



## Past, Present and Future

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 L-rd 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.

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