

Erev Rosh Hashanah

Standing on the Precipice

5784

Shanah Tovah!

Welcome to Erev Rosh Hashanah. Whether you have been preparing for this for a month or even longer, or if this snuck up on you, it is here and here we are.

For the whole of Elul, the shofar has rung out in every synagogue around the world reverberating its tone, a reverberation that we feel within our bodies and cuts through to our core, our soul.

Maimonides teaches that the shofar's wail beckons to us and calls:

עורו יְשָׁנִים מִשְׁנַתְּכֶם

“Wake up, sleepers, from your sleep! Slumberers, arise from your slumber!”

For most of our lives, we walk in a sort of stupor, surviving from one moment to the next. We are asleep. Or worse! We are in a nightmare of our own creation! What if a person is lying next to you, someone you love, tossing and turning, clearly suffering from their dreams, what do you do? You wake them up!

This is the power of Rosh Hashanah! It is a call to us to awaken to the world that surrounds us, the beauty and the suffering, and the reality of who we are.

“Search your ways,” continues Maimonides, “and return in *teshuvah* and remember your Creator!”

Wake up to this moment! Be present here and now!

There is no moment more vital than this one, standing before God, asking God to forgive us for all the wrongdoings of our past year, beseeching God for support, to mend the brokenness of our hearts. Life is ephemeral and we keep acting as if every day will go on for an eternity when we know that it will not. Wake Up!

We feel the *yirah* of the moment, with both of its meanings, fear and awe. We speak in the words of our *tefillah* and in our hearts about trembling before God as the melodies, the prayers express a longing to be closer to God. We hold both simultaneously in our hearts at this moment and for the next ten days as the Gates of Heaven are open before us.

Just as the shofar penetrates to the deepest fathoms of our soul, its blast is so tremendously powerful that it rips a hole through the cosmos, creating a bridge between us and God.

This bridge that the shofar blast has created between us and heaven yawns before us, long, daunting, foreboding. We are standing on this bridge, feeling the weight of *yirah*, fear and awe. The majesty of the moment seizes us, and we do not know how to move. We are paralyzed, gripped in fear and awe. Have all of my preparations been for naught? Have I done the work I needed to do to cross this bridge? Will I succeed? Will I fail?

We recall the words of Hasid, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov,

ידע, שְׁהָאָדָם צָרִיף לְעֵבֶר עַל גֶּשֶׁר צָר מְאֹד מְאֹד,

“Know that a person, every person needs to cross a very very narrow bridge,”

Each of us, young and old will need to cross this bridge, to stand at the moment of facing God. Who am I? Am I worthy? We ask ourselves. We tremble in fear.

It is at this moment that we remember the second half of Rabbi Nachman's oft-quoted words:

וְהַבִּלְלִי וְהַעֲקָר – שְׁלֹא יִתְפַּחַד בְּלָל

“what is essential, THE most important thing is **not** to be afraid.”

When standing on the precipice, as we are now, one should not be overcome by fear.

No matter how daunting, how overwhelming, we must also remember that desire, that yearning, our soul's deepest wish, to be closer to God.

Take one step forward, and then the next. *Lo tiphached*, do not let fear stop you from making this journey.

You are on the journey of your life, for your life. Our God and our tradition commands that we take this time, this holy and sacred time to wake up, to reflect, to open our eyes to the world around us, to bare our hearts to reveal who we truly are at our core, to come face to face with God.

My blessing for each of us is that we let the power of this time transform us. We must do the work, we must walk the bridge, and we must push forward, no matter how terrifying this journey may be. May we all find ourselves to be better people as we move through this period of radical transformation.

Shanah Tova

Judaism acts under the presumption that we want to be better people, a better person.

We believe we are so very clever.

Mindfulness

Mindset – modern inventions

משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ג'ד'

(ד) אף על פי שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזרת הפתוב רמז יש בו כלומר עורו ישנים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו מתרדמתכם וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם. אלו השוכחים את האמת בהבלי הזמן ושוגים כל שנתם בהבל וריק אשר לא יועיל ולא יציל, הביטו לנפשותיכם והיטיבו דרכיכם ומעלליכם ויעזב כל אחד מכם דרכו הרעה ומחשבתו אשר לא טובה.

Mishneh Torah, Repentance 3:4

(4) Even though the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah is a Biblical decree, it hints at something, i.e., "Wake up, sleepers, from your sleep! And slumberers, arise from your slumber! Search your ways and return in *teshuvah* and remember your Creator! Those who forget the Truth amidst the futility of the moment and are infatuated all their years with vanity and nothingness that will not help and will not save, examine your souls and improve your ways and your motivations! Let each of you abandon his wicked ways, and his thoughts which are no good."

Peeling layers of an onion (ever try to peel an onion? Who does that?)

More like a tough outer shell

Cycle of transformation

Spiritual clarity leads to spiritual growth

A more fulfilling and meaningful life

Against our base instincts

Our fears

Turn away from Judaism because they don't find it meaningful or fulfilling

Overt about what we are up to.

Cycle, because each year (each step of the journey) we need to reevaluate where we are, are the strategies we are using to help us clear the paths to our soul still working, or have we very cleverly discerned new ways to