

I want to begin by thanking the sponsors of this Yom Kippur drasha:

- Avi and Sara Bernstein
- Chaim and Sherry Berlin, “in honor of Rabbi Marwick and Kenny Friedman, who have put forth a Herculean effort to offer the Shomrei community a safe and inspiring way to connect with our Creator during these unprecedented times.”
- Ken and Yocheved Gelula, “in appreciation of Rabbi Marwick. May we continue to be inspired by his words and actions in the new year.”
- Avi and Sora Greenlinger, “in honor of our Rav, and as a zechus for all the *tefillos* of our Kehilla, whether said in shul or at home this year, to be answered *l'tova*.”
- Murray and Baila Jacobson, “on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Yahrzeit of Murray’s father, Bernard Jacobson, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei.”
- Barry and Phyllis Levi, “in honor of our grandson Eliyahu Levi's Bo Bayom Bar Mitzva on Erev Yom Kippur and in memory of our dear parents, Eric and Ruth Levi and Edith Bremont, a"n.”
- Dr. Noah and Ellen Lightman “in honor of our outstanding Rav, Rabbi Marwick, for his love and devotion to our wonderful Shul, Shomrei Emunah.”
- Avrami and Michelle Rakovsky
- Jordan and Chana Leah Wiener, “with great *hakaras hatov* to Rabbi Marwick!”
- Mendy and Peshie Vim, “in memory of Miriam bas Meir Mattisyahu haLevi, Mendy Vim's mother.”
- Sasha and Debbie Zakharin, “in gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu Whom we beseech for continued good health for our families and the entire Kehilla, and in honor of Rabbi Marwick for his tireless devotion to the Shul.”

Thank you all for your generosity and support of the Shul. May *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* reward you with a year of *bracha* and *hatzlacha*, good health and happiness!

I also want to thank the medical professionals in our shul, and our community, who have been working tirelessly to help keep our shul and community safe. May Haskadosh Baruch Hu reward them with a year of good health and happiness, *bracha and hatzlacha*!

The **Mishna in Taanis 26a** teaches us

לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כט"ו באב ויום הכפורים

There were no greater days for the Jewish people than Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur was one of the best days, the most **joyous** and **happy** days, on the Jewish calendar. More than Purim and Chanuka, Pesach and Sukkos, was the joy of Yom Kippur!

When we think of Yom Tov in general, we normally visualize bountiful holiday meals, but there is obviously no such meal **on** Yom Kippur. But **Rabbeinu Yonah** writes that the *seuda hamafsekes* is actually the *seuda* of Yom Kippur. I believe that a joyous meal before we begin the day is supposed to set the tone for the day. To properly keep this day, we must come into Yom Kippur with celebration...with a sense of optimism and joy.

Isn't this hard to imagine? When we think of this day, we normally think about fasting, many hours of davening, serious introspection, and the gravity of the day.

What is the cause of happiness and joy, optimism and celebration on this day?

It is a day of *vidui*—admitting our wrongdoings, owning up to our mistakes, our failings. We think about what we have done wrong--the people we have let down, the potential we have not lived up to--and we promise to do better.

This is a time when we think of the past year...what has transpired. We implore Hashem "let the year and its curses end."

We wear white clothes and kittels, our burial shrouds. The *Sefer HaLevush* says that these clothes remind us of the day of death. Facing our mortality once a year may be helpful—but where is the happiness? Where is the joy?

This year especially, how can we feel joy when we take stock of this past year—such a challenging year, filled with so much pain and suffering?

The world around us crumbled. Every time we checked the news, we confronted sickness and death. We heard of increases in anti-Semitic acts throughout the world. And in our shul, too, unfortunately we suffered tragedies this year, *lo aleinu*—with the loss of treasured members ...whom we miss so much and whom we think about on this day.

So where is the joy in this day of introspection and reflection? What am I missing?

The great Israeli media personality **Sivan Rahav Meir** writes that she received the following message before Rosh Hashana this year:

*Shalom Sivan, this is Chagit Rhein. 14 years ago, on Rosh Hashana eve, I was preparing to light the candles. This was a month and half after my son, Benaya Rhein, fell in the Second Lebanon War. The pain was so raw. Over the holiday candles we bless "שהחיינו וקיימנו והגענו לזמן הזה", "who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion." I stood over the candles and I felt that I was not capable of making this bracha sincerely. I wanted to make a bracha from the heart, and I felt that this would be fake. How could I say "שהחיינו וקיימנו" "who has granted us life" when my son had just been killed? I stood over the candles with tears in my eyes. I prayed for the strength and the proper insight in order to bless with joy.*

*After a period of time that seemed like eternity, I suddenly looked around. I saw [my family and loved ones, people I care about,] standing there, and suddenly I understood: Yes, שהחיינו "who has granted us life. "Say thank you for all that you have, for the tremendous abundance in your life that cannot be taken for granted in any way. I felt my heart open and I shouted: שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה I think they heard me all the way to Kalkilya. . . I have always endeavored to preserve the understanding gained at that moment so that it would not go away, but would rather become my worldview. If only all of us could succeed this year in changing our perspective by looking around us and inside of us to see the good within the present crisis, to be joyful that we have arrived at Rosh Hashana 5781, having been granted the gift of life."*

The famous question is asked: why does Rosh Hashana come before Yom Kippur? Wouldn't it be more logical to ask Hashem for forgiveness before we are judged?

One answer is that, more than a judgment day, Rosh Hashana is a day to accept Hashem as King. It is a day to contemplate the fact that everything we have is given to us by Hashem and cannot be taken for granted. And it is a day to appreciate everything in our lives--our ability to breathe, to walk, to talk, and to be part of a family and community. EVERYTHING is a gift. Nothing can be taken for granted.

But these gifts come with expectations...with responsibilities. As the **Ramcha'l** writes in *Mesilas Yesharim* (Perek 8)

ההסתכלות ברוב הטובות, שהקדוש ברוך הוא עושה עם האדם בכל עת ובכל שעה, והנפלאות הגדולות שעושה עמו מעת הלידה עד היום האחרון,

*Focusing on all the good that the Hashem does with man at all moments and all times and the great wonders He performs for us from the time of birth until our final day.*

כי כל מה שירבה להסתכל ולהתבונן בדברים אלה, הנה ירבה להכיר לעצמו חובה רבה אל האל המטיב לו,

*For the more one looks into and contemplates these things, the more he will recognize his enormous debt to G-d Who bestows good to him.*

And it is from this place of appreciation and gratitude that we must then approach the day of Yom Kippur, asking ourselves, with everything Hashem does for us, **how can we turn our backs on Him? How can we shirk our responsibilities, our mission in life?**

As much as we will get into the details of our sins, enumerating the dozens of things we have done wrong and need to work on, the overarching question of the day is not the mundane specifics of what we did wrong, but how could we do any of it? How can we ever forget about Hashem's will? How can we let Him down? As we say in Parshas Haazinu זאת תגמלו ה' לה' תגמלו זאת as the Bechor Shor and Rabbeinu Bachai explain, **Is this how you repay Hashem after all the chessed He does for us?**

We must come into Yom Kippur with gratitude and appreciation, because of all that Hashem has given us. And this should lead to humility and a feeling of disappointment in ourselves for not living up to His expectations. And this, in turn, should lead us to a strong commitment to live up to our potential this year.

And with this perspective, Yom Kippur becomes a day of joy... joy in recognizing that we have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven...that our blessings abound. With this perspective, we can appreciate that we have been given new opportunities, a new chance at life.

Similarly, the **Gemara Taanis 30b** records that Tu B'Av was the day that, after 40 years in the *midbar*, the people stopped dying. People who expected to die were given another chance at life.

אמר רבן אלא חמשה עשר באב מאי היא? רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: יום שכלו בו מתי מדבר.

Rashi cites a *braisa* that every year before the ninth of Av, the Jews in the *midbar*, knowing there had been a decree on the *dor hamidbar*, would dig their own graves, and sleep in that grave, and anticipate that thousands would not wake up. Every year, someone would announce—separate the living from the dead. But in the fortieth year, everyone climbed out of the grave in the morning. Convinced they had erred in the calculation of the date, they repeated the dreadful task of going to sleep in their graves, until the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, when they saw that the moon was full and knew the decree was up. Imagine their excitement! Their new lease on life! תחיית המתים

When a baby is born, there is much excitement. But what is the source of that excitement? The baby hasn't done anything yet. It is the excitement of a new life, a new beginning, full of potential, so much anticipation of a bright future ahead!

That is the magic of Yom Kippur—our excitement and joy at having another chance...a new chance at life. That is why Chazal compared other new starts—a wedding day, the day someone converts, or the day someone achieves a great position--to Yom Kippur.

All three represent the beginning of something brand new. There is excitement and anticipation. Yom Kippur is a day of *teshuvah* ומחילה, a day of *teshuvah* and *kapara*. It gives us the ability to learn from our past—to do more of the things that went well and to avoid the things that didn't go well, to create a brighter and stronger future for ourselves and our families.

It is the day on which, according to our tradition, the second *luchos* were given at Sinai. The second *luchos* represented a second chance for *bnai Yisrael*. So, too, Yom Kippur represents a second chance for us. Let's not squander it.

In the words of **Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch** (Vayikra 16:23)

“Yom Hakippurim is the *moed* of *kapara*, the *moed* of spiritual, moral and social rebirth through the supreme grace of God, the *moed* of reawakening from spiritual, moral, and social death. Hence "לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כט"ו באב וכיום הכיפורים" from the Gemara Taanis that we cited above.

During this Covid pandemic, many things we usually take for granted were taken from us. For most of us, many things are slowly being restored. For example, after 3 months out of shul, we were able to reopen. It felt like shul was a gift. Who truly appreciated shul until this happened?

Yom Kippur should give us a new lease on life. And it should propel us to expect more of ourselves this year; to hold ourselves more accountable for our actions. We are at a fork in the road this year, more than ever before.

Let us take this joy in this spiritual awakening and recognize that, though we have struggled, within those struggles there is opportunity. Opportunity to rise to the challenge, to discover within ourselves a strength and resilience we didn't know we possessed. To build on our mistakes. To develop a sharper perspective. A new start in life. I believe that Chazal understood that, no matter our challenges and mistakes, at the end of the *teshuva* process, we can make a fresh start...and there is no greater joy than being given a fresh start in life.

**Rav Hirsch** explains that the two goats of the Yom Kippur *avoda* were there to teach us about the consequences of the choices we make in life. The goats were to be identical in height, color, and cost, but they met very different fates. One of them was sacrificed to Hashem, dying a quick, relatively painless death, and the other was pushed off a cliff to a gruesome death. He suggests that the goats' different fates represent the choices **we** make in life—good vs. evil; a life of meaning vs. a life without meaning. Our choices are as real as the fate of those goats...

The goat that was sacrificed on the *mizbe'ach* symbolized the idea that we are beholden to something greater than ourselves. And the other goat, which found its fate in a desolate, unholy place, symbolized the idea of a life focused only on the here and now, lacking higher purpose or meaning.

Each of us has been given tremendous power and abilities. How we use this power determines the worthiness or worthlessness of our moral existence. What kind of goat will we be—l'Hashem or l'Azazel? Will we rise to the challenge? Will we grow from this?

Today, the choice is ours to make.

Let us not waste the inspiration and lessons learned in this unprecedented year.

Let us make sure we do not forget who we are meant to be...and live our lives accordingly.

Yom Kippur is upon us. Let us feel the joy of our existence. Let us thank Hashem for all the blessings in our lives. And let us enjoy a fresh start and do more to live up to our obligations, our responsibilities. On this Yom Kippur, let us commit to choose life ובהרת בהיים.

How does each of us accomplish this? That is a question each of us must ask ourselves ...through honest soul searching and an unwavering commitment to a life of meaning and a life of truth. May we all be forgiven on this day and inscribed in the Book of Life, for a year of good health and happiness, *bracha* and *hatzlacha*...and may we join together in *Yerushalayim Habenuya...bimhera v'yamenu...amen*.