And perhaps that explains why we wish one another:

Shana Tova U'Metuka - a good and sweet year.

Why both? If it is good, is that not enough?

Imagine a doctor gives you medicine and says, "This medicine is good for you. It will heal you, but it may come with headaches, nausea and discomfort."

Then he says, "I have another medicine that will accomplish the same good, but without those painful side effects."

Of course we would say: **Give me that one!**

That is what we ask Hashem.

We believe that what He does is ultimately for our good. But on Rosh Hashanah we say:

Hashem, this year, please do not only make it good. Make it sweet.

Give us blessings whose goodness we can see and feel. Give us health, happiness, parnassah, nachat and peace without having to ask, "Why did it have to happen this way?"

Avraham teaches us to have emunah even when we do not understand.

But we are still allowed to pray that this year **we will not need that kind of test.**

As we hear the shofar, the ram's horn that takes us back to the Akedah, may we strengthen our faith that Hashem is King, that He is present in every part of our lives, and that He never forgets us.

And may He bless all of us not simply with a year that is ultimately good, but with goodness we can recognize and enjoy from the very beginning.

A Shana Tova U'Metuka - a year that is good, and a year that tastes sweet.

Are These Days Really About Teshuva?

Rabbi Eliyahu Ebrani

When you ask people what the theme of this time of year – Elul, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur - is you'll commonly hear answers like 'Teshuva to Ha-Shem,' 'Connecting with Ha-Shem,' 'Coming Close to Ha-Shem.' And when you look at the content of our Tefillot this time of year, you'll find a lot to support that claim. **So we're now in a time of returning to Ha-Shem, right?**

Wrong.

Or at least, partly. Because the Mishnah teaches (Yoma 8.9)

עֲבֻרוֹת שֶׁבֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבֶר, אֵין יוֹם הַכַּפֻּרִים מְכַפֵּר, עַד
שֶׁיִּרְצֶה אֶת חֵבֶר

"Sins between one person and another, Yom Kippur does not provide forgiveness until you appease the other person"

This time of year isn't simply about connecting with Ha-Shem, because there's much more here, a human element. A big part of these days seems to involve other people. According to the Mishnah, even if a person does everything right from Elul until Yom Kippur - getting up early for Selichot, hearing Shofar, fasting on Yom Kippur – these days are ineffective if there's a sin they've committed against another person that hasn't been forgiven. When we define these days as simply days of Teshuva and coming close to Ha-Shem, we're missing a big part of the picture.

So what are these days about then? I'd like to suggest we reframe this time of year as a time of reconnection, with Ha-Shem (obviously) but also with other people. A time to amend relations, come closer, both to Ha-Shem and to the people in our lives.

There's a story I heard that can help us here¹. A struggling zoo's star attraction, the monkey, dies overnight. The next morning, the zoo owner calls in Steve, the monkey's zookeeper.

"Steve, we can't afford a new monkey, and without one, we can't afford you either. But here's an offer: put on a monkey costume, sit in the monkey exhibit, and nobody will know the difference."

Steve agrees, and every day, from 9 to 5, he puts on the monkey suit and hangs around the monkey cage. Nobody could even tell he's the monkey.

Months go by, and then one day while Steve is acting like a monkey, he slips. He tumbles and lands in the lion's cave. As the lion slowly approaches, Steve starts yelling, afraid of being eaten alive. The lion is getting closer and closer, and when it gets face to face with Steve wearing the monkey costume, Steve hears the lion whisper "Quiet Steve! If you don't stop yelling you're going to blow *both* of our covers"

I like this story because I think it can help shape our perspective around this time of year. Throughout the year, we can get into so much trouble in our interactions with others. We put up our egos and defenses and can get into messy fights because of then. And in the heat of those fights, we'll unfortunately run into so many sins - Lashon Hara, Jealousy, Machloket and so much more. Sometimes what we really need is to 'take off our costumes' and realize that beneath all the ego, beneath the show that we put on for the world, there's a pure and holy soul that Ha-Shem has given us, and that soul is kindhearted. That soul can put aside jealousy and Machloket, the soul can forgive what was done to us. Like we say in the daily Tefilla **אֱלֹהֵי נִשְׁמָה שְׁנַתָּה בִּי טְהוֹרָה** "My G-d, the soul you have given me is pure." And the same way we have a Holy Soul, others do too. Look beneath the surface, and the people around us, even the ones we might disagree with, are deep down just like us. With that mentality it becomes easier to make amends and forgive.

The other week I was walking inside Hmart when someone bumps into me. He quickly apologizes, then,

¹ 'Attached', Rabbi Yaakov Danishefsky, page 50

seeing my Kippah, says "There's kosher stuff here?", "Yes, all these are kosher" I say, pointing to a row of kosher sauces. Then he says, almost apologizing, "I know I should keep kosher more" and walks away. I wondered what was going on in his head. Is it possible that we sometimes convince ourselves that something Jewish or religious is just 'not for us'? Maybe, much the same way we relate to others, we're guilty of putting up our defenses towards Ha-Shem. We let ourselves believe that religion is not for us, that G-d doesn't care about us, and we put distance between us and Him. Here, too, what we need is to remember that all of this is like a costume we put on. G-d cares about each and every one of us, about everything we do, big or small – otherwise we wouldn't be here. What we need this time of year more than anytime is a reminder that we're all G-d's beloved children, to put down our excuses, defenses, our 'monkey costumes' and allow ourselves to draw closer in Teshuva.

There's an interesting connection some make between Yom Kippur and Purim, noting that the words כְּפֻרִים and פֻּרִים are very similar, and the name of Yom Kippur could be read to mean "a day like Purim". On Purim we're reminded that there's more to things than meets

the eye – we wear costumes and masks to remember the Purim story. A story in which the main character, Esther, hides her true identity from others, and a story where Ha-Shem too operates in a hidden, behind-the-scenes fashion. Maybe the connection here is that Yom Kippur too is like Purim, in which we need to remember our true identity is much more than meets the eye. That we ourselves are capable of much more than we give ourselves credit for, and when it comes to others we need to likewise remember that deep down others have a G-d given soul too.

What comes out of this is a slightly adjusted perspective on this time of year. It's a time for connecting, for recognizing the holy soul that we've all been given, and being reminded that the things we get caught up with are not what truly define us. It's a time to reconnect with Ha-Shem, with others, and with our true selves. A time to stop looking at externals, to reconnect to our true essences, to forgive and to grow. May we use this time of year in the best way, and be blessed with a year full of goodness, blessings, and happiness.

The King is in The Field

Jeremy Gorjian

There is a very popular saying associated with the month of Elul, and especially as we get closer to the Yamim Noraim: “המלך בשדה” — “The King is in the field.”

We hear this phrase all the time, but what does it really mean? What is the deeper message behind the idea that “the King is in the field”?

There is a beautiful parable I once heard that helped me understand the true meaning of this concept.

Imagine having the opportunity to meet the President of the United States. It would probably begin with a background check. Then would come a screening process, followed by a pre-meeting to understand the purpose and intentions of the visit. Finally, after weeks of preparation, the day of the meeting arrives.

You wake up early in the morning and make your way to the White House. You go through security, another round of screening, and perhaps several more interviews before finally being escorted into the Oval Office.

After weeks of waiting, preparation, and security checks, the moment has finally arrived. You walk into the Oval Office and are greeted by the President. You speak for a few minutes, the meeting comes to an end, and you walk out feeling an incredible high: “I just had a meeting with the President of the United States.”

Elul, and especially Yom Kippur, is the complete opposite. There are no security checks. No background checks. No screening process. No appointment that needs to be approved.

Hashem is coming out of His “Oval Office” to greet us.

All we need to do is show up and take advantage of the opportunity we have been given.

It is an opportunity to speak to Hashem, to connect with Him, and to strengthen and regain our faith in Him.

The goal is not to set unrealistic expectations or to think that we need to completely transform ourselves overnight.

The goal is simply to open up. To connect. To embrace our relationship with Hashem.

One step at a time. One prayer at a time. One moment at a time.

Yom Kippur should not feel like just another ritual of fasting and long prayers. It is a day of opportunity.

A day where we are given the chance to connect with our Creator in the highest way possible. The gates are open. The heavens are accepting. And the opportunity is in our hands.

I often think back to my year in Yeshiva, and especially to the end of Yom Kippur. After an entire day of fasting and davening, my Rebbe once grabbed our hands and began dancing with us.

Of course, I had to ask, “What’s going on?”

After hours of fasting, praying, and being so exhausted, how could we possibly be dancing and singing with so much energy?

He answered with something I will never forget:

“We were just granted an entire day of opportunity to connect on the highest level with our Creator. How can we not be celebrating?”

That is what Yom Kippur can be. Not just a day of fasting. Not just a day of prayer.

But a day where the King comes out to the field to meet us.

A day where Hashem is waiting for us to simply show up, open our hearts, and connect.

May we all have a meaningful, spiritual, uplifting, and truly connecting Yom Kippur.

The Gift of Rosh HaShana

Ziv Livian

The Gemara says: **"Who is considered a fool? One who loses everything he was given (Chagiga 4a)."**

And we can ask: **Is this the definition of a fool?**

What if he didn't lose everything he was given? Let's say that someone gave him a large sum of money, one million dollars, to watch over. The next day, he sees that **he carelessly lost almost all of it**, except for one dollar.

Does that mean that he is not considered a fool, because he didn't lose that one dollar?

Only a person who loses absolutely everything is considered a fool?

What is the Gemara trying to tell us?

I heard a beautiful idea from Rabbi Amiram, from 'Mishkan HaKohanim' in Tel Aviv.

The rabbi explains that **Rosh Hashanah is an incredible day**, because it is the day that determines our blessings and abundance for the entire year.

It is possible that every day next year, one will work very, very hard, **pray very hard for something**, but on Rosh Hashanah it was already decreed that he cannot receive

this. So no matter what he will do, **he will not receive it.**

Rosh Hashanah is when it is decided in Shamayim what you will and will not have for the entire year.

So when the Gemara tells us, **"Who is a fool? He who loses everything he was given,"** it's referring to the day of Rosh Hashanah.

That's the day that's going to determine everything we will have in the upcoming year.

And therefore, **it would be foolish of us to waste this day.**

A wise Jew is one who, on this day that determines the entire year ahead of him, will focus on prayer—praying for his family and children, praying for his health, praying for Parnassah, praying for closeness to Hashem, praying for our soldiers, and praying for anything else that he wishes for himself and for Am Yisrael.

Hopefully, Hashem will accept our prayers and bless us all with a beautiful year, filled with success in all aspects of our lives.

Shana Tova.

Direction, Not Perfection

Jared Rahमान

Every year during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* (the Ten Days of Repentance), some of us may feel an overwhelming sense of dread or heaviness. We focus on our shortcomings; we may learn *Shulchan Aruch* and begin to think about all the halachot we are not keeping properly, and wonder how on earth we are expected to completely transform our lives in just ten short days.

I recently came across an incredible story in the *sefer* Secrets of the Soul: Volume One (Self-Awareness and Dealing with Challenges), which records conversations with Rav Shlomo Hoffman ז"ל, compiled by Rabbi Meir Simcha Stein. In one shiur on *teshuvah*, Rav Hoffman recounts walking through the hallways of the Chevron Yeshiva in 1938 looking visibly cold and serious. The Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yechezkel Sarna ז"ל, stopped him and asked why he looked so sad. Rav Hoffman replied that he was terrified: the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 1:3) writes that true *teshuvah* requires reaching a level where Hashem Himself can testify that the sinner will never repeat the mistake. "Who can ever achieve that level?" Rav Hoffman asked.

Rav Yechezkel rebuked him: "Why are you following only the most stringent opinion? Rabbeinu Yonah says in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:2) that *teshuvah* means 'standing on the right path' (*omed b'derech yesharah*). When the Gemara states that Yom Kippur atones for those who repent, it does not refer only to those who have already arrived at the final destination; it refers to those who are on the right path". To explain what this means, Rav Sarna cited a *mashal* (parable) passed down through the Alter of Slobodka from the founder of the Mussar movement, Rav Yisrael Salanter (from *Ohr Yisrael*, Ma'amar 30):

A traveler set out from Yerushalayim toward Bnei Brak, a journey of about an hour. Two hours later, completely lost, he stopped to ask a passerby for directions, only to be told he was deep in the Negev desert near the Ramon Crater, now three hours away from Bnei Brak! "How can that be?" he cried. "I was only an hour away when I started!" The passerby replied, "You took a wrong turn and drove the

wrong way. All you need to do now is turn your car around and start driving back toward your destination."

Herein lies the essential *chiddush*: Even though the traveler is now geographically farther from his destination than when he started, he is in an infinitely better position the moment he turns around. As long as he faced the wrong way, he would never arrive; once he is pointed in the correct direction, it is only a matter of time before he reaches his goal.

Rav Yisrael Salanter highlights this from the *dikduk* (precise grammar) of the Gemara (*Shevuos* 13a; *Niddah* 70b), which states that Yom Kippur atones for those who are *shavim* / *osin teshuvah*; in the continuous, active process of returning, not merely *shavu* / *asu*, those who have already completed the journey.

Human nature craves overnight transformations, but our *middot* and habits do not change in an instant. If someone resolves to stop speaking *lashon ha'ra*, they cannot expect to change their speech habits overnight; but if they commit to learning the *Chofetz Chaim's* *Shemiras HaLashon* daily, they are actively standing on the right path. As the *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar HaTeshuvah*, ch. 2) notes, the foundational step of *teshuvah* is simply recognizing our shortcomings with honesty, without rationalizing or making excuses (*much'shar l'teshuvah*).

The *avodah* we should focus our efforts on during these ten days is not changing ourselves completely, but rather making an honest *chesbbon hanefesh* (self-calculation) of what areas we have room to improve in, and to formulate a plan for the upcoming year on how to bring ourselves closer to our goals of self-refinement.

Hashem does not demand that we finish the entire journey of *teshuvah* in ten days, or even ten years. It is the work of a lifetime. What Hashem asks of us during these holy days is simply to turn the wheel, align ourselves with the right path, and start moving forward.

Bezrat Hashem, we should all be *zochet* to turn ourselves
in the right direction, and may we be written and sealed
in The Book of Life this year!

Shana v'Chatima Tov

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