Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

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This edition is dedicated in loving memory of Ricky and Sonia Shaw
ראובן מתתיהו בן אליקים גצל • ز"ש • שושנה בת קלמן • ז"ש
beloved parents of Rabbi Andrew Shaw, Chief Executive of Mizrachi UK
Head

It is fascinating that the Hebrew for our New Year is Rosh Hashanah – the Head of the Year – and not the more obvious term Reishit HaShanah, which means the beginning of the year. So why did our Sages pick this term – the head – to define the first festival of the year?

It seems that the head and mind are the keys to understanding the essence of the day.

On the anniversary of Creation, we aim to envision and recreate in our minds the ideal world we would like to live in and the ideal role we would like to play in it.

It’s a time of deep cognitive reflection. We examine our spiritual and mental paradigms, thought processes and mindset as we address the salient issues of life in preparation for the year ahead. It’s a time for big picture mind mapping rather than meddling in minutiae.

There is no focus on individual actions nor any mention of sin – not one single confession – throughout the lengthy prayer service. We dare not get lost in the details lest we fail to distinguish the woods from the trees. It’s not a time ‘to be rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic,’ but rather to ensure that we are heading in the right direction. The shofar is the instrument of the day and the echo of Jewish history calling us to recalibrate our moral course and reset our spiritual compass.

Rosh Hashanah is an intense exercise in systematic and strategic spiritual thinking.

Heart

Yom Kippur is all about Service of the Heart – Avodat HaLev.

The ideal exists in our head, whereas actual change happens through the heart. Our inner will – our ratzon – is the engine of personal transformation. Yom Kippur is a day that rotates around the axis of will, want and desire. It demands a detailed spiritual makeover to align our will with the Divine Will in every area of life. That is why vidui – personal

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confession – is the essence of the day. We strike our chest and heart dozens of times, acknowledging where we have deviated and expressing our deepest desire to return to the right path.

Where there is a will, there is always a way back.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; head and heart, ideal and real, macro-thinking and micro-planning, intertwine to give us unparalleled days of spiritual inspiration.

Soul

Nevertheless, despite these spiritual peaks, something is sorely missing from this religious equation: simcha – happiness and joy. Simcha is the true soul of Judaism, for at its core it is not only a religion but a celebration of religious life.3

The Yamim Noraim are truly Days of Awe. Throughout the 10 Days of Repentance the theme of judgment, of “who will live and who will die,” creates an inescapable mood of sobriety, an undertone of fear and trepidation.

Furthermore, in our plea for atonement on Yom Kippur, we have ‘afflicted’ ourselves by refraining from the basic normative life pleasures. In our quest for forgiveness and purity, we have necessarily but unnaturally detached ourselves from the fullness of life. This tense and intense time has taken its toll.

And this is the reason why – explains Rav Kook4 – Sukkot comes immediately after Yom Kippur. We are in desperate need of an injection of joy to reinstate the vigor and vibrancy of life.

Spiritual life had become imbalanced through the uplifting yet energy-depleting motif of judgment, fear and fasting.

Sukkot restores the balance through a love of life, a celebration of mitzvot, with the festival’s unmatched ambience of joy, joie de vivre and rejoicing in G-d’s presence.5

It seems to me that this message is particularly relevant for Tishrei 5781. This New Year brings with it a deep sense of vulnerability during these unusual and unpredictable Corona times. None of us quite knows just how long it will continue – whether it will end soon, which we all pray for, or whether it will be the ‘new normal’ for the year ahead.

One thing is clear – we need to dig deep and engage these times with the holistic spiritual paradigm of Head, Heart and Soul.

Therefore, if we look at the festivals of the month as one unit, they encompass the complete religious experience in preparing for the coming year.

They express the aspiration for a holy life as a wholesome spiritual endeavor – a harmonious synergy of both body and soul. Intertwining love and fear, separation and integration, solemnity and celebration, they give us the ultimate blueprint to face the year ahead.

A healthy, happy and sweet year for one and all!

1 Reishit is the obvious word as it is not only the first word in the Torah – BeReishit – but it is also mentioned in Devarim (11:12) as ‘the beginning of the year’ – Reishit HaShana. Additionally, it is from this verse that the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 17b) learns the concept of judgment at the beginning of the year impacting the rest of the year, which forms the Biblical basis for Rosh Hashanah being a Day of Judgement. Nevertheless, our Sages chose Rosh Hashanah as the name of the day and hence the name of the Tractate and the universally used name of the festival.

2 Our Sages define prayer as Avodat HaLev – service of the heart (Ta’anit 2a, Rambam, Hilchet Tefillah 1:1.) Yom Kippur is a unique day of intense prayer encompassing five distinct prayer services.

3 The verse explicitly states that the root cause of the terrible curses mentioned in Parashat Ki Tavo is serving G-d without happiness and joy – “since you did not serve the L-rd your G-d with happiness (simcha) and with gladness of heart...” (Devarim 28:47). It is clear that scrupulous observance of Torah and mitzvot devoid of simcha is not a religious life but rather a spiritual curse.

4 Orot HaTeshuva 9:10.

5 The imperative of simcha on Sukkot is mentioned three times in the Torah, more than any other festival. One famous expression of this is stated in the Mishna (Sukkot 5:1), “That one who has not seen the simcha of the water-drawing ceremony (which took place every evening on the intermediary days of the festival) has not seen simcha in his life.” Moreover, Shemini Atzeret is the pinnacle of the simcha of Sukkot and is solely dedicated to happiness, simply rejoicing in G-d’s intimate presence without need of any command or action; neither Sukkah nor species, as the Talmud learns (Sukkah 48a) from the verse “and only be happy.” It is, therefore, no surprise that our Sages later instituted Simchat Torah on this festival (on the same day in Israel) as an expression of our joy at our very connection to Torah.

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Rosh Hashanah
How We Get Hashem to Remember

The Malchuyot Focus

The Torah tells us two things about Rosh Hashanah — that it is a day of terua (horn blowing) and that its goal is zikaron (memory). These two words are the basis for the beracha of zichronot and shofarot.

Two questions need to be asked. The first is the relationship between the two — terua and zikaron. The second is about the third beracha — malchuyot — that we not only add, but actually begin with, and emphasize throughout our Rosh Hashanah and Aseret Yemei Teshuva liturgy.

Why do we focus on malchuyot — the one beracha not mentioned (explicitly) by the Torah in reference to Rosh Hashanah?

Zikaron — Who Needs Reminding?

The answer lies in understanding who zikaron aims to remind and how it does so. Rashi and the Rashbam on Vayikra 23:24 explain that zikaron aims to remind Hashem — of us (Rashbam) and of Akeidat Yitzchak (Rashi). This approach is based on the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16a) that explains we use a ram’s horn to remind Hashem of the akeida.

The obvious question is why Hashem needs reminding? This is probably part of the reason why the Rashbam explains zikaron’s goal differently. The Rashbam understands that we are the ones who need reminding — the shofar reminds us of Hashem by waking us from the stupor of our normal routines. Though we know that Hashem created us and therefore our life’s mission should be to serve Him, we are often too busy to reflect and focus our lives on this mission. On Rosh Hashanah — the day Hashem created Man — we blow the shofar to remind us that we are His creations and that we should work to live up to the goals we were created to accomplish.

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 331) uses the Rambam’s explanation to explain the first approach as well. The question is not what Hashem remembers, but what He associates with us (lizkor lachem). When we identify with Akeidat Yitzchak as a model for our religious commitment, Hashem sees us in this same light. Our willingness to sacrifice ourselves for and commit ourselves to Avodat Hashem merits us Hashem’s rachamim (mercy) and His blessings for the continued good life we can use to best serve Him.

Zikaron Hinges on Malchuyot

We can now understand the centrality of malchuyot. The mission we are meant to remember on Rosh Hashanah is rooted in the recognition of Hashem as our King and Creator. The Torah focuses on the goal — zikaron. We focus on the means — malchuyot — which helps us develop and maintain the zikaron mindset.

This approach is summarized by the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16a), which quotes Hashem’s explanation of malchuyot’s goal as ‘for you to accept Me as King’ and then that of zichronot as ‘for your memory to rise positively before Me.’

The Shofar as the Common Facilitator

The Gemara concludes by presenting the shofar as the tool meant to inspire the unique aspects of both malchuyot and zichronot.

First, we use the shofar as a coronation horn. In addition to the general coronation symbolism, our shofar also reminds us of the shofar that proclaimed Hashem’s presence at Har Sinai for Matan Torah. We then use the ram’s shofar to remind us and (through this) Hashem of Akeidat Yitzchak — the symbol of the commitment modeled by our forefathers and ancestors for us to emulate. After the beracha of zichronot, we blow the shofar as part of shofarot, which describe the shofar gadol that will herald the final redemption.

May our sincere and complete kabbalat ol malchut shamayim bring Hashem to view us in a way that merits Him blessing us with an upcoming year of good health, hatzlacha and the Final Redemption.

1. The connection of the shofar to the akeida also appears in the Midrash Rabbah (Bereishit Rabbah 56:10). See also Vayikra Rabbah (29 DH Rebbe Yehoshua) that also sees the shofar as aiming to impact Hashem.
2. Mishneh Torah Teshuva 3:4. See also Yerushalayim (RH 58:4) and the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayishlach 2), which also see the shofar as aiming to impact Man.

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Teshuva in the Wake of Pandemic
Rupture and Repair

As the Yamim Noraim approach, we are enjoined to take advantage of this time and seek out a relationship with Hashem as He is so near (Yeshayahu 55:6). This year in particular, we must undergo personal and national introspection in the wake of a worldwide מגפה (plague or pandemic) that has taken hundreds of thousands of lives. The Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ta’aniot 1:1-2) teaches us that suffering befalls us, we are implored to view it as an indication of our wrongdoings and undergo a process of repentance.

The first time a מגפה strikes Am Yisrael follows the story of the 10 slandering spies, who died in a מגפה. Immediately thereafter, Moshe warns בניא יسرائيل – “who seek to repent” by attempting to engage in battle with the Canaanites and Amalekites as they enter the Land – that they will be unsuccessful in their attempts. Hashem will not accompany them for He has already punished them with 40 years in the wilderness (Bamidbar 14:42). They did not properly display belief in Hashem’s powers of conquest earlier, and therefore they are killed by their enemies.

Perhaps this is the first message we must internalize today: taking advantage of Divinely-destined opportunities to come to Eretz Yisrael. Perhaps we have not properly heeded the miraculous “knocks” to return to Eretz Yisrael. Perhaps a pandemic strikes to remind us to take advantage of “open skies” and a Promised Land before it’s too late.

The second time a מגפה appears is in the aftermath of the Korach rebellion (Bamidbar 17:6-14). Despite the miraculous punishments of Korach and his followers, בניא יسرائيل blame Moshe and Aharon for their deaths, and Hashem warns of immediate punishment. Moshe quickly tells Aharon to take ketoret and atone for the people, saving lives amidst the pandemic that killed 14,700 people. In anticipation of future democratic arguments, Hashem then manifests Aharon’s Divine appointment through the blossoming of his staff – a sign of continued authority.

Our generation has witnessed the waning of leadership in many spheres of government and judiciary. The Torah commands us to ensure that officers of the law are instituted in every community and abide by values of justice and righteousness. Torah leadership as well must be respected in every generation, a phenomenon drastically lacking today in many Jewish communities. Sometimes it takes a pandemic to recognize and respect Torah authorities.

The third and final מגפה in the Torah comes as a punishment for the sin of Ba‘al Pe‘or, when 24,000 men were killed after practicing a promiscuous form of idolatry (Bamidbar 25:1-9). After Hashem rewards Pinchas for ending the pandemic through publicly murdering two of the perpetrators, He commands Moshe to fight against the people of Midian for sending their daughters to seduce בניא יישראל. However, before this commandment is carried out, the Torah teaches us what appear to be unrelated narratives including a national census, the petition of the daughters of Tzelofchad, and the laws of the annulment of vows. The common denominator of all these apparent non-sequiturs is the theme of family.

The national census includes the counting of every individual family, to literally rebuild the family structure that had been destroyed by the sin of Ba‘al Pe‘or. Bnot Tzelofchad come to Moshe to appeal for the perpetuation of their father’s legacy within his family, and fathers/husbands are taught to listen to their daughters and wives in order to annul relevant vows.

The pandemic of Ba‘al Pe‘or and the ensuing repair reminds us of the dangers various cultures pose to the sanctity of our homes. Only once we rebuild our immediate family structure, restore family values and learn to listen to our family members, are we sufficiently edified to battle our surrounding enemies. How relevant in our post-modern society which has redefined marriage, family and simultaneously disposed of their intrinsic sanctity! Teshuva in the wake of pandemic enjoins us to quarantine in our homes with immediate family members and invest in rebuilding our relationships.

In the midst of these days of sensitized introspection, let us take heed of the Torah’s messages of pandemics, and stir our souls and selves to reignite our commitment to Eretz Yisrael, Torah leadership and family values. Together with tefillah and tzedakah, may we merit repair and refuah for this upcoming year!

1 Bamidbar 14:37. Rashi explains that they died through their tongues מנה מנה מנה.
2 See Seforno (Devarim 1:45), HaEmek Davar (Bamidbar 14:40-45).
3 See Rav J.B. Soloveitchik, “Kol Dodi Dofek.”

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Hatarat Nedarim via Zoom?

On Erev Rosh Hashanah, the custom is to annul one’s vows (hatarat nedarim). If people are in quarantine or at-risk, can they do this via Zoom or over the phone?

The Gemara (Nedarim 8b) says a husband can be a shaliach for his wife to annul her vows in front of a Beit Din (in certain conditions).

The Ran writes that in the Tosafot’s opinion, one can appoint an outside shaliach for hatarat nedarim. The chiddush of the Gemara is that even a husband can be a shaliach for his wife, despite the fact he might not present accurate testimony because her vows may have an effect on him too. Hence a stranger can be a shaliach because he has no personal interest in annulling the vow.

The Ran adds that the person who made the vow does not have to be physically in front of the Beit Din. He can send a letter expressing regret for taking the vow and that’s enough for Beit Din to annul it.

The Rashba even says a letter is preferable to sending a shaliach.1

However, the Rambam (Laws of Vows 6:4) rules that another person cannot be a shaliach for hatarat nedarim, but only a husband for his wife, and the Rivash writes (ibid.) that sending a letter has no benefit and hatarat nedarim is only possible in the physical presence of the person making the vow.

Similarly, the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 228:16) rules like the Rambam that the person who made the vow needs to come to the Beit Din, and that a shaliach is not effective. The Taz (se’if katan 20) adds that even annulment by letter is worthless.

In light of the above, it appears we cannot allow hatarat nedarim by Zoom or phone, because the person seeking the annulment is not physically present. Nevertheless, why does that proscribe the use of a shaliach?

There are two ways of understanding this:

A vow could be considered equivalent to a din, a judgement, and just as one needs to judge a person physically in front of a Beit Din, so it should be to annul a vow. However, is a physical presence in the court a written edict or is it just a way to ensure the truth is told, in which case that can be done on Zoom too.2

Using a shaliach may mean it’s impossible to fully clarify the details and why exactly the person wants to annul his vow. According to this opinion, it is certainly permitted to annul vows over the phone or via Zoom, because the Beit Din can see or talk directly to the person.

Practically speaking, ideally, one should annul vows by appearing physically in front of a Beit Din, but in cases like quarantine or hospitalization – or even concern about leaving the house due to corona – one can annul vows via Zoom for the following reasons:

The Pitchei Teshuva writes that many authorities disagree with the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch and allow annulment through a shaliach in certain cases.

It could be that the Shulchan Aruch permits hatarat nedarim in writing (even though he forbids the use of a shaliach), since he doesn’t explicitly state it is forbidden. If so, phone or Zoom can be allowed.

The Rambam may have only forbade the use of a shaliach because of accuracy, but if the Beit Din is able to speak directly to the person, he may allow it.3

It is possible that Zoom – which allows both sides to see and hear one another – is considered equivalent to a physical presence in court (in contrast to tefilla and berachot, when it is not considered as being present).

All this is true for private hatarat nedarim throughout the year, so all the more so on Erev Rosh Hashanah, which is a minhag lechumra, one can rely on these opinions and use Zoom or phone (with of course three people – the Beit Din – on the other end).4

1 Brought in the responsa of the Rivash, siman 370.
2 There is room to be lenient when dealing with testimony of clarification rather than testimony of what or whether something happened or not. See Techumin 34, p. 292.
3 Shevet HaKehati (4:239) writes that for this reason one can be lenient lechatichla and annul vows over the phone.
4 Whether the three judges need to be in one place is another question.

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The Deep Significance of the Shofar

The shofar has a number of uses in Tanach, the most basic of which is as a musical instrument, expressing joy. For example, when bringing the Aron up to Jerusalem, David and the people blow the shofar as part of the great celebration (Shmuel Bet 6:15). Similarly, in Tehillim 150:3: “Praise Him with the blast of the shofar, praise Him with lyre and harp.”

The blowing of the shofar at the beginning of the Jubilee year can also be interpreted as a sound of joy, but its purpose could simply be to proclaim the start of the momentous year. Shofar as announcement appears numerous times, particularly in connection to war, for example, when Gidon calls upon the local residents to gather for war (Shoftim 7:8), or when Shaul blows the shofar after Yonatan kills the Philistine commissioner as a sign for the war to begin (Shmuel Aleph 13:3), and many others.

It appears the function of the shofar was to declare war, to warn, and to cause the people to gather in preparation for war. Indeed, the shofar became so identified with war that it is sometimes mentioned as a synonym for war or the fear that accompanies it: “Is the shofar ever sounded in a city and people do not fear?” (Amos 3:6).

In addition to joy and announcing war, blowing the shofar is also used to mark the coronation of kings (see Melachim Aleph 1 as an example).

At Har Sinai, G-d’s Revelation is prefaced by the blowing of the shofar, and we can deduce that the sound of the shofar here is expressing G-d’s Kingship (Shemot 19:16).

At the time of the conquest of Jericho, the shofar combines both aspects – it’s a war, but it’s a miraculous war, hence the blowing is performed by the Kohanim before the Ark of G-d: “And the seven Kohanim carrying the seven shofars before the Ark of G-d walked on and blew the shofars” (Yehoshua 6:13).

On Rosh Hashanah, we have the opportunity to stop and listen to the sound of the shofar, which arouses our hearts and awakens our internal voice. Indeed, the blasts of the shofar can make us tremble and fearful, like the shofar sounded at the start of a war. It hits us with a powerful sense of what the Day of Judgement is, as we recall our mistakes and failures, feel trepidation for the year ahead and spur ourselves to do teshuva out of Yirat Hashem (the fear of G-d).

On the other hand, at the same time, the sound of the shofar can stir feelings of celebration and joy, like an instrument accompanying festive occasions.

In addition, the shofar on Rosh Hashanah can also express the coronation of G-d as King over the World, and perhaps in that sense it really does integrate the two aspects above: Coronating G-d is a festive and joyous event, yet it also carries an element of duty and responsibility, and may be destructive when human beings are not worthy of it. That’s why many prophets describe the day of G-d as אדוד ואלה – great and full of awe, i.e. our contrasting emotions accompanying the shofar blowing are an expression of the day’s essence – joy and celebration at being so close to G-d, together with the awe, fear and trepidation of standing before Him in judgement.

I think that Ezra and Nechemia taught the people the right balance between these two feelings on this day: “So Ezra the Kohen brought the Torah before the congregation... on the first day of the seventh month [Rosh Hashanah]... and Ezra blessed Hashem, the great G-d... they bowed and prostrated themselves in front of G-d... and they read clearly from G-d’s Torah, applying wisdom... and Nechemia said... ‘Today is holy to the L-rd your G-d. Don’t mourn and don’t cry, for all the people were crying as they heard the words of the Torah. And he said to them, ‘Go eat from the best foods and drink sweet beverages... because the day is holy to our Master and don’t be sad because rejoicing in G-d is your fortress’” (Nechemia 8:2-10).

Ezra and Nechemia taught the people that Rosh Hashanah is a day of holiness, and it is fitting to contemplate one’s Avodat Hashem and mitzvah observance and give an accounting of oneself. On the other hand, one must be wary of slipping into sadness and tears. It is a day of joy, of celebration, “because rejoicing in G-d is your fortress.” That is what gives us the feeling of security and serenity. That is what gives us true joy.

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Standing Alone
Before Hashem

The Mishna towards the beginning of Masechet Rosh Hashanah (1:2) informs us: “On Rosh Hashanah, all the creatures of the world pass before Him (Hashem) like ‘Bnei Maron,’ as it says, ‘He who fashions their hearts together, who understands all their actions.’”

What does it mean that on Rosh Hashanah we all come before Hashem “like Bnei Maron”?

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18a) provides three explanations:

“What is meant by ‘like Bnei Maron’? Here (in Bavel) they translated, ‘like young sheep.’ Resh Lakish said, ‘like the ascent of Beit Maron.’ Rav Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel, ‘like the soldiers of the house of David.’”

Rashi explains each of these opinions: according to the first opinion, we pass before Hashem for judgment like sheep being counted for tithing as they pass through a narrow gate, one at a time. According to Resh Lakish, we pass before Hashem like a line of people climbing the ascent of Beit Maron, where the narrow path between two valleys only allows one person to pass at a time. According to Rav Yehuda in the name of Shmuel, we pass before Hashem like the soldiers of David, who went out to battle single-file.

The common message of these images is that on Rosh Hashanah we stand before Hashem as individuals. We cannot blame others, hide behind general societal decadence, or justify ourselves by pointing out those who achieve less than us. We are each judged in comparison to our own potential and must accept responsibility as individuals.

However, the continuation of the Gemara portrays a very different scene:

“Rabba bar Bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, ‘And they are all scanned in one glance.’ Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said, ‘We can also support this from the Mishna, ‘He who fashions their hearts together, who understands all their actions.’”

According to this, we are judged simultaneously, as one collective unit. This is not meant to contradict the previous sentiment, but to add a further dimension, for Rosh Hashanah presents us with a dual challenge.

On the one hand, we pass before Hashem as individuals. At the same time, like the individual sheep who is an integral member of the flock and the individual soldier who is part of an army and represents his country, we stand before Hashem as part of something greater than ourselves. We cannot divorce our individual destiny from the destiny of our people or the destiny of the world.

The image of coming before Hashem “like Bnei Maron” is particularly poignant this year. At the time of writing this article, it seems unlikely that we will have communal Tefillot in shuls this year, and even if conditions do allow it, we will be extremely limited in numbers and still exclude many individuals who would otherwise have been able to attend.

Rather than focus on what we are missing this year, we must use the opportunity to add meaning to our Rosh Hashanah experience. Though it is not advisable or sustainable as a long-term measure, there can be something deeply meaningful in standing before Hashem as individuals.

This year, we cannot delegate our supplications to the Chazan or treat our prayers like a spectator sport. Away from the “safety in numbers” of communal prayer, we have no choice but to accept responsibility for our own prayer experience as we stand as individuals before Hashem.

We have so much to thank Hashem for. And so much to pray for as well. Imagine being granted a private audience with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on one of her birthdays. This year, each of us can have a private audience with The King of kings on the day of His coronation over the Universe.

Wishing you a year of health, blessing and prosperity.

Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Rabbi Danny Mirvis is the Senior Rabbi at Mizrachi Melbourne.
L’CHAIM TO ALL THE HAPPY MOMENTS

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An aspect of Yom HaKippurim not often addressed is that it seems to have been a minhag in Klal Yisrael to make shidduchim on Yom Kippur, as it states:1

ולא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב מאשר ביום הכפורים ביהו בעדות הנשים...

“There were no more joyous days in Israel than the 15th of Av and Yom HaKippurim because on that day the daughters of Israel would borrow clothes from each other…”

The Mishna then proceeds to describe in detail how the marriages were arranged. The Radak,2 in explaining the celebrations held in Shiloh during the times of the Judges, says it refers to the custom mentioned in Masechet Ta'anit regarding making shidduchim on Yom HaKippurim.

What is the connection between Yom HaKippurim and getting married?

The second luchot were given to Klal Yisrael on Yom HaKippurim. Many commentators see the luchot as a symbol of the kiddushin between Klal Yisrael and HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Chazal say the verse3 המפות דしまう בימים טובים איש ליום simcha is an allusion to “the day of his wedding – this represents Matan Torah.”

Since the giving of the second set of luchot on Yom HaKippurim is also a day of Matan Torah, we see thereby the strong connection between Yom HaKippurim and the institution of marriage. Jewish couples are thus given the message that their lives and households need to be conducted by the dictates of the Torah.

The Michtav M’Eliyahu4 describes the joy one is meant to experience at the conclusion of Yom HaKippurim. We have hopefully been worthy of receiving atonement and absolution due to the power of the day and through our prayers, repentance and charity. At the close of Neilah, many burst into song and dance exactly because of this feeling of happiness. An atmosphere of simcha is certainly conducive to a Jewish marriage.

Doubt causes anguish. Resolving doubt leads to happiness. On Yom Kippur, when the red string tied to the horns of the goat sent to Azazel turned white and when the Kohen Gadol emerged unscathed from the Holy of Holies, Klal Yisrael knew with certainty they had been forgiven of their sins.

There is no greater simcha than resolving doubts – clarity and absolute knowledge on Yom Kippur that we are still beloved by G-d was the background to brides and grooms finding each other.

No other human could be in the Beit HaMikdash when the Kohen Gadol was doing the Avodah. The Holy of Holies is a hidden place. There is a strong component of tzniut, modesty in the Avodah of Yom HaKippurim.

This was a message Chazal wanted couples to have as a foundation in their new lives together, as they build a Bayit Ne’eman BeYisrael.

May the merit of many shidduchim in Klal Yisrael, Limud HaTorah, Devikut with Hashem – brought on by selicha and mechila via Yom Kippur, modesty, and above all simcha – lead to the coming of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, Bimheira BeYameinu, Amen.

1 Masechet Ta’anit 26b. 2 Shoftim 21:19. 3 Shir HaShirim 3:11. 4 Volume 1 page 266. 5 Harerei Kedem 161.
The Powerful Prayer of the Shofar

The shofar has been a symbol of Jewish pride and salvation throughout the ages. Its cry was heard before the Jewish people entered into battle and it will be blown to herald the coming of the Messiah. And who can forget the emotional and hugely meaningful blowing of the shofar by Rav Goren after we liberated Jerusalem and the Western Wall in 1967?

Whilst there are many minhagim (customs) surrounding Rosh Hashanah, the primary mitzvah is the sounding of the shofar. Both in Vayikra and Bamidbar, Rosh Hashanah is described as a day of shofar blowing.

Much has been written about the shofar and what its different blasts represent but there are also many different sources in Chazal that point to the shofar as a form of prayer before the Almighty.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 26a), when discussing which animals’ horns are fit for the making of a shofar, disqualifies that of a cow. The reason is אֵין קָטֵיגוֹר נַעֲשָׂה סָנֵיגוֹר (the accuser cannot become the defender.) Since the shofar pleads our case before the Heavenly Court, it is inappropriate to come from a cow, because that ‘reminds’ G-d of the sin of the Golden Calf and its disastrous consequences.

The Mishna (Rosh Hashanah 26b) discusses the shape of the shofar that should be used on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Tanna Kama (first opinion) holds that we use a straight horn on Rosh Hashanah and a bent or curved one on Yom Kippur.

Rav Yehuda disagrees and holds the reverse. He sees the shape of the shofar representing a person’s posture. During the Day of Judgment, we are supposed to be bent over in prayer asking forgiveness from the Almighty and so the shape of the shofar must represent that.

According to Rabbeinu Tam, the mitzvah of the shofar is one of hearing and not blowing. One who listens but does not blow fulfills his obligation through the halachic principle of שוֹמֵע כְּעוֹנֶה (one who hears is considered as if he heard it himself.) This principle usually only applies in the realm of prayers or blessings.

The question then arises, what type of prayer are we offering before G-d when we blow the shofar? Unlike any other prayer, the shofar has no words to express what we are asking for and no structured paragraphs and texts to help us organize our thoughts. What is the meaning of the shofar’s prayer and what are we trying to express?

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 32b) derives the different sounds of the shofar from the cries of Sisera’s mother at the death of her son. Sisera was a wicked army general who tried to destroy the Jewish people. How can we possibly learn the details of such an important mitzvah from the death of such a wicked person?

Even within a culture and society permeated with evil, there is nothing more natural and pure than the cry of a mother longing for her child. This is why we also read about the Akeida on Rosh Hashanah and Sarah’s cries when she heard about the binding of her son Yitzchak (Vayikra Rabbah 20:2). Whilst Sarah and Sisera’s mother represent very different things, their stories are bound together on Rosh Hashanah, by the natural fear and concern of a mother for her son. A mother’s cry comes from the very depths of her soul.

This might explain why the shofar is a prayer without a sound. We spend most of our year organizing our thoughts and putting them in writing or expressing them during conversation. Nevertheless, there is something destructive, limiting, about having to organize our thoughts. We lose the ability to express how we really feel and what we are really going through. The most authentic messages are lost when we need to translate them into words.

On Rosh Hashanah, we are instructed to blow the shofar and express a prayer on a completely different level. A wordless prayer expressing our deepest feelings and emotions as our lives and the lives of our loved ones hang in the balance.

This is the beauty of the shofar’s prayer. In its merit may we be blessed with a wonderful year ahead.
We are so used to the word “new” but the Torah asks us to stop and contemplate. To truly renew ourselves. What actually becomes “new,” in our world and in ourselves, at this time of year? Our Sages ask us to contemplate three things each day, as if they were new:

1. Torah

One of the most popular words in Devarim, which we read throughout the month of Elul, is יָהָֽיְ - “today.” Again and again, as we read about entering the Land of Israel, we are asked to relate to past events as if they are actually happening to us this very morning, and not 3,000 years ago in the desert. “On this day the L-rd your G-d commands you” (Devarim 26:16). Rashi comments: “Each day, let them (the commandments) be brand new as if you had just been commanded to perform them.”

Elsewhere we read “On this day you have become the L-rd your G-d’s own people” (Devarim 27:9) and Rashi, in the same spirit of perpetual renewal, comments: “Let every day be in your eyes as the very same day you entered into a covenant with Him.”

Now is the most appropriate time of the year to refresh and renew our connection to the Torah, to think of it as a gift we just received this morning, and to visualize how the new year will look when a completely new light of Torah – one never seen before – shines upon it from within.

2. Eretz Yisrael

The Land of Israel is the Promised Land, the Holy Land, but is it a new land? Indeed, we justifiably tell ourselves and the entire world that we have an ancient, historical right to this Land. Nevertheless, we should never allow our relationship to the Land of Israel to become old or stale.

As the verse states, “And it will be when the L-rd brings you to the land of the Canaanites as He swore to you and to your forefathers, and He will give it to you” (Shemot 13:11), upon which Rashi elaborates: “And He will give it to you, that is, you should consider it as if He gave it to you on that same day and not as an inheritance from your ancestors.”

It does not matter where we live. We must create a personal, vibrant and emotional connection with the Land of Israel. We cannot rely only on what we were told by our great-great-grandparents. Again, the months of Elul and Tishrei are the perfect time to think about how to bring a new and authentic connection with the Land of Israel into our lives.
3. Marriage and Family

In Devarim, we receive many instructions on married life and the education of our children – the questions children will ask, the answers we will give, and the manner in which we should educate them.

And it is precisely here, in what we think is our comfort zone, we are called upon to find something new.

Under the chupah, we say, “Behold, you are now holy to me, with this ring, according to the religion of Moshe and Israel.” A hundred years ago, Rabbi Tzvi Kunstlicher, in “Be’er Tzvi,” asked why we emphasize “according to the religion of Moshe and Israel.” He answered that our marital relationship should be the same as our relationship to the Torah given by Moshe to Israel – a relationship of daily renewal. That is, “every day should be like new,” as new as the day you stood under the chupah. Here too, we would be wise to devote time, thought and creativity to renew our most important relationships within the intimate surroundings of home.

Our Sages defined the biggest challenge of our times in this way: we should not take our greatest gifts – Torah, the Land of Israel, our families – for granted. The prevailing culture broadcasts a message that loyalty to a text (Torah), a Land (Israel), or fellow members of a covenant (family) are values that have vanished from the world. This culture sees newness as external to ourselves and not something to be sought or attained within.

On Rosh Hashanah, we are called upon to find new meaning in those elements of our lives that have stood the test of time – Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the sanctity of the Jewish family.

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Two Thoughts on the Shofar

Before blowing the shofar, we recite chapter 47 of Tehillim seven times, "לַמְנַצֵּֽחַ לִבְנֵי־קֹֽרַח מִזְמוֹר..." It is a very special moment.

So why at this very moment must we remember Korach’s sons? Korach started the controversy against Moshe and Aharon. A controversy about honor, pride and personal gain, ending in tragedy – Korach and his whole congregation were swallowed up in the ground and died.

But what about Korach’s sons? They did not die. At the last minute, they regretted their actions. To this day, we learn from them that one should never give up hope of repentance and returning to G-d.

Have we prepared for this moment of blowing the shofar? Were we in a mindframe of learning and teshuva and reflection during Elul? For many of us, the first day of Tishrei, Rosh Hashanah arrives uninvited, as if we never knew it was upon us, and we find ourselves standing in somber silence waiting for the shofar to blast. What can we do to compensate for our lack of preparation? “For the sons of Korach, a psalm…”

You can always connect and fix things, even now. It’s never too late. This is the message for this one-time moment, once a year. You can always repair and improve. No matter where you have been the past year. No matter what your Elul looked like. Here, in just another second, we will hear the shofar, and together we will anoint G-d.

Some data about the past year: Every 60 seconds the world watches more than four million videos on YouTube, sends 156 million emails, asks Google 3.5 million questions and sends about 20 million WhatsApp messages. What was once called the Information Highway is now the Information Intifada, attacking us with constant bombardments of data. No human brain is capable of absorbing so much information.

The main mitzvah on Rosh Hashanah is to hear the shofar – “Yom Teruah.” Other nations mark their new years with street celebrations, a loud countdown, drinking and eating – while we gather inside to be silent and listen. As the outside world becomes louder and louder, this silence for the shofar takes on added meaning and significance.

We are resetting the system. Stop talking and shouting and arguing. Remain silent and listen to a voice above words, texts and videos: “Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, who has made us holy through His commandments, and has commanded us to listen to the sound of the shofar.”

Stop making the noise. Listen!

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir are popular Israeli media personalities and World Mizrachi’s Scholars-in-Residence.
When Miriam learned she was pregnant with her third child, she was ambivalent about her pregnancy. She and her two young children were feeling unwell and she had recently been laid off from her part-time job, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Without his wife’s paycheck to supplement the family income, Miriam’s husband was afraid they wouldn’t be able to both feed the family and pay their rent.

Then Miriam tested positive for Covid-19.

Due to her high-risk pregnancy, she was rushed into isolation in the corona ward at Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem. Miriam felt helpless, as though her entire life was crumbling around her, and she was left to deal with it all on her own, without even the support of her close family.

When a Shaare Zedek social worker suggested she contact Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael, Miriam jumped at the chance.

For many women suffering from financial and emotional distress, or experiencing medical complications or high-risk pregnancies, the pregnancy is often too much to cope with.

That’s where Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael steps in.

Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael (with the financial backing of Just One Life, USA) was formed in 1988 by concerned individuals who recognized the need to provide support for expectant mothers in Israel, where financial hardship and social and medical issues can lead to difficult pregnancies.

The founders of the organization were Rabbi Solomon J. Sharfman a”h, Dr. Shimon Glick, who was then the Dean of Ben-Gurion University Soroka Hospital, Jack Forgash, a businessman from the USA and a friend of Dr. Glick and Rabbi Sharfman, and Madelaine Gitelman from Jerusalem, who became the organization’s Director and Head of Social Workers in 1989. The organization’s name was derived from the Talmudic passage in Sanhedrin that states, “One who saves a single Jewish life has saved an entire world.”

The key to the organization’s success is that “we provide stability to families who are experiencing turbulence in their lives,” said Rabbi Martin Katz, who has served as the USA Executive Vice President of Just One Life since its founding. “By providing professional counseling, emotional support and financial assistance, Just One Life empowers mothers to bring their pregnancy to full term, thus preserving Israel’s most precious resource – its children.”

Veteran social worker Chaya Katzin, the current Israel Director and Head of Social Workers, and her team of social workers and therapists, help expectant women speak about their challenges at the welcoming Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael/Just One Life office on Jerusalem’s King George Street.

“Helping women process their choices and empowering them to understand their strengths is the goal of our intervention. We try to bring down the crisis level and arm women with the skills they need to more easily manage their lives,” says Katzin. “Through various workshops and methods of individual and group therapy, we help women...”
develop an empowered approach to parenting and provide their children with a healthy and supportive environment."

For example, Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael’s team of social workers provided Miriam with emotional and financial support, and empowered her to cope with her difficult pregnancy and give birth to a healthy son. The brit was in their home, the baby is starting off his new life with a layette provided by Just One Life, and Miriam is in a much stronger mental and physical position to be a happy healthy mother to her children.

The social workers and therapists at Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael aid approximately 500 families every year, which has resulted in over 18,500 babies over the last three decades. The couples come from all over Israel and from a broad range of backgrounds: religious and secular, Ashkenazi and Sephardi and new immigrants as well as longtime Israelis. But what the women share in common are limited incomes, stressful family situations or health issues. A pregnancy only adds to their long roster of challenges.

Jack Forgash, the Chairman and Co-Founder of JOL and Nefesh Achat for 31 years, said, “I would be remiss if I did not give praise, recognition and todah to the manner in which the professional social workers for 31 years have given care and compassion to the mothers and the 18,500 plus children born in Israel. To Madelaine Gitelman, who served as Director for 27 years, current Director, Chaya Katzin, and the professional staff – Shira Keyak, Sara Gordon, Atara Block and Eliana Rubinstein. Just One Life in the USA provides the resources and the Nefesh Achat organization in Israel provides the loving care.”

Women often find their way to the Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael office through referrals from doctors, social workers, nurses and welfare offices. Even now during this pandemic, overwhelmed hospital nurses and social workers are calling upon Nefesh Achat to take on additional cases.

The organization also receives referrals from major hospitals across Israel. For example, Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael maintains a strong relationship with Shaare Zedek in Jerusalem. Shaare Zedek’s high-risk pregnancy clinic, led by Dr. Ori Shen and Mrs. Yehudit Ackerman, refers patients who require additional emotional or financial support to Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael. Dr. Shen has praised the organization’s important work: “There is no doubt Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael’s assistance has created circumstances optimal for helping the couples and has brought about beneficial outcomes.”

The vast majority of the women that turn to Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael have very limited income. Currently, 1.7 million people in Israel are living below the poverty level. Just One Life provides nearly $1,800 to each mother for financial and psychological services.

Just One Life has earned praise from many leading politicians and medical professionals, including Danny Danon, Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations, who recently recognized the organization’s three decades of success in bringing Jewish life into the world: “Your work for Jewish families is fundamental to the future and well-being of the Jewish people. Bringing Just One Life to Israel was an important development, and brought the issue of raising Jewish children straight to the heart of the Jewish world.”

The children who have been born with the support of Just One Life are now taking their rightful places in society. Many have grown up to serve in the Israel Defense Forces, attend Torah institutions and universities and have families of their own.

“In the 31 years since the organization has been helping women have their babies, nobody has ever come back to complain,” recounts Katz. “But many have returned to give thanks. They say, ‘I can’t imagine what my life would be like without my children.’”

For more information and to donate please contact:

Just One Life Inc. • 501 C-3 Organization • 587 Fifth Avenue, Room 702, NY, NY 10017 • Rabbi Martin Katz • 347-996-7751 • www.justonelife.org

Nefesh Achat B’Yisrael • 16 King George Street, Jerusalem, Israel 91024 • Chaya Katzin • 02-625-4973 • nefesh@netvision.net.il

Just Life | כנסת אוחזת בישראלי
Avraham’s 10th and final trial was the binding of Yitzchak. In his first one – “G-d said to Avraham, ‘Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house, to the Land that I will show you....’” – Avraham is told to divorce himself from his past.

His final trial is even more difficult though. This time, he is told to renounce his future. His entire life’s work is being put to the test.

At the age of three, Avraham came to the conclusion that the world had a Creator, smashed his father’s idols, and later threw himself into the fire at Ur Kasdim in sanctification of G-d’s name.

When he was miraculously saved from death, he began to “make souls,” i.e., gather a following to whom he would teach that the world has a Creator.

Avraham took in guests, and when they thanked him, he told them the world has a Host and there is no need to thank him. He also exemplified the obligation of ransoming captives when he saved his nephew Lot.

Through the relationship between man and his fellow man, he brought his people to an awareness of the relationship between man and G-d.

Positive action is not enough though. One must also fight evil.

For example, Avraham fought against the worship of the fire-god Molech, which involved child sacrifice. This was an idolatry which embodied the transgression of the mitzvot between human beings and those between man and G-d.

Hence, during those three days on which he journeyed to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son, we can but imagine what was going through Avraham’s mind.

Upon coming down from the mountain, he would have to tell everybody that he had sacrificed his son as a burnt-offering to G-d. This would undermine everything he had worked for, everything he had built and totally confuse the following he had attracted.

Nevertheless, “the two of them walked together” Both Avraham and Yitzchak are committed to carrying out G-d’s command.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa asks the following question: we blow a ram’s horn on the Day of Judgment to arouse the merit of the Binding of Yitzchak.

But surely the ram’s horn recalls the fact that Yitzchak was not actually sacrificed? If the goal was to recall the binding, it would be more appropriate to hold up a slaughtering knife and proclaim that Avraham was ready to sacrifice his son with a similar knife.

The answer is that the blowing of the ram’s horn recalls the Almighty’s words, “Do not harm the lad, and do not do a thing to him.” We ‘remind’ the Almighty that He is opposed to human sacrifice.

We eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of the eternal promise, “Do not harm the lad.” We say, “Enough!” to death and indiscriminate killing and abuse. And we pray that the sacrifices cease and the Almighty will grant us life and a speedy and complete redemption.

Adapted from an article that originally appeared on yeshiva.co

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau is the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv and served as the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1993 to 2003.
Yom Kippur is upon us, and anyone who has ever been hurt by a friend, or some other individual (haven’t we all?) knows exactly how hard it is to forgive. Those on the receiving end have nothing but their anger to use as a defense. What else are they left with? Their dignity has been crushed by having been publicly insulted. Their bodies are still battered after being hit or run over.

After all that, how can we now ask them to set aside those feelings and forgive those who wronged them? In doing so, the perpetrators walk freely, with a broad smile on their faces, while their victims, who are compelled to forgive their attackers, often continue to carry the incident with them throughout their lives.

Those asking for forgiveness don’t have it any easier. What they did may have been completely inadvertent, but now they need to peel away their respectability and approach someone claiming to have been wronged by them and ask for forgiveness for what they may have done to that individual.

And it might not end there. The victim might make things difficult for the one trying to ask for forgiveness.

Why must we go through this complicated process that may be demeaning or frustrating for one or both of the sides involved?

Our Sages tell us that “Whoever lets things ‘slide’ a little, G-d will also let his sins ‘slide’” (Rosh Hashanah 17a). In other words, nobody can claim to have a spotless record when under close scrutiny.

If someone was wronged by someone else, the one who was wronged had obviously wronged another person, and vice-versa.

Therefore, the only way we can face our Creator in judgment with some degree of confidence is if we say to our Creator: “I’ve been able to be forgiving in my scrutiny. I’ve repressed my anger and frustration against someone who has wronged me, so now, You could do the same for me. If I was able to humble my heart and ask for forgiveness from someone I’ve wronged, perhaps You too can ‘humble’ Yourself and judge me with mercy.”

There are those who say that Yom Kippur does not atone for a person’s sins against G-d if he has not effected reconciliation with others.

This idea seems somewhat puzzling. What does a person’s unwillingness to excuse someone for having wronged him have to do with how he sinned against G-d?

The answer to this question relates back to what we’ve just discussed.

Those who cannot make an effort to approach those they have wronged; those who cannot set aside their (or the other person’s) frustration and ego will probably not take the matter seriously when they appear before their Creator as well.

Once a year, as we approach Yom Kippur, it seems as though we all desire a moment of grace – this is the time when we all know we can still be different, regardless of how much we have endured.

We can be reconciled with ourselves and with those around us, for this is a time of forgiveness.

Rabbi David Stav is Chief Rabbi of Shoham and the Chairman of Tzohar.
The first step in the teshuva process is hakarat haCheit (recognition of the sin). The natural state of the Jewish neshama is that it seeks to be close to G-d. It is considered an aberration for a person to distance himself from G-d.

Thus, hakarat haCheit stems from the sinner’s feeling that he is distant from G-d. It is considered an aberration for a person to desire to sin. Thus, hakarat haCheit is necessary to bring the sinner to his senses. He wants to return because of the sense of loneliness he experiences.

The pasuk says, “If his sin that he committed becomes known to him” (Vayikra 4:23, 28), to teach that yediat haCheit (definite knowledge of the sin) is a necessary prerequisite to bringing a Korban Chattat. Tosafot questions why the Torah had to specify that yediat haCheit is necessary prior to offering a Korban Chattat. This should have been understood from the fact that a Korban Chattat may not be offered voluntarily. This korban may only be offered for a cheit one knows he has committed, and so it should be obvious the sinner must know he sinned before bringing the korban.

Tosafot explains the passuk comes to exclude a case in which the individual merely suspects he may have sinned accidentally and therefore is mafrish (sets aside) an animal to be used as a potential korban once he ascertains he did, in fact, commit an aveirah. The passuk teaches that even if he subsequently comes to the realization he did sin, he would not be able to use that animal, because it was sanctified as a korban prior to definite knowledge that he sinned. The obligation to offer a Korban Chattat does not exist prior to yediat haCheit, just as there is no chiyuv teshuva without hakarat haCheit and yediat haCheit.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes that there is a special mitzvah of teshuva on Yom Kippur, beyond the constant obligation to repent every day. He bases himself on the passuk, “before Hashem shall you be cleansed” (Vayikra 16:30), which he understands as a directive to cleanse ourselves on this day. The Rav pointed out a similar statement of the Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 2:7):


Yom Kippur is... a specific time of pardoning and forgiveness; therefore, all people are obligated to do teshuva and to confess their aveirot on Yom Kippur.

Rav Schachter on the Moadim

The Rav suggested a parallel halacha that illustrates this additional requirement. In discussing the destruction of avodah zarah specifically in Eretz Yisrael, the Torah commands:


Based on this, the Rambam (Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 7:1) rules, "קניאי השואלים על מקום אברך את ישראל, אברך את ישראל במצווה לרדוף אחריה עד שבאדיע איתה, במקל ארץ, ויכלה ארצו ממנה אברך את ישראל מצות לרדוף אחריה עד שלא אבדו איתהเทคโนโลยום... ואחרים...ريمוכים את שמה ממקנה..." "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations worshipped... their gods... and you shall obliterate their names from that place" (Devarim 12:2-3).

Based on this, the Rav suggested a parallel halacha that illustrates this additional requirement. In discussing the destruction of avodah zarah specifically in Eretz Yisrael, the Torah commands:


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The Ten Days of Repentance are the holy of holies of Jewish time. They begin with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and culminate 10 days later with Yom Kippur, our Day of Atonement. At no other time do I feel so close to G-d, and I suspect the same is true for most Jews.

These days constitute a courtroom drama like no other. The judge is G-d Himself, and we are on trial for our lives. It begins on Rosh Hashanah, with the sounding of the shofar, the ram’s horn, announcing that the court is in session. The Book of Life, in which our fate will be inscribed, now lies open. As we say in prayer, “On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur, it is sealed, who will live and who will die.” At home, we eat an apple dipped in honey as a symbol of our hope for a sweet new year.

On Yom Kippur, the atmosphere reaches a peak of intensity on a day of fasting and prayer. Repeatedly we confess our sins, whole alphabetical litanies of them, including ones we probably had neither the time nor the imagination to commit. We throw ourselves on the mercy of the court, which is to say on G-d Himself. Write us, we say, in the Book of Life.

And at the end of a long and wrenching day, we finish as we began 10 days earlier, with the sound of the ram’s horn – this time not with tears and fears but with cautious yet confident hope. We have admitted the worst about ourselves and survived.

Beneath the surface of this long religious ritual lies one of the more transformative stories of the human spirit. The sociologist Philip Rieff pointed out that the movement from paganism to monotheism was a transition from fate to faith. By this, he meant that in the world of myth, people were pitted against powerful, capricious forces personified as gods who were at best indifferent, at worst hostile, to humankind. All you could do was try to propitiate, battle or outwit them. This was a culture of character and fate, and its noblest expression was the literature of Greek tragedy.

Jews came to see the world in a completely different way. The book of Bereishit opens with G-d making humans “in His image and likeness.” This phrase has become so familiar to us that we forget how paradoxical it is for the Hebrew Bible since G-d has no image and likeness. As the narrative quickly makes clear, what humans have in common with G-d is freedom and moral responsibility.

The Jewish drama is less about character and fate than about will and choice. To the monotheistic mind, the real battles are not “out there,” against external forces of darkness, but “in here,” between the bad and better angels of our nature. As the religion writer Jack Miles once pointed out, you can see the difference in the contrast between Sophocles and Shakespeare. For Sophocles, Oedipus must battle against blind, inexorable fate. For Shakespeare, writing in a monotheistic age, the drama of “Hamlet” lies within, between “the native hue of resolution” and “the pale cast of thought.”

The trouble is, of course, that faced with a choice, we often make the wrong one. Given a second chance, Adam and Eve would probably pass on the fruit. Cain might work a little harder on his anger management. And there is a straight line from these biblical episodes to the destruction left by Homosapiens: war, murder, human devastation and environmental destruction.

That is still our world today. The key fact about us, according to the Bible, is that uniquely in an
otherwise law-governed universe, we are able to break the law – a power that we too often exercise with relish.

This raises an acute theological dilemma. How are we to reconcile G-d’s high hopes for humanity with our shabby and threadbare moral record? The short answer is forgiveness.

G-d wrote forgiveness into the script. He always gives us a second chance, and more. All we have to do is to acknowledge our wrongs, apologize, make amends and resolve to behave better. And G-d forgives. It allows us to hold simultaneously to the highest moral aspirations while admitting honestly our deepest moral failings. That is the drama of the Jewish High Holy Days.

At the heart of this vision is what the post-Holocaust writer Viktor Frankl called our “search for meaning.” The great institutions of modernity were not constructed to provide meaning. Science tells us how the world came to be but not why. Technology gives us power but cannot tell us how to use it. The market gives us choices but no guidance as to which choices to make. Modern democracies give us a maximum of personal freedom but a minimum of shared morality. You can acknowledge the beauty of all these institutions, yet most of us seek something more.

Meaning comes not from systems of thought but from stories, and the Jewish story is among the most unusual of all. It tells us that G-d sought to make us His partners in the work of creation, but we repeatedly disappointed Him. Yet He never gives up. He forgives us time and again. The real religious mystery of Judaism is not our faith in G-d but G-d’s faith in us.

This is not, as atheists and skeptics sometimes claim, a comforting fiction but quite the opposite. Judaism is G-d’s call to human responsibility, to create a world that is a worthy home for His presence. That is why Jews are so often to be found as doctors fighting disease, economists fighting poverty, lawyers fighting injustice, teachers fighting ignorance and therapists fighting depression and despair.

Judaism is a supremely activist faith for which the greatest religious challenge is to heal some of the wounds of our deeply fractured world. As Frankl put it: the real question is not what do we want from life but what does life want from us.

That is the question we are asked on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. As we ask G-d to write us in the Book of Life, He asks us, what have you done with your life thus far? Have you brought healing to a place of human pain or hope where you found despair? You may have been a success, but have you also been a blessing? Have you written other people in the Book of Life?

To ask these questions once a year in the company of others publicly willing to confess their faults, lifted by the words and music of ancient prayers, knowing that G-d forgives every failure we acknowledge as a failure and that He has faith in us even when we lose faith in ourselves, can be a life-changing experience. That is when we discover that, even in a secular age, G-d is still there, open to us whenever we are willing to open ourselves to Him.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.
When a baby is in its mother’s womb, it can see from one side of the world to the other. Obviously, this cannot be understood on a literal, physical level. What our Sages are conveying to us through this vivid description is that vision is one of the most important aspects of human greatness.

Vision is the intellectual clarity to grasp the ultimate purpose of life; the emotional power to transcend our current circumstances, to see beyond what’s immediately in front of us, and the spiritual inspiration to rise above the travails of life to understand the big picture, the full perspective of why we are here on this earth.

Often, we get so engrossed and entangled in our day-to-day challenges that we don’t stop to think about why we are here in the first place, and whether we are fulfilling the purpose for which we were created. In the rush and pressure of daily life, we often lose sight of the bigger, greater picture.

Rosh Hashanah is a time to step back and regain our lost vision. And the call of the shofar is how we do it. The Rambam writes that the message of the shofar is to “awaken those who are asleep.” The analogy to sleep is profound. The dreams we experience in our sleep seem so real at the time, yet the moment we wake up we realize they were merely illusions. So too, we often live life in a spiritual slumber. We dream of accumulating material possessions and indulging ourselves to the greatest extent, and we forget about any higher purpose. The shofar is a call from G-d to wake up to that higher purpose – to remember why we are in this world in the first place.

It is significant that Rosh Hashanah, the day of repentance and judgment, takes place on the anniversary of the creation of the world. There is a deep connection between these two aspects of the day. The fact that G-d created the world means that life has an elevated, Divine purpose. At the heart and soul of the Torah’s worldview is the idea that G-d created each and every one of us to carry out a unique mission in this world, fulfilling His commandments and living life on an elevated plane. People can so easily forget the purpose of life and slip into a dream-like state of being, where trivial matters assume inflated importance and important values are forgotten.

The shofar, with its simple call to the clarity of purpose, awakens us to see the world the way it is instead of how it appears when we are in a state of spiritual sleep. G-d has given us the incredible gift of Rosh Hashanah to wake us up and reconnect us with who we are and why we are here.

Reconnecting with our soul and with our deepest Divine purpose brings invigorating joy. This is why Rosh Hashanah – while being a day of judgment and introspection – is also celebrated as a festival. It is a day on which we celebrate the profound joy of knowing our mission, of renewing our sense of purpose and recapturing the transcendent vision of life we all saw so perfectly in the womb.

1 Niddah 30b.
2 The Hebrew word חָזוֹן means both vision and prophecy, see I Samuel 3:1; Isaiah 1:1, Proverbs 29:18.
3 See Mesilat Yesharim, chapter 2.
4 Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 3:4.
5 Rosh Hashanah is the first of the Ten Days of Repentance. See Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 2:6.
6 Mishna, Rosh Hashanah 1:2. See Rosh Hashanah 32b; Arachin 10b.
7 See Rosh Hashanah 10b-11a; Vayikra Rabbah 29:1; Pesikta D’Rav Kahanna 23:1; Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 8:1; Bereishit Rabbah 22:4. See also Maharsha, Rosh Hashanah 16a.
8 See Sefat Emet, Parshat Korach, 13:2, quoting his grandfather, Chidushei HaRim on Avot 1:14.
9 See Shulchan Aruch 597:1; Shulchan Aruch HaGraz O.C. 529:5, 597:1.

Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein is the Chief Rabbi of South Africa.
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The Harmony of Torah Study

The last of the 613 mitzvot is to “write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel, and place it in their mouths, so that this song will be for Me a witness in Bnei Yisrael.”

Most of the Torah commentators believe the “song” referred to here is the entire Torah. It is from this verse they derive the mitzvah that every Jew must write his own Sefer Torah, a mitzvah that can be fulfilled by underwriting even one letter, as a single missing letter can invalidate the entire scroll and filling in that letter can make the scroll “kosher” again.

G-d in His Torah is the greatest practitioner of the economy of language. Each word, indeed each letter, offers greater insights into meaning, allusions, inferences, and secrets using the four basic elements (PaRDeS – plain meaning, alluded meaning, derived meaning, mystic meaning) to uncover as many as 70 different interpretations of the text.

Rabbi Moshe Reiss uses the poetic image from Shir HaShirim to further explain the magnificence of Torah study: “The King brought me into His chambers.” When viewed from the outside, the castle is magnificent. However, as one enters and goes from room to room, his awe grows as he encounters greater richness and beauty in the furnishings and accoutrements of each room.

So too with Torah study. During a cursory reading, one can already recognize the Torah’s splendor. However, as one delves ever more deeply into the text, one marvels even more at the myriad nuances and textures that continue to be revealed. The Torah must be appreciated as a whole more than for any particular part of it.

This is what King David meant, posits Rav Reiss, when he wrote, “The Torah of G-d is perfect (complete); it restores the soul.” Only when the Torah is studied and observed in its entirety (rather than piecemeal) does it have the ability to restore one’s soul. Just as one cannot remove even one spring from a clock and expect it to work, so too one cannot remove one piece of Torah and expect it to work on one’s soul.

Two of the symbols that grace our Rosh Hashanah table are the pomegranate and the apple. Rabbi Itamar Schwartz clarifies the differences between them. While we pray that we may be filled with mitzvot like a pomegranate, the Gemara in Berachot says that “even the emptiest of them are filled with mitzvot like a pomegranate.” Rabbi Schwartz cites HaGaon HaRav Dovid Povarsky in explaining that each seed in a pomegranate is separate, enveloped in its individual sac and not connected to any other seed.

In a similar way, a person can have many mitzvot, do many acts of chessed, but these may remain individual acts if one does not infuse these acts with the unifying element of spirituality, indicating life’s deeper spiritual meaning and purpose.

On the other hand, the apple has its seeds at its core, and everything else surrounds them. The apple, the meaning to our lives, is dipped in honey to provide the sweetness our lives need to be meaningful. Each act of observance becomes meaningful when performed as a thread in the fabric of the whole, rather than as an isolated, perhaps even rote, action.

Torah is not just the black-inked words that prescribe and proscribe our actions, but also the white parchment upon which those words are written, the purpose and spirit of the laws without which observance becomes an empty shell.

That is why, continues Rabbi Eliyahu Schlesinger, even if his parents wrote one, it is necessary for every individual to write his own Sefer Torah, to recommit himself to a life infused with Torah as his individual soul relates to G-d. And he must teach his children the entire song – not just the words – so they too will appreciate the beauty and majesty of the Torah to which they are heirs.

When Bnei Yisrael delve deeply into Torah study and give it voice, they sing the praises of G-d and bear witness to His sovereignty over the earth. As Rosh Hashanah approaches, let us write the score of the Torah on our hearts and join together in a joyous symphony of renewed harmony with all creation. Let the spirit and joy of a Torah life infuse our lives with meaning and may we merit the blessings G-d will bestow upon us in the coming year.

Mrs. Shira Smiles is a sought-after international lecturer, a popular seminary teacher, and an experienced curriculum developer.
Many media channels asked me to offer my perspective on this past year: social rifts, demonstrations, economic uncertainty, education crisis... in short, what is going to be?

After some thought, I chose to talk about those who did not have time to go out to demonstrate, or see the social rift, or estimate the economic uncertainty. Those who united all of us this year – the sisters.

With incredible sensitivity, the 13th-century poet, Rabbi Abraham Chazzan Gerondi, chooses to open the Sephardi Rosh Hashanah prayers with the spine-tingling piyut, Achot Ketana – “Little Sister.”

With infinite gentleness, he relates to this fragile hour, the interface between the past year and the new one, the time of the changing of the guard.

He captures the moment when, with tired hands, she hands over the keys to her replacement. Seconds before her watch comes to an end, she briefs her: who needs special care, who will live, who will die after a long life and who prematurely. She will become the achot ketana, the little sister, of the one who comes after her. She is exactly a year older than her replacement, who does not yet know what awaits her.

The paytan movingly chooses to pray for the one who has finished her watch, more than for the one who is taking over now, fresh and alert. He salutes the little sister, the past year, for faithfully helping us breathe, for giving us life, for connecting sunset to sunrise to sunset to sunrise, for having nurtured us so much. Thanks to her, we have grown another year.

They took off their weekday clothes, washed, disinfected themselves and donned white clothes. They entered the sanctuary when no relative was near a patient breathing his last breath, and thus they would count his final breaths: one, one and one, one and two... they did not experience Seder Night or Tikkun Leil Shavuot. They received endless complaints, cried about being suspected of misdemeanors, and yet continued, with selfless devotion, their Seder Avodah.

This year, the sisters were our shofar; our Unetaneh Tokef. They were the answer to so many of the sick – the prayer, the charity, they were the “who” who nursed the “who by pandemic.”

In their stifling white suits, they were our replacement, they were our atonement, they were our substitutes. What for us were statistics were real people for them. When the conflagration was burning outside, they roamed the wards, like angels of peace.

It seems to me, that as the shifts change between the past year and the new one, we should pray for our angelic and weary sisters. And pray for the world that the curses cease, and that finally, we may all have an easy shift.

Achot Ketana

Whispering on her patients’ beds: 
“Please G-d, please cure her diseases 
End the year and its curses.”

1 The word achot (אחות) in Hebrew means both sister and nurse.
2 Paraphrased from the Seder Avodah on Yom Kippur.
3 A reference to the Kapparot ceremony.
4 Paraphrased from the original piyut.

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi is a popular Israeli teacher, speaker and writer.
Horns and Blasts
The Fascinating World of the Shofar

According to the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 26a), a shofar may be made from the horn of any animal from the Bovidae family except that of a cow, although a ram is preferable. Bovidae horns are made of a layer of keratin (the same material as human toenails and fingernails) around a core of bone, with a layer of cartilage in between, which can be removed to leave the hollow keratin horn. There are short shofars, long shofars, curly shofars, straight shofars and curved shofars. There are black shofars, brown shofars, beige shofars and any combination of these colors. All of Klal Yisrael blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. On the facing page are some of the different shofars blown around the world.

Blowing the Shofar

- When Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, the shofar is not blown.1
- Women are not required to listen to the shofar since it is a mitzvah that is dependent on time. A woman cannot blow the shofar for the benefit of a man since he is commanded to fulfill this mitzvah while she is not. However, the custom is that women do listen to the shofar and can blow the shofar for themselves and other women, even with a beracha.2
- On a Biblical level, one is only required to listen to nine calls of the shofar.3 This is derived from verses that three teruot are required and each needs a tekia before and after, totaling nine.4 However, a question arose as to what constitutes a proper terua: is it three short sounds (shevarim), many rapid sounds (terua) or both together (shevarim terua)?5 The Talmud6 therefore requires that we listen to all of them, for a total of 30.
- The Talmud7 specifies that the shofar is blown on two occasions on Rosh Hashanah: once while “sitting” (before Musaf), and once while “standing” (during Musaf). This increases the number of blasts, from the basic requirement of 30 to 60. The Aruch mentions a custom to blow 100 blasts: 30 before Musaf, 30 during the Musaf silent prayer, 30 during the chazzan’s repetition of Musaf, and 10 more after Musaf.8 The final 10 blasts are a tradition dating to the Geonim. Blowing 100 (or 101) blasts is nearly universal today, though many congregations omit the 30 blasts in the silent prayer, and instead blow 40 after Musaf.9

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1 Rosh Hashanah, 4:1.
2 Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 589:6, Rama.
3 Ibid 590:1.
4 Ibid 590:2, Mishna Berurah.
5 Ibid 590:2.
6 Rosh Hashanah 34a.
7 Ibid 16a.
8 Aruch 272:1; mentioned in Tosafot Rosh Hashanah 33b.
9 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 129:17.
Ram’s Horn, Ashkenazi-Sephardi Style

The classic ram horn shofar is by far the most commonly used shofar. Used by both Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities, it is made from the horn of a domestic ram. Most ram horn shofars are long, with a straightened handle and light in color, though black ones are available from black rams. Due to a relatively long drill hole, it has a high and sharp tone.

Ram’s Horn, Yemenite Style

Made according to the Rambam’s ruling that the original shape of the horn must not be changed. This kind of shofar is not straightened, but rather cut next to the hollow part of the horn and has a short drill hole, and therefore a low, deep sound. These shofars are usually not ornamented externally, leaving the horn in its natural state.

Ram’s Horn, Moroccan-German style

A flat ram’s horn shofar. Its production process is complex and takes a long time. It originated during the Spanish Inquisition when the Jews had to conceal their religion and customs and would flatten the shofar to hide it more easily under their clothes. Following the expulsion from Spain, some Jews arrived in North Africa, while others reached Eastern Europe. A vast shofar industry flourished in Morocco, although this type of shofar can also be found in Jewish communities in Poland, Germany and elsewhere.

Kudu’s Horn

The kudu is a species of antelope found in the southern parts of the African continent. Its horn can reach a length of about 150cm and is impressive in size, color and sound. Yemenite Jews used to blow this horn because kudu’s horns were easier to obtain than ram’s horns. This horn has a deep sound due to its large volume of air and can produce different tones (usually 2-3 or more).

Ram’s Horn, Bavli Shofar

The Bavli is a natural, unfinished ram’s horn with a very deep sound and is typically used by Iraqi and Iranian Jews. It looks similar to a Yemenite shofar, with a short drill, a large mouthpiece, and a relatively wide sound box. It is characterized by its narrow panel and a deep low sound.

Did You Know?

- The shofar is the musical instrument mentioned most frequently in the Bible – 72 times!
- The raw horn goes through 14 different stages before it becomes an elegant shofar.
- Washing or cleaning the shofar will change its sound temporarily until it is completely dry.
- Each horn is unique and there isn’t one exactly like it in the whole world, not even its “twin horn” (the other horn of the same ram)!
- The size of the shofar does not affect how kosher it is.
- During the Ottoman and British rule of Jerusalem, the Jews were not allowed to sound the shofar at the Kotel.
Confession and Redemption

*Beset by many evils and troubles, they will say, “It is because G-d is no longer with me that these evil things have befallen me.” On that day I will utterly hide My face because of all the evil that they have done...* (Devarim 31:17-18)

Rambam says that this admission of guilt and regret is still not a full confession, and therefore G-d continues to hide His face. But the hiding is different: no longer is it a hiding of G-d’s mercy, allowing evil to befall them, but rather a hiding of the ultimate Redemption. That change in G-d’s relationship contains a hint to their ultimate redemption when their repentance is complete.

To better understand this, we must first understand the function of verbal confession in the teshuva process. Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 364) offers two explanations of the benefit of verbal confession. First, verbalizing one’s repentance creates the feeling of conversing with a second party, which, in turn, sensitizes a person to the reality of G-d’s presence, G-d’s awareness of his every deed, and the need to render an account before G-d. The greater a person’s awareness that his sin was one in G-d’s presence, with His full knowledge, the greater his shame and regret. Secondly, verbal expression intensifies the process and leaves a more lasting effect.

In addition to regret over the past, teshuva also requires a commitment not to repeat the sin again. That commitment must be so decisive, resolute, and firm that G-d Himself can testify that at the moment of confession, the sinner does not contemplate ever committing that sin again. Just as a vow to do (or not to do) something in the future requires verbal expression, so, too, does the commitment not to repeat past sins.

**Layers of Impurity**

There is yet another aspect of confession that relates to the nature of sin itself. Sin, says the Maharal, is only incidental to the soul of the Jew. It cannot blemish the soul itself. Rather it superimposes layers of impurity that separate one from his essence. Since the Jew’s connection to G-d is through that untainted essence, when he becomes distant from his essence, he also becomes estranged from G-d.

Teshuva, then, is the return of the Jew to his essence and the breakdown of the barriers that separate him from G-d. G-d does not leave the Jew when he sins; rather the Jew loses contact with G-d, Who still resides within the essence of his soul. As the Sages say on the verse, “I am asleep, but my heart is awake” (Song of Songs 5:2), “my heart” refers to G-d. Though the Jew sleeps and loses consciousness of G-d, G-d still occupies his heart.

By articulating his sin in the Vidui confession, the Jew makes it something external to himself. Then he is able to detach those layers of sin that have accreted on his soul. Vidui itself becomes an act of purification. Thus, Targum Yonatan translates the word “purify” in the verse “Before G-d should you purify yourself” (Leviticus 16:30), as “confess.” The confession is itself the act of purification.

It is this last aspect of full Vidui which is lacking in the confession, “Because G-d is not with me, all these misfortunes have befallen me.” Although this statement expresses regret, recognition of the devastation resulting from sin, and even hints to a commitment to avoid this state in the future, it is still lacking. There is no recognition that it is not G-d Who has deserted us, but we who have become detached from ourselves and therefore from G-d.

When a Jew feels G-d has abandoned him, says Sforno, he gives up hope, since he thinks that it is G-d Who must first return. But in truth it is man who has strayed from his essence, and he can find G-d where he originally left Him. Teshuva is thus literally redemption: “Return to Me, for I have redeemed you” (Isaiah 44:22). One redeems his untainted essence from the layers of sin and impurity that encrust it.

As long as we fail to comprehend this aspect of redemption, G-d continues to hide the face of redemption from us. When we appreciate all the aspects of Vidui, including that recognition that G-d remains where He always was, waiting for us to strip away the barriers, we can look forward to both personal and national redemption.

Rabbi Zev Leff serves as the Rav of Moshav Matityahu.
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 malchuyot section tells us of G-d’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 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. A Hebrew quip says 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 of G-d’s eternal sovereignty, always omnipresent even if sometimes hidden.

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

In our liturgy and rabbinic literature, Rosh Hashanah is called the Day of Remembrance. G-d, 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 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 G-d 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 on 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 G-dly in our attitudes and behavior. We hear the echo of the shofar of Sinai, or our own sounding of the shofar, and they inspire 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 shofarot combine these two soundings – Sinai and Redemption – in their message and import. The great army of G-d’s eternal people is being summoned to arms, to face the challenges of the new year. We have to hear those shofar soundings reverberate in our souls, not only in our ears.

Rabbi Berel Wein is Senior Rabbi of Beit Knesset HaNassi in Jerusalem and Director of the Destiny Foundation.
Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are days in which people tend to focus on their own situations – their personal judgment and working to achieve their individual atonement. But a close look at the prayers for both of these days makes it clear that we should not be thinking only of ourselves. All of the prayers are in plural: זָכְרֵנוּ לְחַיִּים – Remember us for life, כָּתְבֵנוּ לְחַיִּים – Inscribe us for life, הַחֲזִירֵנוּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה – Bring us back in repentance, etc.

Why are these prayers in the plural and what does this teach us about how to approach these days?

Moshe begins Parashat Nitzavim, which is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah, by saying “You are standing here today all of you in front of Hashem your G-d, your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your policemen, every man in Israel” (Devarim 29:9). The Zohar teaches that “today” refers to Rosh Hashanah (see Rashi to Iyov 1:9). The Midrash Tanchuma explains that “every man in Israel” connotes that all Jews are held accountable for the sin of just one person. When Achan sinned and took from the spoils of Yericho, G-d said, “Israel has sinned” (Yehoshua 7:11), thus incriminating all Jews in the sin of one man. The Midrash goes on to explain that if we, as a nation, bear such great responsibility for the sin of an individual, all the more so are we judged favorably for the good deeds of one person. That is how we stand before G-d on Rosh Hashanah.

According to this Midrash, there really is no such thing as individual judgment and repentance. We are all responsible for one another and we are all in this together. So the prayers must be in the plural because we cannot succeed in judgment or achieve atonement alone, and as long as others are sinning we cannot be completely purified.

But there is another level to understanding the plural language, which does relate to our individual, personal situations. The Torah teaches that as part of the mitzvah of Eglah Arufa – when a murdered body is found near a city, the elders of the city must declare, “our hands did not spill this blood” (Devarim 21:7). Do we actually suspect that the elders of the city murdered this person? Why must they make this proclamation?

The Gemara in Sotah (45b) explains that this relates to the mitzvah of levaya – escorting a person out of the city. Since this accompaniment serves as a protection for the traveler during his journey, the elders proclaim they did not knowingly allow this deceased person to leave the city limits without an escort. But how does escorting the person a few cubits per the halachic requirement serve as a protection?

The Maharal explains that the purpose of the mitzvah of levaya is to demonstrate that this is not really a lone person walking the roads but rather one who is part of the community. In turn, he is judged as a member of the community and receives the merit of the community as a whole. Thus, the elders swear they afforded this deceased person that protection and his murder was not a result of their negligence in this regard.

As human beings, we are prone to sin and that sin should draw harsh Divine judgment and punishment. But that is only if we are being judged as individuals. As long as a person is viewed as a member of the broader Jewish community, he has the protection of the community during the Divine judgment.

Thus, our only hope to survive the judgment of Rosh Hashanah and achieve atonement on Yom Kippur is if we see ourselves as and others as part of the community. This is why the prayers are in the plural. They remind us not to focus on ourselves but to see ourselves as part of the nation, which is the key to G-d hearing our prayers.

As we prepare for the High Holidays, let us recommit to being givers who always think about the needs of others and the community. Additionally, let us remember that we are responsible for one another and try to inspire those around us. In the merit of these two efforts, may we be blessed as individuals and as a community with a כְּתִיבָה וַחֲתִימָה טוֹבָה.

Rabbi Dov Lipman is a former MK and the author of seven books about Judaism and Israel.
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Rav Sa’adia Gaon says there are 10 thoughts, 10 messages we are supposed to be thinking about as we hear the shofar. For example, malchuyot – how we’re coronating G-d with our shofar blows and our tefilot. For example, shofar of Har Sinai, the shofar of Akeidat Yitzchak, and finally לְעוֹרֵר תְּשׁוּבָה – to arouse us to teshuva. The Rambam says in Hilchot Teshuva (3:4) “Even though ultimately we blow the shofar because G-d commanded us, there is a remez, a hint: wake up you who are sleepwalking through life, review your actions, do teshuva and recognize G-d. “ One final motif Rav Sa’adia Gaon mentions is focusing on the geula haAtidit – the future redemption, the time when we will all hear the Shofar Gadol.

What exactly is geula? What should we be focusing on as we hear the shofar? How would we define geula, past, present and future?

The first national geula was Yetziat Mitzrayim. To start that process, G-d came to Moshe at the burning bush, and they have a back and forth in which G-d implores Moshe to go to Mitzrayim and lead Am Yisrael to freedom and Moshe continually refuses, until G-d finally becomes angry. Doesn’t Moshe want to take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim? Why all the excuses? Why is he so against the idea?

Moshe finally says, “send with whom you shall send.” What does that mean? Rashi says this is referring to Aharon HaKohen but someone else later on in history. Not he whom You have been accustomed to sending, but whom he whom You will send. Who is that? “Eliyahu HaNavi,” says Moshe and G-d answers that this is not His plan. “You go to Pharaoh. That man you’re referring to, he’ll have his time.”

The commentaries explain that redemption is not smooth. You cannot simply climb up the ladder step by step. There are ups and downs, aliyot and yeridot. Forwards and backwards.

Take Yosef for example. He was sold when he was 17, thrown into jail in Egypt and as a result, Bnei Yisrael were forced to slave away in back-breaking labor for hundreds of years. Was this all part of the geula?

Yes, because geula is not a smooth process.

Moshe saw all of history open in front of him. He didn’t only see the galut in Mitzrayim, but the entire process. He saw there would be crusades, pogroms, massacres, a Holocaust. He saw everything and he said, “G-d, I don’t want to be part of it. Let somebody else do this. Let Eliyahu HaNavi do it, skip straight to the final stage.” Moshe argued with G-d and repeatedly refused Him because he loved Am Yisrael. Not because he was insensitive to their plight.

Geula has ups and downs. That’s life – both personal and national. Even the symbol of geula – Mashiach – is a poor man riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). Why a donkey? Shouldn’t it be something more glamorous and majestic?

A donkey doesn’t walk on a straight path. It moves forward, stops and sits down. Then it goes backwards. Sideways. That’s us too, Am Yisrael. As we hear the shofar, we recognize it hasn’t been a smooth process. We’ve come and gone and come and gone. And even now, when we have been zocheh to return to Eretz Yisrael as a nation, the process continues to be rough. There are difficulties and challenges but they are an essential part of the geula process.

Thus through our shofar, we pray that G-d takes us to the end of this process – where there are only aliyot, and yeridot are a thing of the past.

Yehi ratzon that this Rosh Hashanah, as we blow the shofar, let us remind ourselves that we’re almost there. G-d should take away all the yeridot so we reach the end of the geula, the final stage, when we will be able to enjoy the blessings and abundance of Mashiach Tzidkanu.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner is a Rebbe at Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh and Rabbi of the Nofei HaShemesh community.
Tashlich on Rosh Hashanah

T he earliest recording of Tashlich, performed on the first afternoon of Rosh Hashanah, was by the early 15th-century German scholar Rabbi Ya’akov Molin, the Maharil (Minhagei Maharil RH 9). He describes how the masses would walk to rivers and “cast away their sins” by reciting the last verses from the prophet Micah, which include, “He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea” (7:19). Yet the ritual is undoubtedly older, with much speculation about its origin and meaning.

G-d reveals Himself near water in several Biblical stories, including the vision of the Divine Chariots (Ezekiel 1:3) and Daniel’s end-of-days prophecies (Daniel 10:4). One Midrash even claims that all prophecies took place near water (Mechilta Rashbi 12:1). As in the story of Creation (Bereishit 1:2), G-d’s presence, so to speak, is said to hover over water, making it an appropriate place for prayer (Ba’al HaTurim Bereishit 16:7). Indeed, many medieval European synagogues were built close to waterfronts.

Great bodies of water connote majesty and glory. Riverfronts are deemed appropriate sites for royal coronations since they symbolize the new reign’s perpetuity (Horayot 12a). Some later writers speculated that Tashlich similarly celebrates G-d’s kingship over the world, a central theme in the Rosh Hashanah prayers (Yabia Omer OC 4:47). Others alternatively contend that the ceremony recalls Ezra’s Rosh Hashanah assembly that rededicated the Torah by the water gates (Nehemiah 8:1-2). Maharil himself speculates that the waters recall Abraham’s alacrity to bind Isaac, which, according to one Midrash, included him being neck-deep in a river that was created by “Satan” to stymie him.

While the earliest depictions of Tashlich vary, most require using water that contains fish. Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe (16th century, Poland) explained that fish, constantly in danger of being caught by fishermen, warn us of the snares of death and therefore inspire repentance (Levush OC 596). Others believe that because fish are always alert with their roving eyes, they remind us of the ever-watchful gaze of G-d (Shlah RH 23). Alternatively, fish might ward off the evil eye, and represent the blessing of fecundity (MB 583:8).

Some early sources also allude to the ritual of throwing bread or other food into the water, possibly signifying the casting away of our sins. Many Sages, however, deemed this a violation of the holiday restrictions, especially if Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat when carrying food and prayer books in unenclosed public domains is prohibited. The Shulchan Aruch omits any reference to throwing food or fish (OC 583). In his lesser-known philosophical work, Rabbi Moshe Isserlis describes how the mighty waters make us contemplate the grandness of G-d’s creation and His dominance over nature, leading us to repentance and the casting away of sins (Torat HaOlah 3:56).

These creative interpretations notwithstanding, the diverse and conflicting practices and interpretations most likely reflect emendations of a folk custom with potentially problematic meaning. In a detailed study on this custom’s history, Prof. Jacob Lauterbach speculated that this rite stemmed from an attempt to pacify certain Satanic forces and protect children from undue harm. Historians have further pointed to a medieval ritual with similar themes and rites documented in Rashi’s 11th century Talmudic commentary (Shabbat 81b). Suspicious of Tashlich’s origins, the Gra abstained from the entire ritual (Ma’aseh Rav 202), a position which my family and others of Lithuanian descent continue to maintain (see Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 583:4).

Be that as it may, the ritual clearly continues to have widespread observance. Here in Jerusalem, the lack of bodies of water has not deterred its citizens from flocking to empty ancient wells, artificial ponds, Ir David’s wellspring, and even kiddie pools in synagogue courtyards! Nonetheless, no interpretation of the ritual has been universally embraced. While the famed 16th-century mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria ordained shaking out one’s clothing to aid the extraction of harmful forces, more rationalist scholars shunned this embellishment, instead framing Tashlich as a mere tool to inspire repentance – to stimulate us to genuine introspection and change.

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody is the author of A Guide to the Complex: Contemporary Halakhic Debates (Maggid) and runs the “Jewish Law Live” YouTube channel and Facebook group.
The Inspiration to Change

W

e read in Parashat Nitzavim that the mitzvah of teshuva is “not in heaven or across the sea,” far away and unreachable, but rather within our grasp and our ability to accomplish. The Torah makes it sound so easy! Let’s look together at three cases of teshuva in Tanach to learn more about teshuva.

Upon realizing that Yehuda will never fulfill his promise of allowing Sheilah to marry her, Tamar, Yehuda’s daughter-in-law, disguises herself as a prostitute to tempt Yehuda, who does not recognize her. Several months later, when Tamar’s pregnancy from that encounter comes to light, Yehuda condemns Tamar to death for her adultery, as she was still tied to Sheilah. As she walks to her death, she sends Yehuda his ring, her death, she sends Yehuda his ring, his own unborn children – and his own unborn children – we are guilty, for we did not listen to our brother’s cries. What inspired their feelings of teshuva? It seems they did not feel remorse after the sale, nor after they see their father’s suffering when he concludes Yosef has been killed. They feel remorse when they experience yisurin: difficulties and suffering. As they experienced this persecution, and while they did not know for sure this was a punishment from G-d, they began to question, why is this happening?

David HaMelech, a descendant of Yehuda and Tamar, sees, desires and takes Batsheva while her husband is away at battle. Upon discovering she is pregnant, David invites her husband Uriah home from the battlefield, in the hope he will go home to his wife and thus assume the baby is his own. Uriah’s refusal to go home to be with his wife while Am Yisrael is in danger on the battlefield is an ironic condemnation of David’s sin. David then orchestrates Uriah’s death in battle and takes Batsheva as his wife after she mourns her husband.

At this moment, Yehuda faced a terrible choice: publicly humiliate himself by admitting to this intimate encounter with his daughter-in-law, or allow Tamar – and his own unborn children – to die by fire. Yehuda summons up the courage, and in two words redeems himself and rises to lead the family: נא אשמיךaven – she is more right than I. His recognition of his responsibility for the situation, combined with his strength of character and willingness to be humbled, inspired his successful teshuva.

Later, when Yosef’s brothers encounter the Egyptian viceroy’s hostility and false accusation, they whisper to each other, אני אשומם אתポート – we are guilty, for we did not listen to our brother’s cries. What inspired their feelings of teshuva? It seems they did not feel remorse after hearing his punishment, but yet that teshuva is meaningful and accepted as well.

Rav Soloveichik writes in Halachic Man that “Repentance, according to the halachic view, is an act of creation – self-creation. The severing of one’s psychic identity with one’s previous ‘I,’ and the creation of a new ‘I,’ possessing a new consciousness, a new heart and spirit, different desires, longings, goals – this is the meaning of the repentance compounded of regret over the past and resolve for the future.” At this challenging time, may we all find within ourselves the creative power to transform ourselves this year with sincere teshuva and lasting change.

Rabbanit Sally Mayer serves as Rosh Midrasha at Ohr Torah Stone’s Midreshet Lindenbaum.
Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are a time of grandeur, and of tradition. Each year, as the summer draws to a close, and the familiar sound of the shofar becomes part of our daily experience, we realize just how much our souls long for the rituals that facilitate the teshuva process. We long for the sea of white that creates a sense of reverence, and for the familiar tunes that thunder through our synagogue halls. We long for the worn pages of machzorim that bring back memories of prayers past, and for the wrinkled hands that reach over every so often and pull us in close. We long for all the things we have come to associate with the high point of our religious calendar.

But this year is different. Cognizant of the fact that Jewish Law prioritizes human life above all else, Jews around the world will have a religious experience wholly different from what they are accustomed to. For many of us, the lack and the emptiness will be profound. And so perhaps this year, more than any other, we can draw insight from the Haftarah we read on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. In this famous portion, we encounter Chana, Elkanah’s barren wife, in the throes of despair and longing. And while Chana’s struggle is unique to her, the depiction of her emotional state is something to which many of us may currently relate. She is described as being frustrated with her reality, and sad about all the things she is missing. She is angry, maybe even irrationally, at herself and at the people around her. When the text describes her inability to even participate in her family’s celebrations, one senses a profound loneliness and disconnection.

Chana doesn’t remain mired in self-pity though. She breaks with convention and travels alone to the Mishkan in Shiloh. Once there, she doesn’t engage with a kohen or bring a sacrifice, as would have been expected. Instead, she utters a silent, personal prayer. The text seems to be saying that Chana is not relying on people around her, or on traditional rituals, to extricate her from her misery. She uses her loneliness to fuel a connection with G-d that is qualitatively different from anything her contemporaries – even Eli the High Priest – had ever seen. Rather than depending on things external, Chana reaches deeply into her pain, her desires, and her faith, to craft a prayer that sets the template for all subsequent tefilot (Berachot 31a).

Our history is filled with scenarios that have forced Jews to find creative ways to uphold ritual norms. Wars, plagues, periods of oppression. Each historical contingency brought with it its own set of challenges. Our challenge this year is to find a way to connect, even as we are disconnected. Our challenge this year is to find inspiration, in the absence of those things we rely on to inspire us. Our challenge this year is to remember we are still a link in our chain of tradition, even if the wrinkled hands can’t pull us in close to remind us.

And so, as we meet these challenges, let us look at Chana. Let us look at what it means to keep praying, even as we feel isolated, and know that what we’re feeling now won’t last forever. Let us remember that ultimately, our fate lies in G-d’s hands and that it is not the volume of our tefilot that reverberates, but their sincerity.

As we listen to Chana’s words, let us take comfort in knowing that even the quietest of prayers can breach the gates of Heaven.

Yael Leibowitz has taught Continuing Education courses and served as Resident Scholar in New York. She is currently teaching as she continues her studies at Bar-Ilan University.

Yael Leibowitz
Rav Ilan & Chana Brownstein
White Plains, NY

“We are so excited to be heading with our daughter, Emunah Shirah, for shlichut as Directors of Youth Programming at the Young Israel of White Plains, in White Plains, NY. Although youth activities look a little different now with Corona, we’re excited to make the best of our situation and create fun and engaging experiences for our shul. Additionally, Chana will be working as the Program Coordinator at the Jewish Renaissance Experience, an organization dedicated to enhancing and building Jewish connection and education. “In all of our different roles, we’re excited to help connect those around us to the sweetness of the Torah and the light of Hashem.”

Chaim and Shira have just arrived for shlichut in Toronto, Canada. Chaim will be a member of the Beit Midrash Zichron Dov (affiliated with YU and Torah MiTzion) and he will also serve as Rabbinic Assistant at the BAYT (Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto) in Thornhill. Shira will be running informal education activities at Ulpanat Orot of Bnei Akiva Schools and coordinating the women’s Beit Midrash for OU-JLIC. Their daughter Talya’s main goal will be to charm everyone with her cuteness.

Chaim and Shira hope to bring Torat Eretz Yisrael with them and contribute to the thriving Zionist community of Toronto. They are looking forward to making connections with the members of the community (hopefully in person and not only virtually). Chaim and Shira are confident that they will gain and learn much from the Toronto community, of which they have already heard amazing things.

“Chaim and Shira hope to bring Torah MiTzion with them, we will teach at the local school which serves all streams and promotes academic excellence as well as a love for Israel. We also plan to hold chavrutas with adults in the community and to run small learning groups and classes in the various synagogues.

“We are especially excited and looking forward to getting to know this Jewish community in which the various streams work together – Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. We come with a passion for teaching and with the humility to learn from this unique community, and with the help of G-d we shall succeed.”

Rav Nechemya & Batya Rosenfeld
Nashville, Tennessee

“World Mizrachi runs several leadership programs to prepare rabbis, educators and shlichim to serve in communities around the world. Here we profile some of the families who are starting their shlichut, and some who have recently returned.”

Raising the bar in leadership development, Mizrachi is revolutionizing the recruitment and training of the next generation of rabbinic and educational leaders to serve world Jewry. Through pinpoint searches in Israel and unique partnerships with local communities we have built a cadre of young and powerful educators ready to serve and to lead. To find out more, contact Rav Hillel van Leeuwen at ravhillel@mizrachi.org.
“We were educators with Mizrachi/OU-JLIC at the University of Maryland. The opportunity to affect Jews during their transformative years as young adults – after high school and after their Gap Year – was incredible. This is when they are shaping their views on life: What does marriage look like? How do you raise children? What does it mean to get a job? Am I a liberal or a conservative? Being there for them during these turbulent years was a huge zechut.

“We never told anybody what to be or how to behave. We gently tried to push them out of their comfort zone and make them think about their choices. It might be easy to convince some students to stay religious (and push off intermarriage for one more generation), but their children will grow in a strongly Jewish environment only if their parents themselves actually become passionate Jews.

“It was all about building relationships and being their friends. So as you can imagine, leaving the campus was not easy for us, as we had 400 children we felt so close to and so connected to.”

“We have just returned from two years of shlichut, where we wore so many ‘hats’. Over the course of a weekend, we would first meet with students at Finchley Synagogue where Moshe helped run the Night Seder. The next day we would meet with high school teens, teaching them Prophets and Jewish Philosophy. On Shabbat itself, as Assistant Rabbi at Borehamwood Shul, Moshe would give a high-level shiur before the Torah reading. Then as Borehamwood Youth rabbinic couple, we would host 30 teenagers in our house for Seudah Shlishit. We were not done yet! Moshe would lead the most amazing discussions for adults in a shiur on “Tzurba M’Rabanan” (practical Halacha). On Sundays, we ended the weekend playing foosball, football or tennis with the community kids, pizza in one hand and a tennis racket in the other! Over the course of the entire weekend, Moria also gave classes to the women of the community making our experience truly holistic in nature.

“These roles helped us make an impact on a far wider circle. We got to experience and influence the community in all its beauty; the young children, the students, and their parents.”

Rav Glicksberg served as a Dayan on the Johannesburg Beth Din, the Senior Rabbi of the Mizrachi Yeshiva College Shul and as the Rosh Kollel of the Beit Mordechai Campus Kollel.

Rabbanit Amira founded and built the Midrasha, a high-level women’s learning program, catering primarily to those who have returned from learning in seminaries in Israel with also high level women’s shiurim for the broader community.

The Glicksbergs, through these multiple roles, touched the lives of many hundreds of families during the course of their multifaceted shlichut in building the community, Beit Midrash learning and the Beth Din.

The Glicksbergs recently returned after six years in South Africa, and Rabbi Glicksberg has been recently appointed as the Rosh Beit Midrash of the prestigious Machon Ariel/Harry Fischel Institute which trains some of the leading dayanim – rabbinic judges and rabbis – fulfilling such roles in Israel and around the world.
Kapara

LOOKING FORWARD

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the Day of Atonement a precise translation for Yom Kippur? In English, the word “atonement” implies amends for certain wrongdoing. In this sense, the Day of Atonement implies expiation for transgressions we may have committed over the course of the previous year. However, in Chumash, we find numerous instances in which the word kippurim is used in a very different context.

For example, in Bereishit, when G-d commands Noach to build the ark, we find the very first use of this shooresh (כ-פ-ר), suggesting it implies a sort of protective covering: “you shall coat it from within and out with ‘kofer’ – pitch.” In Shemot (16:4), the Torah employs this same root to describe the manna covering the ground like frost. Later in Shemot (25:17), the special lid for the Ark of the Covenant is named the “kaporet” – כַּפֹּרֶת. While the typical Biblical word for a covering is מגضة, this special name highlights its protective nature, for the keruvim on this kaporet are protecting the Ark (the symbol of our Covenant with G-d) – just as they protect the ‘path to the Tree of Life’ in Gan Eden (see Bereishit 3:24 and Mishlei 3:18).

Therefore, when Vayikra (23:27) informs us that the 10th day of the seventh month is Yom HaKippurim, there must be something ‘protective’ about that special day! This simplest understanding might be that this day protects us from punishment for our sins of the previous year. However, one could suggest a different understanding, one that looks forward to the coming year as well, based on the first time we find the word kippurim in the details of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan (Shemot 29).

Before the Priests could begin their daily service in the Mishkan, there was a need for a seven-day inaugural ceremony where the blood of a sacrificial ram was sprinkled upon them. In a similar manner, the blood of a sacrificial bull was sprinkled on the mizbayach. In the summary verses, this act of sprinkling the blood is referred to as kippurim (see 29:36). This suggests that before the Priests can begin their service of G-d in the Mishkan, they require some sort of protection. Most likely, this ‘protection’ is necessary as G-d’s Shechinah will dwell in the Mishkan. This encounter with G-d is quite dangerous, for a human who is not worthy of this encounter may deserve immediate death.

In fact, in the aftermath of the Sin of the Golden Calf, G-d warned Moshe that He can no longer dwell among this stiff-necked nation, due to their rebellious nature. Had Moshe Rabbeinu not interceded on their behalf, the special covenant between G-d and Am Yisrael would have been broken forever. However, in light of Moshe Rabbeinu’s famous prayer (see Shemot 33:12-19), G-d establishes a new Covenant, this time including the option of Mercy and Forgiveness for wayward behavior, thus enabling G-d’s Shechinah to dwell among His People even though they may be stiff-necked.

As Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishrei, marks the anniversary of G-d’s declaration of His attributes of Mercy, and the re-establishment of the Covenant, it is only fitting that on this day we remind ourselves of this special privilege, that G-d continues to dwell in our midst, even though we may not always be perfect. Symbolically, the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies on this day reflects our desire to remain His loyal servants. However, to show G-d that we need ‘protection’ – as we may not be worthy of this encounter – the High Priest must perform a symbolic act of kapara (see Vayikra 16:16).

As every Jew is a member of this Priestly nation, we serve G-d not only in His Temple but also in our daily lives by keeping His commandments. Therefore, at the beginning of every year, we must not only ask G-d for forgiveness for our transgressions of the previous year, but we must also prepare ourselves for the spiritual challenges that will face us in the year that now begins, showing our gratitude to G-d for His attributes of Mercy that enable our relationship to remain eternal. Hence, Yom HaKippurim serves as a very fitting name for this holiday, as our worthiness to remain His People begins with our humble recognition that we may not always be so worthy.

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

is an internationally acclaimed Tanach scholar and online Jewish education pioneer.
I still don’t know how he made it into the Infantry Officer’s training, but I do know how difficult it was for him. Overweight, and far from being an athlete, the physical challenges he would have to overcome seemed insurmountable. How would he run up a 3km mountain wearing a gas mask, and in the time allotted? How would he pass the Bar-Or 2km run test? How would he manage the morning runs for what seemed endless miles? And most of all, how would he get through Wingate and the “freak of nature” run and obstacle course?

Two-thirds of the way through the obstacle course, I stopped wondering about him and started worrying how on earth I would make it through myself. Every time we practiced it, after coming up soaked out of the river I could not seem to get up the six-meter rope fast enough; between the extra weight from the water and my slippery hands and boots, I just didn’t get it. So one night I went down to the course on my own to practice, and there he was running through his paces. He simply refused to give in.

Turned out he was in an artillery unit, and his commanding officer had convinced him to apply for the officer’s course – and had subsequently advocated for him to be accepted – and he did not want to let this officer down. In the end, by the thinnest of margins (finishing the course with barely five seconds to spare), he passed.

There is a fascinating suggestion in the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 16b): “Rav Kruspedai says in the name of Rav Yochanan, ‘Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah: the righteous are written into the book of the righteous and granted life, the wicked are written into the book of the wicked and decreed to die, and the intermediates are written into the book of the intermediates whose judgment is withheld until Yom Kippur; if they merit they are then inscribed in the book of life, and if not...’”

What exactly is the book of intermediates?

Rav Hutner, in Pachad Yitzchak, suggests that this intermediacy is not a status but a character trait. A person who is happy with mediocrity, who does not seek to excel or overcome, to achieve or to advance. Such a person just wants to get by, to be comfortable.

Many years ago, upon returning for my second year of study in yeshiva, I remember the disappointment I experienced upon discovering I had been switched into a different shiur with a different Rebbe. Having spent a year under the tutelage of Rav Ezra Bick, I was excited to come back after a summer break and hit the books, feeling I finally understood what was going on and what was expected of me. Hoping to convince Rav Bick to allow me to stay in his shiur, I went to speak with him and he listened attentively to what I had to say until I mentioned I felt I had finally gotten comfortable in his class.

“Comfortable?! The last thing you should be if you want to grow is ‘comfortable’ — you should feel challenged!” And that was the end of the discussion!

We live in a world where it is easy to be comfortable — but do we challenge ourselves to be better than we were last year? Do we plan for another year of the same routine, because it is so... comfortable? Or do we become part of making the world a better place in the coming year?

The Rambam, apparently based on this Talmudic dictum, rules accordingly (Hilchot Teshuvah 1:2-3), suggesting it’s the person whose merits and transgressions are balanced who has the chance to do teshuva between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This week we have the chance to be better, to rise to the challenge of how much better we can be. Just like that officer’s course cadet who refused to accept mediocrity late in the night on a lonely obstacle course.

This year, on the night of Yom Kippur, as we recite the Kol Nidre prayers exhorting us to live up to the nedarim (promises) we made to ourselves this past year, let us resolve to rise this year far above and beyond mediocrity, let us aspire to excellence — excellence in who we can be, and excellence in how we care for each other.

Rabbi Binny Friedman is the Rosh Yeshiva of Orayta.
A chassid once came to Rebbe Elimelech of Lzhenesk and asked if he could see how the Rebbe performs kapparot. The holy master told the chassid that if he really wants to see a holy and meaningful kapparot, he should go to Reb Moshe, the innkeeper who lived in another town.

Obediently, the chassid made his way to Reb Moshe to see how he performed kapparot on Erev Yom Kippur. He reached the modest house and saw a man sitting at a table. And this is what he overheard:

“My dear wife, please bring the two booklets I keep throughout the year.” Reb Moshe opened the first one and began to cry as he read his list of sins aloud. “Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, I know I made a lot of mistakes throughout the year. I didn’t keep your Torah and I transgressed many of your commandments.”

He then closed the first book and spoke in a serious tone: “Master of the Universe, I admit my faults and mistakes. But with Your permission, I would like to read from this other book. Reb Moshe opened the book and began to describe the suffering of our Exile, and all the poverty, starvation, persecutions and isolation the Jewish people had suffered that year.

Reb Moshe raised his voice and said, “Dear G-d, I have a deal for you – let’s delete my book and Your Book. Let’s turn over a new leaf. I’ll try my best and I hope You’ll do the same – הֲגֹא הָיָת.”

The year of 5780 was a very challenging one. We experienced bitterness, loneliness and suffering. We still mourn and regret the passing of relatives and friends. Society faces a scary and uncertain future. Many people would indeed like to delete the memory of these last few months.

I doubt if many of us have the courage, purity and holiness of Reb Moshe to make this kind of deal with G-d. Even to describe and list our good deeds and merits is a little presumptuous, as the passuk says “If you are righteous, what do you give Him?” (Job 35:7).

Of course, our Sages teach us that we are not allowed to erase nor obliterate the past. On the contrary, we have the obligation to remember and grow from adversity, as human beings, as a nation and as a society.

Rambam says, “Among the ways of repentance are, for the penitent to continue to cry out in tearful supplication before Hashem” (Hilchot Teshuva 2, 4). “Sins which he had made confession of one Day of Atonement, one should repeat and make a confession on every other Day of Atonement, though he continues to be a penitent” (ibid. 8).

Repentance consists of a continuous process of recollection, recalling our faults and contemplating the vicissitudes of our past. This process brings us closer to the Creator and gives us a deeper perspective on life and meaning.

At this time of the year, G-d calls for a “Great Reset.” For the last decade and more, mankind has advanced in so many fields: technology, medicine, economics, industry, etc. The feeling of הָיוּ הַצְּלָה אַל-כָּתוּב – and you became like G-d, seemed appropriate. Suddenly though, this year it all came crumbling down. We have literally felt the verse תֹּלֶה אֶרֶץ עַל בְּלִימָה (Job 26:7), “Who suspends earth over nothingness.”

It’s not all doom and heaviness though. Throughout this pandemic, we have also witnessed many positive deeds and initiatives. Inspiring acts of chessed, people supporting and caring for one another and an increase of global online Torah learning.

My personal lessons from the pandemic are developing a stronger and deeper connection with G-d, appreciating His World and Magnificence and a more powerful feeling of belonging to Am Yisrael.

During this coming year, I pray to translate those feelings into actions that will improve our world.

Rabbi Shmuel (Saul) Paves is Community Rav at Minyan Israel (formerly Bnei Akiva) and Vice-President of Mizrachi Brazil. He was also Ram at Yeshivat Or Israel College and Headmaster of Yavne School.
Who Am I?

Point to yourself. Where did you point? Are you a specific body part? Who are you? This is one of the most simple yet sophisticated questions anyone can ask of themselves and the New Year is a great time to start.

The central command of Rosh Hashanah and the Biblical name that represents its essence is יוֹם תְּרוּעָה – a day of terua sounding (Bamidbar 29:1; Vayikra 23:24). In defining the term terua, which comes from the shofar, the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 33b) translates it to be a yevava, sobbing or moaning. This is derived from a story in Shoftim (5:28), in which a pagan army general named Sisera went to war with the Israelites and was defeated and killed. Sisera’s mother looked out of the window, awaiting her son’s return, and cried (vateyabev). Tosafot (Rosh Hashanah 33b) cites the custom of sounding a total of 100 shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah to parallel the 100 cries she let out as she waited in vain for her son.

Unable to do anything about her son’s return, Sisera’s mother lets out a guttural cry because that’s all she can do. That is the broken sound of the shofar, a plea from a place of desperation to pierce the heavens in search of a positive outcome.

Perhaps there is more in this story that gets to the very heart of what the shofar represents. We are never told the name of Sisera’s mother. We are never told what she did or what kind of person she was. Rather, she is only mentioned by association, suggesting perhaps that she has no real independent identity other than her relationship to her son. Therefore, when she loses her son, she loses the only sense of identity she ever knew and cries out in anguish.

She metaphorically looks out of the window and does not see her son on the other side. She sees a translucent reflection of herself. A self she did not fully recognize beyond the context of her son. If one were to try to touch one’s reflection in water, it would dissolve and if one were to reach out to a reflection in the window, it always remains beyond reach. A reflection is simply an empty, intangible image. This is symbolic of Sisera’s mother’s perception of herself without her son. She was only ever defined by someone else and the thought of losing that was terrifying.

Most people are defined by something other than their essence. Someone who is good at sport, music or art can become defined by that talent rather than let it be but one expression of who they are. When that is lost, they often experience an existential crisis – who are they now? I remember a close friend who was a phenomenal soccer player before he damaged his leg and couldn’t play again. He was faced with the big question – now what? Others whose identities are based around another person are faced with the same question when that relationship is severed.

We often classify ourselves by our job or title or relationship to a relative. However, if our internal identity is built upon something external, we are profoundly affected when the externality changes. This unique period of political uncertainty, Covid-19 and other global instabilities has caused many to question basic assumptions, which will undoubtedly force a different Rosh Hashanah.

The cry of the shofar, like that of Sisera’s mother, beckons us to ask who we truly are – what makes us who we are and how are we going to focus in the New Year on that which contributes to the person we truly want to be. More than the ephemeral reflection Sisera’s mother saw, let us build an identity that is palpable, substantive and of immense value. So we can appreciate who we are and know who we want to become.

Shana Tova!

Rabbi Benji Levy is CEO of Mosaic United.
The 40 days of the Yamim Noraim are meant to change us into a new creation, an improved model of our former self. Indeed, we are commanded to listen, to hear. The key is listening. We must listen attentively to the shofar blasts and discern the message which each note carries: the sounds of contrition and humility, the sounds of the broken heart, the sounds of majesty, the trumpeting of the glory of the King and His deep devotion to us.

Together, these sounds create a symphony that instills in us a sense of gratitude to G-d, reminding us how dependent we are on Hashem each moment of our existence. At the same time, these sounds overwhelm us with a deep pride and confidence in who we are, and what we can be: a nation of destiny, an Am Segula cherished by our Creator and safeguarded by His mighty Hand.

In the sounds of the shofar, with lyrics provided by the Machzor, we perceive our whole history, from Creation to Flood to Matan Torah to the Exodus to our return to Israel and eventual redemption, when the Shofar Gadol will be sounded and the entire world will hear. The sounds of the shofar – like all music – have a mystical power that can penetrate to the deepest parts of our neshamot.

The surprising bracha on tekiat shofar is,لامውניע קול שופאר. Not to blow the shofar, but to hear it! Nowhere else do we have such a bracha; not for Megillah reading (קֵנֶה מֵאֱלֶה תְּפִלָּה), nor Torah study (לַעֲמֹּם בֶּדֶרֶךְ מְדָרִית). The message is simply to hear. A message echoed in the Selichot’s שומע אֶל הָרִנָּה וְאֶל הַתְּפִלָּה, and in praising G-d as שומע קולך, in praising G-d as שומע כליך.

We must train ourselves to listen and to hear. It’s not easy; it’s an acquired trait. To be a good listener requires patience and humility. It’s not contingent on a reply, we just need to know someone out there is listening. People often complain, “This one-way conversation is so frustrating; I speak to Him, but He never answers!” But isn’t it wonderful to talk and not be interrupted, to have G-d’s complete attention, to say what we want to say, with faith that He hears us out?

As for answers, perhaps, if when we are doing praying and pouring out our hearts, we stop to listen – deeply – we might just hear G-d reaching towards us. במשהו dialogs, says the Unetaneh Tokef prayer, קול דמוןיה דזר הושע. A thin little whisper emerges amidst the grand blasts of the shofar. That small voice — perhaps the one inside our head, or inside our heart — is trying to speak to us, and it carries a powerful message.

This art of listening doesn’t always come naturally. But if we work at it, if we learn to listen, to hear, then a whole new world – G-d’s world – will open up to us.
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Born in Grodzisk, Poland, Rav Shapira was the youngest son of the Chasidic Rebbe, Elimelech of Grodzisk. His father died when he was just a year old and he was taken and educated by his grandfather. In his house, Yeshayahu received an education deeply rooted in Chasidism, being groomed to take over his father's rather substantial following. Part of his education included the nurturing of a deep love for Eretz Yisrael (if not for Zionism) and when the time came to become Rebbe, Rav Shapira decided to go to Eretz Yisrael instead. Upon arriving in Jaffa, he met with Rav Kook, who had a tremendous influence on the young Chasid. Unfortunately, World War I broke out and Rav Shapira decided he should be with the family he had left behind in Poland.

There, Rav Shapira began to teach the ideas of Religious Zionism among the various Chasidic communities and he began his involvement in Mizrachi. He joined the First Mizrachi Convention of 1917 and called upon all Orthodox Jews to sell their businesses and possessions and go and live in Eretz Yisrael. He became convinced that agriculture and farming were the surest ways to reclaim the Land of Israel and to bring about the Redemption. In 1919, he spoke to the Congress in Hebrew and reiterated the need to establish agricultural settlements.

In 1920, Rav Shapira came on aliya and immediately took over as head of the Immigration and Labor Department at the World Mizrachi Headquarters in Jerusalem. In this capacity, he initiated the building of the Rosh Pina-Tangah Road and the cleaning of Solomon’s Pools outside of Bethlehem. Personally participating in these efforts, he soon became known as the Pioneer Rebbe. In addition, he began a movement to help people who couldn’t find work, thereby combating problems of unemployment.

In 1921, he took part in what was to become the foundation meeting of HaPoel HaMizrachi. He was one of the chief instigators behind the creation of a Religious Zionist Labor movement to answer the needs of religious youth who wished to fuse their lives (which were dedicated to Torah) with the Labor ideology. At the first HaPoel HaMizrachi Congress in 1922, Rav Shapira was the keynote speaker and soon became one of the Movement’s three directors, as well as head of its Settlement Division. Although most of his energies were devoted to establishing Religious Zionist Labor communities, he continued to serve on the board of the Mizrachi Party. When HaPoel HaMizrachi became embroiled in its first identity crisis, Rav Shapira supported the faction which desired to enter the general Labor Movement, i.e., the Histadrut. After the crisis had passed, he devoted his time to buying land for settlement. However, he continued to represent HaPoel HaMizrachi at inter-governmental meetings and in public forums.

In 1924, Rav Shapira traveled back to Poland to try and influence some of the Chasidic community to come to Eretz Yisrael. To this end, he was largely successful in convincing two fairly young rebbes, Rabbi Yehezkel Taub and Rabbi Israel Hoffstein, to move to Israel with their chassidim. They bought land with the help of Rav Shapira and founded the settlements of Nachalat Ya’akov and Avodat Yisrael, which later merged into Kfar Chasidim. He went on to found Kfar Ata.

For 10 years, from 1933-43, Rav Shapira managed Zerubavel, a cooperative bank in Yerushalayim. But desiring to reenter agriculture, he settled in Kfar Pines, where his home served as a spiritual center for HaPoel HaMizrachi until his death in 1945. He wrote many articles on economic and agricultural problems, often foreseeing the problematic halachic issues to emerge with the new State. Synagogues in Kfar Pines, Kfar Ata and Tel Aviv were named after him, as well as a forest in the Galilee.
Seeking to raise the morale of the Jewish people in exile, the prophet Yishayahu describes the days when the Children of Israel will return to the Land of Israel: “And in that day, a great ram’s horn shall be sounded, and the strayed who are in the land of Assyria and the expelled who are in the land of Egypt shall come and worship the L-rd on the holy mount, in Jerusalem” (Yishayahu 27:13). This is how the Prophet connects the sound of the shofar and the return to the Land of Israel. In Musaf on Rosh Hashanah, we ask: “Our G-d and the G-d of our fathers... blow a great shofar for our freedom” and thus we connect the sound of the shofar to the national freedom of the people of Israel.

Rabbi Kook, who saw pioneering as a value and a mitzvah, explains that Redemption has three shofarot: large, medium and small, and on Rosh Hashanah, we ask: “Our G-d and the G-d of our fathers... blow a great shofar for our freedom” and thus we connect the sound of the shofar to the national freedom of the people of Israel.

The Shulchan Aruch also distinguishes between three shofars. One, the best shofar for Rosh Hashanah is from a ram’s horn. Second, if there is no ram’s horn, all shofars are kosher. And the third type of shofar, from an unclean animal or a non-Jew’s shofar, is prohibited but if one blows one of these, he has fulfilled the obligation.

Rabbi Kook compares these three shofarot to the three ways of redemption: spiritual aliyah, national aliyah and aliyah out of necessity.

There were generations when aliyah to Eretz Yisrael was through the great shofar, as people from all over the world looked up to Eretz Yisrael, their hearts sought the sanctity of the Land and at great personal sacrifice and risk, they came to an uninhabited land to instigate the redemption with their own hands.

The medium shofar, the regular shofar, is the pioneering shofar, the natural voice, the national emotion that calls on every Jew anywhere in the world to be part of the State of Israel. Families, lone soldiers, young students see our small country as their national home and leave their country, their homeland and their father’s house, immigrating to Eretz Yisrael and realizing their dreams of national belonging.

The third shofar, the little shofar, is blown only if there is no kosher shofar, i.e. when there is no great shofar, no longings for the Holy Land and no ordinary shofar, the natural desire to connect to the flag and national anthem. Then and only then does the wrong shofar, the enemies of Israel, come and blow in our ears the sound that awakens us to redemption.

The shofar of an unclean animal sounds the voice of Mashiach and does not give the Jews of the Diaspora respite. Starting with Amalek, through expulsions, riots, the Holocaust and the travails of our own times, this year we have heard the sound of the coronavirus shofar that arouses us to the Land of Israel.

The global pandemic is changing our priorities and the sound of this invalid shofar coming out of the impure ‘corona beast’ is alerting entire communities around the world. Along with the rise in anti-Semitism, the transition to remote work and distance education, we are seeing a growing interest in aliyah to Eretz Yisrael.

As Head of the Rural Growth and Development Division of the World Zionist Organization, I have received dozens of enquiries from various aliyah organizations seeking places that can absorb hundreds of families. Entire communities seek to move their lives to the Land of Israel.

This Rosh Hashanah, let us pray with the utmost intention that G-d will blow a great shofar for our freedom. Both as individuals and as a whole, may we know how to transcend the here and now and succeed in serving G-d and move to the Land of Israel.

May we merit to live in a generation in which G-d’s revelation in the world is only through the great shofar and not through pandemics and the like.

Gael Grunewald is Head of the Rural Growth and Development Division of the WZO, former Director of World Bnei Akiva and one of World Mizrachi’s representatives in the National Institutions.
“How can we unite in this separation?” These words from “Keter Melucha,” Ishay Ribo’s corona-related song, express one of the key challenges of the past few months. We live in a time of separation and divisiveness. Whether we are currently in a state of a full lockdown or the new normal of social distancing, physical separation between people has been one of the defining features of the corona pandemic. This has often hurt our sense of belonging to a broader family, social circle, or community. In addition, this medically-mandated physical distancing has unfortunately been accompanied by an uptick in tribalism, fractured societies and demonizations of the other.

Surprisingly, according to Rav Kook, one key method for achieving unity in a time of divisiveness is proper and sincere teshuva. In Orot HaTeshuva (12:4), he writes: “Every sin, even the most trivial of sins, instills in a person a feeling of hatred towards something, and through teshuva the love returns to shine.”

This assertion is surprising. Granted, interpersonal sins can poison a social environment. But there are private sins between man and G-d which do not involve other people. How can missing a prayer or eating milk and meat instill hatred in one’s heart for other people? And how can repentance restore feelings of love?

The answer requires a better understanding of Rav Kook’s broad conceptualization of repentance. In Orot HaTeshuva, he describes that a person can only engage in proper repentance after understanding several kabbalistic assertions regarding the cosmos.

The first principle is that G-d imprinted a sense of positive dynamism and movement into the world. Nothing is stable. The entire world is “constantly developing” (Ibid. 5:3). Societies rise and fall, only to have better and more just societies arise in their wake (Ibid. 4:3). With the passage of time, biological organisms evolve to become better adapted to their environments (Shemonah Kevatzim 1:485). And from a spiritual perspective, every entity, in its own way, naturally strives towards greater and greater heights in the form of a closer connection to G-d (Orot HaTeshuva 4:2).

A second, interrelated point is that this joint movement towards perfection generates a sense of togetherness between all parts of creation. “The entire world is filled with harmony,” declared Rav Kook, since “the strong moral calling” to constantly grow closer to G-d emanates from “the united voice of each part of the cosmos” (Ibid. 8:7). Each individual soul hears this unified calling and naturally takes its place in this cosmic movement towards greater spiritual heights.

For Rav Kook, this picture sets the stage to understand the devastation of sin. In addition to contaminating the person, sin “causes distress to the heart since it contradicts the unity that exists between the individual person and all of existence” (Ibid. 8:3). All of creation is harmoniously working together to connect with G-d while the sinner severs himself from this joint mission. This leaves the sinner in the unnatural and confusing state of detachment and aloneness.

This explains why sin, even those between man and G-d, instills hatred of the other within the heart. Sin causes an abnormal separation from the rest of the cosmos which leads to an unhealthy growth of one’s individual ego. This ultimately breeds hatred and divisiveness.

Repentance is not only a personal return to G-d but also a return to feeling reunited with the rest of creation. Through teshuva, a person regains his natural place in the harmonious symphony of the cosmos. In fact, Rav Kook writes that to do teshuva, one must view “the world as a whole, and every particular creation, the history of humanity and each individual person… as a single book of different chapters” (Ibid. 4:4). Only after realizing the interconnectedness of all aspects of creation can the light of teshuva shine within the individual person.

We enter this High Holiday season in a world brimming with separation and divisiveness. Our personal teshuva must be intimately bound with a deep connection to others. In this way, we can fix not only ourselves but also foster a sense of harmony amongst all of G-d’s creations.

Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein is a faculty member of Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim and Yeshiva University.
Israel’s Supreme Court has gone beyond the limits of “reasonable” intervention in Israeli political and public life with its ever-expanding scope of super-subjective decision-making.

Going back 25 years to the term of then-Court President (Chief Justice) Aharon Barak, the Court effectively stripped Israeli law of any inherent meaning and created complete legal mayhem. Barak and his colleagues developed a series of mumbo-jumbo, infinitely pliant concepts that allow High Court justices to apply their own sensibilities to issues before the Court; to socially re-engineer Israeli society – in their enlightened image, of course.

“Reasonableness” is a term that runs like a computer virus through the High Court’s decisions over the past two decades. It is authoritarian jargon which means the Court elastically can go any way it pleases; as are the Court’s “broad interpretations” of law to fit its own perceptions of “values,” “balance,” and “equality.”

Given the longstanding makeup of the Court, decisions that employ such supple and flexible principles invariably are skewed in favor of the liberal side of the political spectrum.

And thus, the Court has ruled in recent years with a liberal fist on the allocation of JNF land, Palestinian residency rights in Israel, rights of foreign converts to citizenship, Haredi draft deferments and stipends to yeshiva students, commerce and road closings on Shabbat, and more.

The Court has found it “unreasonable” that religious Jews be allowed to pray on the Temple Mount because this would disturb the Arabs and require a massive police presence. On the other hand, the Court has found it “reasonable” to allow the Women of the Wall to pray in a manner offensive to most worshippers at the Western Wall despite the disturbance involved and the massive police presence required to make it feasible.

It was found “unreasonable” that Religious Zionist Jews operate “acceptance committees” to maintain distinctly homogenous small communities even though is this basic libertarianism, not discrimination. But it is “reasonable” for Bedouins and Arabs to operate “acceptance committees,” because they are considered “distinct” and apparently more kosher communities by the Court.

It was “reasonable” for the Central Elections Committee to ban the right-wing and anti-Arab “Otzma Le-Yisrael” party from running in the three last election campaigns, said the High Court. But it was “unreasonable” to disallow the anti-Israel Joint Arab List from running, including some of its openly pro-terrorist candidates like Heba Yazbak and Hanin Zoabi.

So it was again this year when the High Court of Justice struck down the 2017 Settlements Regularization Law as “unconstitutional,” because it impinges on the land rights of absentee Palestinians and mere cash compensation isn’t sufficient. But it was okay to crush the rights of Israeli Jews and expel them from their homes in Gush Katif with a few pennies of compensation. (The Court refused to intervene in that matter.)

So it may be when the Court rules on the historic Jewish Nation-State law of 2018, which was passed as a “Basic Law” – meaning that it was meant as supra-Court constitutional legislation. The Court has no right to touch this. Nevertheless, current Chief Justice Esther Hayut has convened an 11-justice panel to judge the law’s “reasonableness.”

So it may be when the Court rules soon on a petition from a group of extremist professors to terminate all government funding for gender-separate Haredi college programs. Accepting the petition would be a disaster for the slow but measurable movement of Haredi men and women into the workforce – which is crucial for the Israeli economy and the future of our society.

What is next? Well, would a decision by the government to extend Israeli law to security zones and all settlements in Judea and Samaria be a “reasonable” decision? How about the opposite decision – to dismantle all settlements? Which of these decisions would be “reasonable” and which not? The imperious High Court justices will decide, not the electorate – unless the Knesset legislates limits on the High Court’s reach, or at least enacts an override provision.
Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz zt’l (1937–2020) was a teacher, philosopher, social critic and prolific author.

Rabbi Steinsaltz was the first person since the medieval sage Rashi to have completed a full translation of and commentary on the Babylonian Talmud, and of the Tanach. He has been hailed by Time Magazine as a once-in-a-millennium scholar – beyond translating the Talmud he has made it more accessible to more Jews than ever before.

Born in Jerusalem in 1937 to secular parents, Rabbi Steinsaltz studied physics and chemistry at the Hebrew University. He established several experimental schools and, at the age of 24, became Israel’s youngest school principal.

Continuing his work as a teacher and spiritual mentor, Rabbi Steinsaltz established a network of schools and educational institutions in Israel and the former Soviet Union.

Israeli President, Reuven Rivlin, called Rabbi Steinsaltz a “modern-day Rashi” and a “man of great spiritual courage, deep knowledge and profound thought who brought the Talmud to Am Yisrael in clear and accessible Hebrew and English.”

Rabbi Meni Even-Israel, Rabbi Steinsaltz’s son, recalls how on the Yamim Noraim, although it took Rav Steinsaltz more than 25 minutes to recite the silent Amidah, he nevertheless insisted that his congregation not wait for him before beginning the chazan’s repetition: “My father thought about the klal – the whole. He did not feel as though he was more important than everyone else and should make everyone wait for him. He didn’t want to turn people off and upset the community.”

Rabbi Steinsaltz passed away in August 2020. He will forever be remembered as a giant in the Jewish world.
The Unique Duality of Shabbat Teshuva

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

The basic meaning of the Hebrew word תְשׁוּבָה is standstill, cessation. G-d “worked” on the six days of Creation, and then when He arrived, He stopped working. But תְשׁוּבָה has an additional meaning, which is found also in Rabbinic literature: return. This meaning does not contradict the idea of cessation but rather complements it.

Before Creation, it was as if the Almighty had nothing to do with the universe. In fact, Creation does not pertain to the order of things that existed before it. In this sense, Shabbat is a return to the primordial state. It can be said that Shabbat is the seventh day upon which all of Creation is perfected. Yet at the same time, it is also a return to the pre-Creation state. Every Shabbat is therefore both the Shabbat after Creation and the Shabbat that preceded it.

These two elements also exist in teshuva. On the one hand, the first step of teshuva is to cease our transgressions and then detach ourselves from our sins. But teshuva also means “return,” a return to the state of things prior to sinning. In daily life, it is so much easier to stop doing something than to restore things to their former state. So too in teshuva. It is easier to cut and stop a sequence of actions than to return to the innocence that preceded the sin. Yet the prayer and the heartfelt desire that accompany every act of teshuva is to effect a change of action, a total uprooting of one’s evil deeds and a return to purity. (We seek to at least uproot the evil from our hearts because certain actions are irreversible.) This aspect of teshuva, a return to purity, underlies the Rabbinic saying (Midrash Tehillim 90) that teshuva preceded Creation. This is why teshuva contains this pull towards the pre-Creation state.

These two aspects of Shabbat, cessation and teshuva, are found in the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Shabbat Shuva, or Teshuva. It is a unique combination of the essences of both Shabbat and teshuva, which together create a new entity. On the one hand, it is the only Shabbat in the year when one can engage in teshuva. On the other, it is the only time in which teshuva can be done in a Shabbat-like manner.

On Shabbat, we are commanded both to cease working and to turn the Shabbat into a day of pleasure (see Isaiah 58:13). But the experience of teshuva — born out of thoughts, memories and heart-rending compunctions — is usually not very pleasurable. In fact, this is precisely why we do not deal with teshuva nor confess our sins on Shabbat. However important they may be, teshuva and confession mar our Oneg Shabbat. On Shabbat Teshuva, we are therefore called upon to enact a Shabbat-like teshuva — namely, a teshuva that does not touch upon the painful or difficult sides of sin. Instead, we focus on building ourselves from within. We can restructure ourselves — not by forgetting the facts of our sins, but by erasing the experience of sin from within us.

This point is fully expressed in a verse we repeat both in the selichot and on Yom Kippur: “I have blotted out your sins like a thick mist and your transgressions like a cloud; return to Me, for I have redeemed you” (Isaiah 44:22).

Even after doing teshuva, we still retain a certain amount of memory throughout the year, as it says: “my sin is ever before me” (Psalms 51:5). But during the Ten Days of Repentance — and especially on Shabbat Teshuva and Yom Kippur — teshuva emerges as a renewed ascent whereby sin is erased, and we reach a higher state. Indeed, our Sages teach us that a person who does teshuva out of love merits (Yoma 86b).

The teshuva of Shabbat is a teshuva of love. We return to the Almighty not as people fleeing from their past but as individuals transcending the past. Like all the preparatory work we do to honor the Shabbat, tikkun (repair) is hard, demanding work. But, like this work, it is also what eventually makes Oneg Shabbat possible, and as soon as Shabbat comes in, we forget all our toil. Or, if we do not actually forget the toil, the pleasure of the Shabbat makes it taste a lot sweeter.

The pleasure of Shabbat Teshuva — despite all our sins and transgressions — stems from our adhesion to the aspect of teshuva imprinted in the very essence of Creation, which has nothing to do with sin. This teshuva, which preceded Creation, has nothing to do with reverting back from sin. It is an ascent that makes us see our failures as tests. Instead of thinking about all we have impaired and blemished, this teshuva leads us to focus on the ways in which we will be able to build our future in a loftier way. Even if we are unable to regain our pristine innocence, Shabbat Teshuva reconnects us with the teshuva that preceded the world. Shabbat Teshuva helps turn our complex weekday life, with all its pains and inner struggles, into a new creation: holiness.
n the Rosh Hashanah prayers, we say "Today is the birth-day of the world." This is based on the idea that the world was created (or Man was created) on the first day of the month of Tishrei.

Yet there is a difficulty with this translation. The verb נברע does not mean "to give birth," but rather "to con-ceive." (From the same root we get the words הרוים – "pregnancy" and הורים – "parents.") So should the phrase be translated as "the day the world was conceived"? What would that refer to?

This actually goes back to a debate in the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 10b). Rabbi Eliezer says the world was created in Tishrei. Rabbi Yehoshua disagrees and says the world was created six months earlier (or later) in the month of Nissan. These two opinions are reconciled by Rabbeinu Tam (cited by Tosafot on Rosh Hashanah 27a), who says that in Tishrei G-d decided to create the world (i.e. the idea was conceived), and six months later, in Nissan, the world was created. Nissan is in the spring, when nature is renewed, which is a fitting time to reenact the creation of the world.

Why then do we focus on the creation of the world on Rosh Hashanah (certainly more so than we do in Nissan)? Perhaps to emphasize the centrality of intent. As important as the final results are, what gives them significance is the original intent. סוף מעשה במחשבה תחיל – "the final action was [determined] by the original thought." In a period when we are occupied with repentance, our focus needs to be on our proper intent and thoughts, so our actions will reflect those original considerations.

However, this is not the only word in the phrase whose meaning has been understood differently over time.

The phrase נברע עולם was first used by the prophet Jeremiah: אשר לא מותני מרחם ותהי לי אמי קיבורי והר עולם, “Because he did not kill me before birth, so that my mother might be my grave, and her womb pregnant forever” (Jeremiah 20:17).

We’ve already noted that נברע means “pregnant.” But in this verse, עולם does not mean “world,” but rather “forever.” That is the meaning throughout the entire Bible – it consistently means “eternity” or “always.” In this way, it is related to the word for "hidden" – עולם – meaning, "the hidden, unknown time."

So how did it come to mean “world,” which is the most common usage in Modern Hebrew? Apparently, between the meanings “eternity” and “world,” there was a middle stage, where it meant “age” or “era.” This sense is still preserved in the phrases עולם הזה, עולם הבא, meaning “this age” or “the age to come” respectively. They refer to either the current time we are living in or a future time which in some way will be very different.

Those two eras are so different that they could be understood to be entirely different worlds – in fact, a more common translation for those phrases is "this world" and "the world to come."

From the Rabbinic period onward, עולם came to generally mean “world,” and biblical phrases like מלך עולם were adapted to this new meaning. Another example can be found in Jeremiah 10:10, which describes G-d as מלך עולם. In the biblical context, that meant “the everlasting King.” But when it was adopted into the formula of Jewish blessings, it became “King of the World.”

On Rosh Hashanah, we profess that G-d is קומ של עולם. Of course, by recalling the original creation, we acknowledge that G-d’s reign is eternal as well. For us humans, the distinctions between space and time are difficult to bridge. G-d, however, is above both time and space, so the word עולם applies to Him in both of its meanings.

David Curwin is a writer living in Efrat, and the author of the Balashon blog, balashon.com.
In August 1995, the Dagan Hill, an unoccupied strategic location within the municipal boundaries of Efrat, was the scene of a major two-week protest (with deep involvement by the author of this article) against the Israeli government’s plan to relinquish it to the Palestinian Authority in nearby Bethlehem. During the mayhem, we uncovered ancient man-made shafts in the ground and archaeologists were called in to investigate.

The Biyar system was apparently initiated by the Hasmonaeans and extensively expanded by Herod the Great (37-4 BCE) as a solution to the growth of Jerusalem’s population and the commensurate need for more water, especially during the festival pilgrimages bringing many thousands to Jerusalem. Local springs like the Gihon in Ir David and cisterns that caught winter rains no longer sufficed with the construction of mikvaot, pools and bathhouses. In fact, the Gemara (Ta’anit 19b) and Mishna (Shekalim 4) speak of the water shortage during the festivals and building the aqueduct as one of the uses for the half-shekel Temple tax.

The aqueduct is an incredible feat of engineering. They used very sophisticated techniques for those times, including measuring tools such as grommets, siphons and the best technology Rome could provide while combining different collection methods. The Wadi al Biyar section is springs sourced and used dams and shafts to channel water into an enlarged natural underground water tunnel. This tunnel also gathered rain percolating through the limestone until hitting a nonporous marl layer, creating an aquiclude and then streaming all the water via its gradient.

It was in use until 1967 (a 2000-year run!) maintained over many periods and aided significantly by a pumping station built under the British Mandate in 1924, still visible near the Pina Chama at Tzomet Gush Etzion. It’s now a fun tourist attraction where one can climb underground via one shaft, traverse the tunnel through muddy waters and see how water still flows in, then climb up a ladder and out another shaft further down the valley in between Efrat and Elazar, called appropriately Nachal Pirim (Shafts Creek), with 40 shafts. The nearby Gush Etzion Winery has a line with the same name on the label.

The Arrub section is a hewn stone surface aqueduct with dams and walls on the mountain ridges, wending 40 kilometres (10 km as a crow flies) at a gradient of less than 0.1%. Portions of it are still visible today although much of it was destroyed by negligence or dismantled over the years for use as building material. It was likely added after Herod’s reign.

The northern section was what was discovered in 1995, the deep tunnel carved horizontally through the mountain to empty into Solomon’s Pools. In the absence of electrical pumps, gravity dictated the flow and the Dagan Hill was too high to straddle and keep the water flowing.

After a sojourn in the enormous catchment basins (capacity 250,000 cu/meters) of Solomon’s Pools (not built by King Solomon but perhaps inspired by him), the collected water took different directions. One section led east to the desert fortress–palace at Herodian; remnants can still be seen on Efrat’s Eitam Hill. Another, the Upper Aqueduct, apparently ended at Hezekiah’s Pool in today’s Christian Quarter, to supply Herod’s Palace at Jaffa Gate, although north of Kever Rachel in Bethlehem no remnants have yet been identified. The Lower Aqueduct’s destination was no less than the Temple Mount, and we do have sections in a few areas including the Sultan’s Pools in Jerusalem and on Mount Zion.

Fast forward to 2020: the Dagan Hill is home to a few hundred families, and the municipality is building a park integrating the aqueduct with bike paths and walkways. We still flow towards Jerusalem, just now in traffic on the Tunnel Road.

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1 A geological formation that absorbs and holds water but does not transmit it at a sufficient rate to supply springs, wells, etc.

For a virtual tour of the Biyar, visit www.eveharow.com under Chol Hamoed tour.

Eve Harow is a licensed tour guide, podcaster and public speaker.
The epicenter of Yom Kippur is the vidui, the confession. While vidui is not recited even once on Rosh Hashanah, the full version of vidui is recited nine times over the course of the Yom Kippur services: after the Mincha Amidah just before Yom Kippur, twice during each of the following services – Ma’ariv of Yom Kippur night, and Shacharit, Mussaf and Mincha of Yom Kippur day – once at the end of the silent Amidah, and once during the chazzan’s repetition. There is an additional shorter version of the vidui – just the Ashamnu, Bagadnu... recited in the silent Amidah of Neilah.

The vidui includes the Ashamnu, an alphabetical acrostic of different sins we have committed. It is said in the first-person plural, because while each individual may not have committed these specific sins, as a community we surely have, and our fates are intertwined on this day.

The prescribed list of Ashamnu can seem unfamiliar or remote. Below is a translation¹ and elucidation² that may be helpful to you in your prayers and help make your Yom Kippur more meaningful.

1  Based on the Koren Yom Kippur Mahzor.   2 Based on Rabbi Daniel Fine’s “A Relatable Translation of the Viduy Confession.”

Ashamnu – We have been guilty.
- We have exposed ourselves to things that ruin our sensitivities to spiritual growth.
- We struggle to find time for the people and things that matter most in life, yet we freely waste time on meaningless things.

Bagadnu – We have acted treacherously.
- We fail to notice the good in others. Instead, we reflect our inner frustrations on them.
- We do not listen to people properly. Instead, we impose our interpretations of what the other person means.

Gazalnu – We have robbed.
- We make organizational decisions based on our own personal conveniences.
- We brush off others’ deceitful actions as funny instead of confronting them.

Dibarnu Dofi – We have spoken slander.
- We say things about people we would never say to their faces.
- Our children hear ‘no’ or words of negativity and criticism from us far more than they hear ‘yes’ or words of encouragement and praise.

He’evinu – We have acted perversely.
- We have prioritized short-term wants and current values over Divine wisdom and mitzvot.
- We think and talk about ourselves far too much.
- We encourage others to spend time doing meaningless things.

Ve’hirshanu – We have acted wickedly.
- We prefer not to get involved rather than to stand up for what is right.
- Do we emit positive energy and optimism or negative energy and pessimism?

Zadnu – We have acted presumptuously.
- We begin projects that are exciting at first, but we do not have the commitment to complete them – then we rationalize and justify abandoning them.
- We have shied away from making difficult and courageous moral decisions by claiming there are grey areas.

Chamasnu – We have been violent.
- We have used other people for our projects or favors without properly appreciating them or paying them back.
- We make more of an effort with certain people because of
their social status. • We point out to others what we feel they are incapable of achieving, without building them up to achieve in areas in which they can excel.

**Tafalnu Sheker** – We have framed lies. • We have exaggerated, misrepresented or lied about events. • We have believed others’ distorted views of the world. • We have accepted rumors or gossip too quickly and passed them on to others. • We have judged people too quickly without trying to understand them.

**Ya’atznu Ra** – We have given bad advice. • We have been too quick to give advice without thinking it through properly. • We do not offer impartial advice, especially when we have a conflict of interest. • We have put others in a position where they cannot say ‘no’ to our requests.

**Kizavnu** – We have deceived. • We have promised things just to appease others. • We have used words that are misleading. • We have followed the crowd, irrespective of whether what they are doing is right for us.

**Latznu** – We have scorned. • We have made fun of meaningful things in order to shy away from them. • We have thoughtlessly put others down. • We have tolerated a society in which trampling over others is the way to get ahead.

**Maradnu** – We have rebelled. • We have viewed mitzvot as cultural feel-good activities instead of Divine commands to get close to G-d. • We have been flippant with our relationship with G-d.

**Niatznu** – We have provoked. • We have devoted lots of time to our bodies but not enough to our souls. • We have not taken up opportunities to study Torah.

**Sararnu** – We have turned away. • We have tried to wriggle out of responsibilities in life. • We have been cliquey and kept to our own social circle instead of branching out and reaching out to others.

**Avinu** – We have committed iniquity. • We assume that our way of thinking is right. • We do not disassociate ourselves with people who post, discuss or share vulgar things.

**Pashanu** – We have transgressed. • We have cherry-picked bits of Judaism, we have half-observed parts of Judaism we fancy. • We do not think long enough about our values.

**Tzararnu** – We have persecuted. • We don’t feel each other’s pain enough, preferring to focus on our own lives. • We have not spent enough time pondering the repercussions of decisions we make and their knock-on effects on others.

**Kishinu Oref** – We have been obstinate. • We have seen daily life as a series of coincidences instead of seeing G-d’s hand. • We remain in our comfort zone, deflecting attempts to grow beyond.

**Rashanu** – We have acted wickedly. • We do not see ourselves as having a mission to spread goodness in the world. • We have brushed off our mistakes instead of learning from them.

**Shichatnu** – We have corrupted. • We have been arrogant at times. • We have let our idealism slip away. • We have not self-analyzed.

**Tiavnu** – We have acted abominably. • We got angry when things didn’t go our way. • We have not realized what impacts our characters.

**Tainu** – We have strayed. • We lost sight of our goals and we do not accept when we are criticized. • We limit religion to particular days and places.

**Titanu** – We have led others astray. • We do not call out to G-d for spiritual help. • We do not feel lacking when we ignore our relationship with G-d.
Generally speaking, grieving does not get better in any predictable pattern, but rather follows a random series of ups and downs depending on a host of factors. There are also distinct phases of grief – denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Once you know what to look for, you can almost watch people transition between these phases, although not necessarily in this order.

As the parent of a grieving child, perhaps the most important point to understand is that one never knows which of the countless facets of the tragedy is troubling them. The only way to find out is by talking less and listening more.

Here are some of the messages I have imparted when speaking about tragedy, in the hope you will find at least some of this helpful in speaking to your children:

1. **We are in this together.** I open by giving an analogy of joining a baseball league, by explaining that joining that group means you practice together and support each other over the entire season. You also celebrate victories and get upset over losses as a group.

2. **People grieve differently.** Going back to the baseball analogy, reflect on how different teammates respond to hitting a home run, or winning or losing a game. Some take it in their stride and show little emotion while others go way over the top. Just like there are different ways to celebrate, so too, there are different ways to mourn – and they should feel free to just be themselves, and allow those around them the space to do the same.

3. **How could this happen?** There are various hashkafic approaches to dealing with this kind of question. My approach is a straightforward one and one I find to be honest and teachable. The Gemara occasionally leaves a question unanswered and ends with the word תֵּיקוּ, which basically says we need to wait for Elyahu HaNavi to resolve this. This is simply a תֵּיקוּ and is just incomprehensible. My father’s death 47 years ago is still a תֵּיקוּ to me, and it will probably remain so for the rest of my days.

There will always be תֵּיקוּ questions, and that’s when בִּטָּחוֹן (faith) needs to kick in. The eternal truths of the Torah give us enough confidence in G-d’s Divine Providence (תֵּיקוּ) to give us the faith to take the plunge and accept things we do not understand. Since in the limited time we have in this world, and with our limited understanding of His ways, it is impossible for us to understand 100% of events that happen, we must leave the rest to faith and accept things that are beyond our ability to understand בַּאֲהֵבָה (with love).

Another effective analogy is that בִּטָּחוֹן is similar to taking medication a parent hands you, even if you don’t know what it is – and even if it tastes terrible – because your life experience gives you the trust in your parents to follow their guidance in areas you don’t fully understand.

Many parents and educators hope their kids won’t ask these questions, which might have them grasping for answers. That is not the best approach – for an unasked question is an unanswered one, and you may not be there to answer your children’s questions when they have them later in life.

On a practical note, please keep an eye and ear open to see if your children are ready to talk about their tragedy with you. It is important they do so. And since the grieving cycle is filled with ups and downs, it is not uncommon for children’s emotions to flare up after being completely dormant for days. Please do not hesitate to reach out for professional help if you are concerned that your child(ren) are exhibiting worrying symptoms.

Finally, while this column is child-centered, many of us adults have a challenging time dealing with tragedy. If you find yourself unable to bounce back, please seek professional help yourself. When they do the safety drill on airplanes, they always instruct you to place the oxygen mask on yourself before your child, even though that seems quite selfish to an outside observer. The message is clear though. You cannot be in a position to help your child if you don’t take care of yourself first.

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Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance

Rosh means beginning and shana means year. We are celebrating the beginning of a new year. What is the significance of these two words and the message they impart?

Shana refers to the dimension of time and stems from the same root as shinui, change. We must change with time or we will stagnate and die. We must choose to move forward or inevitably we will find ourselves moving backward. Nothing can thrive in a vacuum. We must be adamant in our resolve to better ourselves and make the necessary adjustments in ourselves before we can hope to attain a fulfilling and satisfying relationship with someone else.

The beginning of a new year is a time of reflection, a time to stop and introspect and assess what we have accomplished in the past year in order to determine and choose our destination and goals for the coming year. Rosh Hashanah is a time to ask ourselves how well we have succeeded in achieving our goals of last year, what still needs to be improved and changed, what traits need to be eliminated and which new attributes need to be incorporated to reach more elevated goals in the coming year. Our Rabbis tell us it is easier to learn the entirety of Mishna than to change one character trait. However, they console us with the adage: לְפוּם צַעֲרָא אַגְרָא – “according to the effort, is the reward!”

Marriage is the pivotal arena for interfacing the lower self with the Divine self, by requiring us to see our reflection – the good and the bad – through our partner. We are sometimes faced with many unpleasant revelations about ourselves and must choose if we wish to play the blame game and project the flaw onto our partner, rendering ourselves unchanged and smug, or accept responsibility, seek the path of self-refinement and move toward our true essence of G-dliness.

One cannot do this work alone. In Bereishit we are told, “it is not good for Man to be alone.” It is precisely for this reason G-d split the all-encompassing Man into a Man and a Woman, for there to be an encounter, a meaningful dialogue through which each gender collectively and individually is afforded the unique opportunity of knowing and understanding ourselves first and then our other half. This holy encounter leads to a total integration and perfection of male and female traits and heals the original fragmentation of the universe while re-uniting us with our Maker.

The letters of רוש, when rearranged, spell אושר, happiness. Happiness is a product of a job well done. Happiness is a sense of satisfaction that the yearman’s effort we made has borne fruit and enables us to live a much more meaningful life.

The first word of the first parasha in the Torah is Bereishit, which is comprised of two words – רוש (beginning) and בית (home). The implicit message is that the preliminary and primary purpose of Creation is achieved through the home. G-d’s expectation of us is to make Him a home on earth in which His glory will be revealed and appreciated. This can be achieved by consciously striving to create an ideal relationship in the coming New Year and preparing to build and strengthen our marriages. If we can do that, we will discover ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction in our lives.

Blessings for a joyous and meaningful New Year!

Sherrie Miller-Heineman has an M.A. in marriage counseling with 30 years experience.
Why is it difficult for us to pray on Yom Kippur? Why did our mothers and fathers shed tears like water while we count how many pages are left in the machzor? Maybe because our ancestors knew they would die one day, but we tend to think we never will. That is if we even bother to think about the most important issue at all.

Human life is short and fragile. True, our lives today are a little less short than those of our ancestors. But that does not really change anything. Each of us will stand before the Creator of the World when his day comes, whether in 20 years, 40, or maybe even tomorrow, G-d forbid. The infantile cult of today’s youth is fueled by vigorous repression of this certain prediction. 40-year-olds pretend to look and act like 20-year-olds as if they would be able to deceive death itself. But if I easily recognize they are 40-year-olds and not boys at the height of their youth, I don’t think the angel of death will be confused either.

There are only two biographical details we all have in common: we are all born and we will all die. Amazing how much energy we invest in ignoring this simple fact.

A person who knows he will die one day always lives in a consciousness of accountability. One day, maybe tomorrow, he will stand before G-d and have to justify every deed he has done and every choice he has made. Our ancestors, who lived in such consciousness, stood in shul and wept on Yom Kippur, begging G-d to postpone the day of their deaths, and striving to make their lives more worthy. And they especially shed tears for their children. If my wife and I have four children, then I pray to G-d for six souls, not just one.

Perhaps there is another reason why it is difficult for us to pray: it diminishes us. For true prayer, one must admit that G-d is Great and All-Powerful and I am small and fragile. How hard it is for our generation to admit this. Who do we identify with? We see the answer in popular movies and Purim costumes: we adore the invincible superheroes of the comic book world. Are we really like that? Are we supposed to be like that – invincible heroes who overpower their opponents with the help of superpowers?

Prof. Mordechai Rotenberg, Israel Prize laureate, developed a method of psychological treatment based on the Jewish spirit. He tells the story of the time a man came to him for help. “My wife is very assertive and tramples over me time and time again. I’m too gentle.” To which the professor replied: “If you had gone to another psychologist, they would have encouraged you to become more aggressive. Since you’ve come to me, I’m telling you your behavior is totally okay. Send your wife to me for treatment.”

Every day, I see advertisements for personal empowerment workshops, and there would still be more to discuss. But I think the first line would be very simple: it is difficult for us to pray because it is difficult for us to look in the mirror.
This Rosh Hashanah, make a gift to Mizrachi.

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To contribute and enter names for the Yizkor wall, visit www.mizrachi.org/yizkor.
On Yom Kippur, 1973, I was a sixth-year hesder student at Yeshivat HaKotel, which overlooks the Western Wall Plaza in the Old City of Jerusalem.

That Yom Kippur, the tension was even greater than usual, although we never imagined that the words of the Unetaneh Tokef prayer – “who will live and who will die, who will die at his predestined time and who before his time ... who by water and who by fire” – would take on such real and immediate significance just a few hours later.

Yom Kippur Afternoon
All of a sudden, the alarms began to sound, the rumors began to spread and the general call-up began. The first students began to leave the yeshiva on their way to their units.

Motzei Yom Kippur, Saturday Night
By the end of the day, most of the students, myself included, were on their way to the front. When I arrived at my assembly point, in the center of Jerusalem, hundreds of reservists were already there. We got onto Egged buses and the mood was somber and silent. News of the battles being fought at the front were streaming in over the radio. Most of us sat deep in thought, looking out the window... would we come back from this war? Would we ever see these views again? Would we ever see our families again?

Sunday Morning, October 7, ’73 (11 Tishrei)
We arrived at the base, received our personal equipment and began loading the tanks.

Sunday Evening
On the second night of the war, we began traveling south toward the Suez Canal. Hard-fought, bloody battles were being waged along the front lines and they told us in the briefing that the situation was dire. We reservists must arrive as quickly as possible to reinforce the units already engaged.

Sunday Night
We ran straight into battle and fired our first shots at enemy tanks that were blocking our path. Eventually, after a tough fight, the Egyptians retreated. We then found ourselves in the midst of another battle near the Bitter Lake, which continued well after midnight.

Monday Morning, October 8, ’73 (12 Tishrei)
Today was our first attempt at a counterattack in the hope of throwing back the Egyptians. Close to 100 Israel tanks participated in the fray and I cannot adequately describe the scenes – shells flying through the air, tanks hit, screams, and the horrific images of the injured and the dead. Several of my friends were killed today.

Tuesday, October 9, ’73 (13 Tishrei)
After a short night’s rest, our battalion rose at first light to prepare for another day of intense fighting.

Tuesday Noon
We captured a hill from which we could see hundreds of Egyptian soldiers and vehicles fleeing south. The command from brigade headquarters was “Charge! Fire all available guns!” The tanks lurched forward with me and others standing in our respective turrets. Unprotected.

It quickly became clear that we had charged straight into an anti-tank ambush. They fired at us from all directions and we experienced heavy losses.

We also experienced, for the first time, the power of a Sager Anti-Tank Missile. My tank took a direct hit.
Shrapnel flew everywhere and I was hit in my upper body.
My face was bloodied, my left hand severely injured and I couldn't see out of my left eye.
I was losing consciousness.
I remembered my tefillin in the tank, then everything went black.
The last image I remember is Ezra Bashari, my tank driver, coming up to the turret, extricating me and laying me down next to the tank, which in the meantime had gone up in flames.
Later, my friends told me I had run to the equipment compartment, grabbed my tefillin and run away before collapsing. They had pulled me up and placed me in the adjacent tank. While the tank made its way to the road, a medical team took me to an emergency field hospital in Refidim. From there, still unconscious, they flew me, with other wounded soldiers, to Tel Hashomer Hospital near Tel Aviv.

Wednesday, October 10, 1973 (14 Tishrei)
I regained consciousness and asked the nurse for the time. I hadn't been able to put on my tefillin yesterday and I didn't want to miss another day. She smiled and told me I was in a hospital and my tefillin were not there.
I remained in the hospital for several months, undergoing six operations.

November 1973
On one of those days in hospital, Rabbi Israel Klein, a member of my tank battalion, came to visit and brought me my tefillin. He told me that after they had moved the tank to the road, the tefillin in my limp hands had fallen into the tank, and they only found them after the ceasefire as they were cleaning up. Fortunately, my name was embroidered on the bag.

September 2020
47 years have passed since that terrible war. Since then, the Unetaneh Tokef prayer has taken on special significance for me, “Who will live and who will die”...
The person who stands in prayer is helpless before the Almighty G-d. He is “created from dust and shall return to dust.” G-d is the eternal King while man is akin to “broken clay, a wilted plant, the dust in the wind and the floating dream,” forever at G-d’s mercy.
The beauty of Unetaneh Tokef is in its clear and simple presentation of things that became real and tangible for me on the battlefields of war.
In the age of technology, modern man feels he is all-powerful. We can travel in space, create revolutionary and elaborate technologies for global communication, advanced spacecraft and fighting disease, yet we still can’t predict what will happen tomorrow.
As we have witnessed very clearly this year, everything can change in a flash and our worst nightmares can become reality at any given moment.
From my own experiences, I think the healthiest outlook on life is that we feel our lives are in G-d’s merciful hands.
We are truly “like pottery in the hand of the craftsman.”

Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman is a member of the Zionist Executive Board and Head of the Center for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora at the World Zionist Organization.
One of the obstacles in the path toward spirituality is the reluctance among many people to consciously reflect upon themselves. The reason for this became apparent to me when I attended a health spa to treat my chronic low back pain.

On the first day at the spa, I was placed in a whirlpool bath in a small cubicle. It was nothing less than paradise. I was at peace and there was nothing to disturb that peace. After about five or six very enjoyable minutes, I emerged from the whirlpool, telling the attendant how relaxing the experience had been. To my astonishment, he said, “You can’t get out yet, sir. The treatment here requires you to stay in the pool for 25 minutes.”

I returned to the tub, but not to an enjoyable experience. Every minute lasted for a painful eternity and after five minutes I could no longer take it. On my second exodus, the attendant informed me that unless I completed the requisite 25 minutes, I could not continue to the next phase of treatment.

Later I reflected on what had been a rude awakening. I had been certain that my distress had been due to the relentless pressures of my practice: a busy emergency room, receiving cases around the clock, a 300-bed acute psychiatric hospital for which I was responsible. Now I had been temporarily liberated from these overwhelming pressures, yet I found more than five minutes of peace intolerable. Why?

We are adept at diversion, at amusing ourselves one way or another, but many of us are unable to truly relax. We entertain ourselves by reading, watching television, chatting with someone, listening to music, etc. But to be entertained is to be diverted. By focusing our attention on these activities, we divert our attention from everything, including ourselves. When all diversions are eliminated, we are left alone with ourselves, forced into direct contact with our own personalities and the personality flaws that trouble us. And this is where the difficulty lies.

I had been left totally alone, in absolute communion with myself. When one is left alone in a room with someone one dislikes, it can be a very unpleasant experience, and one can hardly wait to get away. What was there about myself I didn't like? Why could I not tolerate being in my own presence?

I hypothesized that I must have some character traits I would prefer to disown, but whose existence I could ignore as long as I was distracted by various external pre-occupations and stimuli. As I persisted in my introspection, I found myself to be a jealous person, often trying to impress people. I had temptations and impulses I thought should be alien to a truly moral person. I reasoned that if people ever discovered what emotions existed beneath this facade I presented to the world, they would probably reject me. And how could I ever merit blessings from G-d if I was indeed a base person?

Along this rather depressing course of self-reflection, I came across a passage in the Talmud that enabled me to gain a different perspective. The Talmud explains (Shabbat 89a) that the various Biblical commandments of behavior were given to us precisely because we have a fundamentally animal body, subject to all the instincts and drives of the animal world. Our distinction is that we can become master over these impulses. In other words, the discovery of animalistic traits within myself was no reason to consider myself a “bad” person.

A little investigation with my patients confirmed my hypothesis: many people are indeed incapable of tolerating themselves because they harbor self-directed feelings of negativity. Their discomfort with themselves may be so great that they employ a variety of tactics, some of them quite drastic, to escape or deny their identity as they perceive it.

These people are actually fine, competent and likable people. The problem is, instead of seeing themselves as they really are, they somehow develop a distorted image of themselves, and it is this distorted image – which they assume to be their real image – that becomes intolerable.

Spirituality relates to what is unique in humans and how they master their animal-like instincts. This requires a valid and accurate self-awareness which may be distorted by negative delusions about oneself. For spirituality to be pervasive, aspects of one’s humanity must be viewed realistically and appreciated.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski is a psychiatrist and rabbi, and founder of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pennsylvania.
GENERAL INTEREST

YOM KIPPUR RIDDLE

Question: On one historic Yom Kippur, the entire Jewish people ate and drank and were praised for it by G-d. When did this occur?

Answer: When King Shlomo built the Beit HaMikdash, Yom Kippur occurred during its seven Inauguration (opening festivities) Days. The Sanhedrin decided that not only must the inauguration korbanot be offered, but the people must cook, eat and drink on Yom Kippur or else the happiness of the Inauguration would be incomplete (Mo’ed Katan 9a).

ROSH HASHANAH WORD SBLMERAC

Try to unscramble these Rosh Hashanah related words:

NOHEY • ROSFAH • TEESW • KIETA • HUAETR • MEAIRHSV
CAHOIZRN • EHUATSV • EITRHIS • DTEKZAAH • HCITSAHL • PLPEA
Your Yom Tov table isn’t fully set without

TEPERBERG
FAMILY WINERY SINCE 1870