



Rosh Hashana



English version

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THE ART OF BLOWING SHOFAR

The reason we blow the Shofar is so that G-d will remember for us the cries of Sarah, when she heard the news that her son Yitzhak had been sacrificed, and let it be an atonement for us. The sound of the shofar's blast, is teaching us how to pray, with a broken heart, and how to wail over our sins. (Midrash brought in Kaf Hachaim 590;5)

The way we blow the shofar is learnt from the mother of the wicked General, Sisra, as she waited, looking out the window, for her son to come back from war. He never returned, because Yael had put him to death. Sisra's mother cried 100 cries, and we blow 100 blasts from the Shofar to parallel that. (Rosh Hashana 33b. See Tosafot)

There is no greater yearning, in human relationships, as that of a mother waiting for her only son to return, knowing that he may never come home again. The Shofar is an expression of yearning, of wishing were back home, close to G-d. The word שופר is the same numerical value as ירושלים; as we yearn for Jerusalem, the sacrifices of the Bet Hamikdash, the relationship with G-d we once had.

How ironic that the headlines of the present world news talk about President Sleepy Joe, falling asleep on the Prime Minister of Israel speaking about the loyalty of the Jewish people to America, just a week before Rosh Hashana. It reminds me of the sleepy Achashverosh in Shushan. *בְּלִילָה הָיָה נִדְרָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לְהַבִּיא אֶת-סֵפֶר הַזְכָּרֹנוֹת דְּבַרֵי הַיָּמִים וַיִּהְיוּ נִקְרָאִים לְפָנָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ* On that night, Achashverosh's sleep was disturbed, and he said that the book of

memories, the chronicles, should be brought and be read before the king. The Talmud tells us that it was not just the King Achashverosh's sleep that was disturbed that night. It was also the "slumber of the King of the World" that was disturbed on that night. (Megillah 15b) G-d doesn't sleep, but when we sleep in our relationship with Him, He makes it as if He is sleeping in His relationship with us, allowing everything we rely on to crumble in front of us, putting us in danger. We wake ourselves up, spiritually, with the Shofar, and this "wakes up" our Father, as well.

And what does the King of the World do, when He wakes up? He opens the books of Zichronot, and has the "Chronicles" read in front of Him. He remembers everything, especially the things that everyone else forgot, as we say on Mussaf Rosh Hashana, the part of the prayers that scare me, personally, the most. *כִּי זֹכֵר כָּל הַנְּשַׁכְּחוֹת אֹתָהּ*. *Because You remember all forgotten things.* When a person sins and remembers it, and is always trying to repent *וְהִטָּאתִי נִגְדִי תִמְיֵד*, then G-d "forgets" the sin. (see Yerushalmi Peah 1, 1) But if a person "deletes" the sins from his memory, G-d does not forget those sins. And the opposite is true, as well. When a person remembers the good thing that he did, and feels "Wow! Look at how much I have done! I have done enough in my relationship with You, G-d! I remember how much Tzeddaka I gave, how I once prayed with my whole heart, and I was once a good Jew, I must be a real Tzaddik ..." G-d makes it as if He forgets those good deeds. But if a person busies himself with new Mitzvoth, with



new Torah learning and is so busy running after new Mitzvoth that he “forgets” how many good things he has done, G-d remembers those forgotten things, forever and ever.

It is just a matter of hours before you are invited to come to court, to be judged. To come to G-d with some sort of improvement, no matter how small, that He will judge your future with. The blowing of the Shofar has in it the power to rip up all the evil decrees, and to silence the Satan. ש- שטן ו-ואין פ- פגע ר-רע (Abudraham) We are lucky we have the Shofar, but how does it do what it is supposed to do?

The Chatam Sofer would explain the “prayer” of the Shofar with a Mashal. There was once a king whose children got lost on the road, because they did not follow the map that their father had given them. They went very far, and for a long time, they couldn’t find their way back home. As much as they would cry and call out, the king did not hear them, because they were so far from him. Until they said to themselves, maybe WE forgot how to reach out to our father? How can we let him know that we want to come back to him, if we forget the way he wants to hear us talk to him, in the language that he understands? All we have to communicate with him is just our voice, without words! Maybe he will recognize it is us, when he hears our voice alone, without a language that he does not want to hear!

In my travels fundraising for Sefardic Yeshiva students from low-income families, I have learnt, the hard way, that each person has his way of preferred communication. Reuven will only respond to you in Whatsapp. Shimon will only notice you, if you SMS him. You can only talk to Levi, if you call him by phone. Yehuda, on the other hand, can be reached only in person. Yissachar will respond only by a letter from the post office. What is the way to reach G-d?

The language that G-d relates to and wants to hear is the prayers that are Shofar-like. It is a prayer in which words come from the heart, not from the mouth, alone. The Shofar is that cry, one of no words, a cry of closeness, or yearning, of awakening. It is a type of prayer that comes from a

bent over, humbled heart, like the bent-over shape of the Shofar. It is the language that G-d wants to hear, because He is שומע קול שופר ומאזין תרועה ואין ... שומע תרועת עמו ישראל ברחמים *He hears the sound of the Shofar, and He listens to the Teruah, and there is no one else who is like G-d (in His ability to hear this). He hears the Teruah of His nation Yisrael with mercy.*

Two questions. What is the difference between “hearing the sound of the Shofar” and “listening to the sound of Teruah”? And what does it mean that “no one is like Him”? How does He hear the Shofar differently from the way that anyone else hears it? Any simple person can hear the Shofar sound!

A prayer of a צבור, of a group of people, is the most powerful prayer. צדיקים is the acronym of צדיקים בינונים רשעים. There are prayers of the Tzaddikim, who are compared to the Shofar, that come across, loud and clear, to Heaven. But then, there are the prayers of those who are trying to improve, the ones who have a lot of ups and downs, and sometimes more downs than ups. The prayers that come from a broken heart, from a real cry of the heart, a קול דממה דקה. And even though this person is very far from G-d, and his prayer is just a faint sound in Heaven, G-d listens very closely to his prayer, too. And no one is like G-d, in His ability to hear that cry, that Teruah, from the Benoni and Rasha. Because no one can understand the sinner who has repented, like G-d can. No one can value the teeny, tiny, genuine improvements, like G-d can. He, like a father, can see past all your shortcomings and know that you actually, finally, are beginning to return to Him. (Pri Megadim)

The prayers of the Rosh Hashana are brought up to the highest place in Heaven, by the Shofar. The prayers of Rosh Hashana bring up, with them, the prayers of the whole year. There have been a lot of prayers, but too many prayers without soul. Shofar gives all the prayers, of the whole year, a soul. The Talmud tells us, מצרפה למעשה טובה. When someone has good intentions, but isn’t actually able to do a good deed, G-d considers it as if the person has done the good deed. (Kiddushin 40a) The interesting thing is, the Hebrew word for

considers is מהשיב, not מצרפה. Why do we use the word מצרפה, which means, joins, fuses, combines?

The answer is that there are a lot of times when people do Mitzvoth, or when people pray, but they have no intent, no Kavana. They perform by rote, mindlessly, going through the motions, just an empty body without a soul. G-d does not want heartless, mindless Mitzvoth and prayers. So what does He do? He takes the good intentions of the one who did not merit to carry out his intentions, and He combines, fuses and joins them to the one

who actually did the good deed, but with no heart. This is why it is so important to be part of a Tzibbur.

This is what happens on these days, regarding our prayers, as well. G-d is going to take all of our heart, all of our kavana, all of our intentions, and connect it to all the prayers and services that we did, throughout the year.

Make sure you are ready to come to shul with your whole heart, at least on Rosh Hashana.

NEVER READY ENOUGH

Rosh Hashana has three seemingly unrelated main themes. 1. It is a day of crowning G-d as King, negating completely, that there is any “independent” force, such as “nature.” *Malchuyot*. 2. It is a day of judgement, a day of renewal of the world. *Zichronot*. 3. It is a day of Shofar, a day of תקעו בהדש שופר = הדשו מעשיכם, שפרו מעשיכם. A day of renewal, a day of resolution to be a better you. *Shofarot*. What is the connection between these unrelated three?

There is an age-old question: Wouldn't it work out nicely if we had a Yom Kippur, a day of atonement and cleansing, before Judgment Day, not after? Wouldn't we be more ready for judgment, after ten days of teshuva?

Another question. The prophets Nechemia and Ezra tell the people who were crying, afraid and doing Teshuva on Rosh Hashana, *Don't mourn, and don't cry, ... Go, eat good food and drink sweet beverages, and send presents to those who do not deserve it, because today is a holy day to our Master; Don't feel down, for the delight of YKVK is your stronghold.* (Nechemia 8:10) What is wrong if the people are doing Teshuva, having regret for their misdeeds, feeling scared of judgment on Rosh Hashana?

Rosh Hashana is not a day to regret, or to mention your sins. You should not even be eating nuts, אגוז, as they have the same numerical value as חטא, sin. The time for regret is Elul, and the days from R H until Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashana, itself, is a holiday, as it is a time of connection. One is not

supposed to bring himself to tears on Rosh Hashana, because that would be focusing on your sins, putting yourself in the spotlight, not concentrating on how great G-d is and what your relationship is with Him. The Arizal cried a lot during Rosh Hashana prayers and said that one who does not have tears “fall upon him” in these days – it shows that his soul is not complete. This does not mean tears of regret, but tears of relationship, connection and closeness.

There is an interesting word used in regard with making a relationship, or a covenant: *brit* ברית. The interesting expression is, כורת ברית. “Cutting” a covenant. Why would the term for making an everlasting relationship have the word “cutting” in it? Isn't cutting a relationship almost an oxymoron? (Examples of oxymoron: sweet sorrow, deafening silence, loud whisper, seriously funny, love hate, wise fool, act naturally, alone together). I believe that the answer is that in order for you to have a relationship, you need to give up something of yourself. You need to cut something out of your “space” to make space for the new relationship. G-d will always make space for us, and this is why G-d will forever forgive us, for He is in this eternal relationship with us. He “sits” on a כסא רהמים ומתנהג, כרוב, בהסידות, which is the acronym of כרוב, the Cherub, that is in a relationship with the other Cherub, the Jewish People, יִשָּׁב הַכְּרוּבִים הַזִּקְיָה (Tehillim 80 2) When we are in a relationship with Him, He judges us favorably and forgives. Of course, when we judge favorably, it is because we recognize the fact that there are things that we can't possibly know.

But G-d knows everything. So, what does it mean that He will judge us “favorably?” שׁוֹבֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל עֵד יִקְנוּ אֱלֹקֵיךָ כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעֵוֹנֶיךָ. *Return, Yisrael, to YKVK your G-d, for you have stumbled in your sin.* When you have a relationship with G-d, when you return to Him, He judges you as if the sins that you’ve done are not the real you. You stumbled! It was just a blunder! כַּשַׁלַּת! This is how powerful it is to focus on the relationship, and not on the sin itself, and G-d will make space for you as part of His covenant.

What is the greatest cause of preventing a person from repentance? When G-d made Man, the Torah uses a very misleading word, to teach us a lesson. וְנַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ. Let us make Man in our image, and similar to us. (Bereshit 1; 26) This sounds like G-d was not alone in creating Man, *chas veshalom!!!* But it was still worth it to use this very misleading expression, for the lesson it teaches Mankind: G-d took counsel from the Angels! What?!? The Creator of the angels is going to consult with them, to ask for their advice? We are being taught a lesson in humility, to ask counsel even from those smaller than us. When Moshe was writing the Torah, he said to G-d, “How can I write this *passuk*? It is so misleading!” G-d answered, Write it! Whoever wants to make that mistake, will make it! Even if G-d had written “I will make man,” the haughty person would misinterpret it, because he wants to. The root of all sin, of all our mistakes, of not having a relationship with G-d, is haughtiness. If we learn humility, we can make space for a relationship with G-d, and there is no chance we will sin, or doubt G-d’s Oneness.

The number one cause preventing a person from doing Teshuva is feeling he is on top of the mountain, alone in his haughtiness. G-d wants us to ask another for counsel, even those who seem less important or intelligent than we are, because the other person does not have your ego, your passion, your blind spot. Rosh Hashana comes before Yom Kippur, because the first step to Teshuva is humility. Rosh Hashana is the day we recognize that G-d is King, that there is no such thing as nature, that I am not in control of my life, my world, what I have. How humbling! Rosh Hashana

is the first step toward a relationship with G-d, because of the humility it brings us. By cutting out some of my ego, I can see the world from a vantage point different from my own. As a matter of fact, the whole prayer of Rosh Hashana is that I am nothing; I am not worthy; I am not ready to be judged and I never will be. How so?

There is a word that is seemingly redundant in our High Holiday prayers, the word ובכן. The Avudraham writes that when we say ובכן, this is the same ובכן as found in the *passuk* וּבָכִן אָבוּא אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-כֹדֶת *And so, despite the fact that it is not appropriate, I will come to the king.* (Esther 4 16) Esther said that she was coming to King Achashverosh just because Mordechai told her to, even though, according to the palace etiquette, she should not have done so. So, too, we approach G-d, risking His anger at our behavior, only because He has commanded us to speak to Him. This is a fundamental principle in prayer. You can have the “audacity” to come to speak to G-d when you are not ready, as long as you *know* and *feel* that you are not ready.

The humility we have, the fact that we are willing to get along with others, to join and consult with people who we may feel are “less” than we are, is the first step to making G-d King. What is holding us back from crowning Him, is our self-centeredness and living as if we are king. וַיְהִי בִישְׂרוֹן מְלִדָה בְּהַתְאַסְּףָה רְאִשֵׁי עָם יַחַד שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. The way we make G-d King is through being one with the rest of His people, through humility. These are the words that we say in the introductory prayer on High Holidays אֹהֵלָה לְאֵל אֶחָלָה פָּנָיו *I shall await the L-rd; I shall entreat His favor. I shall ask Him to grant my tongue eloquence. In the midst of the congregated nation, I shall sing His strength. I shall burst out in joyous melodies for His works. The thoughts in man’s heart are his to arrange, but the tongue’s eloquence comes from the L-rd. My Master, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise.* We do not even have the right or the merit, to open our mouths to praise Him! All we have to offer is our humility, our recognition that we can never be ready enough, worthy enough, and the fact that we are amongst His nation!

This is the flow of the three seemingly unrelated concepts of Rosh Hashana. We accept that G-d has control, and we have none; we humble ourselves, and then we reignite the relationship. *Malchuyot*. This is done before G-d judges us, so that when G-d looks at all of our sins, He does not judge us as sinners, because of the renewed relationship. *Zichronot*. And then, after acquiring humility and disassociating with our identity as a sinner, we are ready to do Teshuva. *Shofarot*, שפרו מעשיכם.

It always bothered me, coming to Rosh Hashana, proclaiming G-d is King over the world, when I did not behave like that all year. What a liar! But that is not really how it is in reality. שְׁחֹרָה אֲנִי וְנֹאֲהָהּ (Shir Hashirim 1;5) : – שחורה אני כל ימות השנה ונאוה . אני ביום הכפורים . *I am black all the days of the year, and I am beautiful on Yom Kippur.* (Midrash) How does this make sense? What an oxymoron! Black and beautiful?!

There was once a royal knight, who was asked to be on duty at the river on the outskirts of the country. He was to stand at the bridge by the river border, and at a specific time and day, the king would pass by in his chariot. Then, the knight was

to salute the king. Once, it happened that the king was late. The knight, garbed in royal splendor, began to perspire heavily. His discomfort was so great, that he decided to take a quick dip in the river. A minute after plunging into the refreshing waters, he was aghast to hear the sound of the king's chariot, approaching. How can I salute the king, in my condition of undress, he thought!!! But, how can I not salute him? Trembling with shame and fear, he did salute – expecting the worst of punishments. To his relief and amazement, the king ordered that a great reward be given to this noble knight. What an oxymoron!!

לֹא-הִבִּיט אֵנוֹן בְּיַעֲקֹב וְלֹא-רָאָה עֵמָל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה אֶלְהֵיוֹ עִמּוֹ וְתִרְוַעַת מַלְךְ בּוֹ: *He did not gaze upon the immorality in Yaakov, and sees no perversity in Israel, YKVK His G-d is with him, and the trumpet blast of a king is among him.* (Bamidbar 23; 21) What does this mean? When we fight our Inclination, our Amal, and we lose, G-d does not see those sins. Why not? Because when we are fighting our inclination, we ask G-d for help, for we can't fight our Inclination alone; we are in a relationship with Him, the King, in our hearts, תרועת מלך, from the root of רעות, friendship. (Netivos Shalom)

THE SILENT WITNESS

Your best chance at judgment on Rosh Hashanah is to take it seriously. Rosh Hashanah is the time that G-d judges how much you value life as an opportunity to serve Him better. And the “impression” you make on Rosh Hashanah will be the New You for the New Year.

“You don't get a second chance to make a first impression”. Social science states that after the first 3 seconds, people you meet decided subconsciously if they like you or not. G-d gives you a week to decide what type of impression you want to make, and that will be the New You for the New Year. A lot is at stake during the next week. R. Moshe Shapiro, shlita, was quoted as saying that Rosh Hashannah is the Rosh, the Head of the new year. The whole body is encapsulated in the head; the brain runs every part of the body. And your behavior on Rosh Hashana has control over your

behavior for the coming year. The rest of the year depends on your RH performance.

Recently, I moved apartment in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem. And when moving a family after 10 years, you have a lot of decisions to make. The most common of all decisions was what to throw away and what to keep. My wife and I concluded that the rule of thumb should be something I read in the field of maximizing space and organization. If you had no use out of the item for a whole year, you most probably could get rid of it. The space in your house has more value than the item. Don't waste space on things you don't need or on things that have little importance.

And then, I started shaking. I realized that is what Rosh Hashanah is all about. G-d decides on the upcoming fateful day who used his potential, and who was a waste of oxygen. G-d keeps us around

to bring G-dliness into the world. G-d kept us around last year, for He decided, that we would fulfill a purpose to justify our being around last year. He believed in us. And now, there is judgment, to see if our merits outweigh our misdeeds. Just like an employer checks to see if his employee is bringing in more than is being spent on him. Is it worth keeping me around? Or do I get tossed out, *chas veshalom*?

But G-d saves the day. תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום. *Blow the Shofar in the (new) month, when (the moon) is covered for our holiday.* כי חק לישראל הוא. *For this (day's) law is (a day) beyond logic for Israel. It is a judgement day for the G-d of Yaakov.*

Notice that Pesah and Sukkot are on the 15th of the month, Yom Kippur is on the 10th, Shavuoth, on the 6th, and only Rosh Hashanah is on the first of the month, when the moon is covered. בכסה ליום, "the holiday when the moon is covered". The moon is symbolic of the Jewish people, as mentioned in Birkat Halevana. The similarity between the two is that both the moon and the Jewish people have times when their light is strong and full, and times when our light is weak – then, we are not noticeable. The Jewish holidays, Pesah and Sukkot, are when the moon is full, to commemorate the times when the Jewish people shone in its full glory. So, why is Rosh Hashanah on the day when it looks dark for us? When the moon is covered?

The Zohar says that on the day of Rosh Hashanah, when G-d is judging the world, the Satan levels his accusations against. "G-d! Your children have sinned!" G-d asks the Satan, "Who are your witnesses? My Torah says that I accept testimony only if there are two witnesses". So the Satan goes to the Sun, and brings him as a witness. For surely, the Sun can testify to all the sins of each and every Jew. And the sun testifies. And then the Satan goes to look for the Moon to be the other witness. But the Moon is out of sight! It is covered! The Satan has only one witness, when G-d's Torah requires at least two! This is why we are celebrating Rosh Hashanah, that the moon is covered! And this is

why G-d judges us on Rosh Hashanah. (יערות דבש) (דרוש י' כ"ה אלול/ מדרש – זוהר חלק ג' ער"ה) This is the only way we get out of the sticky judgment. And this is why we are not to mention our sins on Rosh Hashanah, so that there won't be another witness against us! The gentiles, who do not follow the Torah, accept one witness. So the sun is a witness against them, making judgment against them more difficult. But the Jews have this חק, this Torah law, that another witness is needed to get someone in trouble.

I wondered what this means, that the Moon is covered, so it cannot testify against us. Why can't the Satan find the moon? Can't the Satan see in the dark? Can't the moon testify, even if it is covered?

The answer is that the moon is not just covered. The moon has the power of renewal, and when the moon is covered, it is undergoing renewal. The secret of the Jewish people is that they are able to renew themselves. G-d judges us on Rosh Hashanah by the impression we make on that day, more than anything else. As the Shaarei Teshuva (141) cites the Yerushalmi, אם זך וישר הייה לא נאמר. G-d tests how you are now. Rosh Hashanah is a time that you are in the process of renewal. And just as the moon is a different moon, you are a different person. The Satan cannot use the moon, the epitome of renewal, to testify against a nation of renewal. You are a new person, and the Moon knows that the testimony on the old you cannot be used against the new you.

There is one reason why I believe it is fair for me to ask for another year. Because now, I am a year smarter. I have realized what my weaknesses are and what my strengths are. That is why, for a whole month, I am admitting sins, beating my fist against my heart, soul searching and thinking of my sins between the Shofar sets. Because I know that when I am coming into the New Year, I realize where I can go and where I can't. I realize what stresses me and what builds me. And I realize that without G-d, I am nothing.

Maybe, just maybe, G-d will give me another chance to be a better Jew!

A BAAL TESHUVA FROM CHELM

The Masters of Mussar teach us that Teshuva does not mean to be better. It means to be different. The fellow who discovers that he got on the wrong train cannot just get up and sit in the opposite seat, facing the direction in which he wants to be going. He's got to get off the train. Find where he went wrong. And start on a new track. When people discover that they have gotten themselves into a habit that does them no good, the solution is never on the same plateau as the problem. Only uprooting and starting again can make the difference.

This we find in the words of Rabbeinu Yonah in his *Iggeret Hateshuva*. There is only one way to do Teshuva: It is by seeing yourself as a new person and starting afresh. Getting into the "now" and making sure that you do your best that any past mistake will not be repeated. It is not to live in the past and in regret. Regret is an acutely painful feeling, and one that has its very specific time and place. Regret can be effective only AFTER a person has changed. Despite the fact that Teshuva is a combination of *קבלה על הרטה* and *העתידי*, *Regret for the past* and *Accepting a new path for the future*, Teshuva does not start with regret. (This may be the reason why G-d made Rosh Hashana before Yom Kippur: to teach us that before we work on atonement, scrubbing the sins of the past by means of regret, we must initiate a new beginning.) And most people get so busy with regret that they just never do teshuva, no matter how much they try.

This is true about most things for which we would like to do teshuva. We usually attempt teshuva on things that we feel bad about. And then, we get so busy feeling bad about them that we get sidetracked and end up not rectifying them. Regret, says R' Yonah, should be reserved for *after* change. When someone recognizes faulty behavior in himself, he should first figure out what new habits need to be adopted. He should put the new behavior into practice, and only then, after he has already effected a change, can he go through the hell of regret. Why in this order? R' Hutner writes that the Mitzvah of Teshuva is a Mitzvah Temidit, a *constant* mitzvah that can and should be done at any time, in any place. We learn this from

the words of King David *והטאתי נגדי תמיד*. Even so, *this refers to the part of Teshuva that involves making changes for the future, not to regret*. Regret, in its deepest essence, has its root in anger, in not accepting one's past self or behaviors, and is a close cousin to rebuke. The word rebuke is usually understood by us as reprimanding others. R' Hutner points out *that regret is actually rebuking oneself*. And, says R' Hutner, just as rebuke is a mitzvah, so is regret. The problem is that just as rebuke is something that most people are not capable of doing properly, (especially nowadays) so, too, is having regret for sin. Although regret is necessary, it must be approached and felt in the proper way, with caution. It is very hard to rebuke others properly, and no less difficult to rebuke oneself. It's also hard to recognize one's personal strengths, while regretting actions that resulted from the opposite: from personal weakness. Therefore, says R' Hutner, regret cannot be a Mitzvah Temidit. This is ironic, because most people who want to do Teshuva for something in the past just cannot seem to get the regret out of their head, making it somewhat Temidi. That is the only part that should *not* be Temidi.

The town of Chelm decided to build a new synagogue. So, some strong, able-bodied men were sent to a mountaintop to chop down trees for long beams to build the holy building. The men put the logs on their shoulders, four at a time, and trudged down the mountain to the town below. When they arrived, the town chief yelled, "Foolish men! You should have rolled the logs down the mountain!" The chief went up to the top of the mountain and kicked the last log. The log rolled down the hill very smoothly. The men agreed this was an excellent idea. So they trudged back up the mountain with the heavy logs still on their shoulders, and rolled them back down again.

Let the mistakes of the past be the lessons for the future, *but don't waste the future feeling bad about mistakes of the past*. We might even lose our creativity to change our behavior due to our feelings of inadequacy, due to our feelings of regret over slips and foolish mistakes that have been

made. We need that creativity to find a new way, to plan a different path for the future. It is hard to plan a new direction, to figure out where you want to go, when you are looking out of your rear view mirror.

On a similar note, I have found the following to be very true while coaching people. When a person tries to break a negative habit, many times he finds himself in a losing a battle. His conscious and rational decisions lose to habit and the subconscious. “Stop smoking! Stop eating unhealthy or fattening foods! Stop thinking negative or improper thoughts!” None of these commands seems to work. Neither does “Stop being afraid! Stop spacing out! Stop feeling down! Stop laughing ! Stop crying! ” When one tells himself what *not* to do, or, better yet, makes a negative command to the subconscious, it disobeys. Why? The subconscious accepts only suggestions of what *to do*: not commands of what *“stop”* doing or *“don’t do”*. It simply deletes the “don’t”, and carries on with the rest....

In Elul, there are two ways to do teshuva. Stop sinning!. Stop gossiping!. Stop! Or start doing something else. The subconscious knows how to get a person to continue doing something, even though he has made a rational decision to stop that behavior. So, instead of telling your body to stop a

certain habit or obsession, thought process or emotion, tell yourself something to *do*, think or believe. The fellow who is on a diet, who is hungry, should not say to himself *stop desiring the caramel dream chocolate cream and peanut butter whatever*, rather *reach for a carrot* instead. The cigarette smoker should not tell himself smoking kills, you will die younger, or anything else that implies desisting and has not helped him stop smoking until now. Instead, he should *chew on a pencil*, or something else. The person who has a fear does not stop being afraid when he tells himself to stop being afraid. (Eventually one starts to worry that he cannot control his worries.) But if he asks himself rational questions, “*What are the chances of this happening ? What are the advantages of having such a fear?*” then there is a better chance that he will deal more effectively with the fear. Why ? because the subconscious does not listen to commands so easily. But it will learn from a new way of behavior, answering an effective question, new body language (posture/physiology) or action. It will listen to a positive suggestion, where there is no resistance or habit.

If we stay in regret, if we stay at the stop sign, we will never change. If we want change, we must come up with new behaviors, new thoughts, new tactics and new beliefs .

BLASTING THROUGH TO OUR TRUE SELF

I’d like to present three puzzling teachings of our Sages concerning the shofar we blow on Rosh HaShanah, and explain how they can all be understood through one fundamental concept.

First of all, why do we use a ram’s horn, and not the horn of some other animal? The Sages tells us that this “brings up before G-d the memory of Isaac bound on the altar, prepared to be offered up as a sacrifice.” G-d then promises to view us as if we prepared *ourselves* as a sacrifice before Him” (*Rosh HaShanah* 16b). Now, we might wonder, does G-d really need symbolic reminders of Isaac’s self-sacrifice? The moments of history lay before Him like the words on a paper before the eyes of the reader. G-d does not need a symbolic horn to

recall Isaac bound on the altar, and the ram which ultimately substituted for him.

Another puzzle: Our Sages explain that we sound the shofar blasts twice on Rosh HaShanah – once while congregants are seated and then again while they are standing in prayer – in order to “confuse the Satan.” It will cause him to fear that the Final Redemption has arrived, and that his career is over. We want to confuse the Satan so that he does not testify against us during these crucial moments of judgment. Now, again, we might wonder about this: How can a ram’s horn confuse an angel – especially the angel who specialized in confusing us all year round! Hasn’t he learnt already from thousands of previous Rosh Hashanahs that this is

not the shofar of the Final Redemption, but rather just the shofar of the Jews in the synagogue on the Day of Judgment?

One more question. In the Mussaf prayers on Rosh Hashanah, we speak of G-d this way: *כי שומע קולך שופר אתה ומאזין תרועה ואין דומה לך One who listens to the sounds of the shofar, and you hear the Teruah sound, and there is none like You...* This seems to imply that G-d has a special ability to hear something in the sounding of the Shofar that no one else can. What can this possibly be?

The key to all three of these puzzles is *the unique capacity of the shofar to wake us up spiritually and put us in touch with our core desire to act in accordance with the will of the King of Kings, and to serve Him with our entire being like our Patriarch Yitzchak.* This desire is deeper than any personal desire, will, or want. Although we may not have been fully cognizant of it (in ourselves or others) during the year, it is still deep within us. It is an unspoken emotion, one that can only be awakened and expressed through the sound of the shofar – a sound that emanates from the soul itself. Not everyone can hear this, and no-one can hear it like G-d. At the crucial moments when G-d judges us in accordance with who we are then and there, we want more than anything to reconnect to this core emotion and will.

We may have been oblivious to the secret of the shofar during the entire year. We may have acted in a manner that was not in accord with this core will. But it is there. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov would say that a Jew is like an onion. The more you peel, the more tears come out. We Jews may have many levels that cover our true identity. But the shofar peels them away. On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, when we wish we would have been able to

be better, more real, more spiritual – and we feel a tear roll down onto the *Machzor* – that is an expression of our true self. And that is exactly how we want G-d to see us when He comes to judge us.

The Satan works overtime all year long to ensure that this does not happen. His mission is to confuse us so that we get out of touch with our true self. When he sees that the core of the Jew is pure and impenetrable to him – an inner will that bursts forth on Rosh HaShanah – he becomes frightened, thinking that he is finished. He knows that if we uncover this level of our true identity, then we will ultimately see the Final Redemption accompanied by the powerful blasts of the great ram's horn.

In the large coatroom of the well-attended synagogue where I occasionally pray, I recently noticed the following sign: *“Beware of pickpockets!”* A few days later, another sign went up: *“Dear thief! The bag you took contains knives and stones that have great value to me, but absolutely no value to you. Please return the bag to its place!”* I figured that the owner must be a *shochet*. For some reason, I could not get this sign out of my head.

I finally realized that this is the kind of message we should all be conveying to our Evil Inclination during these days leading up to Rosh HaShanah. He stole from us our precious inner identity – what we really are deep inside. Indeed, the Evil Inclination's worst crime is to make each one of us feel like “just another person.” Lowering our sense of self-worth and, consequently, our expectations of ourselves, caused us to feel that we are just fine the way we are. These days especially, we should force the *Yetzer Hara* to give us back our true identity – which is more valuable than anything else in the world!

THE PROCRASTINATION PLUNGE

A 60-year-old man is cleaning out his drawer. He notices a note from the shoemaker, dated 20 years back. He never got around to picking the shoes up, and he had completely forgotten about them. He decides to add some spice to life, to check if the shoemaker is still there and if his shoes are, also,

still there. As he passes by the shoemaker's shop, he notices that it is still open, and the same guy is there, just he is 20 years older.

“Sir, I came to pick up my shoes that I left here, 20 years ago.” “Do you have a receipt that you left the

shoes by me?” “Yes.” He pulls out the slip and shows it to the shoemaker. The shoemaker takes the slip and goes to the back room, to look for the shoes. Shuffling can be heard, as things are moved around, and about 10 minutes later, the shoemaker calls out. “Mark? Are you Mark?” He says, yes. The shoemaker calls out, “Come back tomorrow. Tomorrow your shoes will be ready.”

After working with students for many years as an effective learning specialist, I realized that academic students don't necessarily want to know how to speed read, improve memory or focus. They are interested in one thing: getting homework done. There are four things that hold students back from getting homework done after they have succeeded in absorbing the information given over in class, and it is important to identify what, specifically, is holding them back. I write the causes in order of their frequency. 1. Procrastination. 2. Time management. 3. Motivation. 4. Distraction.

We are all like high school students who need to get our homework done, i.e., some sort of Teshuva, before Rosh Hashana. Procrastination is commonly confused with laziness, or thought of as being a result of laziness. In fact, they are not at all connected. Laziness is defined as being “disinclined to activity or exertion.” Procrastinators don't put things off because they don't want to work. Instead, procrastinators tend to postpone tasks they don't want to do, in favor of tasks that they perceive as either more important or more fun. The shoemaker is not, necessarily, lazy. He just procrastinates, gets busy with the other shoes, with taking customers, with doing the books, paying his bills. The student who does not do homework is not as much a lazy student as he is one who needs help overcoming procrastination – which is a more important lesson for life than school itself. One study found that 70% to 95% of undergraduate students procrastinate, when it comes to doing their homework. Researchers have found that procrastination can negatively impact your grades by as much as five points...which might not sound serious, until you realize that can mean the difference between a B- and a C+.

When a person starts doing something that is more pleasurable, he doesn't necessarily forget what he had to do. What happens in procrastination, is, that we start other actions that we just want, and suddenly we get plunged into doing those not so important actions, as if we need to finish them. As the Ramban teaches us the psychology of the procrastination plunge. לְמַעַן סְפּוֹת הַרְרָה אֶת הַצִּמְצָה
When we translate these words literally, the meaning is hard to understand. In order to add the satiated with the thirsty. (Devarim 29;18) The commentators explain these words in different ways. The Ramban (different than Rashi) explains that the physical component of one's soul, the “nefesh”, is usually sated with what it needs. But when a person tastes a little bit of his desires, he develops a thirst, a hunger, for that addiction or passion. After tasting the desire, whetting the appetite, the Nefesh develops a passion. Before, Nefesh wasn't so hungry. Now, it is starving. A person thinks, I'll just have one small bite, I will just say one thing about that guy, I'll just look once, I'll take just one puff, I'll just hold on to the grudge a drop more, I'll just sleep in on Sunday,... and I will fill my desire with just a tiny drop, a small amount. After just a taster, I won't need it anymore, or even want it anymore. Wrong!! The Yetzer Hara works in the way of משביעו רעב , you give it a finger, and it takes your whole hand. When you whet your appetite, you develop a passion. Your want turns into a need.

Our teenagers want just one quick video game, a drop of entertainment, one song, a small schmooze or just one more chapter of the book. But when you choose to do a not-so- important activity before a more important activity, for just a few minutes, you develop a passion you cannot overcome, and you get dragged into it. I call it the procrastination plunge, and free choice is somewhat taken away.

The passuk is telling us, that G-d does not hold us as accountable for not withstanding our temptations as much as He holds us accountable for not withstanding that first taste, the seemingly innocent “sampling”. We are held accountable for allowing ourselves to get involved in unnecessary situations – situations which were, actually, avoidable. (Bava B. 57b) איכא דרכא אהרינא רשע.

allowing ourselves a “taste”, we are guilty of opening the opportunity to sin. G-d holds us accountable for getting involved in things we did not need to, when we did have the strength to fight the sin, and only along with the accountability for the taster, are we accountable for the sins we have no strength to combat, and they are added to the prosecution.

When we do Teshuva, it is not enough to just regret and stop sinning. **וּמִנְדָּה וְעֵינֵי יִרְחָם** And one who admits and leaves behind will be granted mercy. (Mishlei 28;13) We need to leave the scene of the temptation. We need to leave the cookies in the super-market, we need to leave the grudge of the past behind, we need to leave our access to inappropriate things. The biggest sin is allowing yourself access to the sin, or not creating for yourself the circumstances that will make it easier for you to implement your higher-valued activities and goals. **אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רִשְׁעִים וּבְדַרְדָּרָה חַטָּאִים לֹא יֵשֵׁב**: Fortunate is the Selfie steps to overcome procrastination.

man who never walked in the counsel of the wicked, never stood in the path of the wicked, and who has never sat where the scornful sit. (Tehillim 1;1) If he did not go, how did he stand? If he did not stand there, how did he sit there? And if he did not sit there, how did he scoff? This is to teach you, that if he went, he will end up standing. If he stood, he will end up sitting. If he sat, he will end up scoffing. (Avodah Zarah 18b)

I used to be a self-help addict. I would read endless books on self-help, a book a weekend, believing that knowledge is power. Until I realized that knowledge, itself, is not power. Implementation is power. I call myself a self-help addict because I was procrastinating on implementation by spending time amassing knowledge. Everyone knows that the secret to losing weight is burning more calories than your intake, and the secret to financial stability is to spend less than you earn. The pivotal point of power is the mastery of implementation, and the skill of overcoming procrastination.

1. One of the biggest reasons people procrastinate is because they catastrophize, or make a huge deal out of something. It may be related to how tough, how boring, or how painful it will be to complete the task; whatever the case, the underlying theme is that doing the task will be “unbearable.” This is why I recommend the 5-minute rule: A cognitive behavioral therapy technique for procrastination, in which you set a goal of doing whatever it is you would otherwise avoid, but do it only for five minutes. If after five minutes it’s so horrible that you have to stop, you are free to do so.
2. Procrastination comes in many forms. For example, there is a fine line between perfectionism and procrastination. When you say “I want it to be good. I want it to be perfect,” what you’re really doing is not doing your work. People with perfectionist tendencies tend to wait until things are perfect in order to proceed—so, if it’s not perfect, you cannot be finished. Or, if it is not the perfect time, you believe you can’t start. This all-or-nothing mentality can hold you back from starting or completing tasks.
3. Plan your day, week, month, year in advance. This is not a big task. It should take only about 10-15 minutes of quiet time, each day. Do the most difficult and most important things first, and work your way down to the easier stuff.
4. As you start to tackle items on your list, pay attention to when thoughts of procrastination start to creep into your mind. If you find yourself thinking “I don’t feel like doing this now” or “I’ll have time to work on this later,” you need to recognize that you are about to procrastinate.
5. Accountability partner (not your spouse). This can quash procrastination, because when you hold yourself accountable to your accountability partner, you won’t allow yourself to succumb to lame excuses.

6. Deadlines. Make sure that your goals have deadlines, otherwise, you can drag on with the same task for twenty years, like that shoemaker.

ROSH HASHANA SURVIVAL KIT

My 8 year old daughter came back from school and brought home a beautiful concept. Her Morah, her teacher, was displaying the Shofar to the class, showing them its shape, its colors. *One end is thin, while the other end is wide.* My daughter raised her hand from the back of the classroom. “Morah, didn’t you teach us that when we do Teshuvah, Hashem says פתחו לי פתח אחד של תשובה כחודה של מחט ואני פותח לכם פתחים שיהיו עגלות וקרניות נכנסות בו *Open up for Me one Entrance of Teshuva the size of a needle’s hole , and I will open up for you entrances that wagons can pass through!* (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5, 3) My daughter asked the Morah, “Could this be a lesson that we learn from the shape of the Shofar, that Teshuva, for us, is just to start, to take the first step, and Hashem helps us out with the rest, opening up gateways to connect to Him?” Allow me to expound on this concept.

The Shofar is amazing, for, in appearance, it is quite unimpressive. It looks like a simple horn, but it is the strongest weapon of the Jewish Nation. כי *For the Mitzvah of the Shofar is a Hok, a Mishpat of the G-d of Yaakov.* Hok and Mishpat both mean statute. But the difference is that Hok is a law whose meaning we do not know , while Mishpat is a law that we can understand. This sheds light on the Rambam... אע”פ שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזירת הכתוב, רמז יש בו *Even though blowing the Shofar on Rosh Hashana is a Law for which we are given no reason, still, the Shofar comes to hint something to us.* עורו עורו ישינים משינתכם והקיצו נרדמים מתרדמתכם והפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם *It is to wake us up from our spiritual slumber...* (Rambam Teshuva 3; 4)

There is a self- help gem buried between these words. If the Shofar is intended to be a “wake-up” call for us, why does the message have to be hinted at? Why does the Torah not just go straight to the point and tell us that we are to wake up and do Teshuva? The answer to this question is the secret to waking up spiritually. A person can wake up

spiritually only if he uses his brains, his creativity, expending effort to figure out what he should be doing, from the hints that life throws in his path. Only if he picks up the hints that G-d is sending him. If you tell someone off, they just do not listen. You’ve got to hint it to him. *Let him realize it on his own.* The Shofar does not have an explicit meaning. Because, *there is nothing that can be more meaningful and powerful than an observation you come to on your own.* My daughter came up with an eye-opening insight, her own meaning of the Shofar. So, I made my own observation about her observation.

It is annoying when we get “woken up”, and we find ourselves unable to change. It is something like when you wake up late and you have to catch a train,... but you can’t find your shoe. You’re awake, but you are jammed. You are so trapped in your behaviors that even if you wanted to change, you couldn’t do it. You have been trying to “get things moving” during the whole month of Elul, but you seem to be, still, in the same place. You can’t stop speaking Lashon Hara, even if you want to . You can’t learn more Torah, even if you try. You are just like a person who is walking up a downward escalator. How sad.

But then, the Shofar screams out; it tells you that you’ve got it all wrong. G-d did not ask you to change. He asked you to try. Not even try your best. Just try. Keep trying, and He will open the doors of change for you. He will accept you, as long as you accept Him, and let Him into your life, even just a crack.

The Point of A Needle

Why does the Midrash talk about the hole a needle makes in a cloth? Why not the hole a nail makes in a piece of wood? Because in order for someone to repent, one needs to soften himself up, being as pliable as material, not stiff, like wood. Only then

can one do real Teshuva. What does it mean, to be soft, like material, or stiff, like wood?

There is a great saying. From the moment I heard it, it has just been floating around in my head. “*A person is always in one of two modes. Either אין עוד מלבדו , or, אין עוד מלבדי.*” A person is always in one of these two zones. *There is nothing else in the world except G-d. Or, There is nothing else in the world except for Me.* You cannot be in both zones simultaneously. We say, or are supposed to say, each morning in the beginning of Shaharit. ומותר אין האדם מן הבהמה... Literally, there is no way in which Man is superior to an animal, other than the fact that Man has a Neshama, while the animal does not. The Kotzker spices up this saying with his unique Hassidic wit. The only plus of Man over the Animal is the ability to be אין , or “unimportant”. I.e., an animal is always thinking about its own survival, or אני , Me. Betsy the Cow, is worried about Betsy, and Rexie the Dog, is worried about Rexie’s dog food. Humans can transcend themselves, be considerate, and let others’ priorities be a priority. Being considerate of others, instead of being self-centered, helps Man bring G-d into his personal world.

Now, let’s play around with the letters of אני , Me. If we bring G-d into Me, i.e., if we move the letter ך , the letter of G-d and the letter of the Neshama,(see Zohar in beginning of M.Ruth) into the center of Me, into the center of our priorities, into the center of the word אני , then we get the word אין , Nothing. I am nothing, without G-d. This ability to make room for G-d in our lives, to put Him in the center of our priorities, is the greatness of Man over animal. But, if the spiritual part of Me is the last priority, the ך gets pushed to the end of

the word, and all that is left is אני , and “he” is nothing better than an animal.

The difference between a garment and a piece of wood is that a garment makes room for a needle and thread, it has room inside it for something other than itself. A piece of wood, has no room inside it for anything else, and so the nail is only wedged into it. One can do real Teshuva only by opening a crack just big enough for the letter ך to enter. As long as a person’s thoughts revolve around himself, his money , his fame and honor or his temptations, there is no room for “hints”. There is no room for G-d.

The “latest” in psychology is that for an addict to overcome addictions, he has to recognize the fact that he is addicted. That he is *not* in control. He needs to pray to G-d to help him change. It is the only way to overcome habit. G-d. אלמלא הקב”ה עוזרו (Kiddushin 30b) The bent shape of the Shofar teaches us this lesson of humbleness. כמה דכייף איניש דעתיה טפי מעלי (Rosh Hashana 26b) . The more a person humbles himself during Rosh Hashana, the better. This is the lesson that we are to learn from the bent Shofar. To bend ourselves, and allow G-d in.

And one last word about the point of a needle. If you have ever blown a shofar, you know how it feels to channel all the air, everything you’ve got, into that one point. If your strength is spread out over too much territory, you cannot change. You need to have just one point, that you want to change. You give all you’ve got to G-d by just changing one thing. That’s how you make an opening, an Entrance of Teshuvah, by directing all your energy to make a small change in your behavior, the size of of a needle’s hole.

24 HOURS AT MACY’S

My five year old daughter came back from kindergarten and sang me a song. The song spoke about a mother that saw a cute dress for her daughter in the store window. 50% off. She passed the store for ten days, every day reminding herself that she wanted the dress; she just needed to find

the time to go in and buy it. *When she finally found time to stop in*, she asked for the dress. “Sorry, the sale is over.” “*But I was so busy, I did not have time to come in...*” “Sorry, ma’am. The sale has expired.”

It was a **מציאה**, a find, a good deal. But it slipped through her fingers. She felt bad; the dress would have been so cute on her daughter. And then, my daughter sang, **דרשו ה' בהמצאו** – *Seek out G-d when He is to be found – this refers to (doing teshuva in) the ten days of teshuva , from the beginning of Rosh Hashanah till the end of Yom Kippur.* The words of the song were a great lesson. When Hashem is *to be found* means a time when you can get close to Hashem “at half price.” You can do Teshuva at half price. It is a *find, a מציאה*. All year long, Teshuva can be done, but only with a longer procedure. During these days, there is a *ten days’ blowout clearance sale*: all you have to do is *seek*. Seek G-d. And how is this done? How do we seek G-d? For that, we need to *seek time*. Time to spend alone and go into our hearts. Time to review the busy daily schedule and see what can be done differently that will make us a drop better and give more quality to life.

Why did my daughter’s nursery rhyme call it a *bargain*? All year long, teshuva means changing your ways, becoming somewhat of a different person. Now, teshuva is half price, because all you’ve got to do is *decide that you want to be better, you want to be closer to G-d, and then G-d will consider it as if you have made the change, as if you have already changed. Just in time for judgment.*

This reminds me of an episode that I laugh about each time it comes to mind. Living in Israel, it is hard to find nice, quality clothes for good prices, so my wife and I decided to do some serious shopping when we went to America for my brother’s wedding. On the day of the wedding, we went to Macy’s. Many items were on sale, with really significant reductions. We were not sure if we really needed everything we had chosen. We had to be on time for picture taking .Time was short. It’s difficult to make decisions under pressure, so I asked the newly trained cashier if he would be able to put part of the clothing on hold for us for two or three days. Right away, he called the manager, and relayed his message. “Sir, our policy is to hold your items for 24 hours.” I knew that we would not be back, the day after the wedding, in 24 hours from that moment. It was 12 noon. Half jokingly , I

asked the cashier, “Does the 24 hours begin immediately from now , or from the end of the business day?” I just wanted to see if there was any way that the clothes my wife had worked so hard to choose could be left on the side for a few more hours the next day. Again, a call to the manager. “The 24 hours begin right now.” And then, partially out of frustration, partially out of wanting to add a little comic relief, I asked him, as if wondering out loud, “Sir, is it possible that the 24 hours can be split up? A couple of hours today, a couple of hours tomorrow, spreading out the hours until next week?” He took me seriously . He picked up the phone and called the manager. “A gentleman, here, wants to know if he can put some items on hold for a couple of hours today, a couple of hours tomorrow, or even next week. Is that under the 24-hour policy of putting things on hold in Macys?” It looked as if it was going to take the manager 24 hours to understand. So, I left the store and the rookie cashier, who was, in all earnestness trying to explain his question to the manager. He must have felt that he had better know the store policy, just in case someone *else* might want to split the “24 hours on hold” store policy.

In those ten days of teshuva that we have, there are 240 hours = 14,400 minutes= 864,000 seconds. That’s it. You can’t put time on hold. You can’t take some time from today, a little time from tomorrow... it is the store policy. Manager’s orders. Take it or leave it. Take it, *or lose it.*

People spend hours seeking out brand names and good quality at discount prices. For the Teshuva bargain this week, you do not even need to spend time and money getting out to the shopping mall, filling up with gas, paying for tolls or parking. You do not even need internet or a credit card. Just park right there on a chair in a quiet spot. Away from internet, Amazon , eBay or anything else in which people immerse themselves in for untold hours. Take out a pen and paper. And start writing whatever you think you may be able to do better this year. And there – you got it! 50 % off. Your earnings are already in your Heavenly Bank Account. And you’ve gotten a better *quality* life. *Same second delivery...*

THE HUMILITY TACTIC

The clock is ticking. We are in a total lack of control of the time, the judgment, the verdict. All we have for self-defense is Teshuva, Tefillah and Tzeddaka. (Rosh Hashana 16b). Rosh Hashana is coming soon, G-d is going to judge me soon, and some time on that day, my fate for the future will be decided. Time flies when you are having fun, and time disappears when you are not doing Teshuva.

This is not a scare tactic. This is a humility tactic. Rosh Hashana judgment is not to scare us. It is to make us humble.

Probably the biggest lesson of Rosh Hashana is that nothing is for granted. All that you have from last year, all of your honor and respect, all of your wisdom, all of your skill, your health, your life, your freedom, your relationships, your very existence, your whole “account”, ... does not transfer over to the new account, the new year, “automatically”, without the King’s decision.

As a coach, I have seen many life changes over the years. People sat with me while they were going through the darkest moments in their life, and then I saw them a year later – the happiest people. Everything just worked itself out; even the wildest of dreams came true. Like having a first child at the age of 60+, like breaking the connection with marijuana, like going from financial depression to making 500 grand in one year, or seeing a close relative being suddenly, miraculously released from jail. Or seeing the boy with a strong stutter, who no one wanted to marry, end up marrying the girl of his dreams. And the list goes on. All those verdicts were given on RH.

Every Rosh Hashana, the Y2K fantasy goes into effect. Before New Year 2000, people were frantic with worry that the computers running very important data were not ready for the switch from 999 to 000. But every year, on Rosh Hashana, we all go to 000. And then, G-d decides what to give us for the New Year. You cannot transfer anything from one account to another, from one year to another – even your right to live – without G-d’s

approval. This is true to the extent that halacha dictates that we recite the blessing, ברוך אתה ה' ,אלוקינו מלך העולם מהיה המתים ,if we did not see a person for an entire year. *Blessed are You, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who resurrects the dead.* What? Your friend did not die! Why this wording?!! Because if you did not see each other for a year, certainly, one Rosh Hashana has passed by. If you passed Rosh Hashana, it is not that you made it out, alive, but that G-d gave you another chance to live. He resurrected you. (Berachot 58b, see Meharsha: Shulchan Aruch OH 225;1) A scary thought. Or, more precisely, a humbling thought.

The voice of the shofar expresses many things: our crying out to G-d, our tears, our request that He remember the Binding of Yitzhak. (Rosh Hashana 16a). It is also G-d’s calling out to us, to waken us from our slumber of Olam Hazei, of materialism and self-centeredness (Rambam Teshuva 3;4). It is the sign to reach for a new perspective of humility, as portrayed by the bent-over shape of the Shofar (Rosh Hashana 26b see Rashi). How does the Rambam say something different from the Talmud? And why does the Talmud, itself, contradict itself?

I believe that it all boils down to humility. When we are humble, we remind G-d of the binding of Yitzhak, “and He considers it as if we had bound ourselves”. And the only way that we can awaken ourselves from the slumber of Olam Hazei is through humility. How so?

Every time we see G-d’s strength, we see His humility. (Megillah 31a) Before creating Adam, G-d consulted with the angels. וַיִּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נִצְעֻרָה אָדָם. *Let us make man.* Rashi says, *Even though the angels did not help Him in creating Man, and there is a place for the hypocrites to focus on, the Torah does not refrain from teaching proper conduct and humility, that a person who is greater should consult and ask permission from those who are less in stature.*

The Midrash tells us the rest of the story. *When Moshe recorded the Torah, when he reached this*

verse, he asked G-d why He would allow an opening for hypocrisy in His Torah. G-d said that He wanted to teach humanity humility, to seek counsel from those who are less wise. The lesson of humility is a great lesson, and if a person wants to make a mistake, misinterpreting, believing that there is more than one G-d, Has Veshalom, then he will make a mistake no matter what is written (Breshit Rabah 8:8). Even if the Torah says “I will make man”.

But why is this lesson of humility so important that G-d is willing to allow a place for heresy? Because once someone is humble, there is no room for mistakes. G-d is so obvious. All questions about Emunah come when one is lacking in humility.

The Alter from Slabodka, R' Eliyahu Dessler, and R Chaim Friedlander all learn from here that the first thing that stops someone from repentance, from uprooting bad habits, is haughtiness. A person thinks within the framework of his desires. *And a person's desires go according to his haughtiness.* How much he thinks he deserves. If someone decides to follow a certain way, even if he is making a grave mistake, no one can stop him. And if someone is haughty, all he wants is his way. One's logic is distorted.

The atom bomb to the Yetzer Hara is humility. אשא אל ההרים *I raise my eyes to the mountains*, to the Yetzer Harah that looks so overpowering. Western Culture, Advertisements, Honor, Money, Fame, Life Challenges, Stress. The *mountains* of the Yetzer Harah. (When Mashiach comes, G-d will slaughter the Satan in front of the world, and to the righteous, the Satan will look like a huge *mountain*. See Sukkah 52a) What is the only weapon against all of this? מאין יבא עזרי. *From אין, from nothingness, from humility, will come my strength.* That is the only help I can get.

Why is humility the only key out of the Escape Room of Desire, Lust and Ego? Because that is the only way one can see outside his four amot, outside his mental schema. The first sin of Man was from the desire to be G-dlike, והייתם כאלוקים. With that first sin of arrogance, we gave entry to the Yetzer Hara into our psyches. And when we get rid of

arrogance, we rid ourselves of lusts, bodily appetites and negative emotions such as anger and jealousy. When we rid ourselves of arrogance, we shake off all negativity, bitterness and grudges. This is why when you find humility inside your heart to forgive, G-d forgives you for all your sins. כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו. (Rosh Hashana 17a)

This is why we read the story of Chana and Peninah on Rosh Hashana. It is the story of Elkana's two wives. Chana was barren; Peninah was mother of 7. Peninah would praise her 7 children to Chana, intending to make Chana so hurt that she would pray with more intent and merit a child. And then, G-d switched things around. Chana had seven sons, and Peninah lost hers. Although her intentions were great, a drop of haughtiness ruined them. Because haughtiness can make you the most insensitive, the most self-centered and the most evil person in the Universe. And on Rosh Hashana we read this story to remind us that G-d can switch all the one ups and one downs we have 180 degrees.

So, what does G-d want from us on Rosh Hashana? How does G-d want us to restart at the start of the new year? *To make ourselves small, so that He can make us great* (Eruvin 13a). Small ego, big man. Big ego, small man. The whole Shirah of Chana is about משפיל גאים עדי ארץ *That G-d brings down the haughty to the ground.* מגביה שפלים עד *That G-d brings the lowly up high.* The Kotzker would say that the reason why G-d brings the humble to the very top and keeps them there is because even when they are on the top, they stay humble. And the reason why G-d brings the haughty to the ground and keeps them there is because, even while they are on the bottom, they remain haughty.

There are seven mitzvot each one of which has the weight of all 613. Denying Avodah Zarah, 2. Wearing Tzitzit. 3. Shabbat. 4. Torah learning. 5. Brit Milah. 6. Tzedaka. 7. Living in Eretz Yisrael. The Baal Haturim, in this week's parasha, lists an 8th. The Mitzvah of Teshuva. Why is Teshuva so powerful? Because Teshuva is the power of humility, and when you master humility, it is as if

you observed all the 613.)See Baal Haturim Devarim 30; 11)

May we all merit a year of happiness, hope, health and most importantly, a year of humility.

THE EQUILIBRIUM HOLIDAY

Rosh Hashana is the holiday of mixed emotions. It is a day of precise judgment, but yet a day of joy. A day to tap into our humility, while we celebrate it as a holiday. I always had a hard time figuring out what state of mind to be in, on Rosh Hashana. To cry, or not to cry? This was always for me a bottleneck of emotions. The Halacha is that I am allowed to cry only if I am brought to tears from the depth of feeling of my prayers. This is the only day of the year that even our tears have an instruction manual. What is all this emotional tightrope? Even in the blowing of Shofar, there is somewhat a mixture of G-d's Attributes. עלה אלוקים בתרועה יקוב בקול שופר (Tehillim 47 6) The Alshich points out that Elokim is the Attribute of Judgement, while YHVH is the Attribute of G-d's Mercy, which is activated when a person taps into Shofar, or שפרו מעשיכם, better your ways. What is the point of this "equilibrium"?

The Sefer Hachinuch explains for us the concept of Rosh Hashana. "It is from G-d's kindness toward his creations to judge and inspect their actions once a year, *in order* that they not sin too much, and that there be a place for kapparah... This day is the day that holds up the world, and that is why we make it a holiday. And because it is a day of judgment, it is appropriate to approach it with fear and trepidation more than any Holiday."

Rashi quotes the Midrash in the beginning of this week's parasha. "Why is it that the Parasha of Nitzavim (literally, standing up) is next to the curses and threats of Parashat Ki Tavo for those who do not keep the Torah? Because after the Jews heard the 98 curses, and after they heard the 49 of Sefer Vayikra, their faces changed colors, and they said, Who can stand up to these?! Moshe calmed them and said, אתם נצבים היום You are standing today; you angered Hashem so much, and yet He still did not put an end to you, and you are all still standing..."

This is hard to understand. Wasn't the purpose of the curses and threats to warn Klal Yisrael to be careful to keep the Torah, every Mitzvah? What was Moshe doing calming them down, diminishing their fear, telling them they don't have anything to be afraid of? Why was he mixing up their emotions?

But the answer is that all that G-d wants is sincerity. He knows who we are, our backgrounds, our weaknesses and our tests. He does not ask of you more than you are able to do. But just one thing: Be serious about it. Once the Jews turned colors, Moshe knew that they were taking it seriously. And this is the purpose of the equilibrium. G-d has a place for Mercy, and that place is reserved for those who take Him and His Torah seriously. Not for the ones who say שלום יהיה לי כי בשרירות לבי אך I follow the dictates of my heart...

Every year, G-d creates the world anew. Rashi, on the first passuk, **בראשית ברא אלוקים** says that in the beginning, G-d wanted to create the world with His Name Elokim, the Attribute of Judgment. Rashi's commentary is based on a Midrash Breshit on the words (in Bereishit), **אֵלֶּה תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם, וְשָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם – בַּיּוֹם עָשׂוֹת יִקְנֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם** – *These are the creations of the Heavens and the Earth, when He created them. On the day that YHVH Elokim created the earth and the Heavens.* The Midrash says, "YHVH Elokim" – it is similar to a King that had empty cups. The King said, if I put hot water into them, they will explode. Cold water, they will implode. What did the king do? He mixed hot and cold water, and he put it into the cups and they remained undamaged. So, HKBH said, if I create the world with My Attribute of Mercy, there will be a lot of sinners. If I create it with the Attribute of Judgment, how can the world stand? Therefore, I am creating the world with a mixture of both Mercy and Judgment, and I hope it will last!

G-d's judgment is meant to prevent sin. The point of Rosh Hashana is that we take this day and think that even if we have sinned, we are happy *to be aware* that we have sinned, and we know what we have to work on.

Recently, a thought came to mind. The letters YHVH are a shortened version of יהוה ויהיה He was, He is, He will be. What does this have to do with Mercy? The Attribute of Mercy is, in Hebrew, רחמים, Rachamim. The Abarbanel (Ki Tisa 34) says that the word רחמים comes from the word רחם Rechem. Womb. What does this mean?

G-d's Mercy does not mean that G-d just lets things pass. וייתור. He does so only with the logic of a womb. The womb symbolizes a place where there is no place. To make room for someone where there is no room for that person to exist. So to, with mercy, G-d created room for the sinner to repent. How, exactly, does He do that?

The womb symbolizes that for the sake of the future, it is worth dealing with the present. Don't look at the present for what it is; look at it with the future in mind. Look at the good that is going to be born. G-d has patience with a person as he is, in the present, because He knows that this person has the **potential for growth and improvement**.

There are three ways G-d finds a place for a person who is, seemingly, undeserving. His past – he may have some merit in his past or from his parents. זכות אבות. His present- באשר הוא שם. Even if he will be bad in the future, for now, he is good. His future – Moshe did not kill the Egyptian until he saw, with his Ruach Hakodesh, that nothing good was going to come out of this Egyptian. Being that G-d is היה הווה ויהיה – He is not bound by time. He is in the past, present, and future, all at the same time. G-d can see things for our merit that we may not see. That is why we cannot explain G-d's decision of רשע וטוב לו – צדיק ורע לו – why good things happen to bad people, or bad things happen to good people. This is an outcome of His הרחמים, the Attribute of Mercy.

So, we say before blowing the Shofar, Alah Elokim bitruah, Hashem b'kol shofar. Elokim – His Attribute of Justice ascends with the t'ruah blast; but His Attribute of Mercy, YKVK, ascends with the sound of Shofar, of improvement. The message of the Shofar is Shipru Maasechem, improve your deeds, and by doing so, G-d will reveal Himself as YHVH and find a place for you, even if you are not deserving, but in the merit of the new you of the New Year.

PREPARED FOR LIFE

Rav Abahu said, why do we blow a Shofar made of a ram's horn (on Rosh Hashana)? G-d said, blow Shofar of a ram before Me on Rosh Hashana, so that I will remember the Akeidah of Yitzhak, son of Abraham for you, and I will consider it as if you performed your own Akeidah before Me. (Rosh Hashana 16a) I always wondered how G-d could consider that we sacrificed ourselves on the Altar to Him? How can anything we do be considered in any way like Yitzhak's self- sacrifice, even in the wildest stretch of imagination? And why does Rav Abahu mention Yitzhak son of Abraham?

It's quite interesting. Out of the whole episode, it is the Akeida, of all things, that G-d remembers. Because that is all that a human being, even one as great as Yitzhak, can do. Prepare. Maybe your

Akeida will not be considered as being exactly like the Akeidah of Yitzhak, but by preparing the way he did, that preparation will be considered a sacrifice, just as it was for Yitzhak.

You see, Yitzhak did not just jump onto the Altar and ask to get it over with. Yitzhak was very prepared. He asked to be tied. The Akeidah is the binding that Yitzhak asked of his father, so that he would not make any movement, causing himself to be *pasul*, unfit as a sacrifice. Yitzhak was also concerned about the possibility that he could involuntarily hurt his father, out of a reflex action. Even in that fateful moment, his thoughts were concentrated on not causing his father to bleed. (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer) He was totally calm about the situation and prepared for it, so he was able to

think about doing the job in the best possible way. Yitzhak asked to be bound, so that he could be totally prepared. For that is all that G-d wants from us. To be prepared to serve Him.

The Noam Elimelech derives the secret of Chassidut from here: if you want to *daven* well, prepare yourself to die *Al Kidush Hashem*. Vision yourself ready to die for the sake of G-d's Name, and your *kavvana* will soar. Each morning before prayer, visualize your very own Akeidah.

Your life is about how well you perform. There is a rule in performance. The 6 P rule. Prior Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance. If you made a parenting mistake, don't blame yourself. Just be more prepared next time. If you schmoozed through your learning Seder, don't feel bad. Just be more prepared next time. If you spaced out through *Shemoneh Esrei*, don't feel like a loser. Just be more prepared next time.

You see, your performance will be as great as your preparation. As a rebbi, I have learned this the hard way. When I am not prepared enough, even if the boys in *Shiur* don't know the Gemara well, they feel that I am unprepared. And they are insulted.

When your Shabbat table is not a Shabbat table – no singing, no connection with the kids, no *divrei*

Torah, most of the time – it's because you, the father, are not prepared. You did not prepare what to say, you did not prepare what to sing, or you did not prepare a topic your kids are interested in. Your Shabbat Table can make the family reach a much higher spiritual level, if you just prepare. It's amazing what a bag of treats can do.

I am not blaming myself, or anybody else. I am trying to understand life. All we do, our whole life, is prepare. Think about what we do most of our productive hours in life. You prepare your house for better living. Prepare for work. Prepare for eating. Prepare for a good sleep. Of course, what ends up happening is always only in G-d's Hands. But He leaves preparation up to us and expects us to prepare.

Scary things happen when we forget to prepare for the important things in life. Preparation leads to making the right choices in life. You can prepare to bring up children, or just happen to have them grow up in your home. You can prepare the necessary attitudes and behaviors that make a tranquil home, or just happen to live there. You can prepare your children for leading a life of serving G-d, or just wait and see what happens.

The greatest things that human beings accomplish are usually the rewards G-d grants for the great efforts that were expended.

THE MEANING OF TESHUVA

The Talmud gives us an example of when a sinner can be considered a genuine *Baal Teshuvah* (penitent): *If he refrains from sinning a second time when he encounters the same woman at the same place and time where he had previously sinned (Yoma 86b).*

This is a rather puzzling test. Must a *Baal Teshuvah* actually return to the same place and the same temptation in order to prove his sincerity? Even more puzzling is the Talmud's mention of going back to the *time* of the sin. How can the penitent possibly accomplish this? We find a precedent for this approach in G-d's response to Yishmael's prayer when he and his mother Hagar seemed to have run out of water in

the desert. When Yishmael felt himself close to dying of thirst, he turned to G-d and cried out for mercy. G-d was about to create a spring of water when the angels tried to intervene: *How can You bring water to the boy whose future descendents will kill Your children through thirst?* G-d responded: *What is Yishmael at present – a tzaddik or rasha? Tzaddik! He is to be judged as he is now – באשר הוא שם* “The *Kli Yakar* helps us understand what the Sages mean by drawing our attention to two key *pssukim* in our *parashah*: “*For this mitzvah is not in the heavens...nor across the sea that you may say: ‘Who will cross the sea and get it for us so that we can fulfill it?’ Rather, it is very close to you; it is in*

your mouth and heart to do it"(Dvarim 30:12-13). In other words, one must not be afraid to do *teshuvah* because he might not withstand the tests that lie ahead. Neither does he need to go to the far ends of the world – to the scene of sin – in order to prove that he will not sin again. Rather, the place of the sin is in the heart. Intense regret can return one to the place and time of sin in order to uproot it. Pain and positive regret can change the heart. They can transform past failure into lessons for the present and future. Change in perception on the part of the *Baal Teshuvah* ultimately result in change of behavior and character. And that is how we are judged on Rosh HaShanah. G-d sees our present state, and how it will result in positive change in the future. What happened in the past does not determine the ultimate verdict. What is decisive is our character and our "re-programmed" heart as we stand before the Supreme Judge on Rosh HaShanah.

Why is this? Because a person's essence is what is in his mind and heart at the present moment.

This concept can help us understand a curious request we make of G-d numerous times during this High Holiday season: בספר צדיקים וחסידיים – *Inscribe us in the Book of the Righteous and Pious*. The question is obvious. If we are righteous, we need not ask. If we are not, why would imploring G-d get us into the Book where we do not belong? How are we to understand such a request?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto explains how *teshuvah* works. *When the thought of pleasure and willingness is removed from the sin, then the sin itself is erased and nullified* (*Messilat Yesharim* Ch. 4). Sin is generated by an evil thought. When we oppose inner negative motives mentally and emotionally, G-d is willing to see us as different people. Although we may have sinned throughout the year, sincere thoughts of *teshuvah* can enable us to stand before G-d on Rosh Hashanah and say: *"I now perceive all that pleasure I derived from the sin as pain. I do not want to continue such actions. I am not the sinful "I" of yesterday. And I am not the "I" of tomorrow, where I might fail another test. Right*

now, I am a better person – the "I" I really want to be"

There is a midrash that can help us in becoming that person we really want to be (*Midrash Aseret Hadibrot* on לא תגזול). King Solomon was once approached by three merchants who suspected each other of pocketing the profits from their successful business trip. King Solomon replied that he would be willing to judge the case the following day. When the three merchants re-assembled, he told them about a query sent to him by the Roman Emperor involving a boy and girl who had promised to marry when they came of age. They stipulated that in case either one would decide to marry someone else, they would first ask permission of the other party. Time passed, and the young woman found a suitable man whom she liked very much. True to her word, she took her fiancé to the door of the man she once promised to marry in order to get his permission. The man kindly accepted the woman's decision and refused the handsome present of gold and precious stones that the groom had brought along to appease him. With real sincerity, he wished the young couple a happy life together. On the way home, unfortunately, the pair was captured by a ruthless band of thieves. The booty was split between them, and the young bride was taken to the leader of the gang. She implored him to hear her story. The head of the thieves somehow found it in his heart to be merciful, and returned the bride to the groom – together with all the gold and precious stones.

King Solomon turned to the three merchants, and asked them to help decide the question sent by the Emperor: Which of the three acted most nobly – the woman who kept the promise of her youth, the man who both gave permission for her to marry someone else and refused the lavish present, or the head of the thieves who could have had both the money and the bride had his mercy not gotten the better of him?

Each one voiced a different opinion, but King Solomon commanded that the one who praised the thief be tied up and whipped. If he praised the thief who had no legal rights to the bride or valuables, then he must be a thief himself! And, of course, the man confessed.

As King Solomon wrote in the Book of Proverbs: "...a man is according to what he praises" (*Mishlei* 27:21). If we praise good deeds, then that is who we are. If we ask to be inscribed in the

Book of the Righteous, it means that we really want to be righteous. And if we are sincere, that is how we are perceived by G-d as well. כן יהי רצון

WRONG SIDE OF THE BED

As Chaikel, the water carrier, was going about his daily chores, he was stopped by the Baal Shem Tov. "How are you doing?" the tzaddik asked. "Rabbi, what do you want me to say," Chaikel groaned. "Life is so difficult and bitter. Every single day, I've got to walk all the way to the well and carry the water back to the village. It's too much for me, too draining. And aside from that, I'm also subject to much abuse from the village's youngsters, giving them the enjoyment of watching a man collapsing under his heavy load."

The following day the Baal Shem Tov posed the identical question. This time the response was different. "Baruch HaShem, every morning I wake up and HaShem gives me strength to go about my business," he answered with a huge smile. "Through my buckets I bring *brachah* into my home. At the end of a long, hard day, I return home to find my wife waiting for me. Without me, she wouldn't be able to survive. All this gives me the strength to continue."

With this, the Baal Shem Tov turned to his students and said, "Chaikel has just helped me understand something I've been trying to comprehend for a long time. There are two contradicting phrases from Chazal (Rosh HaShana 16a). First, they state that a person is judged on Rosh HaShana; but then, it goes on to say, that he's judged daily. Chaikel has just explained this to me."

"As you've just seen, Chaikel hasn't changed his difficult schedule or back breaking work since yesterday, yet his mood has changed. On Rosh HaShana, the day on which it's decided how much money one will earn during the year, it was decided that Chaikel shall receive *parnasah* from carrying water. Every day, however, it is decided what his mood will be, whether or not on that particular day he will enjoy what he's doing." (Story from the sefer **על מועדי השנה**, חיים שיש בהם)

This story relates to us a point that may, at times, confuse us. The story seems to express that *we are not in control of our emotions; rather, the way we feel is subject to Divine Judgment. If one is angry or sad, there is nothing that he or she can do about it. That was the Heavenly decree of the day, due to their actions. The wrong side of the bed that one wakes up on is out of one's control, for it is a Heavenly punishment.*

This is a common mistake. Our emotions, the way we feel, have everything to do with *the way we think*. Waking up on "the wrong side of the bed" is a follow-up of going to bed with a negative thought or belief.

If a person feels strong emotions about something, and we tell him to stop that feeling – *stop being frustrated, stop worrying, stop being angry* – this just adds to the fire. The way we can help to get ourselves or others out of a negative emotion is by finding out what thoughts or beliefs caused it. Guidance to a healthier and more positive way of thinking can be given only when the strong emotion has subsided. Not always are we in control of our thoughts: ironically, if one were to decide not to think tomorrow, he would wake up thinking that he does not want to think! Thoughts come to mind with or against our will. However, we can decide if we would like to entertain a certain thought, and how we want to believe and look at things.

By perceiving life in a certain way, we bring judgment on ourselves. I believe that the Baal Shem Tov was telling his students that *the way we think brings about Heavenly Judgment that determines how we feel. And the way we believe will bring judgment as to what type of "luck" we will have in life. We can learn this from Chana.*

“On Rosh Hashana, Chana was remembered” (Rosh H.10b, 11a). Each year for the Holidays, her husband, Elkana, would bring the family up to Shilo, the place of the Mishkan. Her husband had another wife, Pnina, who *did* have children: ten of them. Elkana would always give Chana a double portion of the holiday feast, for he loved her, and commiserated with her for her being childless. Pnina teased Chana, trying to get her to pray for children at the Mishkan with bitter tears on the holidays. This gave Chana great pain, causing her to lose her appetite at the meals. Elkana came to Chana to console her and said, “Why are you crying? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart bitter? Am I not better for you, as a husband, than ten children?”

We might ask, what kind of a consolation was this meant to be? *So what? Her Shalom Bayit, tranquility at home, is fine. Still, she does not have any children! How can she be happy when she is taunted by the other wife, who has a whole school bus of children, when she is all alone?*

The answer is that Elkana was trying to shift Chana’s perspective to look at what *is* working out and be happy and appreciative for it. It is for her to choose her focus, and she had a beautiful marriage with Elkana. Elkana tried to cheer her up saying that their marriage was everything. Chana was so overwhelmed with pain and bitterness that she was unable to hear Elkana’s attempts to help her. So, she went to the Mishkan to pray and pour out her frustration to G-d.

She made a silent prayer, which, as the first of its kind, aroused the suspicion of Eli, the Kohen Gadol. Something here was strange, so Eli Hakohen approached the woman. When Eli heard of her trials, he blessed her with a baby **ואלקי ישראל** (the word is spelled **שלתך**, not **שאלתך**). Commentators deduce from here that

Eli was telling her, not only will G-d answer your prayers, but he will also give you a baby). Then, she stopped being angry. **ופניה לא היו לה עוד** (Anger was no longer visible on her face). Immediately after she changed the expression on her face from anger to calm, she was remembered by G-d, and she became pregnant. – Blessings follow those who *believe that things will be okay*.

Not only is it important for us to take charge of our thoughts and beliefs for better living; we must repent having negative and invalid thoughts of the past, as well. R’ Ovadia Yosef, shlita, mentioned this in his weekly worldwide class a few years back. The passuk says **יעזוב רשע דרכו ואיש און ימחשבוותיו** *the wicked shall leave his ways, and a strong-minded man (shall leave) his thoughts*. The passuk here is describing two types of teshuva: teshuva from sin and evil ways, and teshuva from thoughts that are invalid – those that are against Torah principles or against the truth. For example, says R’ Ovadia, a person who thinks, even for a minute, that learning Torah is not saving the world, that learning Torah is not keeping our nation alive, must do Teshuva for such thoughts. For this goes against the teachings of our Rabbis, **אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה חוקות שמים וארץ לא שמתי**. Thoughts and beliefs are of great importance, because they determine the way we are going to feel and behave. And it is safe to say that if our belief in G-d – that He cares for us and loves us so much, that He always has only the best for us in mind – is ever weakened, even to an almost negligible degree, it is a serious breach of faith which requires our repentance.

The way we look at things, the way we believe, can instill hope in us. This may even be the way that G-d will judge us. This is what I believe the Baal Shem Tov wanted to teach his students, and teach us all!

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H