

A YOM TOV THOUGHT

Don't Ignore It, Pray It.

Today our lives are on the line. Everything is decided on Rosh Hashanah. The gemara Rosh Hashanah tells us that Sarah, Rachel, and Channah were remembered on Rosh Hashanah and it was decreed that they would bear children. We commemorate this with the reading of the Torah and the Haftarah on the first day of Yom Tov.

We all face situations that bring out strong emotions and test how we respond. Both the good and the bad. When we are faced with challenges that stir the emotions, everyone has their own way of coping. Some people swallow them. Take it out on others. Some ignore them. Some try to numb

themselves or distract themselves from what they are feeling. We are remarkably good at finding a "drug of choice" and that doesn't necessarily mean an actual drug. It could be scrolling through nothing on our phone, checking the news, watching another episode, eating, or simply finding something, anything, to take our minds off what we're feeling.

The *pasuk* tells us about Channah, that "She was feeling bitter, and she prayed to Hashem, weeping continuously" (*Shmuel* 1 1:10). After watching Peninnah have ten children and being provoked year after year, the pain she carried was unimaginable. Channah could have given up. Shut down. Run.

Pretended everything is okay. She didn't; she took her pain and brought it to Hashem, told Him about it, and cried.

The gemara tells us that the gates of tears are never closed. The Meiri explains that when a *tefillah* comes from the depth of the heart until the emotion produces tears, it is a



RABBI
HILLEL
MILEVSKY



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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

WITH
RABBI YITZCHOK PREIS

Q. We customarily eat pomegranate on Rosh Hashanah and utter a prayer that we be filled with *mitzvos* like the pomegranate (is filled with seeds).

I came across a statement of the Talmud that "even the 'empty' (spiritually deficient) are filled with *mitzvos* like the pomegranate." If even such people are "filled" with *mitzvos*, what are we asking for? And, if the "empty" are "filled," why are they called "empty"?

A. The Kli Yakar (*Shmos* 30:34) explains that the "empty" ones are actually filled with many sins. But the gift of *teshuvah*, when done "to the max," provides the capacity for those sins to be converted to *mitzvos*. Our request on Rosh Hashanah is that we become "filled" without the very risky sequence of failure followed by *teshuvah*. Rather, we pray that we merit being totally

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

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filled with intrinsic *mitzvos* and have no “space” for sin.

The Pri Chodosh suggests that “empty ones” is a description of those who do eventually accrue many, many *mitzvos* – but over a full lifetime. Our Rosh Hashanah request is that we merit being saturated with the wealth of *mitzvos* – this year! 🕊️

A YOM TOV THOUGHT

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tefillah that has much more power. *Chazal* are teaching us the power of bringing genuine emotion into our *tefillah*.

When something happens that triggers an emotion, even something small, let us put it in our pocket till the next *tefillah* (maybe write it down). During *Shemoneh Esrei*, when the time is right, we can pull it out. Stop. Feel it. Use it and cry out to Hashem. He loves to hear what we have to say.

On a greater level, Rosh Hashanah is the day when everything is decided for

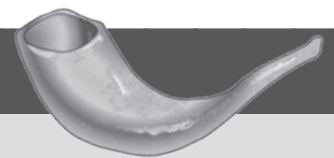
the next year. We ask Hashem for life, health, *parnassah*, *nachas*, and so much more. Yet sometimes we stand during davening and struggle to truly feel the weight of what we are asking for. This Rosh Hashanah, let us stop and think about the past year, the moments of joy, the moments of pain, the things we are grateful for, and the things we are still waiting for. Bring those emotions with you into your *tefillah*. Just like Channah took her pain and brought it to Hashem, let us bring our own emotions before Him and have a Rosh Hashanah of true connection. 🕊️

TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI YEHUDAH LEVI

Many Ashkenazic communities recite Chapter 27 of *Tehillim*, *L'dovid Hashem Ori*, daily from the beginning of *Elul* until the end of *Sukkos*. The primary *halachic* basis for this practice is the *sefer Mateh Ephraim*, by Rabbi Ephraim Zalman Margolios, in which the author cites a Midrash on *Tehillim* which finds allusions to Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and *Sukkos* in the verses of this psalm. Although *Mateh Ephraim* is a 19th century work, the custom was undoubtedly observed prior to the 19th century, as a hundred years earlier it stirred controversy over suspected Sabbatian roots. The earliest documented source for this practice seems to be the *sefer Shem Tov Katan* printed in Germany in 1706 by Rabbi Binyamin Beinush, who draws on kabbalah to explain the advantages of reciting *L'dovid Hashem* this time of year. In a lecture delivered at Kehilas Degel Israel in Kew Gardens Hills, NY, Dr. Shnayer Leiman presents a fascinating tradition tracing the roots of this custom back to 16th century kabbalist Rabbi Eliyahu Bal Shem of Chelm, Poland (an ancestor of Rabbi Yaakov Emden). 🕊️

POWERFUL ROSH HASHANAH THOUGHTS



Rabbi Dovid spetner

“Our Shabbos Opportunity: Don’t Blow It!”

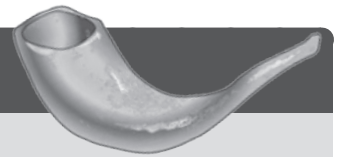
The first day of Rosh Hashanah being Shabbos has certain advantages. No shofar blowing. A shorter davening. Those who get extra stressed when fulfilling a once-a-year Torah *mitzvah* relax a little. Sounds like a good thing. Perhaps, but maybe not.

The gemara in *Rosh Hashanah* 16b tells us that any year in which we do not blow the shofar at its beginning, its end will be bad. So then how could *Chazal* do this to us? Although they wanted to safeguard Shabbos so that no one would carry a shofar, was that so necessary that they could put us in such a difficult position?

Tosfos, however, reassures us that the gemara’s dire prediction applies only when some fluke occurs that prevents us from blowing shofar, but not when Shabbos is the reason for not blowing.

The Meshech Chochma questions why this is so. Unlike other *mitzvos* where you are relieved of your obligation when things happen beyond your control, shofar performs a specific task. The gemara in *Rosh Hashanah* 16a explains that when we are being judged, it’s the shofar that brings the positive memory of us before Hashem.

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The *Midrash Rabba* in *Vayikra* (29:3) describes how when we blow the shofar, Hashem moves, so to speak, from the throne of strict justice to the throne of mercy. How, then, do we manage without a shofar when that seems to be the key to achieving a good judgement on Rosh Hashanah?

Many years ago I asked my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Ruderman, ז"ל, a question that troubled me. I understood how Avrohom *Avinu* was prepared to sacrifice his son despite its being in conflict with everything he knew and believed because he heard the command directly from Hashem. However, how did Yitzchok have the right to acquiesce to being slaughtered? He didn't hear Hashem speak. Maybe his father was insane?

Rav Ruderman directed me to the gemara in *Sanhedrin* (89b) that asks this question and answers that since Avrohom was previously established as a prophet, it was appropriate for Yitzchok to believe him.

The Chasam Sofer (*Shu"t* OC #208) elaborates on this gemara by describing the challenge to Avrohom as a test of faith in the Written Torah, as he had to remain true to Hashem's demand of him. Yitzchok, however, had a test of his faith in the Oral Torah. He was challenged to remain faithful to that which was transmitted to him from others. It was a very significant test in that it demanded he follow despite it being in conflict with what his intelligence told him made sense (see the Chasam Sofer *ibid.* for a breathtaking explanation of the irrationality of the *Akeida*).

This, writes the Chasam Sofer, is the merit that we call upon from the *Akeida* of Yitzchok in the Rosh Hashanah davening. We dedicate ourselves to follow the dictates of our sages even when it may not align with our thinking and the way we would have designed Jewish law.

Rav Menachem Greenblatt once suggested to me that perhaps the Chasam Sofer's explanation is exactly the reason why we can merit a good judgment on Shabbos Rosh Hashanah despite not blowing shofar. The gemara Rosh Hashanah cited above in explaining the function of the shofar says that we use a ram's horn to recall the ram that replaced Yitzchok. When we do this, Hashem recalls the binding of Yitzchok ben Avrohom and views it as if we had bound ourselves before Him.

Yitzchok, listening to his father Avrohom, "bound" himself to listen to the Torah handed down to him from his father despite it not fitting his understanding. We bind ourselves to listen to our sages not to blow the shofar on Shabbos. To us it may seem preposterous to not "save ourselves" by blowing the shofar because of a far-fetched concern that someone may carry a shofar on Shabbos. However, it is precisely this commitment to listen to our Sages despite our concerns and rationales that aligns us with the commitment of Yitzchok ben Avrohom. This commitment then is our "shofar," calling out to Hashem to see our adherence to His word as handed down through our Sages. Seeing this, Hashem moves from His throne of Justice to His throne of Mercy, granting us life and the opportunity to serve Him. 🤖

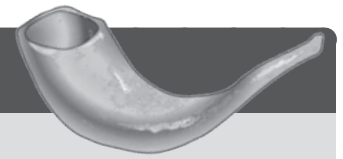
Rabbi Yehudah Levi

The gemara in Rosh Hashanah discusses the periods in which the judgment of man occurs, and records varying opinions as to whether it happens on Rosh Hashanah, every day, or even every moment. Later the gemara cites the teaching of R' Yitzchak who learns from the story of Yishmael son of Avraham that a person is judged *Ba'asher hu shum* – the way he is at that moment. Rabbi Tzvi Kaplan of Yerushalayim shared that based on these passages his great grandfather, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, highlighted the differing nature between mortal judgment and that of Hashem's. Generally, when a person stands trial, the time and place of the proceedings are unimportant; the only details that matter are those pertinent to when the episode being scrutinized occurred. Hashem, however, judges a person based on the way he is at the moment of judgment, giving tremendous significance to the moments of judgment themselves. We have an opportunity on Rosh Hashanah to recalibrate our lifestyles towards coming closer to Hashem, and our behavior on that day itself can impact our chances for success. Terrifying, yet a golden opportunity. 🤖

Rabbi Moishe Dornstein

Is it all a scam?

We find something very interesting in terms of our behavior on Rosh Hashanah. In Chazal we find a tremendous emphasis on *emes*, living with truth. Yet our actions on Rosh Hashanah seem to contradict that. We find a lot of things that are really out of our day-to-day league that we take on when it comes to these days. We are told not to waste time, don't sleep unnecessarily, don't engage in pointless talk. We eat *simanim* and don't eat nuts. We spend a lot of time davening; people say a lot of *Tehilim*. Some have a custom to only eat *Pas Yisrael* during these ten days. We fast a bunch. We are really acting as if we are on a higher level than we truly are.



Why? It seems like it's all a scam. Who are we fooling? We know we aren't holding on these levels; we know that as soon as this time period is over we will go right back to the way we were before. It's almost like we are trying to scam Hashem and show Him that we are better than we really are. So why are we doing all these extra things?

The seforim teach us that in fact we aren't fooling Hashem or ourselves. In reality, on Rosh Hashanah we get the opportunity to be our true selves. The whole year we do things that put distance between us and Hashem. The outcome is that we lose connection not only with Hashem but also with ourselves. On Rosh Hashanah we get to spend two days in the palace of the King. Two days spent completely in a G-dly world. A world of spirituality, a world of crowning Hashem King. We get to meet with the Shechina itself. When you are in the presence of the King your behavior has to be different. It has nothing to do with you; rather, it's out of respect for being brought so close to the inner chambers of the palace.

Hashem in Rosh Hashanah brings us close to Him. He tells us, "You are a son of the King, you have special greatness. Come spend two days with Me and through that you will be able to lift yourself out of your low state."

On Rosh Hashanah we come home, home to Hashem and to ourselves. And when we act better than who we truly are, that actually lifts us up and changes us. 🙏

Rabbi Tzion Yosef Ziv

Rosh Hashanah is, in a word, malchut. Crowning Hashem as King, The King, of all kings. Echad. The single force of all that was, is, and will be. The focus of every day, but especially this day, is the Ribbono Shel Olam, the Master of the World.

Thus, our Sages tell us that on Rosh Hashanah we should abstain from personal requests. If I'm davening for my wealth, my honor, a new Genesis GV70 for me (specifically the 3.5T in case anyone wants to sponsor...), if I'm davening for me I have clearly missed the sefina (the boat) and have violated the intention of the day.

However, there is one area in which I can be selfish, and I'm even supposed to be: devarim ruchniyim, matters of holiness. HaGaon Rav Nevenzal, shlit"a, the Rav of the Old City, teaches: in regards to my spiritual growth, the milchama of my tov conquering my ra, I should pray for the absolute maximum, pleading with fervor for every single goal and dream.

When it comes to ruchniyut, there is no limit. As King David writes in Tehillim 81:11, harchev picha, open wide your mouth, v'amaleihu, and I (Hashem) will fill it. Chazal teach that even if the level is in fact unattainable, one must nevertheless strive and yearn to reach the highest level imaginable, for more than we want to receive, Hashem desires to give. The holy Ramchal writes famously, adam lo nivreh, man was created, ela l'hitaneig bziv haShechinah, for the sole purpose of receiving pleasure from the goodness of Hashem.

Rav Nevenzal explains, this is why we read from the story of Chana, mother of Shmuel the prophet, as the Haftorah on the first day of Rosh Hashanah; the prayer of Chana is our model for prayer on this holy day. Chana comes to Shiloh to pray for a son. If Hashem gives her a son, that alone would be a great gift, but she's not satisfied—"and give your maidservant 'zera anashim' (male offspring)." Chazal tell us that Chana was asking for a son who is the equal of two men—and not just any two men, but two tzaddikim!—and not just any two tzaddikim; her son has to be on the level of Moshe and Aharon! And her prayer was not only heard, but it was answered in the most amazing way; as we say in Kabbalat Shabbat: Moshe v'Aharon b'cohanav, u'Shmuel koraii Shemo, Moshe and Aharon among His priests and Shmuel among those who invoke His name, which teaches us that Shmuel, on some level, was equal to Moshe and Aharon.

Chana refused to ask for only a little. She refused to be meek. Rather, she was az for kedusha, she was bold, chutzpahdig even, when it came to a matter of holiness. And Chana was answered. Her prayers emanated from the depths of her heart, and they were therefore answered.

The gemara Megillah tells us Chana was answered on Rosh Hashanah. Rachmana liba ba, Hashem desires our heart, and Hashem desires to give to us, with an open hand. Hashem created the world specifically for man, and most specifically for His children, Am Yisroel. On Rosh Hashanah, we are crowning Hashem as King, as our loving parent.

And any good parent will tell you, the best gift you could give me is a gift for my child. And all they desire anyway is to see their children reach their potential.

This Rosh Hashanah, we have an opportunity to bring down the year of our dreams, the year Hashem desires, the shana of tov that will unlock our true selves—but only if we pray for it. Only if we truly truly yearn, from the depths of our heart. Harchev picha, v'amaleihu. We should be zocheh to the year we yearn for, the year we're all waiting for, the singular dream of the Jewish people: crowning Hashem as King in our Temple in Jerusalem finally realized! Shana tova umetuka my friends! 🙏