

שמע קולנו

Hear Our Voice

ראש השנה תשע"ט
Rosh Hashanah 5779



*A Compilation of Torah Insights, Experiences,
and Wisdom from the TBDJ Community*



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שנה טובה ומתוקה!



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Preface

Rabbi Yechezkel Freundlich

Shema Koleinu

It is with great pleasure that I present you with this inaugural edition of Shema Koleinu 5779. This compendium of Rosh Hashanah essays, thoughts and reflections - authored by members of the TBDJ family - was created with the hope of adding understanding and meaning to these special days of Rosh Hashanah. Inside you will find a wide array of topics, ranging from a description of the emotions of sitting around Bubby's Holiday table to an analysis of the Rosh Hashanah Torah reading. Each article presents a unique perspective into the author's distinct Rosh Hashanah experience. Taken as a whole, this publication is a beautiful expression of the wonderfully diverse community in which we live. I am sure you will find each article both insightful and thought provoking.

A publication such as this also helps us to connect to one another. Each author has shared with us a small piece of themselves through their contribution. Some experiences you will read about are similar to your own and some will be different. TBDJ is, thank G-d, a large congregation, but each article contained herein makes it feel a little bit smaller. Please take the time to seek out each author, introduce yourself if you do not yet know them, and share your thoughts and reflections on their words.

I would like to thank Judah Aspler for the layout of this handsome publication, Mike Cohen for his editing assistance, and the Steinlauf family for their generous sponsorship.

It is my hope that Shema Koleinu will serve as a source of inspiration on these Holy Days.

May Hashem hear (*shema*) our voices (*koleinu*) and bless us with a happy, healthy and sweet new year!



Kotel at Dusk, Brocha Teichman Fine Art



President's Message

Jonathan Gal

The Uniting Sound of The Shofar

When Rabbi Freundlich put out a call for articles written by TBDJers about the High Holidays, it dawned on me that I have spent every single Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (save one while I was away in Israel in Yeshiva) at TBDJ. I remember as a child davening in the Parallel Service next to my father. We had a seat near those sliding green tinted glass doors which provided a 10-year-old with an easy escape to the hallway to go out and play. As a teenager and young adult, I remember davening with my father and grandfather z'l in the Hashkama Minyan in the Library. Talking was frowned upon there, but I remember trying to sneak in a covert joke or two to my friends without getting caught. Eventually, I moved back to the Parallel Service and enjoyed the *hemeishe* davening and *ruach* of the minyan.

Last year as the President, I davened upstairs in the Main Sanctuary for the first time. Perhaps my current seat gave me a little bit of a unique view, but I tremendously enjoyed both the davening and as well as watching the interactions between the congregants in their seats. The smiles I saw from people when their long-time seat neighbour walked in reflected a real and meaningful connection to each other.

Only recently have I fully appreciated the deep connection that so many of us have to TBDJ. We have daily, weekly and holiday shul attendees, but somehow each person's unique association to TBDJ bonds us all together. TBDJ is more than just a place of prayer or a place of learning. It is a true community center where we come to be closer to Hashem and to feel part of this incredible and diverse community. The High Holiday experience is when this connection often deepens and that certainly has been the case for me.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity over the years to experience three different High Holiday minyanim here on Baily Road. One thing I have found that binds everything together - across minyan, age and gender - is the Shofar. The room is always perfectly quiet and intently focused on Rosh Hashanah when the shofar is blown. For a few moments, all other conversation ceases and we all reflect in our own way about the power of the day.

Truthfully, I've always been envious watching young children experience the shofar. For them, this moment is the highlight of the day and the awe and wonderment on their faces is itself a sight to behold. While they don't grasp the magnitude of the day and what it really means, in that moment they really get it.



Often, I try to close my eyes during the shofar blasts and take some personal time to reflect on the past year. But if for some reason I can't get into that zone, the look on the faces of my children as they experience the shofar is enough to bring me back to the place I want to be. If for some reason this year you are feeling disconnected and unable to feel the awesomeness of the day, perhaps a look at the wonder on the expressive face of a child will help you get back into the mindset. I know it works for me.

Wishing everyone a Shana Tovah U'Metukah!



Foreword: Mah Nishtanah

by Benjamin Rudski

Being the youngest member of my family, I am very well acquainted with Mah Nishtanah, the Four Questions asked during the Passover Seder. These Four Questions all center on the fact that the Seder night is different from any other night. We are currently the farthest we could get from Passover. We are half a year away. However, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur have always been my *mah nishtanah* moments.

Thirteen years ago this Shabbat Shuva, the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, my family began attending Shul every Shabbat. It is our Bar Mitzvah year. I can hardly remember a time that Shul was not part of my life. Every Saturday and Yom Tov morning begins like clockwork with a scramble to get out of the house in time for davening, and then many hours spent in Shul. After thirteen years, I am finally getting used to this routine. In all honesty, I have not always accepted this new routine quietly. When we began coming to Shul, I was not yet six and would leave the house angrily, not wanting to miss a whole morning of doing nothing. I would sit in Shul angrily, trying hard not to fight with my brother or fall asleep. I would leave Shul angry about the time that I had spent there.

My confusion peaked at the High Holy Days. Everything was completely different. We sat in a different room, in different seats, and listened to a different Rabbi and a different Chazzan. And, to make matters worse, the davening was completely different and much longer. I had to sit until my mother was finally ready to go home to set the table for lunch, at which point I would gladly leave with her. Gradually, anger and frustration turned to more constructive uses. Instead of just sitting bored and pouting, I began doing two things: consuming vast amounts of candy (all of which I brought from home, since my parents never let me ask other people) and reading. On Shabbat, this would translate into bringing some sort of space, hockey or computer-related book, while eating numerous caramels and *Laffy Taffys*. On the High Holy Days, the Shul helped me out. Much to my delight, I came across Rabbi Steinmetz's *Readings and Reflections*. I leafed through the booklet several times, reading some of the pieces, while skipping over others. These readings greatly enhanced my Shul experience. Many have stayed with me and have shaped my perspective on the world around me.

Times have changed. I now come to Shul to daven, leaving most extra reading



material at home. Braces ended my candy consumption. When Rabbi Freundlich approached my brother and I about writing for *Shema Koleinu*, I did not know what to write. And then, I thought back to my past, to *Mah Nishtanah*, and finally to the importance of the *Readings and Reflections* to my Shul experience. I realized that my time had come to give back to the Shul. I offered to write this foreword in the hope that others will be inspired as I was all those years ago. Read these reflections. Re-read them. Be inspired by them. While the davening is the primary purpose of these days in Shul, having a little extra inspiration from supplemental reading can never hurt. If, like me, you are easily distracted, consider hiding this booklet until after you have davened, or giving it to a friend to read until you are ready for it. And just remember, do not turn the pages too loudly during the Rabbi's sermon!

Shanah Tovah and happy reading.



Spiritual Momentum

by Rev. Amiel Bender

When does the High Holiday season begin for you?

People tend to “click in” to the High Holiday season at different intervals. The communal spiritual wakeup call begins with the sounding of the shofar and the insertion of psalm 27, **לדוד ה' אורי** in our morning and evening prayers at the beginning of the month of Elul, one month before Rosh Hashanah. In a physical sense, the Synagogue's reminder to purchase High Holiday seats, the search for the perfect High Holiday cuisine items, as well as equipping ourselves with the proper clothing remind us that the High Holidays are at hand.

I believe that the mindset change into the High Holidays is personal and subjective. We are all different and unique in our spiritual and physical approach to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

My own High Holiday experience steps up a notch with a beautiful verse found in **פרשת כי תבוא** which is generally read Shabbat afternoon at mincha, just a few hours before we commence with our first Selichot prayers of the season. It is the final verse of the Torah reading and in true *Amiel Fashion*, it is a *Musical Connection*.

The verse reads:

השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים וברך את עמך את ישראל...

Gaze down from Your holy abode, from the heavens and bless Your people Israel...

Simply speaking, we ask Hashem to look down upon us from His Holy Throne above. The timing of the reading of this verse lends itself to the thought that we are asking Hashem to bless us as we are about to embark on our most significant days of prayer preceding judgement from above, the days that will define our year to come.

I find it amazing that this last verse in the Torah reading advises us about beseeching Hashem for blessings just a few short hours before we begin to pour out our hearts in earnest prayer in our first Selichot service of the season!

There is a beautiful tradition that originated in old Europe. Musically, the *taamei hamikra*, the Torah cantillation, of this verse is read a half tone higher than the verses preceding it.

Half tone changes in modern music, which occur at different intervals in a song, is commonplace in today's musical world. It is a sign of *musical momentum*, a way of adding energy to the presentation of a musical piece.

I would like to suggest that the function of this tone change is a sign of *spiritual*



momentum. We have lived our year up to this point and are now poised for the next step – to look ahead and to “step up” our act for next year. It symbolizes a change in our mindset: How do we make ourselves better? What can we do differently? With Selichot just a few hours away the elevation of the tone tells us that from this point on, it is about energizing ourselves spiritually. It is about elevating ourselves to higher levels of meaning and holiness in our lives as we approach the Creator of the world. We pray not just for ourselves, but more importantly as the verse is in plural, for our beloved families, our community, our nation, our home Israel and so much more.

שנה טובה!



G-d's Alarm Clock

*by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom*

There are many lovely explanations for why we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, but one of the most powerful is given by Moses Maimonides. For Maimonides the shofar is G-d's alarm clock, waking us up from the "slumber" in which we spend many of our days. What did he mean?

G-d's greatest gift to us is time, and He gives it to us on equal terms. Whether we are rich or poor, there are still only 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week and a span of years that is all too short. Often we spend our time on things that in Maimonides' words "neither help nor save." How many people looking back on a lifetime, saying, "I wish I had spent more time at committee meetings"? By contrast, how many say, "I wish I had spent more time with my children, or helping others, or simply enjoying being alive"?

Sometimes we can be so busy making a living that we hardly have time to live. Experts on time management speak about two types of activity: the urgent and the important. Often our days are spent on the urgent, and we lose out on the important. I remember a conversation with someone who had been a workaholic, busy seven days a week. As a result of a personal crisis he decided to keep Shabbat. He later told me it was the best decision he ever made. "Now," he said, "I have time for my wife and child and for my friends. Going to shul has made me part of a community. The strange thing is that the work still gets done, in six days, not seven."

Shabbat teaches us to take time for what is important, even though it isn't urgent. Thirty years ago, when technology was less advanced, most people who wrote about the future saw it as an age of leisure when we would have far more free time. It has not happened that way. We seem more pressurized than ever and less relaxed. Mobile phones, e-mails and pocket computers mean that we are constantly on call. As Wordsworth said, "The world is too much with us; late and soon / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." The Psalmist put it best: "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are when we number our days. Asking to be written in the book of life, we think about life and how we use it. In this context the three key words of the "Unetaneh Tokef" prayer are fundamental: teshuvah (repentance), tefillah (prayer) and tzedakah (charity). Teshuvah is about our relationship with ourselves. Tefillah is about our relationship with G-d. Tzedakah is about our relationship with other people.

Teshuvah means not only "repentance" but also "returning" – to our roots, our faith, our people's history and our vocation as heirs to those who stood at Sinai more than 3,000 years ago. Teshuvah asks us: did we grow in the past year or did we stand still?



Did we study the texts of our heritage? Did we keep one more mitzvah? Did we live fully and confidently as Jews? Teshuvah is our satellite navigation system giving us a direction in life.

Tefillah means prayer. It is our conversation with G-d. We speak, but if we are wise we also listen, to the voice of G-d as refracted through the prayers of a hundred generations of our ancestors. Tefillah is less about asking G-d for what we want, more about asking G-d to teach us what to want. A new car? A better job? An exotic holiday? Our prayers do not speak about these things because life is about more than these things. It is less about what we own than about what we do and who we aspire to be. We speak about forgiveness and about G-d's presence in our lives. We remind ourselves that, short though our time on earth is, by connecting with G-d we touch eternity. Tefillah is our "mobile phone to heaven."

Tzedakah is about the good we do for others. Sir Moses Montefiore was one of the great figures of Victorian Jewry. He was a wealthy man and devoted much of his long life to serving the Jewish people in Britain and worldwide (he built the windmill in Jerusalem, and the area of which it is a part – Yemin Moshe – is named after him). Someone once asked him how much he was worth, and he gave him a figure. "But," said the questioner, "I know you own more than that." "You didn't ask me what I own but what I am worth. The figure I gave you was how much money I have given this year to charity, because we are worth what we are willing to share with others." That is tzedakah.

Certain mitzvot in Judaism are rehearsals for a time to come. Shabbat is a rehearsal for the messianic age when strife will end and peace reign. Yom Kippur – when we do not eat or drink or engage in physical pleasure, and when there is a custom to wear a kittel like a shroud – is a dress rehearsal for death. It forces us to ask the ultimate question: what did I do in my life that was worthwhile? Did I waste time or did I share it, with my faith, with G-d, and with those in need?

Knowing that none of us will live for ever, we ask G-d for another year: to grow, to pray and to give. That is what Maimonides meant when he called the shofar "G-d's alarm call", asking us not to slumber through life, but to use it to bring blessings.

May the Almighty bless us, our families and the Jewish people, and may He write us all in the Book of Life.

(Reprinted with permission. To read more from Rabbi Sacks, and to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org)



Kreplach, Family and Blessings

by *Brenda Langburt*

When Rabbi Freundlich asked me if I wanted to share my thoughts with the congregation on what Rosh Hashanah means to me, I initially hesitated, as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are intensely personal and private days for me. I am someone who prefers to keep my personal life out of the public eye and who rarely shares my political views or life events on social media (except for with my immediate family). But I wanted to support the Rabbi's efforts to bring the TBDJ family a little closer, and I found myself questioning what the meaning of this Holiday really was to me. I do not attend shul on a regular basis, but the High Holidays are different. They are the few days a year when I purposely get off the treadmill of life and turn my attention to food, family and G-d.

Why is it that holidays evoke such special memories attached to food? When I reflect on past Rosh Hashanahs from my childhood, I can see a clear picture in my head of my mother standing in the kitchen for hours, rolling out dough and hand-making dozens and dozens of individually-wrapped tiny kreplach. This was a once-a year special occurrence, because, as anyone who ever made kreplach knows, it is an arduous and tedious task! Combined with her "chicken soup for the soul," I looked forward to eating them every new year. And the holidays didn't only mean kreplach. It was my mother's Polish version of cholent, another labour intensive dish, made by hand-rubbing 10 lbs of potatoes. When baked overnight, the potatoes formed a delicious crispy crust that my siblings and I would fight over every time. And then there was her "bubbaleh," another eastern European potato dish that required a lot of potato rubbing, a lot of kvetching, and fingernails in need of a manicure at the end.

As I reflected on why these foods symbolize the High Holidays to me, I realized that in fact they implied something much more deeply felt. Kreplach, cholent and bubbaleh represent a time in my life that's fading away. They were foods made with love by my mother who no longer has the energy to cook them- foods which herald from a chapter in Polish Jewish history whose pages are turning way too fast. As the child of Polish immigrants to Canada, I grew up on a traditional eastern European diet of meat and potatoes, albeit with a Jewish twist. While today I have traded cholent for sushi and kreplach for quinoa, my mother has quietly become one of the last of her generation of yiddishe mamas who actually cooked foods with names like bubbaleh. The holidays somehow manage to bring these realities to the forefront, forever reminding me of my childhood, my mother and wonderful tastes and smells. There is a nostalgic sadness to these feelings of times past, of time marching forward, of dishes with Yiddish names that my own children won't remember.



In the last year, I have also found myself at a new stage in life. I am an official “empty-nester.” As the High Holidays approach, I look towards this time when all of us will be together again, eating, laughing, going to shul and enjoying each other’s company. Growing up, my grandparents, aunts and uncles all lived in the States. Every year, they would travel to Montreal at this time of year - my grandparents to share the holidays with us and my aunts to pay their respects at the gravesite of their parents (my grandparents). Since none of those family members are here today, I find it a bit odd that on this particular Jewish Holiday, we juxtapose the memory of those who have passed with the anticipation of those who will come from afar. And as we embark upon each new year, I do not take for granted, for even one day, that I have my mother and father with us to usher it in. While I am not a religious person, as I get older I find myself becoming more aware and more grateful for these times together.

Which brings me to blessings. Every Rosh Hashanah, before heading out to shul, my father would ask his children to stand in front of him. He would place his hands on our heads and one-by-one recite the priestly blessing for a son or daughter, the Birkat Kohanim. I cherish the blessings I receive from my father each year and hold on to the feeling of his hands upon my head. I have this strong feeling that time is precious, that life is precious, that being in the moment is precious. While food and family bring up tastes and memories to cherish, there are more importantly blessings to be thankful for. For me, this is a time to give thanks for all that I have, especially for having another year with those that I love. I pray to be inscribed in the Book of Life and re-dedicate myself to being a better person. The blowing of the shofar at the end of the services feels like a blast of hope... for all our blessings to continue, for all of us to gather together next year and for our wishes and prayers to come true. And if anyone in the congregation wants recipes, they’ll have to ask my mother.



Journey To Understanding

by Dr. Rosanne Superstein Kliot

Rosh Hashanah has always been a very special time for me. Having been a student for close to 25 years, its timing at the start of the new academic year gave it extra significance. The anticipation of recommencing my studies, together with celebrating a new Jewish year was very exciting. I enjoyed the festive meals, time with family and friends and, on occasion, even a new outfit.

Growing up, I remember large festive family dinners with my cousins, aunts and uncles, while eating time-honoured dishes. Although all of my first cousins have moved away, I was fortunate to marry into a family who loves all the festivities and never shies away from a big gathering.

We have now established new traditions with our children. My husband and I have an open door policy welcoming new and old friends, some of whom are not Jewish, together with new arrivals to Montreal to our holiday table. There is always room for more guests. Our children have often told us how they look forward to Rosh Hashanah and we feel so happy that we have been able to create a warm and welcoming environment for all to enjoy. The feeling of inclusiveness that we hope to impart on our children is a fundamental part of our values.

My personal journey of understanding the meaning of the new year has evolved over the years. In my youth, my thoughts were naively filled with only positive notions. Time has, however, eroded some of this invincibility. Experience has taught me that life is fragile, and that tragedy can strike anyone of us at anytime.

Every day at work I am faced with a reminder of the precariousness of our existence. I see children who were healthy one day being diagnosed the next day with terrible illnesses and watch their poor parents struggle with the news and their new reality. I watch the innocent children bravely face each day not knowing what the future holds and too naive to even wonder about it.

With each passing year, I become more appreciative of all that I have and understand the importance of good health. When I daven during Rosh Hashanah I pray for those less fortunate than myself and that they will be granted another year of health and happiness.

Rosh Hashanah for me now, in addition to festive meals establishing warm family traditions, has become a time to reflect, put aside differences and remember the big picture of what is truly important and what is not.

Shana Tovah!



When Life Gives You Lemons ... Do you Have to Make Lemonade?

by *Stephanie Steinman*

When I was a little girl, Rosh Hashanah meant new clothes. One of my earliest memories was running around downstairs of this very shul, showing off my new dress and beautiful new black patent leather shoes. I will always remember my favourite red dress with the white stripe in front, wearing it proudly and promising my mom that I wouldn't get dirty. That was unfortunately one promise I couldn't keep! As a self-absorbed seven-year old in pigtails, that red dress signified to me the true importance of Rosh Hashanah. I needed to look my best because G-d was watching and judging.

As the years passed and I grew older and just a little bit wiser, Rosh Hashanah began to take on new meaning. Shul was not just an opportunity to see and to be seen, but a place that I would find real meaning and to make sense of what happened to me during the previous year.

Through the years, I was faced with significant obstacles. As I sat in shul over the years, I always tried to find sense and explanations as to why I was chosen to have these difficulties, doubting if I really had the strength and courage to dig deep and to carry on. What were the lessons I was supposed to learn and from whom? I was reminded that all of us have had some of our hopes extinguished, expectations that went unfulfilled, goals that were missed and projects that failed. These challenges are a reason for us to dig deeper; to discover new depths in our personality that we didn't think we had. Easier said than done, right? In Judaism, we are told to love each day - to not take anything for granted, not a moment, not even a breath. Every day, a gift. No matter if life gives us lemons, we must make lemonade. But what if you don't want to make lemonade?

When life hands you bitter lemons, you have to decide to make it sweet. And that can be hard. Very hard. It can be hard to enjoy life when you're missing a loved one, including your beloved 15 ½ year old dog Rudy.

We are reminded of the story of Joseph. When he is down in the pit, he begins to rewrite his story, reshape the narrative of his life. He now knows that he was never really in control of what happens - none of us really are. We can learn from Joseph. We can determine the person that we want to become during this New Year. Having hit rock bottom, Joseph had begun his process of growth in the pit and had started to rise even before his brothers pulled him up. The brothers don't know this, but the man they pull up out of the pit is a very different person than the boy they threw in. He is still Joseph, but a new version.

When I enter this special place we call TBDJ on Rosh Hashanah, I will remember the story of Joseph. I will remember that all of us have the power to lift up from our struggles and transform ourselves with a renewed idealism and optimism that will carry us through the entire year. Though it's true, a new dress and beautiful new shoes may help too!

Shana Tovah!



The High Holidays and Austrian Economics

by *Nathan Rosenshein*

The Austrian economist, Professor Ludwig Von Mises, authored many books and publications and was well-known for his ground breaking work in his field. Among the most profound truths to be found in his writings are three simple words: "Actions have consequences." This phrase is a concise and profound summary of something we should all be keenly aware of, especially during the period that we now find ourselves in – The High Holy Days.

Many sincere people who are trying to do the right thing during the month of Elul, the days leading up to Rosh Hashanah, approach this time period with an attitude that can be summarized as follows: This is a court hearing. We will present our case to the Judge, a hearing will be held, and judgement will be rendered. Our Machzor, in fact, use the phrase "*BeRosh Hashanah Yikosaivun, Uveyom Tzom Kippur Yechaseimun*" - On Rosh Hashanah it will be inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it will be sealed.

If we survived the year, most of us conclude that all is well, and all we need to do is to continue coasting. But is that really the case? And if it is, then why do so many of us have the feeling that we are falling short of our spiritual potential?

I would like to suggest an approach that ties in to the mantra above: Actions have consequences.

To advance ourselves in any area, we need to have inspiration, motivation and goals. Most importantly, we need a game plan. It may be a partial plan, it may need fine tuning, and it may become outdated in the future. But nonetheless, the fact that we have such a plan is an important starting point.

Next, we need practical strategies for implementing the plan. Without this crucial step, the plan cannot be brought to fruition.

And we need ongoing motivation to keep us moving forward.

We are, in many ways, blessed to be living in the 21st century. The information age has opened us up to the availability of books, articles, websites, and resources that could not even have been imagined in the past. There are resources that open our eyes to the great Rabbis, scholars and thinkers of past decades and centuries. Take advantage of these resources! Learn, study and absorb their wisdom.

Our tradition as observant Jews has a powerful lesson to teach us about how to relate to previous generations. As opposed to modern culture, which posits that the young have an exclusive understanding of how the world works, our tradition



teaches the opposite – that we are much weaker intellectually, spiritually and morally than our ancestors. In fact, it is only because we “stand on the shoulders of our fathers and mothers” that we are able to accomplish anything at all!

Besides the intellectual and spiritual values, we also start with amazing moral values. As the American-Israeli author Naomi Ragen writes:

Jews don't burn mosques or churches. We don't target children or old women. We, despite all that was done to us and all the hatred we receive, continue to be compassionate, to value justice and human life. We continue to teach our children to value life and love other people, and strive towards peace. Our children don't throw stones at Arabs. We don't burn the flags of other countries.

(Never prouder to be an Israeli and a Jew, published article, April 25, 2002, following the terrorist attack at the Pesach Seder in Netanya)

In view of the fact that actions do have consequences, that we need game plans and strategies to be successful, and that the High Holy Days are similar to a court hearing, I would humbly suggest the following:

Come to court prepared. Preparation means that each and every day of the year, without exception, we try to improve over yesterday. Whether this means improving the way we relate to our families or friends, improving our religious observance, watching our words to ensure that we do not speak hurtfully of others or to others, coming to shul more often, giving more charity, being more careful with ethics, or fill in your own particular idea.....the point is to be moving in the right direction each day. If we make the first positive move, Hashem will help guide us in the right direction. But we have to make the first move.

In this manner, we come to court prepared and increase the likelihood of a positive judgement for ourselves and our families.

To allow Naomi Ragen to have the last words:

Thank you G-d, for making me a Jew, and teaching me Your Laws, at this time and in this place, when so many all over the world have lost their moral bearings and have sunk so low. Thank you for keeping Your promise to Abraham, for bringing me, his descendant, back here thousands of years later. I will try to be worthy of being a Jew, to be worthy of all the good You've showered on me and the Jewish people by giving us back our homeland, and helping us to defeat our enemies, the enemies of all good people everywhere. (ibid)

I would like to wish the entire TBDJ Family a wonderful, healthy, happy, fulfilling upcoming new year. Shana Tovah!



The Rosh Hashanah Cup Holder

by Adina Moss

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur have always been a combination of two themes for me.

On the one hand, it's a time for introspection and self-improvement. Just mentioning the 3 "Ts" (*teshuvah*, *teffilah*, and *tzedakah*) has always been an automatic trigger to begin evaluating the year that had past, and plan for the year ahead. Have I been a good daughter? Friend? Jew? How many apologies do I owe? What can I do better? How can I be a better person, be nicer to others, learn more Torah?

On the other hand, it prompts me to take a step back and appreciate how fortunate I am. It makes me instinctively start thanking G-d for all the good that I have in my life at that time- my health, my family, my friends, food on the table, shoes on my feet, passing an exam, finding my "lost" watch, getting pregnant and having children, and the list goes on and on.

I have been doing this every year for as long as I can remember. Always welcoming the once-a-year reminder for self-evaluation and gratitude. I thought it was a great practice.

Until two years ago, when I was diagnosed with cancer.

And then I started to wonder—why do we tend to wait for a bad situation (or the High Holidays) to make us stop and truly appreciate what it is we have? Why does it take a sick child to appreciate when he or she is healthy? Strep throat to appreciate pain-free swallowing (so basic!)? A broken oven to appreciate stress-free cooking? (Even a pastrami sandwich in Toronto to appreciate Montreal smoked meat . . . wait, who am I kidding? Every Montrealer appreciates smoked meat!)

Why did I need a cancer diagnosis to appreciate life?

At one of my (many) appointments at the hospital, I asked the oncologist about my prognosis. The first words to come out of his mouth were, "it's not good . . ." (It turned out that it wasn't that bad either, but, apparently, it also wasn't good.) It was then that I had a moment of clarity. (Well, first I had a moment of panic, but then I had a moment of clarity.) And I realized something that I imagine most of us have already realized at one point or another—we don't allocate enough time in our lives to sufficiently value what it is we have. It's not enough to go about our day-to-day lives and stop only when we have momentary reminders. Because the problem with these moments is exactly that—they are just moments. We too easily fall back into our regular routines and our revelations slowly fade away. We need to wake up every morning and appreciate having another day. To thank G-d for every blessing.



To acknowledge that what we have accomplished in life is directly because of the hurdles we've had to overcome.

We need to find a way to start appreciating the small things, the not-so-major milestones in our everyday lives, without being prompted.

Recently, I started taking a pill that I can't take with any other medication. With a pillbox already designated for both mornings and nights, I had to find an alternative time and method to remember. My occupational therapist suggested leaving them somewhere out of the ordinary, so that when I see them I notice they are out of place and am reminded to take them. They currently reside in my car's cup holder.

How can we create a "cup holder" for our lives, to help us see all the good around us? I don't actually have an answer. I wish I did. (If you have any suggestions, I would love to hear them!) But this Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, let's stop and appreciate all of our many blessings. Let's promise ourselves to not wait until next year to be thankful for what we have, to fix what we have broken, and to work on ourselves.

Even after going through a very difficult year, I find myself slowly sliding away from appreciating every day and every situation, and transitioning back to my old routine of once-a-year soul searching.

This Rosh Hashanah, let's find our "cup holders"!

Shana Tovah!

May this year be filled with health, happiness, and laughter for you and your family!



The Torah Reading: Connecting us to Avraham and The Place

by Dr. David Zukor

I was honoured and humbled when Rabbi Freundlich asked me to write some thoughts about Rosh Hashanah. So much has already been said – what could I offer?

I've been very privileged to *lein* (read the Torah) on Rosh Hashanah. The Torah reading on both days includes well known and very powerful stories found in Parshat Vayera. I'd like to share several incidents and *pesukim* (verses) that really resonate with me as they relate to the meaning and significance of Rosh Hashanah.

On the first day we learn that Hashem “remembered” Sarah. This refers to the fact that he answered her prayers for a child (similar to the story of Hanna in the Haftara) and we of course hope and wish for positive responses to our *tefillot* as well.

After the weaning of Yitzchak, Sarah realizes that Hagar's son Yishmael is “bad company” for Yitzchak (see Rashi on the word “*metzachek*”).

Avraham, greatly distressed when Sarah asks him to banish Hagar and Yishmael, appeals to Hashem, who answers: “Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice...” (Bereishit 21:12).

Now, Avraham has already “blessed” Yishmael (in the previous Parsha) when he prayed “*loo Yishmael yichye lifanecha*” (O, that Yishmael should live before You! Bereishit 17:19). Faced with the difficult task of banishing this very same son, Hashem consoles Avraham and tells him not to worry: “But the son of the slave woman as well I will make into a nation for he is your offspring.”

It always resonates strongly with me that Israel's dilemmas with our “neighbours” all stem from this story. Avraham's legendary compassion has left us with an eternal problem. Maybe things could have been so different...

Of course, I'm always heartened and encouraged by Hashem's concluding message to Avraham: “...but it is through Yitzchak that offspring will be considered yours” (Bereishit 21:12).

We know it; now we just have to convince a few billion people.

On the second of the Days of Awe, the Torah portion is truly “awe” inspiring. The highlight for me (and in my mind the most dramatic aliyah of the entire year) is the description of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, the recounting of the Binding of Isaac. This story also includes a life saving angel and the origin of the Shofar.

Personally, the most important “connection” is where this all took place – Har Habayit, also known as Har Moria, or the Temple Mount. This is the exact same place that Noach brought his sacrifice after the Flood, where Yaakov dreamt his dream of the ladder,



where Shlomo built the first Beit Hamikdash, where the Second Temple stood...

I'm blessed with being able to daven daily at the Kotel when I'm "home" in Jerusalem. Despite (or because of) this, I've come to realize that our "real" place is the site repeatedly referred to in the Torah simply as Hamakom - THE Place - the Har Habayit. (In a recent poll, 60 percent of Jews felt that the Kotel was the most important Jewish place).

We read in the first aliyah of the second day of Rosh Hashanah: "On the third day, Avraham lifted his eyes and saw The Place (Hamakom) from afar...." (Bereishit 22:4).

If you stand today in Ir David (the City of David - and you owe it to yourself to visit) and look south, you will see a hilltop with a transmission tower on its top. That is the modern neighborhood of Arnona, which is not far from the new US Embassy. It's also the exact spot that Avraham our grandfather was standing on as described in this pasuk!

Researchers have shown that this spot is a three day walk from Beersheva and is also the first spot from that direction where the Har Habayit could be seen.

To me, the connection between the Torah reading of these two days and the present day is enormous and ties everything together. In fact, I reflect on this all year long because it validates who, what and where we as Am Yisrael are.

May we be privileged to spend all our holidays together in Yerushalayim Ir Habnuya.

Ktiva v'Chatima Tovah!



The Machzor

by Esther Rozenek

Growing up in Israel with parents who were children during the Holocaust, Rosh Hashanah was a very uplifting experience.

My late father came to Israel before 1948 as an orphan with three younger siblings under his care. My late mother came to Israel to join her mother, my Savta. After what my family experienced during the Shoah, Rosh Hashanah was all about family and cherishing the gift of being together, especially after so much that was lost. The shul that we went to was a *shtiebel*; it was situated in a defunct store that was converted into a shul. The women's section was in an alcove of a staircase leading to an apartment located above the shul and adjacent stores. There was no air conditioner and only one single fan. Despite the heat and the makeshift space, the davening was quiet and meaningful. I can still hear the special *nigunim* (melodies).

As an adult with my own family, I cherish my upbringing and continuing the motto of valuing family and being involved in doing *chesed* (good deeds) for people in the community.

* * *

On Rosh Hashanah we hold in our hands The Machzor. Why is it called by that name?

Machzor (מחזור) comes from the root חזר, which means "repeat"; every year the special prayers for the Holiday are repeated. Today we are accustomed to using one main Machzor in shul. In our *shtiebel* in Israel, everyone brought their own Machzor and some of the prayers had the melodies that were sung from many generations ago.

A very special פיוט (liturgical poem) in the Machzor is *Unetaneh Tokef*. Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgement when we stand in front of Hashem to be judged. The Rambam explains in הלכות תשובה פרק ג that there are three types of people and that their judgement is weighted according to their good deeds and according to their sins.

The *Tzadik* (righteous one) has more good deeds than sins; on Rosh Hashanah he is signed to life. The *Rasha* (wicked one) has more sins than good deeds; he is signed to death. The middle man has exactly half good deeds and half sins; his judgement is postponed until Yom Kippur. If he does *teshuvah* (repentance) he will be signed for life, but if he doesn't repent he will be signed for death.

The Sephardic Machzor has a different פיוט (liturgical poem) which is called *Little Sister* - אחות קטנה, that was written in Spain in the 13th century by Rabbi Abraham



Hazan Girondi. His name appears in the poem in an Acrostic. This poem describes the Jewish people as a little sister in exile who is hoping that Hashem will remember her forever and redeem her. Every paragraph ends with the words "Let all the curses of the year end." Only the last paragraph ends with a belief in the happiness of the Redemption still to come: "May the New Year start with blessings!"

Another important prayer is *Shema Koleinu*. This tefillah is actually said during our prayers every day of the year (except for Shabbat), so what is the special significance of this prayer on Rosh Hashanah? The *Medrash* (Leviticus Rabbah) explains that the whole year Israel is busy with their daily life. On Rosh Hashanah, however, we stop and blow the shofar. When we do that Hashem changes from his Seat of Judgement and instead sits on His Seat of Mercy. Rashi in Tractate Bava Metzia explains that the power of tefillah on Rosh Hashanah is that our prayers are accepted.

One of the customs of Rosh Hashanah is dipping an apple in honey. My late father used to buy honey directly from a family that owned a bee hive and they would bring us enough containers of honey to last us the entire season. Today, many years later, honey still remains a staple at my brother's home as well as in ours.

May it be that Hashem renew for us a good sweet year like honey. May our prayers be heard - Shemah Koleinu - and accepted!



The Unexpected Kippah Effect

by *David Ettedgui*

This past year, I had the honour of serving as president of the Lord Reading Law Society. The Society, founded in 1948, serves as the collective voice of Jewish jurists in Quebec and is dedicated to the furtherance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In addition to the defence of human rights, the Society is best known for its gala dinners featuring prominent speakers from judicial, academic, political and business spheres.

I wasn't sure what to expect when I took the job, but I knew that preparation and hard work would be the linchpin to a successful presidency. And so, I devoted countless hours to the Society. With a global vision in mind, I knew I had to lock down my speakers early, in some cases a year before the events. They included supreme court justices from Canada, the United States and Israel, a former Premier of Quebec and the president of a para-public corporation, to name a few.

In addition, I had the opportunity to represent the Society at many public functions. I was also invited to Parliament, both the House of Commons and the Senate, as well as the National Assembly where my colleagues and I had a private luncheon with the Justice Minister of Quebec.

With the assistance and guidance of my Board, the year was a resounding success.

Those still reading this article should, by now, be asking themselves two important questions: What exactly is the purpose of this self-aggrandizing discourse? And what does it have to do with Rosh Hashanah?

The answer: To share the most satisfying and rewarding event that took place during my presidency. Conventional wisdom would lead many to believe that it must have been the opportunity to meet prominent members of the legal and political communities. While that certainly was rewarding, upon reflection I realized that this was not the most gratifying part of my presidency.

Rather, the most memorable part was an event that took place at the final dinner of the season. I had just delivered my final speech as president and passed the proverbial baton to my successor. I was enveloped with a sense of relief and accomplishment. But then it became meaningful in an unexpected way.

A member of the Society approached me and asked if we could speak privately. I obliged, expecting the usual complaint or suggestion. However, the member expressed his appreciation for how I conducted myself during my presidency and how I stayed true to my beliefs. When I asked what he meant by the comment,



he replied that although he considers himself a modern orthodox Jew, he seldom wears his kippah outside of a synagogue or at home and never to the office or in court. However, seeing me wear my kippah at Parliament, Quebec Bar meetings and especially in the National Assembly at my luncheon meeting with the Justice Minister (the Kosher lunch added to the optics), gave him the courage to extend his kippah wearing practice outside of his synagogue and home.

His words were a reminder that my mandate as president required commitment and devotion to a cause bigger than myself. As the voice for Jewish jurists in Quebec, I felt that my connection to my faith needed to be at the front and center of my actions, even though the majority of Jewish lawyers in Quebec aren't necessarily orthodox. Sometimes, in a world characterized by religious, political and ethnic divisiveness, as evidenced by recent political rhetoric, it can be difficult to make that choice. I knew that wearing a kippah might inadvertently attract the ire of others for reasons beyond my control, but I also knew that I had to remain true to my beliefs. For this reason, I continue to wear my kippah with pride in all contexts. After all, Providence is always looking out for us, even in the face of uncertainty.

I don't consider myself a role model and I'm by no means the only attorney who unabashedly wears a kippah to court. One need not look further than my fellow TBDJ Board Member and friend Michael Hollander. But, I do my best to lead by example for my children, and to this end, act in a fashion that harmonizes with my values.

When I reflect upon the last year, I am reminded that hard work, passion and commitment to something bigger than ourselves are core tenets of our faith and these tenets help us achieve success far beyond our expectations. No time of the year is more appropriate to reflect on this ideal than Rosh Hashanah. As the Rambam teaches us, the shofar blasts are a call for introspection, a call to look inside ourselves and improve our ways and actions (*Rambam, Laws of Teshuva 3:4*).

I hope that my experience may inspire others to remain true to their beliefs in the face of intimidating obstacles as we start this New Year.

Shana Tovah!



Religion and Tradition and Meaning

by Harriet Greenstone

When I think of the High Holidays, I reflect upon how much the prayers and religious laws and customs mean to me. I think of the familiar warmth of traditions passed on from generation to generation. We cherish and hang on to the old ones and create new ones, sometimes by active collaboration and sometimes purely by chance. “That was fun and meaningful. Let’s do this every year.” Whether baking honey cakes, decorating the succah, or where we sit at the family table, they are all practices that bring us together as a community and as families.

Many family traditions have been formed around a dining room table. My maternal grandmother passed away when I was 8 years old. She was very special to me and I treasure my memories of our times together. Many of them involved family dinners – playing with leftover dough while she baked, watching her prepare meals, and helping her lay them out on her big dining room table. Then the whole family would come together around the table – all the aunts and uncles and cousins – and we’d enjoy joyful celebrations together.

I was privileged to inherit that special dining room set as we were planning my wedding and setting up our home. For many years, every Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah and so many other Holidays, the family continued to gather around this table and relive memories of the many wonderful occasions we’ve shared, comparing old stories and memories while creating new ones. My parents, aunts and uncles, and many cousins often made mention of how proud Bubby would have been to see the beautiful Jewish traditions and values that we have continued to follow, from slowing down as Shabbat and the Holidays approach to setting the table and making sure that much too much food fills the table.

With a blink of the eye I am now the Bubby, Baruch Hashem, maybe not as fancy – sometimes mixing our own fruit punch rather than making our own dough – but still cherishing the laughter and the special moments. My eldest daughter now has my mother’s dining room table, which my mother was blessed with the opportunity of witnessing and beaming with pride as her granddaughter continued the traditions. And now I watch in pride as she sets the table and prepares the delicacies in the elegant tradition of her Bubby and her grandma.

My mother, who was the owner of a well-known traditional gift shop, always pulled out her fanciest dishes and tableware for family celebrations, explaining that we should set the finest table for those we love and care about. That tradition has continued. And so has my father’s tradition of doing kaporos with coins with all of us. When my siblings and I married and had our own children, my father came to each of our homes on the eve of Yom Kippur to perform the ritual. This meant so much to us. Our children waited expectantly for this special tradition, just as we had done a generation before. After my father passed, my husband took over the



tradition in our home and later in the homes of our children and grandchildren. As Yom Kippur Eve approaches, they call and remind him. Of course, they could do it themselves, but that's not part of the tradition.

With every marriage, maintaining the rituals of both families helps to bring them together, creating a unique mixture of old and new traditions for each generation. For instance, I now make the sweet potato pudding that my husband's mother always made as well as her liver potato knishes – a delicacy that one family enjoys but the other looks at with slight trepidation. My family loves when I make brisket and karnatzl. Each family member will give a smile and hug and say, "You remembered to make it!" I truly believe it's important that family traditions, whether they involve food or how we set the table or how we celebrate special holidays, be carried on.

Sometimes we might wonder why these traditions matter. When I would ask my mother why we followed certain traditions, she responded that her mother told her to. She proudly added she never asked why. One of my daughters once heard a story at a synagogue learning session prior to Rosh Hashanah: A young woman asked her mother why she always cut the ends off the roast beef before cooking it. Her mother responded, "Because my mother said so." Not satisfied, the young woman went to her grandmother. She asked the same question and received the same answer: "Because my mother did it that way." Fortunately, her great-grandmother was still around to ask. "Why did you always cut the ends of the roast beef before cooking it?" The answer was unexpected. "It was the only way it would fit into my special pot." Some say you must ask why. Others do it because it feels right and is respectful.

Does that make the tradition meaningless? I don't think so. It's not about food, or objects, or practices. It's about sharing memories that bond us together as families. This is the time of year when we traditionally join together to pray in celebration of the High Holidays and to think meaningfully about how we live our lives. It's also a perfect opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the importance of family, by sharing each other's company, our memories, and our treasured traditions.

I also love the religious aspect of this time of year. We shut off all technology and listen to some of the most beautiful songs and prayers. These days we often hear about value of "mindfulness." As the Holidays approach I pray we take the time to be mindful of what we have. Mindful of the tastes, the hugs, the laughter.

We also need to hear the meaning of the prayers, to take the time to be mindful and reflect as we ask for forgiveness and pray for health, happiness and life. We take stock of the year that has passed and the one that lies ahead. I cherish my time of reflection and my time with Hashem.



Abraham, Jonah and a Jewish Mother: Lessons About G-d's Trials

by Jack Rudski

If life was always easy, how would we grow? If we faced no struggles, how could we move forward? The challenges we face are tests from G-d. They try our resilience, resourcefulness and faith. We can choose to run away from these challenges or face them head on. The former is easy, the latter is hard. The former keeps us stagnant, while the latter allows us to progress.

On Rosh Hashanah, we read about *Akeidat Yitzchak*, the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:1-24). After Sarah delivers Isaac at the age of 90, G-d tells Abraham that he must take Isaac, his son, his 'only' son, the 'one he loves' and sacrifice him. Abraham does as G-d commands: "So Abraham rose early in the morning . . . and started for the place about which G-d had told him" (22:3, translation from Birnbaum Machzor). It must have been hard for Abraham. Isaac was his only son with Sarah and he loved him dearly. Regardless, he rose and he dutifully obeyed, seemingly believing that everything would be alright. In the end, Abraham did not have to sacrifice his son, but his obedience and faith were rewarded (22:17).

At Mincha on Yom Kippur, we read a very different story of faith: The story of Jonah. G-d commands Jonah to go and speak to the people of Nineveh because they are misbehaving. This could not have been an easy task. Reproaching the inhabitants of a big city is scary to say the least! However, unlike Abraham, Jonah does not obey. Jonah does not meet his challenge head on. Rather, he goes to Yafo to get on a boat for a faraway land to "flee from before G-d" (1:2). However, there is no escaping G-d. G-d tries to teach Jonah faith, both with the fish and the *kikayon* tree. By the end, Jonah's faith seems to remain thin. When G-d causes the tree to wither, Jonah asks to die (4:8) because he does not want to manage the lack of shade. Jonah consistently tries to avoid his challenges, unlike Abraham who confronts them. Jonah does not rise above, while Abraham does.

The *Yamim Nora'im* are a good time to reflect on faith. Faith in the face of challenges is not limited to Biblical characters. My zaidie Sam was born in Sarnaki, Poland in 1935. When the war broke out, his shtetl was close to the dividing line between the Russians and the Germans. His mother knew what the Germans would do, so in the middle of the night, she and my great-grandfather dragged their four-year-old son across the Bug River to the Russian side. The Russians deported them to Archangelsk, near the Arctic Circle. The labour camps were not pleasant, but they were far better than the certain death that awaited those on the German side. My great-great-grandfather, Ephraim Gershon, died from the hard labour. My great-grandmother was not one to give in to bad circumstances. She was intent on keeping her son alive.



She traded on the black market for food. This came in handy when another Jew arrived. He was wealthier and more learned, and my great-grandmother knew he would not last long. She saw a unique opportunity. She offered the man food from the black market in exchange for Hebrew and Torah lessons for my grandfather. In the middle of a war, in a Russian labour camp, a Jewish mother wanted her son to learn Hebrew so that he could read the Torah. Like Abraham, she made the best of a bad situation and rose to the challenge, showing that she would not lose faith. My great-grandmother may have run away from the Germans, as Jonah tried to run away from Nineveh, but unlike Jonah, she did not run from G-d. She did not run away from hope.

We do not know what the new year will bring. We pray that we will have a year of health, happiness, success and peace. However, perhaps we should temper our anger and fear if we encounter challenges. G-d sends us these challenges to let us show our faith and courage. G-d sends us tests so that we can be like Abraham and meet them head on. I wish you all the strength, resilience and faith to meet whatever challenges you face.



Recovery from “Mitzvah” Shock

by Roslyn Guttman

Shmuel Greenbaum created a website called “Partners in Kindness” after his wife Shoshana was killed by a suicide bomber in a Jerusalem restaurant in 2001. He didn’t wallow in self pity nor let anger or hatred control his life. Instead, he focused on the positive. He responded to the tragedy by teaching kindness through personal stories of everyday people. The website gathers stories related to acts of kindness and sends them out in a daily email called “A Daily Dose of Kindness.”

Below is an incident I was part of that occurred a few years ago that I submitted to Partners in Kindness.

* * *

The experience:

I work for a small company. One day, our computer consultant, Li Wong,* a lovely woman who comes in every so often, forgot her lunch.

I had to run some errands that day at noon, which included picking up challahs for Shabbos. Since Li was new to the area, I suggested she come with me and we’d pick up sandwiches at the kosher bakery while I was there.

Off we went. When we arrived, Li insisted that she wanted to pay the parking meter. I wouldn’t have any of that, so I dashed out of the car before her and beat her to it.

Upon our return, I realized that I didn’t have my keys. Apparently, in my haste to get out of the car before her, I had locked them inside. Sure enough, I looked inside and there they were – in the ignition. I panicked because I hate to be late for work.

I looked around and saw a Chassid in a van across the street. He was about to take off when I flagged him down and asked him for the number of *Chaverim*, an organization that dispatches volunteers to help people who are locked out of their cars, homes or have other minor emergencies. He gave me the phone number. I called and in no time flat a *Chaverim* volunteer was there to help me out. Li was shocked. I explained the concept of one Jew helping out another – that it is a *mitzvah*. She said that she had never heard of seen anything like it, EVER!

I was taken aback when Li couldn’t believe that the man from *Chaverim* wanted nothing in return from me. However, I did ask for one of the self-addressed envelopes he had with him so that I could send a donation.

Li was convinced that this was a charge. “Absolutely not,” I said, explaining that I wanted to send something because supplies cost money and that my money would



aid the organization's ability to continue servicing others.

Driving back to work Li was speechless. I asked her if she was okay. Basically, she was recuperating from “*mitzvah*” shock.

* * *

I'm not saying that other nations in the world don't aid others in distress. Of course, help is everywhere.

But we as Jews are *required* to do mitzvot. It is not just a nice thing to do – it is an obligation. The Torah guides us every step of the way; it is there to mold and teach us proper behavior in the way that Hashem requires of us. What a gift it is to be a Jew! Not only is it a gift, it is an honour, a privilege, and a blessing. But it also carries an enormous responsibility.

On Rosh Hashanah we praise Hashem throughout the davening. And on Yom Kippur we “*tsitter*,” we beg forgiveness and resolve to better ourselves and follow His ways.

May we never be “shocked” by kindness, but instead feel it is a sacred duty which elevates us closer to Hashem and allows us to shine as a light unto the nations. May our acts of kindness inspire others, and may we always have the ability to recognize and appreciate other people's kindnesses to us.

(* Name has been changed)



The Physical Spirituality of Rosh Hashanah

by Jack Lehrer

Rosh Hashanah has always mystified me. How can the month of Tishrei, which is actually the 7th month of the year, usher in the new year? Why isn't Rosh Hashanah in the month of Nissan which is the first month of the year?

The Talmud (Tractate Rosh Hashanah 10b) records a disagreement between R' Eliezer and R' Yehoshua as to when Creation really took place. R' Eliezer believes Creation took place in the month of Tishrei while R' Yehoshua claims that creation took place in the month of Nissan. Both present compelling and valid reasons for their positions. It would seem that they can't both be right.

Perhaps they can.

I saw a beautiful reconciliation of both thoughts from Rabbeinu Tam, who suggested as follows: The *conception* of the world was created by Hashem in the month of Tishrei, but the actual *physical creation* took place in the month of Nissan.

I find this idea fascinating because Rosh Hashanah (Tishrei) and Pesach (Nissan) are the two Holidays that I feel require the most amount of work. Pesach is a *physical* type of work, where we work hard, for many hours for weeks in advance to clean our homes and rid ourselves of all our chametz. We have to prepare our matzah, maror, charoset, and all our needs for the seder, not to forget the many hours spent koshering utensils and appliances.

Rosh Hashanah, on the other hand, requires a *spiritual* preparation. As we enter the month of Elul we begin blowing the shofar and reciting *L'Dovid* and Slichot (penitential prayers). Although Ashkenazim begin saying Slichot towards the end of Elul, Sefardim actually start at the beginning of the month.

Elul is a time of introspection; we look within our souls, realize what our past year's failures have been and resolve to do *tshuva* (repentance) and reach a higher *madreiga* (level) than the previous year.

The davening (praying) that we do is of course very spiritual, but even our meals are intertwined with spirituality. At night, we recite the *yehi ratzons* (may it be G-d's will) over the *simanim* (symbolic foods). There are multiple symbols that we use, from dipping apple in honey in supplication for a sweet year, to the eating of a fish or sheep's head asking Hashem that in life we too should be like the head and not like the tail.

There is also a *minhag* (custom) not to sleep on Rosh Hashanah. A common explanation is in order not to have a sleepy year, though the fact that Rosh Hashanah



is considered one long day, and we certainly sleep at night brings this minhag into question. Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the Arizal, explains that you should only avoid sleep in the morning of Rosh Hashanah, so that you won't miss the shofar blowing.

Either way, refraining from sleep on Rosh Hashanah is not the craziest idea in the world; on Rosh Hashanah you should be praying to Hashem, and that is much more effective while you are conscious.

There is also a minhag not to eat nuts because the gematria (numerical value of the letters) of *egoz* (nuts) is equal to the gematria of the word for *chet* (sin).

I personally do not subscribe to this particular minhag because I am not a big fan of gematria, and even if I were, this gematria only works if you spell the word *chet* incorrectly.

In any case, regardless of what minhagim (customs) you follow, may they be done with full *kavanah* (sincere intention) and may all your prayers be answered.

On that note I would like to end by wishing everyone a Ketiva V'chatima Tovah, and may you have a Sweet New Year!



Rosh Hashanah – TBDJ Style

by Ralph Munk

The arrival of Rosh Hashanah means many different things to us.

It is the celebration of the New Year with family and friends, many of whom come in from out of town to celebrate with those who remained in Montreal.

Rosh Hashanah is also a period of reflection: a time to reflect on the year that passed, and a time to take inventory of what has changed during the last year, including new arrivals to the family, and sometimes unfortunately, losses to our families. What did we do right this past year? What did we do wrong? Who was wronged? Usually, the latter is much more difficult to recognize.

Rosh Hashanah is when we get a clean slate. Many people make New Year's resolutions, both in the Jewish and Gregorian calendars. They pledge to lose weight, do things differently, be a better child, parent and person.

Just in case it wasn't a pristine year, we always have an additional Ten Days to make a good impression, before our fate is sealed for the following year on Yom Kippur.

One thing about Rosh Hashanah that has always remained consistent and served as a stabilizing factor in my life is TBDJ, where I have been a member for close to 45 years. Four generations of my family have attended Rosh Hashanah services here. I have been a member through the tenure of four rabbis. There have been many changes to the membership over this period. Political instability during the seventies and eighties in Quebec drove away many young members of our congregation, especially the young anglophones establishing their careers and starting families.

Rosh Hashanah allowed us to see those who moved away. Many, if not all of the Quebec expatriates in North America, came back to spend the High Holidays with parents and family members remaining in Montreal. Annually, I would see old friends who returned to spend Yom Tov with their families. TBDJ became a place where old friendships and acquaintances were rekindled.

Before I was married 40 years ago, I would sit in shul with my father, in my current seat to the right of the pulpit. My wife Kitty sat with my mother directly behind us. After the birth of our three children in the 80s, my children would shuffle between myself and my wife. My kids have fond memories of their early days in shul and looked forward to coming. They remember the Shofar blowing contests downstairs in the nursery, and, of course, the Candyman. There was a lot of activity and noise in the Sanctuary whenever they would be there.

My two boys, Roni and Daniel were both Bar Mitzvahed at TBDJ. Roni has three girls



of his own, and my daughter Shari also has three children, two sons and a daughter. It doesn't seem that long ago, but the next generation is now doing the same things as their parents some 25 to 30 years ago - shofar blowing contests and hunting for lollypops.

Within four years, a series of Bat and Bar Mitzvahs at TBDJ will start among my grandchildren, the fourth generation of our family who attend TBDJ.

My father, Abraham Munk z"l, is no longer with us. My mother, Kreina, now goes to a different shul which is walking distance from her home. But, with my children and their spouses sitting in the same seats that I sat in next to my father 45 years ago, TBDJ is one item which has remained constant over the years.



The Evolutionary Process: It All Begins With Trust

by *Martine Cohen*

One of the places in the Torah where we find the concept of Teshuvah is in Devarim, Chapter 30 verse 2:

"ושבת עד ד' אלוךך..."

"And you will return to the L-rd, your G-d..."

"Lashuv" in Hebrew means to return. Teshuvah is a process of return - a return to our path, to our original state of being. A return to that beautiful sliver of light that shines within each of us and which is bestowed upon us by the Almighty and trusting Hashem. At birth, Hashem entrusts us with the most of sacred entities: a piece of Himself. He trusts each and every one of us unconditionally, right from the get go, with a *neshama* for us to safeguard. We are to be guided by this *neshama* and shine its light upon the world. What a tremendous gift and privilege! What a tremendous responsibility! This responsibility is one we sometimes lose sight of, falter in living up to, or are unable to fully meet. And yet Hashem remains by our side throughout. So much so that we are given the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*, *The Ten Days of Repentance*, as a designated opportunity to rectify things, find our path again and return to where we belong.

Aseret Yemei Teshuvah are days of internal preparation and reflection with an eye towards the ultimate: Yom Kippur. These ten days are a time for us to decisively re-iterate our commitment and consciously and consistently engage in the process of return. The Torah and our Sages provide us with steps and guidelines to engage in this process. It is primarily an internal process. To embark on this journey, it is not sufficient to only acknowledge our misdeeds. We must go through an evolutionary process, cleansing ourselves from the inside out, to the point where we can forgive ourselves and allow for others to forgive us. We must be open and receptive to Hashem's forgiveness of us and to accepting both our fallibilities and Hashem's acceptance of them. We must face them, own them and work to do better, all the while recognizing that only Hashem is infallible. It is a sacred and most humbling experience. One that truly allows us to reconnect with our *neshama* and return to Hashem and the path of the Torah in a new, enlightened and improved way.

May we all have a meaningful and enriching *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*.



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