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SHOFAR
**The Purpose
of its Sound**

NEW YEAR
**A Holiday
for Mankind**

NEW YEAR
**A Day of
Judgment?**

ROSH HASHANA

**To earn life
we must accept
these truths...**

JewishTimes

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| Authors may not have been advised of reprints of their essays |

3 Shofar

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Rabbi Chait discusses the core principles behind the shofar sound.

9 Holiday for Man

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi Mann explains how New Year is for all mankind.

6 Earn Life

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The sages formulated our New Year prayers to share fundamental truths. A few main phrases enlighten us.

11 Day of Judgment

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

The musaf prayer sheds light on the true nature of the New Year holiday. It's not as we might think.



Rabbi Tarfon said, "The day is short, and the work is plentiful, and the laborers are lazy, and the reward is great, and the Master of the house is insistent."

He used to say, "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it; If you have studied much Torah, you shall be given much reward. Faithful is your Employer to pay you the reward of your labor; and know that the grant of reward unto the righteous is in the age to come."

PIRKEI AVOS 2:14,15

SHOFAR'S SIGNIFICANCE

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

What should a person have in mind when listening to the "Kol Shofar," the sound of the Shofar? In Hilchos Teshuvah (3:4), Maimonides discusses the function of Shofar. Maimonides states that even though the voice of the Shofar is obligatory because of a decree of the Torah, there is also a philosophical concept. The voice of the Shofar is to awaken man from his slumber. It should cause one to investigate his actions, repent and remember his Creator. It is designed for those who forget the truth and waste their time in helpless and vain endeavors. It is to provoke them to analyze their souls, improve their ways and actions, and forsake their evil conduct and corrupt philosophies. This is a very large demand of an individual to be motivated to such a large degree by the simple voice of the Shofar. When one hears the Shofar it should prompt him to do teshuva. A total overhaul of the human personality is summoned by the Kol Shofar. One's entire approach to life has to be changed. Maimonides is not referring to teshuva – repentance – from a specific sin, but rather, a teshuva, which transforms the entire character of the sinner. How does the sound of the Shofar awaken a person to do teshuva? What is so unique about the Kol Shofar that can cause a person to redirect his life's energies and change? (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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SHOFAR'S SIGNIFICANCE

It is apparent that the Kol Shofar must be related to a deep idea, which reflects upon human nature and stimulates one to change the focus of his life. The obvious question is what is this idea and how is it so compelling to evoke such a dramatic response. What is the philosophical principle that Maimonides alludes to?

The sanctity of the day of Rosh Hashana is described in the Torah as “Yom Teruah”, a day of blasts. The Torah is very sparse in its description of the Kedushas Hayom, the sanctity of the day, other than saying it is a Yom Teruah. Why is the Torah so concise when describing the character of this day as opposed to Yom Kippur, where the Torah elaborates the sanctity of the day as a day of affliction? It is evident that these two words “Yom Teruah” must encapsulate the entire character of the day. This also reinforces the concept that the Kol Shofar strikes at the very heart of man, his very nature. The sanctity of the day as a Yom Teruah must embody this concept. How does the mechanical sound of a Shofar express the Kedushas Hayom?

Onkelos translates Teruah as a “yevava”, weeping. The Yom Teruah is a yom yevava, a day of weeping. The Gemara teaches us that the yevava of the Teruah is expressed by the cry of the mother of Sisra. Sisra was a great warrior and waged many successful battles. His mother always anxiously awaited his return and celebrated his triumphs. However, at the time he was eventually defeated, she was looking out the window, anxiously awaiting his arrival as in past battles. As time transpired she started to realize that he was not returning and started to howl. Her crying is described as a yevava. It is that crying that the Kol Shofar replicates. What was so unique about her crying and why does the Gemara cite it as a paradigm for the Kol Shofar?

The Torah describes the Kol Teruah as the sound blown by the trumpets when the Bnei Yisrael moved their camp while traveling in the wilderness to the holy land. When God commanded Moshe to inform Klal Yisrael that it was time to embark, the sound of the Teruah summoned their departure. Onkelos again translates Teruah as a yevava, a cry. Rashi in his commentary states there were three factors that were needed before the camp embarked: the word of God, Moshe's instruction and the Teruah. The traveling of the camp was more than just a practical phenomenon. It symbolized that the entire destiny of Klal Yisrael – the nation of Israel – was in the hands of God. They were in the wilderness and needed the providence and direction from God in order to survive. They were helpless and vulnerable and their destiny was determined by the system the Torah sets out for

their embarking. Three essential components dictated their movements. It had to be the word of God as transmitted by Moshe and summoned by the sound of the Teruah. Thus, the Teruah is not just significant on Rosh Hashana, but it also played a role in the destiny of the nation as reflected in the wilderness. It is interesting to note that the destiny of man cannot be determined by the word of God alone. After the giving of the Torah at Sinai, we require the interpretation of the Oral Tradition by Moshe, our teacher. Without the Torah a person will certainly go astray. A person needs God to direct his destiny but he also needs the teachings of the Torah. Because of man's limitations God alone is not enough; he needs the guidance of the Torah. God does not function alone because the gap between God and man is great. Man, on his own, cannot scale the chasm that exists between him and his Creator. He needs the prophet; he requires the teachings of Moshe to assist him. If he endeavors to close this gap on his own he will undoubtedly fall prey to the philosophy of the idolaters. This failure is exemplified by every organized religion that attempts to close the gap between man and the Almighty. They create their own false and corrupt systems, which cater to their emotional needs and desires. The third element required in the camps' movements were the sound of the Teruah. The sound of the Shofar is essential to shape the destiny of Klal Yisrael. Again we see that the Kol Shofar is not merely a mechanical sound but contains a vital message.

The sound of the Shofar is unique. It is a yevava, a cry. What is this cry? It is the inherent cry of every human that is part of his nature. It is the proclivity of man to cry, a cry of his state of depression. Why is man depressed? The Gemara in Nazir 3b tells of the story of a particular Nazirite about whom Rabbi Shimon Hatzadik commented. He said,

“I never ate the guilt offering of a defiled Nazirite except once. There was a handsome lad from the south who had beautiful eyes and wonderful locks shaped into curls. This lad shaved his head prompting me to question his actions. The lad responded that he was a shepherd and would gaze at his appearance in the well as he drew water for his flock. The lad said, ‘Then I saw my evil inclination was overwhelming me and driving me from this world. I said to it, ‘wretched one why are you arrogant in a world that is not yours...in the end you will be just maggots and worms’. The lad thereby said that he would shear his locks for the glory of God. Rabbi Shimon upon hearing the lads response kissed him upon his head and said there shall be more Nazirites in Israel like you.”

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SHOFAR'S SIGNIFICANCE



The Nazirite was insightful in recognizing that this is a world that is not his. This story personifies man's constant struggle with his yetzer hara, his evil inclination. This lad recognized that man is not in control. The life of instinctual desires and pleasures as proposed by the yetzer hara, only makes sense if man is in control. Instinctual pleasures cannot bring happiness in a world that is not man's. This world is God's world and is governed by the will of the Creator. The lures of the world of instinctual pleasures, fueled by the powers of one's fantasy, is shattered when man comes to the recognition that this world is not his. Man's existence in this world is tenuous and transitory at best, and reality belies the illusion of the world of the physical. This perceptive lad recognized that this is not man's world. Man is but a resident for a short duration. Man cannot control reality, but rather, he must conform to reality and the will of the Creator. Upon such recognition, man can cling to reality by embracing the Source of reality, and his soul can partake of an eternal existence.

The universal cry of mankind is the recognition that man is really not in control. Loss of control is a powerful psychological blow. Man desires to be powerful. The cry embedded in the human soul is that man is not in control and in reality, he is powerless. This world is not man's. He is totally vulnerable and at any moment he could be gone.

The mother of Sisra cried upon the recognition that he was vulnerable. The fantasy that he was invincible was shattered and she cried repeatedly. She cried the cry that exists within every created being. This world is not man's world. It is an "olam she-aino shelo", a world that belongs not to him.

The Torah chose the mechanical cry of the Shofar to convey that our destiny is in the hands of our Creator. This world is not our world that we can control. Rosh Hashana it is a day of Teruah, a day where man cries and acknowledges that this is not his world. This recognition alone is insufficient: it must be accompanied by "Malchus Hashem", God's Kingship. This is the ultimate realization that this world is merely a reflection of God's will and God is the king. His royalty is proclaimed by mankind and is manifest by observing His creations. On Rosh Hashana Klal Yisrael blows the Teruah and proclaims the sovereignty of the Almighty. We are not depressed by the eternal cry of mankind, that this is not his world. We do not create man made religions to pacify our fears and allow us to deceive ourselves by continuing to live life based upon the false world of the instinctual pleasures. We recognize that this world is not man's. Our response is to proclaim the sovereignty of our Creator and cling to the source of reality. We recognize that our destiny is in God's hands and we live our lives as mandated by the teachings of his Torah. When we complete the initial set of our blowing, we recite a verse from Psalms, "Fortunate are the people that know the Teruah, Hashem in the light of your presence we shall walk." This obviously does not mean that we know 'how' to blow the Shofar. We are fortunate that we understand the 'significance' of the sound of the Shofar. Our response is that we follow the light of God's presence and are blessed that we can live our lives based upon true reality, as expressed in the Kol Shofar. ■



ROSH HASHANA

To earn life we must accept these truths

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

To benefit at all from our lives, we must understand our Creator's intent, starting with understanding His purpose in our very existence. As Rosh Hashanna is when God determines "who lives and who dies", we are now amidst an opportune season to examine Torah and the holiday prayers to gain insight into those criteria that directly impact God's Judgment Day, and our verdict.

The prayers speak of God's "writing" and "sealing" our judgment, which take place on Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur respectively. But the prayers also include certain fundamentals for us to consider. The Men of the Great Assembly^[1] who formulated these prayers intended to grant us life by carefully recording truths that will elevate understanding of God. As Rabbi Ruben Gober stated, this in turn entitles us to be "remembered" on Rosh Hashanna, the "Day of Remembrance." Realizing these fundamentals, and following them in action, we can use the Rosh Hashanna prayers to transform ourselves to a person worthy of life. Therefore, it is advisable to pray in the language you understand, and review the prayers prior to this special day. It is also vital to pray with a minyan, so our worth in God's eyes is not solely dependent on our own deeds, but as a member of the Jewish nation. Maimonides taught, "Whoever prays with a minyan has his prayers heard regularly." Before analyzing the brief words of the New Year prayer, let's review the context in which they are intentionally placed.

The Ata Kadosh prayer is recited three times daily all year. Ata Kadosh means, "You (God) are distinct." "Holy" (kadosh) refers to that which is set aside and unique. We know nothing about what God is, only what He has performed. Even Moses did not know God's true essence. We admit to God's unknowable nature with the words "Ata Kadosh." Rabbi Israel Chait taught that this admission is necessary, and is the culmination of the preceding two prayers where we first refer to God as "God of our fathers" a familiar term. We then discuss His planned resurrection of the dead, no longer citing the familiar personalities of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but "mankind" in general. This progression from the patriarchs to the resurrection of man, intends to mature us from relating to God as a "personal" God. We culminate in Ata Kadosh, admitting we know nothing about God. This progression moves man away from viewing God as "my personal God" and viewing God objectively: for an objective view of God is more accurate, and prayer intends to perfect our ideas about God. While it is true that God guided the patriarchs, and us, specific beneficiaries do not define what God is. It is more accurate to say God helps others too (resurrection), and it is even more accurate to say He is removed from all we know, "Ata Kadosh." Even without creation and mankind, God reserves His unique position. His greatness is independent of Creation; His capacity precedes His acts,

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although we cannot speak of time regarding God. His goodness for man does not make Him better. Although it was an act of great kindness to create man, this does not define God, for He is far greater, with no words that could embody that greatness. So we must not end with praising God for assisting the patriarchs, or resurrection, but we must culminate in praise independent of those ideas. King David too ends his Psalms, calling on musical instruments to praise God, demonstrating that words cannot behold God's true greatness. Mere sounds without words convey this amazing point, as Rabbi Chait taught.

It is crucial that we grasp one more point: praise of God is for us alone, as we cannot affect God at all, as if He possessed human qualities and enjoyed hearing our praises. All we do is solely for us, and cannot be "for God." God's commands are to benefit us; this is an act of great kindness. By understanding that God gains nothing from mankind, we agree that the brilliant men who formulated the prayers intended mankind to derive truths and increase our enjoyment in this life by adhering to truth and reality, and abandoning fantasy, the root of many conflicts. Now that we understand that the Ata Kadosh prayer addresses knowledge of God, this directs us to seek greater knowledge of God offered through the Rosh Hashanna additions: truths about God that we do not yet know, or that time and distractions have obscured over the past year. We now have context. Let's now examine the New Year's few but potent additions to Ata Kadosh and discover its penetrating messages.

“And so too, Hashem our God, place Your fear on all of Your works, and dread on all that You created, and all Your works will fear you, and all Your creations will bow to You. And they will all band together as one group to fulfill Your will with a complete heart. As we know, Hashem our God, that dominion is Yours; might is in Your hand and Your awesome fame is on all that You created.”

There is only one creation in which fear and dread of God exists; that is man. All other creations are bereft of intelligence, and thus, all things except man lack fear or dread of God. Nothing else "knows" God so as to fear Him. This prayer, then, attempts to awaken man to the reality we find difficult to accept. Our egocentric predisposition wishes to deny dependence, and our mortality. These Ata Kadosh additions play a primary role on Rosh Hashanna, the day of Remembrance. For as

we said: if we are to be remembered before God, we must attain a level of existence where we live as the Creator intended. Otherwise, our lives are meaningless to Him and He can terminate our existence. Our sole objective is to use our intelligence and arrive at an acute awareness and awe of the Creator, via Torah study and the study of nature. So the Sages who formulated this prayer highlighted this very need, that we become fully aware of what God means.

But they saw that man's ego attachment makes it impossible to initiate an immediate and complete transition from egocentric life, to full subordination to this reality, that we are created and dependent beings. Therefore, they designed this prayer in two steps: 1) that as God's "works" we first "fear" God; 2) that we "dread" God. We can't suddenly accept we were made from nothing; this is too drastic a change in our composure. The Sages realized this, and initially referred to us as God's "works," still maintaining some dignity, but dependent in some measure. And they also only asked we "fear" God. Then, they said we should advance one more step, and identify ourselves truthfully, as "created from nothing." Also, this must be accompanied by a "dread." Dread refers to life, that is, we feel dreadful concerning our tenuous existence. This can occur only when we accept that we once did not exist, that we only exist now due to His continued will, and that God can take our life at any moment. If we see this as true, then we have arrived at the optimum state of truth, and we accept God as the King and ruler over all, including our very lives.

This idea is then followed by man's responses: fearing and bowing to God, respective to those two stages we just mentioned. Man lives not theoretically, but if he accepts something as true, this is naturally expressed in action; i.e., fearing and bowing. This is required as a barometer of our true convictions. Similarly, one cannot be charitable in theory alone. He must give his wealth to be considered truly charitable.

Next, we pray to "band together as one group to fulfill Your will with a complete heart." This teaches that God's will is for a society, not individuals. We become perfected only when we accept others as equals. This is fundamental: God's will extends to all members of the human race, explaining why the word "all" is repeated many times, as in "place Your fear on all of Your works." Living in groups, we are forced to accept God's desire for people besides ourselves. This is part of the grand design, and a crucial element in our perfection. We now understand the term "fulfill Your will with a complete heart." A "complete heart" is a necessary statement when there is a risk that we won't be complete, but divisive. And this only occurs in a society, where I strive

to maintain significance over others. This is most predominant. Who doesn't sense some envy when a peer strikes it rich, receives some award, or builds the most grandiose home? As we are to live in societies, we must be aware of divisiveness towards others, and work to eliminate it, "fulfilling Your will with a complete heart." We must treat others as we desire to be treated.

“As we know, Hashem our God, that dominion is Yours...”

The next lesson is to correct an error. When we discuss such truths, this might imply these truths are not so obvious, and this reflects poorly in our minds regarding God's fame. Rav Hai Gaon taught that the first statement in the Ten Commandments—"I am God"—could not be a command. For this would imply that God's existence is not obvious, and requires a command. Here too, we say "As we know, Hashem our God, that dominion is Yours." We state that this knowledge is known, and "Your awesome fame is on all that You created." God's existence is an inescapable and undeniable truth. We cannot treat it as a newly found concept, for this degrades God's fame and wisdom that is most evident.

“And so also, God, give fame to the Jews...”

But God is not concerned for the Jew alone who recites these prayers. He created all mankind. Therefore the following section of this prayer asks God to promote the fame of the Jew for the sake of all other people, that they too may come to learn these truths. We ask God to give us hope. This means that he fulfills His promises to those who follow Him. For this validates the Torah, and enables hope for all others. Eloquent speech is also sought, as speech is the vehicle to teach others. And we refer to the Messiah as this is God's validation of Torah to the highest degree, that He delivers His ultimate promise for mankind...an era where all nations will abandon their falsehoods and impostor gods, and will accept Torah.

“And so also, let the righteous people see and rejoice...and let all evil vanish like smoke”

Following this section, we describe the righteous people who will exult and sing. This is done, as man requires an example that human perfection is attainable. Talmud teaches that in Abraham's days, his peers doubted his perfection, as they required justification for their sins. "Abraham isn't so great" they said. "He might have followed God up to this point, but he would not sacrifice his son, if God asked." His peers

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degraded Abraham, for had Abraham been perfect in all areas; they would not be able to justify their own lust-filled lives. The Talmud scripts a discussion where God “pleads” with Abraham to fulfill one last test, to sacrifice Isaac. God doesn’t plead, but pleading means it was essential to mankind that a perfected individual fully adhere to God’s word. Such an example of complete devotion to God is required to teach man that Torah is attainable. Thus, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. We now understand why this Torah section is a theme of these awesome days. The concept of the righteous people “singing” conveys their conviction. When one believes in the greatness of another person or group, he cheers or sings as an expression of his convictions becoming realized. For this reason, the Jews sang praises to God their savior upon the shores of the Reed Sea. This section concludes with the vanishing of sin, since we see righteous people living without sin, we hope and pray this empowers all others to follow their lead.

“And You God, reign alone...in Jerusalem”

Next, we pray that God reigns alone. We ask this, as man’s insecurities do not let up; he fabricates imagined powers and forces to protect and provide for him. Man is superstitious; his emotions overpower him, despite the absolute absence of any evidence for assumed powers. Those of you who still believe in segulas, that the Western Wall assists your prayers, amulets, red bendels, or any assumed power other than God, must focus on these words: “God reigns alone.” Although abstract and never seen, God is real, while assumed powers are false and therefore are prohibited. This prayer asks man to live intelligently and accept God alone as the sole source of power for Whom we have evidence and Torah’s testimony, abandoning all other beliefs that offer no evidence. In this prayer, why do we ask God to reign on the Temple Mount, on the land of Israel and in Jerusalem? First of all, this validates God’s promise of Israel to Abraham, and thereby validates the Torah. Secondly, it denies all other religions as true, as God reigns only in Israel. All other assumed gods are thereby exposed as false. It is for this reason that this prayer concludes with the statement “there is no other God besides You.” God and His unity are inextricably bound together. “God” means the “One” Who made the entire universe. He made it alone. All else, by definition, are creations. There is but one Creator.



“You are unique and Your name is awesome”

Finally, we mention that God is one, by citing the verse, “Master of legions will be lofty in judgment.” How does judgment convey God’s exclusive reign as they only power in the universe?

Throughout history, there was only one God who responded to his people’s cries. God protects the righteous Jews. He performed miraculous victories over our enemies. Both testify to the only true living God. Egypt’s idols were defenseless during the Plague of the Firstborn, where God destroyed their idols. Their stone gods could not protect them and all others from any plague. God’s judgment teaches His omniscience and omnipotence. He knows who is righteous and who sins. He rewards and punishes each member of mankind. History attests to this, so much so, that Islam and Christianity could not deny the entire Torah. Therefore they cannibalized Judaism, and transformed it as it pleased their agendas. No other nation claims miracles were witnessed, that their gods acted as gods. No evidence exists defending alien gods as possessing any power, or even life. They are all inanimate stone and metal statues:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have a mouth but do not speak; they have eyes but do not see. They have ears but do not hear; they have a nose but do not smell. Hands, but they do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they do not make a peep from their throat. The who fashioned these gods are just like them; all those that trust in them. (Psalms 115)

All other religions are bereft of any defense for their beliefs. Only in Torah and Jewish history is there clear evidence of God. This must resonate with you.

God’s judgment of every person on Rosh Hashanna forces us to accept the reality that He is the only God. Rabbi Chait taught that we always praise God’s “name” alone, and never praise Him. This is because we cannot know what He truly is. All we know is His name. But this too, is our admission of how far above man is the Creator.

Summary

We must appreciate the efforts of these Sages who drafted our prayers. This prayer alone reflects the tremendous wisdom and benefits they desired to share with all generations. They sought to offer each one of us the best lot in life. How many days and weeks they must have spent weighing each word, ensuring no important concept was overlooked. Realizing this, we might now approach all other prayers with the sense that great wisdom waits to be discovered. I hope this analysis inspires you to treat all prayers with a renewed respect, and even awe. And if we are awed by men, how much more must we be awed by God, in front of Whom we stand in dread as He inscribes our fate. May we all use the brief hours in shul this Rosh Hashanna to arrive at a clear understanding of our status as created things, but primarily, God’s position as Creator and the only power in the universe. With this realization, may God will us to enjoy another year of health, happiness and success in all areas. A happy New Year to all. ■

[1] The Men of the Great Assembly or Anshei Knesset HaGedolah, also known as the Great Synagogue was an assembly of 120 scribes, sages, and prophets, in the period from the end of the prophets since the early Second Temple period to the early Hellenistic period.

Holiday for Mankind

RABBI REUVEN MANN

One of the most significant aspects of Rosh Hashana is its unique prayers. What do Jews pray for on their New Year celebration?

Most people would imagine that, given the awesomeness of the moment—when we appear before the Creator for judgement—our supplications would focus exclusively on our personal well-being and that of family and close ones.

But that is not the case. Our High Holiday prayers, which some Christian theologians have described as “noble,” concentrate on the most sublime matters:

“And so too, O Hashem, our God, instill Your awe upon all Your works and Your dread upon all that You have created. Let all works revere You and all creatures prostrate themselves before You. Let them all become a single society, to do Your will wholeheartedly.”

The main theme of Rosh Hashana is the coronation of Hashem as the King of the Universe. It’s ironic that we are petitioning for the Creator to become Sovereign of the world. The notion of humans praying for G-d is absurd, even blasphemous. (Who would we address such a prayer to?)

Still, we do pray that Hashem should emerge as the world’s Ruler. And we know He doesn’t need our help to become the Master of Mankind. However, His “desire” is that we humans should acknowledge Him as a result of our own understanding and free will. He will not impose Himself on the world.

Therefore, we pray that Hashem should orchestrate the earth-shattering events that the world’s inhabitants will take to heart and proclaim as one that He alone is the Being we must answer to.

The second theme of Rosh Hashana is Divine Judgment.

“...It is true that You alone are the One who judges, proves, knows, and bears witness...Like a shepherd tending his flock, making sheep pass under his staff, so shall you cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living; and You shall apportion the fixed needs of all Your creatures and inscribe their verdict.”

This great “accounting” is not limited to the Jews. On this day, all of G-d’s creations come under his scrutiny, Jews as well as gentiles. And our prayer is that all people of every race and background will unite in accepting the Kingship of Heaven.

Thus, I believe that Rosh Hashana is the most universal Jewish holiday, when we pray for Tikkun Olam, mending and perfecting the world. We want to inspire all of mankind to renounce hatred and affirm the dignity of all people, who are created in the image of G-d.

I therefore respectfully affirm that you don’t have to be Jewish to acknowledge and experience the holiness of Rosh Hashana. All who have been created must recognize their Creator. We must all humble ourselves before Him and resolve to live in a way that brings honor to His Name.

On a purely practical level, all of us, Jew and gentile alike, should be aware that we are being judged, and our fate for the coming year is being determined. Thus, none of us should presume that we have nothing to fear or be concerned about.

We need to look within, examine our deeds, and make amends to those whom we may have offended. This should be a time of repentance and determination to raise our existence to a higher level.

May the Jewish people lead the way, setting the example of wise and compassionate behavior that will inspire the world to follow suit. That is truly our mission as a “Kingdom of Priests and Holy Nation.” Shana tova to all.

Shabbat shalom v’shana tova. ■

Dear Friends,

In this time of “social isolation,” we should seek ways to avoid boredom by staying occupied with meaningful activity. The world of virtual reality allows us to stay in touch with friends and attend all kinds of classes available online. But that can only take you so far. Comes Shabbat and Yom Tov, and you need books, especially on the parsha. I personally recommend Eternally Yours on Genesis <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis> and Exodus <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and my newest one on Numbers <http://bit.ly/EY-Numbers2>. They are easy to read, interesting, and thought-provoking conversation starters. I am especially interested in your feedback and hope you can write a brief review and post it on Amazon.

Day of Judgment

RABBI RUBEN GOBER



Each Jewish Yom Tov (holiday) has its own ‘Tefilas Musaf’ (added prayer) in which the unique theme of that holiday is expressed. For example, on Pesach the tefila mentions that it is the time of our redemption and on Shavuot it mentions that it is the time that we received the Torah. However, when we look at the Musaf of Rosh Hashana we notice that the essential theme of the day is mysteriously lacking. Everyone knows that the basic theme of this holiday is Yom HaDin—the Day of Judgment. The Talmud in Rosh Hashana 16a says that on this day everyone in the world passes before G-d to be judged. Yet, when we search the Musaf, we find that there is no mention of this theme at all. The only reference that we find to the Day of Judgment is in the middle bracha (blessing), that of Zichronos (remembrance) where we speak of G-d remembering all creatures on this day and deciding their fate. However, we are still left to wonder why Chazal (our sages) only inserted this in the greater theme of Zichronos, when we focus on ideas about G-d, rather than constructing a blessing that focuses on our being judged.

Even more curious is how Chazal didn’t even construct a bracha that has at its essence a request of G-d to pass a favorable ‘verdict’. When we think of being judged, we naturally think of going before a judge to plead our case or at least asking for mercy in the outcome. Our tefilos contain no such request. With these observations we are left with some strong questions: Why would Chazal leave out the essential theme of Judgment from the tefila? Why would they not construct a blessing in which we can express our request for a favorable verdict?

One may respond simply that there are specific requests that we make with regards to the judgment. There are four extra insertions that we add in to our tefilos on Rosh Hashana and on the following days until Yom Kippur; these additions contain requests, such as “write us in the book of life” and the like. But upon closer examination, we see that this just raises more questions. Firstly, why are our requests for life and a good year limited to additions and not an actual bracha? Shouldn’t there be a specific bracha formulated for this purpose? Furthermore, the Tur, in Orach Chaim Siman 582, says that these additions were allowed by our sages but only with difficulty. This seems extremely problematic—if the additions are appropriate then why were they only allowed with difficulty? If they’re not appropriate, then they shouldn’t be allowed at all!

Apparently, when they constructed the tefila, Chazal did not want to emphasize the idea that we are being judged. What did they want us to focus on? Let us examine the basic themes they established for the Musaf prayer of Rosh Hashana. There are three brachos unique to this day (what follows is an extremely brief summary of the blessings for reference; a deeper understanding of each one demands analysis beyond the scope of this article). The first one is ‘Malchios’, kingship, in which we speak about G-d as King of the universe and how in the

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future all of mankind will recognize this idea. 'Zichronos', remembrance, is the second bracha; the basic concept here is that G-d is an Omniscient Being who on this day decides the fate of all beings for the upcoming year (again, notice the lack of the term 'din', judgment, in the bracha). The third bracha is 'Shofaros' which expresses ideas behind the commandment to blow a ram's horn on this day; here the basic idea is the distance between man and G-d, as it says at the end "and none is similar to You." All these berachos express ideas about G-d, without any focus on man or man's needs. Even from our cursory examination we see that on the Day of Judgment, Chazal felt that it is inappropriate for us to focus on ourselves, despite the fact that we are being judged. Just the opposite—man must focus on that which is beyond himself and the physical world. Chazal constructed the Tefila in such a way that one must draw his attention to philosophical ideas about God. Of course the question we need to ask is why.

Clearly, Chazal are teaching us that Judaism has a different view of 'Judgment Day'. The Torah's concept of Yom HaDin isn't how most people look at judgment, like a court case for every individual where we sit in front of the judge and argue our case. It's true that we are judged, but in Torah the din, the verdict, isn't based on a simplistic notion of whether we are 'good people' or 'bad people', innocent or guilty. Of course it is true, as many statements of Chazal point out, that there is a verdict passed based on whether we are righteous or evil individuals. However, this really depends on one concept—the state of the soul. Man's level isn't a simple question of his good deeds or bad deeds; it has to do with his perfection and how he has attached himself to the truth. God, of course, is the Ultimate Truth and Existence—He is the Prime Mover of the Universe, upon which all other existences are dependent. For our souls to attain any level of existence we must exercise our 'bechira chofshis', our free choice, to use our G-d given wisdom in pursuit of truth and G-d; only in this way can we attain true metaphysical existence for our soul.

It is based on this concept that we are judged; come Yom HaDin, man really has no right to come before G-d and 'plead his case'. Such a notion is against Torah—G-d knows what level man is on and all that he has encountered in this world. This isn't a court case where man tries to convince the judge of his innocence—such an idea is absurd with reference to G-d. Our notion of Din is totally different—its based

on a philosophical, metaphysical foundation of Judaism, that of the state of man's soul. In Torah, the notion of 'Judgment' means that man must reflect on where he stands with regards to reality for ultimately that is how he is judged; for us, it is a chance to reflect on the true ideas behind the physical universe and give our souls real existence. It is only in this way that we may warrant a favorable verdict.

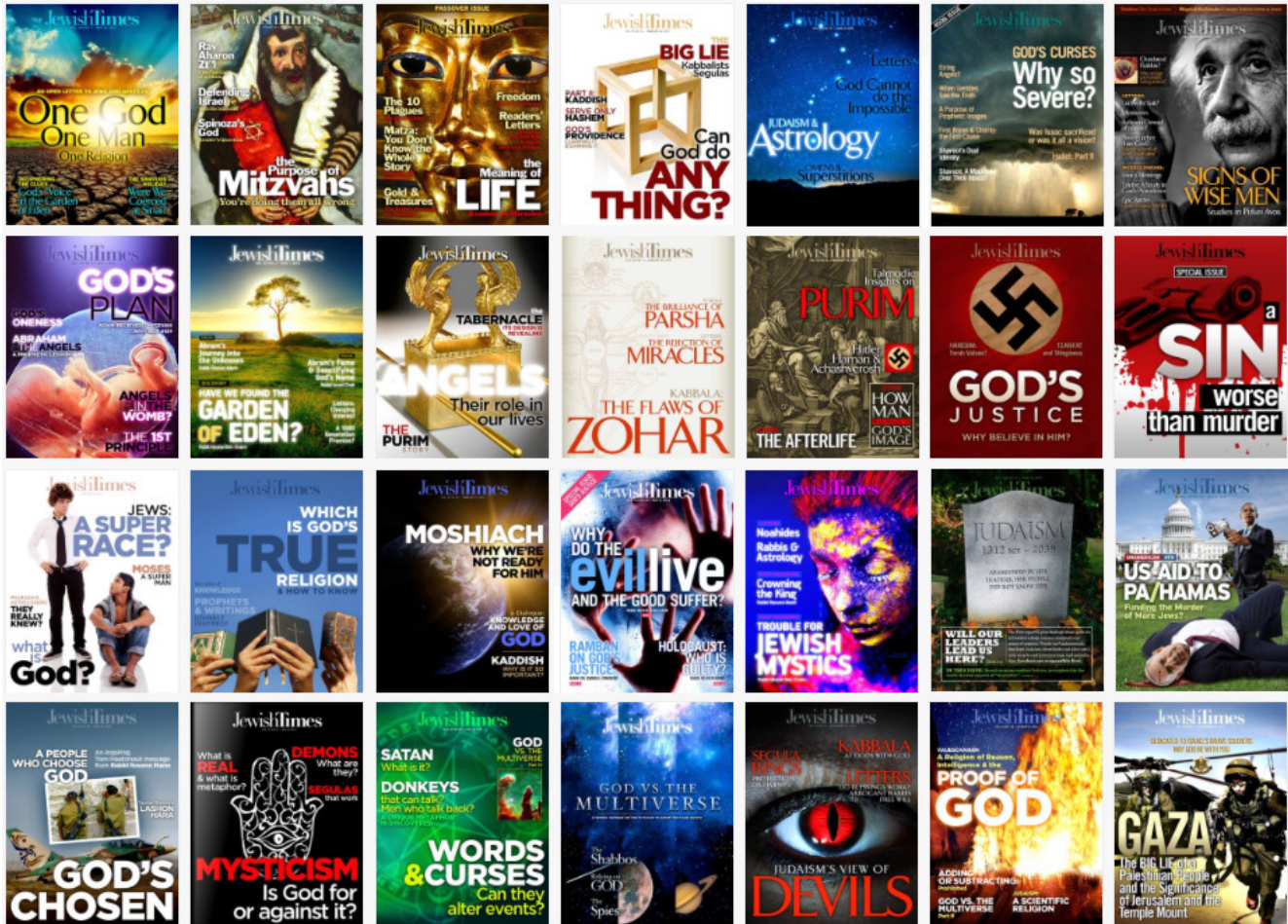
With this understanding of Judgment, we can see why our tefilos don't mention Yom HaDin and don't have specific requests that pertain to the judgment. Chazal didn't want man to be caught up in his own personal judgment; there's no point in it since it won't accomplish anything.

The judgment is based on G-d's knowledge of man and the level of his soul. For man to win a favorable verdict, there is only one thing he needs to do—to reflect on the ideas about real existence, and there is no Real Existence other than G-d.

We may now explain why the Tur writes that the additions in Tefila that contain requests were only allowed with difficulty. Clearly, Chazal didn't want man to focus on his own physical needs on this day and it is for this reason that there is no specific bracha that talks about this. The essential goal is for man to focus on what is true and real, and attach himself to those ideas. However, Judaism doesn't deny human nature, and it is only natural that if man is being judged then he be concerned about himself. Man by his very nature is egoistic and must think about himself and his physical needs. Recognizing this, Chazal made a concession to human nature and allowed for him to ask for a good verdict. However, this was only a concession and Chazal ensured that this idea be clear by only allowing these requests to be expressed as additions in pre-existing brachos. When we look closely at the specific berachos in which the additions are inserted, the first two and last two of the tefila, we notice that these are berachos that focus on G-d and Divine Providence and not man's own needs. It is clear that on this day, the Day of Judgment, our sages wanted to guide us in gaining "real life", focusing on ideas about G-d and giving existence to our souls. ■

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