

# KJ Beginners

## High Holiday Reader 5780



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# Rosh Hashanah

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# 7

## TIPS FOR ROSH HASHANAH

By Alyssa Rachel Gross

How to get closer to your best self this New Year.

**1 If not now, when?**  
It's never the perfect time to change an ingrained habit. Don't wait for a magical moment or to hit rock bottom. Start today.

**2 Gradual steps**  
Stop trying to change everything all at once. Make an ironclad commitment to one action.

**3 Write down your goals**  
Write it down, type it out, or text yourself your goals for the month or the year. Not only will you have a daily anchor to review but you will also have a benchmark for success.

**4 Tell someone**  
Let someone (or a few) know that you're making a change. You'll gain support and accountability. And once you see them rooting you on, you won't want to let them down.

**5 Break it down**  
If you want to supercharge an area of your life, break it down into an actionable set of steps. Instead of saying "I'd like to get healthy", write down "no sugar in my coffee" or "1 hour at the gym on Monday and Wednesdays."

**6 Focus on the rose**  
Keep your eye on what you're working towards rather than on what you are giving up. Every rose has its thorns. Focus on the rose.

# 7

### Be kind to yourself

Forgive yourself when you slip up. Talk to yourself as you would a good friend or your child, expressing compassion, understanding and inspiration to jump back on the horse.



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### Why do we deserve to be judged favorably?

If we are judged on Rosh Hashanah and wish to merit a favorable outcome, shouldn't our prayers articulate the all-important desire to improve? Why is there no mention of *teshuva*, repentance? And doesn't the festive holiday greeting of Happy New Year seem out of context for a day that should be more solemn?

The purpose of Rosh Hashanah can be understood through the main themes of the central *Mussaf* prayer offered on that day. The prayer is organized in three sections.

**1. Malchiot (Kingship):** We begin the special silent prayer of Rosh Hashanah by declaring God our King. The prohibition of worshipping a foreign god is often understood to prohibit Jews from subscribing to idol worship, paganism, and the deities of other religions. Today, this prohibition may not seem relevant. The Talmud, however, explains that the commandment does not refer solely to idol worship, but also to giving credence to other negative influences.

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, one of the great spiritual guides of the past century, further explains this concept. He suggests that harmful desires do not always present themselves to us as such. It is true, there are pleasures in life which we know are plainly wrong. But there are also influences and desires that present themselves as the voice inside us that has our self interest in mind. It may be the voice that calls us to get ahead in business at the expense of other core values. Or it can be the voice that masks our jealousy with the need not to "fall behind." When faced with a moral or ethical dilemma it may seem like there are two legitimate paths to greatness. The second path, however, is often akin to a "foreign god"; it is the alternative force that pulls us away from God and His commandments.

When we declare God's Oneness on Rosh Hashanah, we recognize that these alternative paths are a force of challenge. Chasing negative influences that may be promoted by society is not a path that will leave us satisfied. We wish to focus on what is truly important in our lives and our core values. This is the message of *Malchiot*, Kingship.

**2. Zichronot (Remembrances):** Once we establish our fundamental goals in the section of Kingship, the prayers transition to the next section called *Zichronos*. This is often translated as remembrances, but unlike humans who forget and remember, it is inconceivable that such a concept exists in the context of an all powerful God. What then is the theme of this section of the Rosh Hashanah prayer?

*Zichronot* refers to God's ability to identify and consider all factors and aspects of a decision. God is aware of our mission in life, our motivations, our thoughts, and our desires. Each and every one of these facets is considered when we are judged.

On a practical level, how does this all encompassing knowledge impact us? Greatness as defined by a mortal is superficial; one cannot possibly consider the innate gifts or challenges that are part of another person's composition. However, greatness as defined by God is far deeper. It considers every aspect of the person, his capabilities, his achievements and failures, and even his intentions. There is no absolute definition of success – it is dependent on the individual.

As the Kotzker Rebbe, a great hassidic master known for his witty observations, said, one who is on the bottom of a ladder and climbing up is far higher than one on the top of the ladder who is on his way down. We all have our struggles, pre-dispositions and flaws. However, if we are working to climb, then we are working to achieve greatness.

We recognize that the processes of establishing God as our King, and developing a relationship with Him is dependent on who we are and our strengths. This is an energizing concept, as we begin to give credit to our relative challenges, and each obstacle we overcome.

**3. Shofarot (The Shofar):** *Shofarot* refers to this symbolic horn, the shofar, blown on Rosh Hashanah. What does the shofar represent? Maimonides tells us that it symbolizes a new beginning. It is for this reason that it was present at Mount Sinai as the Jewish Nation was forged, and it is for this reason that we sound it on Rosh Hashanah when we desire to start anew.

Why do we desire a new beginning?

As described above, we began our prayers by declaring God's Oneness, and the path in life we would like to lead. We continued by setting context for those life goals, considering our abilities and what God expects of us in particular. Yet after completing this self assessment, we come to question whether we could have accomplished more during the past year. Have we given our best effort to self improvement, to our relationships with our fellow man and with God? The answer to the question likely gives one pause. We therefore ask God for a new beginning. We blow the shofar.

We desire to earn our existence, but we never forget that we are human and imperfect. We rid ourselves of the misconception that God is a big bad bully in the sky who looks to find fault in our actions, and must be pacified through strange rituals. Rather, He wants to bestow His goodness upon us, and we ask Him to do so for the sake of our relationship. We do so by blowing the Shofar.

This relationship is the meaning and purpose of Rosh Hashanah. We are not asked on this day of new beginnings to examine our individual sins. Instead, we recognize our connection with our Father and King. The bond is greater and more powerful than individual failings or shortcomings. We call upon Him in the spirit of the shofar, and ask that we continue our relationship. We focus on our destination, not the small turns we have taken on our journey there.

It is our willingness to declare God as King that entitles us to a new life. Our request for life is based on our desire for a relationship with Him. Like other relationships it is possible that there are areas that need improvement, however, those imperfections should not detract from the value of the relationship. It is for this reason that Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of God's Kingship and our desire to have a relationship with him. May the coming Rosh Hashanah indeed serve as a prelude to a Happy New Year for each of us and our families.

[Adam's Birthday | Yanki Tauber | Chabad.org](#)

Were Adam and Eve Jewish? The reason I ask is that the Jewish calendar seems to be exclusively about Jewish history and the Jewish experience: Passover celebrates our liberation from Egypt, Shavout our

receiving the Torah at Sinai, Yom Kippur is when G-d forgave us for the sin of the Golden Calf and Sukkot recalls the divine protection during our wanderings through the desert. The list goes on: Simchat Torah, Chanukah, Purim, Lag BaOmer, Tishah B'Av—virtually all our holy days, festivals and special dates are distinctly Jewish affairs, concerned with our lives as Jews.

One very significant exception: the festival of Rosh Hashanah, which marks the birthday of the first two human beings, Adam and Eve, who walked the earth some 2,000 years before the first Jew was born and nearly 2,500 years before we were proclaimed a people at Mount Sinai.

And Rosh Hashanah is clearly more than a token "Goyim Appreciation Day." As its name proclaims, it's the head of the Jewish year. And as the Chassidic masters point out, the head of a thing is its primary and most encompassing component.

We Jews have a reputation for being an insular lot. We stand before G-d as Jews, relate to each other as Jews, study, pray, and do acts of kindness as Jews, are born, marry, die and are buried as Jews. And we keep our Jewishness to ourselves: unlike most other religions and isms, we have no interest in converting non-Jews to Judaism. If people show interest, we try to talk them out of it.

So why is the very "head" of our year the one festival which relates to humanity as a whole?

Yet Judaism does have a universal message—one that is fundamental, indeed primal, to our identity as Jews. In the words of our sages, "Civility (derech erez) comes before Torah."

Long before the Children of Israel received the Torah with its 613 mitzvot, Adam and Eve were given the fundamental laws of civilization. Later, these were reiterated to Noah and his sons and became known as the "Seven Noahide Laws." And when we stood at Sinai to receive "our" mitzvot, we were also given the job of "prevailing upon all inhabitants of the world to accept the laws commanded to the Children of Noah" (Maimonides' Mishnah Torah, Laws of Kings 7:10).

The Noahide Code is not a "religion." This isn't a scaled-down Judaism for non-Jews. Rather, it's G-d's blueprint for civilization, a seven-point foundation for the building of a just, moral and ethical society on earth. The Seven Laws include basics such as: Do not murder your fellow man. Do not steal. Be faithful to your spouse. Do not tear a limb off a living animal. Establish the legal and social institutions that will ensure a just and compassionate society.

Where it gets interesting is with the first two laws: belief in G-d and the prohibition against blasphemy. I have a confession to make: some of my best friends are atheists. I can already hear them saying: "In my book, when you bring G-d into the picture, that's religion, not morality or ethics. You can be a moral person also if you don't believe in and respect G-d." But the entire point of the Noahide Code is that there's no morality without G-d. Humanism won't cut it.

How you think of G-d, how you communicate with G-d, how you serve G-d—that's between you and G-d. That's religion. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the basic premise that the world has a Boss. That we are answerable to a higher authority than ourselves. That the One who created human life also set down the rules for humane living, and enforces those rules.

This—the Noahide Code insists—is the only viable basis for a civilized world.

A few short weeks ago, the awful realization hit us squarely in the face with the force of a Category Five storm: How pitifully thin the veneer of civilization is, how quickly it crumbles when its artificial supports are swept away!

This is what it takes, in this great country of ours, to stave off the law of the jungle: policemen to watch what we're doing, and policemen's police to make sure the policemen show up for work in the morning. Oh, and a few more important things: electric lights so that the policemen can see us, and passable roads so that they can cart us off to jail.

Turn off the lights, flood the roads and disable the punch clocks in the police stations, and five thousand years of civilization evaporate in an hour. The strong prey on the weak, pillaging and raping simply because they can.

I have another confession: some of my best friends are cultural snobs. I hear them saying: "You say that civilization broke down? You call those people civilized? Do they attend the opera on Wednesday nights? Have they read Voltaire? Do they gather in each other's homes in the evenings to discuss the great moral philosophers of the Rationalist and Humanist schools? These are people who have lived in poverty and depravity all their lives. Nothing really changed. It's just that before the hurricane, the crime and squalor in their ghettos followed certain known patterns and were nicely contained by police reports and government statistics. What shocked you was just more of the same, without the usual frames of reference. That's all..."

Ok. So let's look back not three weeks but a hundred years. Question: What country had more moral philosophers per square kilometer than any other before or since? Answer: A large Western European country, begins with the letter G. Question: What country orchestrated, but a generation later, a highly efficient operation, aided by sophisticated technologies and accompanied by strains of Wagner, which was also the most horrendous acts of torture and murder in human history? Answer: Same place.

It's really quite logical. As the ancients said, you can't raise yourself by grabbing a fistful of your own hair and pulling upwards. Nothing human-based will ever transcend the human. A philosophy conceived by the human mind will be elegantly refuted—or side-stepped—by that same mind at the service of its own instincts.

Morality and ethics—the notion that "I want to do this but I won't because it's wrong" and "I don't feel like it, but I'll do it because it's the right thing to do"—might be temporarily enforced by a philosopher's thesis or a policeman's gun. But not for long.

On Rosh Hashanah we remember, and remind the world, that G-d created man and woman, G-d gave them the gift of life, and G-d laid down its rules: respect the life, family and property of your fellow, treat the creatures of your planet kindly, do charity and uphold justice. Do so not only because it makes sense to you, not only because it "feels right," but because you are a subject of G-d and you accept your Sovereign's decrees.

This is the fountainhead of our existence. Without this, there is nothing.

**God is offering another year of life. What are we going to do with it?**

"I have a dream..." — a phrase immortalised by Martin Luther King. "...I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character..." It was a dream that he did not live to see realized; a dream that is still not realized. But a man who dreams is a man who cares. And a man who cares is a man who makes a difference.

We Jews also have a dream. A dream that we have dreamt for almost 3500 years. And Rosh Hashana is the day that we remind ourselves of that dream.

You would think that on the awesome Day of Judgment, — "who will live and who will die, who by fire and who by sword..." — you would think that we would pray for forgiveness, for health, for a year of life. But if you look at the essence of the prayer service, you will see that we ask for none of this.

What do we ask? We ask that God perfect the world. We ask for unity amongst people. We ask for harmony. We ask for the destruction of evil and justice in response to righteousness. In short, we ask that God bring us the Messianic Age. It's all lovely stuff, but at first glance, it seems a little out of place on Rosh Hashana.

In fact, it's exactly what Rosh Hashana is all about.

We stand before a loving God, our Father. Every Father wants their child to live a long, healthy and prosperous life. And so, like any good father, He is offering us another year. The question is whether we are interested. The year is on offer, but what are we going to do with it? Are we living for something that matters? Or are we concerned about our next lollipop? Are we striving to be great, or meandering towards mediocrity?

Rosh Hashana is there to lift our sights, to remind us to dream. And to dream of great things — peace, love, justice... Why bother dreaming of anything less? By dreaming grandiose dreams, we remind ourselves that life really does matter. This is not just another year of drudgery. It is a year in which we can accomplish great things. We remind ourselves that we really do want another year, another opportunity to strive towards making a difference.

Rosh Hashana is a day to ask the all important question: What am I living for? If we know what we are living for and it is something that matters, God will give us life. If we're wasting life, God may give us a little more to waste, but then again, He may not.

Let's not take the chance. On Rosh Hashana, let's make sure we have a dream.

**The Science of Shofar | Dr. Yvette Alt Miller | Aish.com**

How our body's reaction to hearing the shofar's blast primes us for real change.

Each day of Rosh Hashanah, our synagogue services are punctuated by a hundred calls from the shofar, a ram's horn that reverberates with a distinctive, alarm-like cry.

The shofar's rousing blast speaks to us more intensely than words ever can. It's a personal call to each of us to wake up and use the opportunity of Rosh Hashanah to change.

Modern science has documented the physical responses human beings undergo when we're subjected to loud, resonant sounds such as the shofar.

Sometimes called the "fight or flight" response, the physical changes we undergo when confronted with a sudden, urgent alarm helps us deal with immediate threats. During Rosh Hashanah, these changes can help us see the world differently, giving us a different perspective and helping us see areas where we need to grow.

#### 1. Our senses are sharpened.

When we're startled, the hypothalamus in our brain immediately starts producing hormones, altering our physiological state. One of the first is Neuropeptide-S, a small protein that makes us more alert. It decreases our need for sleep, and sharpens our alertness and feelings of energy.

Our brains also send a signal to our adrenal glands to start releasing adrenaline and norepinephrine, two hormones that increase our heart and breathing rates and sharpen our sense of concentration. Within moments, we're transformed into a new state of alertness, able to see dangers and details we overlooked before.

On Rosh Hashanah, these moments are invaluable. The energy we gain as we hear the shofar's loud blasts gives us – for a moment – a new, sharper state of consciousness, and a different way of looking at the world.

#### 2. Emotion grows stronger.

Another effect of sudden stress is simplification in our thought processes. When we're startled, our brains release catecholamines, neurotransmitters which stimulate a part of our brain called the amygdale, a center that relies on emotional – rather than purely rational – thought.

This shift helps us to not overload on details or become bogged down as we make decisions: it's the part of our fight-or-flight response that helps us decide to "run!" in times of danger.

It can also give us the clarity to see our behavior clearly, without the rationalization that's part of more nuanced, everyday thought.

Thinking with our amygdale in the moments after the shofar's blasts helps us to see ourselves more honestly, to perceive our behavior as good or bad, without the rationalizations. It can give us the courage to admit our shortcomings and the clarity to know what to do in the future.

3. Long-term memory is switched on.

At the same time our amygdala is stimulated, so is our brain's nearby hippocampus, the region that stores long-term memories. It helps make sure we don't waste these moments, that we learn from the stress we've just experienced.

This means that anything we're about to experience in our newly heightened state will make a lasting imprint on us, remaining lodged in our memories longer than ordinary experiences.

This helps to ensure that our Rosh Hashanah resolutions have a more lasting impact. All our thoughts – our emotions, our resolutions and decisions to change – will all become a deep part of us, lodged in our long-term memory.

When we hear the loud shofar blasts, our brains become more sensitive; knowing this can help make sure that we use these precious moments to instill positive messages and resolutions to grow deep in our memories, to draw from all year long.

4. Our brain becomes more active.

While all these changes are taking place, during times of stress our brains become more active overall. Nerve cells in our brains receive more messages than normal, and we experience increased brain activity. We're able to process much more information than during less-intense moments.

The period when we can hear the shofar's call is very brief. Yet if we let it, it can stimulate us to think more deeply and make more lasting decisions than we're accustomed to.

Judaism teaches that it's possible to make even major decisions and change our lives in an instant. The extra capacity we have for thought and mental activity during this period makes change more possible. As we listen to the urgent, loud sounds of the shofar, our bodies are perfectly calibrated to react to this loud, insistent call by giving us greater energy and focus. Let's use it to analyze our past deeds and resolve to grow in the coming year.

## [Answering Rosh Hashanah's Call | Sara Debbie Gutfreund | Aish.com](#)

The shofar's cry is God calling out my name, looking for me.

If you have ever lost a child in a crowded place, you know the raw fear. Has anyone seen a two-year-old with a blue shirt on? He has brown hair. A Gap baseball hat with green letters?

A couple of years ago we lost our toddler in an amusement park in Israel. One second he was right in front of us, and the next thing we knew he was nowhere to be found. At first we thought he had to be at most a few feet away, and we called out his name. No response. After a minute of looking around and shouting, I began to panic. Where could he have gone? We started stopping people and asking them to help us. I fought back tears as I ran past the jumping castles and bumper cars. By then we had a small crowd circling the area and calling his name.

When I finally spotted him, I couldn't believe what I saw. There he was, sitting in a pool of colorful, plastic balls laughing with another little boy that he didn't even know. For a moment, I just stood there with tears of relief weaving their way down my cheeks. And then I ran and gathered him into my arms. All this time he didn't even know that he had been lost. He didn't know that he couldn't just walk away on his own. He didn't know that being separated from us was dangerous. He looked up at me in confusion when I picked him up.

"Why Mommy cry?" he asked me. Because you were lost. Because you didn't even know that you were lost. Because you don't realize how dangerous it is to be separated from us. But I couldn't say any of that. I just buried my head into his soft curls and cried harder.

With Rosh Hashanah on our doorstep, I think about that moment. I realize that sometimes I, too, don't realize how dangerous it is to be disconnected from the Source of my life. Too often I go through my days as if I'm the one writing the script. Meanwhile, He is looking for me. He sends out search parties. He calls my name. Has anyone seen her? She was here just a second ago. She doesn't even know how to get back. She doesn't realize that she can't survive on her own. Why doesn't she answer my call?

On this Day of Judgment we are all found, no matter how far away we have wandered. The King picks each of us up and gathers our lives into His arms.

And then He cries. Tekiah. The shofar. Why is the King crying? The wailing gets louder and louder. It speaks through the power of its wordlessness. Your life is on the line. Why don't you call out to me?

Shevarim-Teruah. Your job. Right now it's being described and set for the next year, down to every penny that you will earn. Tell me what you need.

Tekiah. Your health is being written out now, every single detail of how you will feel every day. Wake up.

Shevarim. Your children, your family, everything that you care about is being decided today. And I am waiting for you to call out to Me. Don't you hear me calling your name? Don't you hear my cry? Where are you?

"On Rosh Hashanah will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur will be sealed... who will live and who will die... who will rest and who will wander..."

Today is the beginning of time. Today we remember and are remembered. Today we see that we did not create ourselves, and that we cannot survive on our own. A recent photo in the newspaper showed Israelis trying on gas masks. The masks looked so strange, almost like alien costumes. But then I realized that putting on a mask to breathe is a lot less strange than the miraculous reality of how we actually breathe on our own each day. We think that we are 'just' breathing, but really the King is creating and decreeing every single breath that we take.

We think that we have decided what we are going to be doing this year, but the Creator of the world has His own plans. Our lives are gathered in His Arms. The shofar's weeping cradles us. We are found. We are remembered.

We are standing before the King. Our lives are on the line. Here is our chance to speak up and say: I need You. Please sustain me. Please heal me. Please bless me. I see now that I am lost. I hear You calling my name. Please give me the words. Please give me the voice. I want to answer Your call.

## Rosh Hashanah Codes | Michael Gourarie | Chabad.org

At the Rosh Hashanah meal we eat all kinds of special foods. We dip the apple in honey for a sweet year. We eat the head of a fish to be a head and not a tail, and pomegranates so that our blessings and good deeds should be as many as the seeds. These foods are called "*simanim*"—symbols or codes. They allude to and represent the blessings that we all pray for.

However, this practice seems a little strange. Why would we cryptically refer to the things that we wish for in the form of a symbol or a code? Why don't we just stick to explicitly asking for a sweet, prosperous, healthy year?

Perhaps one of the answers is that these symbols carry an important message for the new year. We trust that G-d will bless us all with a year of health, prosperity and an abundance of good things. But these gifts themselves do not automatically bring inner happiness and fulfillment. Happiness is not proportionate to how much we possess or what we own.

G-d's blessings are like codes that need to be decoded to discover the hidden opportunities that lie within them. They are not an end in themselves. With each blessing that we receive we have a choice. We can use it superficially for pleasure and self-centered enjoyment, or we can use it as a means to generate goodness and bring meaning and purpose to our existence. When we choose to use our health, longevity and prosperity to help others, do another mitzvah, further our education or strengthen our relationships, then we have uncovered the hidden deep power behind the Divine gifts and blessings.

So this Rosh Hashanah G-d will surely do His part. He will bless us with all the wonderful things represented by these foods. Let us do our part and decode the message that comes together with each blessing. It is this combination that will bring the true and real sweetness and happiness into the new year.

On the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashana, there is a ceremony called Tashlich. Jews traditionally go to a body of water to pray and throw bread crumbs into the water. Symbolically, the fish devour their sins.

Occasionally, people ask what kind of bread crumbs should be thrown. Here are suggestions for breads which may be most appropriate for specific sins and misbehaviors:

For ordinary sins: White Bread

For particularly dark sins: Pumpernickel

For complex sins: Multi-Grain

For twisted sins: Pretzels

For tasteless sins: Rice Cakes

For sins of indecision: Waffles For sins committed in haste: Matzoh

For sins of chutzpah: Fresh Bread

For substance abuse: Stoned Wheat

For petty larceny: Stollen

For committing auto theft: Caraway

For timidity/cowardice: Milk Toast

For ill-temperedness: Sourdough

For silliness, eccentricity: Nut Bread

For not giving full value: Shortbread

For jingoism, chauvinism: Yankee Doodles

For excessive irony: Rye Bread

For unnecessary chances: Hero Bread

For telling bad jokes/puns: Corn Bread

For war-mongering: Kaiser Rolls

For causing injury to others: Tortes

For racist attitudes: Crackers

For sophisticated racism: Ritz Crackers

For being holier than thou: Bagels

For abrasiveness: Grits

For dropping in without notice: Popovers

For over-eating: Stuffing

For impetuosity: Quick Bread

For raising your voice too often: Challah

For pride and egotism: Puff Pastry

For sycophancy : Brownies

For being overly smothering: Angel Food Cake

For laziness: Any long loaf

# High Holiday Spiritual Inspiration

Some Wisdom to Consider | Johnny Solomon | [Johnnysolomon.com](http://Johnnysolomon.com)

- 1) “If a person doesn’t constantly strive to ascend higher and higher, he inevitably descends lower and lower.” (Vilna Gaon, Even Sheleima Ch. 4)
- 2) “We are changed, not by what we receive, but by what we do.” (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World p. 149)
- 3) “When we are no longer able to change a situation... we are challenged to change ourselves.” (Victor Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning p. 112)
- 4) “When I was young, I wanted to change the world. I tried, but the world did not change. Then I tried to change my town, but the town did not change. Then I tried to change my family, but my family did not change. Then I knew: first, I must change myself.” (Rabbi Yisrael Salanter)
- 5) “We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand.” (Randy Pausch)
- 6) “This is the entirety of man: Not for himself was man created, but instead to help others to the extent of his ability to do so.” (Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin)
- 7) “I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions.” (Stephen R. Covey)
- 8) “A person who is truly reverent in his fear of Heaven is one who lies awake at night worrying ‘What have I done today to relieve the suffering of a Jew made wretched by his troubles?’” (Rabbi Aryeh Levin, A Tzaddik In Our Time p. 416)
- 9) “Forgive yourself. Forgive others. Don’t wait.” (Tuesdays with Morrie p. 167)
- 10) “If you are generous to others, God will be generous to you.” (The Essential Pele Yoetz p. 156)
- 11) “When I get to heaven, God won’t ask me ‘Zusya, why weren’t you Moses?’. He’ll ask me, ‘Zusya, why weren’t you Zusya?’.”
- 12) “The worst fault a person can have is to forget his intrinsic greatness as a human being.” (Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin, Dor Deiah Vol. 1 p. 172)
- 13) “Lead a supernatural life and God will provide the miracles.” (Lubavitcher Rebbe, *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: 365 Meditations of the Rebbe* p. 50)
- 14) “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” (Lao Tzu)

- 15) “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” (Anne Frank)
- 16) “The desire to be another person, to be different than I am now, is the central motif of repentance... Man, through repentance, creates himself, his own “I””. (Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* p. 113)
- 17) “Tears are the sweat of the soul.” (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary to Bereishit 37:35)
- 18) “No fraction of time, however infinite, should slip through the fingers left unexploited; for eternity may depend upon the brief moment.” (Rav J. B. Soloveitchik, *Sacred and Profane: Kodesh and Chol in World Perspectives*)
- 19) “Torah is not education; it’s transformation.” (Rebbetzen Dena Weinberg)

## What Do You Have When You Have Nothing? | Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz

My mother was sixteen when she was sent to the Kolozsvár Ghetto. There, as she and her family were stripped of their remaining possessions, she experienced her first taste of the torture the Nazis would inflict on her. Men were taken out at night by Hungarian guards and members of the Gestapo, and a flame was held to their feet to get them to reveal the whereabouts of the any gems or gold they might have hidden. From that point on, things only got worse. She was deported from the ghetto to Auschwitz, then sent to a labor camp a few weeks later, and finally, towards the end of the war, escaped while on a death march

Those first moments of freedom must have been frightening for my mother. How does a 17 year old girl look forward to life without a home, a country, a single possession? What do you have when you have nothing?

As my children were entering their teens, I would emphasize to them the contrast between their childhood and my mother’s. I used to think of this contrast only in one direction, as in how much more my children have than their grandmother did at their age: freedom, security, and material comfort.

Now, I think there is another contrast: my children’s generation, with all of its material advantages, still struggles with resilience and character. The generation of survivors, the people who had nothing, who had every reason to emotionally collapse, exhibited remarkable character. If you asked these survivors the question: what do you have when you have nothing? The answer would be, you have a lot.

The Roman orator and statesman Cicero wrote: “**Omnia mea mecum porto**” - “**I am carrying all my things with me**”. Rav Azriel Hildesheimer, at opening of Berlin Rabbinical Seminary in 1873, related this quote from Cicero to a Talmudic passage (Baba Metzia 42a) that says “*Blessing rests only on a thing which is hidden from sight*”. Rav Hildesheimer explains “*that the only blessing is that which is invisible, that is, of the spirit and the idea.*”, and that the lesson of Jewish history is that “*the scorned, sold and mortgaged Jewish servant, who has been driven out at the whim of others, was continuously reminded, again and again, that his only true belonging was that which he carried with him constantly, which no one could separate him from.*”

(See Marc Shapiro, “Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer’s Program of Torah u-Madda”, The Torah u-Madda Journal 9 (2000), page 80.)

This lesson is what I learned from my mother’s example: the greatest gifts are the ones you carry in your heart. These survivors, these penniless, unfortunate, persecuted refugees possessed something invaluable: their heart. And that is all that mattered.

But what do you carry in your heart? First of all, you carry your education with you; nothing could be more practical. Kohelet (4:13) writes: *“Better to be a wise and poor youth, than a foolish and well established elder statesman.”* In the end, wisdom is the most valuable commodity, and education has always been a Jewish priority.

A perfect example is the Jewish interest in medicine, a field Jews still dominate today. Dr. Avram Mark Clarfield (“Jews and Medicine”, *Medical Post*, 39(6), p. 27) offers an anecdote that underlines how unusual the Jewish dominance of medicine is:

*“Several years ago, while talking to a group of physicians in an Edinburgh hospital, we got to discussing which nation had the monopoly on first-class medical research.*

*“It's clearly the Germans,” offered a Scottish physician.*

*“Why?” I asked.*

*“Because the authors of most of the articles in the most prestigious American journals all have names like Levine, Glickman, Berliner and Feinstein--obviously all of German origin.”*

*I smiled to myself.”*

This keen interest in medicine goes back to the Middle Ages. Joseph Shatzmiller in *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society*, tells of countries where less than 1 percent of the population was Jewish, yet Jews were over 50% of the doctors. Clearly, education was important to Jews, and in particular, medical education. Some have speculated that this is because that *“by providing Jewish practitioners with a craft they could “carry” with them whenever they had to leave their homes and establish themselves in a new place, the practice of medicine also eased the harsh circumstances that stemmed from imposed migration (evictions and expulsions).”* (See Carmen Caballero Navas, “Medicine among Medieval Jews: The Science, the Art, and the Practice”, in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 339.)

The wandering Jews of Europe needed an asset they could monetize anywhere; and so they relied on their education to support themselves whenever they had to find a new home.

But the lesson of *Omnia mea mecum porto* refers to more than education. It reminds us that the mindset we carry determines our happiness. This lesson, one that was stressed by the Stoics, finds expression in the Mishnah (Avot 4:1) that says *“Who is the mighty one? He who conquers his impulse...Who is the rich one? He who is happy with his lot”*. Strength and wealth are primarily a matter of mindset. When facing challenges courage is more important than strength; in everyday living, contentment is more important than wealth.

All of us would nod our heads in agreement when hearing these lessons. However, this is not the way we actually live. An abundance of material comfort doesn't diminish material desires, but on the contrary, makes us more materialistic. The Talmud (Berachot 43a) sees the wealth the Jews took out of Egypt as a corrupting influence, and the motivating cause behind the Golden Calf. Similarly, material success has reoriented the way Americans think. Tim Kasser Kasser ("Materialism and Its Alternatives" in M. Csikszentmihalyi & I. S. Csikszentmihalyi (Eds.), *A Life Worth Living: Contributions to Positive Psychology*, pp. 200-214) notes that contemporary Americans think that the "goods life" is the path to the "good life." This mistake leads to a great deal of unhappiness. Kasser notes multiple studies that show that the more materialistic someone is, the less happy they are likely to be.

That is why the lesson of the Mishna is so significant: How many people actually are happy with their lot?

The experience of having nothing teaches us how to be grateful for everything. One of my mother's favorite sayings was "hunger is the best cook". She said that the food she ate right after being liberated was the best meal she ever ate in her life, because the overwhelming hunger she experienced at the time brought out the best in the bland food she ate. With the right outlook, any piece of food is exceptional; and the mindset of one who has nothing sees life as a gift, not a given.

Beyond education and mindset, the final (and most important) item to carry is: values. (Before discussing this further, it needs to be noted that for a Jew, faith in God is a given, a spiritual oxygen that sustains us every day. And faith is an all-encompassing value, and all other values are just a commentary on faith. But what are those other values?)

David Brooks (in a 2014 TED Talk entitled based on *The Lonely Man of Faith* by Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik) coined two types of virtues a person can have: "resume virtues" and "eulogy virtues".

Some virtues are about work: can you compete? Are you pragmatic? A good leader? A financial wizard? Other virtues are about the types of accomplishments people speak about at a funeral: Did you volunteer? What type of father were you? Were you idealistic? I would point out this contrast between the domains of "resume" and "eulogy" is not just about virtues; it is about priorities and values, about the content and purpose of life.

This lesson is found in Jeremiah (9:22-23), who inspires the Mishnah in its' comments on the worthiness of strength, wisdom and wealth:

*Thus says the Lord:*

*"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,  
Let not the mighty man glory in his might,  
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;  
But let him who glories glory in this,  
That he understands and knows Me,  
That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,"  
says the Lord.*

Jeremiah offers a harsh appraisal of human success. Do the resume virtues of wisdom, strength, or wealth matter? No, they are not important. What matters are the values love, justice and righteousness; what

matters are eulogy virtues, which are a blueprint to the meaning of life. For this reason, Maimonides at the end of his great philosophical work, the Guide to the Perplexed (III:54), offers an exposition of this verse in Jeremiah, because he sees these values are the very purpose of our lives.

Love, justice and righteousness are most compelling when you experience them directly. These eulogy virtues matter because we intuitively understand that they endow our lives with meaning. Dr. David Pelcovitz told me a powerful story about a 9 year old girl that illustrates how inspiring eulogy virtues are.

*A 9 year old girl, encouraged by her mother, started to volunteer by visiting an elderly woman who had lost most of her eyesight. One day, while chatting with the young girl, the woman explained that she could recover her eyesight if she would have a small operation; but because she was on a fixed income, she lacked the resources to pay for this expensive procedure. Inspired to action, the girl went home and told her mother that she was going to do a fundraiser to pay for the elderly woman's operation. The mother smiled at her daughter's good intentions, but assumed, like most parents, that her daughter's naive dream would soon disappear.*

*The next day, the girl went to school and began to raise money. She went from class to class, from teacher to teacher, and at the end of the day, after all the change had been exchanged into bills, the girl had a grand total of 83 dollars. She took the thick envelope stuffed with singles, and ran off to her elderly friend. Not knowing much about contemporary medical economics, the girl announced to her elderly friend that she had raised the money for the operation! So, the young girl and the elderly woman took a short walk over to the local Ophthalmologist's office.*

*The doctor examined the elderly woman, and says yes, she is a candidate for the procedure, and he can do it right away. At that point, the young girl chirps up and says that she will pay for the procedure, and produces the envelope with the 83 dollars.*

*The doctor does the operation.*

*The girl comes home, and reports to her mother the day's events. The mother is mortified; she assumes that her daughter has somehow misled the doctor. She runs to the doctor's office to apologize, and to negotiate a way to pay him the balance. As the mother continues to talk, the doctor cuts her off in middle, and opens his jacket. In his inside pocket is the envelope, stuffed with singles; he had not put the cash away. He told the mother that this envelope was far more precious to him than any amount of money, because this envelope reminded him of goodness of humanity and why he became a doctor in the first place.*

This is a story about values: the values of a mother, a daughter and a doctor. They all understand the lesson of "Omnia mea mecum porto", that it is what you carry in your heart that matters; and if your heart is filled with love, justice and righteousness you have everything you need. And if there is one lesson I want my own children to remember it is this: what you need most in life cannot be put in a suitcase. Just carry your education, carry your character, and carry your values; then you will have everything you need.

### **Spiritual growth based on scientific research.**

As Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, approaches, here are five ways to making real changes and get the new year off to a fresh start.

#### 1. Amp up your expectations.

In 1965, teachers in a San Francisco elementary school were given lists of students who were likely to have amazing “growth spurts” in the coming year. A Harvard psychologist, Robert Rosenthal, had tested all of the children, and was able to inform their teachers which kids were likely to achieve great things in the coming months.

At the end of the year, the teachers’ experience tallied with Dr. Rosenthal’s: those students he predicted would have growth spurts did so, enjoying above-average intellectual success across the board in school.

What the teachers didn’t know was that the list of names they were given at the beginning of the year was entirely randomly-generated. There was no academic test; each teacher was given a list of arbitrary names. Yet the students’ growth was real. When teachers expected more from those students, the students delivered, increasing their performance in class. The IQs of those students identified as “Growth Spurters” also increased, measuring much higher after the academic year than at the beginning, and increasing significantly in relation to their peers.

This year, view yourself as a “Growth Spurter.” Give yourself the gift of believing in yourself and watch yourself grow into your higher expectations.

#### 2. Break your routine.

When we learn new skills we use our prefrontal cortex, the part of our brain in charge of deliberate, rational thought. (Think of learning to drive: first-time drivers don’t carry on conversations, for instance – all their attention is focused on what they’re doing.) Once we master a skill, however, it gets downgraded to our basal ganglia, a part of our brains that is associated with emotion and memory. (This is why driving is second nature to us, allowing us to talk or listen to the radio with one part of our brains while we use another to navigate a car.) Finally, our brains experience a third emotion: pleasure, when a habitual act is completed.

We tend to perform activities the same way each time when we’re in our usual environment. Changing our surroundings, however, breaks up the three-part loop that governs habits in our brains. When our usual cues and rewards are absent, it’s easier to change our behavior.

This year, consider ways to go someplace new – literally. Volunteering at a new place, joining a new community, reaching out to new people are all ways to push ourselves beyond our comfort zones, escape our default ways of doing things, and give ourselves space to be someone new.

### 3. Evaluate your community.

The people we surround ourselves with are crucial to our own behavior.

In one recent study monitoring students who transferred to a new university, entrenched habits like reading the newspaper, exercising, and watching television were all altered; transfer students quickly conformed to the habits of their new community.

The people we surround ourselves with have profound effects on the way we do things and the decisions we make. Even our most intimate choices might be influenced by those in our wider community. One study found that being privy to the details of a friend's divorce increased one's own chances of getting divorced by 75% - even hearing about the divorce of a friend of a friend raised one's own chances of divorce a shocking 33%.

Positive effects also flow from being part of a community. Two thousand years ago, the Jewish sage Rabbi Hillel recognized the importance of community in shaping our goals and sense of self. He counseled his students: "Do not separate yourself from the community" (Pirkei Avot 2:5). We all are stronger when we reach out to others and share in a set of values and goals.

This year, take a look at your social connections. Ask yourself how you can spend time with those whose values and lifestyle you want to share. Consider strengthening your links to your local Jewish community, and allowing the support and connectedness of your community to enrich you as well.

### 4. Spend more time with loved ones.

Recent research shows that spending time with people who are dear to us profoundly affects our physical well-being. In one major study, physical wounds healed faster for people who had close, positive relationships in their lives. Another study found that people who feel they have close relationships are more productive at work.

In today's hyper-busy world, it can feel next-to-impossible to carve out quality time to spend with those we care about. Fortunately, Jewish tradition provides a built-in opportunity for spending quality time with friends and family each week by slowing down and coming together over meals on Shabbat. Disconnecting from all our gadgets makes sure we spend quality face-to-face time at home. There's even research to back up the benefits of these weekly meals: eating regular family meals together is associated with lower levels of stress for kids and adults. For children, eating a family meal is also connected to lower levels of drug abuse, higher grades, and better health.

### 5. Say thank you.

Saying thank you is one of the most powerful ways we can move beyond our old habits and transform our lives.

In a ground-breaking study a little over a decade ago, Dr. Robert Emmons of University of California, Davis and Dr. Michael McCullough of the University of Miami asked one group to write in journals about their daily lives and another group to work through their problems and irritations in their writing. A third group was asked to focus on writing things they were grateful for.

At the end of the study, they found something remarkable: the participants who used their journals to record what they were thankful for reported markedly higher levels of happiness and well-being. Their entire demeanor was altered by the experiment. They displayed higher levels of energy, determination, alertness, attentiveness and enthusiasm. This translated into concrete action, as well. People who kept gratitude lists were more likely to make progress towards important goals.

It isn't only writing down what we're grateful for that can have this profound effect: the researchers also found that attending religious services, praying, and studying religion also creates a feeling of gratitude that can transform our lives.

## Tefillin on Death Row, Second Chances, and Seizing the Moment | Rabbi Elie Weinstock

What kind of scene does this picture describe?



This is a picture of Rabbi Dovid Goldstein, director of Chabad-Lubavitch of West Houston, Texas, and Jedidiah Murphy, a death-row inmate in a West Livingston, Texas prison. (Guess which one is which. [?](#))

The story was covered in the Jewish press, and there is longer story about this subject on Chabad's website. Rabbi Goldstein enabled Murphy, convicted for killing a 79-year-old woman, to lay tefillin for the first time. It was not easy to arrange as state law prevents death row inmates from having direct contact with their visitors. Goldstein provided the tefillin and a kippah for Murphy and instructed him through the glass. Rabbi and prisoner celebrated the "Bar Mitzvah" with chips and soft drinks from the nearby vending machine.

(This was not Goldstein's first time putting tefillin on a death-row inmate. In 2013, he helped Douglas Feldman put on tefillin one week before being executed by lethal injection. That time, he was allowed direct contact with the prisoner since the tefillin were considered part of his last rites.)

What can we take away from a story like this?

There are Jewish criminals... Chabad is dedicated to every single Jew... It's never too late to perform a mitzvah...

I find myself thinking about how we approach second chances. Murphy never had a Bar Mitzvah or a chance to act in a Jewish way. It took a death-row encounter with a truly dedicated rabbi to create this mitzvah moment. Often, we seek out second chances in moments of extremis. We repent in time for Yom

Kippur or we try to spend more time with someone after not spending time with them earlier. As the saying goes, “Better late than never...”

Why can't there be more opportunities to seize the moment? How about more positively-induced second chances? We could each benefit from proactively wanting to do all these good things because they are too good to miss out on, and we want to experience them again.

Do you remember the Life Saver commercial in which a father and his daughter are sitting watching a beautiful sunset. As the last of the light disappears beneath the horizon, the dad says, “Going...going...going...gone!” And then the girl says, “Do it again, Daddy!”

There are so many things we should try to experience again because they are just so special and awesome that, heck, why not? We don't need to wait until the last minute – or when it is too late – to try and spend more time with our family or enjoy the beautiful weather or read that book or try that new experience.

We may not be able to make the sun set again, and we, most certainly, don't want to need to be on death row to push us to perform a mitzvah. For now, as we start a New Year, let's think about all the positive experiences - for religious and personal growth or spending time with family or just doing wonderful things – we can grab.

## Preparing Ourselves for The High Holy Days - A Questionnaire | Rabbi Daniel & Rachel Kraus

Over the past decade and a half, teaching pre-High Holiday workshops, we added a tool that has been an insightful guide to us and have shared in our teaching. Performance reviews are common place and expected: a structured format to reflect and review about what we have accomplished. In the same way, there is a need for a spiritual and religious performance review, to reflect and review on what we have done and project on what can be.

May we all use the month of Elul to properly prepare ourselves to stand before God representing our best selves to usher in 5780.

- 1) When do I most feel that my life is meaningful?
- 2) How often do I express my feelings to those who mean the most to me?
- 3) Are there any ideals I would be willing to die for?
- 4) If I could live my life over, would I change anything?
- 5) What would bring me more happiness than anything else in the world?
- 6) What are my three most significant achievements since Rosh Hashanah?
- 7) What are the three biggest mistakes I've made since last Rosh Hashanah?
- 8) If I knew I couldn't fail, what would I undertake to accomplish in life?
- 9) What are my three major goals in life?

What am I doing to achieve them?

What practical steps can I take toward these goals?

10) If I could give my children only three pieces of advice, what would they be?

11) What is the most important decision I need to make this year?

12) What important decision did I avoid making last year?

13) When do I feel closest to God?

14) Do I have a vision of where I want to be one, three and five years from now?

15) What are the most important relationships in my life?

Over the last year did those relationships become closer and deeper or was there a sense of stagnation and drifting?

What can I do to nurture those relationships this year?

16) If I could change one thing about my spiritual life, what would that be?

On a scale of one to five (five being the highest), how important are the following to you? You cannot have more than three fives or three fours, and you must have at least two threes, two twos and two ones.

- 1) Family
- 2) Being well educated
- 3) Making a contribution to my community
- 4) Spirituality
- 5) Being well liked
- 6) Having a good reputation
- 7) Financial success
- 8) Being Jewish
- 9) Personal fulfillment
- 10) Helping other people

# Yom Kippur

## The Day of Essences | Shais Taub | Chabad.org

On Yom Kippur, we set aside the external trappings of what it means to be a human being and we return to the essence of who we are—G-dly beings that existed long before our bodies came into being. In kind, or more aptly stated, as the impetus for our transformation, G-d also shows us His essence and relates to us directly, without the regular buffers in place.

In other words, Yom Kippur is the day when we get real.

The rest of the year we wear many hats and we are busy doing. Doing what a parent does; doing what a spouse does; doing what a bread-winner does; doing what a member of a community does. On Yom Kippur, we strip down to our true selves and we just be.

### **The Mechanics of Atonement**

Indeed, this getting down to essences is how atonement works. When we have faltered, it is because of our lack of ability to deal with the world. We were supposed to interact with the world in one way, and we chose to interact with it in another, whether in how we eat, do business, engage in intimate relations and so on.

But when we get down to our essence – an essence which has no need to be bogged down in the trappings of this mundane world – we arrive at a place within ourselves that remains completely above the fray. Our essence cannot be sullied for it stands aloof from the incidental matters in which our rest-of-the-year selves are embroiled.

And so, on Yom Kippur, we divorce ourselves from the world and join G-d in a true state of Oneness. On Yom Kippur, we don't need a world and we don't have to figure out how to deal with it. We don't work, we don't eat, we don't engage in marital relations. We don't do anything. We be.

### **Affliction or Transcendence**

On Yom Kippur we are denied five bodily needs: eating, marital relations, bathing, anointing and the wearing of leather shoes. On a basic level, these five modes of abstention are called "afflictions," but the inner dimension of the Torah sees them in a very different light, not (only) as self-denial, but as self-transcendence. We do not deprive our bodies on Yom Kippur; we return to our essence and rise above our bodies. Whereas the rest of the year, we are nourished by eating, on Yom Kippur we are nourished directly from the Source of All Sustenance without need for the intervening medium of food.

During the rest of the year, the soul engages in the task of interacting with the world through the body, taking the mundane and making it holy. This is known as the task of elevating the sparks of G-dly energy that are encumbered within the physical world. This task is necessary for the refinement of the world and the ultimate transformation of the physical plane into a heaven-on-earth. The whole year round, the soul's mission in this world is to find G-d within the trappings of this world; but on Yom Kippur, when we and G-d reveal our essences, we relate directly to one another without the usual game of hide-and-seek.

## **Taking Off Your Shoes**

The fact that we do not wear leather shoes on Yom Kippur is a symbol of the rare and unique relationship with G-d that exists on Yom Kippur.

Leather soles represent a barrier between man and the earth upon which he stands. In macrocosm, this signifies the buffer that exists between G-d and His world. Creation is a dynamic, on-going process, a vast apparatus composed of various planes of existence. Normally, the creative energy filters its way down through this system before reaching us. On Yom Kippur, however, G-d removes the scaffolding which connects the highest heavens to the earth and "takes off His shoes," so to speak, placing Himself in direct contact with the lowest plane of existence. Our removing our shoes is simply meant to mirror this state.

The rest of the year, we interface with the world in order to reveal its latent G-dliness. On Yom Kippur we interface directly with G-d and thereby reveal our own G-dly nature. In other words, in the normal mode of conduct, we are G-d's emissaries, embodied souls which need to eat, work, procreate, manage households and so on, all so we can express the G-dly intent in these things. On Yom Kippur we step back from these roles and return to our true, eternal essence which is directly at One with G-d.

## **Anti-Asceticism**

So, if our true essential state is to be aloof from worldly needs, does this somehow imply that dealing with the physical world the rest of the year is little more than a necessary evil? To the contrary.

We spoke about the buffer between our physical existence and G-d being like the sole of a great universal shoe. On Yom Kippur we remove our leather shoes to indicate that this barrier has been removed. In truth, however, this physical representation is not an exact counterpart. In truth, the leather soles have not been removed but have become so refined that they cease to act as a barrier.

During the rest of the year, we are enjoined to deal with the physical worlds as our mission as servants of G-d. The Hebrew word for servant, *eved*, shares the same root as the word for "tanning [hides]." A tanner takes tough leather and makes it soft and pliable. The *eved* of G-d is thus one who takes the unfinished hides of physical existence and works them over until they become almost transparent to the G-dly intent that lies within them.

Yom Kippur is not an escape from our year-round task of grappling with the material but the net result and culmination of it. Whenever we have acted mindfully and deliberately in our dealings with the world, when we have partaken of our bodily needs for the sake of heaven, we have actually been softening tough leather so that on Yom Kippur, when the essence of this project is revealed, we catch a glimpse of the sum total of our work that will ultimately be realized with the coming of Moshiach.

[Stephen Sondheim and the Great Yom Kippur Morality Play | Sara Yoheved Rigler | Aish.com](#)

## **The perils of the unexamined life.**

Socrates said: "The unexamined life is not worth living." Judaism considers all lives worth living, but it considers the imperative to examine your life so important that every year it devotes ten days – from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur – to the process of introspection and recalibrating your life.

An old Broadway show is the best illustration I know of the perils of the unexamined life. “Merrily We Roll Along,” with songs by the genius Stephen Sondheim, is the story of Frank Shepard, a nice guy and talented composer turned successful Hollywood producer. During a party in the opening scene, Frank is abandoned by his second wife, his “lifelong” friend, and his mistress. He cries out, “I hate my life!” This is the end of the story. The show works its way back in time, scene by scene, answering the refrain from the opening song, “How did you get there from here, Mr. Shepard? ... How did you get to be you?”

Gradually, the audience sees how Frank abandoned his youthful ideals and dreams, along with his first wife, his only child, and his two “lifelong” friends, through his heedless choices to pursue fame and fortune. The song, “Merrily We Roll Along,” paints a picture of the unexamined life, where the protagonist simply rolls along, unaware of where his choices are taking him. The lyrics could be a theme song for the Ten Days of Repentance that we are now in:

*How does it happen?...*

*How did you get so far off the track?*

*Why don't you turn around and go back?...*

*How did you ever get there from here?...*

*How does it slip away slow*

*So you never even notice it's happening?...*

*How did you get there from here, Mr. Shepard?...*

*How did you get to be you?*

Had Stephen Sondheim ever studied Maimonides' tract on *teshuva* (repentance), he would have known that it's always possible to “turn around and go back.” In fact, that's the definition of *teshuva*. During this period leading up to Yom Kippur, every Jew is enjoined to “turn around” by examining his or her life. Take some time before Yom Kippur and ask yourself the hard questions, “Am I where and who I want to be? How did I get here? What choices did I make that landed me here?”

For example:

- Did I want to be single at this age? What choices did I make that landed me here?
- Do I want to have daily friction with my spouse? What choices do I routinely make that bring me to where I don't want to be?
- Do I want to be feuding with my sibling/s? What choices did I make that left me estranged from them?
- What happened to my dream of being a patient, loving, parent? How did I become a yelling, critical parent instead?
- Is this where I want to be in my career? Did I make bad choices to take the easy route or abandon my dreams out of fear of leaving my comfort zone?

Such self-assessment leads to the first step in the *teshuva* process: admitting you made a mistake. Usually, we are so invested in self-justification that we rationalize our bad choices. As the joke goes: What are the three words that every wife longs to hear from her husband? “I was wrong.” How sad that most of us value being right over being loved.

No one ends up where he/she doesn't want to be without having made some bad choices along the way. Introspection identifies those bad choices. Going deeper ferrets out our motive for choosing the way we did. Was it fear? Was it desire? Was it arrogance? Was it laziness?

Most of Frank Shepard's bad choices were rooted in rank desire for wealth and physical pleasure, as well as spinelessness. Thus, in one scene, when his two old friends need him and are waiting for him, he succumbs to the seduction of a Broadway starlet and goes with her instead. As he says at the end, "I kept saying, 'yes,' when I really meant, 'no.'"

### **Healthy Regret**

The next step in the *teshuvah* process is regret. Regret means regretting your own choices, not bemoaning your fate, as if you landed up here through no fault of your own. For a married person, this means not regretting that your spouse has certain bad qualities, but rather regretting that you fail to appreciate his/her good qualities. For a single person this may mean not bemoaning that there are no good men/women out there, but rather regretting that you rejected certain possible mates for spurious reasons.

Regret, as recommended by the 18<sup>th</sup> century sage Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, requires setting aside a defined time and plunging to the depths of sorrow for your bad choice. Such regret differs from guilt. Guilt is like a low-grade fever; you walk around with it, don't deal with it, and it drags on and on. Regret, on the other hand, is like a high fever; you go to bed or take medication or see a doctor. When it's over, it's over.

During the time you have set aside to do *teshuvah* before Yom Kippur, set your timer for a few minutes and plunge to the depth of regret for what you have done. When the timer goes off, it's over. The Talmud says that someone who repents and then revisits his sin is like a dog that vomits and goes back and eats its vomit. "Jewish guilt" is not Jewish. Instead, constructively use your pain to motivate you to change in a positive direction.

A Jew practices "regret" not by feeling like a lowly sinner, but rather by asserting one's inherent greatness and how the wrong act betrayed that. The three minutes of regret should sound like: "How could someone like me do something like that? How could someone who had such ideals have stooped to act like that? How could someone with my knowledge and values have acted so wrongly?"

### **Plan for the Future**

The next step of *teshuvah* is to make a plan for the future to act differently. *How did you get so far off the track? Why don't you turn around and go back?* A Jew can always turn around and go back. The plan must be concrete and comprised of small steps rather than grandiose resolutions that are doomed to fail.

You're critical of your spouse or children? Dedicate one hour a day to a "criticism fast" where, no matter what, you won't indulge your critical nature. You gossip? Undertake one hour a day when no negative words about other people will cross your lips. You don't call your mother because she pushes your buttons? Undertake to call her once a week for ten minutes (and gradually increase that to twice a week).

### **Ask Forgiveness**

If your wrong choices have hurt other people, there's a fourth step: Ask forgiveness. The relative or friend you're feuding with? Forget the autopsy of the original argument and who is wrong; just call him or her

and say, “I really miss our relationship. I’m sorry for my part in distancing you. Please forgive me and let’s be friends.”

Step five pertains only when property is involved. If you stole something, whether it was from a store or a neighbor, you must return it. This includes borrowing an item and forgetting to give it back. Make sure that there’s nothing in your home that you didn’t come by honestly by purchasing it or receiving it as a gift.

“Merrily We Roll Along” flopped on Broadway in 1981. Based on a 1934 play by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart (both Jews), the story is a modern morality play, warning against the perils of failing to regularly examine one’s choices and recalibrate one’s life. The last scene, which takes place 19 years before the first cataclysmic party scene, shows the three young friends fired up with enthusiasm to change the world. Of course the audience left the theater disgusted that Frank betrayed both his ideals and those who loved him. If only Frank had realized that he could still change not the world, but himself! The show would have been better if Maimonides had written the final act.

## Are You a Baal Teshuva? | Elisha Greenbaum | Chabad.org

A friend of mine was discussing the changes he’s made in his lifestyle over the last 10 years. Hailing from a family where the traditions of Judaism were an afterthought at best, he has gradually adopted a number of observances into his life.

With the encouragement of rabbis and other mentors, he now puts on *tefillin* once a week, buys only kosher meat and is a semi-regular synagogue attendee. He and his wife have just enrolled their children in after-school Hebrew lessons.

"I've come a long way from where I started," he observed to me, "but I'll never be a *ba'al teshuvah*" (the term used to describe those who choose to lead a Torah observant life although they weren't raised that way).

Possibly it was rude of me, but I couldn't help laughing at him.

"What do you think you are now?" I said.

When you say the words *baal teshuvah*, people instantly think of a full-on returnee to *yiddishkeit*; a card-carrying black-hatter, who's made a total commitment to an Orthodox way of life.

But the word does not necessarily mean that. *Teshuvah* is the process of returning to one's roots and reconnecting to G-d. For some people this takes an hour, others may stretch their journey over a lifetime.

We are all expected to be *baalei teshuvah*. Every time you make a subtle change for the better, or even contemplate reordering your priorities to make more room for Judaism, you've just done *teshuvah*.

The fifth rebbe of Ger, Grand Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter (1898 – 1992), was once speaking to a teacher in a *yeshiva* for newly-observant young men. The man was detailing the pedagogical methods used in the institution and the radical changes that many of its graduates had made in their personal lives. Then he realized that he might have inadvertently given a mistaken impression of his own background.

"Don't get me wrong, Rebbe," he said. "Though I work with them, I myself am not a *baal teshuvah*." The rebbe responded, "Why on earth not?"

Indeed, why not? Even someone born to a family where full mitzva observance was the norm must aspire to "do *teshuvah*." Why am I not a *ba'al teshuvah*? Why have I not been inspired lately to change for the better?

Even the most famous and respected rabbis in the world declare three times a day during prayer; *bring us back, our Father to your Torah and let us return to you with complete teshuvah*, and (hopefully) they mean it.

In the traditional way of thinking there are no 'segments' in Judaism—the religious and the irreligious, with people occasionally moving between camps—there are just Jews. Sure there are various levels of observance and belief, but it is hoped that every Jew is moving along a continuum, approaching ever closer to G-d.

The theme of this time of year is change. Gradual change. Constant change. Permanent change. Change for its own sake and change for G-d's sake. Where was I last year? Where am I now? Where will I be tomorrow?

Even someone who has made a journey towards complete observance can't afford to sit back and bask in the distinction of being known as a *ba'al teshuvah*, but is expected to undergo a constant process of reinvention. The highest praise in Judaism is to be called a *ba'al teshuvah* and that's a goal to which we must all continually aspire.

Over the last decade, the man I feel proud to call my friend has made changes to his lifestyle and way of thinking that put many of us to shame. He may not currently contemplate making further changes, and indeed he may stay at his current level of involvement for years to come, yet he, like all of us, is on a lifelong journey towards G-d, and his accomplishments to date are priceless.

## The Joy of Sin | Aron Moss | Chabad.org

### **Question:**

I find Yom Kippur depressing. Why spend a day focusing on our sins and failures? Do we need to be reminded how far we are from being perfect?

### **Answer:**

Yom Kippur is a celebration of being human. And being human means being imperfect. Human failure is so predictable, G-d has placed on the calendar an annual day of forgiveness. It is not an optional holiday only for those who happen to have sinned. Yom Kippur comes every single year for every single person. It is as if we are expected to sin, that there will always be mess-ups that we have to make amends for. G-d is so not surprised by our failings that He allows a clean-up day every year. We were never meant to be perfect.

Every Yom Kippur we receive a note from G-d saying something like this:

*I know you are human. Humans are not perfect. I made you that way. And I love you anyway. In fact, that's why I love you - because you are not perfect. I already had perfection before I created you. What I want from creation is an imperfect world that strives to improve, filled with human beings that fail, get up and move ahead. By being imperfect but persevering nevertheless, you have fulfilled the purpose of your creation. You have achieved the one thing that I can't do without you - you have brought the perfect G-d into an imperfect world.*

Thanks.

With Love, G-d

For all of us who are not perfect, Yom Kippur is our day. Rather than be depressed by failings, we celebrate them. Every sin, every slip up, every failed attempt at living up to our calling is another opportunity to grow and improve. Failing at our mission is itself a part of the mission.

Yom Kippur is the day G-d thanks us for being human, and we thank G-d that we aren't perfect. If we were, we'd have nothing to do.

## [What Are the 13 Attributes of Mercy? | Dovie Schochet | Chabad.org](#)

### **Understanding the Yud Gimel Midot Harachamim**

After the grave sin of the golden calf, Moses ascended Mt. Sinai and pleaded with G-d to forgive the Jewish people. After his supplications were accepted, Moses felt it was an auspicious moment to ask G-d to give the Jewish people a way to obtain mercy should they fall again in the future.

G-d agreed with Moses, and told him to wait on a mountain where G-d would show him His glory. Then G-d passed before Moses and proclaimed the verses that are known as the 13 Attributes of Mercy (Middot Harachamim):

The L-rd passed before him and proclaimed: “L-rd, L-rd, benevolent G-d, Who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth, preserving lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin, and He pardons.

The 13 Attributes of Mercy have been known to bring salvation and forgiveness to the Jewish people throughout the generations. In the Talmud, Rabbi Yehudah states that “a covenant was established regarding the 13 Attributes of Mercy that they will never be returned empty-handed.”

Their importance is underscored by the role they play in our prayer services. Every day when many Jews recite “Tachanun” (a confessional prayer), they say the 13 Attributes of Mercy, invoking G-d’s mercy in the face our transgressions. Every fast day, which is an opportune time to repent, this prayer is recited. Most telling of all is how often we say it during the Ne’ilah service on Yom Kippur—the holiest moment of the year.

### **Who Knows 13?**

Let us now explore the power and significance of the number 13.

Any person can show mercy to another, yet there are always restraints and calculations as to how much mercy will be shown. For example, most people walking past a beggar on the street will have a sense of rachmanut (mercy) for the unfortunate person. However, before someone reaches into a pocket to give, he or she will think about the children's tuition, the mortgage, medical bills, etc. And so, only a small sum will be given to the beggar.

The number 13 signifies the infinite. The number 12 signifies constraint and order: e.g., the 12 zodiac signs and the 12 months in a year. Above order and control, 13 connotes boundlessness and immeasurability. The fact that there are 13 Attributes of Mercy teaches us that when G-d shows mercy, He does so without limit. No matter how low we fall, He will come to our aid and forgive us.

This is further demonstrated in the word echad (one), which has the numerical value of 13 ( / 8=ח / 4=ד 1=א). This signifies G-d's oneness in the world, how He is beyond any measure and limitation.

Does G-d Care?

So how can G-d have mercy? Does G-d have emotions and feelings? Furthermore, the rabbis of the Talmud refer to G-d's actions as "middot," "attributes" or "character traits," descriptions that refer to human qualities?

Maimonides explains that G-d Himself does not have any emotions, as G-d is infinite and not restricted to feelings. Rather these "middot" are used in reference to G-d's actions and not His qualities. Moreover, the term "middot" is used only as a "borrowed term," and not to be taken literally. We use this term for G-d because He performs actions in a way that is similar to human actions, which stem from our emotions.

Chassidic thought further expounds on this idea, explaining that G-d Himself is beyond emotions and not tied down to them. On the one hand, there is G-d in actuality, in His essence and glory. On the other hand, there is how G-d portrays Himself and relates to us in this finite world. When G-d appears to be angry or merciful it is because that is how we perceive His G-dly light as it shines in this world.

### **A Dispute of Numbers**

The kabbalists take the following approach to the words that are counted as an attribute.

The 13 Attributes of Mercy according to Kabbalah:

ל-א / G-d — mighty in compassion to give all creatures according to their need;  
רַחוּם / rachum — merciful, that humankind may not be distressed;  
וְחַנוּן / ve'chanun — and gracious if humankind is already in distress;  
אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם / erech apayim — slow to anger; (once, to the righteous)  
אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם / erech apayim — slow to anger; (repeated again for the wicked)  
וְרַב חֶסֶד / ve'rav chesed — and plenteous in kindness;  
וְאֵמֶת / ve'emet — and truth;  
נֹצֵר חֶסֶד / notzer chesed — keeping kindness  
לְאֵלָפִים / laalafim — unto thousands;  
נֹשֵׂא עוֹן / noseh avon — forgiving iniquity;  
וַפְּשָׁח / vafeshah — and transgression;

וְחַטָּאָה / vechata'ah — and sin;  
וְנִקְיָה / venakeh — and pardoning.

However, others argue and offer a different approach to the words that count as an attribute.<sup>7</sup> For example, they believe that the first two names of G-d are attributes themselves. In contrast, the Kabbalistic approach did not include the first two names of G-d, instead, it regards them as introductory notes - as the source for the thirteen attributes of mercy.

יְהוָה / Hashem — compassion before a person sins;  
יְהוָה / Hashem — compassion after a person has sinned;  
אֱלֹהִים / G-d — mighty in compassion, to give all creatures according to their need;  
רַחוּם / rachum — merciful, that humankind may not be distressed;  
וְחַנּוּן / ve'chanun — and gracious if humankind is already in distress;  
אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם / erech apayim — slow to anger;  
וְרַב חֶסֶד / ve'rav chesed — and plenteous in kindness;  
וְאֵמֶת / ve'emet — and truth;  
נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים / notzer chesed laalafim — keeping kindness unto thousands;  
נֹשֵׂא עֲוֹן / noseh avon — forgiving iniquity;  
וּפְשָׁע / vafeshah — and transgression;  
וְחַטָּאָה / VeChata'ah — and sin;  
וְנִקְיָה / VeNakeh — and pardoning.

The consensus amongst the Rabbinic authorities leans towards the kabbalistic approach. One of the reasons given for this is because in halachik analysis, when Torah is discussing a matter which has strong ties to Kabbalah, then the kabbalistic approach is the accepted opinion.

### The Mystical 13

Kabbalists explain that besides the 13 attributes which G-d said to Moses, there is another set which was later said to the prophet Micah:

מִי אֵל כְּמוֹךָ / mee E-l kamocho — Who is a G-d like you (in compassion);  
נֹשֵׂא עֲוֹן / noseh avon — who bears iniquity;  
וְעֵבֶר עַל פְּשָׁע / ve'over al pesha — and overlooks sin;  
לִישִׁי'עִירֵית נַחְלָתוֹ / lishi'eirit nachalato — For the remnant of his heritage;  
לֹא הֶחְזִיק לְעַד אַפּוֹ / lo hechzik le'ad apoh — He does not retain his anger forever;  
כִּי חָפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא / ki chafetz chesed hu — for He desires kindness;  
יָשׁוּב יְרַחֲמֵנוּ / yashuv yerachamanu — He shall again have mercy on us;  
וַיַּכְבֹּשׁ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ / yichbosh avonoteinu — and suppresses our iniquities;  
וַיִּתְּשֵׁלֵךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם כָּל חַטָּאתָם / vetashlich bimtzolet yam kol chatotam — casts our sins into the depths of the sea;  
תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב / titein emet le'Yaakov — You grant truth to Jacob;  
חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם / chesed le'Avraham — kindness to Abraham;  
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתֵּינוּ / asher nishba'ata le'avotaynu — which You previously swore to our forefathers;  
מִיָּמֵי קֶדֶם / mimei kedem — from the earliest days.

However, the kabbalists explain that these 13 attributes are on a loftier plane than the ones that were given to Moses. The kabbalists refer to the 13 attributes given to Moses as “zeir anpin,” which means

“small face,” referring to a small revelation of G-d. The attributes given to Micah are referred to as “arich anpin,” which means “big face,” referring to a great revelation of G-d. Kabbalah further refers to the attributes said to Micah as the soul/internal attributes, whereas those given to Moses are body/external attributes.

The reason why the attributes said to Micah are on a grander scale is because they don't express any aspects of judgment or severity. In contrast, some of the attributes given to Moses, such as “truth,” imply distance and coldness. Truth looks at something for what it is and is unwilling to look past the wrong that was committed.

### **13 vs. 13**

Thirteen is a significant number in Judaism. It is the age when a boy becomes Bar Mitzvah and assumes the obligation to keep the laws of the Torah. It also corresponds to the 13 tribes of Israel (when including Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Menashe), and often brings to mind Maimonides' 13 principles of faith.

There are also “the 13 principles of hermeneutic methodology by which Torah law is extrapolated.” These rules, compiled by the talmudic sage Rabbi Ishmael, outline the methods by which the Torah is elucidated and halachic decisions are deduced.

The 13 Attributes of Mercy are perhaps the most significant of the 13s that appear in Judaism. The notion of mercy is especially relevant and necessary when dealing with penitence. It is for this reason that the Attributes of Mercy are recited numerous times during the Hebrew month of Elul, and especially on the Day of Atonement.

The kabbalists also suggest that there is a correlation between the 13 principles of Torah interpretation and the 13 Attributes of Mercy. The name of the month of Elul can be read as an acronym for the words of the verse from Shir HaShirim, “אני לדודי ודודי לי,” “I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me.” The verse concludes, “Ha-roeh bashoshanim,” “He browses among the lilies.” The Talmud teaches not to read the verse as “bashoshanim,” “lilies,” rather as “shoshanim ba'Torah,” “the teachings in Torah.” The idea that both the month of Elul—when the 13 Attributes of Mercy are more regularly referenced and revealed—and learning Torah are alluded to in the same verse demonstrates a clear link between the two.

Further, Rosh Chodesh Elul, the first day of the month of Elul, began the 40 days when Moses ascended Mt.Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets. The sages tell us that many more dimensions of Torah were revealed at that time, which further demonstrates the connection between Torah and the month of Elul, and more particularly their shared theme of 13.

There is another set of 13. According to the Zohar there are 13 strands of a beard, which correspond to the 13 Attributes of Mercy. This correlation demonstrates the holiness of a beard, and how growing one brings down Divine help and mercy.

The Talmud

The Talmud states -

G-d passed before him and proclaimed ... Rabbi Yochanan said: “Were it not written in the text, it would be impossible for us to say such a thing; this verse teaches us that G-d enwrapped Himself like the shaliach tzibbur [prayer leader] of a congregation and showed Moses the order of prayer. He said to him: ‘Whenever Israel sin, let them carry out this service before Me, and I will forgive them.’”

So what does it mean, “It would be impossible for us to say”? What is it that would be impossible? What is Rabbi Yochanan coming to teach us here? Finally, what is this “service” to which G-d refers?

For any of us to imagine that G-d plays dress up is simply ludicrous. And yet, the sages say that G-d wrapped himself in a tallit, prayer shawl, like a prayer leader, and appeared to Moses. The sages learn this from the words, “G-d passed before him.” The verb “pass” is used when speaking of a prayer leader, when we ask him to “pass” before the ark to lead the prayers. G-d portrayed Himself in this way to teach us the holiness of these 13 Attributes of Mercy: they can be said only when there is a minyan, a quorum, as per the rule that a holy act may be done only in the presence of a minyan.

But what is this service that G-d wants us to do?

### **Speech vs Action?**

“Whenever Israel sin, let them carry out this service before Me, and I will forgive them.”

So what does G-d want us to do in order for Him to forgive us? “Let them carry out this service before Me.” What is “this” service? It seems ambiguous and vague.

Some commentaries believe that mentioning the Attributes of Mercy in prayer alone has the power to influence G-d to forgive us for our sins. However, most kabbalists and commentaries on the Talmud explain that G-d is asking us to imitate His actions: just as He is merciful, so too should we be merciful; just as He is kind, so too should we be kind. Most opinions seem to follow this explanation; because if G-d meant for the prayer alone to be sufficient, the verse should have read, “Let them carry out this prayer before me.”

However, others say that this expectation is placed on the leader of the congregation alone; the one leading the service should be of good character, and only then will the prayers of the community be answered.

### **The Chassidic Approach**

The concept of arousing G-d’s Attributes of Mercy is understood simply: when we sin and seek forgiveness, or we are going through a trying time, G-d will come to our aid.

However, Chassidut takes us a step deeper. It teaches that reciting the 13 Attributes of Mercy creates a strong bond between G-d and the soul.

Every Jew has within a spark of G-dliness that is constantly reanimating the body at every moment. When we nullify ourselves by putting away our selfish desires and letting that Divine spark grow into a raging fire, to the extent that we are willing to sacrifice our life for G-d, then G-d responds in kind, measure for measure, and reveals to us His inner G-dly light.

This is because the people of Israel, G-d and the first attribute of mercy (according to Kabbalah) all contain the word “E-I,” “G-d,” in them. This reveals the deep and powerful bond the three share, and shows that no matter what challenges we face, G-d is our father, and when we cry out, He will embrace us and love us as His children.

## The 10 Martyrs | Mendy Minkowitz | Chabad.org

One of the most moving narratives to emerge from our history of martyrdom is the account of the Ten Martyrs—the heart-rending narrative describing in graphic detail the deaths of 10 Mishnaic-era Torah luminaries who were slaughtered on the altar of senseless hatred.

Ashkenazic Jews read the account of the Ten Martyrs in the Yom Kippur liturgy after the description of the High Priest’s service in the Temple on Yom Kippur, and Sephardic Jews read it on Tisha B’Av, a day when we mourn the destruction of both Holy Temples.

Midrash Eleh Ezkerah lists the following sages as the Ten Martyrs:

Rabbi Yishmael Ben Elisha the High Priest

Rabbi Shimon Ben Gamliel Hazaken

Rabbi Chanina Ben Tradyon

Rabbi Akiva

Rabbi Yehudah Ben Bava

Rabbi Chutzpit Hameturgeman

Rabbi Yeshevav Hasofer

Rabbi Elazar Ben Shamua

Rabbi Chanina Ben Chachinai

Rabbi Yehudah Ben Dama

### **Historical Placement of the 10 Martyrs**

When a wicked king like Nebuchadnezzar or his like will arise and issue a decree against the Jews to nullify their faith or one of the mitzvahs, one should sacrifice one's life rather than transgress any of the other mitzvahs.”

Since the time of our forefather Abraham, and throughout a long history of suffering and oppression, the Jewish people have been imbued with the ability and the willpower to lay down their lives for G-d.

There is some disagreement among the rabbis as to who the 10 sages were and when they were killed. The widely accepted source for the account of the Ten Martyrs, the famous poetic lamentation of Midrash Eleh Ezkerah, seems to indicate that the 10 sages were all summoned by a Roman governor and killed at once. However, most agree that the 10 sages could not have been killed at the same time, or even in near succession, since they were not contemporaries.

All other accounts of the Ten Martyrs conclude that two of them were killed during the Great Revolt, which was staged by the Jews against the Roman oppressors between the years 66 and 74 CE, while the rest were killed in the Bar Kochba Revolt some 60 years later, between 132 and 136 CE.

During the Great Revolt, which ultimately led to the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple), Jewish blood was spilled in barbaric ways and at staggering rates, yet the final blow to the morale of the people was dealt with the tragic martyrdom of the Jewish leaders, who were publicly tortured and executed. This is why only their deaths are meticulously recorded and described.

### **Who Were They?**

The dispute over when the deaths of the Ten Martyrs occurred hinges on a disagreement as to their identity.

As mentioned above, many of these sages were not contemporaries, and could therefore not have been killed at the same time.

Some sources deal with this issue by coming to different conclusions about who some of the martyrs were: they mention Bar Kappara, Rabbi Shimon Ben Azzai and Rabbi Yehuda Hanachtom as possible martyrs, which would diminish the chronological gaps.

### **The Story Behind the Story**

The sages also disagree regarding the reason for the punishment of the Ten Martyrs. However, the reasons given are not mutually exclusive, and can all be embraced as different facets of the same concept. Indeed it is written, “There are 70 faces to Torah” —meaning that differing opinions can, and indeed do, offer more insight into one incident than a single explanation could.

The Talmud tells us that when Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues visited a dying Rabbi Eliezer, the latter said that he would be “surprised if they [his visitors] would die a natural death.” When Rabbi Akiva asked him what kind of death he would suffer, Rabbi Eliezer answered, “Yours will be worse than theirs.”

However, according to Eleh Ezkerah, and thus according to most opinions, the story of the Ten Martyrs has its roots in an incident involving the Roman prefect of Jerusalem, the wicked Turnusrufus, who was well-versed in Jewish literature.

He had been learning the passage in Exodus that states, “He who kidnaps a man and sells him, and [the victim] is found in his possession, he shall surely be put to death.” Turnusrufus immediately realized that his interpretation of this law offered him a golden opportunity to humiliate the Jewish faith and murder its chief exponents.

Turnusrufus summoned Rabbi Shimon Ben Gamliel and his colleagues and presented a question before them:

What is the law with regards to he who kidnaps a man from the Jewish nation and sells him [into slavery]?” The rabbis replied that Torah mandates that such a man be put to death. “If so,” continued Turnusrufus, “where are your forbearers who sold their brother into slavery? Had they been here, I would have prosecuted them before your eyes. As for you, accept the decree of heaven, for since the times [of the 12 tribes] there have never been 10 sages of your stature [alive at one time]. Take upon yourself to die in accordance with your law; for Joseph the son of Jacob was kidnapped and sold by his 10 brothers, and their punishment has never been exacted.

The holy men listened, and rather than dismissing this claim as a mere pretext for murder, rather than pleading for their lives, they asked the wicked prefect to grant them three days to verify whether their martyrdom had indeed been sanctioned by the heavenly court.

Rabbi Yishmael the High Priest invoked the Holy Name of G-d, which it is prohibited to utter or write (under normal circumstances), and ascended to heaven to ascertain the verity of the decree.

Rabbi Yishmael was greeted by the angel Gavriel, who said to him, “Yishmael, my son, I swear by your life that I have heard from behind the veil that 10 sages have been delivered to be killed by the wicked kingdom.”

“But why so?” Rabbi Yishmael asked. And the angel confirmed what Turnusrufus had said—that they were to stand in place of the 10 brothers who sold Joseph into slavery and suffer their punishment.

Upon his return to his colleagues, Rabbi Yishmael related what he had heard from Gavriel the angel and urged his fellow sages to accept that this was a heavenly decree.

### **The Angels Protest**

Even after the decree had been issued, the martyrs remained steadfast in their adherence to the Torah, which only enraged Turnusrufus further.

Eleh Ezkerah describes in detail how each of the sages was killed while he was in the middle of performing a mitzvah, and thus returned his soul to her Maker in purity and holiness. Elijah the Prophet came to collect their souls when they departed their bodies, and divine proclamations announced their individual merits to the world.

The Midrash relates that as heaven and earth stormed with the sacrifice of these lofty souls, the angels wept and protested before G-d against such brutality. G-d responded by telling the angels to be silent, making this story one of the most powerful paradigms describing the incomprehensible mystery of G-d’s ways.

The story of the Ten Martyrs is the story of the Jewish soul, which “wants not and cannot be severed from the living G-d,” even if for just one instant, and will endure any suffering to keep that connection intact.

This is the story of the world until its inherent goodness will be brought to the fore, “and all wickedness will go up in smoke, when You will remove the rule of evil from the world.”

The murder of the Ten Martyrs marked the beginning of the end of Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land and the subsequent exile of the Jewish people onto foreign soil. This is the exile that envelops us until today, and from which we yearn to be redeemed with the immediate coming of Moshiach.



# sukkah dinner

## UNDER THE STARS



THURSDAY + OCTOBER 17 + 7 PM

Join us for a joyous and delicious evening  
in the Sukkah featuring a wine tasting,  
delicious food, live music and  
holiday spirit.



RSVP | [ckj.org/kjbsukkah](http://ckj.org/kjbsukkah)

\$50 Per Person | \$90 Per Couple

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# STUDY WITH KJ

## SUNDAYS

FOLLOWING

8:30 AM SERVICES

**Dr. William Major Memorial  
Advanced Shiur in Talmud**

*Rabbi Dr. Jeremy Wieder*

Starting September 1

## MONDAYS

8:30 AM

**Exploring  
Jewish Thought**

*Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz*

Starting October 28

7:00 PM

**Jewish Learning Institute  
(JLI): Worrier to Warrior**

*Rabbi Elie Weinstock*

Starting November 11

## TUESDAYS

8:15 AM

**Parsha Foundations**

*Rabbi Elie Weinstock*

Starting September 17

6:30 PM

**Jewish Letters  
Through the Ages**

*Rabbi Yossi Weiser*

Starting September 10

7:00 PM

**For the Love of God**

*Rabbi Meyer Laniado*

Starting October 29

7:15 PM

**What a Parsha!**

*Rabbi Yossi Weiser*

Starting September 10

8:00 PM

**The Book of  
Bamidbar with Rashi**

*Martin Kaufman*

Starting September 10

## WEDNESDAYS

8:30 AM

**Parashat haShavua  
for Women**

*Rabbi Haskel Lookstein*

Starting September 11

6:30 PM

**Crash Course in  
Hebrew Reading**

*Sara Rosen*

Fall/Winter: September 11

Spring: March 4

7:30 PM

**Prayerbook Hebrew**

*Sara Rosen*

Fall/Winter: September 11

Spring: March 4

9:30 PM

**Contemporary  
Halakhic Issues**

*Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz*

Starting October 30

## THURSDAYS

8:30 AM

**Kings One: David and  
Batsheva, The Finale**

*Dr. Shera Aranoff Tuchman*

Starting October 24

7:00 PM

**Meaningful Jewish Living**  
*Rabbinical Staff*

Starting September 12

[ckj.org/mjl](http://ckj.org/mjl)



CONGREGATION KEHILATH JESHURUN

# Shabbat Mornings *with KJ Beginners*

*“Shabbat for people who want to know more”*



## **Beginners Service – Experience the Difference!**

With George Rohr, Rachel Kraus, Dr. Steve Rudolph and Morris Massel

Start your Shabbat morning with information and inspiration at our welcoming, no-Hebrew-necessary service where prayers, the weekly Torah portion, and rituals are explained. No question is off limits -- you'll never look at Shabbat morning the same way again!

Saturdays at 9:30

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## **KJB Minyan – Explore Prayer & Parsha!**

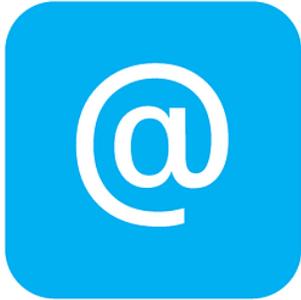
With Rabbi Daniel Kraus and Chazan Shilo Kramer

This welcoming, interactive, and intimate service allows you to explore prayer and parsha like never before. Open questions, honest answers with a healthy dose of spirit and soul. The KJB Minyan is where the classical synagogue service meets your needs.

Saturdays at 9:15

**Kiddush all together following services!**

# CONTACT US:



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