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ROSH HASHANNAH 5787

10 Things I Really Don't Want to Hear From My Rabbi on Rosh HaShannah

RABBI TZVI FREEMAN (Chabad.org)

Dear Rabbi,

You probably don't know me by name, or face, or seat number, since I generally turn up only for High Holidays and the occasional bar mitzvah. To tell you the truth, I'm still mulling over if I should show up this Rosh Hashanah.

I mean, it's cool to see the crowd all decked out. But there are other venues for that. And your jokes are usually not bad—but again, I have better places where world-class comedians have you in fits of laughter.

So I figured I would shoot you a few tips, just suggestions mind you, of things you might say in your sermon that might interest me—if I do actually come. Actually, most of the list ended up as what doesn't interest me.

Hey, take it or leave it. It's just me, some anonymous stereotypical Jew.

1. PLEASE STOP RIPPING APART THE WORLD I LIVE IN.

If Rosh Hashanah is, like you say, a judgment day for the entire world, why do our rabbis have to play the prosecution? Do you really think people pay for membership in your synagogue so you can condemn them, along with the whole rest of the world?

So here's my advice: Do you know how much further you could get if you acted as our defense attorney instead? I mean, who do you think we would like more, the guy who sees every big and little thing that's wrong with us, or the guy who finds all the good in us—even the good we ourselves never realized we had? What if you showed us that you actually love us, and all your fellow Jews, and even all of humanity?

Besides, I really don't believe the world is getting worse every day. If it is, it's your generation's fault, not my own. I'm looking forward to great things. We've almost beat starvation around the world. Hi-tech has the potential of solving many of the world's other most significant economic problems—and get us vacationing on Mars. More people give more money to charity, and more people spend more time volunteering for worthy causes than ever before.

So tell me more good stuff about the future, and how I can get involved in making it happen. And explain to me, please, how your traditional Jewish practice is relevant to all this.

2. IF THIS IS A LECTURE ABOUT MY BAD BEHAVIOR, I'M NOT THERE.

Look, it's not like I believe I'm perfect. Far from it. In fact, I come loaded with enough guilt to sink a cruise ship. It's part of my operating system. So when somebody hits those sensitive soft spots, I just run away.

Instead, how about providing us with some tools for positive, higher living? Everyone else is offering meditation, mindfulness, yoga and hyper-motivational strategies for stress-free life and success. And for good reason: We need it. What have you got to offer?

And I mean tools. Daily practices that will change my life. I know you've got them. The kosher thing. The Shabbat thing. The prayers in black leather boxes and white blankets with black stripes thing. But I have no idea how any of these connect to anything spiritual. Maybe they don't. But if they do, why aren't you telling me about that?

Even if I'm not ready to give them a whirl, at least I'll know they're there. At least then you've given me a real way to improve myself.

3. IF I WANT MY VALUES AFFIRMED, I'VE GOT FACEBOOK, YOUTUBE AND THE IDIOT BOX.

Isn't there anything transcendental, spiritual and otherworldly in this religion? Elsewhere, spiritual teachers wear flowing robes, or at least designer jeans. Most rabbis dress like middle management from some bottom-line, dinosaur corporation—and talk like them too. Why is that?

Okay, I'm not asking you to look like the black-turtleneck-and-jeans CEO of some startup. And I certainly don't mind learning something about traditional family values, social justice, principles and morals. Even if I don't keep them, I'm not going to argue.

But if I'm coming on the ultimate spiritual day of my own religion, I want to get high, real high. I want you to look and act like a guide to a world beyond my own.

Give me mystery. Give me beauty. Give me that wow factor—the stuff I just can't wrap my mind around, but sounds real cool. And then show me how to bring it down to earth, how to make my life just as awesome.

Then I'll know that you are the address for spiritual guidance and healing of the soul. You will be my icon of Jewish spirituality.

4. I DON'T LIVE IN ISRAEL.

Yes, I know it's important. But I wish you could relate to the hassle I got in college over it. And, really, I have sincere questions about some of its policies.

So don't expect to win me over in one sermon, no matter how many facts you pummel me with.

Besides, right now, it's not at the top of my priority list. What is? Me. Talk to me about me.

And no, that's not egocentric. There's a lot going on inside me, and I could use some real guidance dealing with it. Doesn't my own religion have anything to say about me and my personal issues?

5. THE HOLOCAUST DOESN'T INSPIRE ME.

Why should it? Is it inspiring to be a member of the persecuted people? Does it make me proud that the whole world hated us, wished we would be gone for good, and wouldn't even step in to accept refugees or bomb a few train tracks? Is that supposed to be the basis of my entire Jewishness—that I'm a member of the people they keep trying to destroy?

C'mon, Rabbi! I really want you to make me feel good that I'm a Jew! Just tell me: What does that mean? Where do I come from? What are we here for? How do I fit into all this?

Get me high, Rabbi! Don't they call these the High Holidays? Get me high on my Jewishness!

6. MY POLITICS ARE NOT YOUR POLITICS.

Look, statistically speaking, the more opinions you have, the more of your congregation you're going to alienate.

And the fact is, I'm sick of politics. I've given up on the movers, the shakers and the candlestick makers floating in their little tub in Washington, D.C. There's nobody there that inspires me, nobody to emulate, nobody to respect.

But you—if you will just talk with dignity, speak some enlightened words, speak to me, to my soul, instead of down to me like I'm just another

seat-filler to applaud your dramatics and histrionics. If you stand for something, bravely and with certainty, totally unfazed that you're being 100% un-pc and you know I'm going to utterly reject every word—but I will respect you.

Then you could be my hero, the one person in the world I can admire.

7. I'M HERE. I DON'T HAVE TO BE. EVER.

So I didn't come to synagogue the rest of the year. Why should I? I had my bar mitzvah already, and if I had a kid, I don't really know that I would put him through the same ordeal.

If I do come this year for the High Holidays, you better think of a real good reason I should be coming back. Because all the reasons I've been given until now just have not worked. Especially anything that sounds close to yet another "So you finally remembered you have a mother" guilt trip.

8. IF I WANT TO KNOW WHAT CHESTERTON, PUSHKIN AND MALCOLM GLADWELL HAVE TO SAY, WHY WOULD I COME TO A JEWISH SYNAGOGUE ON ROSH HASHANAH?

True, I want to see that you can relate to my world. I grasp best ideas when I can connect to things I already know.

But there's stuff I know nothing about. Like my own Judaism. Moses split the Red Sea, David killed Goliath, Albert Einstein split an atom (or something like that) and Moshe Dayan won a war with one eye in six days. (Hey, is that why we rest on the seventh?) There's one G-d, not two, three, or fifteen million. He gets real upset if you don't listen to Him, and some people believe in Him. That's about it.

I'm assaulted by a thousand voices each day, screaming at me their opinions, their great ideas, their new path to wisdom. Isn't there some authentically Jewish wisdom and guidance through this messy life? Weren't there any true Jewish sages that I can relate to?

9. TED TALKS DON'T GO OVER 20 MINUTES. THERE'S A REASON FOR THAT.

And since I haven't left you much to say, that should be easy now. Unless you just feel some great need to fill that hour with your masterful oratorical skills. In which case, why am I paying your synagogue to be an extra on your set?

That's really all I want to see. Is it your sermon that concerns you, or is it me, and everyone else who has committed to sitting there?

10. CAN YOU EXPLAIN IN SIMPLE, DOWN-TO-EARTH LANGUAGE JUST WHAT IT IS I SHOULD BE DOING TO BE A BETTER JEW?

No, I'm not going to negotiate a deal between Israel and Iran. Neither do I really believe I'll be the savior of the blue whale, or the pandas.

And if you expect me to give up on dining with my friends at my favorite restaurants, or missing out on the action downtown on Friday nights just because of your once-a-year sermon, it just ain't happening.

But, hey, give me something small and easy, and maybe I can handle it. Something I can actually carry out the door with me into the year. Like maybe just a little mitzvah to do once a week.

And you know what? If you walk over to me before I leave, give me all your attention for even half a minute, and leave me with a warm handshake or even a hug—you might just have me sold.

It's those small things, y'know. Sell me something I can afford. To me, those are the most valuable things of all.

Nerve Centre of the Year

RABBI ELIYAHU HOFFMANN (Torah.org)

Some people thrive on irregularity. They love changes in their schedules – days off; exploring new places and doing new things. These people often find day-to-day life droll and humdrum; they constantly await the opportunity to investigate new vistas and experience new events.

Then there are people like me. I love routine. I thrive on regularity. I find drastic schedule changes difficult to adapt to. Such people would gladly do the same thing day in/day out, rarely feeling the need to “get away” from routine and do something out of the ordinary. For such individuals, days like Rosh Hashana present a unique challenge. We are asked to pour tremendous energy and concentration into a short, 48 hour period. In complete departure from schedule, we spend most of our day in shul, immersed in prayer. We are told that these two short days have a disproportionate effect over our entire year. How is one to understand and adapt to this sudden and drastic change? How can we gain an appreciation of these days, so that we may truly utilize them to their full potential?

While Rosh Hashana is indeed the Jewish New Year, the word Rosh does not mean new. Rosh means head; thus Rosh Hashana is the Head of the Year. Why do refer to it as the head, as opposed to the beginning, of the

year? If a person has a problem with his feet, his feet suffer. If his hands are not healthy, his hands hurt. If a person has difficulty with his brain, his entire body suffers. The brain is not simply another organ playing its role in the multifaceted creation we know as the human body – the brain is the nerve-centre of the entire body. It controls our actions, our movements, even our thoughts and feelings. While in rare cases doctors may consider amputating a sick limb, or even transplanting a critical organ such as a liver or heart, one does not remove the brain.

Thus it would be fair to say that, within the scheme of the human body, the relatively small brain plays a disproportionately large role. This is why we go to such lengths to protect our heads. Bicycle helmets are now required by the law. Broken hands and feet can be mended; a blow to the brain, G-d forbid, can be life-threatening.

Just like the body has an appendage that plays a central and irreplaceable role in its function, time also has its “head.” Rosh Hashana is the “Head of the Year.” It is the nerve-centre of the Jewish calendar. While it represents a relatively small portion of the time-cycle, its effect over the coming year is powerful and immeasurable. Just like a small irregularity in the brain could have catastrophic effects on the entire body's function, so too even small deviations and lapses on Rosh Hashana can cause untold harm to our lives over the coming year. Is it just? Is it fair that such a short period should have such a powerful impact? That's not for us to judge. We can only absorb the fact, and try our best to take advantage of these incredibly powerful 48 hours.

This concept helps to explain some of the unusual customs and laws surrounding Rosh Hashana. Commentators quote the Talmud Yerushalmi that suggests one not rest (during the daytime) on Rosh Hashana. “One who sleeps on Rosh Hashana will have a sleepy mazal the coming year.” What's the difference, one might ask, if I have a little nap on Rosh Hashana? I do it every other Shabbos and Yom Tov! Rosh Hashana is different. It is the “head” of the year. Half an hour – a small period of time – on Rosh Hashana, may regulate entire weeks or even months of our coming year, just as a tiny area of the brain may control critical bodily functions and services. Commentators even question why we're allowed to sleep at night on Rosh Hashana! (Luckily for us they rule it permissible.)

Rosh Hashana is steeped in ritual. We eat the head of a sheep or fish as a symbol of leadership and ascendancy. We dip our challah and apple in honey in the hope of a sweet year. We even avoid sharp, bitter or pungent foods for the same reasons. While all year long we would consider such practices superstitious and obsessive, Rosh Hashana has such tremendous impact on our lives that even small changes that serve to put us in the right frame of mind (sweet, positive), and arouse us to prayer and faith, are necessary and normal.

On Rosh Hashana, we are especially meticulous with our prayers. While all year long we are not particular about the precise vowelization of some words, on Rosh Hashana we are. “Zochreinu l'chaim – remember us for life!” While during the year we often pronounce it “La'chaim,” on Rosh Hashana we are careful to say “L'chaim,” because La'chaim sounds too similar to “Lo chaim,” which means “not life.” (Mishnah Berurah 582:16) Consider this: If halacha requires us on Rosh Hashana to be so careful with our prayers, how much more so must we be careful with what we speak about at our Yom Tov meals, or during our breaks from prayer or Torah study!

The Talmud (Yerushalmi quoted by Ran) rules that if one blows the shofar from its wider side, he has not fulfilled his obligation. The shofar may only be blown from its narrower side. Perhaps this halacha alludes to the above concept: The voice of the shofar emerges from a tiny hole, travelling through an ever-widening cavity, until ultimately it leaves its confines, and its powerful voice fills every corner of the synagogue, permeating as well the thoughts and consciousness of all who hear it. So too Rosh Hashana is a small window to our year, from where our lives emerge, never unchanged, impacted by these two short days with such great repercussion.

Just 48 hours of time, with so much hanging in the balance. Forty eight is the numerical value (gematria) of moach – the brain. Rosh Hashana is the nerve-centre of our coming year. May the Almighty grant us the sense and the clarity to utilize it to its full potential and appreciate its impact.

Wishing all our readers and all of K'lal Yisrael a good Shabbos, a good Yom Tov, a K'siva ve-chasima tova, and a gut gebentsched yur!

RESOLUTIONS, ANYONE?

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (JNS.org)

Does anybody still make New Year's resolutions? Or are we over that phase?

One guy said, “My New Year’s resolution is to have a fat bank account and a skinny body. Last year, I got mixed up!”

Most people I know have long stopped making New Year’s resolutions because they know it doesn’t work. They just go “in one year, and out the other!”

The harsh reality is that “Change” has been described as the single most difficult thing to do in the world! We get comfortable in our discomfort. “Better the devil you know,” they say. Embracing change and new lifestyles is very, very difficult. We are creatures of habit. The only people who like change are wet babies.

But the fact is that millions of people have changed. Some stopped smoking. Others stopped drinking or gambling. And many have become practicing Jews, even though they weren’t brought up that way. Some started eating kosher, while others started keeping Shabbat.

So, it can be done. But I will be the first to acknowledge that it isn’t easy.

But what does Judaism say about change?

The answer is that Judaism insists that we can change our ways and learn new habits. You may be surprised to hear that even the holiest rabbis would make Rosh Hashanah resolutions to further improve themselves—to do even better.

That’s the good news. The bad news is that it doesn’t just happen by making a wish. It takes work, serious work But Judaism insists that it can be done.

One of the 13 principles of faith is that there is reward and punishment. Now how can there possibly be reward and punishment for our behaviour (or misbehaviour) if we never had the ability to behave correctly in the first place?

Clearly, the fact that there is ultimate accountability proves that we always had the freedom of choice to live correctly, regardless of our inborn nature. And that’s why we are responsible and will be held accountable for our actions.

Of course, a lot has to do with our attitude. As a wise man once said, “Whether you think you can or you think you cannot, you are right.” It is your own attitude that will determine success or failure

I think of my own father. He was a chain smoker. He went through three packs a day; I never saw him without a cigarette between his fingers. Until he started getting bronchitis. And after the antibiotic was finished, he’d get bronchitis again—and again. When his doctor told him, “If you don’t stop smoking, you will keep getting bronchitis,” then and there, my father dropped the half-used pack of cigarettes in the trash in the doctor’s office. He never touched a cigarette again for the rest of his life!

Do you want to hear something fascinating? In all those years when he was a smoker, there was one occasion when he would not touch a cigarette for 25 hours at a time.

On Shabbat! How did he do it? After all, he was still addicted back then.

The answer is that when you are religious and you know that smoking on Shabbat is prohibited by Torah law, then in your head, you know there’s nothing to talk about. It’s simply non-negotiable. And if it’s not negotiable, then you don’t even think about it.

So, it really is all in the mind.

Now, I’m no psychologist, but I need to stress that we are talking about changing actions, not personalities. People don’t change their basic character types; however, they certainly can learn to change their behavioural patterns, even if it goes against their natural impulses.

People who are born stingy by nature can learn to give tzedakah. In fact, they may have to give until it hurts (literally). But they can offer charity. And the more they do, the easier and more rewarding it gets. Good habits become second nature.

Here is an example from the Rosh Hashanah Torah reading.

On the second day, we read the Akedah, the final test of faith that G-d put to our father Abraham. Would he be prepared to take the son he waited 100 years for to Mount Moriah, bring him up on the altar of G-d and sacrifice the boy?

We all know the story. Abraham and Isaac wake up early in the morning and walk up the mountain in good faith. At the very last minute, there is a stay of execution. It’s only a test!

Indeed, at the very last second, the angel of G-d says to Abraham: “Do not lay your hand upon the lad, nor do anything to him. For now, I know that you are a G-d-fearing man.”

And the question is: Only now you know that Abraham is G-d-fearing? He has been your faithful servant for more than a century. You already tested him nine other times! And he passed every one of those tests with flying colors. Until now, you didn’t know that Abraham was a G-d-fearing man?

The answer is that up until the Akedah, there was no question that Abraham served G-d faithfully. But in which area of life was his service expressed? It was mainly in the realm of chesed—kindness, hospitality and saving people from distress.

There was no question whatsoever that Abraham was Mr. Nice Guy personified, the kindest man on earth. But now the big question was: Could this same benevolent father restrain his natural inclination to be kind and do something extremely unkind? Would he really be able to act so harshly with his own beloved son if G-d asked him to? Now this was a test.

And only when Abraham passed it—not the test of love and kindness, but the test of discipline, going against nature—only then was G-d able to say: Now I know that you are indeed a G-d-fearing man, Abraham. Not only a G-d-loving man, but a G-d-fearing man, too.

The bottom line is that regardless of our natural inborn inclinations, we can always do what is right.

So, as we stand here just before the New Year, a time when G-d promises us that we can change our conduct for the good if we really want to, let us choose to make a new resolution. Let us resolve to take upon ourselves a new mitzvah, a new good habit, for the New Jewish Year: 5787.

Shana Tovah! May it be a blessed New Year for us all. And may we unlock all our potential for good. Amen!

The Ever-Present

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

Rosh HaShana is the birthday of humanity. It coincides with the creation of man. The blowing of the Shofar may well be a reenactment of the blowing of the “breath of life” into the nostrils of the first man, endowing him and his descendants with a G-dly soul. It is the reception of that and development of that deeply seeded greatness that we quest for each year at this time. What does it mean to have a Divine Soul embedded within our beings?

The Gesher HaChaim lists a number of major differences between a human being and an animal. Amongst the items spoken about there is man’s unique ability to perceive past, present, and future, and to see himself as a creature of history.

At a Bris in Jerusalem a great Rabbi stood up to speak and wish well to the grandfather, a an accomplished Talmud scholar, on the occasion of the Bris of his first grand-child, “Mazel Tov” he said, “today you are a human being!” Everyone was stunned. Maybe there is some hidden insult implied here. Until now he wasn’t human?

Then he went on to explain that in the animal kingdom it is common to find creatures that have an instinct to protect its young cub, kitten, fledgling you name it.

However, only by humans does a grandparent demonstrate love and care for his or her grandchild and grandchildren have fealty for grandparents. This is symptomatic of real soulfulness, to see one’s self in a grander historical or familial context. The greater one’s spiritual development the broader is his grasp of the importance of the historical relevance of his life, and its mission.

In the liturgy of Rosh HaShana. We say over and over again, “HASHEM Melech, HASHEM Malach, HASHEM Yimloch, l’olam va’ed”. HASHEM is King, HASHEM, was King, and HASHEM will be King forever! While we are reciting this, I am thinking from my lowly place that HASHEM is the King in the past, present, and future! That’s all! Now it dawns on me something more and beyond all – more.

What we are saying is “to HASHEM, Who is the King, there is no time.” Time is a created illusion. The animal lives in the second and for the second. The animal soul has no sense of history or destiny, only brute survival. The G-dly Soul, however, is rooted in a sublimely transcendent source.

On Rosh HaShana, which is called Yom Zikaron” a Day of Remembering, we are choosing to connect to the Memory of the Universe, where nothing and no one is lost or forgotten. From that perspective, there is no future or past. Everything is alive and real in the ever present. HASHEM is King of everything, all history and destiny, and at once.

Animals are, in that sense, forgetful. Their entire psychology and consciousness is anchored in separated segments of the instinctual present.

That’s not life, as we speak of wishing to be written into the Book of Life on Rosh HaShana.

“Real Life” is a world of remembrance, a meaningful connectedness of the dots of time. Every second, is wedded to whole a minute, an hour to a day, a week to a year, a decade to a century and a millennium. That historical snapshot is viewed by HASHEM Who rules over all time. We want to contribute valuable golden threads to the tapestry of HASHEM’s grand plan, from the beginning of creation until the end of times.

From that lofty place the Shofar calls us to broaden our vision, as our G-dly Souls are awakened. Simultaneously it calls for us to reconcile the seconds of our lives, which is essentially an invitation to Teshuvah.

The phrase says, “Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That’s why it’s called the present.” Sure we are meant to cherish the present but not as a beast licks the bowl. There are 86,400 seconds in a day and each one is a ray of eternity to be lived with an eye of awareness open, for something more life affirming than the present: THE EVER- PRESENT.

Five Micro changes that Can Transform the New Year

DEBBIE GUTFREUND (Aish.com)

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, the number of changes you want to make in your life can feel overwhelming. But real transformation usually comes from small, daily microchanges, not sweeping overhauls.

Here are five simple changes that can help you grow and move closer to your potential this year.

1. CHANGING THE WORDS YOU USE.

The words you use most often become the lens through which you see the world. You don't need to pretend everything is positive to think more proactively, hopefully and accurately. Try replacing "I'm so busy" with "I have a lot on my plate" – this shifts busyness from an identity to a temporary circumstance. Or swap "I'm so bad at this" for "I'm learning to do this," turning a permanent obstacle into a challenge you can overcome.

The words you choose build a different reality moment by moment.

2. HAVE A "NO ZERO DAYS" RULE.

Every day, do something, however small, that moves you toward your goals. Walk two blocks if you don't have time for a full workout. Write one paragraph of that proposal. Send one email to push the project forward.

This rule replaces the pressure of "I have to make major progress today" with "Every day I can do one small thing that brings me closer to the person I want to become."

3. REPLACE ONE COMPLAINT WITH A REQUEST.

This small change moves you from focusing on what you don't like to asking for what would make things better, turning blame into communication.

Instead of "You never help," try "Can you do the dishes tonight?" Instead of "No one ever checks in on me," try "I'd really like to hear from you, can you call me later?"

Next time you're about to complain, pause and ask yourself: What request is hiding inside this complaint?

4. SEND ONE APPRECIATION TEXT A WEEK.

This microchange takes about 30 seconds but it can deepen your relationships and shift where your attention goes. The goal isn't a generic "thinking of you" text, but training yourself to notice others and say the things you'd otherwise leave unsaid.

Once a week, pick one person and ask yourself: What's one thing I appreciate about this person that I haven't told them lately? This habit stops you from assuming people know how you feel, and builds the habit of expressing gratitude for having them in your life.

5. DO ONE UNCOMFORTABLE THING BEFORE NOON.

Committing to one hard task before noon each day ensures that discomfort itself doesn't stand between you and your goals. The idea is to practice moving toward growth, even when you don't feel like it.

Motivation usually comes after you act, not before, so doing something uncomfortable early in the day sends yourself a clear message: I can handle discomfort. I don't have to avoid it.

It also means you won't spend the rest of the day finding reasons to skip it. Even a small daily practice like this keeps you moving toward who you want to become, especially when it's hard.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks taught: "If we change the way we think, we can change the way we feel, which changes the way we act, which changes the person we become." As Rosh Hashanah approaches, start making the small, daily changes that can transform your year.

The Ice Bath and the Birth of a New You

RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG (Aish.com)

A year ago, I bought an ice bath and I’m proud to say I hardly miss a day: three minutes immersed in 45°F (7°C) water. Many studies now show the health benefits of cold exposure—from cardiovascular health and inflammation control to muscle recovery and increased metabolism. An ice bath triggers a fight-or-flight response; your body knows it can’t stay there, and the cold prompts a surge of epinephrine (adrenaline) and dopamine. These neurochemicals make us feel alert, awake, and energized. After my daily plunge, I feel like I’ve had three cups of coffee and could lift a truck.

All of that is nice, but it’s not what inspires me to use it.

For a long time, scientists believed the brain was hard-wired—rigid, fixed, finite. More recently, neuroscience has shown the brain is “plastic” – we can change and rewire it. We aren’t born with a fixed set of feelings, thoughts, capabilities, skills, strength, and focus. Rather, we are blessed with the gift of neuroplasticity.

Neuroplasticity describes the brain’s ability to change throughout our lives. As Dr. Norman Doidge writes in *The Brain That Changes Itself*, brain plasticity exists from cradle to grave. New neural pathways can open; we can rewire our brains through our habits, behaviors, choices, and efforts. Even a 100-year-old can still mold the brain; it’s never too late. We can recreate and rewire—if we want to.

ROSH HASHANAH: THE DAY OF YOUR CREATION

Rosh Hashanah corresponds not with the first day of creation but with the sixth—not when heaven and earth came to be, but when humanity entered the world. Only then did the world have meaning and purpose and could be considered complete. On Rosh Hashanah, we don’t say in the Machzor “today was the creation of the world.” It isn’t just a birthday or an anniversary; we aren’t commemorating a past event. Indeed, we aren’t even being judged for what we’ve done with our time since creation until now; judgment is not for our past.

We say, “today is the conception of the world”—today, your new world is being conceived—and therefore today we will be judged for what we do with the opportunity to restart, reset, and reboot. We cannot change the past; we cannot go back and make different choices. Of course, we must take responsibility for the past and feel remorse and regret. But its real significance is what we learn from it: how we change to avoid repeating it, and how we create a new future with our fresh start.

The Talmud teaches that we aren’t judged for the past (Rosh Hashana 16b). We are responsible for the present—who we are right now, at this moment. We are evaluated not by the anniversary of our birth, but our “birth-day” – the day we are reborn and start again.

Rosh Hashanah as a gift of new beginnings and clean slates is not only a metaphysical truth; it’s evident in the physical world, too. We are evaluated not for what we have done since creation, but for whether we choose to embrace creation—the power to create again and again, to remold, rewire, and reshape our brains and ourselves.

On Rosh Hashanah we are asked: Are you fixed or growing? A finished product or a work in progress? Stuck in the past or improving for the future? Neuro-stuck or neuro-plastic?

DOING THE HARD THINGS

Every time I step into the ice bath, I don’t want to. But I do it anyway, and when I do, I am literally rewiring and changing my brain. There is a part of the cortex that supports willpower called the anterior mid-cingulate cortex (aMCC). When we perform a task that we don’t want to, the aMCC grows—becoming stronger and more capable of completing actions outside our comfort zone. The challenge is that it must be renewed daily. If you retreat to your comfort zone, the aMCC shrinks back toward its original size.

We live in an age of “life hacks,” shortcuts for everything. There may be hacks in technology and home improvement, but not in life. The only hack is to do the hard thing; doing the hard thing makes you more capable of doing more hard things. We can sit in 45°F water for three minutes. We can rewire ourselves to be selfless instead of selfish, calm instead of angry, patient instead of rushed, givers instead of takers—to live the life we’ve dreamed of living.

Let this Rosh Hashanah be a day of neuroplasticity. Take time to reflect: How will you rewire? What will you reprogram? Which challenge will you take on? Which comfort zone will you breach? Will you take a plunge—have a change of mind and allow your mind to change?

Rosh Hashanah: Early, Late or Just Right

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMotion.com)

"And on the seventh month on the first day of the month, it shall be a day of rest. It is a sacred day for remembrance and blowing" (Vayikra 23:24).

What the Torah calls a day of blowing (of the ram's horn) is more commonly known as Rosh Hashanah, the New Year. Yet the seventh month seems an odd time to be celebrating the start of a new year. We are apparently six months late... or perhaps it is six months early.

The Jewish calendar is both solar and lunar-based. Our months follow the lunar cycle, beginning with Nisan, whereas our years follow the solar cycle. The approximately eleven-day difference between the solar and lunar years necessitates the addition of an extra month seven out of every nineteen years, thereby keeping the lunar and solar years in sync.

Would it not have been simpler to have either a lunar or solar year? Why juggle the months and years, thereby causing fluctuations in the timing of the holidays? Some years, Rosh Hashanah is "early", and some years it is "late"—it seems that only rarely is it just right.

The Netziv (Shemot 12:1) offers an illuminating insight. Tishrei marks the creation of the world at large and man in particular. The laws of nature, physics, biology, chemistry and the like were established by G-d during this creation period. Nisan, on the other hand, marks the beginnings of Jewish history, our formation as a nation. The Jew, the Netziv explains, lives in the two worlds of Tishrei and Nisan simultaneously. First and foremost, the Jew must be an integral part of the world around him, and as such, must be concerned with such universal issues as the environment, hunger, war and peace. At the same time, the Jew is part of a unique people, with a special mission, one often at odds with world opinion. We must be prepared, if necessary, to be a nation that dwells alone, with its own laws and mores. The challenge is to be a product of both Tishrei and Nisan, to be both part of the world and apart from the world, each at the appropriate time.

Rosh Hashanah is celebrated in Tishrei, not Nisan. It is a holiday for all of mankind. The Mishna (Rosh Hashanah 12:), in describing G-d's judgment of the world, makes it clear that it is the entire world, Jew and non-Jew alike, that is to be judged. Zichronot, the request that G-d remember us, begins by invoking Noah, the father of man, and not Abraham, the first Jew. It is G-d's kingship over the world that forms the theme of our piyutim, liturgical poems. Even the shofar was an instrument used by all nations, primarily as a call to arms—hence, the reason we blow the shofar during Mussaf. Had we blown the shofar first thing in the morning, the Romans might have interpreted it as a call to war (Tosafot, Rosh Hashanah 32b s.v. b'shehat).

The fact that the aseret yemei teshuva begin during Tishrei and not Nisan indicates that the goal and focus of these days must be to make us better people, not just better Jews. Being a better person is a prerequisite to being a better Jew. Being a good Jew is relatively easy. Keeping kosher today is simple; companies vie to receive kosher certification. Observing Shabbat is easy; there is even legislation to protect those who must miss work for religious reasons. Torah is available in all languages and in all types of media. "This mitzvah that I command to you today is not too mysterious or remote from you. It is not in heaven...it is not over the sea. It is something that is very close to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can keep it" (Devarim 30:11-14).

It is much more difficult to be a better person, a ben-Adam; to treat others with respect, to control our temper, to compete fairly and to speak appropriately. The Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva, 7:2) teaches that the sins most difficult to overcome, the flaws on which we must focus our repentance, are those of character. We must strive to banish anger, fighting, and jealousy; not to be overly materialistic, honour-seekers or gluttons. It is, as Rav Yisroel Salanter noted, harder to change one character trait than to learn the entire Talmud—harder, but more significant. May this Tishrei mark the continuation of our quest to develop our human potential to the fullest.

Adam's Birthday

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

Were Adam and Eve Jewish?

The reason I ask is that the Jewish calendar seems to be exclusively about Jewish history and the Jewish experience: Passover celebrates our liberation from Egypt, Shavout our receiving the Torah at Sinai, Yom Kippur is when G-d forgave us for the sin of the Golden Calf and Sukkot recalls the divine protection during our wanderings through the desert. The list goes on: Simchat Torah, Chanukah, Purim, Lag BaOmer, Tishah B'Av—virtually all

our holy days, festivals and special dates are distinctly Jewish affairs, concerned with our lives as Jews.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have another confession: some of my best friends are cultural snobs. I hear them saying: "You say that civilization broke down? You call those people civilized? Do they attend the opera on Wednesday nights? Have they read Voltaire? Do they gather in each other's homes in the evenings to discuss the great moral philosophers of the Rationalist and Humanist schools? These are people who have lived in poverty and depravity all their lives. Nothing really changed. It's just that before the hurricane, the crime and squalor in their ghettos followed certain known patterns and were nicely contained by police reports and government statistics. What shocked you

was just more of the same, without the usual frames of reference. That's all..."

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

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

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

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

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

The Day We Are Asked "Why?"

AVROHOM YAAKOV

One of the great paradoxes of Rosh Hashanah is that it is simultaneously the birthday of humanity and the Day of Judgment.

At first glance, these seem like very different themes. Birthdays are celebrations. Judgments are evaluations. Yet Chazal deliberately joined the two. The very day on which Adam was created became the day on which every human being stands before G-d.

Rabbi Eliezer teaches that the world was created in Tishrei (Rosh Hashanah 11a). According to the traditional chronology, Creation began on the 25th of Elul, and Adam was created on the sixth day, 1 Tishrei, the day we celebrate as Rosh Hashanah. This understanding is reflected in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy: "Today is the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day."

Yet that same day is also identified by the Mishnah as the Day of Judgment: "On Rosh Hashanah all who come into the world pass before Him like sheep." (Rosh Hashanah 1:2) The Gemara further explains that on Rosh Hashanah humanity is judged regarding the coming year (Rosh Hashanah 16a-b).

The obvious question is: Why should the anniversary of creation be the Day of Judgment?

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 29:1) offers a fascinating answer. On the very first Rosh Hashanah, Adam's entire story unfolded. He was created, commanded, sinned, judged, and granted mercy all on the same day. G-d then declared: "Just as you stood before Me in judgment on this day and received mercy, so too your descendants will stand before Me in judgment on this day."

Rosh Hashanah is therefore not merely the anniversary of creation. It is the anniversary of the first human judgment.

BEFORE ADAM, the world was magnificent, but it was not yet moral. There were stars, oceans, mountains, plants, and animals. Everything functioned according to G-d's design, but nothing could be held accountable. Judgment only became possible when G-d created a being capable of asking: "What ought I do?"

With free will came responsibility. With responsibility came accountability. And with accountability came judgment.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Rosh Hashanah is not primarily a celebration of the world's birthday, but of the emergence of humanity as G-d's servant. Since human beings were created with a mission, the anniversary of their creation naturally becomes the annual review of that mission.

This raises an uncomfortable question for all of us - what exactly is that mission?

As someone once put it, is life simply about being "hatched, matched and dispatched"?

We are born, we study, we work, we raise families, and eventually we leave this world. Yet instinctively we know there must be something more.

Adam was not placed in Gan Eden merely to exist. He was given a purpose (Bereishis 2:15): "To work it and to guard it."

The very first human being was entrusted with responsibility. Human life was never intended to be passive. We were created to contribute, to build, to repair, and to elevate G-d's world.

Rosh Hashanah therefore is not primarily asking about your success or wealth accumulation, but why you were created, and are you living in alignment with that purpose?

This raises another question.

An annual review makes sense for an employee. Without regular feedback, people drift off course. But why review all of humanity every year? And more fundamentally, how has humanity survived the review?

If the world was truly judged based on its record, surely history contains countless moments when existence itself should have failed.

What about the cruelty of Rome?

The barbarity of the Crusades?

The massacres of the Cossacks?

The hatred unleashed during the Black Death?

The horrors of the Holocaust?

At any of those moments, humanity appeared profoundly unworthy.

Perhaps the answer is that G-d is not merely asking whether humanity has succeeded. He is asking whether humanity still has a future. Whether there remains hope. Whether people remain capable of choosing good. Whether the mission of creation can still be fulfilled.

Throughout history the answer appears to have been yes.

One Avrohom emerged from a world of idolatry. One Moshe emerged from a nation of slaves. A handful of Holocaust survivors rebuilt Torah communities, schools, yeshivos, synagogues, and families throughout the world.

Judgment is not merely an assessment of what humanity has been. It is an evaluation of what humanity can yet become.

This also explains the central theme of the Rosh Hashanah prayers: Malchuyos, commemorating humanity's recognition of G-d's sovereignty.

As Creator and King, G-d asks:

- Has mankind fulfilled its purpose?
- Has each individual advanced the mission for which they were created?
- Does the world deserve another year of blessing and opportunity?

Seen this way, the Day of Creation and the Day of Judgment are not two separate ideas at all. They are the same idea. The Creator reviews His creation.

On Rosh Hashanah, G-d does not merely judge us.

He reminds us that we matter.

A stone is not judged. An animal is not judged. A machine is not judged.

Only a being capable of moral choice is judged.

Judgment is therefore not a sign of G-d's distance from us. It is evidence of His belief in us.

Every year G-d asks the same question He asked Adam (Bereishit 3:9): "Where are you?"

Not geographically, but existentially.

Where are you relative to the person you could become? Where are you relative to the mission for which you were created? And perhaps the greatest comfort of Rosh Hashanah is that Adam's story did not end with judgment.

It ended with mercy.

As the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 29:1) teaches, Adam was judged and forgiven on that first Rosh Hashanah. That established the pattern for every Rosh Hashanah thereafter.

We stand before G-d imperfect, aware of our failures and shortcomings.

Yet we also stand before Him as human beings created in His image, endowed with purpose and potential.

The question of Rosh Hashanah is therefore not whether we are flawless.

It is whether we still have a "why."

And as long as we can answer that question, the story of creation remains unfinished, and the Creator continues to invest in His creation for another year.

News & Views

The left only bothered by Jews

JAMES SINKINSON (JNS.org 8-9-26)

While Middle East history in this century is drenched in blood, dominated by tyranny and scarred by the murder of millions of innocents, the causes of this massive injustice and inhumanity have failed to energize the American political left. Tragic, brutally violent conflicts in Iraq, Sudan, Syria and Yemen in the last 26 years have inspired no tent-cities, screaming protests, indignant op-eds or new categories of revolutionary study to university curricula.

Only one conflict has animated and energized the radical left as no other—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict generally, and specifically, the Gaza war that Hamas started on Oct. 7, 2023. Ironically, the actual human and territorial impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is dwarfed by the massive killing, destruction and savage cruelty caused by the region’s other conflicts.

By most any measure of historical impact, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would only rate a footnote. Why then has this conflict generated more attention among the political left—as well as its handmaiden, the mainstream media—than all the region’s other conflicts combined?

Examining Israel’s uniqueness in the Middle East, the reasons for its outsized attraction to the Western public, media, academics and radical-left activists seem obvious. Likewise, the reason that Israel has become a lightning rod for outraged criticism, condemnation and hate from the left is also explicable, given the left’s revolutionary ideological roots.

As the Middle East’s only liberal democracy, Israel certainly deserves attention from the West. Israel is also distinguished as the geographical and spiritual origin point of Christianity—and, of course, Israel hosts significant religious sites for both Christians and Muslims. Furthermore, there’s no ignoring that Israel is America’s undisputed strongest ally in the region and among its most stalwart allies globally.

Finally, and above all, when assessing the disproportionate hostility toward Israel by the political left, we must note that Israel is the only non-Muslim country in the entire region—a tiny outpost of just 10 million people on territory the size of New Jersey, dominated by a vast sea of half a billion Muslims, who occupy territory 550 times greater than the Jewish state.

Ironically, Israel’s geographic and demographic underdog status buys it nothing from the ultraleft, which dogmatically categorizes the Jewish state’s indigenous people as colonizing invaders and oppressors. Indeed, it is precisely the contrast between Israel’s Jewish and Zionist values that makes it an enemy of today’s neo-Marxists, who are increasingly poisoning American politics.

MORE THAN 20 WARS AND high-intensity conflicts have roiled the Middle East in the last 26 years, all of which resulted in many more deaths than the Gaza war. These include wars in Iraq (500,000-plus dead), Syria (500,000-plus dead), Yemen (377,000 dead) and Sudan (600,000 dead). Aside from Iraq, in which U.S. and other Western forces were heavily and directly involved, all of these conflicts were civil wars that merited little-to-no mobilization from America’s radical left.

However, the war in Gaza—which claimed 77,000 fatalities, half of them fighters—drew massive attention from American ultra-leftists. Researchers at Crowd Counting Consortium (CCC), which records U.S. protest actions, describe the Gaza protests as the largest and most sustained U.S. protest wave sparked by a foreign event in CCC’s tracking since 2017.

How the left makes war in Gaza fit its false narrative.

What makes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Gaza war different from other horrific conflicts in the Middle East? First, this isn’t a Muslim-on-Muslim struggle, but rather Muslims on Jews. Ultra-leftists don’t care when “people of color” kill other people of color, as occurred in all other Middle East conflicts.

Thus, the radicals falsely cast Jews as white Westerners colonizing “Palestine,” whose relative-newcomer Arabs first called themselves “indigenous Palestinians” in 1967. Radical activists reverse reality to fit their rigid neo-Marxist ideology, which requires a conquering white interloper who subjugates native people. In fact, Jews, with their 3,000-year history in the land of Israel, are its indigenous people, still fighting off Arab colonizers. Jewish values represent the struggle of freedom over tyranny.

Israel represents the triumph of Jewish self-determination in the form of Zionism. According to author Dara Horn, Jewish values are fundamentally anti-tyrannical, anti-hierarchical and nonconformist. This has put Israel and Zionism at odds with authoritarian powers—from the Romans and Babylonians to the Muslims, Ottomans and the British Mandate.

In Europe, Jewish individualism and particularity frustrated all manner of authoritarian regimes, including Nazi Germany, for centuries. The collectively minded Soviet Union, especially, resented Jewish nationalism as an unacceptable form of particularism, against which it trumped up condemnations of Zionism as racist, colonialist and genocidal.

Jewish individualism and self-determination are anathema to the ultra-left.

Jewish tradition places strong emphasis on individual moral agency, free will, rigorous debate and the right to national identity. No wonder today’s radical left, which prioritizes collectivism, universalism and conformity with politically correct dogma, finds free-minded Jews, especially Zionists, anathema.

Moreover, neo-Marxist “classism” divides people into acceptable and unacceptable identities—favoring people of color and non-binary genders, while rejecting meritocracy, individualism and the traditional family. The ultraleft therefore specifically condemns American Jewish social and economic success as “unfair”—rejecting individual Jews unless they agree to conform to leftist ideology, such as abandoning Zionism and Jewish particularity. For similar reasons, these neo-Marxists also condemn the leading successes of Western civilization—the United States and Israel—for their emphasis on individualism, nationalism and capitalism.

The ultra-left doesn’t just hate Israel, but also America and common values.

Read the manifestos and demands of today’s Democratic Socialists of America. They are anti-Israel and antisemitic, to be sure, but they also oppose core American values—advocating the abolition of the U.S. Constitution, police, our judicial system, freedom of speech, meritocracy and our capitalist economy. Israel is indeed the canary in the coal mine: first, they come for the Jews; then they come for the remainder of loyal Americans.

Ultra-left opposition to Israel is tied directly to the stubborn independence of the Jews—their insistence on freedom from tyranny, fair treatment as a unique people, and the right to a national homeland. Remember, too, that those who oppose Israel also oppose the United States and its protection of Western civilization’s most cherished values.

When Every Jew in the World Is a ‘Settler’

SETH MANDEL (Commentary.org 8-9-26)

Andy Burnham has decided to begin his term as prime minister by fundamentally reshaping Britain’s relationship with Israel. For the worse.

Burnham is trying to prevent any further exodus of anti-Zionist politicians from his ruling but floundering Labour Party. Keir Starmer, his predecessor, came into office on a massive electoral wave, which he promptly squandered. To get out of the hole Starmer left London in, Burnham has picked up a shovel and begun to dig: He is simply doubling down on Starmerism.

And the first order of business is to institute a boycott of Jewish towns and businesses in Judea and Samaria.

That’s going to cost Palestinians jobs, but the Gaza Left is unconcerned with actual living, breathing Palestinians. Burnham too, apparently.

Why is Burnham instituting discriminatory policies against Jews while making Palestinian lives harder? Because he has been convinced by the “settler violence” narrative.

Now, violence orchestrated by a few dozen extremist Jews has risen. But by the most recent annual statistics we have, that violence still does not reach the number of attacks originating in Judea and Samaria by Palestinians against Jews.

Still, violence moving in the wrong direction is a problem. And there are two ways that Israel’s allies have sought to address it. The first is the approach taken by President Trump. Along with Ambassador Mike Huckabee and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the administration’s team has real credibility with the Israeli prime minister and the segment of the Israeli population most affected by, and implicated in, disorder in Judea and Samaria.

The result: Recently Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the removal of several illegal settler outposts, and the IDF dismissed a soldier who prayed with settlers who besieged an Arab home, despite it being election season, a

time when Benjamin Netanyahu is usually more hesitant to anger the right wing.

The Trump team won Israel's trust and got some concessions.

The other strategy, the one pursued by Burnham, France, Canada, and other Western countries, was the opposite: reduce cooperation, reduce trust, and remove all possible diplomatic influence over the Israelis.

The results: Israel closed the British consulate in Jerusalem and removed Britons from West Bank Palestinian military training and from the Gaza postwar coordination team.

The removal of the consulate in Jerusalem is overdue. The UK uses it as a diplomatic post for Palestinians but keeps its Israeli embassy in Tel Aviv. The UK is now free to move its Palestinian consulate into the state of Palestine that it recognized.

The other result of all this will, of course, be increased anti-Semitism. If you want to understand why Jews are uncomfortable with the suddenly ubiquitous "settler violence" narrative, it's not only because it paints all Jewish life beyond the armistice line as illegitimate. It's also because of stories like the following, from the Times of Israel's New York correspondent:

"The flyers went up in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood last month, plastered onto lampposts, bollards, building walls and traffic control boxes.

"Beware: Talmudists are trained to cheat," said one of the flyers posted in opposition to a housing redevelopment project.

"Locals vs. Rothschilds," another said.

"While those flyers echoed age-old antisemitic tropes, others deployed Israel-related or anti-Zionist rhetoric, decrying 'dirty Zionist money' and comparing the redevelopment project to the Nakba.

"Stop Zionist occupation of Manhattan. NYCHA residents must keep their homes," one said, referring to the New York City Housing Authority, at the entrance to an apartment building."

Progressive DSA-types have been nurturing this particular globalization of Jewish evil for a few years, but it has really taken off now. In a June Democratic primary debate, Darializa Avila Chevalier specifically equated gentrification in New York with West Bank settlement and suggested the same "institutions" are responsible for both. It was an absolutely crazy thing to say, true bottom-of-the-barrel Jew-baiting. But Chevalier wasn't the first and won't be the last to say it.

A group called Crown Heights Bites Back is part of this activist campaign. Last year it put out a statement that said: "Black people in Brooklyn are violently exploited via rents to then feed their genocidal land grabs in Palestine."

One of the major figures in New York's anti-Semitic incitement industry is Nerdeen Kiswani, who, as the Times of Israel notes, accused "Zionist landlords" of "exploiting Black communities here and building settlements with it in Palestine."

Do I even need to mention the popular "Israelis are colonizing the world" videos and the constant attacks on Israelis traveling abroad?

The point is that Jews understand that when the progressive political dogma holds that all Jewish Israelis are settlers, the lie soon gets applied to Jews anywhere at all. Andy Burnham is reacting to this ugly campaign by rewarding it, and thus feeding it. And he'll continue to do it after seeing the consequences for Jews around the world.

Kosher & Halacha Korner

The following article may be at variance to local Kashrus Agencies. When in doubt, contact your local reputable Agency. In Australia, direct any questions to info@kosher.org.au or visit www.kosher.org.au

A Basic Understanding Of The Tekios

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)

One of the most important mitzvos of Rosh Hashanah is the Biblical command to blow the shofar. Although the significance of this mitzvah has been expounded at length – Rav Sa'adiah Gaon enumerates ten different reasons for blowing shofar(1) – still many people are unfamiliar with the basic procedures involved: how many blasts are sounded, how long or short must they be, etc. While the tokea (the one who blows the shofar) and the makri (the individual who instructs the tokea which blast to sound) must be thoroughly versed in these intricate laws(2) – since it is they who determine

if a particular blast was invalid and must be repeated – still it is important for the entire congregation to have some degree of familiarity with the general laws governing this mitzvah.

THE BASIC MITZVAH

The Biblical command is to blow three sets of blasts on Rosh Hashanah. A set of blasts means one teruah sound preceded and followed by a tekiah sound. Thus, the sum total of blasts which one is required to hear on Rosh Hashanah is nine – six tekiah sounds and three teruah sounds.

The tekiah sound was always well defined and agreed upon by all authorities – a long, straight (without a break or pause) blast. The teruah sound, however, was not well understood and the Rabbis were unsure of how, exactly, it was supposed to sound.(3) The Talmud(4) describes three possibilities:

Three short, straight blasts – what we commonly refer to as shevarim;

Nine(5) very short, staccato blasts – what we commonly refer to as teruah;

A combination of both of the above sounds – a shevarim-teruah compound.

To satisfy all of the above opinions, the Rabbis established that the three sets of tekios be blown in three different ways, alternating the teruah sound in each set. Thus we blow tekiah shevarim-teruah tekiah (TaSHRaT) three times; tekiah shevarim tekiah (TaSHaT) three times; and tekiah teruah tekiah (TaRaT) three times. All together that adds up to thirty different blasts: eighteen tekios, three shevarim-teruahs, three shevarim and three teruahs. This is the minimum number of blasts that every adult male is required to hear on Rosh Hashanah. These are called tekios d'myushav, since the congregation is permitted to sit while they are being blown. In practice, however, it is almost universally accepted to stand during these tekios.(6)

[A person who is in dire circumstances (a patient in the hospital, for example) and is unable to hear (or blow) thirty blasts, should try to hear (or blow) ten sounds: one TaSHRaT, one TaSHaT and one TaRaT.(7) No blessing, however, is recited over these blasts.]

In addition to these Biblically required blasts, we blow seventy more. Thirty more are blown during Musaf, ten each after the Malchiyos, Zichronos and Shofaros divisions of Shemoneh Esrei. Every adult male is Rabbinically obligated to blow or hear these blasts in their designated places during the Musaf service. They are called tekios d'meumad, since one is required to stand while they are being blown.(8)

Finally, it is customary to blow forty more blasts for a sum total of one hundred blasts. While this custom is based on several early sources(9) and has been almost universally adopted, there are various practices regarding when, exactly, they are blown. Generally, these blasts are blown towards the end of as well as after the Musaf service, and one should refrain from speaking(10) until after all one hundred blasts have been blown.(11)

HOW LONG SHOULD EACH BLAST BE?

The length of a tekiah, both before and after the shevarim or teruah, must be at least as long as the shevarim or teruah which it accompanies.(12) Thus, since it takes about two to three seconds to blow a shevarim or a teruah, the tekiah before and after must be at least two to three seconds long. Since it takes longer than that to blow the combination shevarim-teruah sound, the tekiah which precedes and follows these sounds must be longer as well. Most congregations allot about four or five seconds for each of these tekios. The makri is responsible to keep time.

[It is important to remember that each tekiah must be heard in its entirety no matter how long it takes. If, for example, a tekiah is blown for seven seconds, which is much longer than required, the entire seven seconds' worth must be heard by the congregation. Care must be taken not to begin reciting the Yehi ratzon until after the blast is concluded.(13)]

A teruah is at least nine short blasts (beeps), although in practice, many more beeps are sounded when the teruah is blown. No breath may be taken between the short beeps; they must be blown consecutively.

Each shever should be about three teruah-beeps long. B'diavad the shever is valid even if it is only two beeps long, provided that all three shevarim are of that length.(14) No breath may be taken between each shever; they must be blown consecutively.(15)

SHEVARIM – TERUAH -HOW IS IT BLOWN?

There are two views of how to blow the shevarim-teruah combination. Some opinions hold that no breath may be taken between them and even b'diavad, a breath between them invalidates the blast. Others hold that a breath should be taken between the shevarim and the teruah [provided that it takes no longer than the split second that it takes to draw a breath].

The custom in most congregations is to do it both ways; the tekios before Musaf are blown with no breath taken between the shevarim-teruah, while the tekios during and after Musaf are blown with a break for drawing a breath between the shevarim-teruah.⁽¹⁶⁾

MISTAKES WHILE BLOWING

There are basically two types of mistakes that the tokea can make while blowing shofar. The most common is that the tokea tries but fails to produce the proper sound. The general rule is that the tokea ignores the failed try, takes a breath, and tries again.⁽¹⁷⁾

The other type of mistake is that the tokea blows the blast properly, but loses track and blows the wrong blast, e.g., instead of shevarim he thinks that a tekiah is in order, or instead of teruah he thinks that a shevarim is due. In that case, it is not sufficient to merely ignore the wrong blast; rather, the tokea must repeat the tekiah that begins this set of tekios.⁽¹⁸⁾

When a tekiah needs to be repeated, it is proper that the makri notify the congregation (by banging on the bimah, etc.), so that the listeners do not lose track of which blasts are being blown.

ADDITIONAL HIDDURIM

As there are different views and/or stringencies pertaining to various aspects of tekias ha-shofar, one who wishes to be extremely particular in this mitzvah may blow (or hear) additional blasts after Musaf is over in order to satisfy all opinions. These include the following hiddurim:

There are several ways of blowing the shevarim sound; while some blow short, straight blasts, others make a slight undulation (tu-u-tu).

Some opinions maintain that l'chatchilah, each shever should be no longer than the length of two beeps.⁽¹⁹⁾

Some opinions hold that when the shevarim-teruah sound is blown, there may not be any break at all between them (even if no breath is taken); the last shever must lead directly into the teruah.⁽²⁰⁾

Some authorities insist that the tekiah sound be straight and clear from beginning to end, with no fluctuation of pitch throughout the entire blast.⁽²¹⁾

FOOTNOTES:

1 The most fundamental reason to perform this mitzvah, however, is simply that Hashem commanded us to do so.

2 Mateh Efrayim 585:2.

3 While the basic definition of a teruah is a “crying” sound, it was unclear if that resembled short “wailing” sounds or longer “groaning” sounds.

4 Rosh Hashanah 33b.

5 There are Rishonim who hold that a teruah is three short beeps. B'diavad, we may rely on that view to fulfill our obligation (Mishnah Berurah 590:12).

6 Mishnah Berurah 585:2. A weak or elderly person may lean on a chair or a table during these sets of tekios (Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 585:2).

7 Based on Mishnah Berurah 586:22 and 620:7. See also Mateh Efrayim 586:7 and Ktzei ha-Mateh 590:1. See, however, Mateh Efrayim 593:3, who seems to rule in this case that three TaSHRaTs should be blown.

8 Mishnah Berurah 592:2. B'diavad, one fulfills his obligation if he sat during these tekios; ibid.

9 See Mishnah Berurah 592:4.

10 Asher yatzar, however, may be recited; Minchas Yitzchak 3:44; 4:47.

11 Chayei Adam 141:9.

12 This is based on the minimum length of time required for the teruah, not on the actual time it took to blow a particular teruah.

13 Mishnah Berurah 587:16; Ha-tekios k'Halachah u'Behiddur 1, quoting several sources.

14 Shulchan Aruch Harav 590:7.

15 O.C. 590:4.

16 Mishnah Berurah 590:20 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 18. The makri, too, should take a breath between the announcement of shevarim-teruah, so that the tokea will follow his lead (Elef ha-Magen 22).

17 Based on Mishnah Berurah 590:34, Aruch ha-Shulchan 590:20, and Da'as Torah 590:8.

18 Another example is when the tokea mistakenly blows [or begins to blow] two sets of shevarim or teruos in a row. The original tekiah must be repeated.

19 See O.C. 590:3.

20 Avnei Nezer 443; Chazon Ish O.C. 136:1. This is difficult to perform properly.

21 Harav Y.L. Diskin, based on the view of the Ramban and Ritva; see Moadim u'Zemanim 1:5. The Chazon Ish, however, was not particular about this; Orchos Rabbeinu 2:183.

Candles (Melb) Fri 11 September 2026, 1 Tishrei 5787 5.49p/6.47p/6.48p