

# Days<sup>of</sup>Awe

*The Ohr Somayach Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur Handbook*

## *A word from the Roshei Yeshiva*

The Yomim Noraim Handbook follows the handbooks which Ohr Somayach has produced for Pesach, Chanukah and Purim. Once again, it contains insightful articles from the outstanding educators who teach in the Yeshiva in Jerusalem or lecture in international programs. It is our hope that the rich material in this handbook will help instill more meaning to your Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur - and the days in between.

The faculty, staff and students of Ohr Somayach extend best wishes to our alumni and to all of Klal Yisrael for a *k'tiva v'chatima tova* - for a new year of peace, prosperity and happiness.

*Rav Mendel Weinbach*

*Rav Nota Schiller*

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# The Sound *of the* Shofar & *the* Harkening *of the* Teruah

BY RAV YITZCHAK BREITOWITZ

**T**he musaf prayer of Rosh Hashana is the longest of the year. In contrast to every other musaf, which has seven blessings, the musaf of Rosh Hashana contains nine. The first three and the last three are standard (other than the fact that the third beracha regarding G-d's sanctity is expanded to several paragraphs and ends in Ha'Melech Hakadosh, "the Holy King" rather than "the Holy G-d".) Each of the middle three *berachot* focuses on a discrete theme:

(1) *Malchuyot* - G-d's kingship;

(2) *Zichronot* - G-d's remembering and judging our past behavior but recalling also the merit of our *avot* and His covenant with the Jewish people;

(3) *Shofarot* - the idea of shofar as a precursor to revelation (the giving of the Torah) and ultimately redemption (Mashiach).

The Maharsha explains that each section of the musaf is designed to reaffirm a central tenet of our faith. *Malchuyot* affirms G-d's role as creator of the world; *Zichronot* - G-d's intervention into the affairs of man ultimately rewarding good and punishing evil; *Shofarot* - the principle that "good" and "evil" are not left to idiosyncratic definition but are determined by revealed truth - Matan Torah.

The end of the beracha of *Shofarot* contains an intriguing redundancy: "For You hear ["shomay'ah"] the voice of the shofar and harken ["ma'azin] to the teruah [the quivering sounds of the shofar] and none is like You. Blessed are You, G-d, who *hears* ["shomay'ah"] the voice of the shofar of His people Israel with compassion."

What is the difference between "hearing" and "harkening"? Why the dichotomy between "the voice of the shofar" and "teruah," coupling "shofar" with the verb *hear* and "teruah" with *harken*? If, for whatever reason, *harken* should be coupled with teruah, why does the beracha end by combining teruah with "hearing"?

The Pri Megadim offers the following explanation: the various sounds of the shofar represent the Jewish soul — the breath of the Divine spirit that animates the body. The tekiah sound - straight, unwavering, confident, and strong - represents the pristine holiness of the saint who has never sinned, the *tzaddik gamur*. The broken, wavering tremors of shevarim and teruah represent the sinner who has initially become distanced from G-d but through repentance and prayer (the cries of a broken heart) seeks to reestablish the connection.

Thus, tekiah (the long sound) = *tzadik gamur* (perfectly righteous); shevarim/teruah (the broken sounds) = the ba'al

teshuva (the person who has strayed but seeks reunification).

In Hebrew, the verb "shma" (hear) connotes listening to someone who is immediately adjacent. Le'haazin (harken) connotes listening from a distance, thereby necessitating moving one's ear closer to be able to hear.

Based on these two assumptions, the text of the beracha is now clear:

1. You *hear* ("shma") the voice of the shofar: G-d, You are always near to the righteous who serve You and love You with all their hearts.

2. *But* even with respect to those broken souls who have rejected and despised You, creating distance from You, You nevertheless turn Your ear towards them trying to pick up any little hint of repentance and remorse. And in Your love for even those who have gone astray, there is no one comparable. Thus, ma'azin teruah - You endeavor to pick up the crying of the heart from a distance.

3. And when such teshuva is attained, Your love for the ba'al teshuva creates a closeness (hence, the final use of the verb "shma") no less than that G-d has for the righteous and indeed, according to Chazal, may even be greater.

In essence, the beracha graphically paints a portrait of initial distance, G-d's yearning for our closeness, our responding to His needs, and eventually achieving that closeness (which is the symbolism of the straight tekiah that follows the shevarim and teruah).

The shofar is the cry of the heart — recalling the purity of our beginnings, the disintegration of our pristine selves, the process of teshuvah and the culmination of rectification. It is a prayer without words, for words are both inadequate and unnecessary. It is the expression of the essence of a Jew who, no matter how far he may have gone, remains the beloved child of G-d.

This season is indeed one of introspection, soul searching, and resolution, but lest we fall into disillusionment and despair let us also remember that there is no time of year when G-d's love is so palpable and accessible, when His yearning for us so great, where every little move towards Him on our part will be reciprocated many times over. Where, as Chazal say, if we open up no larger than the eye of a needle, He will open up to us like the doors of the Beit Hamikdash.

The shofar is described as eliciting a favorable remembrance from G-d but it does so by effecting transformations within ourselves. May we merit to respond to its call.

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# A Pound for Weighing Chest-Beating on Yom Kippur

BY RAV MENDEL WEINBACH

**P**ounding one's chest conjures up memories of jungle king Tarzan demonstrating his primitive sense of macho. But if chest-beating is viewed as a sign of masculine strength in the secular world, it is appreciated as a sign of human weakness in the Jewish world.

Throughout Yom Kippur a Jew pounds his chest as he confesses his sins before his Creator on the day when his judgment is sealed. Once right before the Fast Day begins, and five times throughout the night and day of Yom Kippur, the Jew recites his long list of sins, each of which is accompanied by a fist striking at the heart

*Teshuva* — repentance and return — is comprised of regret for past sin, resolution for the future and a verbal admission of the sin. All of these ingredients are readily understandable as being indispensable elements for genuine return to G-d. But why is it necessary to pound the chest while making that admission of guilt?

The answer can perhaps be found in the dialogue between Iyov (Job) and the friends who came to console him for the loss of his children, his health and his fortune which Heaven had inflicted on him as a trial of his faith in G-d. On the verge of total despair, Iyov presented an argument that attempted, says the Talmud (*Bava Batra 16*), to free all of mankind from responsibility for their sins. The evil inclination which G-d created to challenge man in his use of his free will is so powerful, argued Iyov, that man is as helpless in being a sinner as an animal with uncloven hooves is in being not kosher for consumption. To this, his consoler responded that G-d had indeed created a powerful poison to persuade man to sin, but He also created an equally powerful antidote called Torah. Man could therefore not blame his Creator for his own failures to meet the challenges to his free will.

Iyov's futile effort at self justification echoes throughout the generations. It is heard in the international courtrooms from defendants on trial for crimes against mankind who plead they were helpless because they were only obeying orders in perpetrating their atrocities. It is heard in local courtrooms where a glib lawyer pleads for his criminal client on the grounds that his crime was not the product of any evil in him, but rather the result of a problematic childhood, corrupting environment or economic despair.

It is also heard in the privacy of our hearts whenever we feel too weak to overcome temptation or to admit our sin in failing to do so. How many times have we heard ourselves and others say "That's the way I am!" "I'm only human!" when backed against the wall with criticism of our behavior?

This is why a Jew pounds upon his heart, home of the evil inclination and the good one, as if to say "You caused me to sin!" The Jew who is courageous enough to confess his sin is actually admitting that he cannot "pass the buck" of responsibility to the Creator, but rather declares that "the buck stops here!" At this moment of truth he avoids putting all the blame for his shortcomings on his parents, his teachers, his neighbors and friends and admits he is ultimately the guilty party. In the same heart and mind where lurks the poison of the evil inclination there is available the good one which obedience to Torah can activate as an antidote.

The repentant Jew pounds on his heart as he imagines the Heavenly Court weighing his virtues against his faults on this Day of Judgment. He knows that each pound will help to tip the scale in behalf of a favorable judgment for a good year to come.

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# THE COSMIC DIALOGUE

BY RAV NOTA SCHILLER

Classically, the question has been posed that Yom Kippur as atonement should seemingly precede Rosh Hashana as the Day of Judgment.

Various approaches have been taken to resolve this. One approach would seem that petitioning for atonement is to engage the Creator, the Master of the Universe, in a dialogue. It has been said that Torah learning is when G-d speaks to us; prayer is when we speak to G-d. And while the structure and language of prayer are Torah-formed, yet the presentation is ours. One hundred people in a room reciting the same words are yet engaged in 100 discrete experiences, each bringing to bear the learning, the sincerity, and the feelings that he has garnered and is prepared to invest.

Rosh Hashana is described as the day during which we coronate the Divinity. Obviously, G-d does not need our coronation. By definition, he can not *need*. The point of the "coronation" and its coinciding with the day G-d created man- *hayom harat olam*- is to avail us of the opportunity to focus on the relationship between Creator and creature. The Shem M'Shmuel asks where is the mitzvah of the day that reflects this creation of man and answers the injecting of the breath into the shofar corresponds to G-d's breathing life into the nostrils of man.

Before one can beseech and petition G-d for atonement, one must establish the actual proportions, the ratio of mortal to Sublime. Only then can there be authenticity in the dialogue, the cosmic discussion that ensues. Coronating G-d allows us, entitles us, to approach atonement with integrity. Owning up to this relationship living through Rosh Hashana first. Perhaps the very sound of the shofar signifies that man- celebrated as the speaking creature- ultimately lacks words to express the Utterly Sublime. We need to resort to the shofar to express that submission.

The days of teshuvah climaxing with Yom Kippur are made up of unique moments when the smog of subjectivity has been reduced. A newly rarefied clarity in the atmosphere- *dirshu Hashem b'himatzo*. While He is always there, just as He is always everywhere, yet as Eretz Yisroel, Yerushalyim, and the Makom HaMigdash in concentric circles intensifies our access to His Indwelling Presence, similarly, the days of teshuvah from Rosh Hashana are a progression of intensifying vividness *in time* to grasp the essential creature/Creator relationship and seize the moment.

The Kli Yakar quotes the Zohar on the verse. "Lifnay sayvah takum" (Stand up before the elderly person) as also indicating that one should stand and take one's proper place before our elderly years. Yom Kippur is called *Shabbos Shabboson*, a double kind of a Shabbos, and he explains that since we refrain from work on the Shabbos, basically our external limbs are at rest, but the coursing of the blood through our viscera are busy every Shabbos, digesting and processing the various delicacies. Through the fasting, Yom Kippur we are externally and internally at rest. *Shabbos Shabboson*.

Each day of the *asret yimay teshuvah*, as we move from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur clarifying, engaging, and joining in an oneness with Klal Yisroel. Solidarity as facilitator. Freed of the material needs and competitiveness, that oneness that is only achieved, collectively and individually, through the pursuit of Torah and mitzvot as purifying agents and connective tissue to all Jews of all times. That is the unity of Klal Yisroel that enables us to genuinely relate to that Utter Oneness.

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# Beginnings

by Rabbi Dr. Akiva Tatz

## Why Rosh Hashana can affect the entire year

**“E**verything goes after the beginning.” This statement of Chazal contains hidden depth. The moment of conception of anything which comes into existence must contain all the elements of the future of that thing. Just as all the genes of a human being are laid down at conception and thereafter all the physical features which manifest in the child as it develops are results of those genes, so too all phenomena in the world are a reflection of the elements contained, infinitely compressed, in their beginnings.

The moment of transition from non-existence to existence is the most potent, containing all. Thereafter, as the child develops, a critical phase follows, but not as critical as the first instant, and so on, each phase a revelation of the coding of the previous. The closer to the beginning, the more critical. Small effects at the genetic level will be much more far-reaching than larger effects during embryonic development, and effects at embryonic level more far-reaching than effects at the adult level. Therefore, the moment which demands greatest care, greatest intensity, greatest purity, is the very first.

Time is also a creation. The Jewish year is an organic entity. Its conception takes place on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. For this reason we are so extremely careful about trying to live correctly on Rosh Hashana and the subsequent days. The way one begins the year will determine how the rest of the year reveals itself. If one can form the genes of the year correctly, the fetus will develop correctly and the child and adult will be wholesome.

Mistakes in this phase will be very hard to correct later. Efforts made in the first ten days may prevent major “surgery” being necessary later. Each moment of Rosh Hashana should be utilized with exquisite care, only positive personality traits should be manifest, great control over anger and other negative traits should be exercised. Many have the custom not to sleep during the

day of Rosh Hashana, at least not until midday — they want to lay down the genes of the year in consciousness and spiritual effort, not oblivion.

What should be the major focus of the day? Can one really correct all one’s personality faults in one day, or even ten? The answer lies in a description of Chazal’s of the human being. There is a description of a righteous person as a tree planted in good soil whose branches overhang bad soil. The meaning is that the root is good, the person is essentially good, but no-one is perfect and the branches overhanging bad ground represent the person’s shortcomings. However, some pruning will reveal roots entirely good. The pruning may take the form of suffering in this world — in the next world, the dimension of truth, the person will be revealed as wholly positive.

A negative individual is described as a tree planted in bad soil where branches overhang good ground. The root and essence are bad, but even the worst individual has positive actions and qualities. However, some pruning will reveal the essence as bad. The pruning may take the form of great happiness and reward in this world, leaving a clarified existence of negativity in the next.

This idea helps one to understand a difficult section in the Rambam. The Rambam states that on Rosh Hashana the righteous are sealed for life immediately, the evil are sealed for the opposite immediately, and those who are intermediate, neither righteous nor evil, hang in the balance until Yom Kippur. The Rambam says that these are people whose mitzvos exactly equal their aveiros. (Not necessarily in number, quality counts.)

The strange part of this discussion is that the Rambam goes on to say that most people are in this third category, that is exactly balanced between good and bad. Is it really possible that most people are exactly balanced in terms of their positive and negative actions?

The explanation, however, is that what is meant here is not an exact technical balancing of actions, what is

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meant is that most people are trees planted midway between good and bad soil — available for good and positive actions when the opportunity arises, when inspiration occurs, but unfortunately, available for selfishness and negativity when tempted. Most people have never made a conscious policy decision about what they are here for. Where is your tree planted? Its default position straddles the line. What is required at the moment of conception of consciousness, at the moment of conception of time, is a decision about who I am in essence, not about which technical actions need work —

that will come later.

Rosh Hashana is a time for moving the core, making sure the tree is moved entirely into positive territory, the pruning is the second stage. Consciously choosing a positive direction, setting a spiritual goal and beginning movement in its direction is what Rosh Hashana must teach.

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## Rosh Hashanah Q&A

### Questions

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tishrei is Rosh Hashana?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of Tanach does the beginning of the Tashlich prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were “remembered” by Hashem on Rosh Hashana?
7. A person’s yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashana, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: “Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah...” What was Abraham’s prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashana, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the shehechyanu blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashana which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

### Answers

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah. (*Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*)
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it “a day of shofar blowing.” (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai). (*Bamidbar 29:1*)
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: “The fragrance of my

- son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed...” (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this “field” as an apple orchard. (*Ta’anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*)
4. “Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar,” and the shehechyanu blessing. (*Orach Chaim 581:2*)
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashana it was decreed that these barren women would bear children. (*Tractate Rosh Hashana 10b*)
7. Expenses for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and the cost of one’s children’s Torah education. (*Ba’er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*)
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (*Onkelos 22:14*). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac. (*Rashi 22:13*)
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The “two-day festival” arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashana. Since Rosh Hashana occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashana it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the shehechyanu blessing. Thus, the shehechyanu blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no shehechyanu blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashana.) (*Taz 600:2*)

# STRATEGIC teshuva

BY RABBI DR. DOVID GOTTLIEB

## *Creative Ways to Make Yourself Do the "Right Thing"*

**W**e all have some bad *midot* (character traits) and some bad habits. When we consider doing *teshuva* for them, we are apt to think as follows: "I am really out of control. Why do I do those terrible things? I should be stronger! How can I increase my self-control so that I can overcome those strains, temptations, etc.?"

That sort of thinking can be useful. But it is not the only helpful approach. Another attack is this: "When do I fail like this? What is there in the environment? What else has happened that day? Under which *specific circumstances* do I fail? And, ...what can I do to *change those circumstances*?" The technique of changing the circumstances in which we generally fail is what I call "Strategic Teshuva."

*Midot* and habits generally have "triggers." For example, certain people provoke an angry, aggressive response. Other people may not pose a problem. Or the "trigger" might be specific activities, such as driving in heavy traffic ("road rage"), caring for fighting siblings, waiting in lines at the bus terminal, filling out government forms, and so on.

The same is true for other temptations. Laziness comes naturally when one is surrounded by computer games, bad literature, inviting beaches and - most important - other lazy people. (A boy from Los Angeles told me it took him six years to get his bachelor's degree because certain courses interfered with his beach schedule!) Illicit pleasures attract most strongly when they are readily available and when others in the neighborhood indulge.

Our first responsibility is for our *actions*. When the "triggers" of the bad habits and *midos* occur, it is extremely difficult to stop the habits and *midot* from acting. One solution is to try to *avoid the triggers*. Change the environment. Move your residence if you can. If you can't, spend as much time in another environment which will provide respite from the temptation. (The most effective positive environment is doing *mitzvot* with other people: Learn in a *beit midrash*, visit the

hospital *with others*, plan a *chesed* project *with others*, teach Torah *in a school*, etc.) Certain activities cause tension which triggers anger. If you cannot avoid those activities, alternate with relaxing activities.

A second solution is to *add* something to the environment which will make it easier to do the right thing. If you have trouble getting up for *davening* in shul, make a study partner for ten minutes before *davening*. Then, when the alarm rings and you reach over to push the snooze button, you will think: "But what if my study partner comes and I'm not there?! How embarrassing!" - and you will get up!

In many cases you can make a contract with yourself: If I succeed in overcoming the temptation (enough times) then I will allow myself something I very much enjoy. This is what psychologists call a "behavior contract." Thus I have a personal incentive to do the right thing. For example: "If I get through the meeting without getting angry, I will allow myself to buy that picture for the wall/go to that restaurant/etc."

*The key is to control the environment by avoiding some things and creatively adding others so that it will be easier to do the right thing.*

Now, some people think that this cannot be right. This means that we are only running away from our problems, not solving them! The problem is precisely this: I am not able to *overcome* those temptations. How do I solve that problem? By *avoiding* them, or by adding extra incentives?

There are two answers. First, who says that the only problem is to overcome the desire? On the contrary: Our first responsibility is for our *actions*. Suppose someone cannot control a desire to steal from Macy's. If he shops only in Bloomingdale's, or he rewards himself for not stealing from Macy's, he has not overcome the desire - but at least he is not stealing!

Second, often we can only overcome the desire if we have a respite from the wrong actions. As long as the bad habits and *midot* are active it is very difficult to gain control.

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Therefore, avoiding the triggers and adding payoffs may be the only way to gain control. Yes, the *ultimate* goal is to become immune to the temptations. But this may require two stages: First avoiding the triggers and adding payoffs; and then developing the psychological strength to resist. Trying to do without the first stage may make the second stage impossible.

Think of addictions. You cannot simply tell the addict: “Stop using that stuff!” He can’t stop, and all the therapy in the world will not help *while he is still on the drug*. But if he enters a sanitarium where the drug is unavailable, then the therapy can help him become immune to the temptation to use drugs.

Strategic *teshuva* may thus be the necessary first step to complete *teshuva*. But it is more than that. If that is all that you can manage at the moment, then strategic *teshuva* is enough to gain *kappara* (atonement). Hashem does not ask more of us than we can do. If you avoid the triggers, add incentives and start to work on immunity, then in the meantime you have *kappara* for all the past mistakes even before you achieve immunity. Isn’t that worth it?

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## Yom Kippur Q&A

### Questions

1. Passover commemorates the going out of Egypt. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah. What historical event can Yom Kippur be said to commemorate?
2. For what kinds of sins does Yom Kippur not atone?
3. What should someone do if the person he wronged does not forgive him the first time?
4. Why is the vidui confession included during the mincha prayer the afternoon before Yom Kippur?
5. On Yom Kippur we refrain from: Working, eating, drinking, washing, anointing, family relations and wearing leather shoes. Which three of these prohibitions are more severe than the others?
6. In what two ways does the prohibition against eating food on Yom Kippur differ from the prohibition against eating pork the entire year?
7. Who wrote the prayer “Unesaneh Tokef” said during the chazan’s repetition of musaf?
8. Why do we read the book of Yona on Yom Kippur?
9. In what two ways does havdalah after Yom Kippur differ from havdalah after Shabbos?
10. Ideally, what mitzvah should one begin immediately after Yom Kippur?

### Answers

1. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the tenth of Tishrei with the second set of Tablets, signifying forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. Yom Kippur can be said to commemorate this event, the first national day of forgiveness for the Jewish People.
2. Sins committed against other people, including hurting

- someone’s feelings. Yom Kippur does not atone for these sins until the perpetrator gains forgiveness from the victim himself. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
3. He should try at least two more times to gain forgiveness. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
4. Lest one choke while eating the pre-Yom Kippur meal and die without atonement, or lest one become intoxicated and unable to concentrate on the prayers at night. (*Mishna Berura 607:1*)
5. Eating, drinking, working. (*Mishna Krisus 1:1*)
6. a) Although any amount is forbidden, eating on Yom Kippur is not punishable by a Sanhedrin until one has eaten food equal in volume to the size of a date. Eating pork, on the other hand, is punishable for eating even an olive-sized piece, which is smaller than a date. (*Mishna Berura 612:1*)  
b) Eating on Yom Kippur incurs the punishment of kares - spiritual excision, whereas eating pork does not.
7. “Unesaneh Tokef” was written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany about 1000 years ago.
8. The repentance of the people of Ninveh serves as an inspiration to us to repent, and shows us that repentance can overturn a Divine decree. (*Shelah Hakadosh*)
9. After Yom Kippur, the blessing over spices is omitted from havdalah. Also, the source of the flame used for havdalah after Yom Kippur must be a fire kindled before Yom Kippur. (*Orach Chaim 624:3,4*)
10. Building the succa. (*Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5*)

# Where *is the* King?

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

## I. Radio Drama

**T**he year is 1943. In a farmhouse of a remote French village, two shadowy figures struggle to move aside a fake stove. Behind the stove sits a primitive but powerful radio, covered in newspaper.

One of the figures bends silently over the radio and with well-practiced hands coaxes it into life. Its vacuum tubes start to glow dully, and the sound of airwaves, of static, can be heard escaping from his large *baekelite* headphones. Suddenly the hissing and popping of the static clears and the unmistakable sound of a lone timpani drum quietly fills the room.

Quietly, ever so quietly, it sounds out a letter in Morse code: Short, short, short, long. Short, short, short, long. ...- , ...-. The letter is the letter "V". "V" for victory. Then a voice: "The night is your friend. The V is your sign..."

The Free French government was in exile in London. In

its stead, a puppet regime ruled, but the people were loyal to their leader even though he was far away.

Nightly, they listened, hoping for a few words, a message of encouragement from their leader. For, however far away he was, they would never desert or be unfaithful to him. They longed for the day when he would emerge from exile and free them from their oppressors.

## II. A Brief History of Kings

Where have the all the kings gone?

As part of the Creation, Hashem wanted there to be a tangible symbol of His Kingship. From this symbol we would be able to catch the smallest glimpse, the most distant echo of the Glory of Heaven, its Awesomeness and its Majesty. For this reason He created kings.

A few hundred years ago, kings ruled with absolute authority in their lands. More recently, nations have been un-

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willing to give to their rulers unbounded dominion; rather the king has been placed under the rule of the state.

With the advent of the republic, the notion of kingship has been virtually extinguished. There remain but a few nations who still conserve a constitutional monarchy, but even in those countries, the monarchy is but a pale puppet show beset with problems from without and within.

In a republic, it is the people that rule; or rather, it is the political parties that rule. The fear of the king is no longer. We have reduced the king to a glib smile and well coiffed hair, to a denim jacket and a strong handshake, or as it's called in the trade "pumping the flesh."

The tenure of a president is transitory. Even in countries where he may enjoy a broad power-base, he must expend vast amounts of time, money and energy flattering the spectrum of political interests to assure his re-election.

Since monarchy was created only to give us a microcosmic semblance of the Heavenly Kingship, how should we understand this ebbing of the power of kings? In other words, if the earthly monarchy is no more than a reflection of Hashem's Kingship, and a means to make it easier for us to accept His Dominion upon ourselves, why has the power and the status of monarchy been allowed to wane?

Hashem relates to us through 'measure for measure.' *When the world at large believed in G-d, we were afforded an ever present representation of Hashem's Kingship in the form of the rule of kings. When the world turned to atheism, there was a concomitant withdrawal of the power of kings.*

The basic tenet of Judaism is that Hashem is One. When a king united his people he was also the symbol of their unity. Today, on the other hand, political parties by definition stand for diffusion and separation. This is but a mir-

ror of the fact that the world has turned its back on Hashem's Oneness.

Only when the world perceives the Oneness of Hashem will kingship return to mankind.

### III. The Return of the King

For some two thousand years, the Jewish People has been 'sitting by its radio,' listening attentively, waiting for the return of the King.

The false monarchy of atheism, the puppet regimes of hedonism and materialism seem to rule unchecked, but from His exile, the King still rules.

He is in hiding. We do not see Him. But we continue an unremitting guerrilla war against His enemies. We will never be subjugated to them, never accept their rulership.

And He continues to rule, even though we do not see Him. He rules in secret, in hiding. And we sit by our 'spiritual radios' - our Holy Torah, receiving instructions from Him.

We long for the day when He will return to us and the world will acknowledge Him as Ruler. When kingship will return to the House of David and there will come a Rosh Hashana when we will crown Him, not in exile, but revealed for all the world to see.

*Based on Alei Shor, Vol. 2 Malchuyos, by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe.  
Thanks to Rabbi Pinchas Kantrovitz*

*Rabbi Sinclair lectures in the main Ohr Somayach campus in Jerusalem. His website can be found at:  
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*All of us at oh.edu wish all of Klal Yisrael a Shana Tova!*

## The Rosh Hashanah-Yom Kippur Handbook

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The

MEANING

of the

SHOFAR

*10 reasons for the mitzvah of blowing the shofar, based on Rav Saadiah Gaon*

**R**osh Hashana is the day that commemorates the creation of the world and it is described as the “coronation” of Hashem (G-d). As it is customary to sound a trumpet at a king’s coronation so we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana. By blowing the shofar we recognize the “purpose” of the creation.

- The shofar blast marks the beginning of a period of amnesty which is known as The Ten Days of Repentance. Repentance is based on the fact that since humanity has been given free-will, and our actions are not pre-determined, we must take responsibility for our actions. The ability to repent teaches us that our future is not bound by our past and that by changing our behaviour we have the ability to change our past.

- When the Jews accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai, the sound of the shofar is described as “continuously increased and was very great” (Exodus 19:19). The shofar serves to remind us of the revelation at Mt. Sinai and therefore to renew our commitment to Hashem and to accept that Torah morality is absolute and G-d given - not relative, nor does it depend on human understanding.

- The prophets called out to the Jewish People and aroused them to improve their ways. The shofar reminds us of the admonitions of the prophets and their calls to repentance. We should be aware of the fact that Hashem communicated with us, via the prophets, and displayed through them His desire to perfect us and not to punish us.

- The shofar reminds us to pray for the rebuilding of the Temple where trumpets and shofars were sounded. Just as Hashem manifests His presence in the world in specific places like the Temple in Jerusalem. He also manifests His presence at special times, such as the Ten Days of Repentance.

- The ram’s horn reminds us of the Binding of Isaac when Abraham demonstrated his absolute faith in Hashem by being prepared to sacrifice his son. Hashem demonstrated His absolute love for Abraham by having him sacrifice a ram in his place.

- The sound of the shofar is supposed to inspire fear in the hearts of those who hear it. It allows one to dwell upon fear of punishment, to progress from there to fear of doing evil and then to fear of G-d. Finally one arrives at the feeling of awe of G-d.

- The shofar reminds us of the day of judgment in the future. And inspires us to pray for the perfection of world, all of mankind and the Messianic era.

- The sound inspires us to yearn for the ingathering of the Exiles, that will be heralded by the sound of a shofar. There will be absolute unity amongst the Jewish People and our connection to Land of Israel will again be absolute.

- The shofar recalls the resurrection of the dead which will be accompanied by the sound of a shofar. As G-d is the source of all life and the creator of all existence so He has complete control over death.

*Additional reasons from other sources:*

- The shofar ushers in the Divine court session and shows our trust in Hashem’s judgement. By showing our eagerness to be judged by Hashem we thus confuse the heavenly prosecutor, the Satan.

- Shofar blasts were sounded preceding a war - to rally the troops for action and to call the people together for prayer and repentance. The shofar is therefore like an air raid siren that alerts us to danger, and summons us to action.

# TREPIDATION & JOY

BY RABBI DOVID WEINBERGER

The Torah states in Shmot 23:34: “On the fifteenth day of *this* seventh month is the festival of Succot, seven days dedicated to G-d.” Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch queries as to the Torah’s emphasis of the word “this”. Why is it necessary to emphasize that the Festival of Succot is in the month of Tishrei? To answer this question we must first understand the character and essence of this month.

The first day of the month is known as “*Yom Teruah*” — “a day when the shofar is sounded.” The one hundred blasts of the shofar that we are accustomed to sounding indeed serve as a wake-up call to *teshuvah*, thus obligating us to engage in self-introspection and to return to the proper service of our Creator. The verse “awaken you sleepy ones from your sleep” states this quite clearly.

Following Rosh Hashana is Yom Kippur, the tenth day of the month, which is set aside for forgiveness, pardon and atonement. This singular day of the year is the holiest day of the year, when we can cleanse ourselves from our iniquities and sins that we have committed during the course of the year. Following these days of awe, when our lives literally hang in the balance, comes the Festival of Succot, the holiday of joy when not one or two days are designated, but rather a full seven days are set aside to rejoice with G-d, thus forging closer ties with our Father in Heaven. Rabbi Hirsch says that the lesson of the month of Tishrei is teaching us how the Jew is

obligated to live throughout his or her entire life.

One day set aside for Rosh Hashana as a day of introspection, one day for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, but days of joy are in abundance — as we see that Succot is to be celebrated for the full seven days. This has been the guiding light indeed of the Jewish People from the beginning of their existence. Our Rabbis teach us that this is to be the cycle of the Jewish nation and indeed of each and every individual in particular. Our existence is indeed a cyclical one, days filled with both sadness and joy. As a nation, we have been exposed to the saddest events in history such as blood libels, pogroms, crusades and, in more recent history, the Holocaust. Yet, simultaneously, we have witnessed the resurgence and vibrancy of Torah communities in this country and around the globe.

We are witnessing with our own eyes the return of thousands of Jews to a firm commitment to Torah and *mitzvot* both in the Diaspora and in Eretz Yisrael. The Torah thus teaches us that G-d’s normative behavior for the Jew, both individually and collectively, is that joy and happiness will ultimately outweigh the fears and trepidation that we all endure in our turbulent world.

Yet, how do we utilize this special month of the year in the best way possible? From one day to the next, a period of twenty-four hours passes. The day of Rosh Hashana, however, is not just a time-lapse, but rather a

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year's end and a new year's beginning. We all will be getting many new calendars celebrating our New Year. But if we examine carefully the different types of calendars, we will note that some are daily, some weekly, and some monthly. The common denominator of all of these calendars is that when the time has lapsed, we tear off the page and discard it.

There is, however, another type of calendar that allows us to see much more than the particular day, week, or even month at a time. This calendar reveals the expanse of a year or more, giving us the full spectrum of transition from one year to the next. We don't tear off the old sheet,

but we rather move along the continuum of time to the new era. Rosh Hashana is termed the *Yom Hazikaron*, the Day of Remembrance. It is a time that G-d has allotted for us to take a retrospective and prospective look at ourselves as we move forward in time. A good company always maintains accurate records of past bills, accounts and checks for constant reference. As we log away the year 5770 let us not discard it. We must keep it handy for constant soul-searching and analysis of our past year in order that our New Year will reflect how meaningful each and every day really is.

*Rabbi Weinberger, a devoted friend of Torah institutions and particularly Ohr Somayach, is the rav of Congregation Shaaray Tefila in Lawrence, N.Y. and the renowned author of a wide range of seforim on halocho, hashkofah and tefilah.*

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# dip the apple in the honey

BY RABBI RICHARD JACOBS

**R**osh Hashana and Yom Kippur are full of customs which on the surface seem pretty strange; for example, casting our sins into the water on Rosh Hashana (*Tashlich*) and the atonement ritual of *Kaparot* on the day preceding Yom Kippur.

Dipping an apple in honey is so well known it is now synonymous with Rosh Hashana greetings cards and it is no less strange than either *Tashlich* or *Kaparot*. An apple dipped in honey is one of the symbolic foods that we eat on the first night of Rosh Hashana. We return from our evening prayers to find the Yom Tov table not yet laden with a sumptuous Yom Tov meal. Instead it is covered with “delectable delights”, including apples and honey, fenu-greek, leek, beets, dates, gourd, pomegranate, fish and in pride of place the head of a fish (or if you are really lucky a head of lamb).

After Kiddush and Challah (also honey dipped), yet before the meal proper, we embark on what can only be de-

scribed as a tantalizing taste sensation, eating a morsel from each dish preceded by a short (and equally puzzling) prayer. For example: on eating the apple in honey we say “May it be Your will ...that You renew us for a good and sweet New Year”; on eating the pomegranate we sat “May it be Your will...that our merits increase as (the seeds of) a pomegranate”; and on eating the fish we state “May it be Your will ... that we be fruitful and multiply like fish”<sup>1</sup>.

What is the point of this exercise? Do we really think that eating an apple in honey will cause us to have a sweet new year? That eating pomegranate will cause our merits to increase? Or that eating fish will cause us to have more children?

Yet our Sages tell us that “*Simanim milsa he*”<sup>2</sup> – these symbols are significant. To understand we need to look a bit deeper.

The Rema in the laws of Rosh Hashana<sup>3</sup> tells us that there are those that are careful not to eat nuts on Rosh

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Hashana<sup>3</sup>. One of the reasons he gives is that the Hebrew word for nut (*egoz*) has the same numerical value (*gematria*<sup>4</sup>) as the Hebrew word of sin (*chet*)<sup>5</sup>. From this we can see how far we are supposed to distance ourselves from even the hint of sin on Rosh Hashana. The Kotsker Rebbe, with his customary wit, points out not to forget that sin also has the numerical value as the word sin — for sure it is more important for us to distance ourselves from committing a sin rather than just refraining from eating nuts.

These symbols are significant when they come to stir us to strengthen our *emunah*, our faith. By eating these foods and, more importantly, by saying these short prayers, we fill ourselves with positive will and inspire ourselves to improve our deeds. It is our responsibility not to only keep the bathwater, but also to ensure that we do not lose the deeper meaning of this curious custom.

Each symbol also has its own deeper meaning. One of my favorite explanations of the custom to dip the apple in honey is that of the Bnei Yissasschar.

A highlight of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur services is the prayer of “*Unesaneh Tokef*”. At the climax of the prayer the congregation call out in unison, “*U’teshuva* (and repentance), *u’tefillah* (and prayer), *u’tzedakeh* (and charity) *ma’avirin et roa hagzeira*” (remove the evil of the decree!). Above the words “*U’teshuva u’tefillah u’tzedakeh*” are written another three words *Tsom* (fast), *Kol* (voice) and *Mamon* (money). These three words indicate the means with which we can achieve repentance, prayer and charity.

The Bnei Yissasschar points out that each of these words has the numerical value of 136, in total 408<sup>6</sup>. Apple, *tapuach* in Hebrew is spelt taf + peh + vav + chet. The outer letters have the numerical value of 408<sup>7</sup> while the inner two

letters have the value of 86, which is the equivalent of the name of G-d that represents Judgement<sup>8</sup>. Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgement when we are judged for our actions. The word for honey in Hebrew is *D’vash*, which has the same numerical value as *Av Harachamim* – Merciful Father<sup>9</sup>.

Dipping the apple in the honey hints to us the way which we can successful turn this Day of Judgment into a merciful one – by repenting, praying and giving charity.

Wishing you a sweet New Year.

*Rabbi Jacobs is the Executive Director of the Ohr Lagolah Hertz Institute for International Teacher Training, an affiliate of Ohr Somayach Institutions*

1. The full text can be found in the ArtScroll Rosh Hashana Machzor page 96
2. Horayos 12a, Kerisus 6a
3. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 584:2
4. Each of the letters of the Hebrew Aleph-Bet has an equivalent numerical value. A Gematria is the sum of the values of all the letters in each word. On occasion an additional 1 is added for the word as a whole. Our Sages often link and draw connections between words and phrases with the same numerical value.
5. Aleph (1) + gimmel (3) + vav (6) + zayin (7) + 1 (for the word) = 18 = chet (8) + tet (9) + aleph (1)
6. Tzadi (90) + vav (6) + mem (40) = 136  
Kuf (100) + vav (6) + lamed (30) = 136  
Mem (40) + mem (40) + vav (6) + nun (50) = 136  
The sum total is 408
7. Taf (400) + chet (8) = 408
8. Peh (80) + vav (6) = 86 = aleph (1) + lamed (30) + heh (5) + yud (10) + mem (40)
9. Daled (4) + beit (2) + shin (300) = 306 = aleph (1) + beit (2) + heh (5) + resh (200) + chet (8) + mem (40) + yud (10) + mem (40)

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# Polished

## Jews and Jewelry on Yom Kippur

BY RABBI REUVEN LAUFFER

**H**ave you ever seen an unpolished diamond before? I have. If you want to have an idea of what they look like just go outside and pick up any old stone from the ground. Dust it off and hold it up to the light and admire its, well, stony appearance. I really can't think of a more apt description. They are an insurance agent's nightmare, because if one were to inadvertently drop an unpolished diamond outside it would be nigh on impossible to distinguish it from the thousands of plain old stones.

So what's so special about them? Why would someone voluntarily choose to part with a small (sometimes large) fortune to buy them? Because, as we all know, appearances can be deceptive. No one buys an unpolished diamond because it's identical to a regular stone. The only reason to buy an unpolished diamond is for what's underneath the surface: Hidden from the human eye, but present nevertheless, is potentially one of the most beautiful sights of the natural world! But there is a certain built-in paradox about all this. In order to really appreciate the diamond in its unpolished state, one has to be aware of what lies underneath that surface. Otherwise you're going to get some pretty funny looks from people when they see that new piece of jewelry!

On the face of it Yom Kippur may not seem to be the best time to discuss the pros and cons of unpolished diamonds versus the polished variety. But I'm not so sure. You see, most of us actually bear a startling resemblance to unpolished diamonds!

At birth each of us was given the most exquisite gift from G-d. Its brilliance and beauty are unparalleled - even by the cleanest, brightest diamond. This gift is called the *neshama* (soul) and its potential is simply breathtaking! It is comprised, in part, of luminosity, sparkle and luster, and it is just waiting to be revealed to the world.

If it weren't for a small "technical problem," each uniquely fashioned *neshama* (individually designed by the Creator Himself - just for you!) would release its dazzling light and color into the environment this very minute. But it can't because right now it's covered with the drab grayness of this physical world that we live in. In fact, it is so overcome, the vast majority of people cannot even identify it!

There is a famous Chasidic story told about Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk. Many years ago, he finally fulfilled his dream to settle in the Land of Israel. Forty days after his arrival he invited all of his family and students to a special festive meal. During the meal, Rabbi Menachem Mendel recounted that before embarking on his trip he had gone to a pious and holy rabbi for a blessing. The Rabbi had informed him that on his arrival in the Land of Israel every stone will be a diamond! He related to his spellbound audience that on arriving he had looked and looked and all he had seen was...stones! Not a single diamond on the ground. Imagine his disappointment! What had happened to the guarantee that he had been given? So fiercely did Rabbi Menachem Mendel believe in the promise that he

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would see diamonds that he fasted for forty days straight, eating only at night! On the fortieth day he opened his eyes, looked out of the window and saw...diamonds!

Don't think that Rabbi Menachem Mendel made a special meal because now he was rich. Don't think that he went to the grocery store and bought all the requirements for the meal with a stone he picked up off the ground! Quite the opposite! For the store owner and everyone else, all the "diamonds" were still stones.

No, Rabbi Menachem Mendel was celebrating the moment that he was able to recognize the diamonds that were all around him, but that he had never been privy to see before. He was celebrating his new-found blessing to be able to cut away, just like a master jeweler, the unimpressive, the unprepossessing, exterior to reveal the magnificent opulence that lies underneath.

You know, Yom Kippur is the culmination of our own forty day period. Starting on the first day of the month of Elul there is a special period of time for intensive introspection. It is time that is specifically dedicated to identifying that priceless gem buried deep inside of us and to beginning the process that will bring it to the surface and turn it in to a pure source of light. Just like a rough diamond, our

*neshamot* must be polished and shaped; turned into something that refracts G-d's light. This will only happen when our *neshamot* have become cleansed of the dirt that has accumulated around them. For forty days we polish our *neshamot* - it's a painstaking business. Hair's breadth by hair's breadth, we slowly begin to remove the grime. Day by day, every second must be dedicated until the last day of the process when we can unveil our pure, polished, radiant *neshamot* to the world.

Yom Kippur is that day. The last day, the fortieth day is the final test. The last exam to see whether we are worthy of being put on show by the "Master Jeweler." In effect, Yom Kippur is the ultimate jewelry exhibition - and we are the exhibits!

Let us hope and pray that by the end of this Yom Kippur we succeed in our goal; that every place we go, we will be exhibiting the cleanest, purest, most exquisite diamond in the world. One that people will immediately recognize who the "Artisan" was and point at it and say "I, too, want such a *neshama*!"

*Rabbi Lauffer lecturers in the main Ohr Somayach campus in Jerusalem.*

# A Few Quiet Moments

by Rabbi Dovid Kaplan

During the advance toward Yom Kippur, the subject on everyone's mind is *teshuva*. Some soul-searching, regret and a commitment to better behavior in the future are most definitely de rigueur at this time of year. Yet the judgment itself still hangs in the balance and everyone would like to come out with a favorable one.

The Gemara tells about a difficult period in the life of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, known to us by the honorific "Rebbe." For thirteen years, Rebbe experienced continuous, excruciating pain, part of the time due to a mouth condition and part to what seems to have been a kidney stone. Think about that. Two of the worst types of pain

known to man, and Rebbe went through them nonstop for such a long stretch. What did he do to deserve such suffering? What was the meaning of these afflictions?

The Gemara says Rebbe was being punished for a lapse in the degree of sensitivity expected of him — a lapse that would probably not even be noticed in the behavior of any of us. Rebbe, however, was no ordinary person, and he was therefore held to a very exacting standard. What happened was that a calf was being led off to be *shechted*. Painless as *shechita* is, the calf preferred to stay alive, so he put his head against Rebbe in a gesture indicating that he wanted Rebbe to rescue him.

Rebbe responded in one sentence. "Go," he said. "That's what you were created for." That's it. That was the whole

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incident. One sentence. But for Rebbe, at his level, it was considered inappropriate.

The Gemara further discloses what happened that put an end to Rebbe's agony. His maid was sweeping the house one day and came across some little rodents. She was going to sweep them out, but Rebbe stopped her.

"The verse states that G-d has mercy on *all* of His creatures. Let them be.' In Heaven at that moment it was decided that since Rebbe was merciful he would be granted Divine mercy and his suffering would cease.

Now let's think about this for a moment. Thirteen Elul had come and gone. We may be sure that Rebbe utilized them to the fullest for introspection, good deeds and *teshuva*. Thirteen Rosh Hashanas and Yom Kippurs, with his unimaginably lofty prayers. Yet none of it helped relieve his pain. It took a concrete act of mercy aimed at apparently insignificant little creatures to bring about his being spared.

Our Sages teach a principle that encompasses this idea: "One who is merciful toward creatures will be granted mercy from Heaven: 'Creatures, of course, include human beings — and human beings include a person's family members and students. Not only strangers and casual acquaintances should be on the receiving end of our merciful actions. Our nearest and dearest, first and foremost, are the ones who should trigger our mercy sensors.

So often we verbally swat children and students unjustifiably. Of course, not always. Sometimes they must be put in their places and quite sternly, but there are many

times when it's not so. Does a three-year-old really deserve a good holler because you've had a tough day? Can a student be granted clemency from punishment instead of facing intransigent authority based on the letter of the law, in the name of principle? Countless examples come to mind.

It's a good idea for every individual, at some point before Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to find a few quiet moments to think about his or her treatment of those around him. During recent talks at a yeshiva and a seminary, I told the students that if they'd really like to know what in their interpersonal misdeeds need fixing, they'd be wise to ask their dormitory roommates. Boy, will they find out some interesting information — whom they've been disturbing with late-night noise, who's been irritated by someone sitting on her bed, who's been hurt by the use of "innocent" nicknames, who doesn't appreciate practical jokes.

Parents and teachers can and should do the same. Consult your "housemates" to find out their view of your behavior. And make it easy for them. Tell them to be frank and speak freely, and don't interrupt or become defensive. Accept what they say like the "mature adults" we tell them to be. And then think about what they tell you. If there's any validity to what they've said, act on it.

With that in mind I wish one and all a happy and healthy year and a *ktiva v'chatima tova*.

Rabbi Kaplan a Senior Lecturer in Ohr Somayach's Jerusalem Campus.

## Rosh Hashanah Yiddle Riddle

**Question:** The Talmud says that you say a blessing when you see a friend whom you haven't seen in a long time. As the Shulchan Aruch states: "One who sees his friend after 30 days says '*Shehechyanu*' (the happiness blessing); and after (not having seen him for) 12 months he blesses '*Mechayeh Hametim*' (Blessed are You...who revives the dead)."

What is different about not seeing a friend for a year that it requires a different blessing, the blessing of the revival of the dead?

**Answer:** Every year on Rosh Hashana we are judged regarding whether we will live or die. So if a person hasn't seen his friend during any normal 12 month period, his friend has undergone a life or death judgment and been thus far saved from it.

• Sources: *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 225:1*

## Yom Kippur Yiddle Riddle

**Question:** On one historic Yom Kippur, the entire Jewish people ate and drank and were praised for it by Hashem; when did this occur?

**Answer:** When King Solomon built the Temple, Yom Kippur occurred during its seven Inauguration Days. The Sanhedrin decided that not only must the Inauguration Sacrifices for the Temple be offered but, moreover, the people must cook, eat, and drink on Yom Kippur or else the happiness of the Inauguration would be incomplete. (See Tractate Mo'ed Katan 9a.)

# Ask!

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## Why No Hallel on Rosh Hashana?

**From: Arthur in Chicago**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Since in addition to being the beginning of the New Year, Rosh Hashana is also the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, why don't we say Hallel on Rosh Hashana as on other days of Rosh Chodesh?*

Dear Arthur,

Good question.

Since Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgment, each person should feel anxiety and awe. He should guard against levity and anything that distracts him from the awe of judgment.

So great is awe of judgment among Israel on Rosh Hashana that despite its being a festival, they do not recite the *Hallel* song of praise recited on the New Moon or festivals. For *Hallel* is said only with a joy-filled heart, whereas during the days of judgment there should be more fear and trembling in Jewish hearts than rejoicing.

Thus our sages taught, "Said the angels before G-d, Lord of the Universe, why does Israel fail to utter song before you during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur? He replied, When the King sits on the throne of judgment and the books of life and death are before him, can Israel utter song?" (Rosh Hashana 32).

Nevertheless, a person should not be saddened by fear of judgment. One should have a haircut, wash, and wear special clothes in honor of the festival. A husband should also give his wife a gift in honor of the day, and buy treats

for the children. This demonstrates our faith that G-d will show us favor.

So we find that when Ezra the Scribe read the Torah before the assembly gathered on Rosh Hashana, and all the people wept on hearing the admonitions of the Torah, Ezra and Nehemiah said to them, "Do not mourn and do not weep. Go eat delicacies and drink sweet drinks and send gifts to whoever has no food, for the day is sacred to our Lord" (Nehemiah 6:10).

Similarly, our sages taught: "Usually, a person who has a judgment pending against him dresses in black and neglects his appearance in worry of the outcome. Israel however is different. They dress in white, they eat, drink and rejoice in the knowledge that G-d will perform miracles in their behalf [and forgive them]" (Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashana, ch. 1).

## Physical Feetness

**Anon from Australia wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,  
What is the rationale behind the prohibition of not wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur?*

Dear Anon,

The shoe symbolizes the physical body. Just as the shoe encases the lowest part of the body and allows it to ambulate in the world, so too the body encases the lowest level of the soul and allows it to ambulate and relate to the physical world.

Therefore, whenever G-d wants a person to relate on a totally spiritual level, ignoring the body, He commands him to remove his shoes. This was true when G-d spoke to Moses and to Joshua; it was true for the kohanim in the Temple in Jerusalem, and it is true for every Jew on Yom

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Kippur. We ignore the physical for one day a year, and to symbolize this we remove our leather shoes. Leather specifically, because it came from a living creature and hence symbolizes the body in a much more graphic way than other materials.

The shoe is also removed in a ceremony called "chalitzah," as follows: If one of two brothers dies childless, it is a mitzvah for the widow and the surviving brother to marry each other. If the brother refuses, then the widow is to remove his shoe, signifying that he does not deserve physical comfort or even a body, because he refuses to give a physical form to his deceased brother's soul.

## Virtual Forgiveness

From: E. T. in Denver

Dear Rabbi,  
Is it permissible to ask for mechila (forgiveness) over an

email network rather than in person? I know it's not preferable, but many of us work in large networked environments. We considered the option of sending it receipt-requested to a specific address rather than an all-points broadcast. Thanks!

Dear E. T.

There are two components in achieving forgiveness from someone we have wronged. One is the initiative of asking for forgiveness; the other is the granting of the forgiveness. Ideally, we try for both. While doing so in person is the best way to appease someone, it is not always possible. Asking for forgiveness in a written letter, over the phone or in cyber space is also acceptable particularly when the person responds. Nevertheless, even if a person doesn't confirm his forgiveness, in the pre-Kol Nidre confession a Jew says that he forgives anyone who wronged him, and prays that Heaven will inspire others to forgive him as well.

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