



Rabbi Zev Cohen

## Bracha from the Rov

Lekavod Rabbosai,

Rosh Hashana תשפ"א is almost here. There are many explanations for the term ראש השנה. One of the basic explanations is that ראש means the head, which means the beginning, which means the place of vision. How we visualize this year should take place. How we plan for our year to unfold and blossom. All of this is regarding the only thing we can control. How we plan to work on our relationship with הקדוש ברוך הוא. How we plan on upgrading our תורה, our מצוות, and our חסד. How we plan on being better spouses, better parents, and better friends. For that, רבותי, is the only thing that's really under our control. ראש השנה the head of the year. How we plan on using our heads, our intellectual capacity and our visual capacity to interact in our daily lives בין אדם לחברו and בין אדם למקום.

Michal and I wish everybody that תשפ"א should be a year in which Corona is over. תשפ"א should be a year in which we are all able to get back together. תשפ"א should be a year in which we can dance, sing eat and meet everyone in our Shul. תשפ"א should be a year in which everybody has געזונט and פרנסה and נחת from their children. We are an incredible קהילה we have accomplished so many wonderful things and we have much more to do. We can do it and we will do it.

Wishing everyone a כתיבה וחתימה טובה,

*Rabbi Zev and Michal Cohen*

**Rabbi Zev Cohen's**  
**Shabbos Shuva Drasha**  
**Shabbos Parshas Haazinu 4:30pm**

לעלוי נשמת ברוך בן מרדכי



Rabbi Mordechai Millunchick

## Why is Shofar Cancelled this year?

The shofar is such an integral part of Rosh Hashana that the Torah calls the day “Yom Teruah”, a day of shofar blowing. The gemora (Rosh Hashana 16a, 34b) tells us that it is through the shofar that the remembrance of Klal Yisroel is brought before Hashem on this Day of Judgment. When we perform the Torah mitzvah of shofar, the Satan is ‘confused’ and cannot fully prosecute us. Rav Yitzchak says that any year that does not have the shofar blown at its start has “crying out” at its end-- מרעין בסופה.

Despite the importance of the mitzvah of shofar, we do not blow when Rosh Hashana falls on Shabbos.

This is a rabbinic enactment, a decree lest one carry his shofar in a public domain. This is something that we must ponder. How can it be that Chazal would make a decree that supersedes the fulfillment of not just any Torah mitzvah, but one as important, with such global implications, as shofar? Should we be worried this year because there is no shofar?

The Tosfos quote the Behag, stating that Rav Yitzchak’s concern regarding the ill effects of not blowing the shofar is not in regard to not blowing on Shabbos.

The Rama Mipano explains that the kedusha of Shabbos is so great that this sanctity is more than enough to negate any prosecution done by the Satan. A similar idea is expressed by Rav Yosef Chaim of Baghdad. He explains that, in truth, the concern that one may carry the shofar on Shabbos is not the main reason there is no shofar on Shabbos. Rather, there is no *need* to blow, as the tikunim of Shabbos take the place of the shofar. Nevertheless, we are able fulfill these spiritual elements of the shofar through the ‘zichron teruah’, mentioning of the shofar.

The Chasam Sofer (Parshas Vaeira) takes another

approach to this question. Rav Saadya Gaon offers ten reasons as to why we blow the shofar (these ten reasons are listed in the Artscroll Machzor pg 430). Two of the reasons are to remind ourselves of both the Akeidas Yitzchak and Maamad Har Sinai. When we say ‘ועקדת יצחק ברחמים תזכור’, Hashem should remember Akeidas Yitzchak, this refers specifically to those who listen to תורה שבעל פה, the Chachamim, their gezeiros and takanos – decrees and rules. At the Akeida, it was only Avraham Avinu who heard the command from Hashem. Yitzchok heard the command from his father. At Har Sinai we received not only the written Torah, but also the Oral Torah. This is why the shofar that sounded at Har Sinai

was connected to Yitzchak, from the איל של יצחק.

**How can it be that Chazal would make a decree that supersedes a mitzvah, with such global implications, as shofar?**

Avraham Avinu spent his entire life defeating the false ideas of his time, teaching the world about emunah and the fallacies of the ways of idol worship and child sacrifice. But then came the command from Hashem, a test unlike any other -- and Avraham was prepared to change. This is teshuva, a changing of

our ways in response to the רצון ה'.

Not blowing the shofar on Shabbos, despite all the benefits it brings with it, because of distant concern that someone may carry it shows us the level that Klal Yisroel hold onto the words of the Chachomim. This has a source: Yitzchak Avinu. Yitzchak accepted his father’s תורה שבעל פה, and stuck out his neck even though it was against every thing he knew.

This explains the Behag. Not blowing on Shabbos doesn’t expose us to the Satan; rather, the act of not blowing itself arouses the זכור עקדת יצחק, the good will generated by the Akeida.



May these zechus reach the Kisai Hakavod herald good tidings for all of Klal Yisroel.



Rabbi Dr. Aryeh Sova

# The First Stage of Teshuva

Rav Shlomo Hoffman, a talmid of Rav Isaac Sher, discussed how he used to counsel students who would turn to him distraught and hopeless about the terrible sins they performed (Sichos Im Harav Shlom Hoffman, 3:4). Based on teachings of Rav Yisrael Salanter (Or Yisrael 30), he would point the students to the gemara in Nidda 70b which states that Hashem saves those who have sinned when they are עוֹשִׂין תְּשׁוּבָה; salvation is not just granted to those who have done teshuva, but even to those who are currently engaged in the repentance process. Similarly, the gemara Kerisos (7a) states יוֹה"כ אֵין מְכַפֵּר אֶלָּא עַל הַשְּׁבִי, which can be similarly inferred that Yom Kippur serves as an atonement for those who are simply *shavin*, returning, on their way back in the right direction.

Even one who has merely taken the first small steps back in the right direction has already fulfilled a fundamental act of teshuva worthy of redemption on some level. All one has to do is start to have the initial spark of change and one is already considered to have begun doing teshuva, before any behavioral changes have actually been accomplished.

One would think the first step on the road of teshuva is leaving one's sins behind, or the feelings of guilt and regret over what one has done. However, based on Chovos Halevavos (Sha'ar Teshuva 3), Rav Hoffman explained to these deeply discouraged students that the first step in doing teshuva is purely intellectual-recognizing logically that one's actions are falling short of where he or she should be. Only then can one begin feeling the emotional impact of pain and remorse.

Recognizing in a clear-headed manner, without defensiveness, justifications or distortions, that one is not doing what he or she can and should be doing is the fundamental first step of teshuva. It is the minimum level required to be considered on the road to teshuva and for the singular day of Yom Kippur to act as atonement, even if he believes he that he will continue to relapse again. Perhaps this can explain why we first ask Hashem for intellectual daas in shemoneh esrai and then ask for support achieving a *teshuvah shleimah*, a full repentance.

This seemingly simple act of humble and honest self reflection is no small feat. Even if the intellectual

realization of the discrepancy between where one is and where one should be is not yet accompanied by the pain of *charatah*, regret, it can still be exceedingly difficult to achieve this initial spark of teshuva.

To delve deeply into some of the factors impeding us from taking this first step is beyond the scope of this article and is the subject of many sifrei mussar. However, I will briefly note some psychological factors and cognitive biases that often impede this initial process.

In psychological parlance, one who has not yet reached the stage of intellectually honest self assessment of self defeating behaviors is considered to be precontemplative, someone who is unaware of their negative behaviors, or who is not ready to consider the need to make changes.

Researchers list four R's as reasons for someone remaining in this stage: reluctance, rebellion, resignation, and rationalization. Those who are (1) reluctant to make changes may not be accurately assessing the choices they are making, or through sheer lack of introspection or apathy may be completely unaware. (2) Rebellious precontemplators may be anxious or insecure and are unable to receive feedback about their choices because they do not want to be told what to do. Individuals who are (3) resigned are hopeless, overwhelmed, and exhausted about the idea of making possible changes to one's life. They believe their behavior is already a

foregone conclusion. Finally, those who (4) rationalize their behaviors defend their choices and blame others. People who can move past these response styles can then begin the change process and can enter what is known as the contemplation stage.

**“Even one who has merely taken the first small steps has already fulfilled a fundamental act of teshuva worthy of redemption”**

Another challenge impeding this first spark of teshuva is that individuals tend to make self-serving

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## The First Stage of Teshuva continued

attributions, where we seek reasons to view ourselves in the most favorable light. Additionally, people also tend to demonstrate another personal bias where we are more likely to ascribe our successes to ourselves and to blame our failures on others. When provided stories of failures about themselves, people tended to provide external reasons to explain the circumstances, but when the same stories were told about others, people provided internal assessments of other people, explaining why they were the cause of their own failures.

Looking into the dark recesses of our own personalities and making an honest assessment of our shortcomings is painful. We naturally swerve away from feelings of discomfort when forced to look at our own behaviors, although it is easy for us to critique someone else's character (this phenomenon is known as the actor-observer bias). However, change comes from no longer being comfortable. We see how powerful and impactful the first step of intellectual honesty and accurate self assessment can be in leading to the ultimate process of changing one's behavior and character.

In his Derashos (14), the Bais HaLevi describes an astonishing act of honest and introspective self assessment during one of the most pivotal moments in Jewish history. After the brothers threw Yosef into the

pit, the pasuk says  
וַיֵּשֶׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל הַבּוֹר

The Medrash (84:19) explains that this is a terminology of teshuva; Reuven was in the

process of teshuva,

sitting in sackcloth and fasting and "returned (teshuva)" to the pit. This action was considered so revolutionary that Hashem declared no one had ever done teshuva for a sin before this event and that Reuven repented even before the sin occurred. How could this possibly be the first act of teshuva in history and what do Reuven's actions of teshuva have to do with Yosef's being in the pit?

Reuven sinned when he previously relocated Yaakov's bed to his mother's tent. He surely believed intellectually that he was making the right, just and only decision to assuage his mother's shame. Additionally, the

family was well aware that Yaakov was destined to have only twelve sons. Reuven could have further justified his actions since he knew he was not preventing the fulfillment of the twelve *shevatim* destiny of Yaakov's family, as all twelve sons had already been born. However, when Yosef was thrown into the dark pit filled with snakes and scorpions, suddenly the fate of the twelve *shevatim*, on which the future destiny of the Jewish people was dependent, was thrown into a precarious situation.

Reuven saw the chain of events of Yosef being thrown into the pit and immediately used it as an opportunity to introspect and hold himself accountable somehow for his previous actions. He feared that if Yosef died it would be linked to his sin, since he possibly prevented Yaakov from having more sons.

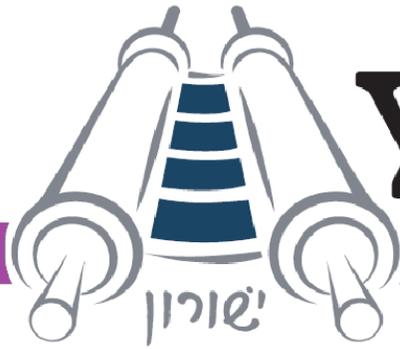
Reuven was able to use an event seemingly completely unrelated to his personal failing, and find a reason to reassess himself and hold himself responsible. He looked inward despite the fact that he could have made countless defenses and justifications about why Yosef deserved this fate. Not only that, but Reuven did not wait for his sin to come to fruition and began repenting, donning sackcloth and fasting, even before any tragic consequence had actually occurred. When he arrived at the pit and Yosef was gone, his only conclusion was that this was all because he had previously fell short-  
וַיֵּאמֶר הַיְלִיד אֵינֶנּוּ וְאֲנִי אֶנְהָ אֲנִי־בָא

No one before had ever taken such responsibility for an action from which he or she was so removed, and no one had ever done it before any negative events had even occurred. This was an act of brave, deeply honest introspection and scrupulously meticulous self assessment and accountability.

During this season of teshuva, let us all be fortunate to find the sparks of teshuva by taking the first steps of the process, humbly recognizing where we are falling short and holding ourselves accountable without defensiveness. When we take this brave step of returning to the hidden pits of our own personalities and exploring what is inside, we can begin the long journey of change. 

*Let this devar Torah please serve as zechus for a refuah sheleimah bkarov for my precious Rus Chaya Moriah bas Shoshana Miriam.*

**Change comes  
from no longer  
being comfortable.**



# YESHURUN

For Women

Rosh Hashana 5781



Tema Taxer

## A Day of Evaluation

Rosh Hashana is a day of conflicting emotions. Unlike other Yomim Tovim where we have a clear focus of the day (Pesach – Yetzias Mitzrayim, Shavuot – Matan Torah, Sukkot – Simcha), the opposing dimensions of Rosh Hashana can be confusing. It is the Yom HaDin, the Day of Judgment, which we approach with apprehension. Yet, Nechemia (8:10) tells Klal Yisrael regarding Rosh Hashana: Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages and send portions to those who have nothing prepared for today is sacred for Hashem.

While in judgment for our past deeds, we beseech Hashem for mercy and kindness. And yet, at the same time, we request physical and spiritual needs of which we may not be worthy. To ask for more while being judged seems brazen. The coronation of the King is a universal and glorious celebration – yet we are concerned for our very lives. We experience joy and fear simultaneously. It is truly a day of *gilu bir'ada*.

In his sefer *Sifsei Chaim*, Rabbi Chaim Freidlander zt"l reconciles the conflicting dimensions of Rosh Hashana through a short episode in Sefer Bereishis that sheds a clarifying light on the true essence of Rosh Hashana.

In Parashas Vayeshev, the Torah tells the riveting story of the life of Yosef HaTzadik. It tells of

the pride of his father, the envy of his brothers, his attempted murder, his sale as a slave and unjust imprisonment. Yosef deciphers the dreams of fellow inmates who are later released as predicted. The Torah then tells of a birthday party. Pharaoh, the King of Mitzrayim, made a grand celebratory event in honor of his birthday. At this party, Pharaoh counted among his servants the Sar HaMashkim and Sar HaOfim, who confided their dreams to Yosef. As Yosef predicted, Pharaoh restored the Sar HaMashkim to his original post and executed the Sar HaOfim.

How unusual that in the midst of a joyous celebration, the festivities are paused for a public hanging! It seems incongruous to the purpose of the event and very inappropriate timing.

The Sifsei Chaim explains that this was no ordinary birthday party. Pharaoh considered himself to be a god as stated in Yechezkel (29:3): *Li yiori v'ani asisini* -The Nile is mine and I created it. He felt he created the Nile, which provided sustenance to the entire county. He therefore considered himself all-powerful. Pharaoh's birthday was not simply a personal event. It was a national anniversary celebration of his power and rule.

The pasuk in Bereishis (40:20), when describing Pharaoh's counting the Sar HaMashkim

and Sar HaOfim, uses the words “Vayisa es rosh”, as opposed to other words used for counting. In Parashas Bamidbar (1:2), Moshe Rabeinu counts the Jewish people, “Se’u es rosh kol adas Bnei Yisroel”. The same word for counting is used as is seen at the counting of Pharaoh’s servants. The Ramban on Bamidbar (1:45), quoting Midrash Rabba, explains that this was not merely a census, but rather the count was done “bechavod uvigdula lechol echad ve’echad”. Moshe met with each individual, assessed their stature and assigned a task. Moshe then granted the tools necessary to accomplish the task.

The Ramchal in Derech Hashem explains that each Rosh Hashana, the world experiences a new cycle and a new edition that has never existed previously. Therefore, we say “hayom haras olam – today is the birthday of the world” in present tense. Just as a child entering a new grade at school has new experiences and expectations while in an environment that may look and feel familiar, so too each year is a new existence and experience of the world that has never been created before, while it too may seem familiar.

Pharaoh’s birthday party and evaluation of his servants on that day helps us understand Hashem’s role on Rosh Hashana. Pharaoh was conducting an annual review of his kingdom. As his kingdom entered its “renewed edition”, he determined whether those who served him did so effectively and faithfully. He decided if they were an asset and were entitled to the same position or a promotion (as seen with the Sar HaMashkim), or if they were a liability and had to be relieved of their duties (as seen with the Sar HaOfim). Not coincidentally, this birthday party occurred on Rosh

Hashana – as Chazal tell us that Yosef was released from prison on Rosh Hashana, which was exactly 2 years after Pharaoh’s party.

Hashem’s primary role on Rosh Hashana as King is to judge His servants’ effectiveness in His kingdom. He evaluates the world, reviews the performance of His staff and assigns renewed roles to each cabinet member. At the same time, Hashem provides the tools and means for each person to execute their mission.

On Rosh Hashana, all aspects of the day are directed toward this goal. We declare that G-d is the King of the Universe. We understand that He is reviewing each of our roles in His mighty kingdom and we are being reassigned our position in that kingdom. It is therefore apropos that while we stand in judgment, we beseech Hashem for a promotion to serve Him with pride, and we ask for the means necessary to achieve our goals as individuals and as a community. A high-ranking officer represents the king. Therefore, he must do so with health, strength and prosperity, as he is a reflection of his boss. We therefore ask Hashem for all that we need so that we can serve Him with pride and faithfulness.

As opposed to a king of basar vadam, who judges based on past deeds, we have been given a treasured gift. Not only is Rosh Hashana the first day of the renewed kingdom and therefore the day of judgement, it is also the first day of the Aseres Yemei Teshuva. Hashem desires our success. If we had failings in the past, we have the ability to rectify those misdeeds through sincere teshuva. We then can attain a high post in G-d’s kingdom with the promise of faithful service in the future to proclaim to all: Hashem Yimloch Le’Olam Va’ed. 

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