

# *Torah Wellsprings*

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Rosh Hashanah*





# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings - Rosh Hashanah

With Rosh Hashanah upon us, it is the fervent hope and prayer of every Yid to be inscribed for a good year in the *sefer* of *tzaddikim gemurim*. We will discuss some counsels that help us be inscribed for a good year.

## Chesed

There are many ways to prepare and ready ourselves for the Yom Hadin.

Reb Avigdor Miller *zt'l* advised a fellow Yid who asked him how to prepare for the judgment of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to smile.

He explained his answer with a *mashal*: A storeowner took inventory at the end of the year to review the profits and expenses of the store, and he concluded that he must cut costs. Some of the workers will need to go.

His advisor said, "No matter what you do, don't fire Mr. So-and-so. He always has a smile on his face, and customers love him. Some come to your store just because he is there."

*Hashem, keviyachol*, takes inventory at the end of each year to see how the world is running. For some people, it is decided that the time has come for them to go from the world, *r'l*. But if someone lives his life with a constant smile on his face, bringing joy to

others, he is an asset to the world, and Hashem will grant him life and a good year so he can continue bringing happiness to others.

Similarly, Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* taught that those who do *chesed* have a better chance of receiving a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Even if they don't deserve to live by their own merit, they will be granted life because people need them.<sup>1</sup>

A community near Radin asked a *bachur* to join them for Rosh Hashanah because they wanted him to give over *divrei Torah* and *mussar* on Rosh Hashanah and to rouse them to *teshuvah*.

The *bachur* refused because he wanted to be with the Chofetz Chaim on Rosh Hashanah.

The Chofetz Chaim told the *bachur* the following important message: "*A mentch leibt nisht far zich* — man doesn't live for himself." A person came down to this world to help others.

The *bachur* went to the neighboring town for Rosh Hashanah.<sup>2</sup>

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 16:) states, תשובה, תפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה, "*Teshuvah*, *tefillah*, and *tzedakah* annul the harsh decrees."

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1. The Elef Hamagen (583:4) writes "When one has guests on Rosh Hashanah, it is considered as though he had in mind all the *kavanos* of the Arizal in his *tefillah*."

The Arizal taught kabbalistic ideas to think while praying. The average person isn't able to incorporate those lofty thoughts into his prayer. However, when one has guests on Rosh Hashanah, it will be considered as though he concentrated on all those lofty thoughts.

2. Someone spent most of his Rosh Hashanah in the hospital helping a sick friend. Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zy'a* commented that this man is a "ben Olam HaBa." His prayers were fewer on that day, but he will inherit Olam HaBah in the merit of the *chesed* he performed.

How does tzedakah annul harsh decrees and help us in judgment?

The Leket Yosher answers in the name of the scholar (chaver) Moshe Mintz zt'l:

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 10) explains the pasuk (*Mishlei* 19:17), מלוה ה' חונן דל, that when one helps the poor, it is like he lent money to Hashem. When one gives *tzedakah*, he is Hashem's מלוה. He is the lender, and Hashem is like the borrower. The halachah is that when there is a monetary dispute between a *malveh* and *loveh* (lender and borrower), the lender has the right to choose the beis din. So, as he is Hashem's מלוה, he can request to be judged in Hashem's compassionate court, and he will certainly be judged favorably.<sup>3</sup>

On the pasuk, שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך, the Kedushas Levi explains that Heaven mimics the deeds of man. Therefore, it is important to judge people favorably because this will spur Hashem to do the same.

The Kedushas Levi writes, "On Rosh Hashanah, we must rouse Hashem's attributes of compassion so that Hashem will use them. When we act kindly to others and judge every Yid favorably, this will rouse Hashem to do the same, and He will judge all Yidden favorably. This is the translation of the pasuk, שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך, you can arrange the judgment of heaven... שופטו את העם משפט צדק, by judging your fellow man favorably. Because the way a person acts to others, that is how Heaven will act with him."<sup>4</sup>

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3. In נתנה תוקף we say, ויכון בחדס כסאך, with deeds of *chesed*, one has the right to decide which throne Hashem should sit on during the judgment, whether the throne of *din* or *rachamim*.

4. Once, in a yeshiva, the gabai called up a wealthy person for *maftir*. People started whisering, "Why did the gabai give *maftir* to the wealthy person? There's a *chasan* in the beis medresh, and *maftir* belongs to the *chasan*! Furthermore, this *chasan* is an orphan! The gabai shouldn't have slighted him by giving him a regular *aliyah*."

The *chasan* heard their hushed conversation and clarified the matter. "I asked the gabai not to give me *maftir* because the haftarah is long, and I'm shy to chant the long *haftarah*."

Had the *chasan* remained silent, people would have judged the gabai wrongly. They would say that his desire for money caused him to slight the *chasan*.

We must train ourselves to judge our fellow man favorably, especially since our first assumptions are often wrong.

There were two neighbors who didn't get along well. They didn't fight, *chas veshalom*, but when they met, their conversations were always tense.

But then something happened that could have potentially turned this cold relationship into an outright fight. One of the neighbors told his rav, "My neighbor's son is getting married and my neighbor placed an empty invitation envelope in my mailbox! He is hinting to me that he doesn't want me to come to the *chasunah*. And that's not right. I'm a neighbor, after all. If that's the way he wants it, I will stop pretending to like him. I will create a real *machlokes*..."

The rav replied, "You must judge your neighbor favorably. Perhaps he forgot to put the invitation into the envelope."

The man replied, "Did you ever receive an invitation envelope with nothing inside?"

The rav admitted that he never heard of such a thing, "Nevertheless, you are obligated to judge him favorably."

Later that day, this man received an invitation in the mail to some other *chasunah*. He opened the envelope, and lo and behold, there was no invitation inside! Hashem showed him that sometimes people forget to

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 25) states, "Rebbe said to Reb Chiya 'Go to עין טב (a city where there was a prominent *beis din*) and establish [Rosh Hashanah]."

עין טב literally means "good eye."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* said that this Gemara indicates that we should have a good eye on Rosh Hashanah.

A good eye means seeing the good in others, forgiving, helping others, etc. This will help us in our judgment.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 23) says, "Whoever is *maavir al midosov* [and is *mevater*] Hashem forgives all his sins."

In the *beis midrash* of the Rashash *zy'a* (*Nahar Shalom*) the *gabbai* accidentally sold the same seat to two people for the Rosh Hashanah *tefillos*. When they both came to sit at the same seat, they realized there was a problem. So they quickly went over to the *gabbai* and asked him who had bought the seat.

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put in the invitation, and he should judge his neighbor favorably.

He saved the envelope, so he could always remember to judge his fellow man favorably.

There was a *kollel yungerman* who was marrying off a child, and he asked his friends in the *kollel* to help him with the large expenses. They all gave him what they could, because they knew that he was poor.

But when he gave out the wedding invitations, they saw that the *chasunah* will be in the large Wagshall Hall, which is one of the luxurious halls in Bnei Brak. Now, they were upset. "Is that why he took our money, so he can make the *chasunah* in an expensive hall? Why can't he make his *chasunah* in a regular hall, like we do?"

But they kept their thoughts to themselves.

Shortly after this incident, a generous donor sent money to the *kollel*, and those in need had a right to come forward to receive a bonus. The man said, "Now that I'm making a *chasunah*, I certainly need this extra bonus."

But the person in charge of the distribution refused to give him any money.

"Why not? Am I less eligible than anyone else?"

The person in charge replied, "We see you have plenty of money. How else can you make a *chasunah* in Wagshall's large hall?"

The *yungerman* replied, "If I could tell you the reason, you would understand. But I can't tell you." And he left.

Many *yungerleit* heard this exchange, and they judged this man negatively. They didn't believe he had a valid explanation for spending so much money on the hall.

The following day, the *kollel yungerman* came to *kollel* and said to the person in charge of the distribution and to the other *yungerleit*, "I wasn't able to tell you yesterday, but I can tell you now. I wanted to make the *chasunah* in Wagshall's small hall. When I spoke to the manager of the hall, he asked me who my father was and I told him. He exclaimed, 'Your father saved my life in the Holocaust! I was searching for him for years, so I can repay him.' He requested that I make the *chasunah* in the large hall, and he said that he gives it to me for free, on the condition that I don't tell anyone. Yesterday, I told him that I'm losing money and my respect in the *kollel* due to this secret, so he agreed that I can tell the story."

The entire *kollel* was ashamed that they wrongly suspected him. They learned to judge their fellow man favorably.

And, as the Kedushas Levi taught, by judging others favorably, Hashem will judge us favorably on Rosh Hashanah and grant us, and all of Klal Yisrael, a good year.



The *gabbai* checked his files and admitted that he had made a mistake. He had sold the seat twice.

One of the two would need to be *mevater*, but neither wanted to. On Rosh Hashanah night, there weren't so many people in the Beis Midrash, and they both had a place to daven. But they (and everyone around them) knew there would be an argument over who gets the seat the following day.

That night, one of the two men had a dream. He saw beautiful caravans being led by *malachim*. "What's this all about?" he asked a *malach*.

"Today is Rosh Hashanah. The wagons are carrying your good deeds. They will be placed on a scale to determine what type of year you will have."

Soon he saw very ugly caravans led by frightening-looking angels. "What's happening now?" he asked.

"These are your *aveiros*. They will be placed on the other side of the scale."

The man looked up at the big scale set in the middle of the road and saw that it was tipping to the side of guilt. He was frightened.

The *beis din* ruled that he would die that year because of his many sins.

Then a compassionate angel arrived and said, "This man had a lot of *yesurim* (pain and troubles) this year, and *yesurim* atones."

The angels began to remove several packages of sins from the scale. The *yesurim* took away the *aveiros*. The two sides of the

scale were almost equal, but it was still slightly tipped to the side of guilt.

The merciful angel said, "If this person was *mevater* (gave in to others to avoid a *machlokes*), we could remove some more packages of sins because Chazal say that *vitur* removes *aveiros*. Let's check his deeds to see whether he is *mevater*."

Still sleeping, the man realized that if he is *mevater* his seat, his life would be saved. "I'm *mevater*!" he shouted. "I'm *mevater*!" and then he awoke.

In the morning, he quickly ran to the *gabbai* and told him that he was *mevater* his seat to the other person.<sup>5</sup>

### A Broken Heart

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 16:) writes, כל שנה שרשה בתחלתה מתעשרת בסופה, "Every year that (the Jewish nation) is poor at the beginning will prosper in the end."

Rashi explains that this doesn't mean they are actually poor, rather "They *act* like they are poor on Rosh Hashanah and daven in a pleading manner. As it states (*Mishlei* 18), תחנונים ידבר רש, 'A poor man speaks with supplications.'" If they do so, the following year will be a prosperous one.

It isn't proper to come to Rosh Hashanah with the attitude that "I deserve a good year." A person should feel like he doesn't deserve anything and plead to Hashem. That attitude bears better results.

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 26:) says that on Rosh Hashanah, we should blow with a

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5. Shame is also a form of *yesurim*, which removes many sins.

Someone suffering from a *dibbuk*, was brought before the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*. Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l*, who was present, repeated that this *dibbuk* avoided G-d fearing people, but it especially enjoyed being near sinful people.

There was a great sinner in the room, and the *dibbuk* hugged him and kissed him, and listed all the sins he did. After doing this, the *dibbuk* didn't want to have anything to do with this man anymore. The people in the room asked the *dibbuk* why, and the *dibbuk* replied, "After I revealed his sins in public, his embarrassment purified him. Now he's a *tzaddik*, so I don't want to have anything to do with him anymore."

curved shofar because, "On Rosh Hashanah, the more one bends his heart [with humility] the better." He should feel unworthy, pleading for mercy. That will help him receive a good judgment.

One year, the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* entered late to *tekiyas shofar*. Everyone was waiting until he came. The Chozeh explained that he didn't want to hear shofar before he found some good deed in himself, but he could only find faults. (Due to his humility, he couldn't find any good deeds in his repertoire.)

Then he remembered that there was a day that he wanted to perform a particular mitzvah, so he asked his *gabai* to awaken him early in the morning. But unfortunately, the *gabbai* overslept, preventing the Chozeh from doing this mitzvah.

The Chozeh wanted to rebuke his *gabai* harshly for his negligence, but then he reconsidered, "Why did I want to wake up early? Because I wanted to do Hashem's will. Now it is Hashem's will that I shouldn't become angry." When the *gabai* came in, the Chozeh spoke with the *gabai* kindly, as usual. He didn't show any signs of anger. It was with this merit that he came to *tekiyas shofar*.

This story demonstrates the Chozeh's humble, broken heart. He felt that aside from that one good deed, he didn't have any merits. It is with such feelings of humility we should approach the *tekiyas* and *tefillas* on Rosh Hashanah.

Before starting the *tekiyas*, Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zt'l* shouted, "Hashem! Only You know my broken heart," and then he began *Min HaMeitzar* and *tekiyas shofar*.

Reb Volf Kitzes *zt'l* was the *baal tokeia* in the Baal Shem Tov's minyan. One year, before Rosh Hashanah, the Baal Shem Tov *zy'a* taught Reb Volf deep thoughts of kabbalah that he should concentrate on while blowing the shofar.

Reb Wolf wrote down the ideas, so he could remember them when he blows shofar, but he lost the paper!

He blew the shofar that year amidst tears and with a broken heart, regretting that he couldn't blow the shofar while concentrating on the *kavanas* the Baal Shem Tov taught him.

Later, Reb Volf told the Baal Shem Tov that he feared that the *tekiyas* didn't accomplish what they needed to achieve because he lost the kabbalistic thoughts.

The Baal Shem Tov informed him that he had wanted him to lose the paper, to teach him how to blow shofar with a broken heart. The Baal Shem Tov explained, "The kabbalistic thoughts (called *kavanas*) are keys that open the locks of heaven. Each kabbalistic meditation opens another lock. But a broken heart is an ax that opens all doors. Your *tekiyas*, blown with a broken heart, went straight up to heaven and accomplished everything."

The *baal makri* (the one who calls out *tekiyah*, *shevarim*, etc.) asked my grandfather, Rebbe Dovid Biderman *zy'a*, what kabbalistic *kavanas* he should have in mind when he calls out the *tekiyas*. Rebbe Dovid Biderman replied, "I don't know *kavanas* and you also don't know them. But one *kavanah* I will tell you. The *shevarim* is a small broken heart, and *truah* is a big broken heart."

Reb Velvel Eisenbach *zt'l* was from the elders of Yerushalayim. He was *niftar* a few years ago on Rosh Hashanah at the age of 106. He repeated what he heard from his grandfather, who heard it from his grandfather — to whom the following story happened.

When this grandfather was a child, he was by Rebbe Aharon Chernobyler *zy'a* for Rosh Hashanah. He davened on a balcony built especially for Rosh Hashanah to accommodate the many guests who arrived for *yom tov*. But it was extremely crowded, and he fainted.

People threw water on the child and gave him water to drink. It was impossible to get the child outside due to the enormous crowd in the shul, so they brought the child to an



opening in the floor, facing the beis medresh below so that he would get some air.

Lying there, he observed Rebbe Aharon Chernobyler approach the *bimah* for *tekiyas shofar*, and was also able to hear the *vort* Rebbe Aharon Chernobyler said before the *tekiyos*.

Rebbe Aharon said, "It is written (*Tehillim* 47), עלה אלקים בתרועה: Elokim represents *middas hadin* (punishment). עלה אלקים, the *midas hadin* is raised and removed, בתרועה, with a broken heart.

The following words are ה' בקול שופר. This can mean ה' עלה... Hashem's compassion (represented by the name הוי"ה) will also ascend and leave us, בקול שופר, when one thinks that everything is good, and he isn't worried at all."<sup>6</sup>

When the Rebbe said this, the entire congregation cried. The child became wet again, this time from their tears.

A king banished his son from the palace and his government position because of his misdeeds and appointed a minister to fill his son's role.

One day, the king regretted banishing his son, so he asked his son to return. But the minister was worried that the son would return to his position in the government, which would mean that he would lose his job, so when the son arrived, the minister painted the son's face black. Now, the king wouldn't recognize him.

The son came to the king and said, "It's true that you can't recognize me, but look into my eyes, and you will see that I'm your son."

We say in the Rosh Hashanah tefillah, אֵלֵינוּ כְּבָנִים... וְאֵלֵינוּ כְּעַבְדִּים עֵינֵינוּ לְךָ תְּלוּיָה, that Hashem should judge us favorably, for we are His children. But if it is unrecognizable that we are Hashem's children, we request עֵינֵינוּ, that Hashem should look into our eyes and see that we rely solely on Him, and Hashem will have compassion on us and save us.

We look up to Hashem to save us because we recognize that we can't help ourselves. And Hashem, seeing our broken hearts, accepts our pleas and grants us a good year.

### Preparing for Rosh Hashanah

The Arugas HaBosem (Re'eh) says that at the beginning of Elul, the yetzer hara tells the person, "You have thirty days to do teshuvah. You have time. You don't have to begin now." And then, towards the end of Elul, the yetzer hara says, "You didn't do teshuvah until now, it is too late to begin."<sup>7</sup>

But it is never too late. Even in the final days of Elul, we can begin.

One of the ideal times to prepare for Rosh Hashanah is during the last three days of Elul.

*Shulchan Aruch* (581:1) teaches, "For Selichos and for the yomim nora'im, be cautious to seek a shaliach tzibbur who is the most appropriate, the greatest scholar, the most perfect in good deeds that you can find. He should be [at least] thirty years old, and he should be married. But all Yidden are kosher, as long as the community wants him."

The poskim say that the chazanim and the baalei tokeiya (those who blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah) should do teshuvah on the days before Rosh Hashanah.

6. שופר means good, as we say in the Rosh Hashanah tefillah, שְׁפֹרוּ מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם, improve your deeds, and as the Gemara says, שְׁפִיר קָא אָמַר, "You said well."

7. The yetzer hara uses this strategy regarding a person's life cycle. When he is young, the yetzer hara says, "You have time to do teshuvah." And then when he is older, the yetzer hara says, "You didn't do teshuvah until now, and now you are going to begin?"

The *tzibbur* is dependent on the chazanim and the *baalei tokeiya* for a good year, therefore, it is important that they be righteous.

The Chasam Sofer teaches that we no longer rely on the *baalei tefillah* (at least, not as much as people relied on them in the past). Unfortunately, the chazanim are often not sufficiently righteous to pray and to guarantee the community a good year. Therefore, the Chasam Sofer says that each person should consider himself like the chazan. Everyone should be occupied with *teshuvah* during the days before Rosh Hashanah, to make himself worthy because his *tefillos* are needed.

The Beis Yisrael of Gur *zy'a* taught these ideas with a *mashal*:

The animals in the jungle had a serious problem because their king, the powerful lion, was angry at them for something they had done. So the animals gathered to seek a solution, but they didn't find one and didn't know what to do.

Then, the fox spoke up. "I know three hundred *mashalim* (parables)," he said. "I will tell them to the king to explain our situation and our point of view. He will understand, and he will forgive us. Come along with me."

The animals were relieved that the clever fox had a solution, and they hiked together to meet the king of the forest.

After walking some time, the fox told the animals, "I forgot one hundred of the parables. But don't worry, I still have another two hundred parables," and the animals walked on.

Sometime later, the fox said, "I forgot another hundred parables. But you need not worry as I still know one hundred parables. That is enough to appease the king."

The animals stood before the great lion in awe, and the fox told them, "I just forgot the

last one hundred parables. I can't help you anymore. Now it is up to you. Say whatever you can to appease the king."

They all pleaded before the king, and the king accepted their pleas and forgave them.

The Beis Yisrael explained that from the onset, the clever fox didn't have anything to tell the king, but he understood that their only hope was to go to the lion and plead before him. So, the fox told the animals that he had three hundred parables, and they could rely on him. They trusted the fox, which gave them the courage to come to the king. And now that they stood before the king, it was their turn to say whatever they could to save themselves.

The Beis Yisrael *zt'l* explained that this occurs when chassidim come to their Rebbe for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and they expect the Rebbe to daven for them and save them. Instead, the Rebbe tells them, "I also don't know what to say. I am unworthy and can't guarantee that I can help you. Therefore, everyone must plead before Hashem that He grant you a good year."

So, everyone should consider himself to be the chazan. His future and his family's future are being decided on this day. His *tefillos* are needed.

We shouldn't underestimate the value of our *tefillos*. The Noam Elimelech *zt'l* teaches that when a person prays for himself from the depths of his heart, this *tefillah* will help him more than when a *tzaddik* davens for him. The Beis Aharon writes that when one davens with a *minyan*, his *tefillah* is equivalent to the *tefillos* of the greatest *tzaddikim*. So, don't underestimate the power of your *tefillos*.

Consider yourself as a chazan and prepare for Rosh Hashanah with *teshuvah*. During the year's final days, think about the year that passed and ask yourself, "What did I do wrong, and in which *mitzvos* am I lacking?"

What did I do correctly, and which deeds should I continue doing."<sup>8</sup>

If we introspect well during these days, it will help our tefillos on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>9</sup>

We seek ways and techniques to be granted a good year and not be affected by the Satan's slander. The Nesivos HaMishpat zt'l offered the following suggestion:

Shulchan Aruch (see *Choshen Mishpat* 34:20) tells us that a שׂוֹנֵא, someone who hates you, is pasul to be an *eid*, a witness, against you. The Nesivos HaMishpat says that if we can make the Satan our enemy, all his testimony is void and discarded. The court will say, "You speak so because you hate this man."

But is the Satan our enemy? The Satan is the *yetzer hara*,<sup>10</sup> and many people seem to

8. In *Shemonah Esrei* of Rosh Hashanah, we say the *pasuk* (*Yirmiyahu* 31:19), כִּי מִדִּי דְּבָרִי בּו זְכוֹר אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד עַל כֵּן הָמוּ מַעֲיִ לוֹ, רַחֵם אֶרְחַמֶּנּוּ נֶאֱמַר ה'. Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz zt'l explained these words as follows, כִּי מִדִּי דְּבָרִי בּו, when I speak to myself in introspection about my sins, I tell myself, זְכוֹר, "Is that called remembering Hashem? Is the amount I think about Hashem sufficient? אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד, I will remember Hashem more." הָמוּ מַעֲיִ לוֹ, this arouses Hashem's compassion. Hashem says, רַחֵם, "Is the manner in which I act with this person called compassionate? אֶרְחַמֶּנּוּ עוֹד, I will have more compassion on him."

9. The Chovas HaLevavos (*Shaar Avodas Hashem* 9) teaches the following *mashal*:

A republic on an island near India had an unusual custom. Every year, they appointed a foreigner to be king of their country. At the end of the year they would send him away and crown someone else in his place.

When a foreigner was crowned king, he wasn't told that his kingship wouldn't last longer than a year. This was a well-kept secret by everyone who lived in this country.

The king (who thought he would be king for many years) would amass a lot of wealth during his year of rulership, but at the end of the year he would unceremoniously be sent away, and he would leave a poor man. All his wealth had to remain behind.

One year, the newly appointed king was wiser than all the others, and he immediately sensed that a secret was being held from him, and he wanted to know what it was.

"There is no secret at all," the people in the government told him. "Why should there be a secret? You are king, and that's all."

"Who were the kings before me?" he asked. "What happened to them?"

He didn't receive any straight answers.

The king, wanting to get to the bottom of the matter, befriended a high-ranking government official, and then, one day the king asked him, "What is the secret of this country?"

The official replied, "At the end of the year, you will be sent back to your country, with only the shirt on your back. You will be forced to leave behind all the wealth you amassed."

This king, having found out the secret, began shipping gold and precious gems out of the little country back to his hometown. He didn't build expensive palaces within the kingdom, as the kings before him did, because he knew that whatever stays on the island would soon be taken away from him.

When the year was over, he was sent away, but he didn't leave as a poor man. He returned to the wealth he amassed during the year of his kingdom, which was waiting for him in his homeland.

We, too, won't be here, in this world, forever. There will come a day when we will be snatched away from this world, and we will leave behind all the wealth we amassed. But the Torah we leaned and the mitzvos we kept will remain with us forever.

Those who remember this will prepare for that time.

10. The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 16) states, הוּא שָׂטָן הוּא יֵצֵר הָרָע הוּא מַלְאָךְ הַמוֹת, "He is the Satan, he is the *yetzer hara*, he is the Angel of Death." The same malach fulfills these three roles. He begins as a *yetzer hara*, by convincing



be good friends with the *yetzer hara*. They spend time with the *yetzer hara* and listen to his counsel.

How can we prove that the Satan is our enemy?

Chazal say that a שונא, an enemy, is someone with whom you didn't speak for three days because of your hatred toward him (see *Choshen Mishpat* 7:7). Therefore, the Nesivos HaMishpat recommends that we avoid the *yetzer hara* for three days before Rosh Hashanah. We shouldn't listen to his suggestions. It will then be considered our enemy, and his testimonies on Rosh Hashanah will be invalid.

Chazal tell us, שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא ליכא, "There is no reward in this world for the mitzvos." The reward for the mitzvos is so great that it can only be received in Olam HaBa. Nevertheless, the Vilna Gaon zt'l tells us that we are rewarded in this world for our efforts to prepare for the mitzvos.

The story of Akeidas Yitzchak<sup>11</sup> took three days. The first two days were the days of preparation. (Avraham chopped wood, harnessed his donkey, and traveled to the akeidah.) The akeidah itself, was on the third day.<sup>12</sup> We receive reward and bounty in this world from the first two days of preparation. This is as it states (*Hoshei'a* 6:2), יחיינו מימיו ביום השלישי, "He will give us life from the two days. On the third day, He will set us up, and we will live before Him." The Vilna Gaon zy'a explains that reward is לפני before Hashem, in Gan Eden. The reward in this world is יחיינו מימיו from the two days that Avraham prepared for the Akeidah.

The Vilna Gaon explains that we earn a lot of blessings from the Akeidah, but mainly for the days Avraham prepared himself for the Akeidah.

Therefore, on the days before Rosh Hashanah, prepare yourself for this holy day. Prepare by cooking good meals, making the simanim, prepare with Tehillim and thoughts of teshuvah. Prepare yourself, and you will be rewarded in this world, as well.

### **Teshuvah in a Moment**

If you didn't do teshuvah yet, and you find yourself on the final day of Elul, know that it isn't too late.

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 2:) tell us, יום אחד בשנה, חשוב שנה, "One day a year is counted like a year." The Chidushei HaRim zt'l says this alludes to erev Rosh Hashanah. This one day is equal to the entire year. If we do *teshuvah* on this day, it will be considered as if we were righteous the entire year.

Regardless of how many sins one has, everything can be rectified in a moment.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:2) states, "What is *teshuvah*? It is (1) to leave the sin, (2) to remove it from his thoughts, and (3) to be determined never to commit this sin again." In other words, teshuvah is a decision. When one decides that he won't commit this sin anymore, this is teshuvah, and a conclusion can be made in a moment.

The Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 17:) tells the story of a grave sinner, Elazar ben Durdiyah, who did teshuvah in one day and died that day in the midst of his bitter remorse. A bas kol announced, "Reb Elazar ben Durdiyah will merit Olam HaBa." Rebbe said, "It isn't

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people to do *aveiros*. Then he acts as a Satan, and tells the heavenly court about what he did. Afterwards, he serves as the angel of death, to take the person's life as a punishment for the *aveirah*.

**11.** The akeidah is associated with Rosh Hashanah because we daven that in the merit of the akeidah Hashem should overcome His anger and have compassion on the Jewish nation. We use a ram's shofar to awaken the merit of the akeidah (because Avraham sacrificed a ram instead of Yitzchak).

**12.** The akeidah was on the third day, as it states ויהי ביום השלישי... וירא את המקום...

solely that baalei teshuvah are accepted, but they are also called Rebbe." This is because that day, the sinner Elazar ben Durdiyah was forgiven, and was called Reb Elazar ben Durdiyah from that day on.

This is an example of teshuvah being accepted immediately. It doesn't take long to do teshuvah.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 49:) says that if a total *rasha* (רשע גמור) gives a ring to a woman for marriage, and he says *על מנת שאני צדיק גמור*, "The marriage is contingent on me being a perfect tzaddik," we consider them married (מספק), because he may have had a thought of *teshuvah* when he gave her the ring. This tells us that teshuvah can be done in a moment. One thought of *teshuvah* turns the person around from being a total *rasha* (*rasha gamur*) to being a perfect tzaddik (*tzaddik gamur*).

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 40:) states, "If one was a *rasha* his entire life and he does *teshuvah* in the end, his past bad deeds won't be mentioned anymore."

A moment of *teshuvah* is significant. Therefore, those who take advantage of Erev Rosh Hashanah to do teshuvah are fortunate because they can correct and amend their past and merit a good year on this day. On this day, they can totally change their status,

from being a *rasha gamur* to a *tzaddik gamur*.<sup>13</sup>

On Erev Rosh Hashanah, when you are occupied with teshuvah, also be busy with tefillah. You can earn a good judgment with your tefillos on this day.

There will be people who will say, "I should have davened throughout the month of Elul, but I didn't. I didn't say all the Selichos, and it wasn't always with kavanah. I didn't say Tehillim, and now it is almost Rosh Hashanah. It is too late to begin now."

But they are mistaken because, as we've seen, it takes just one moment to do teshuvah, and one can accomplish a lot with his tefillos on this day.

In the Minchah of Erev Rosh Hashanah we say, *ברך עלינו את השנה הזאת*, "Bless this year." But there are only a few moments left in the year! Why are we asking for a blessing for a year that is just about over?

This isn't a question, as we will see from the following story, which was repeated by Reb Shmuel Aurbach zt'l:

Someone told him that his stock portfolio crashed on Erev Rosh Hashanah at three o'clock in the afternoon, and he lost a lot of

### 13. The Kol Bo teaches:

On Rosh Hashanah, when the Satan recounts our sins, Hakadosh Baruch Hu replies, "We can't believe you without proof. Bring two witnesses who will provide testimony." The Satan calls for the sun to testify against the Jewish nation, and the sun agrees to come. The Satan asks the moon to be the second witness, but the moon doesn't want to speak against the Jewish nation, so it hides. It states (*Tehillim* 81:4), *בכסה ליום חגינו*, which means the moon is concealed on Rosh Hashanah. It hides because it doesn't want to testify against the Jewish nation. And, without two witnesses to testify against us, we are acquitted.

The Noda b'Yehudah (*Tzlach, drush* 1:6-8) asks that the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 66) states that we don't need two witnesses to say that someone has a blemish. One witness is sufficient to testify that someone has a *מום*, a blemish. So, it would seem that the sun can testify alone that the Jewish nation sinned with their eyes and ears, etc., and they have become *בעלי מומים*, blemished people (when one sins with his eyes, it's as though he is blind, and when one sins with his ears, it is as though he is deaf).

The Noda b'Yehudah concludes: The solution is *teshuvah*. This is the meaning of the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 23:12), *והיה לפניך ערב*, on erev Rosh Hashanah, *ירחץ במים*, wash yourself with tears, *וכבוא השמש*, and then, when the sun comes to testify, his testimony won't be accepted. And then, *יבוא אל תוך המחנה*, you will be permitted to return to the camp for you will be acquitted in court.

money. We see that we need Hashem's blessings every moment.

The Ahavas Yisrael of Viznitz zy'a said: We daven on erev Rosh Hashanah that Hashem should bless the year because we can't be without Hashem's *brachos*, not even for a moment.

The Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l expresses that one can earn a lot of money on the last day of the year and attain other kinds of salvations on the final day of the year. So, it is always worthwhile to request Hashem for His blessings.

The Tur (581) writes, "The custom in Ashkenaz (Germany) is to fast on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*. The Midrash Tanchuma states, 'It can be compared to a country that owed taxes to a king, and the king came with his army to collect the debt. When the king was ten *parsahs* away, the country's leaders came out to greet the king and explained that they couldn't afford to pay the large tax. The king said that he agreed to forgive 1/3rd of the debt. The king and his army continued marching toward the country. The middle-class people came forward and told the king about their financial hardships, and the king agreed to relieve the country from another third of the debt. When the king came even closer to the city, everyone came out to greet the king. At that point, the king forgave the final third of the debt.'

"The *nimshal* is, on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, tzaddikim fast, and Hashem pardons a third of their sins. During Aseres Yemei Teshuvah the middle-level Yidden fast, and Hashem pardons another third. On Yom Kippur, when everyone fasts, Hashem forgives the Jewish people entirely."

So, there is a lot we can accomplish on this day. It is a day for tefillah and teshuvah.

### **Bitachon**

The Tur (581) states, "We wash and get a haircut on Erev Rosh Hashanah. The way of the world is that on a day of judgment, a

person dresses in dark clothes, doesn't shave, and doesn't cut his fingernails because he doesn't know what the outcome of the judgment will be. But the Jewish nation doesn't do so. They dress in white clothing, cut their nails, they eat, drink, and are happy on Rosh Hashanah because they are certain that Hakadosh Baruch Hu will perform a miracle for them. Therefore, the custom is to take a haircut, wash clothing and prepare many good foods in honor of Rosh Hashanah."

The Tur calls the good judgment that we receive on Rosh Hashanah a miracle, and it is indeed so. It is a miracle. We can't claim that we deserve a good year. Everyone is aware of the deeds that they are embarrassed of. And there were so many mitzvos that we could have done and didn't do. If Hashem judges us with a critical eye, we would be in great danger. Therefore, the term "miracle" is correct. Hashem miraculously finds a way to vindicate us in judgment and to grant us a good year.

Since we are facing a judgment, every aspect of the judicial process must be according to law. It isn't chas v'shalom like Hashem corrupts the rules of justice to help us. Rather, within the rules of justice, Hashem finds loopholes and legal approaches to exonerate us.

The Jewish nation experiences many miracles. Reb Yaakov Emdin zt'l says that the greatest miracle of all is that we live among nations who want to destroy us, yet the Jewish nation survives. We can be compared to a sheep surrounded by seventy wolves, yet it survives and thrives. This miracle, he says, is even greater than the miracles of yetzias Mitzrayim, kriyas Yam Suf, and the other great miracles that happened to our nation.

The Mabit says that Hashem's hashgachah pratis over us in galus is even greater than when the Beis HaMikdash stood.



We enjoy many miracles in galus, and one of the miracles is that Hashem grants us a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah.

Therefore, Rosh Hashanah is a day of conflicting feelings because we experience fear and also joy on this day. We stand in judgment and know that we aren't worthy, so we are very afraid, but we are also confident that Hashem will find a way to acquit us and grant us a good year, so we are happy on this day, as well.<sup>14</sup>

It is a mitzvah from the Torah to be happy on Rosh Hashanah. The Shaagas Aryeh (62, quoted in Mishnah Berurah 597:1) proves that Rosh Hashanah is called חג<sup>15</sup> and therefore also about Rosh Hashanah the Torah says ושמחת בחגך, that we must be happy.

On Rosh Hashanah, the entire community (men and women) gathered on the road in front of the second Beis HaMikdash and Ezra HaKohen read the sefer Torah to them from daybreak until noon. Everyone cried because they understood that they didn't keep the Torah properly. Ezra, Nechemiah, and the Levi'im told the nation to stop crying and to be happy. (*Nechemyah* 8:10) לכו אכלו משמנים ושתו כי חדות ד' היא ממתקים.. כי קדוש היום לאדונינו ואל תעצבו כי חדות ד' היא מעוזכם "Eat fatty foods and drink sweet drinks... because it is a holy day for our Master. Don't be sad. Your joy with Hashem is your strength." Our joy and bitachon that

Hashem will grant us a good year is the strength that will help us in judgment.<sup>16</sup>

On Rosh Hashanah, we want to change our ways, but to do so, one needs to be happy. Happiness makes change more attainable. The Avodas Yisrael zt'l (Netzavim) explains that if we are sad on Rosh Hashanah, we won't be able to do teshuvah and change our ways. He writes in the name of the Magid of Mezritch zt'l, "The tzaddikim, although they are very afraid, they trust in Hashem's salvation and kindness, and they are determined to return to Hashem. Although their thoughts remind them of their aveiros, an indication of the kitrug that is happening in heaven, tzaddikim steer their thoughts away from their aveiros to think about teshuvah, to leave the aveiros from now on. They accept the yoke of heaven, and they trust in Hashem's immense kindness."

The Siforno (*Vayikra* 23:24) writes, "Although on this day, Hashem sits on His throne of judgment, it is proper that we should rejoice even more, because He is our King, and He will seek to do kindness with us and judge us favorably in His judgment. As it states, כִּי ה' שׁוֹפֵטנוּ ה' מְחַקְקֵנוּ ה' מֶלְכֵנוּ הוּא יוֹשְׁעֵנוּ 'Hashem is our judge, Hashem is our King, and He will save us.'<sup>17</sup>

**14.** The Sma'k writes that we wear white clothing, which resembles tachrichim, so that the joy on Rosh Hashanah will be in the spirit appropriate for the awesome day of Rosh Hashanah.

**15.** Rosh Hashanah is called חג as it states (*Tehillim* 81:4), בכסה ליום חגנו.

The Mishnah (*Rosh Hashanah* 4:1) calls Rosh Hashanah "yom tov" ("as it states יום טוב של ראש השנה). The Chasam Sofer zt'l proves from this that we should be happy on Rosh Hashanah as we are on yom tov.

**16.** Each month has a formation of Hashem's name הו"ה. The formation for Tishrei is ויהי. The Magen Avraham (of Trisk) zt'l explains that this is because Chazal tell us that ויהי represents joy, and we are supposed to be happy this month.

**17.** Reb Moshe Chaim of Slonim zt'l would say to those who were excessively afraid of the Yomim Norai'm, "It isn't a band of thieves who are seated in the court, up in heaven. It is our Father in heaven, and we can trust that He will save His children."

There was a *bachur* who was very afraid of the judgment on Rosh Hashanah. The Chazon Ish zt'l asked the *bachur*, "Why don't we say Tashlich when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos?"

The Mahari'l teaches that the first day of Rosh Hashanah is דינא קשיא, very severe *dinim*. The second day is דינא רפא, a softer judgment.

The Shaul u'Meishiv (מהדורה רביעא ח"ג קכ"ה) disagrees. He writes, "This idea that the first day is דינא קשיא, is hard to understand because there are obvious proofs that it isn't a harsh day, at all. The halachah is that we say *shehecheyanu* on this day. We wouldn't say *shehecheyanu* if it weren't a day of joy.<sup>18</sup> We don't say *shehecheyanu* during *sefiras ha'omer* because there is no joy due to the Churban Beis haMikdash. If the first day were a sad day, a day of *dinim*, we wouldn't say *shehecheyanu*. Therefore, it isn't דינא קשיא. It's a day when Hashem forgives our sins; it is a holy day. On this day, the *imahos* were remembered [to bear children] and all goodness and holy bounty comes from this day."

### A New Creation

Let's elaborate on the great joy of Rosh Hashanah. (Afterwards, we will go back and discuss the immense fear of Rosh Hashanah, and the fusion of both emotions.)

We read the *tochachah* in parashas Ki Savo two weeks before Rosh Hashanah. Chazal explain that this is because we want the year with its curses to end (תכלה שנה) (וקללותיה) and a new year with its blessings to begin.

Also, before Maariv of Rosh Hashanah, we say the short prayer אבות קטנה. Its theme is once again that the curses of last year should end and a new year with its blessings should begin (תחל שנה וברכותיה).

Everyone carries a *pekel*, their share of problems, but things can become better. It is a new year, and everything can turn around for the better. The Gemara (Pesachim 54:) says that seven things are concealed from all people, and one of them is יום הנחמה, the day when all one's tzaros and worries will go away. Such a day in a person's life does occur. It is the day when all the troubles of the past end and better times begin. Perhaps it will happen this year? Everything is decreed on Rosh Hashanah. So, this is the day that everything can turn around and become better; that is a reason to rejoice and be happy.

The Gemara (Brachos 60a; Rashi Bereishis 30:21) tells us that Leah had six children, Bilhah and Zilpah each had two children, which means that at this time (before Rachel had children) Yaakov had ten sons. Leah knew with *ruach hakodesh* that Yaakov would have another two sons. When Leah became pregnant with a son, she said, "Now my sister, Rachel, will be less than the maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah, because they each have two sons and Rachel will only have one son." Therefore, Leah davened that the son in her womb should become a

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The *bachur* repeated the reason that's written in the *Mishnah Berurah* (583:8). It is because people carry their *machzorim* to *Tashlich*, and on Shabbos one isn't permitted to carry.

The Chazon Ish told the *bachur*, "For you the problem isn't only that you are carrying the *machzor*. For you, it is also that you are carrying your sins. Because I see that you're carrying a heavy burden of sin on your shoulders."

In this humorous way, the Chazon Ish taught this *bachur* the proper attitude we should have on Rosh Hashanah.

18. According to the Raavad, one doesn't say שהחיינו on the shofar because of the fear of the judgment.

Shulchan Aruch (584:2) states that it is customary that the person who blows shofar has an *aliyah*. The Levush explains, פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב, Torah makes people happy, and thereby, he will be able to blow the shofar with joy.

female. Hashem accepted her tefillos, and the fetus became a female (Dinah).

This episode is discussed in the *yotzros* of Rosh Hashanah when we say זכר לה יושב מערכות, "The One Who sits in heaven remembered her; a fetus to exchange in the bellow of the sister."

However, we wonder, what does this episode have to do with Rosh Hashanah?

The answer is that this is a story of a turnover. A son miraculously became a daughter. And that is the story of Rosh Hashanah. It is a new year, and brand-new things can occur. The reality of the past can turn over, and everything can become good.

The Imrei Emes of Ger *zt'l* said, "Yosef left prison on Rosh Hashanah. Similarly, everyone is in his own imprisonment, and he can be freed on Rosh Hashanah." It is a time when the *tzaros* of the past end, and *be'ezras* Hashem, now begins a better future.

The creation becomes new each Rosh Hashanah. Rebbe Yohonoson Eibshitz *zt'l* (*Yaaras Dvash* vol.2 *drush* 5) explains that each year, on Rosh Hashanah, the world is created again. In the *musaf Shemonah Esrei* we say, היום הרת עולם, "Today is the creation of the world," and this is literal. Creation happens on Rosh Hashanah.

We also say in the *Shemonah Esrei*, זֶה הַיּוֹם, תחילת מעשיך, "This is the day, the beginning of Your creation." Creation happens again today on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>19</sup>

At the time of Creation, Hashem blew life into Adam's nostrils, as it states (*Bereishis* 2:7), וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נֶשְׁמַת חַיִּים. The Baal HaTanya says that this occurs each year anew by *tekiyas shofar*. It is like man is being created again. He is a new person.

And since the person and the world are new, new things can happen. Life can become better from now on. The past doesn't obligate the future to be the same. And this is a reason to celebrate.<sup>20</sup>

### Meeting the King

There's another reason to be happy on Rosh Hashanah: we have the privilege to meet the King on this day!

The Sfas Emes (5639) writes, "Although they know that Hashem is judging them, nevertheless, every Yid understands that it is a great merit to be remembered by Hashem. They consider it worthwhile to be judged by Him just so that Hashem will think about them. And in the merit that they feel privileged that Hashem thinks of them, Hashem remembers all the good they do, and Hashem leaves His throne of justice and sits on His throne of compassion. They deserve this because they understand that the greatest good they can receive from Hashem is that Hashem should think about them."

Chazal tell us that on Rosh Hashanah every Yid passes before Hashem כבני מרון, like sheep that pass through a gate, one by one. It is frightening to stand before Hashem, especially when our deeds are being

19. On Pesach we say זמן חרותנו, on Succos we say זמן שמחתנו, but on Rosh Hashanah, we don't say זמן בריאת העולם - the time of the creation of the world. This is because Rosh Hashanah doesn't commemorate the past. It is happening now and it is determining the future.

20. It is also a reason for immense fear, because we are not guaranteed that the good will continue. We will discuss this point when we elaborate about the fear on Rosh Hashanah.

One wouldn't buy a brand new piece of furniture if it has a scratch. But if one already owns the furniture, he won't throw it out because of a scratch. The *nimshal* - the world is being created anew on this day, therefore there is a greater need and caution that everything should be perfect, without any *aveiros*. It's a new world, and we must do our part to make it a good world.



reviewed, but it is all worthwhile to be so close to Hashem for that moment.

At the beginning of *sefer BaMidbar*, Hashem instructs Moshe and Aharon to count the Jewish people. One of the reasons for this census, writes the Ramban (*Bamidbar* 1:45), is to give the Yidden the opportunity to stand before Moshe and Aharon. Standing before these two great tzaddikim greatly benefited the Jewish nation. The Ramban writes, "When one comes before the greatest *navi* [Moshe] and his brother, sanctified by Hashem [Aharon] and tells them his name, this is a merit for him, and it grants him life because he is being counted together with the Jewish nation. Moshe and Aharon will look at them with a good eye and pray for them."

Certainly, to be in Hashem's presence is a blessing, which results in spiritual and material success. This occurs on Rosh Hashanah.

To explain the joy, we repeat a true story that the Pnei Menachem *zt'l* related:

A fan of the president of the United States heard that the president was visiting his neighborhood, so he quickly jumped into his car, passed red lights, and committed several other driving violations because he wanted the privilege to meet the president. Naturally, many bodyguards and obstacles prevented him from reaching the president, but he jumped over all of them and spoke with the president for a few moments. The police caught up to him and arrested him, and he was sent to jail for a while, but he says it was all worthwhile for the few moments he spoke to the president.

On Rosh Hashanah, we meet with Hashem, we crown Hashem as King of the

world, and this opportunity fills our hearts with joy. Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer *zt'l* said, אין, לך חן מתוך מזה, "There is nothing sweeter than that."

It states (Tehilim 96:11-13) ישמחו השמים ותגל הארץ... לפני ה' כי בא לשפוט הארץ, "The heavens will rejoice, and the earth will exult...before Hashem for He has come to judge the earth." The Meiri (Chibur haTeshuvah 2:7) proves from this pasuk that we must be happy on Rosh Hashanah because on this day, Hashem judges the earth, and we merit to be in His presence.

Rebbe Yechezkel of Radamsk *zt'l* (grandson of the Tiferes Shlomo *zt'l*) said, "Throughout the year, there is a curtain that separates Bnei Yisrael from their father in heaven, but on Rosh Hashanah, there is no division," and that is the great joy of Rosh Hashanah.

The Chinuch (311) explains that the judgment is every year (on Rosh Hashanah), which is for our benefit because our sins are still few, and Hashem will forgive us. Even if He punishes people to cleanse them of their sins, the punishments are relatively light, as there aren't so many aveiros. This process is preferred over if Hashem would judge us, say, once in every ten years. The sins would be many, and the punishment would be severe.<sup>21</sup>

The Chinuch concludes, "So, Rosh Hashanah is a very special day. The world's existence is dependent on this day. Therefore, it is proper to make this day a yom tov. It is among the special yomim tovim of the year."

In summary, we have seen several reasons to be happy on Rosh Hashanah. (a) We trust that Hashem will grant us a good judgment, (b) the year is new, and new and better things can happen to us, (c) we have the privilege

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21. We quote the Chinuch: "Hashem does kindness with His creations and reviews their deeds one day each year before their sins become too many. Their sins are still few, so Hashem forgives them. Even if there are sins that need cleansing, He punishes slowly, little by little. Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 4.) say, 'To the one He loves, He punishes little by little.' If He would only review their deeds once in a very long time, their sins would be many, and the world might be destroyed, *chalilah*."

to be close to Hashem, (d) as the Chinuch teaches, it is for our benefit to have our aveiros removed once a year rather than building up over many years.

It is a joyous day, and it is an awesome day (as we elaborate later on). We experience on this day a mixture of both emotions.

### ***Simanim***

In the haftorah of the first day of Rosh Hashanah (I *Shmuel* 1), we read about Chanah, who was sad because she didn't have children. Her husband, Elkanah, asked her, "Why do you cry? Why aren't you eating? I am better to you than ten children."

The Navi continues that Chanah ate but was still very distressed. She went to Mishkan Shilo and davened for children. After her *tefillos* the Navi writes, ותאכל ופניה לא, "She ate, and her sad face was no longer."

So, Chanah davened with joy. The Chasam Sofer teaches that her joy helped her receive her salvation.

Chazal say, בר"ה נפקדה שרה רחל וחנה, "On Rosh Hashanah Chanah was remembered," to bear a child, and it was in the merit of her happiness.

On Rosh Hashanah night, we eat simanim, such as apple dipped in honey, and we daven for a good, sweet year.

The origin of this custom is the Gemara (*Krisus* 6) which states, סימנא מילתא הוא, a sign has significance.

The *Eliyahu Rabba* (quoted in *Mishnah Berurah*) writes, "The Shlah teaches that these signs remind the person to rouse himself to *teshuvah* and to daven for these matters." So, when we eat apple dipped in honey, we daven that it should be a good, sweet year, and we rouse ourselves with thoughts of *teshuvah* so we can merit this.

Reb Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmas Shlomo*) says that more than the foods we eat, it's our *bitachon* that it will be a good year, combined

with our confident words that make a positive impression on the year. He writes, "Eating these foods isn't a tefillah. Eating is never a tefillah. Rather, we eat these foods to illustrate our trust that Hashem will give us a good year. We eat these sweet, good foods, and we say on them [that it should be a good year], so if *chas veshalom* there was a harsh decree, it will be turned over for good by our words. Amen, so shall be His will."

Words have power. If you say it will be a sweet year, this is like a prophecy, which has the power to be fulfilled.

Reb Shlomo Kluger adds, "On Rosh Hashanah, after *shacharis*, one should say, כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד, 'Everything Hashem does is for the good.' וגם זו לטובה 'And this is also good.' Such words turn things over that everything will indeed be good."

The utmost good *siman* is to be happy on Rosh Hashanah. If eating foods and saying words that show it will be a good year make an impression on the upcoming year, certainly happiness will make a positive imprint on the year.

We will prove this from the following Gemara:

The Gemara (*Brachos* 18) tells us, "A poor chassid gave tzedakah to another poor person on *erev* Rosh Hashanah during a famine. His wife got upset with him, so he went to sleep in the cemetery that night. In the cemetery, he overheard a conversation between two *neshamos*. One said, 'My friend, let's float around the world and listen in from behind the curtain [of heaven] to know which punishments are coming to the world.'"

The second soul answered that she was embarrassed to leave her grave because she was buried in a mat of reeds.

So, the first soul went alone. When she returned, she told her friend, "Heaven

decreed that all crops planted by the first rains of the season will be ruined by hail."<sup>22</sup>

The chassid, having overheard their conversation, planted his field by the second rain that year. Everyone's crop was destroyed in the hail, except for his.

The following year he returned to the cemetery, and he heard the two souls conversing again. Once again, one of them asked her friend to float around the world to hear what is decreed in heaven, and the other replied that she can't because she is buried in a mat of reeds. So, one soul traveled alone, and when she returned, she said that she heard that this year, whoever plants in the second rain will be destroyed by a disease called *shidafon*."

That year, everyone planted by the second rain (because they remember from the previous year that the chassid planted at the second rain and his were the only crops that survived). But a disease destroyed all the crops planted that year at the second rain. The chassid planted by the first rain, and his crops grew well.<sup>23</sup>

When we think about this Gemara, we understand that the chassid had terrible *simanim* on Rosh Hashanah. We can't imagine worse *simanim*! His wife got mad at him, and he ended up sleeping in a cemetery! But despite the bad signs, he became wealthy, two years in a row! This is because the person's disposition is even more important than the foods he eats. This chassid remained happy, despite having to sleep in the graveyard, and his happiness brought him two successful years.

The primary *siman* is joy. As the Mishnah Berurah writes, "We do *simanim* for a good omen. Therefore, it's obvious that one must be cautious not to become angry on these days. In addition to the severe sin, one must make a good sign for the new year. He should be happy and trust in Hashem."

People in Yerushalayim would say, "If an apple dipped in honey is a sign for a sweet year, certainly, if a person is a 'sweet Yid,' by keeping a smile on his face and by greeting others warmly, what better omen can there be for a sweet new year?"

The Nesivos Shalom *zy'a* told the following story:

Rosh Hashanah night, in the home of a certain tzaddik, everything was going wrong. The *becher* filled for Kiddush spilled over the table before the tzaddik could recite Kiddush. When he was cutting challah, the challah slipped from his hand and fell onto the floor.

His rebbetzin didn't serve fish that night because it burned. She said, "I'm afraid that these are bad *simanim*. So many negative things are happening."

Her husband replied, "The main *siman* is a happy disposition. We eat meat and sweet foods on Rosh Hashanah because these foods make us happy, and happiness is a good omen for the upcoming year. Baruch Hashem, despite everything, we are happy. So, we have a very good omen for the coming year."<sup>24</sup>

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22. The crops of the first rain will be tall and strong, and they will break from the hail. The crops planted by the second rain will be still soft and flexible at the time of the hail, and the hail won't harm them.

23. The *Iyun Yaakov* explains, "It seems to me that the chassid [chose to sleep in the cemetery] because he was afraid that if he remains at home, he might quarrel with his wife on Rosh Hashanah. He didn't want to sleep in somebody else's house in order to protect his wife's honor. He chose to sleep in the cemetery so no one should know about the fight.

"In the merit of *tzedakah* [that he gave to the poor] he was rewarded, because he heard the spirits, and he knew when to plant..."

24. Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer *zt'l* explains that we don't eat sour foods on Rosh Hashanah to avoid making



The great mekubal, Reb Yehudah Psayah zt'l sat at his table Rosh Hashanah night, dressed in white clothing, surrounded by guests, and it was all very honorable and well. But one of the guests moved the table, and the candles fell and blew out. It was now dark in the room. Reb Yehudah Psayah didn't become angry or upset. His mood remained cheerful and happy. But because it was dark, when his Rebbetzin came in with a tray of fish, she dropped the tray, sending fish and sauce across the floor. Reb Yehudah stood up to see what happened, and he slipped on the fish sauce and fell to the ground, and now his once-white clothing were covered in fish sauce. Even then, Reb Yehudah remained in happy spirits. And what was the outcome of all these negative simanim? He said that he never had such a wonderful year. Wherever he put his hand, he had success, created many chidushei Torah and had divine spiritual revelations. Because the most important siman is happiness, stemming from bitachon that Hashem will grant us a good year.

### Fear and Joy

We've discussed the obligation to be happy on Rosh Hashanah. We will now address the great fear of Rosh Hashanah, and our duty to blend joy with fear.

Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaar HaYirah 101) writes, "From the beginning of Elul until Yom Kippur, one should be afraid and tremble from the awesome judgment."

The Baal HaTurim (Netzavim ד"ה את לבבך) writes that the pasuk (Tehillim 26:13) לֹא־אֶמְנָתִי לֵיּוֹלָא hints to Elul because לֵיּוֹלָא has the letters of אֱלֹהִים, and he writes, "From Elul on I am afraid before Hashem."

The Shlah Hakadosh (beginning of Rosh Hashanah) discusses the pasuk (Amos 3:8) אֲרִיָּה אָרָא, "A lion has roared; who will not fear?" He expresses that the letters אֲרִיָּה stand for אֱלֹהִים, ראש השנה, יום כיפור, הושענא רבא. On these days, who isn't afraid of Hashem's judgment?

It states (Tehillim 119:120) סָמַר מִפְּחָדְךָ בָּשָׂרִי "My flesh bristles from fear of You, and I fear Your judgment." These words are gematriya 2090, the same as אֱלֹהִים, ראש השנה, יום כיפור, נעילה, הושענא רבא.

The Steipler Gaon zt'l would often repeat in the name of the Chazon Ish zt'l that the definition of yiras Shamayim in our generation is to believe whatever happens to us throughout the year was decreed on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>25</sup>

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a sour face on Rosh Hashanah. We don't want to show a bitter face on Rosh Hashanah, for it will *chas veshalom* set a precedent for bitterness throughout the year.

Reb Pinchas Koritzer zt'l compared Rosh Hashanah to an architect who draws up a blueprint for a beautiful building. Each mark of the pencil corresponds to something bigger. Similarly, Rosh Hashanah is the blueprint for what will happen during the year. Therefore, Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz zt'l said, one should be cautious with every moment of Rosh Hashanah, because each moment becomes part of the blueprint for the upcoming year.

Someone told Reb Mordechai Chaim Slonimer zt'l that he doesn't have enough money to buy a head of a fish, and he is worried what will be with him that year if he doesn't have this *siman*.

Reb Mordechai Chaim told him, "Buy a fish tail (which is called an עק, end, in Yiddish) and pray, 'May it be Hashem's will that it should finally be the עק, end, of all our suffering.'"

25. After Rosh Hashanah, Reb Eliyahu Dessler (*Michtav Me'Eliyahu Elul* p.74) said, "I wasn't in heaven, so I don't know what was decided in the Divine court. However, as the year passes, I will know what was decreed there."

Rashi (*Rosh Hashanah* 8.) writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu judges the entire world [on Rosh Hashanah, to

Throughout Elul, Reb Aharon of Belz zt'l would chant in a holy, Rosh Hashanah tune, "The Rambam says we must do teshuvah and the Raavad doesn't argue. What is going to be with us? What will be the end?"

A mashal is told in the name of Reb Chaim of Brisk zt'l:

A person planning to smuggle illegal merchandise over a border can't sleep for nights because he is afraid of getting caught. The wagon driver hired for this mission isn't as scared because it isn't his merchandise. But when he approaches the border, he becomes afraid. One isn't afraid at all, and that is the horse. We say (Tehillim 32:9) אל תהיו ככוס כפרד, "Don't be like a horse, like a mule..."

We shouldn't be like animals who have no fear at all. We are nearing the days of judgment, our baggage will be inspected, and it is appropriate that we be afraid.

Shulchan Aruch (Yorah Deiah 245:17) says that a melamed (teacher of children) needs to be well rested. A melamed asked Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld whether he should sleep adequately during the Selichos days or wake up early to attend Selichos. Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld ruled that he must get up to say Selichos. We see that these days are different than the rest of the year.

A chazan was reviewing the tefillos of *yomim nora'im* from a machzor before Rosh Hashanah. Rebbe Mordechai of Nadvorna zt'l commented to him, "The machzor is the same this year as last year. Instead of looking into the machzor, I advise you to look into yourself to see what needs to be improved."

Once, Reb Yitzchak Dovid Gutfarb zt'l visited the beis din in Yerushalayim. The members of the court asked him whether he was involved in a dispute or some other case, and he replied that he was not. "So why did you come here?"

He replied, "I wanted to see how people act when they are being judged. I saw some people saying Tehillim with a lot of kavanah while they waited for their turn, I saw some pleading their case before the beis din with all their strength and emotion. I thought to myself, "What are they talking about? It is just money, after all. On Rosh Hashanah, our very lives will be judged! Yet, it is Elul, and I see that everyone is calm and tranquil, and no one is worried." So, when you see someone who isn't afraid on Rosh Hashanah, it might not be bitachon. It might be simply that he has no fear at all. The perfect emotion is immense fear that is sweetened with trust in Hashem.

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determine] what will happen to them until next year Tishrei." As the year progresses, we will discover what was decreed in Heaven.

The Rokeach explains that הרות (from the phrase היום הרות עולם) means pregnancy, because everything that will happen during the year, has its origin — its pregnancy — on Rosh Hashanah.

There was a time when there was a financial crash in the world, and businesspeople in Yerushalayim were also affected by it.

There was a wealthy Yid in Yerushalayim named Reb Yosef Weinberg z'l who didn't show any signs of worry at all. The Birchas Avraham zt'l asked him how he maintains his serenity at this time. He replied, "My market day is Rosh Hashanah. (מיין יריד איז ר"ה)." Everything is decided on that day, and the rest of the year is when these matters transpire.

The Birchas Avraham was very impressed by this answer, and he repeated it several times.

A *yungerman* was *niftar* from pneumonia in the middle of the winter. Reb Chaim Shmuelewitz zt'l said, "He wasn't *niftar* in the cold of the winter. He was *niftar* on Rosh Hashanah, when the sun was shining brightly," because the decree was sealed on Rosh Hashanah.

The Tur (581) writes that people generally wear black clothing when they are tried in court because they fear they might be found guilty. The Jewish nation wears white clothing because they trust Hashem will make a miracle for them and save them. The miforshim ask that they should wear colorful clothing.

The miforshim answer: When one wears decorated clothing, that doesn't show that he trusts in Hashem because perhaps he isn't afraid of the judgment at all. He doesn't believe that he is being judged, which is why he is so calm and relaxed. But when he wears white clothing, the clothes of tachrichim, he shows that he knows there's a judgment, only he is happy because he trusts in Hashem.

A person once told the Brisker Rav zt'l that we must believe that Hashem will give us a good judgment on Rosh Hashanah. The Brisker Rav told him that this isn't bitachon. This is not being afraid at all. He said, "Bitachon is only where there is fear. Not being afraid isn't bitachon."

A sign of our fear is that we don't say Hallel on Rosh Hashanah.

The Chinuch (311) writes, "Despite our joy, it is a day of judgment, so it is appropriate that we be afraid more than we have on the other yomim tovim. This is the reason we don't say *Hallel* on this holiday. It isn't proper to say *Hallel* when one is standing in judgment."

The Mishnah Berurah (584:1) writes, "We don't say Hallel on Rosh Hashanah because the books of life and death are opened, so how can we sing Hallel? Although we are certain we will be acquitted and found

innocent in the judgment, nevertheless, one must be afraid because of the awe of the judgment. In the merit of his fear, he will be remembered [for a good year]."

The Rambam (*Pirush HaMishnayos Rosh Hashanah* 4) writes, "*Hallel* isn't said on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur because they are days of avodah, humility, fear, and awe of Hashem. They are days to escape and to run to Hashem, days for *teshuvah*, tefillos, requests, and forgiveness. Therefore, *Hallel* and joy aren't appropriate on these days."<sup>26</sup>

Notice that the Rambam refers to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as days of fear and days "to escape and run to Hashem." Unlike most fears that cause people to run away from their fear, the fear of Rosh Hashanah draws people closer to Hashem.

This is as we say in *Selichos*, אֲתַכְסֶּה מִחֲמוּתְךָ בְּצִלְךָ, "I hide from Your anger in Your shadow." This is the uniqueness of the fear of Hashem. It draws us closer.

Reb Bunim of Peshischa zt'l writes in a letter, "During these days, joy is concealed in fear. May Hashem grant us that it should be both, together."

The Beis Aharon zt'l (Stolin) instructed two of his *chassidim* to study the section of *Reishis Chachmah* (*Shaar HaGehinom*) that describes the punishments of Gehinom. He told them to return in three months to report what they had studied.

Three months later, they returned, and the Beis Aharon asked one of them what he had learned. The chassid replied, "It was extremely frightening. *Reishis Chachmah* describes Gehinom in detail. I tremble, just thinking about the great punishments that are in store for each *aveirah*."

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26. The Chasam Sofer taught another reason why we don't say *Hallel*. He explains that it is known that our ancestors join us in our *tefillos* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is written, לֹא הַמֵּתִים יִהְיוּ יָהּ, "the dead don't say *Hallel*" therefore we don't say *Hallel* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The Meiri (Rosh Hashanah 16.) writes, "On Rosh Hashanah, the judgment is for the living and for the dead, whether it will be pleasure or distress, wealth or loss."



The Rebbe replied, "You don't need to worry. We have a compassionate Father, and when we do *teshuvah*, Hashem forgives us."

Then the Rebbe asked the other chassid to repeat what he learned in *Reishis Chachmah*. He calmly repeated the ideas. It was evident that he wasn't afraid.

The Rebbe told him, "You must know that this is only a *mashal*. Gehinom is far more severe than that."

There was a third chassid present, and he asked the Rebbe, "Should one be afraid of Gehinom or not? You gave conflicting messages to your chasidim, and I don't know how to reconcile them."

The Rebbe replied, "If a person is afraid of Gehinom, he has nothing to fear. But if he isn't afraid, he has a lot to be afraid of."

Similarly, regarding the awesome judgment of Rosh Hashanah, if we are afraid, we have nothing to fear. But if we aren't scared, we have a lot to fear.<sup>27</sup>

About the mitzvah of shofar, the Torah (Bamidbar 29:1) says, "יום תרועה יהיה לכם, 'It shall be a day of shofar sounding for you.'" The Torah doesn't say תעבירו שופר, to blow shofar, rather "It shall be a day of shofar." The Tzlach understands from this that the entire day of Rosh Hashanah should be spent in fear of Hashem, represented by the groaning sounds (גנוחי גנה) of the shofar.

Rabbeinu Yonah (*Brachos* 21.) writes, "Although for humans joy and fear are opposites, by Hakadosh Baruch Hu they aren't. In fact, fear increases one's joy."

So, too, on Rosh Hashanah, we are very afraid, yet we are joyous. In avodas Hashem, these two emotions aren't contradictory.

The sounds of the shofar also express fear and joy. The *sefarim* write that *tekiyah* expresses joy, while *shevarim* and *truah* are the sounds of a broken heart. So, the shofar represents the fusion of fear with joy.

Yitzchak Avinu represents fear of Heaven, which is why he is often referred to as *Pachad Yitzchok*, the fear of Yitzchak. Yet Yitzchak also means laughter, and happiness. The Sfas Emes *zt'l* writes, "It is possible he was called Yitzchak because his face shone with happiness for there is no one happier than the person who truly fears Hashem and doesn't have any other fear."

### The Awesome Judgment

The Beis Aharon (*Netzavim*) writes, "The main thing is [that on Rosh Hashanah] everyone should draw fear upon themselves. Either *yirah iloyah*, divine fear [the fear that comes when one perceives Hashem's greatness], or, if he isn't on this level, he should be afraid of the judgment. The main thing is that everyone must be very afraid, and then Hakadosh Baruch Hu will do *tzedakah* (kindness) with us."

Some people have attained the higher form of fear, *yirah iloya*, fear of Hashem's greatness. On Rosh Hashanah, they focus on Hashem's greatness, and their hearts are filled with fear.

Those not yet on that level should also be afraid on Rosh Hashanah. They should be fearful of the judgment of the day.

Let us take a moment to describe the judgment of Rosh Hashanah:

First, be aware that sometimes, on Rosh Hashanah, you are being judged several years in advance. The *Magan Avraham* (end of 591) proves this from Pharaoh's dream, which occurred on Rosh Hashanah. He dreamed

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27. Tana d'Bei Eliyahu states, "יראתי מתוך שמחתי ושמחתי מתוך יראתי, 'I was afraid in the midst of my joy, and I was joyous in the midst of my fear.'" We can explain that if one is afraid, he certainly has reason to be happy, because the fear is a *segulah* that he will have a good judgment.

about seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of hunger. The future of fourteen years was determined on that Rosh Hashanah.

Even if the judgment is for one year, it is enough to fill our hearts with fear. Think about the tefillah of ונתנה תוקף, that so many communities say with immense fear and awe. מי יחיה ומי ימות... מי ישלם, all these matters and more are decided on Rosh Hashanah.

It states (*Koheles* 3:14), והאלקים עשה שיראו מלפניו, "Hashem made we should fear Him." The *Zohar* (vol.3 98:) says this *pasuk* refers to Rosh Hashanah. Hashem established Rosh Hashanah, so we will learn to fear Him.

Rosh Hashanah is called (*Tehillim* 81:4), בכסה, "a concealed holiday," because the results of the awesome judgment are concealed from us until they happen.<sup>28</sup>

The Navi (*Shoftim* 5:1) writes, ותשר דבורה וברק, "Devorah and Barak sang on that day..." They praised Hashem that they won the war against Sisra.

In this song, they said (5:28), בעד החלון נשקפה, מודע בושש רכבו לבוא, מודע אחרו ותיבב אם סיסרא... מודע בושש רכבו לבוא, מודע אחרו

"Sisra's mother was looking out the window, crying... Why isn't his chariot here yet? Why is he delayed?"<sup>29</sup>

Why was Sisra's mother so worried? Sisra was a mighty warrior and won every war he fought. She should have assumed he would certainly win this war, too. Apparently, she thought, "He won every war until now, but maybe this time will be different."

The past doesn't guarantee the future.

So, although we are obligated to be happy on Rosh Hashanah and to have positive thoughts, trusting that Hashem will grant us a good year, we also need fear. The mixture of both emotions is *mesugal* for attaining a good year.

### Tefillah

Tefillos are always powerful, particularly tefillos said at the beginning of the year.

It states (*Iyov* 22:28), ותגזר אומר ויקם לך, "Whatever you decree will occur." A Yid requests and Hashem grants his wishes. The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 106., *Rashi*) teaches that this *pasuk* refers especially to tefillos said at

<sup>28</sup>. A mother was *r'l niftarah* and the family didn't know how to break this tragic news to the orphaned, young child. After discussing it together, they came up with an idea: They bought a new suit for the young child and in one of the pockets they put a letter, describing the tragedy that occurred.

The *nimshal* is:

Rosh Hashanah, everyone receives a verdict for the upcoming year, only we don't know what it is. It is concealed from us, as though the verdict is tucked away in one of our pockets. But as time passes, it will be revealed to us what was decided on Rosh Hashanah.

The process of *maasar behaimah* is that sheep pass through a narrow doorway and are marked with a red dye, which designates them as a *korban maasar*. If the sheep would know that the red mark that's on their back is a sign that they will soon be sacrificed, they would try to wash off the red dye. Chazal say that we go before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah כבני מרון, like sheep passing one by one through the narrow doorway. We can explain that also people are marked and judged on Rosh Hashanah, only they don't know what the judgment is. If they knew, they might try with all their might (with tefillah and teshuvah) to remove the mark, so they will be granted a good year.

<sup>29</sup>. Several laws of shofar are learned from this *pasuk*. Because the Navi calls her cries, תיבב, and Onkelos on תרועה writes, יבבא. This tells us that a shofar should sound like someone crying.

The Midrash states that Sisro's mother shed one hundred tears. This is the origin of our custom to blow the shofar one hundred times on Rosh Hashanah.

the beginning of the year because those tefillos are very effective.<sup>30</sup>

The Aruch L'Ner teaches that the uniqueness of tefillos said at the beginning of the year is that such tefillos are always answered. Tefillos said throughout the year, sometimes they are answered, and sometimes not. But tefillos at the beginning of the year are always answered.

Therefore, let's take advantage of the tefillos on Rosh Hashanah, Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, and Yom Kippur. Our tefillos make a difference.<sup>31</sup>

As a child, Reb Yitzchak Tuvyah Weiss *zt'l* (the *gavod* of Yerushalayim) lived in a city about four kilometers from Pressburg. When the Germans entered his city, they ordered the Jewish community to board trains. The Germans said they were being transported to a work camp, and whoever didn't board the train would be shot.

The Jewish community didn't know whether to believe the Germans or if it was a ruse to get them to the gas chambers. The rabbanim and community leaders didn't

know whether they should encourage people to listen to the Germans or encourage everyone to hide or escape.

Reb Tuvyah Weiss (still a child) was sent to Pressburg to take counsel from the ראש הקהל of Pressburg.

The *Rosh hakahal* of Pressburg replied that their lives were in grave danger either way.

The *rosh hakahal* also told him that the king of England managed to save one thousand children. The *rosh hakahal* said, "I have some tickets to the children's transport, but I don't know who to save and who has precedence over whom. But since you came here, here's a ticket. Go and save yourself."

Reb Tuvyah gave over the bleak report to the community leaders of his city and then went home to quickly pack his bags. He said goodbye to his parents and went on the transport. (His mother's last words to him were that he must never forget that he's a Yid.)

Soon, he was safe on English soil with a thousand other children. A short while later, the king of England requested to see the thousand children he had saved.

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**30.** The Gemara is discussing a hired worker who didn't listen to his boss. Instead of planting wheat kernels, as he was told to do, he planted barley.

There was a flood that year; a river overflowed. All the crops of his field (and of other people's fields) were destroyed.

The negligent worker claims that he doesn't have to pay because even if he would have planted wheat (as he was supposed to) it also wouldn't grow due to the flood.

The Gemara says that he has to pay for the damages. Rashi explains that the owner of the field tells him, "At the beginning of the year, I didn't pray that the barley crop should succeed, I prayed that the wheat crop should succeed." If the worker would have planted wheat, perhaps it wouldn't be destroyed in the flood. Some miracle would have occurred, and his crops would have been saved. But he prayed for his wheat, and he didn't have a wheat crop, just a barley crop, and therefore he suffered a loss.

We see from this Gemara the amazing power of tefillos, and especially those said at the beginning of the year.

**31.** Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld *zt'l* wouldn't listen to *shidduchim* for his children unless he davened for their *shidduch* on Rosh Hashanah. Once, a *shidduch* was suggested for one of his children and pressure was placed on him to consider it. He didn't really want to consider it because he didn't pray for that child's *shidduch* on Rosh Hashanah. But due to the pressure, he considered it, and the *shidduch* was finalized. Sadly, this marriage didn't last long, *rachmana litzlan*. This is because success needs tefillos, and ideally, they need the tefillos said at the beginning of the year.



The children were gathered and stood respectfully on both sides of the road as the king drove between them.

Suddenly, one of the children, a very courageous young boy, jumped forward and asked to speak to the king. The king's servants wanted to send the boy away, but the king stopped them and called over the boy. The child thanked the king for saving him along with the other children, "But it upsets me that the king's compassion isn't perfect because I left my parents and family behind. How can I be happy with my salvation when I'm worried about the safety of my parents and family?" The king asked him for his parents' address.

Two weeks later, his parents and extended family arrived in England.

Reb Tuvyah Weiss zt'l recounted this episode and said, "There were another 999 children there. None of them thought to come forward and beg the king to save their families. Only this boy did, and he benefitted so much from that. Let this be a reminder that we should take advantage of the opportunities that come our way."

On our topic, let's take advantage of our power of tefillah, especially at this time of year. The King is present, as it states *דרשו ה' בהמצאו*. If we call out to Him, He will answer us and grant our requests.

### Ask for a Lot

When we daven, we should ask for a lot. Don't be stingy with your requests; Hashem can provide a lot.<sup>32</sup>

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**32.** An angel once said to a person, "Ask whatever you want, and your wishes will be granted."

This person was blind, poor, and childless. What should he ask for? He can only ask for one thing, but he needs three salvations. He said, "I want to see my great-grandchildren eating off golden dishes." For this request to be fulfilled, he will receive healthy eyesight, wealth, and children.

When one is given the option to ask, he should ask wisely.

Czar Nicolai would sometimes dress like a regular person and mingle with the populace to hear what people were saying about him. Once, he spoke to four people at a bar, appearing like a regular citizen. He asked them, "If the king would grant you whatever you want, what would you request?"

One said, "I'd ask for a million dollars."

Another said, "I would ask for a mansion."

A third said that he would ask for a bank.

The fourth said, "I request that you leave us in peace and stop bothering us with your foolish questions. You're not the king, and you can't give us anything."

The king wrote letters to all four people. To one he gave a million dollars, to the second, a mansion, to the third he gave a bank, and to the fourth he wrote, "You wanted to be left in peace, therefore I will do so."

These days, the King is giving us the option to request whatever we want. We would be wise to be like the first three men, and not like the fourth, who didn't recognize the potential that was before him.

When the poor go around a *beis midrash* collecting money, they don't get too much. The *mispa'elim* generally give small donations — a quarter, a dollar, and the like. But when the poor visit the wealthy in their homes, they receive larger donations. What's the difference? Why do they receive more in their homes than in the *beis midrash*?

Reb Tzaddok HaKohen zt'l explains that when the poor go around the *beis midrash*, they don't expect to receive too much money, and that's the reason they don't get it. When the poor man goes to their homes, he expects to receive more, and therefore he receives more.

Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zt'l* told the following:

Once, a soldier saw the enemy raise his rifle to shoot Czar Nicolai. The loyal soldier shouted, causing Nicolai's horse to jump, which saved Nicolai's life because the bullet hit the horse instead of Nicolai.

"You saved my life," Nicolai said to the soldier. "How can I repay you?"

The soldier replied, "I don't get along well with my commander, and I want to be moved to a different brigade."

"Your request will be fulfilled," Nicolai said, "but you are a fool because you could have requested so much more. If you had asked to become the general, I would have also granted that to you."

Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zy'a* said that people are also foolish when they ask for small things from Hashem, like a bit more money, or a drop more success, etc. They can ask for so much more, and Hashem will grant it to them.

The Midrash (ילקוט מעם לעז ראה "נתן תתן") tells a story that took place when Alexander Mokdon came to Eretz Yisrael. A Yid came forward and greeted Alexander and blessed him.

Alexander rewarded him with a city.

Alexander's servants asked, "He is a poor man. He would have been satisfied with a

smaller present, too. Why did you give him a city?"

Alexander replied, "When one gives a present, its worth should be according to the eyes of the giver and not according to the perception of the receiver."

The Lev Simchah *zt'l* repeated this Midrash and explained that when Hashem gives us presents, it will be according to how Hashem understands a present. We say in תפילת טל (said on Pesach): דוד כערכך העמד שמינו, "Friend, according to Your assessments, establish our name." This means that Hashem should give us kindness as *He* understands kindness, for that will be much greater than when it is according to our limited perception.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps you will say that you are on a low level and aren't worthy of davening to Hashem. Therefore, we say in the *yotzros* of Rosh Hashanah, ומשוה קטן וגדול, "Hashem acts equally towards the small and the great people." Regardless of your spiritual level, Hashem will accept your tefillos.

The word ובכן is repeated several times in the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur *Shemonah Esrei*. The Abudurham explains that the word comes from the *pasuk* (Esther 4:16) ובכן אבוא אל המלך אשר לא כדת, "And in this manner, I will go to the king..." because, on Rosh Hashanah, we come before the King, Hashem.

The *pasuk* writes, ובכן אבוא אל המלך אשר לא כדת, "and in this manner I will go to the king,

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The lesson is that one receives according to his expectations, and therefore when we daven we should raise our expectations, and then we will receive more.

**33.** A storekeeper of a candy store told a young child that he can take one handful of candies and keep them for himself without paying. The child didn't take on his own, so the storekeeper scooped up a handful and gave it to him.

When he returned home, he explained why he didn't take the handful on his own. "It is because the storekeeper's hand is larger than mine".

The *nimshal* is that we request that Hashem open His hand and grant us kindness. Hashem's hand is *keviyachol* much larger than ours, and when Hashem gives us kindness it will be more than what we can take, or imagine, on our own.

which isn't proper." Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* explains that we say *ובכן* to express *אשר לא כדת*, that even those people who aren't acting properly according to the Torah, they too can come before the King in prayer, and Hashem will accept their tefillos.

### **Hav! Hav!**

What should a person daven for on Rosh Hashanah? We have physical needs, spiritual needs, and we all need the coming of Moshiach. What should be our focus on Rosh Hashanah?

The *Zohar* says that those who daven for their personal needs on Rosh Hashanah are like dogs who shout, "*hav hav* – Give more! Give more!" It seems that it is wrong to daven for worldly needs, we should only daven for Moshiach and spirituality, but this isn't the accepted custom. Tzaddikim say that we should also daven for *gashmiyos*. They explain that this doesn't contradict the *Zohar* since we don't ask for *gashmiyos* for its own sake. We shouldn't daven to become wealthy so that everyone will be jealous of us or that we can take luxurious vacations. Such tefillos aren't appropriate on Rosh Hashanah. But when we daven for *gashmiyos* to have peace of mind to serve Hashem, it is certainly permitted and even admirable.

Rebbe Meir of Premishlan *zt'l* once said, "If you take all the tefillos of Bnei Yisrael, you will see that it is all about money. But if you think of the essence of their money, it is all about mitzvos." Klal Yisrael uses their money to pay for cheder and girl schools and to marry off their children so they can make Shabbos and Yom Tov seudos, etc. In

this sense, asking for *gashmiyos* is like asking for *ruchniyos*.

The *Zohar* says we shouldn't daven for *gashmiyos* – and we don't. Even when we ask for *parnassah*, health, and all our other needs, it is so we can serve Hashem.

One year, before *tekiyas shofar*, the Baal Shem Tov *zy'a* told his students to daven for *parnassah* and all their worldly needs.

The students were surprised because they knew that the *Zohar* says we shouldn't daven for *gashmiyos* on Rosh Hashanah.

The Baal Shem Tov explained that when Hashem grants their *gashmiyos* requests, it will enable them to be devoted to *avodas Hashem*. Thus, even asking for *gashmiyos* can be called davening for *ruchniyos*.<sup>34</sup>

Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zy'a* also encouraged his people to daven for their material needs on Rosh Hashanah. He said, "Those who don't ask don't get." How do you expect to receive if you don't ask?

Rebbe Asher of Stolin *zy'a* says, "The *Zohar* prohibits shouting "*hav hav* – Give more! Give more!" This prohibition is when he has enough, and he only wants more. But for one who doesn't have enough, there is nothing wrong with asking."<sup>35</sup>

We say in the Rosh Hashanah *Shemonei Esrei*, קדוש אתה וגורא שמך ואין אל"ה מבלעדך. Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l* explains that we are saying that Hashem is קדוש, extremely holy, and it doesn't seem right for us to ask Hashem for *parnassah* and other worldly matters.<sup>36</sup>

34. Another benefit to praying for your material needs is that such a *tefillah* is often more sincere, since these needs lay heavily on people's heart. The Tzemech Tzedek said that when one asks for his personal needs, it is *teshuvah iloya* (a very high level of *teshuvah*) because his words are coming forth with sincerity and truth from the depths of his heart to Hashem.

35. The tzaddikim of Karlin *zy'a* taught their chassidim to read *Parashas Haman* every day of Aseres Yemei Teshuvah because this is the time of year when Hashem is rationing our *parnassah* for the entire upcoming year. Therefore, this is the ideal time to daven for *parnassah*.

36. It can be compared to going to a great, powerful king and telling him that you need help changing a



However, we say, "אין אלו"ה מבלעדך, "There is no other G-d other than You." We are telling Hashem, "Perhaps it seems disrespectful to ask You for our worldly needs, but to whom else can we go to receive our needs? Who can help us if not You? Only You can give us our needs; therefore, it is proper that we request them from You."

### Tears

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59.) states, "From the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the gates of tefillah were closed. Yet, the gates of tears weren't locked." The Arizal taught that although Rosh Hashanah is a yom tov, a joyous day, it is important to cry during the tefillah.

In many old machzorim, there are tefillos (called *techinos*) written in Yiddish. These were written specifically for women, who in the past often couldn't read lashon hakodesh.

However, in the past, there were also many ignorant men. They were *am aratzim*, and they also didn't understand *lashon hakadosh*. Yet no one composed *techinos* for them. Why is that? Why are there *techinos* composed specifically for women and not for men?

It is because we primarily need the *tefillos* of women because they daven with tears, and tears break down all barriers.

Reb Elyah Lopian *zt'l* said he received a *kabbalah* that on the *yomim nora'im*, the women who stay home to take care of their children have their own individual channel that elevates their *tefillos* before Hashem's throne. This is partially because of the unique quality of *tefillah* with tears, which women excel in. These *tefillos* are always answered.

A young girl came to a jewelry store and took a liking to a particular necklace on

display. "Is that a real necklace?" she asked the merchant.

"It is real gold," the merchant confirmed.

"Can I see it?"

The merchant knew the young girl couldn't afford to buy the necklace. Nevertheless, he didn't mind doing her a favor and showed it to her.

He gave her the necklace to hold. Her eyes lit up. "How much does it cost?"

"A lot of money. Too much for a young girl like yourself," the merchant replied.

"I want to buy it," she said, "and I have money."

She opened her purse and took out seven dollars and eighty cents.

Startled by her determination, the merchant asked her, "Why do you want the necklace so much?"

She replied, "Our mother died last year, and my older sister takes care of us. Today is her birthday, and I know she will be happy to have this necklace. I want to buy it for her."

"But it costs a lot more money than \$7.80. I'm sorry. I have nothing in the store for that amount of money."

Hearing that, the girl began cried.

The merchant's heart broke for this girl and her family. "You can have the necklace," the merchant said, taking the seven dollars and eighty cents as payment.

Later that day, the older sister came to the store.

"Did my younger sister buy this necklace in your store today?"

"Yes."

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lightbulb or that you need a ride to the store. There are things that aren't fitting to ask from a king. Similarly, it doesn't seem correct to ask Hashem for *gashmiyos*.

"How much did it cost?"

The merchant explained, "My store doesn't have set prices. I quote a price, and the customer says his price, and we negotiate until we reach a decision. Your sister negotiated well and convinced me to sell it for less."

We tell this story to explain the power of tears. When there are tears, you want to say yes. Tears touch the heart, and *keviyachol*, something similar occurs when we cry before Hashem. Our tears open all gates, and our tefillos are answered.

The Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

A prince was in prison in a distant land because he had rebelled against his father, the king. The queen yearned to see her child, so she travelled the long distance and spoke with her son from outside the prison walls.

The son told her how terrible it was for him in prison. She threw him a key, so he could unlock the gate and go free, but the key didn't work.

"Perhaps it's the wrong key," the prince said.

"It's the right key," she replied. "The problem is you've been in jail for a long time, and the lock became rusty. The only solution is for you to cry. Your tears will wash away the corrosion, and the lock will open."

The *nimshal* is: When we *daven* with tears, this will open all locks, and we can return to our Father in heaven.

The Yismach Moshe told the following *mashal*:

"A king was angry at his servants, and they didn't know how to appease him. The *sar hamashkim* (the king's cup-bearer) came up with a solution. "I will serve the king the

type of wine he likes most. The king will be happy, and he will certainly forgive us." This good wine is our tears. When we have tears, Hashem is appeased, as it says, מלך מתרצה בדמעות, "The King who is appeased with tears."

Reb Shlomo Kluger *zt'l* taught that one should pray *before* Rosh Hashanah that he should be able to cry on Rosh Hashanah. He said that this is alluded to in the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 42), צמאה נפשי לאלקים לא"ל חי... היתה לי דמעות, Reb Shlomo Kluger explained, צמאה נפשי לאלקים, "My heart thirsts, that on the day of judgment, on Rosh Hashanah<sup>37</sup>, היתה לי דמעות, I should be able to cry."

A boss told his salesperson, "When a retail customer asks for a price reduction or some other deal, you don't have to come speak to me because you know how I do business, and you know what I would say – you can handle it yourself. However, if a merchant comes to the store and wants to negotiate a large and complicated deal, you will have to wait for me. You cannot negotiate those deals yourself."

Similarly, we tell the *malachim* that they can simply deliver our tears before Hashem, but they shouldn't do anything more than that. *Malachim* can't understand the depth, sincerity, yearning, and pain that are contained in the tears of the Jewish nation, and we want that only Hashem should deal with them.

Therefore, in *Selichos* we say, מכניסי דמעה, הכניסו דמעותינו לפני מלך מתרצה בדמעות, "[The *malachim*] who bring in tears, bring our tears before the King who is appeased with tears." They can bring the tears, but nothing more than that.

The Rebbe of Piaseczna *zt'l hy'd* (who was killed in the Holocaust) said, "Did a *malach* ever experience the pain of being beaten up as Yidden do? Does a *malach* know the humiliation of being pursued and hunted?

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37. אלקים is Hashem's name of judgment

Did a *malach* ever experience the pain of hunger?"

Therefore, we tell the *malachim* to daven for us (השתדלו והרבה תחינה), but when it comes to our tears, they should kindly just bring them before Hashem.

The *Alef HaMagen* (582:45 and see *Maaseh Rav*, *Gr'a* 207) writes that if by nature one is unable to cry, he should pray on Rosh Hashanah in a sobbing voice, the voice of someone crying, for this will rouse his *kavanah* and this will arouse his merits Above. As it states (*Tehillim* 6:9), כי שמע ה' קול בכי, "Hashem heard the voice of my cries."

The *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 59) states that even when the gates of tefillah are locked, the gates of tears remain open. Reb Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* offers a beautiful explanation on this *Gemara*. He says that the gates of tefillah are always open. That isn't the problem. The problem is that we daven without a heart. The heart is closed, so the tefillos don't go up. How do we open the heart? By davening with tears. When we daven with tears (and in a crying tone), this opens our hearts and awakens our *kavanah*. And when we daven with *kavanah*, the gates of heaven are wide open to receive our tefillos.

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* taught that בכי"ה (crying) is *roshei teivos* בשמך יגילון כל היום, "In Your name, we rejoice all day long." Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer explains that crying isn't contradictory to joy. In fact, when one is happy, he can cry whenever he wants to.<sup>38</sup>

We eat honey on Rosh Hashanah. The Rebbe of Gostinen *zt'l* said that דב"ש is *roshei teivos* שימה דמעתי בנאדך, "Place my tears in Your pouch."<sup>39</sup> It shouldn't surprise us that tears are disguised in honey because every part of Rosh Hashanah, including the tears, is sweetened.

### Tears with the Shofar

One year, the Berdichover Rav *zy'a* raised his shofar and called out to the women's section, "The shofar needs to be rinsed out," and they all cried. Their tears rinsed out the shofar.

The Arvei Nachal *zy'a* told the following *mashal*:

A king was traveling with his son in a distant country. The king warned his son, "Be aware of evil people because my enemies live here, and they want to hurt us."

But the prince wasn't careful, and the king's enemies captured him.

Once a year, the king had a custom to drive through that country. The prince planned to shout and scream on that designated day when the king passed his place of captivity. The king would hear him and save him.

But his captives knew the prince's plan, so they put him in an iron room where his voice couldn't be heard.

38. It states (*Nechemyah* 8:10) that we should be happy on Rosh Hashanah. However, the Arizal teaches that we should cry on Rosh Hashanah. Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* (*Imrei Pinchas* תפ"ט) says that this isn't a contradiction. "We can compare it to the joy of a *chasunah*. The *simchah* is immense, but there's fear there as well, as everyone hopes that the marriage will be successful and peaceful, etc. Similarly, on this great day of judgment, there is immense joy because Hashem renews His *meluchah* (kingship), and we, human beings, scratched out from the earth, have the privilege to announce Hashem as the king. Is there a joy greater than that? On the other hand, we cry, because we don't know what the future holds."

39. Rebbe Naftali of Melitz *zt'l* said that when Hashem desires to write good things for the Jewish nation, the Satan dries the inkwell, and the ink doesn't write. We request, שימי דמעתי בנאדך, "Place a drop of our tears into Your inkwell, and then you will be able to write with it."

Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l* said that דבש is *gematriya* אב הרחמן, compassionate Father.



The child had special stones that he received from his father, years before. These stones had an extraordinary power that, when thrown at an iron wall, the wall collapsed.

As the king passed through the city, his son threw the stones at the iron walls, but the walls didn't fall. This was because only clean stones have this special power, and his stones weren't clean.

Realizing that his chance of getting rescued failed, the prince broke into tears. His hot tears fell on the stones, cleansing them.

The prince realized that his stones were sparkling clean. With renewed hope, he threw them at the wall, and the wall collapsed. The king was able to hear the prince's cries and saved him.

The Arvei Nachal explains that the shofar has the potential to break down the iron walls that separate us from our Father in heaven and to bring the long-awaited *geulah*. But it doesn't seem to be working, though. Why? The answer is the shofar works together with tears. It does not function properly when one blows shofar without a broken heart and tears.

## Tehillim

Klal Yisrael has a custom to say more *Tehillim* than usual during these days.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout Rosh Hashanah, the Baal HaTanya *zy'a* was busy with either his *machzor* or his *Tehillim*.

The Brisker Rav *zt'l* also used every spare moment of Rosh Hashanah to say *Tehillim*.

The Emek HaMelech *zt'l* writes the following story:

A simple person lived in a village near Leport who only knew Tanach. He was *niftar* at an old age. Thirty days after his passing, he came in a dream to the *chacham* of the city, holding an old *Tehillim* under his arm. The *chacham* asked, "Aren't you the person we recently buried?"

"Yes, it is I."

"What's that *sefer* under your arm?"

"It's a *Tehillim*. I came to warn you and the townspeople to escape immediately. When I was alive, I recited the entire *Tehillim* daily.<sup>41</sup> I did this for years, and the *Tehillim* I said protected the entire town, but now they no longer have that protection".

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40. There is a *segulah* to say the entire *Tehillim* twice on the first night of Rosh Hashanah. I know people who have practiced this *segulah*, and saw miracles.

The *magid*, Reb Ben Tzion Yadler *zt'l*, gathered a group of older *bachurim* on the night of Rosh Hashanah and said the entire *Tehillim* twice. All of them were engaged shortly thereafter.

There's an *askan* in Eretz Yisrael who had two boys and a girl in *shidduchim* and nothing was progressing. They weren't even getting offers. They did this *segulah*, and the three were engaged that year.

A *yungerman* told me that his wife suffered from an illness, and every few weeks she was hospitalized. One year he did this *segulah*, and she never returned to the hospital for that illness again.

Another person, who had the privilege of marrying off all his children, had three couples who didn't have any children. The father did this *segulah*. He said *Tehillim* twice on Rosh Hashanah night, and that year all three of them were blessed with a child.

I've heard several other stories of people who received their salvation with this *segulah*.

Obviously, this is a very hard *segulah* to do. However, even if one can't say the entire *Tehillim* twice, one can say some *Tehillim* on Rosh Hashanah night (and over the two days of Rosh Hashanah). Another idea is for a family to divide up the *Tehillim* between themselves, so they say the entire *Tehillim* twice.

41. The Shlah's version of this story is that he would finish *Tehillim* once each week.

In the morning, the *chacham* gathered the entire town and told them of his frightening dream. The end was that those who escaped survived, and those who remained perished.

The Emek HaMelech concludes, "From the day my father heard this story, he would say the entire *Tehillim* each week. Whoever says *Tehillim* regularly saves himself, his family, and his generation from all kinds of sorrows and distress, and he draws down from heaven *brachos* and *hatzlachos*. Fortunate is the one who [says *Tehillim*], which benefits himself and his community."

The Noam Elimelech writes:

"Some people ask: How does *tefillah* help? How can a tzaddik pray for an ill person and the ill person becomes better? The answer is that man is connected to all worlds. When he sins, he becomes detached from his connection above, resulting in him becoming ill, *rachmana litzlan*. When the tzaddik davens, he reconnects the person to his source, to where he was before. Automatically, he becomes healed. However, sometimes, the tzaddik's *tefillah* doesn't help, *chalilah*, because there is a *kitrug* [prosecuting angels who prevent the person from becoming

reconnected to his source in heaven]. When this occurs, he needs to become attached to the *עולם הגדול הנקרא תהלה*, to the great world called 'Tehillah' because in this world is a great light and the *kitrug* [prosecuting angels] can't prevent him from reconnecting to his source. In that world there is solely compassion, and everything is fixed. This is the reason Dovid HaMelech's songs are called *תהלים*, because when one says *Tehillim*, he becomes attached to the world of Tehillah, where there is no Satan and no problems."

These amazing words give us a glimpse into the wonders of *Tehillim*. When we say *Tehillim*, we are being connected to a world where there is only compassion. Therefore, with *Tehillim*, we can attain all our needs.

### ***Teshuvah and Shofar***

The Rambam (*Teshuvah* 3:4) writes, "Although blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a *gezeiras hakasuv* (a Torah decree), the shofar is telling us something. The shofar is shouting, *עורו ישנים משנתכם* – Those who sleep, wake up from your sleep! Examine your deeds and repent. Remember your Creator, all those who have forgotten the truth."<sup>42</sup>

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**42.** A baal teshuvah told the following story that happened to him:

"One Rosh Hashanah I was in the hospital, and someone came to blow the shofar for us. I was non-religious at the time, and I was intrigued by the shofar. I asked us a lot of questions about the shofar; I wanted to understand what the shofar was all about. I didn't quite get their explanations, so I told them the following, how it appeared to me:

"I served in the Israeli Navy, on a submarine. Under the water, the means of communication was Morse code. I was an expert in Morse code. I could send and decipher messages very quickly.

"A couple of years after serving in the navy (and after spending a very long vacation in India) I saw an advertisement: The army was looking for a Morse code expert to be in charge of several submarines. To apply for the job, we had to be at a certain office between 10:00 and 12:00 in the morning. I arrived at 11:50. The room was packed with applicants, but no one was being called in. Music played in the background and I sat down for a few moments and listened. Then I got up, brazenly opened the door to the office and said, 'I came for the interview.'"

"There are many people waiting in line ahead of you," the secretary said. "And you just came. Please wait your turn."

"I didn't listen to her. I walked into the room and talked to the person in charge. After speaking for a few moments, I was hired for the job."

The Or HaMeir asks if the primary purpose of shofar is to arouse people to do *teshuvah*, why doesn't the Torah say instead that the rabbanim of each beis medresh should deliver a mussar *drashah* to rouse people to *teshuvah*? Why the shofar?

The Or HaMeir answers with a *mashal*:

A town hired a man to stand guard on a mountaintop. If he sees thieves or any other impeding danger, he will ring bells, shout, and warn the townspeople below.

Once, the man saw thieves. So he shouted and rang his bells: "*Ganavim!* Thieves!" The wealthy people ran out frantically to save their properties, but the poorer folks weren't worried. They knew that the thieves weren't after them.

Another day, the guard shouted, "Fire! There's a fire!" This time, even the poor people ran to put out the fire because they

knew that the fire could consume their meager belongings.

The Or HaMeir explains that if instead of the shofar, the rav of every congregation would give a *mussar drashah*, people would say, "The *rav* isn't talking to me. He is speaking to others who need to improve in those areas."

For example, if the rav would speak about the importance of studying Torah with *hasmadah*, some people in the audience would think, "I'm glad the rav is speaking about this topic because there are many people in this beis medresh who should study more Torah," but he doesn't think the *drashah* applies to him. He believes he studies enough.

Whatever the rav speaks about, be it *tefillah*, *tzedakah*, or having good middos, there will always be those who think the rav is speaking to others, not to them.<sup>43</sup>

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The interviewer went out to the waiting room and said, "Thank you all for coming and I'm sorry about the delay. Anyway, we've already hired someone. You can all go home."

"It isn't fair" they all shouted. "This man came in last. Why did you interview him before us?"

"Didn't you hear the music?" the man said. "Listen carefully. Don't you get it? It's Morse code. It says: 'If you've come for the interview, just open the door and come inside.' This man heard the message. You didn't. So you're obviously not as fluent in the language as he is."

The irreligious man in the hospital said that he thinks the shofar is speaking a language, only it needs to be deciphered. If you could hear its words, you would hear the shofar telling us, "Just open the door and come inside. Come to Hashem. He is waiting for you."

Returning to the story: One person said, "I heard the Morse code in the music, but I decided not to open the door because I didn't see anyone else doing so."

"That's not a valid excuse," the interviewer told him. "If you heard the message, you should have come in. Why do you care what other people are doing?"

The shofar tells us to do *teshuvah* and it is inexcusable to say, "I heard the shofar's message, but I decided not to act upon it, since I didn't see anyone else doing *teshuvah*." That's not a valid excuse. If you understand the shofar's call, open the door and come close to Hashem.

**43.** Someone told a *gadol* about his *shalom bayis* problems.

The *gadol* told him, "The solution is to be *mevater*."

The man replied, "I know that, and I tell it to my wife all the time, but she doesn't get it. She isn't willing to be *mevater*..." This demonstrates people's tendency to think that only others have a problem, and not themselves.



Therefore, the Torah wisely tells us to blow shofar. The shofar shouts, "There's a fire, and we're all in danger!" It is a call to action for everyone.

### The Struggle

There are two types of people who do teshuvah. Some make a firm decision to improve their ways and, indeed, they never return to their old ways. Obviously, that is ideal when possible, but there are baalei teshuvah who can't do that. They struggle with their yetzer hara. They want to improve but encounter many ups and downs, successes, and disappointments.

In *mussaf* of Rosh Hashanah we say, כִּי, "אתה שומע קול שופר ומאזין תרועה ואין דומה לך", "You listen to the sound of the shofar, and you harken to the *teruah*, and no one is like You."

The words are simple enough to understand, but, like all words of the siddur, they contain much depth and meaning. Let us delve into these words.

We begin with some questions:

1) שומע and מאזין both mean "to listen," but there is undoubtedly a difference between them. What is it?

2) What is the קול שופר, and what is the תרועה?

3) Why is שומע phrased together with קול שופר, while מאזין goes with תרועה?

4) Why is this phrase ואין דומה לך, "There is no one like You" attached to this *brachah*?

The *Pri Megadim* (592:1, quoting Reb Chaim Rappaport *zt'l* of Lemberg) explains that these words allude to the two levels of teshuvah discussed above. The firm, long sound of the shofar represents when one makes a kabbalah

to improve, once and for all, and never goes back to his old ways.

The choppy *teruah* represents the baalei teshuvah who improve and fall again. They pick themselves up and try once again to succeed in their teshuvah.

To whom is Hashem closer? We will see that Hashem is closer to those struggling with their teshuvah. These ideas are hinted at in the *brachah* we are discussing.

שומע means to listen from nearby and מאזין is to listen from a distance.<sup>44</sup> Hashem listens to our *tekiyos* from the distance, as we say שומע קול שופר. But Hashem is close to those who struggle with their *teruah*. Therefore, it states מאזין תרועה, Hashem hears the *teruah* from nearby, while שומע קול שופר, Hashem hears the voice of the shofar from a distance.

The *brachah* concludes:

ואין דומה לך, "No One compares to You."

The *Pri Megadim* explains that a human king prefers the company of perfect people. No one is like Hashem, who listens from nearby to the imperfect people who are struggling to serve Hashem properly. Hashem is closer to them than he is to the perfect *tzaddikim* who have perfect success with their teshuvah.

The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16) asks, "Why do we blow shofar with a ram's horn (שופר של איל)? Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, 'Blow for Me with a ram's shofar so that I will remember *akeidas Yitzchok*, and I will consider it as though you were bound on the *akeidah* before Me.'"

We wonder, why does the Torah require specifically the ram's horn? If the purpose of the shofar is to remind Heaven of *akeidas Yitzchak*, any part of the ram would do. For example, the Torah could have given us a

<sup>44</sup>. Moshe Rabbeinu said, האזינו השמים... ותשמע הארץ, "The heaven shall listen... The earth should hear..." Moshe, the *איש אלקים*, was closer to heaven than to the earth, therefore when he spoke to heaven he said האזינו, that they should listen from nearby. To the earth he called ותשמע הארץ, that it should hear from the distance.

mitzvah to hold the ram's foot or some other limb. Why do we specifically perform the mitzvah with the horn?

The answer is that the ram ran to the akeidah, but its horns got caught in a bush. It struggled to be part of the mitzvah but got caught midway, and it is the struggle that is always so precious to Hashem.

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 16) says that we blow the shofar before Shemonah Esrei (תקיעת דמיושב) and again during Shemonah Esrei (תקיעת דמעומד) to confuse the Satan.

How does blowing the shofar twice confuse the Satan?

Tosfos (quoting the *Yerushalmi*) explains that in the future, a great shofar will be blown, as it states, *והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול*, "On that day, a great shofar will be blown..." In that era, the Satan will be judged and slaughtered. When the Satan hears the first set of *tekiyas*, "He is afraid, but isn't completely afraid." He fears that this might be the shofar heralding the future world when the Satan will be slaughtered, but he isn't certain. When he hears the shofar a second time, the Satan says, "This must certainly be the *shofar gadol*. The time of my destruction has arrived." Confused and frightened, he can't speak *kitrug*, *lashon hara* on the Jewish people.

We wonder, why is the Satan so afraid? Doesn't he remember from last year and years before that that we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah? Why does he suspect that this year may be different?

The Satmar Rebbe *zy'a* answers that in each generation it becomes harder to serve Hashem. The Satan thinks, "This year, due to all the challenges and hardship that the Jewish nation endured, they are far more precious than ever before. The shofar I'm hearing is certainly the *shofar gadol* of Moshiach."

Rebbe Yechiel of Moosh *zy'a* once went to the *bimah* to blow shofar and saw through the window a *davar acheir* (pig) eating in a Jewish field. He said, "I will not blow shofar until the *davar acheir* is removed from the Jewish field."

People chased the *davar acheir* out of the field, and when they returned, Rebbe Yechiel blew shofar.

This story was repeated each year by the Slonimer tzaddikim, *zy'a*. The Beis Avraham of Slonim, *zy'a* would say, "Such a story of the *Moosher* (Reb Yechiel of Moosh) I never heard before!" But it was somewhat of a mystery among the chassidim why this story was so special to the Rebbes. What did they see in this story that was so amazing?

Some chasidim thought that it is because this story shows Reb Yechiel of Moosh's ahavas Yisrael. He wouldn't blow shofar when a Yid's field was suffering a loss.

Reb Mottel Slonimer *zy'a* corrected them. He said, "Why don't you understand?! Reb Yechiel of Moosh announced that he wouldn't blow shofar until the *davar acheir*, the *yetzer hara*, was removed from the Jewish hearts. Because this is the purpose of shofar! The shofar removes all the bad and the *yetzer hara* from the hearts of Yidden!"<sup>45</sup>

### **Segulos of Tekiyas Shofar**

The Shaar HaMelech (3:2) writes, "Before the *brachah* for *tekiyas shofar*, stir yourself to cry a lot, especially when you answer amen to the *brachah*, because that's when it is decided how much money you earn this year."

There are other indications that shofar is mesugal for *parnassah*. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 117) says, *שופר ורדיית הפת חכמה היא ואינו מלאכה*, "Blowing shofar and removing bread from the walls of an oven require talent, but they

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45. The Gemara teaches that *chilul Hashem* is only atoned for with death. Nevertheless, there are ways to get atonement without death, too. The Remak quotes the Gemara which states "[Hashem says] 'Blow with a ram's horn before Me, so I will remember *akeidas Yitzchok*, and I will consider it as though you sacrificed yourself before Me.'" When one listens to the shofar, it is like he sacrificed himself before Hashem. It is like he died, so all his sins are forgiven.

aren't *melachos* (on Shabbos)." Why does the Gemara juxtapose blowing shofar and taking out bread?

The Tiferes Shlomo explains that the Gemara is hinting that shofar is *mesugal* for *parnassah*.

The Baal HaTanya *zy'a* taught that the letters after עקר"ה are שופ"ר. This implies that shofar is *mesugal* for the barren to bear children. This the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 11.) states, בראש השנה נפקדה שרה רחל וחנוה, "On Rosh Hashanah, Sarah, Rachel and Chanah were remembered to bear children."

The Zera Kodesh writes, "On Rosh Hashanah, the day the world was created, is a time *mesugal* for the barren to be remembered to bear children."

In the *Mussaf Shemonah Esrei* we say, מִי לֹא נִפְקֵד כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. The Imrei Noam *zt'l* says that נִפְקֵד hints to be remembered to bear children. He adds that the *roshei teivos* of כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה is הַיָּד, and הַיָּד is Hashem's name related to pregnancies, as it states, הִנֵּה הָרָה, "Behold you will be pregnant..." This hints that Rosh Hashanah is a time when Hashem remembers the barren, to bless them with children.

It states, וידגו לרוב בקרב הארץ, "They shall multiply like fish..." Tzaddikim taught that the *gematriya* of רוב בקרב הארץ is ראש השנה. This is another indication that Rosh Hashanah is *mesugal* to bear children.

In נתנה תוקף we say, כמה יעברון וכמה יבראון. The Tiferes Shlomo *zt'l* translated these words as follows: כמה יעברון, Hashem judges how many women will enter עיבור, pregnancy, that year. וכמה יבראון and on Rosh Hashanah there's a judgment on how many people will become בריא, healthy, and cured of their illnesses.

The Pnei Menachem *zt'l* told a *yungerman* who was waiting several years for children that he should have *kavanah* by יעברון, for this is a tested and proven *segulah* for the barren to bear children.

The Apter Rav *zt'l* (*Ohev Yisrael*) teaches that when we read וְה' פָּקַד אֶת שָׂרָה (that Hashem remembered Sarah to grant her a child), it is *mesugal* for פְּקִידַת עֲקָרוֹת, to bring down the salvation for bearing children.

The Midrash states, "When the Jewish people take the shofar and blow it before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, He stands up from the throne of judgment and sits on the throne of compassion."

The Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* explains how this happens:

Rosh Hashanah, Hashem finds Himself sitting on the throne of judgment to judge the Jewish people, and Hashem asks Himself, "How did I get here? Why should I judge the Jewish people whom I love?" Hashem realizes that the Satan convinced Him to judge the Jewish nation. Hashem says, "If the Satan is so powerful and influential that he can convince Me to judge the Jewish nation, then the Jewish people are certainly not guilty of the *aveiros* they committed. How can they stand up against such a cunning Satan?"

With this thought in mind, Hashem abandons the throne of judgment and sits on his throne of compassion.

The Rambam writes, "I, Moshe ben Maimon, when the time for shofar came, took the shofar in my hand and I thought about Who commanded us to do this mitzvah. My knees knocked against each other from fear, and then I began blowing."

The Gemara says about shofar, כִּיֵּן דְּלִיכְרוּן, "Since the shofar arouses Hashem's memory [to remember the good deeds of the Jewish nation], it is as if it was blown inside the Kodshei HaKedoshim."

The Sfas Emes *zt'l* quotes this Gemara and explains that when we blow shofar, it is like we are in the Kodesh HaKedashim, and therefore we must listen to the shofar with immense fear as if he were in the Kodesh HaKedashim.

Wishing all of Klal Yisrael a Kesivah v'Chasimah Tovah!