

# THE ESSENCE OF ROSH HASHANAH

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**About Rav Weinberg Zt"l**

HaRav Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l, was the Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, Maryland from 1987 until his petira in 1999. For many decades he was a force for Torah in the Jewish world. He was the ultimate Rebbi, transforming the hearts and minds of thousands of talmidim with his unfaltering adherence to the truth of Torah and the words of Chazal. With his incisive analysis and penetrating insight, he developed generations of outstanding leaders. They follow his example in their understanding of Torah and in their responsibility for its transmission. His talmidim have been instrumental in creating communal organizations including shuls, schools and kiruv centers. Rav Weinberg was a sought-after advisor, involved in hundreds of private and public issues within the Jewish community. He often conducted the question and answer sessions at Torah Umesorah conventions where many benefited from his counsel. Rav Weinberg was married to Rebbetzin Shaina Chana Ruderman, the daughter of Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, zt"l, the founder of Ner Yisrael. He was the older brother and mentor of Rav Noach Weinberg, zt"l, the founder of Aish HaTorah.



*Dedicated by an anonymous donor l'iluy nishmas  
the Rosh HaYeshiva zt"l*

*Dedicated by Dr. and Mrs. Michael Ring l'iluy nishmas  
Meir Baer ben Shlomo a"h*

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*The Rosh HaYeshiva had a distinctive and expressive style of speaking. The text has been  
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rules have been relaxed to retain the force and flavor of  
the Rosh HaYeshiva's delivery.*

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## The Essence of Rosh Hashanah

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I think we've neglected certain aspects of the *Yomim Tovim*, namely, the character traits that each one develops. We did point out that *Shavuot* is for *emunah* – for faith. It is the source of faith, the development of faith and the giver of faith. But, every *Yom Tov* has the character trait

"...ואולם מלבד הקדוש הזה...יש עוד ענינים פרטיים מיוחדים לכל זמן מזמנים אלה כפי ענינו ושורש כלם הוא סדר ושדרה החכמה העליונה שכל תקון שנתקן ואור גדול שהאיר בזמן מהזמנים בשוב תקופת הזמן ההוא יאיר עלינו אור מעין האור הראשון ותחדש תולדת התקון ההוא במי שקבלו" [דרך ה', פרק שביעי].

that it represents and which we derive from that *Yom Tov*.

The specific trait of *Rosh Hashanah* is much more intimately and deeply associated with the very essence of *Rosh Hashanah* than with

any other *Yom Tov*. The essence of *Rosh Hashanah* is *yirah*, generally translated *fear*, probably more properly translated *awe, reverence*. But, it's got to have the connotation of fear also. Because if it doesn't have the connotation of fear it will miss the major component of what *Rosh Hashanah* is all about.

Again, going back to the prayers which illustrate for us the essence of the day, on *Rosh Hashanah* it's called *Yom Hazikoron Hazeh* – the Day of Remembrance. You have to understand that remembrance in relation to the Almighty invariably, always, means judgment. Because G-d

"...ותתן לנו ה' אלקינו באהבה את יום הזכרון הזה..." [תפילה בר"ה].  
"ויזכר אלקים את נח ואת כל החיה ואת כל הבהמה אשר אתו בתיבה..." [נח, ה, א].  
"ויזכור, אין שכחה ואין זכרון לפניו יתברך, כי לשון זכרון הוא אחר השכחה, אלא דברה תורה בלשון בני אדם להבין השומעים, וכן "וזכרתם להם ברית ראשונים" (ויקרא כו מה) "וזכרתם את ברית יעקב" (שם) והדומים להם. וראה כי די להם סכול הצער הגדול בתבה, וראה שלא יאריך להם עוד תגבורת המים אלא יחסרו מכאן ואילך כמו שגברו" [רד"ק, ק, ג, ה, א].

doesn't have to "remember." He's aware of us and every aspect of being, always, constantly. To *remember* in reference to Him means to *deal with*. Whenever you say of G-d "*Atah Zachortah*," for example, he remembered *Noach* in the *tevah*, it means that He brought it up to deal with. *Zachreinu l'tovah* means deal with us to the good. Every place where the word

"remember" is used in relation to the Creator it always means to deal with, which means to judge, to make judgments, to decide. Therefore, *Yom Hazikaron* means the Day of Judgment, the day in which we are judged by G-d.

Now, the day in which we are judged by G-d should, in the deepest sense of the word, be a day of awe and reverence. But it cannot, and must not, escape the connotation of fear. Fear is the word that should be used wherever there is a realization that we are standing with the

"...אמנם צריך שנקדים כי מיני היראה הם שתיים שהם שלש האחת קלה מאד להשיגה אין דבר קל כמוהו והשנייה קשה מן הכל ושלמותה כמו כן שלימות גדול מאד יש יראת העונש וזהו המין האחד ויש יראת הרוממות וזהו המין השני שיראת החטא חלק שני ממנו..." [מסילת ישרים, פרק כד].

possibilities of good or bad in front of us. And this realization must be there on the day of *Rosh Hashanah*, which is the Day of Judgment.

If we are being judged, then, there is before us the path of guilt and punishment; there is

before us the path of innocence and reward or at least no punishment. This being the case, the *yirah* – the fear – of *Rosh Hashanah* may not be simply that grand and noble emotion called awe and reverence, but must include that lower aspect which we would normally refer to as fear.



What it means is that G-d is never nearer to us, is never more intimate, never more expressive of His love and concern than when He sits and judges us.

What does that mean?

What it means is as follows.

When G-d sits and judges, when He sits on His seat of judgment, He is doing something incredible! He is expressing a degree of caring, a degree of being involved and having concern that is almost impossible to conceive. He personally cares enough about what I did, about what I am, about what I've achieved as to personally sit in judgment and weigh my actions. It's incredible! He is so involved with me that He is sitting personally to weigh and assess the totality of my being. When can He be closer? What greater degree of intimacy can I have with my Creator than He's sitting and dealing with me and weighing every one of my thoughts and every one of my acts and every one of my words? Can you picture a greater closeness? It is

"...כן המאמר שבא אחריו ובטוב העולם נדון... וזה אמרם בפרק בתרא דברכות (נ"ד, א') חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה וקאמר בגמרא מאי מברך אילימא כשם שמברך על הטובה הטוב והמטיב כך מברך על הרעה הטוב והמטיב והתנן על הטובה מברך הטוב והמטיב ועל הרעה מברך דיין אמת אמר רבא לא נצרכא אלא לקבולי בשמחה ע"כ, ואיך ס"ד שיברך הטוב והמטיב על הרעה עד שהוצרך להביא ראיה שאין מברך הטוב והמטיב, אלא דס"ד כיון שגם הרעה באה ממדת הטוב כמו שאמרנו, כי העולם אף כאשר נדון במדת דינו של הקב"ה הוא נדון מצד מדת הטוב שבו, כי מפני שהוא טוב הוא רוצה בטוב, ובמה שמביא פרעניות בעולם הזה נפרע האדם על מעשיו ומסולק בזה הרע ונשאר הטוב. ובשביל כך עצמו חייב לקבל בשמחה מן הש"י מדת דינו, ולברך ברוך דיין אמת כי לא יברך הטוב והמטיב כי לא קבל האדם טוב, וזהו ובטוב העולם נדון שר"ל שאף הרע שמביא הקב"ה בעולם אינו בא רק מפני הטוב שבו יתברך, לא כמו האדם שעושה רעה לאחר מצד הרע שבו אבל אצל הש"י אף הרע הוא מן צד הטוב שבו יתברך וכמו שאמרנו." [דרך חיים, ג' טו].

**בהמצאו**! Sitting in judgment is the deepest being *findable*, the deepest being *near* that can be described.

Punishment and reward are not reward and punishment; it's concern and caring. There is no greater rejection that a

parent can make of a child than not to reward or punish. Because not to reward or punish means that I don't care about you one way or the other. What you do or think is of no concern to me. Because if it is, I've got to react! I've got to react differently when I see you doing the things that I think are right and I've got to react differently when I see you doing things that I think are wrong. But if I react differently, one has to be a reward and the other a punishment. Do you follow that? There is no possibility of talking about a different reaction for one than the other without its being a reward and punishment.

Reward and punishment don't require that I give you a slap. Reward and punishment don't require that I give you a hundred dollars. If I smile, it's a reward. If I frown, it's a punishment. A father, a mother, must reward and punish their child if their child is to grow up a normal human being. Otherwise, the child knows that he's meaningless, he's useless. His own mother and father don't care about him. They're indifferent. And what greater indifference could there be than I don't react to you? And if I do react to you, it's reward and punishment. There is no reaction without reward and punishment, you understand that.

When I say that G-d is rewarding or punishing me, it isn't just simply the reward or the punishment that interests me, but the fact that G-d is indicating His concern, His awareness. It matters to Him. And you don't say to Him, G-d what do you care? They're meaningless. They're motes of dust. Who are they? What are they that you should bother with them? ...**מה אנוש**? What is Man that you should deal with him? Who cares? G-d says, I care! You mean to Me. And you

mean so much that I'm going to sit down and deal with you and make a judgment. How much should you suffer? How much not? To what degree? How much do you need? How much don't you need? What are the aspects of your being? How can they be improved? There's reaction,

"מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ובן אדם כי תפקדנו" [תהילים, ח ה].

"ידוע כי הירך ואחד עשר כוכבים הנקודה בעגולה מהגלגל וכל הארץ כנקודה שלא תתחלק כנגד הרקיע ובן אדם נחלק שלא יקבל חלוק כנגד כל הארץ על כן מה אנוש כי תזכרנו דרך בזוי והטעם אחר שיש לך בריאות גדולות ונכבדות מהאדם איך שמת לב לתת לו כבוד" |אבו עזרא שם|.

there's caring. There's caring means I don't want to hurt you. A parent who *cares* is never going to punish for the sake of *hurting* or *revenge*. A caring parent punishes only in terms of how can I *help* you? I don't want you to cross the street and get, G-d-forbid, hurt by a passing car, right?

I'm prepared to hit you if necessary, even though it's going to make me very unhappy, in order to implant in you the realization that under no circumstances are you allowed to dash into the street. Isn't that what the parent is saying? And the truth is that the most modern liberal parents who say, "what right have you got to hit?", if their child runs out into the street they'll pick him up and hit him, bang, bang, bang! As long as it doesn't really matter you can talk that way, but he can get killed! Now, when he can get killed you're not liberal anymore. Then, you've got to make sure that he doesn't do it. You don't play games when they can get killed. When it's about things that you don't really care about that much, that's one thing, but he can get killed! You know that counts. That's serious. And when it's serious, you take it seriously and you react the way you must. And if the only way to teach that kid not to go into the street is to bang him, you'll bang him up! You don't have a democratic discussion anymore. Whether you should steal or you shouldn't steal, we'll have a democratic discussion, but when it comes to whether you should walk across the street with cars coming, no democratic discussion. NO! Finished! I'm a dictator!

Punishment is the deepest concern from a really loving parent. A normal, caring, loving parent hits or deprives of ice cream or whatever the punishment is *only* when he's convinced that that's the only way to get the child to do what the child has to do *for the child's sake*. And it's certainly wrong to do it because the child will embarrass me. It should be done for the child's sake. And a good parent does it for the child's sake.

Well, G-d is a good parent. And therefore you know that the expression of judgment on *Rosh Hashanah* is the expression of the most intimate and the most ultimate extent of His actual loving involvement and concern for me.

It's a fantastic feeling! I matter! I matter! I make a difference to Him. It really is something that He is interested in. He's judging it. He's taking into account everything I did.

Now, that can only be if what I do makes a difference. If it doesn't make a difference, then, what is He dealing with? What is He sitting in judgment of? I'm going to sit in judgment over whether he made a good move in chess or he didn't make a good move in chess? You're not going to sit in judgment on him about that. Who cares? Did he choose chocolate ice cream or did he choose vanilla ice cream? You're going to sit in judgment? How come you chose vanilla and not chocolate? What difference does it make? What do you care if he took vanilla or chocolate? What do you care? You're not going to sit in judgment. Sitting in judgment is only because it makes a difference. It means that the consequences matter. That's why G-d sits in judgment.

So, a few things. One, it's His deepest moment of intimacy when He sits personally to assess and deal with my actions, thoughts, and words. Two, it is His concern. And three, the concern is for me! He cares about me. And I now know that that reward and punishment is not an abstraction. Reward and punishment are for my good. To set me the way I should be.

Therefore, *Rosh Hashanah* is an opportunity, and should be seen as such, of reaching G-d directly. He's closest. He's dealing with me. He is expressing His concern and interest in me. This is a time to respond to Him.

But, it's called the time of *yirah*. And the whole worship of the day is **תן פחדך** and **יראתיך**, this reverence and fear. That's the whole concept of the day. It is because the establishment of it is that I am being judged, which not only tells us, as we pointed out, His care, His concern, and

"ונמצא בספר התורה...מה שמורה, כי המעשים הנראים מן האדם נתונים ברשותו, והוא בוחר בהם בחפצו, והם היום ברצונו ובחירתו, ועל כן התחייב בגמול וענש על העבודה ועל העברה, והוא מה שאמר הכתוב (דברים, ל, טו): ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת מות ואת הרע, ואמר (דברים ל, יט) ובחרת בחיים." [חובות הלכות, שער עבודת-האלקים, פרק ח].

that what we do matters, but it also tells us that we're *responsible*! You're responsible. You have a purpose in existence! Otherwise, what is responsibility about? It isn't enough to say G-d cares whether I am good or bad. It also says that there *is* a good and there *is* a bad!

Because if there is no good and there is no bad, what are you being judged about? Fear is the statement that there is a right and a wrong. A right and a wrong is the statement that there is a way of life that ought to be pursued and another that must be spurned, that must be rejected. That I have a responsibility of doing that which is right and of *choosing* to do so and pushing away and rejecting the evil. I'm saying that I have to make decisions and that I'm being held responsible for them. That it was up to me whether I did the right or whether I did the wrong. That's what I say when I express my awareness and fear of judgment.

So, coming back therefore to *Rosh Hashanah*, the statement of fear is also an affirmation of Man having purpose and responsibility. That there are things that we hope to achieve and

"מי זה אמר ותהי אדני' לא ציוה. מפני עליון לא תצא הרעות והטוב. מה יתאוונן אדם חי גבר על חטאו" [איכה, ג לז-לט].

"ואם באתי לומר לא מידו באתה אלי הרעה הזאת מקרה הוא שהיה לי איך זאת כי אם בין רעות בין טובות מי זה אמר ותהי אם ה' לא צוה ומפיו לא תצא הן רעה הן טוב אבל מה יש להתאוונן אדם חי גבר על חטאו כל איש ואיש יתאוונן על חטאו כי הם המביאים עליו הרעה" [רש"י שם].

accomplish, and that we are responsible for whatever happens. We are responsible for the good and the evil that exists. Which is, of course, the point of departure for any discussion of the existence of evil in the world with G-d who is all good, only good, and the source of good. That there should exist evil in His Creation has got to

have as its point of departure this responsibility that we as creatures have in bringing about good or evil, right? This is got to be the source of any such discussion.

So concerning *Rosh Hashanah*, one, we affirm that we have a purpose. Two, we are saying that there is a need of assessment. That a Man has to stop each year and measure and weigh. G-d gives us this Day of Judgment as the occasion by which we face up to this need of self-assessment, of becoming aware of ourselves, what we did, what we accomplished and where we're heading, of sitting down and saying, wait a minute, what is it all about? Where are we going? How are we doing it? Which we do supposedly every *Shabbos*, it's true, we do. That is what we ought to do on *Shabbos*. But you've got to recognize the difference of the assessment not simply in terms of *why we're alive*, but in terms of *what have we done* in relation to our purpose, in relation to achieving our goals, assessing the progress or lack of it, assessing the

things that have kept us back and trying to eliminate those areas that only brought harm. And trying to reinforce and reinvigorate those things which we find ourselves strong in our ability to accomplish and do. To strengthen one, to buttress the other. This self-assessment, and therefore taking charge, of not simply what we are, where we're going and what we ought to be doing, *but how are we making out?* What is the progress? What is the lack of it? What can we do to correct it? How can we go about it? Where are the lacks? What needs reinforcement? What needs loosening? All this, G-d opens up for us simply by making it a Day of Judgment.

"א"ר שמואל בר יצחק, כמאן מצליגין האידינא זה היום תחילת מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון כמאן כרבי אליעזר דאמר בתשרי נברא העולם." [ראש השנה, דף, כז.].

"וכבר כתבנו דבפרקי ר"א מפורש דתחילת הבריאה ביום א' היה בכ"ה באלול וביום ו' נברא אדם וע"ש זה נקרא ר"ה תחילת מעשיך שהאדם היה תכלית של כל הבריאה וכאלו לא נברא שום דבר קודם בריאת אדם ונקרא ר"ה תחילת מעשיך שהאדם הוא עיקר המעשים..." [מהרש"א שם].

We recognize *Rosh Hashanah* as being the beginning of the year. This needs a little bit of a qualification. The beginning of the year doesn't mean a year from creation. It means the beginning of another year since the formation of Man. *Rosh Hashanah* is not the first day of creation. *Rosh Hashanah* is the day

that *Adam* was made. Which means that *Rosh Hashanah* - the first day of the year - is not on physical existence, but on Man and his undertaking.

It is proper, of course, to judge Man on *Rosh Hashanah*. This is your birthday. This is when you face the year to come. You can't face the year to come without assessing the year that has just gone by. It is only through seeing your past that you can make plans of what are the proper ways to undertake your future.

"ויהי ביום השלישי יום הולדת את פרעה ויעש משתה לכל עבדיו וישא את ראש שר המשקים ואת ראש שר האפים בתוך עבדיו" [בראשית, מ כ.].

face the year to come. You can't face the year to come without assessing the year that has just gone by. It is only through

seeing your past that you can make plans of what are the proper ways to undertake your future. But this itself tells us something magnificently vital. You can't just say, "Okay G-d, I'm turning over a new leaf. Okay, from now on I'm good." No, you've got to go back and assess your failure. You've got to know where they came from. Where did you fall through? What were the causes of you falling through? You've got to recognize and realize the mistake if you are going to make progress. You're judged not for your undertaking for tomorrow, but for your past, for what you did. Which means that what I did created realities that have to be dealt with. See that! So that you can't say okay I'm fine. No, no, wait a minute, go through, weigh, assess. You're being judged! What are you being judged on? What do you have to correct? How do you have to correct it? You can't just enter the New Year with resolutions, "I'm going to be good." Just a second, *specific!* What are the areas that you have to improve upon? What are the areas you have to mend? What are the areas that were wonderful that you can strengthen and tie yourself to?

This brings again a sense of reality. It isn't a game between me and G-d. It is real. I am structuring my being. That's why I have to find my weaknesses and strengths. I have to perfect myself. I am structuring my being. It's not just "You do this and I'll pay you. You do this and I'll give you a reward." It's that you're structuring and forming your character, your being, your way of existence, what you are, how you're going to express it.

All this is there when we recognize a judgment of the past. And what more proper time for that than on the birthday of Man. It is then that he assesses, okay, how did I do? And he projects to the future. What am I undertaking for the future?

So *Rosh Hashanah*, the day of Man's birthday, it isn't the world's birthday, it is Man who is being judged. Not the world. The world is automatically judged through Man, but it is Man who plays the role in what transpires.

Let me make this point just a little bit clearer.

The universe, the earth, all that's on it, whether there is a drought, whether there is a volcano, whether there is a tornado, all that takes place, are G-d's judgments. They are all built on the judgment of Man, his actions or lack of it. The proof is that the ultimate judgment takes place on Man's birthday, not on the world's birthday. Therefore, it isn't the world that's being judged, it's Man that's being judged. Therefore, we are to understand that the world is a consequence of the judgment of Man.

The implication of this statement is enormous. It rejects Buddhism. Buddhism regards all life as *equally* precious. This statement says that it isn't so. All of existence is precious only through Man. And whatever there is precious in the tree, and in the leaf, and in the animal is because of Man, and through Man. That he is the purpose of existence and they are the means of his existence. That's what it says. Therefore, there is a rejection of respecting life. Life is to be

"...יש לך לדעת כי הנבראים כולם תלויים באדם שהם נבראים בשביל האדם, ואם אין האדם כמו שראוי להיות הנה הכל בטול, וכמו שכתוב בדור המבול (בראשית ו') ויאמר ה' אמחה את האדם אשר בראתי מעל פני האדמה מאדם ועד בהמה עד עוף השמים וגו'..." [דרך חיים, דף כה].

respected only as a service of Man. There is a rejection of that concept that who are we to kill an animal so that Man can eat? You may have other reasons not to kill an animal, even for food, there could be such a thought, but not

because *who are we?* We are what animals are all about. The judgment of what happens to them and what their value is and their history and their development are the judgments of Men – of how G-d judges human beings. In the judgment of human beings lies the fate of the animal world, as well as the inanimate world. Man is the ultimate purpose of all existence. This is what it says.

The fact that *Rosh Hashanah* is on Man's birthday tells us that all of physical existence is *no more* than for the needs and the service of Man. And it tells us that this is not an egotism. It's not an arrogance. It is a statement of fact that G-d is making by making this His Day of Judgment, with all the consequences in our awareness of how we use our environment, how we are in charge, and how we are not in charge, the degree of responsibility, all that is involved in this statement that we make by having a *Rosh Hashanah* that is on the birthday of Man, not the birthday of existence.

That's a tremendously fruitful concept, and a tremendously fruitful statement, when we say on the day of *Rosh Hashanah* **היום הרת עולם** – this is the birthday of the world. What do you mean the birthday of the *world*? It's the birthday of *Man*. The answer is that Man is the *justification* of all existence. That's what it means.

There is left, of course, the fact that the *mitzvah* through which we express all these thoughts, and all these things is the blowing of the *shofar*. With all that it contains, and we would be able to point out much that it contains, but certainly the first and foremost thing that the blowing of the *shofar* does is that it says to us that the central theme of awareness, understanding, and insight, of accepting responsibility, all this, is to *become aware!!* Don't sleep. Become aware! Man



does understand these things. These things are *open* to him, but he sleeps it through. He gets lost in the mundane of his actions so that he forgets what he's all about. And he loses sight of who

"אע"פ שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזירת הכתוב רמז יש בו כלומר עורר ישינים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו מתרדמתכם וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם אלו השוכחים את האמת בהבלי הזמן ושוגים כל שנתם בהבל וריק אשר לא יועיל ולא יציל הביטו לנפשתיכם והטיבו דרכיכם ומעלליכם ייעזוב כל אחד מכם דרכו הרעה ומחשבתו אשר לא טובה..." [רמב"ם, הלכות תשובה, פרק ג, הלכה ד].

and what he is, his responsibilities and the consequences of his being. The *shofar* is a jolt! Remember! Become aware! Don't be complacent! Don't lose yourself in know-nothingness. Don't lose yourself in forgetfulness. Don't drown yourself in the ocean of forgetfulness. That's a primary thing that

immediately the reaction to the *shofar* has to say. Become aware. You've got to know what's happening.

Therefore, that the very essence of a human being is awareness. To be on top of it. Not to let things slide. To know what's going on. To choose. That's what responsibility is all about. If *Rosh Hashanah* is a day of responsibility, *Rosh Hashanah* is the day to tell you that responsibility is to know! To think! To remember! Don't do things out of habit. Do things out of choice. Don't do

"...וההולך בעולמו בלי התבוננות אם טובה דרכו או רעה הגה הוא כסומא ההולך על שפת הנהר אשר סכנתו ודאי עצומה ורעתו קרובה מהצלתו כי אולם חסרון השמירה מפני העוררן הטבעי או מפני העוררן הרצוני דהיינו סתימת העינים בבחירה וחפץ אחד הוא והנה ירמיהו היה מתאונן על רוע בני דורו מפני היותם נגועים בנגע המדה הזאת שהיו מעלימים עיניהם ממעשיהם בלי שישימו לב לראות מה הם הלהעשות אם להעזב ואמר עליהם אין איש רעתו לאמר וגו' כלה שב במרוצתם כסוס שוטף במלחמה והינו שהיו רודפים והולכים במרוצת הרגלם ודרכיהם מבלי שיניחו זמן לעצמם לדקדק על המעשים והדרכים ונמצא שהם נופלים ברעה בלי ראות אותה..." [מסילת ישרים, פרק ב].

things out of comfort and convenience, do them out of choice. Don't do things because it's the path of least resistance, do them out of choice! Which means do them because they're right! Make decisions! Make decisions! That's what it means to become aware.

Think! Know what's going on! Don't become a dreadful animal. Which means that this is the ultimate meaning of judgment. Meaning, know what you're doing. Be aware. Wake up.

Which is probably the most difficult aspect of a Jewish life. The demand that Judaism makes is you're a human being. You're making decisions. Make them knowingly. Make them consciously. Don't make them by surrendering. Don't make them by forfeit. Make it by deliberate choice. That's what it's all about. And you make yourself aware through *Rosh Hashanah*.

But it also tells you the main feature of being human. Namely, to know, become, aware, to be conscious of the need to make decisions. You're responsible, *all the time!* You've got to be up and alert. *All the time.* And you can't afford to lose that alertness for a minute. Because in that loss of alertness is a loss of your human face, of your humanity, of the essence of your being. Awareness. That's what it's all about. And *Rosh Hashanah* is the time, of course, where that is expressing itself to the greatest degree.

So we have the first, the most certain thing that lies in the *shofar*, namely, wake up. The blast of the *shofar* makes you aware. It makes you alert. You know that something is going on. It is a statement that you've got to become a part of what's happening.

And of course, that's why you can easily see that that is THE need of *Rosh Hashanah*. There's got to be this jolt, which the *shofar* for sure accomplishes, whatever the other additional aspects that lie within the *mitzvah* of the blowing of the *shofar*

# "דרשו ה' בהמצאו...אימת, אמר רבה בר אבוה אלו עשרה ימים שבין ר"ה ליהו"כ" [ר"ה דף ית.].

"מצות שופר בראש השנה - שנצטוונו לשמע קול שופר ביום ראשון של תשרי שהוא ראש השנה...משרשי המצוה. לפי שהאדם בעל חמר לא יתעורר לדברים כי אם על ידי מעורר, כדרך בני אדם בעת מלחמה, יריעו אף יצריחו, כדי שיתעוררו יפה למלחמה, וגם כן ביום ראש השנה, שהוא היום הנועד מקדם, לדון בו כל באי עולם, וכמו שאמרו זכרונם לברכה (שם יח, א) בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון, כלומר, שהשגחתו על מעשה כל אחד ואחד בפרט, ואם זכיותו מרבין יצא זכאי, ואם עונותיו מרבין בכדי שראוי לחיבו מחיבין אותו למות, או לאחת מן הגזרות כפי מה שהוא חיב, על כן, צריך כל אחד להעיר טבעו לבקש רחמים על חטאיו מאדון הרחמים, כי קל חנון ורחום הוא, נושא עון ופושע וחטאה ונקה לשבים אליו בכל לבם, וקול השופר מעורר הרבה לב כל שומעיו, וכל שכן קול התרועה כלומר, הקול הנשבר (רמב"ם תשובה ג ד). ומלבד ההתעוררות שבו, יש לו לאדם זכר בדבר שישבר יצר לבו הרע בתאוות העולם ובתשוקיו בשמעו קולות נשברים, כי כל אדם כפי מה שיראה בעיניו, ובאזניו ישמע יכון לבבו ויבין בדברים, והינו דאמר רבי יהודה (שם כו, ב) בראש השנה תוקעין בשל זכרים, כלומר, בקרן הכבשים הכפוף, כדי שיזכר האדם בראותו אותו שיכף לבו לשמים, ורבי לוי פסק הלכה כמותו ומנהגן של ישראל כן..." [חינוך, מצוה תה].



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