

# מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ

## MIKRA'EI KODESH

A Compilation of Rosh Hashana & Yom Kippur  
Divrei Torah, Halakhot, and Guidelines



*This publication has been sponsored Anonymously*

*To honor and remember our family and community members,  
both past and present who have imprinted upon us our Jewish  
Heritage.*

*Be'ezrat Hashem, this year, all of us will be blessed with  
health, happiness, and prosperity.*

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## Halakhot of Rosh HaShana

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### I. Selichot

Beginning the day after Rosh Hodesh Elul (the month before Rosh HaShana) and concluding the day before Yom Kippur, Selichot are recited early each weekday morning before Shacharit. These are special prayers designed to facilitate teshuva (repentance). It is inappropriate to arrive at the annual Day of Judgment, as the first day of the new year is called, without having prepared beforehand.

### II. General Laws and Customs

Since Rosh HaShana is the beginning of the year (and commemorates G-d's creation of the world), it also is the Day of Judgment of humans. One's thoughts should focus on the Creator, acknowledging His kingship and His desire that we strive to improve ourselves spiritually and endeavor to make the world a better place for all in accordance with His will. We must be serious about these matters and not engage in lightheaded behavior. It is necessary to dress modestly.

- ❖ Although it is the Day of Judgment, we are to express our confidence that the Almighty will accept our prayers and repentance and inscribe us for a year of life. Thus, it is prohibited to fast on Rosh HaShana and the mitzvah of Simchat Yom Tov (happiness of the holiday) applies just as on the three festivals; there should be a festive meal both at night and in the day.
- ❖ During the evening meal, after kiddush and hamosi, we eat special foods with an appropriate prayer for each that, through their names or nature, prompt optimistic thoughts for the new year. Some communities have this custom only the first night, some both nights. It is customary to dip the hamosi in honey instead of salt and not eat "sour" dishes throughout Rosh HaShana.

- ❖ The berakha of sheheheyanu is recited in kiddush both nights just as on both nights of all yamim tobim. However, Shulhan Arukh states it is preferable to have a "new" fruit on the table the second night and direct the sheheheyanu toward it also. The reason is that there is a group of poskim who consider the two days of Rosh HaShana as one long day halakhically and according to them sheheheyanu should not be recited the second night for the day itself. Having a new fruit removes any doubt concerning the sheheheyanu. (Reciting an unnecessary berakha is a violation of our responsibility to respect G-d's name.)

In this particular case, however, in the final analysis, if one did not have a new fruit or another new item toward which the sheheheyanu could be directed, it is recited anyway, for it is not a true doubt.

- ❖ It is preferable not to sleep during the day of Rosh HaShana, but rather to study Torah. If one finds himself in a situation where he cannot concentrate on studying Torah and is idling away his time in gossip, etc., it is preferable to sleep.

### III. Prayers

The amida of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur emphasizes the kingship of the Almighty and includes additions reflecting the vision of a world in harmony and peace fulfilling His will. It is customary to have assistants to the right and left of the hazzan during the prayers of these special days.

- ❖ **Additions to Prayers:** Hashem Hu Ha'elokim is recited before Hashem Melekh, Shir Hama'alot Mima'amakim after Yishtabah, Avinu Malkenu after the amida of shahrit and minha.

In the amida on Rosh Hashana, and throughout Aseret Yemei Teshuva (the 10 days from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur), Hamelekh Hakadosh is

said in place of Hakel Hakadosh and Hamelekh Hamishpat is said in place of Melekh Oheb Sedaka Umishpat. Several additional insertions are made in the amida as found in all mahzorim.

- ❖ If one forgot to say HaMelech HaKadosh and remembered within Toch Kedi Dibbur (2-3 seconds), then one should say HaMelech HaKadosh right then. If one remembered only afterwards one must start from the beginning of Shmoneh Esrei.
- ❖ If one forgot to say HaMelech HaMishpat and remembered within Toch Kedi Dibbur (2-3 seconds), then one should say HaMelech HaMishpat right then. If one remembered before finishing the amida (he finished reciting the second "yihyu leratzon" of amida, right before Oseh Shalom), one should go back to the beginning of Hashiva. If one remembered after finishing the amida, one must start from the beginning of Shemneh Esrei.
- ❖ If one is unsure of what he said, we treat it as if he forgot, because we assume that he was used to saying what he does normally. This is true even if he knows that he added the other additions like zochreinu lechaim and mi kamocho.
- ❖ **Torah and Haftarah Readings:** On the first day the Torah reading begins with Hashem's 'remembering' Sarah (with childbirth). A portion about Rosh HaShana is read from a second Sefer Torah. The haftarah is about Hashem's 'remembering' Hannah. The second day Torah reading is about G-d's test of Abraham with Akedat Yitzhak. The portion read from the second Sefer Torah is the same as the first day. The haftarah, from the prophet Jeremiah, is about Hashem's remembering, and love for, Israel.
- ❖ **Musaf:** The musaf prayer of Rosh HaShana includes three special sections reflecting the essence of the day. Each section comprises ten verses from Tanakh and concludes with a berakha. The first section focuses on G-d's kingship (מלכות); the second on His remembrances for

judgment (זכרונות); the third on the significance of the shofar (שופרות).

- ❖ **Tashlikh:** In the afternoon of the first day the custom is to recite 'Tashlikh', a symbolic 'casting away of sins'. It is preferable to recite it by the banks of a body of water but if a natural body of water is not available, it is acceptable to fill a pool. One who did not recite this prayer on Rosh HaShana should do so during Asseret Yeme Teshuva.

## IV. Shofar

It is a Torah commandment to hear the shofar blasts on the day of Rosh HaShana. The shofar is associated with the coronation of a king and helps us focus on the importance of recognizing and accepting Hashem as our king. In addition, in the Books of the Prophets the shofar is associated with the signal of the city watchman who warns that the enemy is arriving.

On the Day of Judgment, the Shofar is the alarm that we are faced with an emergency; it awakens us from our slumber and calls us to repent. The shofar also recalls the ram substituted for the sacrifice of Yitzhak. It is also associated with the Giving of the Torah and the Ingathering of the Exiles.

- ❖ Women are not obligated to hear the shofar as it is a positive mitzvah governed by time. Nevertheless, they fulfill a mitzvah if they hear it.
- ❖ Children who have reached the age of understanding should be brought to synagogue to hear the shofar but only if they do not disturb others.
- ❖ The toke'ah (shofar blower) should stand. The toke'ah must have intentions that his blowing is for the mitzvah and that others may fulfill their obligation through hearing his blowing. The listener must also have intent to fulfill his obligation.
- ❖ Two berakhot are recited before blowing the shofar the first time: Lishmo'ah Kol Shofar and Sheheyanu. One who has fulfilled his obligation of shofar earlier in the day and is blowing only for others may still recite the berakhot.

- ❖ The complete mitzvah comprises one hundred individual blasts. They are blown in eight series. The first series, before musaf, comprises thirty blasts. The other seven series comprise ten blasts each: three series in the quiet amida, three in the hazara and one in the kaddish after the amida. It is customary to blow a 101st blast, a teru`ah gedola, before Alenu.
- ❖ When Rosh HaShana occurs on Shabbat the shofar is not blown and it is mukseh. Although from Torah law the shofar should be blown even on Shabbat, the rabbis prohibited it, fearing it might lead to carrying on Shabbat.

## V. Asseret Yeme Teshuva

The ten days from Rosh HaShana through Yom Kippur are singularly designated and dedicated to Teshuva. Although Teshuva is accepted any time, it is accepted even more readily during these days.

For the above reason it has been traditional that Jewish people give more charity and do more good deeds during these days. It is the time when they express their religious identity.

- ❖ Shulhan Arukh states that it is proper for those accustomed to eating bread baked by non-Jews all year long (known to be kosher, an item that is permitted to eat) to refrain from doing so these days. It is an example of a stringency accepted for these days.
- ❖ **Prayers:** During Asseret Yeme Teshuva a person should pray more carefully than usual. Six insertions and substitutions are made in the amida as found in all siddurim.

## VI. Teshuvah - Repentance

Aspects of complete Teshuva:

1. Viduy—recognition of the sin and confession to Hashem. When done silently it is proper to specify the particular transgression.
  2. Abandoning the sinful practice
  3. Feeling of regret for having done the sin
  4. Resolution for the future
- ❖ In making a resolution for the future, it is proper, often necessary, to devise a strategy to cope with temptation. It is appropriate to build a ‘fence’ around the transgression, that will prevent one from crossing the line, each person as fit to his/her situation.
  - ❖ Just as one must repent for sins involving actions, so must one repent for any evil dispositions that he may have, such as an angry temper, hatred, jealousy, greedy pursuit of money and honor, gluttony, etc.
  - ❖ Sins against one's fellow man are not forgiven by the Almighty until the sinner has received forgiveness from the injured party and repents.
  - ❖ **Hatarat Nedarim (Annulment of Vows):** As the sin of broken vows is very serious, it is customary to make Hatarat Nedarim before Rosh HaShana, to clean the slate as much as possible. We also declare our intention not to vow in the future. Hatarat Nedarim is not a prayer but a declaration to the Bet Din requesting annulment of the vow, which is possible if the individual requesting is deeply regretful for having made the vow. If one did not make a vow Hatarat Nedarim is inapplicable.

## Halakhot of Yom Kippur

### I. Overview

G-d created man and instilled in him free will so that man may choose to serve his Creator and abide by His commandments. The Torah provides the guidelines.

In general, abiding by G-d's will is defined a number of times throughout Tanakh. G-d praised Abraham because "he will instruct his children and household after him to observe the way of Hashem, to do righteousness and justice..." (Gen. 18:17-19). "What is it the Lord requires of you, only to do *mishpat*, love *hesed*, and walk modestly with your G-d" (Micah 6:8). "But let him who chooses to be praised be praised in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Hashem who does *hesed*, *mishpat* and *tzedaka* in the earth, for in these do I desire, declared Hashem" (Jer. 9:23).

Since "there is no man on earth ... who does not sin" (Kohelet 7:20), G-d granted Israel one day each year, the day of Yom Kippur, to facilitate repentance, to purify everyone and grant them forgiveness and atonement. He established this day because He does not desire the death of the sinners, neither physically nor spiritually, but their repenting and living. Indeed, He does not desire the destruction of the world but its flourishing. His desire is that all human society cease from all unethical and immoral behavior and return to Him. It is the responsibility of the nation of Israel to play a leadership role in accomplishing this. Of course, the decision to repent is in the hands of man, dependent on his exercise of his free will.

The prohibitions of the day of Yom Kippur, the fasting and other hardships, and the prayers, help us acknowledge the reality that we have sinned, that we have not sufficiently thought about our actions, that there is great need for improvement and that we deserve punishment. Most of our waking hours during the twenty-four hours of Yom Kippur should be devoted to prayer, introspection, repentance (*Teshuva*) and some time should be made for study of Torah.

### II. Erev Yom Kippur

❖ It is proper for each person to ask forgiveness from anyone he/she may have wronged before Yom Kippur sets in.

- ❖ It is a mitzvah to eat well Erev Yom Kippur.
- ❖ Some have a practice to make symbolic *kaparah* on Erev Yom Kippur (or during the few days before it) with chickens, one for each member of the family. Some give a donation to charity in place of chickens. Some, following Shulhan Arukh, which specifically and strongly stated that this custom should be eliminated because it looks like the way of idolators, do not engage in this practice at all.
- ❖ Mincha is prayed early so that there should be sufficient time for all to eat and get ready for the holy day before sunset.
- ❖ After the final berakha of the individual's amida of mincha, but before reciting the amida's concluding portion, *viduy* (acknowledgment and confession of sins) is recited. It is not repeated in hazara.
- ❖ It is customary to kindle a remembrance candle or a light in or about the synagogue as a memorial for departed members of the family. Remembrance of the departed may serve as inspiration for the living.
- ❖ It is customary for men to immerse in a mikveh (or natural body of water) on Erev Kippur with thoughts of repentance and purification in their minds. When a mikveh is not available or it is impractical it is appropriate to intend such purification with a shower somewhat longer than usual. Although a shower is invalid for the law of a woman's fulfilling the mitzvah of mikveh after her period, immersing of men is not an actual law.
- ❖ **Se'uda Hamafseket.** The final meal before Yom Kippur must be completed before sunset, at which time the fast and all halakhot of the day begin. If one completes this meal early it is considered an early acceptance of the fast unless the person states (or thinks) that he/she does not wish to accept the fast yet. When one accepts the fast early, it is understood that all the laws of Yom Kippur take effect for that individual at that time.

- ❖ In the Mashadi community, the custom is for the women to make a berakha on lighting the candles on Erev Yom Kippur.
- ❖ Men wear a tallit for all Yom Kippur prayers, including arvit. One should try to arrive at the synagogue before sunset so as to be able to say the berakha on donning the tallit.
- ❖ The evening service begins with the chanting of *Lecha Keli*. Although the Torah is not read during the evening, the Ark is opened and the Torah is shown to the congregation, to increase the level of inspiration. Seven Torah scrolls are brought out and *Kal Nidre* is recited three times in the past tense and once in the future tense. It is preferable that this be done before nightfall. The berakha of *Shehechyanu* (for the arrival of Yom Kippur) is recited before beginning arvit.

### III. Yom Kippur and Repentance

Since Yom Kippur, the final day of the Ten Days of Repentance that begin with Rosh Hashana, is the time of Teshuva for each individual as well as for the community, each individual is responsible to repent and confess any wrongdoing on this day. The rabbis have formulated comprehensive texts of confession that are incorporated in the prayers of the day. These include *viduy bagadol*, a long list of transgressions. Although this list of transgressions includes some that most people undoubtedly did not commit, it is permitted to be recited by all, as it is considered a communal confession. Also, one may be responsible for a transgression that was committed by another due to having played a role in causing it. The ripple effects of a transgression go far and wide.

- ❖ Teshuva and Yom Kippur secure atonement for sins between man and G-d only. For sins against one's fellow man there is no atonement until the penitent has compensated the injured party for any loss and gained his forgiveness. One must seek forgiveness from his fellow man even if he had only angered him with words.
  - ❖ One being asked for forgiveness should not be difficult to appease but rather quick to forgive with a sincere heart. If the injured party is confident that the person requesting forgiveness is insincere, he is not obliged to grant forgiveness.
- ❖ It is proper that each individual specifically state at the beginning of the evening of Yom Kippur that he/she forgives everyone.
  - ❖ Just as one must repent for sins involving actions, so must one repent for evil dispositions that he/she may have. These may include a tendency to anger quickly, jealousy, overweening pride, greediness, gluttony, etc.

### IV. Prohibitions

All work that is forbidden on Shabbat is forbidden on Yom Kippur. The prohibitions specific to Yom Kippur are:

- ❖ a) Eating and drinking, b) washing the body, c) application of ointments to the body, d) wearing leather shoes, e) marital relations.
- ❖ Sick people and women who are pregnant, nursing or who recently gave birth (after the first three days) are not automatically exempt from fasting on Yom Kippur as is the case with the minor fasts. Exemption is based on there being at least a minor possibility that fasting would endanger life. Medical experts have stated that in normal pregnancies there is no danger in fasting, although in the later months it may induce labor. A medical and halakhic authority should be consulted in individual cases.
- ❖ A woman in labor on Yom Kippur should eat.
- ❖ One who must eat or drink on Yom Kippur for medical or health reasons should do so in as limited a fashion as possible. Please approach a community Rabbi for further instruction.
- ❖ Washing the body on Yom Kippur should be limited to the fingers. *Netilat Yadayim* is up to the knuckles. It is permitted to wipe away the sediment from one's eyes in the morning. After using the bathroom, or if one has touched a covered part of the body, one should wash up to the knuckles. However, if a part of the body became very sweaty or dirty, it is permitted to wash in a limited manner, for the essential prohibition of washing the body is when done for pleasure.
- ❖ Leather garments other than shoes are permitted.

## V. Prayers

- ❖ On both the night and day of Yom Kippur, the phrase *Barukh Shem Kevod Malkhuto Le`olam Va`ed*, is recited audibly upon reciting Shema.
- ❖ The Torah reading for shaharit is the portion that describes the Yom Kippur service in the sanctuary. Another portion about Yom Kippur is read from a second Sefer Torah. The haftarah is the portion from the prophet Yeshaya that criticizes superficial repentance on a fast day, describing true repentance and calling on the nation of Israel to comport ethically.
- ❖ During hazara (repetition of the amida) of musaf, the hazzan recites the *Avoda*, a description of the Yom Kippur service by the high priest in the days of the Temple. The Ark is opened for this prayer.
- ❖ The Torah reading at mincha is the portion exhorting Israel to refrain from immoral conduct, particularly sexual impropriety. The haftarah reading is Sefer Yonah, which deals in depth with the subject of repentance and G-d's compassion on all people, even sinners.
- ❖ The shofar is not blown during Yom Kippur proper; it is blown after sunset toward the conclusion of the day. The blowing of the shofar does not signal the end of the day, as the day continues until the "stars appear," approximately thirty-five minutes after sunset in the New York region.
- ❖ There are five *amidot* recited on Yom Kippur. In addition to musaf, *ne`ila* is recited after mincha. This is the "closing" prayer, also so-called in reference to the closing of the Heavenly Gates that are especially opened on Yom Kippur.
- ❖ The Aron HaKodesh is opened at the beginning of *ne`ila* and is kept open for the duration of this important prayer.
- ❖ Birkat Kohanim is not recited in mincha, but is recited in *ne`ila*. It must be said before sunset.
- ❖ At the conclusion of Yom Kippur *havdalah* is recited. The candle must be lit from a flame that was burning all of Yom Kippur and "rested." The berakha on *besamim* (fragrant spices) is not recited.

## The Judge, the Sheep, and the Shofar

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Rosh haShana is the beginning of the new Jewish year. Starting a new year is, of course, a reason for celebration and happiness. But for the Jewish people a new year is also a serious event. To the point that the Sages spoke more, much more, about the serious aspects of Rosh haShana than the celebratory aspects of Rosh haShana.

### THE JUDGE

The rabbis of the Mishna explained that Rosh haShana is nothing less than the day of judgment (יום הדין). What judgment? The most meaningful one. Assessing if you are doing with your life what you are supposed to do. And guess who is judging you? God - and yourself.

The trial begins on the first morning of Rosh haShana, the 1st of Tishri. When we enter the synagogue on that day, we should visualize that we are entering a courtroom. Our first challenge is to identify the Judge. He is there, but cannot be “seen” in a normal way. To “see” the Judge, to feel His presence, we use the help of our prayers. When correctly understood, the prayers should open our eyes. The prayers of Rosh haShana introduce God as the King. Judging his subjects was one of the main roles of the Kings of Israel (think, for example, of King Solomon’s judgment). The king was the highest, and final, judicial instance.

Therefore, during Rosh haShana – until the end of Yom Kippur – we repeatedly refer to God in our prayers using a keyword: “MELEKHP”, which in Hebrew means “King” (or MALKENU, our King). “King” in the context of Rosh haShana means “Judge”.

### THE SHEEP

There is a very beautiful metaphor that our Rabbis mention in the Mishna to illustrate this profound idea. They say that on Rosh haShana “all human beings walk

before the Almighty as sheep [in front of the shepherd].”

Once a year the shepherd gathers all his animals in a barn to carefully examine each of them. An expert shepherd needs just a few seconds to evaluate each animal. First, he takes a look at the animal and then examines the quality of the animal’s wool and the body of the sheep. After this short inspection, the shepherd takes his brush and marks each sheep with a different color.

If the wool of the sheep is of good quality, the shepherd will mark the back of the sheep with, say, a yellow color, which means that this sheep will be kept for shearing.

A sheep that is healthy and strong will be marked with blue paint, which means that this sheep will be destined for reproduction. Now, if the wool is not of a good quality and the sheep is not a

good condition for reproduction the shepherd will paint the sheep with a red mark, which indicates that this sheep will be slaughtered for food. In a few seconds the shepherd determines the destiny of each animal for the next cycle.

Our Rabbis use this beautiful illustration to explain how we humans are judged by HaShem, our Shepherd, on Rosh HaShana. The Almighty looks carefully at each one of us. HaShem observes what we have done and have not done during the previous year. He sees if we have grown, learned and improved, or if we have wasted our time. Then, He determines our destiny, marking us for success, good health and life or, Has veShalom, for none of that.

Based on this, one can ask two very important questions:

*On Rosh haShana “All human beings walk before the Almighty as sheep [in front of the shepherd].”*

1. How do we know what the color of the mark is that we carry on our backs after Rosh haShana? Same as the sheep, who walk around the barn without knowing what color they have been marked with, a human being cannot know for sure what color he has on his back. We might think that we have done many good things during the past year, but we cannot be sure that what we have done is enough in the eyes of HaShem. Perhaps, knowing my full potential, God expected much more from me. Therefore, since we cannot be sure of the color we have been marked with, we ALL ASSUME (perhaps as a strategy) that we carry a red mark.

2. Knowing this, what do we do now? What actions must we take?

Our advantage over the sheep is that unlike the sheep, our destiny is still in a pending status, because the final verdict remains open until Yom Kippur! Thus, for the following week, we act as if we were in God's death row, awaiting execution. We repent, we cry, we admit our faults, we beg for forgiveness and we try to "convince the Shepherd" with credible arguments that, although during the past year we might have not done great, next year we will! On Yom Kippur, we devote the whole day exclusively to this matter: appealing the possible capital sentence pending in our backs. We resolve to improve but ultimately, we appeal to HaShem's compassion to grant us "hayim," - life, a new opportunity to show Him that we are worthy of our existence.

The magic of Teshuba, the process of repentance, is that HaShem gives us the opportunity to appeal His own verdict.

### **THE SHOFAR**

The most special event of Rosh haShana, also aimed at identifying the Judge and making us feel that we are standing in front of Him - is the blowing of the Shofar, the ram's horn. The Tora does not mention the reason behind the mitzva of Shofar, but our Rabbis do offer a few explanations.

1. In ancient Israel the Shofar was blown when a new king was crowned. In the same way, when hearing the Shofar on Rosh haShana, we "crown" and accept God as our King and also as our Judge. We declare that we are His subjects and as such we are committed to follow His rules. Among other prerogatives the king had the power to sentence to death or spare someone's life. In Rosh haShana we realize that our lives are ultimately in the hands of God, the supreme King and Judge. Upon hearing the Shofar, we should feel that we are standing in front of God, and that He is now judging us.

If we do not take this idea lightly, we might feel overwhelmed, start to tremble or cry out of fear, since we realize that the Supreme Judge is examining us, and He knows us better than we know ourselves. If this happens, if we cry and tremble when hearing the Shofar, it means that the Shofar is working well, and we are reacting correctly to its deep sound.

2. The Shofar reminds us of aqedat Yitzhaq. Abraham Abinu was ready to sacrifice his own son, following God's commandment. Once Abraham showed his unconditional obedience and love to God, HaShem told him to hold back. Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket and he offered it as a sacrifice to HaShem instead of Yitzhaq. The Shofar is a ram's horn. And when we listen to the Shofar, we remember the sacrifice of Yitzhaq. And we ask HaShem to consider what our father Abraham did as a merit for all of us, his descendants.

3. In ancient times, the Shofar was also used as a kind of a siren. It warned the people that the enemy was approaching and about to attack. The Shofar announced that lives were in danger. Everyone became aware of the imminence of death. In Rosh haShana the Shofar serves as a spiritual wake up call. It reminds us of the fragility of our lives and invites us to introspect and repent. The Shofar declares that God is NOW judging us, and our lives are on the line.

While the Shofar is blown, we do not have to admit any guilt, we do not need to confess or repent or even ask for His forgiveness (and needless to say, when hearing

the Shofar, we should not be “asking” HaShem for things!). All that is extremely important, but this is not the time. We are always calling God and asking for His attention to our needs, except when we listen to the Shofar! We should perceive in the Shofar a Divine call, a wakeup call. This is the only time that HaShem is calling *us*. He summons us to His court. He expects us to listen, wake up, acknowledge our misdeeds, confess them, repair and improve.

What remains to be explained in a little more detail is what should we do while we listen to the Shofar, while we are judged by God?

The process of Teshuba formally lasts for 10 days from the beginning of Rosh haShana until the end of Yom Kippur. And in this process, each day and each event has a different role. Once Rosh haShana is over we begin an intense period of repentance, reparation and forgiveness. We ask God and our peers for forgiveness, aiming to repair as much as we can. The process concludes on Yom Kippur, “the Day of Forgiveness.”

But on Rosh haShana, requesting forgiveness would be premature. On that day, one must concentrate on judging himself in front of God. How should I do that? **Trying to visualize myself, not as I normally do, but as God sees me.**

The voice of the Shofar is a wakeup call for my consciousness and my memory. When I listen to the Shofar, I must look in the mirror and admit my mistakes in my heart. This first step, essential for the whole process of Teshuba is called *hakarat habet*, “admission of my errors.” At that moment I must take charge of my mishaps without evading responsibility.

This self-diagnosis is too serious to be taken lightly: it is a prerequisite for what will come after Rosh haShana: confession, repentance, apology, etc.

I will illustrate with an example what we should be doing when we listen to the Shofar.

One of the most important values in Jewish life is *hesed*, generosity. Let’s take this value as an example. First, I have to recall what I did well and what I did wrong this year in this specific area: Have I dedicated enough of my assets, my time and my effort to help others? Was I present when others needed me? How many people have asked me for help and I ignored them? And especially, how many people who needed help and did NOT ask for help (probably out of shame) have I ignored? When I found out that someone was without a job, did I do everything possible to help? When I knew that someone had no place to be, did I open my house for them?

To get deeper in my introspection I must include God’s perspective into the equation. Because when I feel that I am displaying my failures in front of HaShem my self-inquiry becomes more serious.

For example, given that HaShem was so generous with me, giving me means, health, and talents - isn’t He expecting from me to share with others what He gave to me?

The main challenge of Rosh haShana is to judge myself as much as possible in the way that God is judging me. Seeing myself *from the balcony*, as He sees me. The more real my perception of God’s perception of me is, the less likely that I will deceive myself clinging to my self-exculpatory narrative, and the more effective my Teshuba will be, and vice versa.

*May HaShem judge us all with mercy, like a loving father.  
May we all have a very good and sweet year.*

## Shofetim & The Game of Teshuba

Rabbanit Coty Bitton

The Hakhamim of Musar noticed a very important message in the first Pasuq of our Parasha, something related to the month of Elul and to the process of Teshuba (repentance). The first words of our Parasha literally say: "You will assign to yourself ...judges." They said that beyond the public mitsva of assigning judges to prosecute and punish crimes, we personally must develop the ability to act as "our own judges." This teaches us that Teshuba is not possible unless we abandon the comfort zone of self-defense and self-justification and have the courage to look at ourselves "from the balcony," i.e. as others see us.

When my children were small, I used to take them to bed a little earlier than their sleeping schedule. This allowed us to enjoy quality time by reading a story together, chatting and playing games, without feeling pressured for time. One of those "games" was that each of us had to share something we did during that day that made us feel happy and proud. Examples of what my children said were, "today I lent my pencil to a friend; I helped mom setting the table; I said Tefillah with Kavana; I did not cry when I fell; I scored a goal (think: soccer)," and so on.

In a second round, we talked about something we did today, which now we wish we would have done differently. And the cases that could be brought by my children were: "I hit my brother; I threw my sandwich away instead of eating it; I said an ugly word to my friend; I "borrowed" something that is not mine, etc." I also participated with examples of my day. I shared

with them my feelings of satisfaction if I had cooked dinner for the family of a friend who had given birth, and my frustration if, for example, I failed and spoke lashon hara.

Many times, when we felt inspired and creative, we continued the game by analyzing what everyone had said. We applauded the achievements, and also shared some ideas as to how to repair a wrong action: "tomorrow morning I have to apologize to my friend; I will not throw food; I must give back what I borrowed, etc."

Today I understand that without realizing it, I was giving my children the gift of an invaluable practice: the habit of introspection. Having the courage to look inside ourselves and reflect. Analyzing our behavior as objectively as possible, without the risk of leading them to feel a harmful or destructive "guilt," because we were playing a game, and we were learning that nobody is perfect. It is acceptable to make mistakes. And it is always possible (and indeed very positive in the eyes of HaShem!) to look back and inward, recognizing our faults, and planning to apologize and repair.

Above all, we learned to play the role of being our own "judge" instead of our own "lawyer." When I admit that what I did was wrong, and I make an effort to improve, whatever I will do today will be better than what I did yesterday.

## Closer Than You Think

Rabbi Adam Sabzevari

At the end of Moshe Rabbeinu's life, he imparts encouraging and inspirational words to the Jewish people. Understanding that people might think that the Torah is a difficult burden, Moshe reassures us that observing the Torah is achievable and within our reach.

כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לֹא־נִפְלְאת הוּא  
מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רְחֹקָה הוּא: לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה־  
לָנוּ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְיִקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֶתְּהָ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה: וְלֹא־  
מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הוּא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲבֹר־לָנוּ אֶל־עֵבֶר הַיָּם וְיִקְחֶהָ  
לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֶתְּהָ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה: כִּי־קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מֵאֵד  
בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ (דברים ל: יא-יד):

*This mitzvah that I command you today is not too hidden from you, and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who can ascend to heaven, get it for us, and teach it to us, so that we may perform it?” Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, “Who can cross to the other side of the sea, get it for us, and teach it to us, so that we may perform it?” Rather, [this mitzvah] is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it. (Deuteronomy 30: 11-14).*

Moshe mentions that “this mitzvah” is not too difficult or out of our reach. Instead, it is well within our reach and capabilities. An obvious question arises - which mitzvah is Moshe referring to?

- 1) The **Talmud** (Eruvin 55a) understands this as referring to **studying Torah**.

The Talmud elaborates that if the Torah were in heaven, we would have to go out of our way to acquire it. Instead, the opportunities to study Torah are plentiful and all around us. This is especially true with the advent of modern technology, where one can read the Torah on their phone, listen to a

shiur podcast, or attend a live Zoom video lecture on Torah.

- 2) **Rashi** (1040 - 1105 CE) says this refers to **the entire Torah**, referring to all commandments.

We should believe and have the confidence that we can fulfill and achieve the entire Torah, with all of its laws and guidance.

- 3) **Ramban** (Nachmanides, 1194 - 1270 CE) says this refers specifically to the mitzvah of **teshuva, or repentance**.

A few verses prior to this section (Deuteronomy 30:1-2), the Torah forecasts that in the future, there will be times when we contemplate the events that befall us, and as a result, we will take it to heart and return to Hashem. Ramban explains that Moshe is commenting on that prior statement, that returning to Hashem will not be difficult.

During the important days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we are self-reflective and want to improve. However, we might doubt ourselves and think that we can't change. We might have an inner voice telling us that it is too difficult and distant from us. To this, Moshe encourages us that it is actually a lot closer than you think. Teshuva and self-improvement are already within us, a part of our nature. They are within our mouths and hearts. We are very capable and should have the self-confidence that we can accomplish and achieve greatness in Torah and improving.

In this new year, may we all heed Moshe's words of encouragement and be inspired to better ourselves in the ways of Torah.

## The Power of Teshuva

Jonathan Eliassi

As we continue our journey on what has been an unbelievable year (literally - no one would believe you if you predicted everything that has happened over the past year), we come to an interesting time.

Think about all the things that we have done both right and not so right. Think about the laundry list of items we all aspired to fix and do better. I can't speak for anyone else, but my laundry list looks pretty similar. But there's hope!

In Parashat Shelach Lecha, we read about the incident involving the meraglim (spies) who entered into Eretz Israel and as many of us know, the results were not too promising. But what was their mistake? Did they speak negatively about the land and its fruits? Yes. Did they see themselves as weaker than the Canaanite nations? Yes. Did they forget that Hashem could help them through everything? Unfortunately, yes.

The Chafetz Chaim (Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan HaKohen) adds one reason that sheds much light on one of the main flaws the meraglim and unfortunately some of us also suffer from.

Just a short while before Moshe sent the spies into Eretz Israel, the Jewish people were involved in a few episodes with major consequences such as the golden calf, complaining for meat, etc. The spies thought, “we made so many colossal mistakes and did so much damage, how could Hashem ever forgive us completely enough to protect us from our enemies?”

The mistake the meraglim made, says the Chafetz Chaim, is that they didn't believe that teshuva is THAT real and that it actually works no matter what we've done.

We've all made mistakes. We've all had setbacks. But we must never forget that teshuva works, it's real, and Hashem is waiting for us with open arms. Let us take the initiative of coming one step closer to Hashem and one step closer to improving ourselves. I wish the entire Jewish nation a healthy, happy, sweet, prosperous, meaningful year ahead and to be inscribed in the book of LIFE!

## A Guaranteed Good Year

Cody Hakimian

As we inch closer to Rosh Hashana, it's worthwhile to explore the preparations for the Day of Judgement. The entire month before Rosh Hashana, "Elul" - "אלול", is designated for introspection and self-accounting, and Hashem helps us with this task. It is well known that the first letters of the words of the verse, "אני לדודי לי ודודי לי" - "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine" (Shir HaShirim 6:3), spell out the name אלול — Elul. There is an inherent closeness felt between us and Hashem throughout the month, as hinted to in the name of the month.

There is another less known acronym for the month of אלול — Elul in a verse in Megillat Esther. "איש לרעהו ומתנות לאביונים" - "(One should send) Gifts to his friends and presents to the poor" (Esther 9:22). What is the connection between this verse, which commands us to send gifts to our friends and the poor on Purim, to the month of Elul?

During the rebuilding of the second Bet Hamikdash, many of the exiled Jews returned from Babylonia. On the first Rosh Hashana, during a public Torah Reading, many began to cry. Many of these people had

assimilated into Babylonian society, and had non-Jewish spouses and kids. They were now witnessing the rebuilding of Jerusalem on the Day of Judgement, and were bitterly regretting their past mistakes. The prophet's response to the weeping was, "לכו אכלו לו משמנים ושתו ממתקים ושלחו מנות לאין נכון לו" - "Go eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and **send portions to the poor**" (Nehemiah 8:10).

The prophets were telling the Jewish nation that although they weren't perfect and had to improve their ways, they could be confident in a good judgement if they made sure to help the less fortunate!

The connection between Elul and the verse in Megillat Esther is now resoundingly clear. By being someone that others rely on, we emulate Hashem and become His partners, as Hashem is the ultimate supporter of the needy. Hashem in turn reciprocates by assuring us that we can rely on Him for a sweet judgement.

May we all be inscribed in The Book of Life, and merit a happy, sweet new year.

## The Power of Positive Thoughts & a Pure Heart

Yitzchak Yehoshua

As we approach our new year and face *Yom Hadin* [Judgement Day], let's be introspective and think about how we can enhance ourselves as servants of Hashem from the bottom of our hearts and depths of our minds - not just in our actions, but also in our thoughts and inner feelings.

### David HaMelech's Tefillah

David HaMelech writes in *Sefer Tebillim*:

“לב טהור בראלי אלקים ורוח נכון חדש בקרבי”

*Fashion a pure heart for me, O God; create in me a steadfast spirit.*

The *Malbi'm* comments on this *passuk* and explains that a pure heart is one that does not desire evil and wrongdoing. The *Chid'ab* comments on this *passuk* as well, in his sefer *Chomat Anach*, and explains that:

“דהלב הוא העיקר ומזה נמשך אל כל אברים”

*The heart is the main thing, and from it, all of the organs are influenced.*

David is praying to Hashem to instill in him a pure heart so that this will influence the rest of his body to desire going in the ways of Hashem. Be'ezrat Hashem may we all merit this same tefillah for pure hearts as we enter the new year. The following examples highlight the tremendous power of our thoughts and feelings.

### The Power of a Thought:

בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ:

*First God created the heaven and the earth (Bereshit 1:1).*

The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* comments on this *passuk* and discusses at length the reasons why this parasha begins with the letter ‘ב’, which has a numerical value of two. The *Ohr HaChaim* invokes what seems to be a contradiction between chazal in *masechet Rosh Hashana* 10b. Rabbi Eliezer says that Hashem created the world in the month of *Tishrei*, while Rabbi Yehoshua holds that Hashem created the world in *Nissan*. Says the *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh*:

“ונראה לי כי אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים”

*“And it appears to me that both opinions are the words of the living God.”*

The *Ohr HaChaim* goes on to explain how both opinions are accurate; initially Hashem thought to create the world, and later on, He actually went ahead and took His thoughts to action to create the world. This means that *Hashem's thoughts alone are already the beginning of the world's creation*, and the time of these thoughts can be called the time of creation although no action has yet been taken to create the world. This is why Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua are both correct in their stating that Hashem created the world in *Tishrei* and in *Nissan*, respectively. During one of these months, Hashem thought to create the world, and during the other, Hashem actually created the world. The word בראשית is broken up into ב-ראשית to tell us that there were two (or ‘ב’, a letter with a numerical value of two) geneses (‘ראשית’ beginning) of the world, in *Tishrei* as well as in *Nissan*. In essence, the time of creation is not solely marked by action, rather it is also marked by Hashem's thought to do so.

Thoughts are incredibly powerful. Imagine how much we can accomplish, prior to even taking any action, solely by focusing our *thoughts* on doing *Mitzvot* & conducting ourselves in the ways of Hashem!

### Thoughts of Teshuva

The *gemara* in *Masechet Kiddushin* 49b brings an interesting case that shows us the power of a very small thought of teshuva:

“[התקדשי לי] על מנת שאני צדיק אפילו רשע גמור  
מקודשת שמא הרהר תשובה בדעתו”

*“If one says to a woman: Be betrothed to me on the condition that I am a righteous man, then even if he was a completely wicked man she is betrothed, as perhaps in the meantime he had thoughts of repentance in his mind and is now righteous.”*

What seems to be a folly committed by a *Rasha* [evil man], turns out to be a major lesson. This *Rasha* just needs to make a foolish comment that causes him to think in the very back of his mind about *Teshuva*

[repentance], and it is considered, at least for that moment, that he has done *Teshuva*, and that he is, indeed, considered a *Tzaddik* [righteous man].

What if we went into *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur* with just the slightest thoughts of *Teshuva* [repentance]? Better yet, what if we prayed with *Kavana* and *Dveykut* to Hashem begging for his *Rachamim* [mercy] and positive verdict for the coming year? If a foolish act of a *Rasha* can cause him to be viewed as a *Tzaddik* in Hashem's eyes, how much more so can our powerful *Teffilot* awaken Hashem's *Rachamim*?

"[התקדשי לין] על מנת שאני רשע אפילו צדיק גמור  
מקודשת שמא הרהר דבר עבודת כוכבים בדעתו"

*"Similarly, if one says to a woman: Be betrothed to me on the condition that I am a wicked man, then even if he was a completely righteous man she is betrothed, as perhaps he had thoughts of idol worship in his mind, a serious sin that would earn him the label of wicked."*

[Nevertheless, the potential of a thought can be equally detrimental. †[The same way thoughts can have a positive impact; they can also be detrimental]. The same gemara continues to explain a case contrary to the first. Although the man *is* a complete *Tzaddik* in this case, his brief thought of being a *Rasha* would have been enough to designate him as a real *Rasha* at the time of his offer of betrothal.

As we enter the new year and *Yom HaDin* [judgement day], we must ensure to keep clean minds with pure thoughts, as this has the power to bring favor to the eyes of our Judge, Hashem. We must also not underestimate the profound impact of any thoughts that may *chas veshalom* be contrary to the ways of our holy *Torah*.

### **A Feeling in Their Hearts to Do Teshuva**

Another beautiful example of a *Hirhur Lev* [feeling in the heart] for doing *Teshuva* is found in the case of *Bnei Korach* [the sons of Korach] in *Parashat Korach*. *Bnei Korach* had initially collaborated with their father in his efforts to challenge *Moshe Rabbeinu*, one of the holiest leaders in the history of *Am Yisrael*. The *Chidab* describes *Korach* as a total *Rasha* [evil person] for his act of rebellion against *Moshe*.

*Bnei Korach* went from being supportive of their father's evil work to becoming great *tzaddikim*. *Rashi* explains that at the time of argument between their father and

*Moshe, Bnei Korach* "הרהרו תשובה בלבם" [had thoughts of repentance in their hearts] (*Rashi, Bamidbar 26:11*). This brought forth a major *Ness* [miracle] at the time that *Korach*, along with his whole family, all of his followers and all their possessions were swallowed by the ground and brought directly into *Gebenom* [He-ll]. Miraculously, *Bnei Korach* were saved from this as *chazal* [our sages of blessed memory] explain that a platform held *Bnei Korach* and saved them from being sucked into *Gebenom* with the rest of the group. As they were held by this platform, they received *Ruach Hakodesh* [Divine Wisdom] in which they saw major events in the future of *Am Yisrael* and recited new *perakim* [chapters] of *Tehillim* that David later wrote. In fact, seven such chapters start off mentioning *Bnei Korach* and giving incredible *Kavod* [respect] to them.

All this occurred after *Bnei Korach* simply just had thoughts of repentance. We too, through bringing thoughts of repentance upon ourselves, have the potential to bring major *Yeshuot* into our lives! We can take advantage of this knowledge by bringing thoughts of repentance upon ourselves and seeing how far it will take us this year. This has the potential to bring major *Yeshuot* [miracles] into our lives as well.

### **Forgive my fellow & Hashem forgives me**

Says *Rava* in the *gemara Masechet Rosh Hashanah 17a*:

"כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו"

*"With regard to whoever forgoes his reckonings with others for injustices done to him, the heavenly court in turn forgoes punishment for all his sins."*

*Rashi* explains that our judge, Hashem, in His endless *Rachamim*, rewards *ease in judgement* against one's self, as a result of one forgiving all who have wronged him. This is the power of cleaning our hearts of all grievances against our fellow.

Let's enter the new year with love and positivity towards all members of *Klal Yisrael*, and Hashem *Yitbarach* will only reciprocate the same love and affection towards us. Let's *think deeply* and internalize our commitments to increasing our *Yirat Shamayim*, *Talmud Torah* [learning Torah], *Ma'asim Tovim* [good deeds], and genuine passion to fulfill *Ratzon Hashem* [the will of Hashem]. May we all have a meaningful *Rosh HaShana*, *Aseret Yamei Teshuva* and *Yom Kippur*, in which we connect with Hashem not only through action, but also through our inner thoughts and feelings.

## “New Year’s Resolution”

Ryan LeVian

Chazal teach us that “in a place the Baalei Teshuva (those who have repented) are standing, people who were righteous their whole lives are not able to reach that level.” How is that so? The one who was righteous his whole life, has not sinned much, whereas the one who just became righteous does not really have so much of a background of Judaism and has been sinning pretty much his/her whole life thus far...

Maybe a parable can help us understand; there was a father who had two children. His dream was for his boys to become big Torah scholars. As the older son grew up, he followed in the dream of his father and became a very Torah learned Jew. The younger son started to stray from the path. He started going partying and falling into the wrong crowds. As proud as the father was for his first son, he started to give much more attention to his second son because he wanted to try to pull him back on the right path. The father started to succeed in bringing his son back on the right track and the younger son ended up becoming a Torah learned Jew himself. The father thought to himself that his first-born son was very special, but at the end of the day he grew up into a religious family and environment. He basically just had to do what he was told and he would end up getting to where his father wanted him. The second son on the other hand went off the correct path and it took a lot more courage and strength to get

to where his father wanted. The father always looked at his younger son as having accomplished so much more, even though both children ended up at the same level.

This is the answer to our question. Hashem does not only look at how many sins and mitzvot a person fulfills in his/her life. He looks at the whole picture. He looks at where the person grew up, his environment and how far he has grown. This is why someone who becomes close to Hashem through repenting is at a higher level than someone who was righteous his whole life.

We are now entering into the high holidays. Most of us are probably wondering what our “new year resolution” should be starting on Rosh Hashana. I believe that we all need to try to take something upon ourselves to start this new year. Life is like a downwards escalator; we always have to try going up. If you try to take the route that “you are good the way you are,” you will end up falling down. At the same time, you can’t run on the downwards escalator because you may also fall all the way back to the bottom. We need to be going up at a speed faster than the escalator is going down. Each of us need to find that something we are not excelling in and repent. None of us are perfect and we all need fixing in some aspect. Find that thing that you would like to improve on this year and become a Baal Teshuva because the level you can reach is unfathomable.

## Finding G-d in Our Lives

Eliyahu Ebrani

The time around the High Holidays is one of looking back, taking stock of our actions, and thinking about our past. This past year has been one crazy year. Each and every one of us has felt the effects of a global pandemic. It's only natural, then, that during the High Holidays as we look back on the year that has passed, we wonder why G-d has sent this upon us. What, if anything, can we learn from the events of the past year?

The Gemara (Sukkah 29a) teaches that whenever something bad happens in the world, the Jews should be concerned that it was on their account, and brings a parable to explain:

**משל לסופר שבא לבית הספר ורצועה בידו מי דואג מי שרגיל ללקות בכל יום ויום הוא דואג**

*"This is similar to a teacher who comes to the school with a strap in his hand. Who worries? The child who is accustomed to be beaten every day is the one who worries."*

The Jewish people have been punished more than any other nation, so when we see punishment come to the world, we should assume that it's probably to teach us a lesson. But what lesson can we learn from the ongoing global pandemic?

When we take a look around us, we find that everyone blames the pandemic on someone else. The US blames China, Democrats blame Republicans, the list goes on. But nobody seems to believe that this pandemic may have been sent to us by G-d. In Hebrew we have a word for this: הסתר פנים. Literally the phrase translates to "Hidden Face," and it comes from a *pasuk* in *Parshat Vayelech* (Devarim 31.18)

**וְאֶנְכִי הַסְתֵּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי בָיִם הַהוּא עַל כָּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָּנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים**

*"And I will hide my face at that time because of the many evil things they have done, because they have turned to other gods."*

G-d tells us that if the Jews go astray, leaving the path of the Torah, He will hide from us. When G-d is hiding, His hand isn't visible in the world. Things happen and we don't recognize that they are coming from above. That's precisely what we're living through.

But why would G-d tell us that He's hiding? You see, if someone is hiding, it's a little counterproductive to let everyone know that you're hiding, because now they'll go looking for you. Rav Yaakov Bender explains that there are two types of hiding. There are Jews who went into hiding in Nazi Germany. Someone hiding from the Nazis will not tell anyone that he is in hiding, because he absolutely does not want to risk being found. But then there's a different kind of hiding, the kind we find when a child plays hide-and-go-seek. When a child is playing a game of hide-and-go-seek, after a few minutes pass he may yell out from the hiding spot, "You can't find me." The child invites others to find him because the child ultimately wants to be found and does not want to stay in hiding forever.

Now, when G-d tells us that He will hide from us, we understand that the hiding is part of an exercise in finding Him. The goal of the hiding is that ultimately, we should reveal G-d in our lives. I think this is something we can all work on. On the most basic level, we should try to recognize that whatever is happening in the world is none other than the hand of G-d at work. On a more practical level, maybe we can try recommitting to the mitzvot that we too often forget. Maybe we say too much *lashon hara*, maybe we don't remember to say the proper blessings on foods, or maybe there's some other *mitzva* we haven't been taking as seriously as we should. Either way, I'm sure that each one of us can find something to improve on. I'm confident that when we all make improvements in our daily lives, bringing G-d into our busy lives, G-d will save us from all our troubles and bless us with a happy, healthy, sweet new year.

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