

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

NISABIM/ROSH HASHANAH  
Haftarah: Yeshayahu 61:10-63:9  
SEPT. 7-8, 2018 28 ELUL 5778

DEDICATION: Happy Birthday Ruby !

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## EDITORS NOTES

**I went to have my phone repaired this afternoon. As I waited the 10 minutes that the technician needed to replace the cracked screen, I overheard three ladies talking on their way out. When you hear someone from the community speaking in what I guess to us is an easily recognizable accent and dialogue, you turn as if a relative is speaking to you. She was telling her colleagues that she was stressed and overwhelmed having returned from the shore on Tuesday to Brooklyn, getting her kids into school on Wednesday and getting ready for Rosh Hashana and cooking for company. I laughed and told her that at least she could be comforted in knowing she wasn't alone. We then spoke for a bit about pre-holiday emotions.**

In the secular world during November and December, many people are afflicted with The Holiday Blues. Psychiatrists explain that although the holidays are a time of joy for many, they can also trigger symptoms of anxiety and depression to different degrees. Over the past decade, I have come to realize that I too succumb to Holiday Blues every year. Mine do not occur in November and December. Mine occur during Elul, the days leading to Rosh Hashana and the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

So I sought out papers on the subject to see if there was some commonality. Robert Hales, chair of the UC Davis Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences was very helpful. I list below some of the causes he suggests.

**Lack of sleep** — In the secular world, it is not uncommon for people to spend more time celebrating, meeting people and going out. Unfortunately, decreased sleep is a major contributor to feeling tired and lethargic during the day, and may contribute to increased rates of depressive symptoms. Well that makes perfect sense. In addition

to waking earlier for Selihot, we are getting to bed later trying to get as much work in as possible before the holidays when we will be closed. Many friends plan their overseas trips in the weeks before Rosh Hashana realizing that business travel will be very difficult over the next four weeks.

**Overscheduling** — Elul usually coincides with the back to school period and the returning home for the summer and all that these tasks entail. There is holiday shopping and as noted above, in business the pressure to get these tasks and jobs completed is tremendous. In addition to our regular lives, our volunteer work increases. We are pressed to help raise money and to prepare for the coming year. So many need help and we must be there to help them.

**Unrealistic expectations about ourselves** — Dr. Hales explains that during the holidays, we frequently meet other people that are quite successful and are advancing throughout their careers. This may lead us to place unrealistic expectations on ourselves concerning our own accomplishments, or our perceived lack of them. None of us is perfect, and sometimes we develop unrealistic expectations over the holidays of what we should accomplish and focus on our failures. Wow, how much more so for us during the holidays? Imagine the pressure sitting in the synagogue, listening to drive after drive and bidding for honors. While my dad always taught that we do this to encourage people to participate with everyone else, I imagine for some there is tremendous pressure to save face. This is tremendous and life altering pressure for some.

**Lack of exercise** — People often exercise less during the holidays (although we probably do more walking during the holidays than the rest of the year), but in the weeks leading up to the holidays, lack of time and sleep certainly result in lack of exercise.

**Lack of time for oneself** — We frequently neglect ourselves during this time. This externalization of efforts can deplete your reserves and worsen symptoms of anxiety or depression. Many rabbis explain that during this period their own personal study time is curtailed as they must devote it towards what they must learn in order to teach.

Although I can relate to many of these points, I realize that for me, it's the changing of the hats at a time I shouldn't be changing hats. In these weeks, I go from the rabbi who is or at least tries to be, the teacher, encouraging, learning and growing with those around me, to the auctioneer, salesman and debt collector. Although I know it's a necessary "evil" which is really a misvah, it's something I do not enjoy. The reality is that for many of our synagogues, in these few weeks, we are burdened to raise half or more of our annual expenses between memberships, seats, aliyot, honors, donations and drives. During a time which should be spiritual, I admit, it appears very material. And part of it is because I know that there are too many people who fail to understand that without the effort there won't be synagogues to pray in. And they take it out on the volunteers as if we were making a commission or something. I am glad that I take no pay for anything I do and know it's even harder for those who are paid where they are sometimes accused by people who should know better of being self-serving. And no, we are not the Medici Pope Leo X selling indulgences. Sedakah does not replace Teshuba where we must acknowledge our wrong doings, we must regret and apologize and compensate for them and finally commit to changing our behavior, but it absolutely helps.

Collecting old debts is hardest. And more than raising money, I was so trained by my Rabbi in the dangers of unfulfilled vows that in reaching out, I really want to protect that person. Rabbi Abittan would explain that the power of speech distinguishes man from animal. Words have a power of their own and can create realities and liabilities that must be honored. If a man makes a vow, a neder, to Hashem, he cannot break his word. An unfulfilled vow acts as a blockage to whatever blessing Hashem wishes to bestow upon us. So no matter how much we know we are doing the right thing, we still get accused of trying to pull blood from a stone by people. How is one supposed to feel?

Sometimes I try to fall back on the wise words of one of my dearest and wisest friends Elliot Jemal. Elliot told me once that we are all due some abuse and that abuse can come in many ways, so it might as well come in the act of doing a misvah. Still, I often feel like I should just walk away and leave it for someone else and then the image of my dad haunts me back into the job. I can hear him, "It's not about the honor and it's not about the easy, it's about doing the right thing!"

But for whatever reason the melancholy prevails and then as we enter erev Rosh Hashana and I grab a

towel and walk out the back deck onto the beach and into the ocean and immerse myself completely five times, I shed my skin and walk out a new person at least for the next 48 hours. I look forward to sitting with my wife and family and neighbors and going through the seder of simanim and rising very early the next day and beginning prayers before dawn and praying the amidah at sunrise as I have tried to do every year since I was a child in Deal with Rabbi Dwek. I look forward to the Torah and sometimes think of the Ram that Abraham will sacrifice Tachat Yishak with its horns caught in the thickets or perhaps placed by Hashem in the thickets, remembering that Hashem is in charge of everything and we shouldn't worry as much. That thought is magnified as I pray musaf and my friend Sam Shetrit stands next to me blowing the shofar with the kavanot we discussed and we focus on the thought that Hashem is HaMelech, the King, in charge of everything and we can stop worrying about ourselves. Its an incredible feeling that extends into Tashlich where we again unburden ourselves and remember that Hashem is truly running the show and although we think we are driving the car, that car is really on the track at Nelly Bligh and no matter how much we turn the wheel, press on the gas or hit the brake, we are doing nothing to influence the speed or direction. And this feeling often continues into the fast day which follows.

But unfortunately with the preparations for Kippur, more selling, more begging, more collecting, that melancholy returns for the week until Kippur, when finally we return to the ocean for another set of underwater immersions and Yom Kippur itself takes over. I think for those 25 hours, we operate on that spiritual high through the Neliah service when I can raise my voice which comes from some hidden place shouting out kol mevaser, mevaser veomer – a voice is crying out, crying out and saying – Hashem hu HaElokim – Hashem is the L-rd. And finally as we say Havdalah there is no question that I can feel the joy of the Kohen Gadol in completing the service of the day and join him in his post avodah celebration. And that joy takes us into sukkot and at least for me into the rest of the year, until we get back to Elul and the business starts again!

Wish me luck! And Keep smiling. Remember Avinu Malkeynu, Hashem our Father and our King loves us and that makes all of us His princes and princesses. I'll try to keep smiling too!

Shabbat Shalom and Tizku LeShanim Rabot

David Bibi

## Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

### Nitsavim- Teshuva and Benei Israel seals a covenant with Hashem

- 1- Moshe gathers Benei Israel on the day of his death to enter a covenant with Hashem
- 2- The purpose of the covenant is so we should remain acting like Hashem's nation
- 3- A warning to stay away from avoda zara
- 4- A day will come when we do teshuva and Hashem will gather us and return us to Israel
- 5- Blessings that will come when we do teshuva and return to Hashem
- 6- Hashem reassures us that the Torah is not in the heavens or seas but rather is close and attainable for us to learn
- 7- Hashem again tells Benei Israel that if we follow the mitzvot we will have life and goodness and if we don't there will be death

Some thoughts for a more meaningful Rosh Hashana

#### Mikveh

We have a minhag to go to the mikveh before Rosh Ha'shana in order to cleanse ourselves and accept upon ourselves the kedoosha this awesome day of Rosh Hashana. Ben Ish Hai in Parashat Netzavim brings down the kavanot we should have when dipping.

Dip # 1 - Tahara – Purity

Dip # 2 - Rectify Anger

Dip # 3 - To Sweeten the Judgment

Dip # 4 - To Remove the Weekday Garb & To End Last Year and its Curses

Dip # 5 - To Accept the Holiness of Rosh Hashana & To Begin the New Year and its Blessing

\*\*Thanks to Saul Kassin who sent these kavanot around

#### Dinner

At dinner we eat things as a segula for a good year. And by some of the items we eat we say it is so that we can defeat or remove our enemies. It is helpful to have in mind when saying this that our main enemy is the yetser hara. And thus we can have kavana in asking Hashem to make it easier for us to defeat the yetser hara and that we should desire more to do Hashem's will. We can have kavana that Hashem should make it easier for us this year to want to learn Torah and do mitzvot.

#### After Dinner

Some siddurim (like the Orot siddur) have the mishnayot of Rosh Hashana in them. Many people try and read/learn these mishnayot on Rosh

Hashana. It is a nice idea to read these mishnayot after dinner. This will assure that our night has some Torah learning in it.

#### Walking to Shul

When walking to shul in the morning a nice idea is to think about all the things we are thankful for. Talk to Hashem (out loud). Say thank you Hashem for giving me parents. Thank you Hashem for giving me a wife. Thank you for my children. Thank you that they are healthy and happy and getting along with their friends and learning well in school. Thank you for giving me a year of life and a year of health... and we can think of this again in the tefilah of nishmat. This will lay the foundation of hakarat hatov. This will give us a feeling of "katonti mikol ha'hasadim" as we say in the selichot, that we are humbled by all Hashem has done for us. And thus when we come before Hashem we come as a person who has no demands. Everything we get and ask for is the hesed of Hashem who is giving us more than we rightfully deserve. Let us think about all Hashem has done for us this year!

#### Shachrit

Nishmat - As we are approaching nishmat it is helpful to stop for 30 seconds and think of all the things Hashem has blessed us with. If we have even one of the following items (the ability to see, the ability to hear, the ability to talk, the ability to walk, the ability to think and learn) we are very fortunate. All the more so if we have all these things! If Hashem blessed us with a spouse, if Hashem blessed us with a child, if Hashem blessed us with multiple children, if Hashem gave us a place to live... We are very fortunate! For any of these items alone we cannot begin to thank Hashem adequately. And this is the theme of nishmat. That we all are forever indebted to Hashem and cannot even begin to thank Hashem enough. If we can invoke that feeling hopefully this will make our tefilah of nishmat more powerful. Further, our requests later in the tefilah can have more impact and effectiveness if they are built on a foundation of hakarat ha'tov. This is similar to a parent who wants to give a child but when the child doesn't appreciate what he has and only asks for more the parent holds back so the child will realize all he is getting and taking for granted.

Amida - Melech Hakadosh- We are asking that everyone should realize Hashem is the King. Let us try and imagine what that would be like.

Amida- Ata Bachartanu- There are 7b people in this world. Just ~15m have the guidebook to life and we are in that fortunate group. Hashem chose us as his nation. He gave us the Torah and he gave us the

mitsvot. Think about what this means. Without the Torah there would be no Shabbat, no mitsvot to guide our lives, no community, no emphasis on family. Without Torah where would we be? What would our lives be like? Take a minute to think about this and it will help us to feel grateful while saying these words.

Modim- Same kavana as nishmat. One can stop for 30 seconds before beginning modim and think of 3 or 4 things he is grateful for.

Nakdishach- As everyone is singing together the praises of Hashem think that at this moment not only is everyone in this shul singing the praises of Hashem but in all the other shuls in the community and in all the other shuls in the world everyone is praising Hashem right now. And even the people who usually stay home today they are in shul crowning Hashem as the king. What a kidoosh Hashem! Our king is finally getting some of the respect he deserves.

#### Bidding

On Rosh Hashana we work so hard to get in the right zone for tefilah. It is important to take notice that the more we look up out of our siddur and look around the room taking notice of the things going on around us the more this takes us out of that zone we are working so hard to get in to. This also applies very much with the bidding. If one is going to buy an aliyah that is great but if not let us not be distracted with who is bidding for which aliyah and how much he is paying. This is valuable time that can be spent saying tehillim or reading through the upcoming Musaf amida in English to better understand what we will be saying.

#### Taking out the Torah

The aron is open. This is a precious time. It is an eht rason (a time of mercy). Try to make the most of it. When taking out the Torah we say the words "le'olam Hashem debarecha nisav bashamayim" twelve times. Literally it means "forever Hashem's word is established in shamayim". What does this mean? What should we be thinking when we say this? I heard from Rabbi David Sutton two kavanot we can have when saying this pasook. The first is from the Rashash who explains these words that Hashem's evil decree should stay up in shamayim and not be carried out here in this world. The second is that Hashem's word, the words that created the world, nisav bashamayim, is still established in shamayim and is fueling the existence of the world to this day. We are acknowledging that without Hashem actively making everything in the world happen the world would cease to exist. To help us better understand

this concept we can think of a moonwalk. Without the air being pumped into the moonwalk every second the moonwalk would collapse. Everything exists and is happening because Hashem is making it happen. These words are a statement of emunah!

#### Torah Reading

On the first day we read the Torah portion that discusses how Hashem gave water to Yishmael and Hagar in the desert because Hashem judged Yishmael "ba'asher who sham" (as he was at that moment). We read this to instill in us the idea that Hashem judges us not based on our past actions but based on who we are right now and who we desire to be. Let us put in our heart that we want to be better in an attempt to be judged favorably like Yishmael was. In the haftarah we read the story of Chana to instill in us that Hashem hears our tefilot. If we cry out to Hashem be"H we will merit to be answered like Chana was.

On the second day we read the Torah portion that discusses Akedat Yitshak (possibly the greatest mitzvah ever done). By mentioning this mitzvah we try to invoke the mercy of Hashem. Also, after Abraham was told not to slaughter Yitshak he then saw a ram and brought the ram as a sacrifice. The shofar we blow reminds us of the ram that was sacrificed.

#### Shofar

Let us have kavana that we are fulfilling a mitzvah from the Torah. It is also proper for one to think thoughts of teshuba while the shofar is blowing. The shofar is supposed to instill fear in us and awaken our sleeping hearts to do teshuba. The shofar is also blown when a king is crowned. We are crowning Hashem as our king.

#### Musaf – Making a kabala

Making a kabala. I heard from Rabbi David Sutton quoting the Pele Yoetz that one should try and take something on before Musaf of the Rosh Hashana tefilah. The idea is that by taking on something new, even something small, we are looked at as a baal teshuva (someone who is working on getting closer to Hashem). So to be counted among the "baaley teshuva" one should try and take something on before Musaf.

#### Musaf – The amida

The musaf amida is very different than any other amida we pray during the year. It has a unique structure with 3 middle berachot (malchiyot, zichronot, and shofarot). Each of these berachot contain 10 pesookim related to theme of the beracha (i.e., 10 pesookim with the word melech). We blow the shofar at the end of each of these berachot. It is a

powerful amida. If possible one should try and look through the amida in advance to get familiar with what is being said.

#### After shul

All day long when we have a free minute thank Hashem. Thank him for the things he gave us. List them. Keep saying thank you. A parent wants to give his child more when he sees how happy it makes him and how grateful it makes him. And the opposite is also true. When a child doesn't say thank you for what you gave him and only asks for more it makes a parent not want to give. Let us be that child that Hashem wants to give to.

Also the idea of the day is that Hashem is the king. So maybe it is appropriate to pray during the day that everyone realize Hashem's greatness. Pray for ourselves and for the people around us that we should realize Hashem is the king. That we should all desire to serve him. That we should see with clarity his hand in our lives and that he is running the show. Let us pray that Hashem show himself in the world and everyone should know his is the king!

Some people have a custom to read the tehillim twice on Rosh Hashana. There are 150 psalms in each cycle making 300 psalms if you read it twice. 300 is gematria kaper (i.e. kapara). This is a nice custom because it assures us that we won't waste time during the day.

#### Lunch

Let us have extra kavana in our berachot. Let us be extra careful not to speak lashon hara on the table. We cannot expect our mouths to have power in tefilah if we use them against Hashem to speak lashon hara about his children. Also, the Ben Ish Chai writes that one should be extra careful not to get angry on Rosh Hashana.

#### Tashlich

Tashlich is composed of 3 parts. The first part is zohar. The 2nd is the miy kel kamocha. This is a pasook that mentions Hashem's mercy and that corresponds to the 13 midot of Kel rachum.... This pasook contains the line "ve'tashlich be'msoolot yam kol hatotam" which is where we get the name tashlich. And the last part is a beautiful prayer from the Chida. It is a nice idea to take time to read this part in English (if you don't understand the Hebrew). It is really a special tefilah and we can learn from here a lot of foundations of what things we should be asking Hashem for when we pray to him.

#### During the day

Try and have fear of Hashem all day and to be cognizant throughout the day that we are being judged. Let us try not to have any light headedness. Think thoughts of remorse. Think that all the tragic things that happened this year, all the people that died, all the people that suffered, all the people that got cancer, all the people that struggled in business this year, it was decreed last year on Rosh Hashana! How could this thought not instill fear in a person! (Note, we should be scared, but then we should feel confident that Hashem will judge us favorably since he is merciful and he is our father). We are asking Hashem to reveal himself. This is the main focus and request of the day. With this will come all the things we desire. If our father is the king and in power so we, his children, will have the things we need.

**FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE**  
**"It shall be a day of shofar-sounding for you, you shall make an elevation offering." (Bemidbar 29:1-2)**

In the parashah that lists all the special korbanot of the holidays, we find an interesting difference in the wording when it comes to the musaf offering of Rosh Hashanah. Whereas all the rest use the word "סתברקהו" - you shall offer." Regarding the sacrifice for Rosh Hashanah, the word "ותישעו" - you shall make" is used. Why the discrepancy?

The Daat Zekenim addresses this question and explains that Rosh Hashanah is a day of judgment, when a person must strive to become a "השדח האייר" - a new creation, a new person, free of sin through the power of teshubah. This is why in connection with the korban alone, the Torah uses the verb "ותישעו", you shall make (yourself).

One of the most remarkable features of our generation, which has been almost unparalleled in the history of our nation in exile, is the teshubah movement. It is truly amazing how many people of all ages and backgrounds and from all walks of life, have been able to turn their backs on their previous secular, hedonistic lifestyles, totally devoid of spiritual striving and holiness, and have created of themselves new beings, devoted to Hashem and His Torah. They serve as a model for their fellow Jews on the ability to make an elevation offering of oneself, which surely is a satisfying aroma to Hashem!

Our Sages tell us that whoever is greater than his friend has a greater evil inclination to overcome. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter zt"l noted that the same is true in regard to days of the year. The more sanctified the day is, the greater are the distractions which arise to prevent people from utilizing these days to their fullest. One must be on guard constantly during the High Holidays to avoid the special evil inclination of those days. Rabbi Reuven Semah

### As we enter the holiday of Rosh

**Hashanah**, we should be thinking about the awesomeness of this Day of Judgment, and how the outcome of this day will determine what kind of year we will have. And yet, we see in Shulhan Aruch and in the later commentaries that we are supposed to approach this day with a feeling of joy and confidence. We are instructed to dress in fine clothes and to have festive meals. Even some of our tunes in the selihot that we've been saying for the past month might seem a little too cheerful for the mood that we would expect for such a crucial day like this.

To answer this seeming contradiction, our Sages explain that when we contemplate the judgment that is facing us, we need to do teshubah, and then we can enter the day with a feeling of security that Hashem, in His infinite mercy, will judge us favorably.

There is a commentary on the Shulhan Aruch called Hochmat Shelomo (583:1), who gives a beautiful insight into the procedure of the night of Rosh Hashanah. As we know, we eat the simanim (apples in honey, leek, swiss chard, etc.) and recite a Yehi Rason before we eat each one. Most of us generally view the Yehi Rason as a prayer in which we request that Hashem should make things work out in our favor. However the Hochmat Shelomo says that this is not a prayer at all. Rather we are making a declaration that we have emunah and bitahon that things will in fact turn out well. He explains that by expressing our trust in Hashem, even if chas v'shalom there would be a decree on a person, just by having this total trust in Hashem the person can change the decree to good! According to this, when we say Yehi Rason, we are in effect saying "It will be so"!

The Gemara teaches that the prophet Habakuk said that the most fundamental principle of our faith is "Saddik be'emunato yihyeh" – the righteous one will live through his emunah. When we commit to improve our ways, we can be confident and secure that our merciful Father in Heaven will bless us with a sweet new year. May we all be blessed in the coming year with berachah and success in all of our endeavors. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### What's Right Is Right

In today's fast-moving world, our multi-tasking routine requires quick, decisive thinking. Still, it is all right to ponder before acting; it is even recommended. When we discuss things with others, we become exposed to their ideas. That can be a problem if we reach the conclusion that we are always right, and the other person is always wrong.

If you feel that you are always right, it is likely that you are intolerant. Intolerance means being

unwilling to reconsider ideas and being closed-minded to other points of view. Basically, it is thinking others are wrong for no reason other than they don't agree with your opinion. Intellectual honesty requires you to evaluate the veracity of a statement or opinion before accepting its validity.

The trick is to collect all the facts you can, and then put together the pieces of the puzzle so that they fit. Then you will have the real picture. Then you will see the truth.

Should someone make a statement that you feel is totally wrong, remember that even the worst statement may contain some truth, and perhaps the addition of a missing fact will produce a statement of real truth. Arriving at the truth requires a little patience and a bit of tolerance, so give others a chance to prove their point and you will benefit from your restraint. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

### Basic Elements

"Man needs air, rain and moisture. He needs to breathe oxygen; carbon dioxide and nitrogen and he needs these ingredients to be mixed in the right proportions. He must have light, but he also must have darkness. He needs the earth from which he brings forth the crops that sustain him."

Hashem has set the table for man to live a comfortable life through the Basic Elements of the earth. Each day we should thank Hashem for providing us with all our needs to serve Him correctly and use these gifts to live a better life. (Norman D. Levy; Based on Rabbi Miller's, Duties of the Mind)

### RABBI ELI MANSOUR

In Parashat Nitzavim, Perek 29, pasuk 18, the pasuk writes that there will come a time when a Jew is going to bless himself and say that peace will be with him, even though he walks as his heart sees fit. G-d will not forgive such a man who comes along and says that everything will be OK, and that he will be saved from the wrath of G-d and all his curses, and that he will be fine, for he went along according to his heart. What exactly does it mean about this man when it says, that he walks with his heart?

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank explains that this might be referring to a Jew who is negligent in fulfilling the Miztvot, who simply relies on his good heart and his good intentions. Such a man says that the main thing you do is Chessed to people, to say good morning to people, to be courteous and to be a nice guy. Such a person says that all the other Miztvot and all those other precepts are technicalities, and are not really important.

He says he will be OK, because he goes according to his heart. Modern terminology calls this Jew, a 'Cardiac Jew', which means he is a Jew by heart but not by action.

The Torah says such a Jew will not be spared from the wrath of G-d. It's not enough to be a Jew at heart. One must be a Jew in action. The 613 Mitzvot were not suggestions. They were not ideas or optional. They were laws that were given to all Jews for all time. Having a good heart is important, but that is only one organ in the body. If a person just has a heart, and all the other limbs are failing, then we would not say that this person is really alive. The Pasuk is saying that Hashem will not accept someone who will only follow the way of his heart.

Let's explain this Pasuk in a different light from the Chafetz Chayim. He said that there are many factions of Judaism in modern times that have created new philosophies that veered off the traditional approach of explaining and understanding Torah. These new approaches are based on passion and desire. Those who subscribe or make these new philosophies hide their intent. They make it as if that they have a different approach. They have a different understanding. Meanwhile they want to make these new approaches in order to be lenient on different values and different morals. The Chafetz Chayim says that these people come with guise that they are not making sins, but this is the way their heart understands. This is the way they comprehend it. This means they give new interpretations, that this is the way they see it. But the Pasuk says, that G-d is not going to forgive them for their sinister attempt to try to guise new ideas and philosophies because they are veering from the traditional approach of Torah.

Whatever explanation we say, whether it is from Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank or whether it is from the Chafetz Chayim, whether it's the fact it is not enough to be Jew at heart, or whether it's the fact that one shouldn't interpret the Torah according to his heart, both are unacceptable in the eyes of G-d.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

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## **Rabbi Wein LEARNING HOW TO LOSE**

I recently read an article that featured an interview with a famous and gifted American baseball player. Most athletes when they are questioned or interviewed by the media respond almost like robots with clichés and nice-sounding phrases, which mean absolutely nothing. This athlete in the interview was asked what great benefit he derived from his career in baseball. Instead of the usual answer about teamwork, setting goals, competing fairly and other such noble ideas, this athlete answered that after playing professional baseball for 15 years, the greatest lesson was that it taught him how to lose.

Most people expect that somehow there is a magic formula that will teach them how to win. However, life, like baseball, is really all about learning how to lose so that one can eventually win in the overall perspective of the game of life. From our earliest infancy we are really trained to lose. No matter how spoiled the child may be, he/she will always confront many instances of losing and denial at home, at school and at play.

In my childhood days, I remember that the greatest insult one could receive from one's fellow classmates or teammates was that one was a poor loser. Somehow, deep within us is the recognition and even a desire regarding losing nobly and fairly. In fact, the entire psychology of human beings in proclaiming what they considered to be a moral victory, is based on the idea that many times losing is more important and more valuable than winning.

In the long run of history, the Jewish people could certainly be counted as being losers rather than winners. No people had quite as difficult and painful a history as the Jews. Most of our history was spent in exile from our homeland and dispersed throughout the world. Persecution and discrimination, poverty and permanent uncertainty were the accepted lot of Jew. Nevertheless, the Jewish people remained unaccountably optimistic about its ultimate future and continued to be most influential in the affairs and evolution of civilization. Though we did not win in material and territorial terms, we felt ourselves to be winners in the world of spirit and human progress.

Baseball players fail 65 to 75 percent of the time. Nevertheless, it is their accomplishment when they learn from that experience why they failed and what they can do to attempt to correct that failure that makes the game so fascinating and the setting for the human drama that it is.

The prophets of Israel always emphasize the failures of the Jewish people and admonished them to review those failures and to learn from them. Dwelling only on our victories and on our triumphs only leads to arrogance, hubris and eventually to greater disappointments and deceits. We find throughout the words of the prophets of Israel, details of our shortcomings and of our losing efforts, so that those errors will not be repeated in the future.

One of the great lessons of losing is the ability to recognize and accept the fact that we have lost. By so doing, we move on and make the necessary adjustments so that we do not become serial losers.

Our cousins, the Palestinians or at least the political leadership of the Palestinians, has yet to come to terms with the fact that they lost their opportunity to destroy the Jewish state 70 years ago. They are unable to move on and build for themselves a better and more peaceful society. This is a tragic situation, both for the winners and losers, for it guarantees continued strife over generations.

The rest of the world recognizes, whether officially or simply within the recesses of its inner heart and mind, that the demands of the Palestinians for Jerusalem, the right of return, and for other untenable demands, can never be met. History has decreed otherwise. By not accepting the reality of that decree, great harm is done not only to the state of Israel but to the Palestinians and their cause as well.

When sports teams are accustomed to winning, they find it very difficult to deal with the times that they, undoubtedly, face losses. The Jewish people, accustomed to losing but always resilient and hopeful, learned from their experience how to rise and create the Jewish state when they had the opportunity finally to win. This psychological state of mind should be kept in mind when we look at the diplomatic and military situations that we now face

### **Rabbi Yosef Farhi THE SILENT WITNESS**

Your best chance at judgment on Rosh Hashanah is to take it seriously. Rosh Hashanah is the time that G-d judges how much you value life as an opportunity to serve Him better. And the "impression" you make on Rosh Hashanah will be the New You for the New Year.

"You don't get a second chance to make a first impression". Social science states that after the first 3 seconds, people you meet decided subconsciously if they like you or not. G-d gives you a week to decide what type of impression you want to make, and that

will be the New You for the New Year. A lot is at stake during the next week. R. Moshe Shapiro was quoted as saying that Rosh Hashannah is the Rosh, the Head of the new year. The whole body is encapsulated in the head; the brain runs every part of the body. And your behavior on Rosh Hashana has control over your behavior for the coming year. The rest of the year depends on your RH performance. Recently, I moved apartment in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem. And when moving a family after 10 years, you have a lot of decisions to make. The most common of all decisions was what to throw away and what to keep. My wife and I concluded that the rule of thumb should be something I read in the field of maximizing space and organization. If you had no use out of the item for a whole year, you most probably could get rid of it. The space in your house has more value than the item. Don't waste space on things you don't need or on things that have little importance.

And then, I started shaking. I realized that is what Rosh Hashanah is all about. G-d decides on the upcoming fateful day who used his potential, and who was a waste of oxygen. G-d keeps us around to bring G-dliness into the world. G-d kept us around last year, for He decided, that we would fulfill a purpose to justify our being around last year. He believed in us. And now, there is judgment, to see if our merits outweigh our misdeeds. Just like an employer checks to see if his employee is bringing in more than is being spent on him. Is it worth keeping me around? Or do I get tossed out, chas veshalom?

But G-d saves the day. וניגח מויל הסכב רפוש שדוחב ועקת. Blow the Shofar in the (new) month, when (the moon ) is covered for our holiday. טפשמ , אוה ל-ארשיל קח יכ . בקעי יקולאל For this (day's) law is (a day) beyond logic for Israel. It is a judgement day for the G-d of Yaakov.

Notice that Pesah and Sukkot are on the 15th of the month, Yom Kippur is on the 10th, Shavuoth, on the 6th, and only Rosh Hashanah is on the first of the month, when the moon is covered. וניגח מויל הסכב , "the holiday when the moon is covered". The moon is symbolic of the Jewish people, as mentioned in Birkat Halevana. The similarity between the two is that both the moon and the Jewish people have times when their light is strong and full, and times when our light is weak - then, we are not noticeable. The Jewish holidays, Pesah and Sukkot, are when the moon is full, to commemorate the times when the Jewish people shone in its full glory. So, why is Rosh Hashanah on the day when it looks dark for us? When the moon is covered?

The Zohar says that on the day of Rosh Hashanah, when G-d is judging the world, the Satan levels his accusations against. "G-d! Your children have sinned!" G-d asks the Satan, "Who are your



witnesses? My Torah says that I accept testimony only if there are two witnesses". So the Satan goes to the Sun, and brings him as a witness. For surely, the Sun can testify to all the sins of each and every Jew. And the sun testifies. And then the Satan goes to look for the Moon to be the other witness. But the Moon is out of sight! It is covered! The Satan has only one witness, when G-d's Torah requires at least two! This is why we are celebrating Rosh Hashanah, that the moon is covered! And this is why G-d judges us on Rosh Hashanah. (לולא ה"כ י' שורד שבו תורעי / ה"רע ג' קלח רהוז – שרדמ) This is the only way we get out of the sticky judgment. And this is why we are not to mention our sins on Rosh Hashanah, so that there won't be another witness against us! The gentiles, who do not follow the Torah, accept one witness. So the sun is a witness against them, making judgment against them more difficult. But the Jews have this קק, this Torah law, that another witness is needed to get someone in trouble.

I wondered what this means, that the Moon is covered, so it cannot testify against us. Why can't the Satan find the moon? Can't the Satan see in the dark? Can't the moon testify, even if it is covered? The answer is that the moon is not just covered. The moon has the power of renewal, and when the moon is covered, it is undergoing renewal. The secret of the Jewish people is that they are able to renew themselves. G-d judges us on Rosh Hashanah by the impression we make on that day, more than anything else. As the Shaarei Teshuva (1 41) cites the Yerushalmi, רמאנ אל תייה רשיו רך מא, התא G-d tests how you are now. Rosh Hashanah is a time that you are in the process of renewal. And just as the moon is a different moon, you are a different person. The Satan cannot use the moon, the epitome of renewal, to testify against a nation of renewal. You are a new person, and the Moon knows that the testimony on the old you cannot be used against the new you.

There is one reason why I believe it is fair for me to ask for another year. Because now, I am a year smarter. I have realized what my weaknesses are and what my strengths are. That is why, for a whole month, I am admitting sins, beating my fist against my heart, soul searching and thinking of my sins between the Shofar sets. Because I know that when I am coming into the New Year, I realize where I can go and where I can't. I realize what stresses me and what builds me. And I realize that without G-d, I am nothing.

Maybe, just maybe, G-d will give me another chance to be a better Jew!

### Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The World is Waiting for You

Something remarkable happens in this week's parsha, almost without our noticing it, that changed the very terms of Jewish existence, and has life-changing implications for all of us. Moses renewed the covenant. This may not sound dramatic, but it was.

Thus far, in the history of humanity as told by the Torah, God had made three covenants. The first, in Genesis 9, was with Noah, and through him, with all humanity. I call this the covenant of human solidarity. According to the sages it contains seven commands, the sheva mitzvot bnei Noach, most famous of which is the sanctity of human life: "He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God did God make man" (Gen. 9:6).

The second, in Genesis 17, was with Abraham and his descendants: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty. Walk before Me and have integrity, and I will grant My covenant between Me and you ... I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout the generations as an eternal covenant.'" That made Abraham the father of a new faith that would not be the faith of all humanity but would strive to be a blessing to all humanity: "Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

The third was with the Israelites in the days of Moses, when the people stood at Mount Sinai, heard the Ten Commandments and accepted the terms of their destiny as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Who, though, initiated these three covenants? God. It was not Noah, or Abraham, or Moses, or the Israelites who sought a covenant with God. It was God who sought a covenant with humanity.

There is, though, a discernible change as we trace the trajectory of these three events. From Noah God asked no specific response. There was nothing Noah had to do to show that he accepted the terms of covenant. He now knew that there are seven rules governing acceptable human behaviour, but God asked for no positive covenant-ratifying gesture. Throughout the process Noah was passive.

From Abraham, God did ask for a response – a painful one. "This is My covenant which you shall keep between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. You must circumcise the flesh of your

foreskin. This shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you" (Gen., 17:10-11). The Hebrew word for circumcision is milah, but to this day we call it brit milah or even, simply, brit – which is, of course, the Hebrew word for covenant. God asks, at least of Jewish males, something very demanding: an initiation ceremony.

From the Israelites at Sinai God asked for much more. He asked them in effect to recognise Him as their sole sovereign and legislator. The Sinai covenant came not with seven commands as for Noah, or an eighth as for Abraham, but with 613 of them. The Israelites were to incorporate God-consciousness into every aspect of their lives.

So, as the covenants proceed, God asks more and more of His partners, or to put it slightly differently, He entrusts them with ever greater responsibilities.

Something else happened at Sinai that had not happened before. God tells Moses to announce the nature of the covenant before making it, to see whether the people agree. They do so no less than three times: "Then the people answered as one, saying, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do'" (Ex. 19:7). "The people all responded with a single voice, 'We will do everything the Lord has spoken'" (Ex. 24:3). "The people said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do and heed'" (Ex. 24:7).

This is the first time in history that we encounter the phenomenon enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence, namely "the consent of the governed." God only spoke the Ten Commandments after the people had signalled that they had given their consent to be bound by His word. God does not impose His rule by force.[1] At Sinai, covenant-making became mutual. Both sides had to agree.

So the human role in covenant-making grows greater over time. But Nitzavim takes this one stage further. Moses, seemingly of his own initiative, renewed the covenant:

All of you are standing today before the Lord your God—your leaders, your tribes, your elders and officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, the strangers in your camp, from woodcutter to water-drawer — to enter into the covenant of the Lord your God and its oath, which the Lord your God is making with you today, to establish you today as His people, that He may be your God, as He promised you and swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Deut. 29:9-12)

This was the first time that the covenant was renewed, but not the last. It happened again at the end of Joshua's life (Josh. 24), and later in the days of Jehoiada (2 Kings 11:17), Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29) and Josiah (1 Kings 23: 1-3; 2 Chron. 34: 29-33). After the Babylonian exile, Ezra and Nehemiah convened a national gathering to renew the covenant (Nehemiah 8). But it happened first in today's parsha.

It happened because Moses knew it had to happen. The terms of Jewish history were about to shift from Divine initiative to human initiative. This is what Moses was preparing the Israelites for in the last month of his life. It is as if he had said: Until now God has led – in a pillar of cloud and fire – and you have followed. Now God is handing over the reins of history to you. From here on, you must lead. If your hearts are with Him, He will be with you. But you are now no longer children; you are adults. An adult still has parents, as a child does, but his or her relationship with them is different. An adult knows the burden of responsibility. An adult does not wait for someone else to take the first step.

That is the epic significance of Nitzavim, the parsha that stands almost at the end of the Torah and that we read almost at the end of the year. It is about getting ready for a new beginning: in which we act for God instead of waiting for God to act for us.

Translate this into human terms and you will see how life-changing it can be. Many years ago, at the beginning of my rabbinical career, I kept waiting for a word of encouragement from a senior rabbinical figure. I was working hard, trying innovative approaches, seeking new ways of getting people engaged in Jewish life and learning. You need support at such moments because taking risks and suffering the inevitable criticism is emotionally draining. The encouragement never came. The silence hurt. It ate, like acid, into my heart.

Then in a lightning-flash of insight, I thought: what if I turn the entire scenario around. What if, instead of waiting for Rabbi X to encourage me, I encouraged him? What if I did for him what I was hoping he would do for me? That was a life-changing moment. It gave me a strength I never had before.

I began to formulate it as an ethic. Don't wait to be praised: praise others. Don't wait to be respected: respect others. Don't stand on the sidelines, criticising others. Do something yourself to make things better. Don't wait for the world to change: begin the process yourself, and then win others to the cause. There is a statement attributed to Gandhi (actually he never said it,[2] but in a parallel universe

he might have done): 'Be the change you seek in the world.' Take the initiative.

That was what Moses was doing in the last month of his life, in that long series of public addresses that make up the book of Devarim, culminating in the great covenant-renewal ceremony in today's parsha. Devarim marks the end of the childhood of the Jewish people. From there on, Judaism became God's call to human responsibility. For us, faith is not waiting for God. Faith is the realisation that God is waiting for us.

Hence the life-changing idea: Whenever you find yourself distressed because someone hasn't done for you what you think they should have done, turn the thought around, and then do it for them.

Don't wait for the world to get better. Take the initiative yourself. The world is waiting for you.

[1] Of course, the Babylonian Talmud argues that at Sinai God did impose the covenant by force, namely by "suspending the mountain" over the people's heads. But the Talmud then immediately notes that "this constitutes a fundamental challenge to the authority of the Torah" and concludes that the people finally accepted the Torah voluntarily "in the days of Ahasuerus" (Shabbat 88a). The only question, therefore, is: when was there free consent?

[2] See Brian Morton, 'Falsar words were never spoken,' New York Times, 29 August 2011. The closest he came was, "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do."

### **AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**

The main Avoda/Theme of the Judgment Day is focusing on "Hashem Melech", The King. Hashem created the Universe (which was created on Rosh Hashana) & He runs it all. He is the only One that has any power & only He can do anything for us.

On Rosh Hashana we work on gaining clarity on our EMUNAH. The more Emunah you gain, the more you are ready for the Yom Hadeen, because Emunah includes everything.

Rambam: "I am Hashem your G-d"(10 Commandments) this is the Mitzvah to gain Awareness & Belief in Hashem. This is most fundamental & supercedes even admitting our sins which we don't do on Rosh Hashana.

We have to first think about and do Teshuba for the sin of forgetting that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in

charge of everything, since the lacking of it is the root of our doing sins.

When you go out into the world and you have to make a living and feel you are all alone, know that Hashem remembers people. He remembers Noach (Mussaf Amidah); and so too He remembers the descendants of Noach. This is part of Rosh Hashana, realizing and remembering that He is "Hazan et haolam kulo"/He is sustaining the whole world. That is, your livelihood that you have every day.

The great Purpose in life is to constantly improve, that is something that Hashem is urging us and weighing.

"Hashem imparts wisdom to the wise person" (not the jester) because He sees that this wise person will make the best use of this gift. So, we want to improve ourselves to be in this position for the Great Day of Judgment, Yom Hadeen.

"Asher Bara Elokim Laasot", ". "That Hashem created to do".

The words 'to do' seem superfluous since it was already stated that "Hashem rested from all of the work that He did".

R' Miller explains that the words "to do" come to teach us the great purpose of life is to be a doer, to make something out of ourselves through constant improvement/Teshuba.

Hashem, our Father, Avinu Malkenu, is waiting on Rosh Hashana to hear our commitment to improve. "Bring a Minha offering and come before Hashem" (Hodu) We should come today with some commitment.

We can say, "Hashem, we are going to utilize the coming year to love & fear You.

To do everything to serve Hashem. I am going to make something out of myself".

When Hashem hears our commitment for the New Year, He says: "My child, I see that you are committing to improvement, I commit to giving you another year of life and blessing"