

ROSH HASHANAH 5778

We Jews are very much into our 'mood-music' (prevailing atmosphere or feeling), which can be illustrated with numerous examples: Shuls are invariably built with a lobby designed for contemplation before entering the inner sanctum; each morning we recite *pesukei dezimrah* to prepare ourselves for *shacharit*; each day of every week, we count up towards the following Shabbat and prior to each festival we (are meant to!) commence learning thirty days beforehand; Shavuot and *matan Torah* is preceded by the 49 days of the *Omer* and Tisha B'Av by three weeks of increasingly stringent mourning for *churban Beit Hamikdash* (may it speedily be rebuilt). Most notably, Rosh Hashana is preceded by *Chodesh Elul*, during which (apart from on Shabbat and Erev Rosh Hashana) the shofar is blown every morning and *selichot* are recited for at least the last four days, all designed to put us into a reflective mood ahead of Rosh Hashana and thereby improve our chances of Rosh Hashana being so much more meaningful and successful in its outcomes, both personally and communally. From and including Rosh Hashana, we then have an *aseret yemei teshuva* to consolidate our sincere resolutions and intentions, culminating in Yom Kippur, which is likened to a *mikveh* from which we will emerge spiritually cleansed and purified.

A question often posed is whether it would not be more logical for Yom Kippur to precede Rosh Hashana, as if to suggest that we rid ourselves of all our sins in the old year, to enable us to start the new year with a clean slate.

I recall hearing Dayan Ch. Ehrentreu *Shlita* answering this point with a *moshal* about tall buildings and their foundations. Should a crack appear on the wall of an upper floor, it need not be of undue concern if the foundations of the building have been constructed solidly and, I guess, in accordance with building regulations! However, if the foundations are deficient, then that cracking could well signal serious danger for the entire building.

Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of the creation of Man (*Hayom harat olam*) and *Hashem* as *Borei Olam* is a major component of the liturgy, through which we proclaim His sovereignty on Rosh Hashana. The Dayan went on to make the point that *Hashem* created the universe on the most solid of foundations, that of strict justice, as evidenced by the exclusive use in the first chapter of *Bereishit* of His Name *Elokim*, which denotes *midat hadin*, the attribute of justice. This would

have entailed Man being judged, as deserved, exactly according to his deeds. However, Man is not virtuous enough to survive such harsh scrutiny, without mercy and forbearance, and as early as the second chapter of *Bereishit*, the four-letter Name of *Hashem*, which denotes *midat harachamim*, the attribute of mercy, is introduced, to signify that *Hashem* would now merge compassion with justice (*Rashi*).

The two days of Rosh Hashana provide us with the opportunity to lay our firm foundations, by virtue of the unique nature of these days. Whereas, during Elul, the *aseret yemei teshuva* and on Yom Kippur itself, we are preoccupied with seeking and hopefully obtaining forgiveness, Rosh Hashana is all about proclaiming *Hashem* as sovereign, not just of ourselves, but of the whole universe. In so doing, we establish a relationship to Hashem that is based on our awe and reverence of Him.

Thus, on Rosh Hashana, we fully recognise and internalise *malchut Hashem* and His presence in our lives, and with that foundation, we can then proceed to seek His ultimate forgiveness on Yom Kippur. During the year, insufficient cognisance of *Hashem* in our lives may well have led us towards sin, such that if we tried to do *teshuva* before establishing an appropriate reverence for Hashem, it wouldn't work, since it would be like trying to make our sins vanish without addressing the problem that led us to sin in the first place.

Of course, to obtain forgiveness, we need to have genuine remorse for the wrongs that we have perpetrated in the past, to confess them and to sincerely resolve that they will not be repeated in the future, but whilst we commence this process during Elul, over Rosh Hashana, it is largely put on hold until the *aseret yemei teshuva* and Yom Kippur itself.

The message being conveyed to us, as we celebrate Rosh Hashana, is that the foundations we lay at the outset of the year in the form of our realigned relationship with *Melech Malchei Hamelachim* and our resolutions for future spiritual self-improvement, need to be as strong and sincere as possible to merit the *ketiva vechatima tova* that we each wish for ourselves, our families and all of *klal Yisrael*.