

- 2) כַּרְתִּי - Leek: יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֶ-לֶקְנוּ וְאֶ-לֶקִי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
שִׁיכָרְתוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׁוֹנְאֵינוּ וְכָל-מִבְקָשֵׁי רַעְתֵּינוּ:
- 3) סֻלְקָא - Swiss chard: יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֶ-לֶקְנוּ וְאֶ-לֶקִי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
שִׁיחַתְלִקוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׁוֹנְאֵינוּ וְכָל-מִבְקָשֵׁי רַעְתֵּינוּ:
- 4) תְּמָרִים - Dates: יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֶ-לֶקְנוּ וְאֶ-לֶקִי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
שִׁיתִמוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׁוֹנְאֵינוּ וְכָל-מִבְקָשֵׁי רַעְתֵּינוּ:
- 5) קָרָא - Gourd: יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֶ-לֶקְנוּ וְאֶ-לֶקִי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
שִׁתְקַרַע רוּעַ גִּזְרֵי דִינֵנוּ וְיִקְרָאוּ לְפָנֶיךָ זְכוֹתֵינוּ:
- 6) רוֹבְבָא - Black-eyed peas: יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֶ-לֶקְנוּ וְאֶ-לֶקִי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
שִׁיֶּרְבוּ זְכוֹתֵינוּ כְּרוֹבְבָא וְתִלְבְּבוּ:
- 7) רְמוֹן - Pomegranate: יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֶ-לֶקְנוּ וְאֶ-לֶקִי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
שִׁנְהִיָּה מְלֵאִים מְצוֹת כְּרִמּוֹן:
- 8) רֹאשׁ כֶּבֶשׂ - Head of sheep: יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֶ-לֶקְנוּ וְאֶ-לֶקִי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ
שִׁנְהִיָּה לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב. וְתִזְכֹּר לָנוּ (עַקְדוֹתוֹ) אֵילוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק אָבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ
הַשְּׁלוֹם בֵּן אֲבָרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם:

The Way to Pray

During the month of *Elul*, and on the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we spend much time in prayer. In *Elul*, we say special prayers called “*Selihot*” in preparation for our day of judgment. On Rosh Hashanah, our prayers are considerably longer than those on other holidays. On Yom Kippur, practically the entire day is spent in prayer. Because of the great emphasis on prayer at this time of the year, it is helpful to gain a little perspective on what is the role of prayer.

There is a dispute between two great scholars regarding the nature of prayer. The *Rambam*, Maimonides, is of the opinion that we are required to pray. This requirement is *Mi'd'oraita*, Biblical in nature. The *Ramban*, Nachmanides, on the other hand, takes a very different approach. He feels that G-d never intended for prayer to be compulsory, that people pray to Him because He said they should. Prayer, in the eyes of the *Ramban*, is a gift from G-d. G-d gives us an opportunity to take advantage of the open line we have to Him at any time, in any place, regarding any matter.

Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa explained how prayer is truly a kindness from G-d. In the beginning of *Beresheet*, we read of the curses that G-d meted out to Adam, Chava and the snake upon their violating the prohibition against eating from the *Etz HaDa'at* (the tree of knowledge). The snake received the punishment of “and the dust of the earth you shall eat all the days of your life.” Rav Simcha Bunim asked why this punishment is a curse. The snake, by virtue of this curse, was now a creature who would be able to subsist on dirt. This being the case, the snake was now a creature who never had to look for or toil to obtain sustenance, as dirt is everywhere! How can this be a curse?

To answer this question, Rav Simcha Bunim focuses his attention on the curses that Adam and Chava received. To Adam, G-d said “By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.” To Chava, He said “With pains you shall give birth.” What follows from this is that if a man is having great difficulty sustaining himself, he can turn to G-d for help. If a woman is having a difficult time with childbirth, she can turn to G-d for help. While both man and woman have to endure hardship in order to achieve certain goals, they can

both turn to G-d to ask for His assistance. Hashem wants us to ask Him for help when we need it. The process of asking helps to develop a bond between man and G-d. One should feel that he or she is asking a friend, someone who is close, caring, and willing to help. Hashem wants a close bond to exist between us and Him, and prayer is a way of creating and strengthening this bond.

The snake, unfortunately, has all of his needs provided for. He has nothing to ask of G-d. Anywhere he turns, he has what he needs. He has no hardships, and nothing to request G-d's assistance with. Because he never has to turn to G-d, the snake will never have an opportunity to develop a relationship with G-d. Hashem does not want to have ties of closeness with him. For this reason, the fact that the snake will forever have a ready supply of sustenance is truly a curse.

During this time of the year, we are presented with numerous opportunities to pray, to come closer to G-d. As the *Ramban* said, prayer is a gift, a kindness from G-d. We should try not to feel uncomfortable when we pray. We should not feel burdened by the lengthy prayers. We should view the opportunity that we have in the upcoming weeks as a time when we can really ‘get close to Hashem.’ We should take advantage of this fantastic opportunity to speak with G-d. G-d very much wants to hear from us, and we should not let Him down. (Rabbi Yehudah Prero)

Ups and Downs

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

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

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

The biographer thought he was joking. How could he know from six thousand miles away, over shortwave radio, that one of the violinists was missing? The biographer had his doubts but didn't want to say anything and went home. The next morning, he called the concert hall overseas, asked for the music director, and inquired as to how many musicians were supposed to have been playing the night before versus how many had actually shown up. The concert hall director told him that there were supposed to be 120 musicians, including 15 violinists, but only 14 had shown up!

The biographer was amazed. He returned to Toscanini and said, "Sir, I owe you an apology. I thought you were just making it up the other night. But please, tell me, how could you know that one violinist was missing?"

"There is a great difference between you and me," Toscanini answered. "To the audience everything sounds wonderful. But I'm the conductor, and the conductor has to know every note of music that has to be played. When I realized that certain notes were not being played, I knew without a doubt that one of the violinists was missing."

The High Holy days represent the time when we need to mentally create a bucket list not of places we haven't yet been but of good deeds we haven't yet done.

We should take the story's message to heart. Every one of us has been given the gift of playing a part, small as it might be, in the symphony of life. It may seem insignificant to some. But the Conductor is intensely aware of our playing, of every note we hit correctly as well as every mistake that mars the beauty of the entire performance. For as long as we are still a member of the orchestra, we have the privilege to faithfully carry out our assigned task to the best of our ability.

All of us are indispensable to the "Conductor" and Creator of the universe. We have a mission. The High Holy days represent the time when we need to mentally create a bucket list not of places we haven't been but of good deeds we haven't yet done. Not of pleasures we haven't enjoyed but of obligations we haven't fulfilled. Not of good times we haven't experienced but of holy moments we haven't yet made a part of our lives.

Rosh Hashanah is the time for us to create the bucket list of self-improvement that will hopefully convince G-d we are not yet superfluous. That is the bucket list which does not precede death but rather can mean additional years of life – and a legacy of eternity. (Rabbi Benjamin Blech)

Oops!

“שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעֵוֹנֶיךָ”

“Return O Israel, unto Hashem, your G-d, for you have blundered in your sinfulness” (Hoshea 14:2)

The Rabbis comment that “blunder” connotes accidental behavior, whereas committing sin is often intentional. Why does the prophet seem to confuse the two?

If a person were truly aware of how destructive sin is to his welfare, he would certainly refrain from intentional sin. It is therefore his lack of awareness, whether due to ignorance or to being blinded by passion, that he sins. All sins, even intentional ones, can thus be understood as “blunders” to some extent.

If we resolve to learn more about what G-d demands of us so that we overcome our ignorance, and if we resolve not to let our judgment be distorted by temptation, then we may justly ask G-d to forgive us and we can be sure that He will bring us close to Him.

Connecting to the Past

“Remember for us the covenant of the Patriarchs” (Selihot)

One of the central elements of the *Yamim Noraim* (High Holidays) is the concept of *zechut abot*, which states that we, as children of our holy forefathers, can tap into our ancestors' great spiritual merit and achieve a degree of atonement that would otherwise be impossible. Despite our own inadequacies, we are able stand before Hashem and beg forgiveness due to the special relationship that He enjoyed with our progenitors.

The obvious question is, how is this possible? How can it be that Hashem, the ultimate arbiter of truth and justice, would look past our actual deeds and grant us special reprieve simply because of our lineage? Is it logical to suggest that despite the fact that we may be as guilty of sin (at least on a relative level) as the gentile nations around us, we can be exempted from our poor behavior just because of a special bond which took place some four thousand years ago? Where is the evenhandedness in such judgment?

Rav Dessler (*Michtav M' Eliyahu*) explains this idea through the use of the following example. Suppose that there are two young men who each rob a bank of the same amount of money. One was raised in a crime riddled community without proper parenting and guidance. The other comes from an upstanding home; now, he has fallen in with the wrong crowd, and has turned to a life of crime.

The judge, who happened to be a roommate with the second thief's father during law school, rules that the first thief must spend two years in prison. His friend's son, however, is required to pay a small fine and contribute 200 hours of communal service.

At first glance, this inconsistency in judgment would appear to be highly inappropriate. After all, they committed the same crime. If anything, logic would dictate that the criminal from the depressed neighborhood should be treated with more clemency, while the one who was raised in an upscale setting should be reprimanded more severely. Certainly, the judge would want to avoid any possible accusations of impropriety by letting his friend's son off easy.

Yet, that is exactly the same type of “impropriety” which we ask Hashem for every time that we ask him to spare us in the merit of our forefathers (as we noted above)!

Rav Dessler explains that the proper objective of justice is not to punish criminals or sinners for their misdeeds. Rather, the goal must be to correct the crime or transgression so that they are not repeated in the future.

In the case of the second criminal, who was raised in a home that valued proper conduct and respect for the law, this objective can best be achieved through a more lenient approach. This particular young man understands deep down what is right. With some additional guidance and a return to a strong, healthy environment, he can be redirected along the proper path. Under these circumstances, even “justice” would agree that leniency offers the best means of turning this young man around. Time in the penitentiary would only exacerbate the problem.

The first criminal, on the other hand, does not possess a clear sense of proper social conduct. From his perspective, crime is a way of life, a means of survival. To allow him immediately back on the street would almost guarantee future repetition of criminal activity, which could result in even more dire results. Here, “mercy” would advocate for a stricter punishment, to suffer more today with the hope of a better tomorrow.

When we ask Hashem to factor in his love for our forefathers as part of our judgment, we are not looking to simply take advantage of positive past relationships. Rather, we are asking Him to see the latent potential within us as children of Abraham, Yitzhak and Ya'akov, and judge us in that light. In that respect, we are like the robber who comes from a good home environment but has become entangled with negative influences.

Gentile nations, however, lack that pedigree, and cannot tap into the same reservoirs of proper conduct.

By asking Hashem to grant us clemency in the merit of our forefathers, we are not asking Him to “play favorites.” Rather, we are imploring Him to look deep within us and see us not only for our past misdeeds, but also for our future successes. We hope that He chooses to focus on the latent potential which lies biologically imprinted within each of us and grant us the judgment which will allow us to convert our great potential into reality.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, let us aspire to give Hashem every opportunity to see us as true descendants – spiritual as well as physical – of the *abot* and thereby achieve the type of favorable judgment that we all desire. (Rabbi Naphtali Hoff)

Signs and Symbols

An odd Rosh Hashanah custom, duly recorded in the *Talmud* and halachic codes, is the lavishing of puns on holiday foods.

Most Jews know that on the first night of the new Jewish year, it is customary to eat a piece of apple dipped in honey, to symbolize our hope for a sweet year. Less known is the Rosh Hashanah night custom of eating foods whose names augur well for the future. Though the *Talmud's* examples are, of course, in Hebrew or Aramaic, at least one *halachic* commentary directs us to find pun-foods in whatever language we may speak.

“Help us pare away our sins” before consuming a pear might thus be an appropriate example. Or an entreaty that G-d be our advocate, before eating a piece of avocado. “Lettuce have a wonderful year” might be pushing it a bit, but maybe not. One respected Rabbi once smilingly suggested partaking of a raisin and stalk of celery after expressing the hope for a “raise in salary.”

Such exercises might seem out of place on this holy “day of judgment.” But that is only because we regard the custom simplistically, as some quaint superstition. In truth, though, it is precisely Rosh Hashanah’s austere gravity that lies at the custom’s source.

There are other telling Jewish customs regarding Rosh Hashanah, like the recommendation that the Jewish new year be carefully utilized to the fullest for prayer, Torah-study and good deeds, that not a moment of its time be squandered. Misvot and good conduct, of course, are always “in season,” but they seem to have particular power on Rosh Hashanah. Similarly, Jewish sources caution against expressing anger on Rosh Hashanah. The Jewish new year days are to reflect only the highest Jewish ideals.

The 16th century Jewish luminary Rabbi Yehudah Loewy, known as the *Maharal*, stresses the crucial nature of beginnings. He explains that the trajectory of a projectile – or, we might similarly note, the outcome of a mathematical computation – can be affected to an often astounding degree by a very small change at the start of the process. A diversion of a single degree of arc where the arrow leaves the bow – or an error of a single digit at the first step of a long calculation – can yield a surprisingly large difference in the end. Modern scientific terminology has given the concept both the unwieldy name “sensitive dependence on initial conditions” and the playful one “the butterfly effect,” an allusion to the influence the flapping of a butterfly’s wings halfway around the world could presumably have on next week’s local weather.

Rosh Hashanah is thus much more than the start of the Jewish year. It is the day from which the balance of the year unfolds, a time of “initial conditions” exquisitely sensitive to our actions. Perhaps the Rosh Hashanah puns, too, reflect that sensitivity. After all, word-play is not suggested for any other day of the year.

Maybe by imbuing even things as seemingly inconsequential as our choice of foods with meaning on Rosh Hashanah, we symbolically affirm the idea that beginnings have

unusual potential, that there are times when the import of each of our actions is magnified. By seizing even the most wispy opportunities to try to bestow blessing on the Jewish new year aborning, we declare our determination to start the year as right as we possibly can. The puns should impress upon us the extraordinary degree to which our actions at the start of a Jewish year affect how we will live its balance.

And that is its lesson, one that should lead us to begin the new Jewish year working to make ourselves better Jews in our relations both to one another and to our Creator.

May all we Jews merit a Rosh Hashanah with only sweetness and joy, devoid of sadness and anger. And may we seize every chance to make the start of 5783 as perfect as we can – ushering in a year in which the Jewish People’s collective life and all of our individual lives take a distinct and substantial turnip for the better. (Rabbi Avi Shafran)

The Bucket List of Rosh Hashanahh

Bucket lists are invariably filled with ideas about travel to places you’ve never been, adventures you’ve never had, people you’ve never met. The common theme is one idea: “The saddest people who approach death are those with regrets about things left undone.”

But what’s wrong with the way most people think of a bucket list is that far too often its chief concern is the self. It’s trying to figure out what we’ve missed out on in terms of personal enjoyment. Its chief concern is worrying about whether we have fully partaken of the joys this earth has to offer.

Rosh Hashanahh shows us another way to think about a bucket list. It’s a list rooted in the realization that we have a limited lifespan and that we are put here on earth for a purpose. Our lives carry a mission which represents our reason for having been created. Preparing for the High Holy days entails identifying the reason for our presence in the world – what it is that we contribute to society at large, to our people, to our families and even to G-d. It’s knowing that our lives made a difference, whether we played a role, no matter how small, in helping to make this a better world.

This remarkable story illustrates the point. A century ago the world revered a great symphony conductor, an Italian maestro named Arturo Toscanini, who led concerts all over the world. He was known as an absolute perfectionist and had few peers. Toscanini had a biographer who would interview him periodically over the years as a part of a major book he was writing.

One evening he called Toscanini and told him that he would be in town the next night, and asked if he could come to the house to interview him. Toscanini answered that he could not because he would be doing something special that would require absolute concentration. “Maestro,” the biographer said, “what are you doing that’s so special?”

“There is a concert being played overseas. I used to be the conductor of that symphony orchestra, but I could not be there this year. So I’m going to listen on a shortwave radio and hear how the other conductor leads the orchestra. I don’t want any interruptions whatsoever.”

“Maestro, it would be my greatest pleasure to watch how you listen to a concert played by an orchestra that you used to lead. I promise I won’t say anything. I’ll sit on the other side of the room, quietly.”

“If you promise to be perfectly quiet, you can come,” Toscanini said.

The next night, the biographer came and sat quietly while Toscanini listened to the concert, which lasted almost an hour. When it ended, the biographer remarked, “Wow, wasn’t that magnificent?” Toscanini said, “Not really.”

“Why not?”

“They were supposed to be 120 musicians, including 15 violinists. Only 14 of them played.”