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ALL DEPENDS ON ME

RABBI REUVEN MANN

**CREATION
& NEW YEAR**

HOW IS IT VITAL?

**God as King and Creator
Man as Creation**

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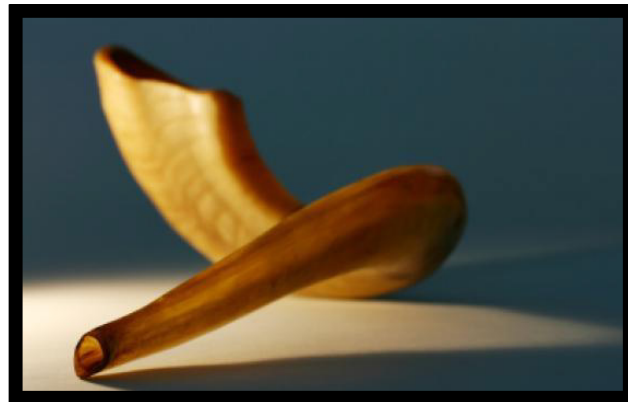
RABBI REUVEN MANN

Applying Moses' stand to help Israel to ourselves on Rosh Hashanna.

5 Vital

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The sages' scripted our New Year prayers to share vital lessons. Use time in temple to grasp the ideas and earn life this year.



Hear the ram's horn shofar and recall the ram Abraham offered in place of Isaac, as Abraham still clung to God through sacrifice, more than he clung to his saved son. Recall the shofar blast on Sinai when God gave His Bible to Moses and the Jews. Recall Sisra's mother who wept like shofar blasts when she accepted reality. And recall the Jubilee shofar reminding all that God is creator and owns all.

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

NEW YEAR

RABBI REUVEN MANN

It All Depends on Me

Throughout history the Jews have been blessed with great leaders, both political and spiritual. It is true that not all Jewish rulers have been righteous. A study of the Book of Kings reveals that harm befell the Jews because of the evil designs of corrupt and power hungry Kings.

However that should not cause us to overlook the positive achievements of truly great individuals such as King David and his son Solomon who built the first Beit Hamikdosh.

One can make a very strong case that the greatest leader of all time was Moshe Rabbenu. His

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political and religious achievements remain unsurpassed.

Interestingly, he lacked the superficial aspects of charisma such as communication skill which most politicians strive for. And he had no desire to be the one in charge. However, Hashem saw something in him that rendered him most qualified to represent Him to the Jews and to Pharaoh. What can we learn from Moshe's leadership style that might be relevant to our own lives?

Moshe was the type of person that intervened to come to the rescue of the oppressed. Thus, he stepped in to save his fellow Jew from the Egyptian officer who was beating him. This put his own life in jeopardy and he had to escape from the clutches of Pharaoh. But it did not diminish his ardor for righting wrongs. When the daughters of Yitro were mistreated by the shepherds because their father had renounced idolatry, Moshe "stood up and saved them."

These two incidents were but a prelude to his greatest rescue mission. This occurred on Mt. Sinai where he had ascended to receive the Tablets from Hashem. While there, Hashem informed Moshe about the sin of the Golden Calf and what He intended to do about it. Hashem said to Moshe, "I have seen this people, and behold! It is a stiff-necked people. And now, desist from Me. Let My anger flare up against them and I shall annihilate them; and I shall make you a great nation."

Moshe then boldly rose to become the defender of the Jewish people. He argued that destroying them would create an irreparable Chillul Hashem (desecration of G-d's Name) as the onlooking nations would not attribute it to the Jew's sinfulness but to some deficiency in Hashem. Moreover, he argued, if the nation that was built on the foundation of the 3 Patriarchs could not withstand such trials, how could one that was based solely on Moshe even have any chance.

Moshe's plea won the day and "Hashem reconsidered regarding the evil that He declared He would do to His People." In effect the intervention of Moshe was responsible for the survival of the Jews from the brink of destruction. But what gave Moshe the right and courage to take upon himself the responsibility for the very existence of the Jewish People?

According to Rashi Hashem hinted to Moshe that the matter was dependent on him. For He

said, "And now desist from Me..." to which Rashi comments, "...here He opened a door for him and informed him that the matter depended on him"

Moshe rose to the challenge and took upon his shoulders this momentous obligation. For he knew full well that there was no guarantee he would succeed and the dangers of failure were unthinkable. But the great leader who is totally dedicated to his people is willing to assume total responsibility and risk everything, when necessary, on their behalf. He doesn't seek to protect himself and distribute the blame among others. He doesn't "play it safe" in order to avoid criticism. He takes bold action according to his wisdom and has the courage to accept the consequences whatever they may be.

We may ourselves not be leaders but this lesson has great relevance to all of us especially at this time of year. For on Rosh Hashana every one of Hashem's creatures stands before Him in judgement. And when questioned or challenged we tend to find excuses and blame our own failings on others, whether it be a matter of unfortuitous circumstances or of people not doing for us what we expected of them.

But this would not be keeping in line with the example of Moshe. Hashem communicated to him that, "this matter depends entirely on you." You cannot put it on anyone else but you must assume the responsibility on your own shoulders and find within yourself the capacity to persevere.

And so it is for the rest of us. When it comes to the most vital issues of judgement and whether or not we have fulfilled our responsibilities before Hashem, we must not seek to escape but rather assume the attitude that the matter depends entirely on ourselves. We can't say that the "situation" is to blame or that things didn't come together properly, or the time just wasn't right. For this matter depends exclusively on ourselves.

In Parshat Nitzavim Hashem states that we can fulfill the commandments. "For this commandment that I command you today— it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven....nor is it across the sea....Rather the matter is very near to you,—in your mouth and your heart—to perform it."

Our ancestors who witnessed the Revelation on Mt Sinai understood the nature of the commitment that was required. As we stand before Hashem at this time of awe let us reaffirm their unequivocal declaration; "We will do and we will listen." ■

NEW YEAR

CREATION
& NEW YEAR

HOW IS IT VITAL?

God as King and Creator and Man as Creation

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

All our prayers are important, phrased by the sages with great wisdom. There is great satisfaction when we pause, study the prayers, and then grasp the underlying beautiful insights and messages. One prayer says the following:

“All whose soul is in their nostrils shall say, ‘God, the ruler of Israel is king and His kingship reigns over all.’”

This embodies New Year’s central theme, explaining why it is placed in the concluding Shmoneh Esray prayer addressing “kingship.” The sages who scripted this prayer could have said, “All mankind shall say...” What then compelled them to replace mankind with, “All whose soul is in their nostrils”?

The fact we “need” air stresses that human life is dependent: air is vital. It is “most” vital, so this phrase does not talk about food or water, but air.

The sages stress our dependence, as dependence—more than all else—emphasizes that God brought everything into existence from nothingness: all depends on God for its very being, and all remains in existence only due to God’s will. All relies upon him. Our existence

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depends on God. The True King is He who “created” everything, not merely he who rules.

God is the One who designed us to live on air; He created us as dependent beings. God created stone which needs nothing, so independent creations do exist. But God determined that man’s dependence is vital to his purpose, to his perfection. For if we had no needs like stone, man might abandon God. Remaining dependent on God helps us follow Torah until we arrive at an appreciation for Torah’s wisdom, and then for God Himself, where we study for no ulterior motive. This is God’s plan for man.

We must take that very air upon which our lives depend, and use it to vocalize praise of He who created us, for our purpose in being created is to recognize God. And that praise is that God rules over all, including man. God rules “over all” is also stressed in this prayer.

The prayer then states that God sanctified us with His commandments. This too expresses kingship, that God can order us to act. But in this case, the acts He commanded are not for Him, but for our benefit. Man finds the greatest

fulfillment in intellectual discovery, Torah study and science. And Torah study is the greatest of all the 613 commands. In fact, without study, we cannot perform the other 612, nor do we understand their purpose. But don’t be misled: the act of fulfilling the 612 other commands is not for the act per se, but that we investigate the ideas behind each command. For in thought and wisdom is where we arrive at our greatest enjoyment and our true perfection.

The prayer then says, “Purify our hearts to serve You in truth.” Man cannot function independent of God’s help. Talmud says, “One who comes to purify himself is helped” (Sabbath 104). This means we can lose focus, become distracted, or succumb to our instincts at any point along our path towards God, and derail our efforts. Therefore, God assists us; we need His assistance.

The final praise is “For You God are truth, and Your words are truth and exist eternally.” Saying that, “God is truth” means that by definition, as the Creator of reality, God defines what is real

and true. And man should desire to follow only what is real, and not delude himself with false gods or imaginations of what make him happy. “Your words are truth” means that God communicated in His Torah only that which is real and truly provides happiness. And this system will never change, it is eternal, explaining the final phrase “existing eternally.”

I hope these brief insights share a glimpse into the depth of our prayers, and that we sense the primary message of Rosh Hashanna, that God is our Creator and our ruler. That we are mere creations. Our lives are dependent. But by following Torah, we can ensure great lives for ourselves, and thereby, God will sustain us and bless us.

May we all use these few hours in temple to explore further in our great sages’ blessings and prayers and derive our own lessons. Doing so, may God look upon each of you and inscribe you this year for health, happiness and success, and seal you for a bountiful year of goodness and serenity, for you, your family, your friends, Israel, and all mankind. ■

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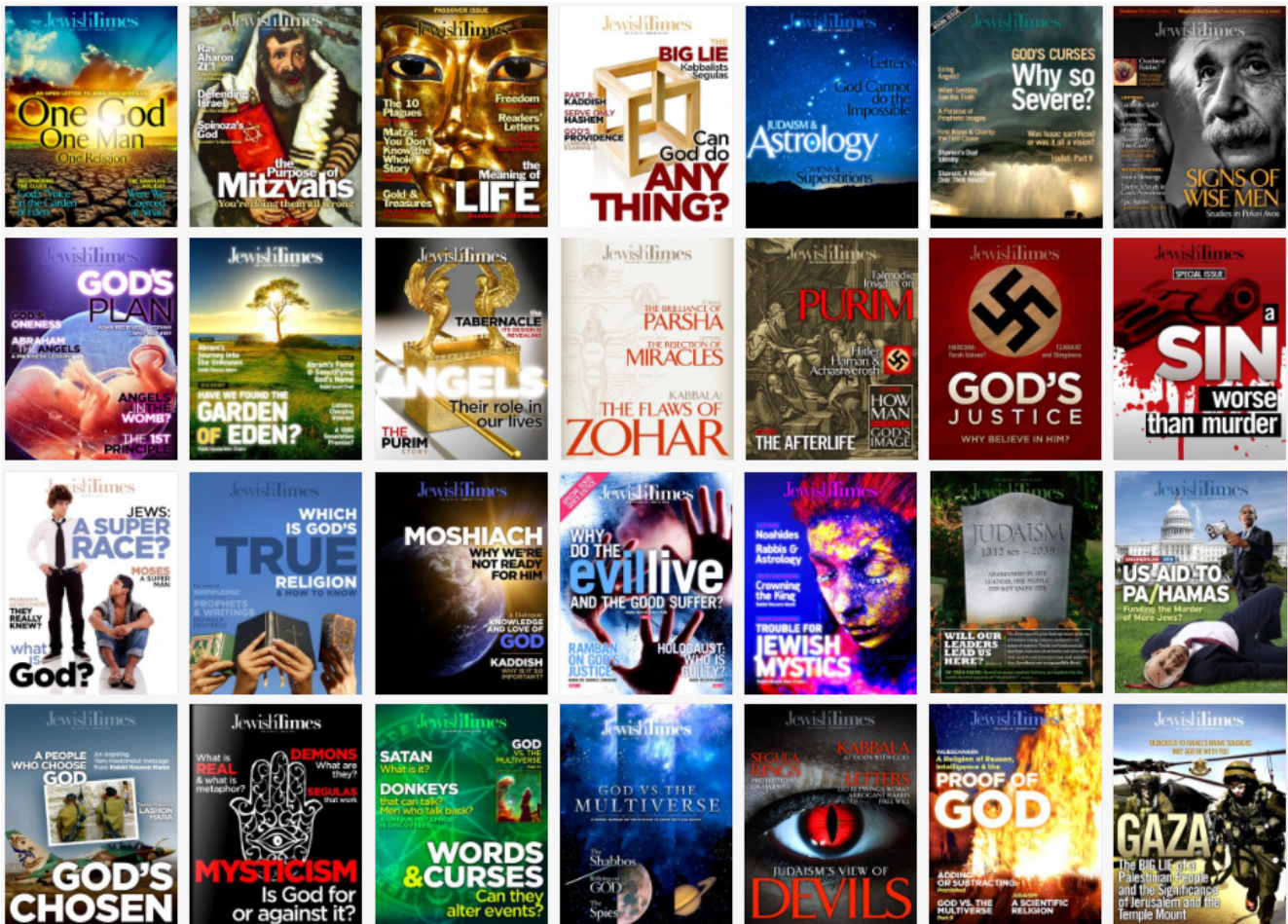


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