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From jr@sco.com To: mj-ravtorah@shamash.org
Subject: Shiur HaRav ZT"L on Shofar (belated)
Sept. 28, 1998
SHIUR HARAV SOLOVEICHIK ZT"L ON INYAN SHOFAR
(Shiur date: Sometime in the mid to late 1950s...)

On Rosh Hashonah, the sounds of the Shofar, the Tekiah and Teruah, are the main aspect of our prayer. Why did the Torah demand that the prayer of the Jew on Rosh Hashonah flow through the Tekias Shofar on Rosh Hashonah, as opposed to prayers all year?

The Likutai Torah (from the first Lubavitcher Rebbe) describes the topic of Shofar in terms of a Kol Pashut, simple sound. He says that each Jew possesses an inner soul and personality that is good and true. The Jew cannot defile this inner soul through sin. When a Jew sins, it is his external personae that is blamed. The inner soul does not participate in this act. If the inner soul would be defiled through sin, Teshuva would not be possible. The entire entre to Teshuva, where man says that the act was committed by someone else who was masquerading as him, is built on the notion of the purity of man's inner soul.

The middle Lubavitcher Rebbes, Reb Ber, explained the verse that Hashem will return your exile and gather you in from among the nations among whom you were exiled (Parshas Nitzavim). He asked why was this verse written in the singular rather than the plural (since Moshe was speaking to all of Bnai Yisrael)? He explained that this verse is not referring to the ultimate political redemption of the nation. Rather, it refers to the exile of the individual, exile from his family, friends and loved ones that can be as painful, or more so, than the exile of the nation throughout Jewish History. The worst exile of all, is the internal exile of the individual. He ostracizes and exiles himself from his own inner personality and strengths in order to fit in with the desires of society. He acts and talks in ways that are meant to ingratiate himself with others, so they will be more accepting of him. The Torah tells us that man will find himself scattered across the far reaches of the world by his multi-faceted attempts to subordinate his true inner soul in deference to what society demands. Man sometimes awakes in the middle of the night gripped with fear as he contemplates the schism between his internal and external personae, yet man responds by further suppressing his inner soul.

For example, someone may prepare a lecture and the salient points of the lecture can be captured in a few sentences. Yet he will embellish the lecture with all sorts of extraneous details, and through his intellectual achievements, weave the disparate pieces into a long and involved, yet ultimately connected lecture. His internal sense of truth tells him that he could accomplish his task succinctly, yet his external personae demands that he embellish in order to impress others.

People live through very trying times, especially Rabbis and leaders, where they feel terribly isolated and depressed by their responsibility and situation. The only answer to such feelings is the expression of M'mamakim Kerasicha Hashem, I call to Hashem from the depths of my suffering. This cry to Hashem derives from the inner, untainted soul. The external personae is not capable of this. Teshuva requires that the inner personae be victorious over the external one, and admit that his entire external posturing is false. Man wears many layers and styles of clothes. One set for his family, another for his employment, another for his interaction with the community. Teshuva demands that man rip away all these garments and expose the true inner Jew who has been suppressed but remains as strong as ever in the desire to pursue the ways of Hashem. This is the meaning of the verse When you are in a difficult situation, you will return to Hashem and listen to Him. You will remove the external layers and reveal the true inner Jew.

The external Jew is evident in prayer as well. Man has been given the ability to express himself and he learns from the society and culture around him how to speak and how to act and even how to pray. However, ultimately man must recognize that he lacks the vocabulary to express his needs to Hashem. This is especially true on Rosh Hashonah, when man is in the depths of despair with the books of life and death open before Hashem, he must recognize that he has been led astray by his external personality, no matter how developed and cultured it may be. We rely on the same expression of fear and pain that an animal utters,

the Genuchi Ganach and Yeluly Yallal, the sobbing and crying noises that we mimic on Rosh Hashonah.

M'mamakim can not be expressed through the beautiful prose that we recite on Rosh Hashonah (the Piyutim). In fact, the prayers on Rosh Hashonah have been recognized universally as the most beautiful in their content and phraseology. M'Mamakim can only be expressed through the simple sound of the Shofar, representing the simple, unaltered inner Jew. No matter how beautiful our words may be, they still represent the external personality. On Rosh Hashonah we must strip that away, only the internal simple Jew can pray, and only through the simple sound of the Shofar.

Judaism is most progressive in its recognition that man can achieve intellectually and use that knowledge in the worship of Hashem. It does not demand that man live a sheltered existence. But Judaism also demands that man recognize that there is a conflict between his external and internal personae. It is the internal Jew that is the key to his existence. That is why Rosh Hashonah is called Yom Hazikaron: man must remember that on this day he must strip away all external pretenses and layers of inner subordination to reach the true internal Jew. Only when he has reached his internal personality, can he call out to Hashem, and pray that Hashem should remember him on this day and inscribe him in the book of life.

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RABBI YAAKOV NEUBURGER
APPROACHING ROSH HASHANA: HOW TO EARN HIS PATIENCE AND TOLERANCE

Some twenty ago Harav Chaim Shmulevits (Sichos Mussar 5732:38) formulated an inspiring approach to these last days of the year, which has since been repeated countless times in various articles and speeches.

Rav Shmulevits was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Yerushalyim and recognized as one of the foremost roshei yeshiva of Israel. It was in one of his year end talks that he formulated the fright and despair that catches up with us as Rosh Hashana looms so large over all. The Rosh Yeshiva explained that even when a Jew feels change and improvement well beyond grasp, there are strategies that Chazal have taught, with which we can prepare for the upcoming Yom Hadin.

Foremost, is to remember the gemara (Rosh Hashana 17a) that records Rav Papa's visit to the ailing Rav Huna (son of Rav Yehoshua), only to find him suffering the pain of imminent death. In fact, Rav Papa takes leave of Rav Huna and commissions the necessary preparations. You can well imagine the surprise and embarrassment that overtook Rav Papa when Rav Huna appeared once again at his place in the beis hamedrash. Rav Huna, realizing Rav Papa's position, explained that he had been privy to the deliberations conducted on High, as they prepared to greet his saintly soul. It was revealed then to him that although he had deserved to leave this world, his easygoing nature and willingness to cut everyone slack, earned the same grace from Hashem, who granted him many more years in this world.

The gemara sees in this story, an illustration of Hashem's approach to all those who, out of genuine humility, tolerate the barbs and lapses of

others. It is referred to in the thirteen attributers of Hashem's mercy: He is "noseh ovin ve'over al pasha," which translates into "noseh ovin l'over al pasha", tolerates the sins of those who close their eyes to the insensitivities of acquaintances and friends.

Thus Rav Chaim would encourage his students that when we find ourselves incapable of further improvement and perhaps even discouraged from introspection, we have by no means exhausted our preparations for the Yemei Hadin. If we could successfully muster up the inner strength to forgive others who may have wronged us, we would, in that merit alone, be eligible for Hashem's compassion.

It is quite possible that we are asked to do more than simply tolerate the lapses of friends, swallow them and dismiss the hurt of the moment. Surely, one who does rise above the offenses of others shows greatness that the gemara prizes. The peace that he, family and friends will come to know will no doubt be a source of great blessing. Nevertheless the mishna that states, "and judge everyone favorably", means just that, that we need to creatively and proactively judge our friends with a good and accepting eye.

The gemara cites several examples of individuals who exercised mental gymnastics in order to explain the surprising and hurtful behavior of others. They were not satisfied with attributing it to circumstances that they could not question or understand. Rather they thought through scenarios that would actually interpret the hurtful behavior into acts of concern and interest.

It is the deep seated sense of goodness and trust in our fellows which allows us to be giving and accepting. In these days we pray for the same from Hashem, hoping that His trust in our goodness and dedication to Him, will earn for us His patience and tolerance, so that we can grow and serve Him with greater vigor and happiness.

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From: Young Israel of Midwood
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Rosh Hashanah Jerusalem and the Shofar
RABBI ELI B. SHULMAN

Delivered at the Young Israel of Midwood,
Rosh Hashanah 5762

I once read about an Orthodox fellow who found himself, through circumstances the details of which I don't recall, in a reform temple, being shown around by the rabbi. The temple was, indeed, magnificent, and the piece de résistance was the electric revolving aron kodesh. And in the aron kodesh was a compartment from which the rabbi proudly withdrew a shofar, which he offered the visitor to try out. Now this fellow was not exactly an expert baal tokeah; the most he had ever been able to get out of a shofar was a feeble squeak or two. But the rabbi seemed anxious that he should try, so he put the shofar to his mouth and, to his surprise, it emitted a beautiful, sonorous blast. Well, he couldn't understand it, until he took a closer look and saw that there was something inside. The rabbi proudly explained to him that this was a foolproof shofar, because inside it was a horn – a kind of small foghorn – that ensured a beautiful tekiah, first time, every time.

Now we may smile at the idea of such a "shofar"; but this story might lead us also to ask: What, in fact, is wrong with using a foghorn for a shofar? If the shofar – as the Rambam writes – is a summons to teshuvah, then why shouldn't any horn, or siren, or trumpet, do as well? Why do we insist that the sound that we hear on Rosh Hashanah be the blast of a ram's horn, and only a ram's horn?

The answer – or, at least, one answer – is given by the Gemara in Rosh Hashanah:

Lama Tok'in Bishofar Shel Ayil - Amar HKB"H Tiku Lifanai Bishofar Shel Ayil Kidei Lihazkir Akeidas Yitzchak.

Why did the Torah insist that we blow a shofar made from a ram's horn? In order to remember the Akeidas Yitzchak, and the ram that Avraham offered at its culmination.

But this answer leads, in turn, to another question: Why is it specifically on Rosh Hashanah, more than on any other Yom Tov, that we need to remember Akeidas Yitzchak? Of course, Akeidas Yitzchak is a zechus, a source of merit, and we are looking for zechuyos on Rosh Hashanah; but the fact is that we could use zechuyos the whole year round, and yet we don't blow shofar then, but only on Rosh Hashanah. Apparently there is something about Rosh Hashanah that requires that we connect ourselves – more than on any other day – with the Akeidas Yitzchak.

I would like to explore one way of understanding this connection. Rosh Hashanah of course, as we all know, is the day of creation: Zeh Hayom Techilas Maasechah. Specifically, it is the day on which man, who was the culmination of Maaseh Bereishis, was created.

Now we know that man was created in two stages: First, his ???, the physical body, was made from the dust of the earth. And then, into that body, was breathed the Nishama, that fills it and gives it life.

Now Chazal – in a very striking midrash – teach that what was true of man was true of the universe as a whole. It, too, has a Guf and a Neshama. Its Guf is the inert matter of which it is built; and its Neshama is the spiritual force of HKBH's word that fills it and gives it life and purpose.

And the universe could no more exist as a Guf without a Neshama than a human being could live as a body without a soul.

And so just as HKB"H breathed a soul into man, he infused Neshama, spiritual animating energy, into the universe as a whole.

And Chazal also taught that that infusion of spirit into the world had a specific focal point; a specific locus in space where the spiritual force of creation was infused into the inert matter of the world. Chazal called that place the Even Shisiya, the foundation stone, and said that it was the stone on which the Aron rested in the Beis Hamikdash in Jerusalem. The whole spiritual force of creation entered the world at that point, and from there it radiated out to the rest of Creation.

And that is why the oldest name of Jerusalem is Shalem – as we read in Lech Lecha, when MakliTzedek Melech Shalem – otherwise known as Shem ben Noach – went out to greet Avraham Avinu; because the Shleimus of the world, the totality of the spiritual energy of all Creation, was focused on that one spot.

But Jerusalem later acquired another name. Because it was in Jerusalem, at the Makom Hamikdash, that Avraham and Yitzchak reached the highest pinnacle of Avodas Hashem that was ever achieved by man, at the Akeidas Yitzchak. It was after the akeidah that G-d said to Avraham "Atah Yadati Ki Yareh Elokim Atah" ; now I know that you have achieved the totality of Yiras Shamayim, of fear of G-d which is the foundation of Avoda.

And so after the Akeidah Avraham gave that place a different name: Hashem Yira'eh, the mountain of Yirah, of Yiras Shamayim.

And from that moment on Jerusalem became the focal point of Avodah, the place where sacrifices were to be brought, and the Tel Talpiyot, the place towards which we pray, the place through which our Tefillos pass as they rise to heaven, as Shlomo Hamelech said: Vihispalilu Eilechah Derech Habayis Hazeh.

And so Jerusalem is a gate; as Yaakov Avinu said, it is Sha'ar Hashamayim, the gate of heaven. And it is a gate through which traffic flows in two directions. On the one hand, it is the gate through which the spiritual force of creation is infused into the world. That is reflected in the name that Malkizedek gave it: Shalem, the place from which the totality of creation is nourished. And, on the other hand, it is the gate through which the spiritual force of our Korbanos, our teshuvah, our

tefillah, the totality of our Avodah passes up toward heaven. And that is reflected in the name that Avraham gave it: Hashem Yiraeh.

And therefore we combine these names: Yirah and Shalem – into one: Yirushalayim.

Zeh Hayom Techilas Maasecha. Today is again the day of creation. Each Rosh Hashanah, creation is renewed. Which means that today, again, the vast spiritual force of creation is being infused into the world, the force that will sustain it until next Rosh Hashanah. And that is happening in Yerushalayim, in the Makom Hamikdash.

And so today we renew our connection with that same place, by channeling our Avodah, our tefillah and teshuvah, into the sound of the shofar, which directs it towards the makom hamikdash, where Avraham and Yitzchak opened the gate of heaven. And so we complete the circuit.

And the greater the force of our Avodah as it rises up in the sound of the shofar, the greater the force with which the Dvar Hashem is breathed into the world; until it shall enter with such as to break the bonds of exile altogether, on the day when the entire Jewish people shall unite together, Viyishtachavu Lichah Bihar Hakodesh Biyirushalayim.



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IS THERE A MITZVA TO REJOICE ON ROSH HASHANA?

BY RABBI HOWARD JACHTER

The Torah (Devarim 16:14) commands us to rejoice on Yom Tov, "Vesamachta Bechagecha." In this issue, we will explore the question of whether there is a Mitzva to experience Simcha on Rosh Hashana or not. This is a challenging question, since on one hand we are terrified of the fact that Hashem is judging us on this day but, on the other hand, the Ashkenazic custom to greet each other with wishes for a "Gut Yom Tov" on Rosh Hashana might indicate that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana. We will see how the traditional authorities grappled with this question. Our discussion will be based on an essay written by Rav Betzalel Zolti (who served as the chief rabbi of Jerusalem) on this topic (Mishnat Yaavetz Orach Chaim 50). We will present the dispute between the Rishonim about this point, an analytical basis for this dispute, five ramifications of the dispute, a possible proof for one side of the dispute, and a somewhat new analysis of the dispute.

The Dispute - Rambam vs. Hagahot Maimoniot There are at least two passages in the Rambam that demonstrate that the Rambam believes that there is a Mitzva of Simcha on Yom Tov. In Hilchot Chanukah 3:6, the Rambam explains why we do not recite Hallel on Rosh Hashana (or Yom Kippur). He explains "these are days of Teshuva, awe, and fear and not days of excessive joy." Accordingly, although Rosh Hashana is not a day of excessive joy, it is a day on which there is some measure of joy. Moreover, the Rambam writes (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:17), "The seven days of Pesach and eight days of Sukkot along with the other Yamim Tovim are all forbidden to have fasts and eulogies occur on them; and one must be happy and joyful on these days." The "other Yamim Tovim" must refer to Shavuot and Rosh Hashana. The Rambam (ibid. 6:18) writes that Simcha includes the eating of meat and drinking of wine.

On the other hand, the Magen Avraham (introduction to chapter 597) cites the Hagahot Maimoniyot who writes that one should not eat meat or drink wine on Rosh Hashana. This authority must believe that there is no Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana, because part of the Mitzva of rejoicing on a Yom Tov is eating meat and drinking wine (see Pesachim 109a).

Analysis of the Dispute Rav Zolti offers an explanation of this debate. He writes that the debate emerges from a dispute regarding the fundamental nature and scope of the Mitzva of Simcha on Yom Tov. Tosafot (Moed Katan 14b s.v. Asei Deyachid) associates the Torah obligation to rejoice on Yom Tov with the consumption of Korbanot (Shalmei Simcha) that are offered as part of the Mitzva of Aliya Leregel that we are obligated to perform on the Shalosh Regalim. In the absence of the offering of the Shalmei Simcha, the Mitzva of Simcha is merely rabbinic in nature. According to Tosafot, argues Rav Zolti, the scope of the obligation to rejoice on Yom Tov cannot apply on Rosh Hashana, since there is no obligation to offer Shalmei Simcha on Rosh Hashana.

The Rambam, however, believes that the biblical obligation to engage in Simcha extends beyond the obligation to offer and consume Shalmei Simcha. The Rambam (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:17-18) writes: A person is obligated to be happy on these days, he, his children, his wife, his grandchildren, and all those who have joined his family, as the Torah states, "and you shall rejoice on your holiday." Even though the Torah is referring to the obligation to offer and consume Korban Shelamim (the Shalmei Simcha), included in this obligation to rejoice is for a person and his entire family to rejoice in the manner that is appropriate for him. How is this practiced? One distributes parched grain, nuts, and delicacies to the children. One purchases, depending on what he can afford, clothes and beautiful jewelry for the women in the family. The men eat meat and drink wine, as there is no rejoicing without meat and wine.

We see that the Rambam believes that the Torah obligation of Simcha on Yom Tov extend beyond offering and eating the Shalmei Simcha. Thus, according to the Rambam, the obligation to rejoice can encompass Rosh Hashana even though Shalmei Simcha are not offered on this holiday.

Five Ramifications of the Dispute The dispute between Tosafot and the Rambam has at least five significant ramifications. One is whether it is permissible to fast on Yom Tov. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 597:1) writes, "we eat, drink, and rejoice on Rosh Hashana and we do not fast." The Rama (ibid. 597:3) cites the opinion of the Terumat Hadeshen (number 245) that it is a Mitzva to fast on Rosh Hashana. Moreover, the Taz (ibid. 597:1) cites the Kol Bo who notes that some authorities believe that one should fast on Rosh Hashana. The Magen Avraham (597:3) cautions, though, that all agree that it is forbidden to fast during the night of Rosh Hashana. The Shulchan Aruch clearly adopts the approach that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana and thus one should not fast on Rosh Hashana. The authorities that permit or encourage fasting on Rosh Hashana seem to believe that there is no Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana.

A second ramification regards a dispute that is recorded by the Rosh towards the conclusion of his commentary to Masechet Rosh Hashana. The argument is whether the phrase "Vatitein Lanu Moadim Lesimcha Chagim Uzmanim Lesasson et Yom Hazikaron Hazeh" ("and You have given us holidays on which we rejoice, festivals and times for jubilation, this day of remembrance") should be incorporated into the Tefillah and Kiddush of Rosh Hashana. Only if one believes that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana is the phrase of Moadim Lesimcha relevant.

A third ramification might be the dispute whether to say the prayer of Tzidkatcha Tzedek at Mincha when Rosh Hashana falls on Shabbat. Sephardim follow the opinion of the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 598) that one should recite Tzidkatcha and Ashkenazim follow the opinion of the Rama (ibid.) that it should be omitted. The Rama believes that since Rosh Hashana is a Yom Tov it should be omitted just as it is omitted on any other festive occasion. Similarly, we have mentioned the Ashkenazic practice to greet others on Rosh Hashana by saying "Gut Yom Tov," which signifies that Ashkenazic tradition accepts Rosh Hashana as a day of rejoicing. The Shulchan Aruch does not subscribe to this approach. We should take notice that the Shulchan Aruch and the Rama appear to contradict their aforementioned ruling regarding fasting on Rosh Hashana.

A fourth ramification might be the dispute recorded in the Mishna (Moed Katan 19a) whether Rosh Hashana cancels the Shiva and Shloshim mourning periods. The reason why Yom Tov cancels Shiva and Shloshim is that the Mitzva of Simchat Yom Tov and Aveilut are utterly incompatible (see Moed Katan 14b). The opinion that believes that Rosh Hashana does not cancel Shiva or Shloshim apparently believes that there is no Mitzva of Simcha on Rosh Hashana and thus mourning is appropriate on Rosh Hashana. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 399:6) rules that Rosh Hashana does cancel Shiva and Shloshim observances.

I heard from Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (in a Shiur he delivered at Yeshiva University in September 1985) that a fifth ramification might be the question debated in the Gemara (Rosh Hashana 26b) regarding the shape of the Shofar that we blow on Rosh Hashana. One opinion believes that the Shofar should be bent (which is the accepted view) since the more one is bent (i.e. subservient to the Creator) on Rosh Hashana the better. The other opinion believes that the more upright (i.e. confident) one is during Rosh Hashana the better. Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the opinion that one should be confident on Rosh Hashana is more compatible with the opinion that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Yom Tov.

A Proof that There is a Mitzva to Rejoice on Rosh Hashana Rav Zolti marshals a passage from Berachot 49a to support the Rambam's view that there is a Mitzva of Simcha on Rosh Hashana. The Gemara presents the formulas to recite on Shabbat and Yom Tov if one forgot to recite the appropriate addition in Birkhat Hamazon for Shabbat and Yom Tov, and realized the error immediately after completing the Beracha of Bonei Yerushalayim. The formula for Shabbat notes that Shabbat is designated for Menucha, the formula for Yom Tov notes that Yom Tov is intended for rejoicing, and the formula for Rosh Chodesh notes that the day is for remembering. Rav Zolti observes that the fact that there is no separate formula for Rosh Hashana indicates that Chazal regard Rosh Hashana to be included with other Yamim Tovim in the Mitzva of Simcha. The fact that we accept the opinion that Rosh Hashana cancels Shiva and Shloshim also demonstrates that there is an element of Simcha on Rosh Hashana.

Rav Zolti defends the authorities that believe that there is no Mitzva of Simcha on Rosh Hashana by saying that these authorities must concede that there is some degree of rejoicing on Rosh Hashana. We have mentioned that the Magen Avraham asserts that all agree that one may not fast during the night of Rosh Hashana. Rav Zolti explains that this is because all agree that there must be some element of rejoicing on Rosh Hashana.

One might add that all agree that there is muted joy on Rosh Hashana as demonstrated by our omission of Hallel on Rosh Hashana, our practice to use a bent Shofar, and the Sephardic practice to recite Tzidkatcha when Rosh Hashana occurs on Shabbat. Thus, we have significantly narrowed the gap between the opinions that we cited at the beginning of our essay. It seems that the dispute is not a broad one but a matter of emphasis, namely, to what extent is the Simchat Yom Tov muted on Rosh Hashana, for example, that we might tolerate or even encourage fasting on Rosh Hashana or describe the day as a time of joy.

Conclusion It seems to be accepted that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana. Similarly, it is accepted that the Simchat Yom Tov of Rosh Hashana is diminished because our fear of G-d's judgment. However, Rishonim seem to dispute to what extent is the Simcha on Rosh Hashana diminished by our fear of G-d's judgment. Let us pray that Hashem will judge all individuals, the Jewish People, and the world favorably this Rosh Hashana.

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Thoughts for Erev Rosh Hashanah

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

[from a number of years ago] 5755

In Tractate Berochos (29a), the Talmud says that on Rosh Hashanna we daven a Shmoneh Esrei [referring to the "standing prayer"] of nine blessings (the standard opening three blessings, the standard closing three blessings, and the middle three are special blessings of Malchiyos, Zichronos, & Shofros -- the middle portions of the Rosh Hashanna Mussaf service dealing respectively with Kingship, Remembrances, and Shofar Blasts). The Gemara says that the source for the number of these blessings, nine, comes from the nine Azkoros -- the nine times that G-d's Name is mentioned in the prayer of Channa [Samuel 2:1-10].

We read the story of Channa [Samuel 1:1-2:10] as the Haftorah for the first day of Rosh Hashanna. Channa was barren. She came to the Mishkan every year to cry her heart out. [The Mishkan, or Tabernacle, was originally built during the years in the Wilderness, and was set up in Shilo during the time of the story of Channa. It eventually gave way to the Beis HaMikdash.] Channa had to suffer the humiliation of her husband having a second wife who was blessed with children, and who taunted Channa over her inability to have children, though for a noble reason (because she wanted to inspire Channa to pray more). Channa's prayers were finally answered on Rosh Hashanna. She eventually gave birth to a son who grew up to become the great prophet Samuel.

The story of Channa contains a lesson that is so vital and central to the message of Rosh Hashanna that not only do we read this Haftorah on the first day of Rosh Hashanna, but the whole Tefillas Mussaf (Additional Prayer) was structured around the nine mentions of G-d's name in Channa's prayer. What is so important about this episode that causes us to base the central prayer of Rosh Hashanna on the prayer of Channa?

An analysis of Channa's prayer reveals that it emphasizes that life is full of changing fortunes. Channa tells us "...while the barren woman has born seven, she that had many children has been bereaved (2:5)".

She describes the fact that in the past she was barren and her co-wife, Penina had many children. But now Channa has 7 children and when each baby was born to Channa, Penina lost a child.

G-d makes some people poor and he makes some people rich. He makes the haughty low and the humble high. Fortunes keep changing.

[Over the last few weeks, I have found a new "mussar sefer" (book on ethics) which has done a wealth of good for me. The "mussar sefer" is called the Business Section of the newspaper. One reads of people and institutions that were riding high and suddenly find that their fortunes have turned. Other people who had nothing, are suddenly overnight millionaires.]

Channa cautions and says (2:3) "Al Tarbu t'dabru gevoha gevoha..." [You mighty ones -- don't speak with haughtiness] "...Keshes Giborim chatim, v'nichsalim ozru chayil" [because you may fall and the weak will be girded with strength] (2:4).

This is Channa's message to the Jewish People on Rosh Hashanna: Life is so fickle. Fortunes are so fragile. Rosh Hashanna is an unbelievably scary day!

Emotionally, Rosh Hashanna is one of the most difficult days of the year. We can deal with Yom Kippur. We do not eat. It is a day of Mercy. We separate ourselves from the rest of the world and we pour our hearts out. But what are we supposed to do on Rosh Hashanna? Rosh Hashanna is the Yom HaDin [the Day of Judgment]. Everything is riding on this day. And yet there is an obligation to observe this day as a Festival -- looking and acting and eating like a Yom Tov. How does one cope with this dichotomy?

Rav Tzadok HaCohen (1823-1900; Chassidic Sage and thinker; one of leading Torah scholars in the 19th century; author of Pri Tzadik) points out that the Shevarim and Teruahs, which are the broken sounds of the shofar (representing the crying out of a broken spirit), must always be sandwiched between two Tekiahs. The firm, unbroken, Tekiah sound

represents Simcha [joy]. This, Rav Tzadok says, captures the theme of the day.

On the exterior, we must act and feel like it is a Yom Tov. But on the interior -- between the Tekios -- we must have a terrible, terrible, fear: a fear that anything can happen.

If anyone doubts this for a minute, they just need to think back about these past few years. Think back on what happened in the world, what happened to individuals, what happened to communities. It is nothing less than frightening!

This is what Channa is trying to tell us. For some people, this year will bring the greatest sorrow... and for some people this year will be one of "the barren woman turning into a mother of seven".

Chaza"l say that the 100 Shofar blasts which we blow on Rosh Hashanna correspond to the 100 cries that Sisro's mother cried on the day of battle [Shoftim 5:28-30, based on Medrash]. Rav Schwab asked, what is the significance of associating our Shofar blasts to the wailings of Rav Sisro's mother? Rav Schwab explained that the wailings of Sisro's mother represented the uncertainty of the future. If Sisro would come back victorious, this would represent the greatest triumph of his military career. On the other hand, he might come back in a coffin. Sisro's mother did not know which scenario would occur, so she wailed out of uncertainty and fear.

Life and Death. Success and Failure. On Rosh Hashanna, everything lies in the balance of Judgment -- nothing less than totally changing or fates. And yet, we as Jews, have to surround these emotions with the Tekiah -- the firm blast of confidence.

We can not wear our emotions on our sleeve. But we must realize that what will be determined on this day is nothing less than the fate of our lives, of our family's lives, of our community's lives, and indeed the life of the entire world. Anything can happen. This is what Channa is telling us. There are no givens, there are no "Chazakahs" [presumed right based on historical precedent], nothing can be taken for granted.

May it be G-d's will that we as a community, together with the entire House of Israel, be written for a good, lengthy, and peaceful life.

Transcribed by David Twersky Assistance by Dovid Hoffman



From: Aish.com [newsletterserver@aish.com] Sent: Sept.12, 2004

[http://www.aish.com/hhelul/hheluldefault/](http://www.aish.com/hhelul/hheluldefault/Understanding_the_High_Holidays.asp)

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UNDERSTANDING THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

BY RABBI EMANUEL FELDMAN

The overarching theme of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is "change:" to change from what we were before and to become new individuals.

Tishrei, the month of Rosh Hashana, is the first month of the universe, and just as when G-d completed His Creation He contemplated and evaluated it, so does He do every Rosh Hashana -- which means that Rosh Hashana is actually the Day of Judgment for the universe and for mankind collectively and individually.

That explains why, more than any other Jewish holiday, Rosh Hashana's liturgy is not limited to Jewish themes exclusively, but contains so many universal themes as well. On no other occasion, for example, is G-d referred to as "King over all the earth," and at no other time is G-d's Holy Temple called a "house of prayer for all the nations." This is all a reflection of the universal judgment of this day.

G-d evaluates us collectively, just as a shepherd looks over his flock with one glance. And individually, He also judges us like a shepherd who looks at each single sheep as it files through a narrow opening in the gate. So Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are more than just a Jewish version of New Year's Day. It's a time of great introspection, of teshuva/repentance, of stock-taking. According to an ancient Jewish

tradition, it marks the creation of Adam and Eve -- who were created, who sinned, and who were judged all on the same day.

All of these traditions underscore the idea that Rosh Hashana is the time of beginnings. For example, the Talmud states that a number of other events took place on Rosh Hashana: Abraham and Jacob were born on Rosh Hashana; the three barren women -- Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah (the mother of the prophet Samuel) -- were all remembered by G-d on Rosh Hashana, when He decreed that they will give birth. On Rosh Hashana, Joseph was freed from the Egyptian prison and became viceroy of Egypt. And on Rosh Hashana, slavery ended for the Jews in Egypt and they waited for the ten plagues to be completed so that they could go out to freedom.

Thus, Rosh Hashana is a time for significant initiatives. As such, it is an opportunity for us to recreate ourselves, to return to a relationship with G-d, to strengthen our ties to our faith...

On the one hand, Rosh Hashana is an extremely solemn day, the most solemn of the year after Yom Kippur. Because Rosh Hashana begins the Ten Days of Repentance, we stand at the bar of judgment on those days. It's as if we were in a courtroom pleading for our very lives.

Our tradition gives us a vivid image: "The Books of the Living and the Books of the Dead are open before Him," which means many things -- but one of the things it means is that we pray that our names be inscribed by our loving and understanding G-d in the one book and not in the other. Our tradition also tells us that beginning with Rosh Hashana, a Jew has the opportunity to return to G-d, to perform teshuva -- which literally means to turn around, to return, to start all over again. Rosh Hashana and its companion, Yom Kippur, are Divine gifts in which we are given the opportunity to reopen our relationship with G-d, when we have the chance to wipe away the past as if it did not exist, and to start over again with a clean slate.

The slate is not wiped clean automatically. The process has to begin with us, with a sense of true regret, with contrition for past misdeeds, and with a serious resolution not to repeat them. The opportunity is given to sincere returners, not to pro forma ones who are just going through the motions. But once the process is properly done, once the catharsis of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur make their impact on us, what could be more joyous than that? So, yes, it is solemnity filled with awe, and also filled with spiritual joy.

Remember that in the religious context joy is deeply inward, and is not necessarily manifested by laughter and smiles. As such, religious joy and religious awe are not contradictions. In fact, they go hand in hand. In the second Psalm, King David says, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling."

The liturgy of Rosh Hashana, especially the additional "musaf" service, is the most magnificent prayer the world has ever seen. It's like a symphony, perfectly balanced, divided into three separate movements, devoted to the themes of:

making G-d our sovereign and acknowledging Him as our King; remembering His intervention in our history, and underscoring our belief in Divine Providence -- the idea that He listens and cares for us; and recalling the numerous Biblical events where the shofar heralds G-d's presence and protection, and longing for the time when the shofar will herald the redemption of all mankind and the coming of the Messiah...

Bear this in mind: the overarching theme of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is "change:" to change from what we were before and to become new individuals. The motif behind it all is accountability. We are responsible for our actions. We do not live in a vacuum. What we do or say has an impact and a resonance in the world. Yom Kippur represents the potential for a human being to change and return: we are not eternally condemned to follow a certain habitual path; we do have the ability, if we so choose, to change our ways.

It is amazing: in the Talmud (Nedarim 39b), the Sages tell us that teshuva, repentance, was created before the world was created. That is to

say, the idea of repentance, of a person changing himself and changing his course, is an integral part of Creation -- and the world could not exist without it.

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From Uri Jacobs <aljacobs@bankofny.com>

Laws and Customs of Elul & the Yomim Noraim

Written by the Adult Education Committee [of Congregation Beth Abraham] - Reviewed by [Rav Neuburger]

The Month of Elul (August 18 - September 15) ...

Other Elul Minhagim:

1) Blowing the Shofar - Beginning on the second day of Rosh Chodesh (the first day of Elul), we begin to blow the shofar after Shacharis every day except for Shabbos and Erev Rosh Hashana. This is based on the Aggadah in Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer says that when Moshe went back up to Har Sinai after Chait HaEgel on the first day of Elul, a shofar was sounded in the camp reminding them not to repeat their sin.

2) Reciting Tehilim 27 L'Dovid Hashem Ori ("The Lord is my Light") - is recited at the conclusion of Shacharis and Maariv everyday until after Succos.

3) New Year Wishes - For generations, it has been the minhag of signing every letter with good wishes for the New Year.

4) Selichos - From Saturday night preceding Rosh Hashana (this year Saturday night September 12th), we rise earlier than usual to recite Selichos. The Selichos affords us the opportunity to recite the 13 Attributes of Mercy. These are a form of prayer revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu that carry with them the promise of being answered to some degree. ...

What are the best times to say Selichos?

1. The ideal time is to recite Selichos in the early morning before sunrise
2. Second best is before shacharis after sunrise or after chaztos (12:50 AM)

Saying Selichos before chaztos is a highly questionable practice reserved for situations where it is close to impossible to attend morning Selichos. ...

Tzedaka

Throughout the Yomim Noraim, we emphasize the mitzvah of tzedaka.

- First as a prayer on our behalf as we recite in Unesaneh Tokef - that tefilla, tzedaka and teshuva will remove any difficult decree against us.

- Second as part of our simchas yom tov, as the Rambam formulates that our simchas yom tov can only be complete if we have extended ourselves

to the less fortunate. In our community, in addition to raising money for the shul and in addition to providing for those who come to our doors, we should have in mind the Rabbis Discretionary Fund which for the most part, provides for many in our own neighborhood, Tomchei Shabbos, Project Ezra and Yad Eliezer, which supports a large number of families in Eretz Yisrael.

Erev Rosh Hashana (Wednesday, September 15)

The recitation of Selichot begins earlier than usual to allow enough time to say a large number of Selichos.

Hataras Nedarim (Annulment of Vows): It is customary to conduct Hataras Nedarim on Erev Rosh Hashana in order to annul any vows that were inadvertently left unfulfilled in the past year that we do not remember. However, should one remember a specific promise as of yet unfulfilled, one must consult the Rav for guidance. Women should appoint their husbands to do the Hataras Nedarim on their behalf and this should be kept in mind during his Hataras Nedarim.

Hataras Nedarim is performed before a Beis Din (court) composed of three Jews, usually after Shacharis on Erev Rosh Hashana. If not done then, it can be performed at any time before Yom Kippur. The members of this Beis Din may be related to the person saying the Hataras Nedarim.

Mikvah: There is an ancient tradition that on Erev Rosh Hashana, men immerse themselves in the mikvah.

Eruv Tavshilin: Since Rosh Hashana and Succos fall out on Thursdays and Fridays, we must remember to make an Eruv Tavshilin on Wednesday, September 15; Wednesday, September 29; and Wednesday, October 6. The Eruv is necessary to allow us to cook and prepare food on Friday (Yom Tov) for Shabbos. The bracha of Al Eruv Tavshillin is said while holding a matzah and one cooked item. These items should be kept in a safe place until Shabbos, where it is customarily eaten for Seudas Shelishis. If an eruv was not made, please consult with the Rav.

Rosh Hashana (September 15 - September 17)

Candle Lighting: On the first night of Rosh Hashana, the brachas "Lehadlik Ner Shel Yom Tov" and "Shehechyanu" are recited when the candles are lit. On the second night of Rosh Hashana, candles are lit after nightfall (after 7:45 pm) accompanied again by the brachas "Lehadlik Ner Shel Yom Tov," and "Shehechyanu." The two days of Rosh Hashana were deemed by the Chachomim to be one long day (Yom Arichta). Accordingly, to justify the recitation of Shehechyanu on the second night, the Chachomim suggested that one should wear a new garment or prepare a new fruit that grows seasonally (and that one has not consumed during the past year) of the Yom Tov meal, and to have this in mind when reciting the Shehechyanu. One who lacks either a new garment or a new fruit should still recite the Shehechyanu.

Shofar: The shofar is presented by the Rambam as a mitzvah for which Hashem did not reveal its rationale. Nevertheless, over time, many ideas have been associated with the shofar - all of which we try to have in mind while listening to the tones. They include:

- Awakening ourselves to teshuva
- A form of prayer
- Announcing the coronation of Hashem in our world and
- Davening for the time when that will be fully recognized by all

Many machzorim record the eleven ideas that are associated with the shofar as well.

There will be a shofar blowing immediately after davening for anyone who missed some of the. Anyone who cannot come to shul to hear the blowing of the shofar should contact the Rav or the President, who will arrange for a private blowing.

Tashlich: This minhag probably comes from the coronation ceremonies of Biblical times that were usually carried out at the riverside. In addition, it also evokes the proclamation of the prophet Micha, "And you shall cast their iniquities into depths of the sea."

Over the last century, many Gedolim have cautioned that Tashlich should not become a social event which could dilute the seriousness of the day. Thus, we do not go as a group, rather make our way throughout the afternoon as families to either the Hackensack River off River Road or Tashlich Creek off Windsor Road.

Shabbos Shuva (September 18)

The rabbi will deliver his Shabbat Shuva drasha ...

Tzom Gedalia (Sunday, September 19)

The Fast of Gedalia commemorates the final disaster which struck the remnant of Jew in the land of Israel after the destruction of the first Temple (3338 PC, 421 BCE) Nevuchadnetzar, the Babylonian Emperor destroyed the Temple but allowed a small number of Jews to remain in the land of Israel. Gedalia ben Achikam was appointed Jewish Governor of the land. When he was assassinated as a result of Jewish infighting, the remaining Jewish population in Israel was exiled and the tragedy of the first Temple era was complete.

Although Tzom Gedaliah is usually on the third day of Tishrei, since the third day is Shabbos, we postpone the fast until Sunday (the fourth of Tishrei) since we obviously are not allowed to fast on Shabbos. ...

Aseres Yemai Tesuva (Sunday, September 19-Friday September 24)

There is the suggestion of the Yaaros Devash - Rav Yonasan Eibeshush,- to take each day of the Aseres Yimai Teshuva and use it to introspect about that day (eg. Shabbos, Sunday, Monday etc...) throughout the year.

The Shulchan Aruch records that during these days, we try to be stringent with eating only Pas Yisroel. That means that although we are accustomed to eating Pas Palter (bread and cakes that were baked by large companies), during the Aseres Yimai teshuva, we should strive to eat only Pas Yisroel if we are not traveling away from home. This Rabbinic law was established to limit socializing outside of the communal framework out of fear of intermarriage. Thus, bread and cakes that are prepared by large companies do not carry that threat and were permitted. In our community, all of the kosher bakeries are Pas Yisroel all year round.

Erev Yom Kippur (September 24)

Kaparos (Atonement): There is an old tradition to take money or a chicken and recite the kaparot while waving the money or chicken over the head of each family member: "This exchange is for me; this is my ransom, this is my atonement. This money (chicken) shall go to charity, and I shall attain a long and good life, the peace." The money or chicken should then be designated to Tzedaka (like Tomchai Shabbos).

Mikvah: ... One immerses in the mikvah on Erev Yom Kippur, even if one has already done so on Erev Rosh Hashana. Some relate the practice of mikva to the pasuk "Lifnei Hashem Titharu" and that is why the practice is far more widespread before Yom Kippur than at any other time.

Seudah Hamafseket: There is a mitzvah to eat throughout the day in preparation for the fast. The Gemara says that one who prepares on Erev Yom Kippur by eating is looked upon as if he fasted both on Erev Yom Kippur and on Yom Kippur. The Seuda is the "Yom Tov" meal of Yom Kippur that is moved to erev Yom Kippur.

Candle Lighting: The Yom Tov candles should be lit prior to the recitation of the bracha "Lehadlik Ner Shel Shabbas V'shel Yom Hakippurim" and Shehechyanu. The bracha "Lehadlik Ner Shel Yom Hakippurim" is one of those unique brachos that are only recited once a year.

Blessing of the Children: Just before leaving for Kol Nidrei services, the children should be given the traditional parental blessing of Friday nights with an additional blessing that invokes G-d's mercy, love and guidance for the year to come. Although many have the ages old custom to bless their children every Friday night, a bracha at this time is most opportune.

Yom Kippur (Shabbos September 25)

There are five main prohibitions on Yom Kippur:

1. Eating and drinking- those who are sick or frail should consult the Rav. 2. Washing - in either hot or cold water. One may wash only until the knuckles upon arising on Yom Kippur morning or after taking care of one's bodily needs. 3. Anointment - any ointment, hair tonic, perfume, scented deoderant etc. 4. Wearing shoes - if they are wholly or partially made of leather (including athletic shoes). This applies to the entire Yom Kippur, not just when in the Synagogue. 5. Marital relations.

After Yom Kippur: On the night following Yom Kippur, as we stream from our shul in a joyous and exalted spirit, hopefully cleansed and purified of all sin, we hurry to perform additional mitzvos. Before breaking the fast, we recite Kiddush Levanah and after our meal, begin hammering the posts of our succah into the ground. We try to heed the Psalmist as he bids us to go Mechayil LeChayil "from strength to strength."

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Sept 13, 2004 To: yhe-holiday@etzion.org.il Subject: Special Rosh Hashana Package

"PURIFY OUR HEARTS TO SERVE YOU IN TRUTH"
BASED ON A SICHA BY HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL

Adapted by Aviad Hacoen Translated by Kaeren Fish

In a manuscript version of Avot De-Rabbi Natan, we read the following depiction of the akeida: Yitzchak asked Avraham, "Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the sacrifice?" He said, "My son – you will be the sacrifice." At that moment Avraham's face changed. He said, "I am old, while he is young. Perhaps he will flee – what will then become of me?" Yitzchak said to him, "Father, have no fear! May it be G-d's will that my blood be accepted favorably – but bind me well, that I should not have to hold myself still. And when you return to Sara, my mother, do not tell her suddenly, so that she will not harm herself: if she is standing on the roof – that she may not fall and die; if she is standing by the well – that she may not throw herself into it; or if she is holding a knife in her hand – that she may not kill herself with it." At that moment, Yitzchak assented verbally to his father's wishes, but in his heart he thought: "Who will save me from my father? I have no one to help me but G-d, as it is written – 'My aid is from G-d, Maker of the heavens and the earth.'" And the ministering angels said: "Come and see these two righteous ones: the father about to slay his son, and the son about to be slain – and they do not prevent each other." (quoted in Torah Sheleima, Vayera 92) Chazal here seek to emphasize the humanity of Avraham. The dialogue between father and son brings the situation to life and makes it relevant to the world of human psychology.

The Sages teach an important principle here. Neither Avraham nor Yitzchak was an angel. The Mishna in Ta'anit (2:4) cites a prayer that supports the midrash's reading of this event:

"He Who answered Avraham at Mt. Moriah – may He answer you and listen to your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Redeemer of Israel."

Immediately we ask: was it really Avraham's prayer that brought about the turning point in the akeida? Do we not believe that from the beginning G-d's intention was merely to test him, that there was never the slightest possibility that Avraham would sacrifice his son?

However, the Men of the Great Assembly, who composed the above prayer, knew that this story represents not only the realization of the Divine will, but also the response to Avraham's HUMAN cry. Even had the Divine plan not been to prevent the slaying, Yitzchak would have been saved from the decree of the akeida by virtue of Avraham's prayer.

In contrast to the story of Sedom, where Avraham "argues" with G-d, the emphasis here is on Avraham's PRAYER. And if there existed no tradition in this regard, our Sages would not emphasize it. Avraham instituted a genuine "prayer service" here – for the moment, and for all generations.

The Yalkut Shimoni brings midrashim that elaborate on this theme and depict Avraham's prayer most dramatically: "He placed him upon the altar – Avraham's eyes gazing into Yitzchak's eyes, and Yitzchak's eyes gazing towards heaven. And tears fell from Avraham's eyes until he was swimming in tears. He said to him, "My son – since you have already expressed your readiness to relinquish your blood, your Creator will find a different sacrifice in your place." At that moment his mouth opened with a great weeping and he sighed a great sigh, and his eyes wandered and looked for the Shekhina. He lifted his voice and said, "I shall lift my eyes towards the hills, from whence my aid shall come. My aid is from G-d, Maker of the heavens and the earth."

Despite G-d's instruction to bind his son, Avraham could not resign himself to this fate; he prayed for his son. This midrash reveals to us Avraham's ambivalent attitude towards the command. On the one hand, he was a loyal servant, eager to fulfill his Creator's word; on the other hand, he was a loving and compassionate father who could not overcome his emotions, and prayed for his son, pleading for his life to be spared.

We are familiar with the phenomenon of the suppression of any human, parental feelings while in the throes of religious ecstasy. In biblical times this found expression in the worship of Molekh, and in our times we see the same attitude in the response of our neighbors to the death of a "shahid."

Had Avraham's test lacked this human dimension, the akeida would not only be greatly diminished in its power, but perhaps the whole episode would have been illegitimate and invalid.

The Gemara (Yoma 69b) teaches: "Moshe said, 'The great, mighty and awesome G-d.' Yirmiyahu said, 'Gentiles crow in His Sanctuary – where is His awesomeness?' Therefore he omitted the word 'awesome.' Daniel said, 'Gentiles are subjugating His children – where is His might?' Therefore he omitted the word 'mighty.' [The Men of the Great Assembly] came and said: 'On the contrary – that is His might: that He conquers His inclination and is long-suffering towards the evil ones. And that is His awesomeness: were it not for fear of G-d, how could this one nation survive among the nations?' And how could [Yirmiyahu and Daniel] change the wording of the prayer instituted by Moshe? R. Elazar said, 'Because they knew that G-d is truthful – therefore they did not lie about Him.'"

"Where is His awesomeness? Where is His might?" Truth bursts forth with a shout, strong enough to change the wording of prayer.

The truth, and honest human emotions – these themselves are G-d's seal, and we are commanded to emulate Him in this regard.

It is with this same attitude in mind that the Sages described Avraham's paternal feelings towards his other son, Yishmael. Even after G-d promises, "Your seed shall be called after Yitzchak," the Midrash (as quoted by Rashi) teaches: "Take your son, your only one, whom you love – Yitzchak: Avraham said to G-d: 'I have two sons.' G-d said to him: 'Your only one.' He said: 'This one is the only son of his mother, and the other one is the only son of his mother.' G-d said: 'Whom you love.' Avraham said: 'I love both.' He said to him: 'Yitzchak.'"

Avraham stands and haggles with G-d; he wants some role for his other son, too – for Yishmael. He is fully aware that G-d has decided that "Your seed shall be called after Yitzchak," while Yishmael is the son of the handmaid. But he never forgets for a moment that Yishmael, too, is his son, and that he must take care of him and his needs.

Avraham's humanity and humaneness, climaxing in the story of Sedom, are not absent from the parasha of the akeida.

Truth is the crux of our Rosh Ha-shana prayers. On this day we emphasize this quality over and over: "For You are a G-d of truth, and Your word is true and stands forever;" "purify our hearts to serve You in truth."

It is clear, then, why it is specifically the shofar that we sound on this day. The call of the shofar is a genuine sound – a simple sound, a cry emanating from the depths of the human heart. It is an honest and accurate expression of his hidden recesses. The sound of the shofar emanates from a natural horn – not from an artificial musical instrument, made by mortal hands. For this reason it is forbidden even to coat the shofar with gold or silver: so that the sound will be heard just as it is, with no "covering" or pretense.

As explained by the Kuzari, the advantage of the shofar is that it expresses itself without words. Too many words cover up the truth.

According to tradition, one hundred shofar blasts are sounded on Rosh Ha-shana, "corresponding to the hundred sighs of the mother of Sisera," as we read (Shoftim 5:28), "The mother of Sisera gazes out of the window and wails."

This seems quite surprising: on Rosh Ha-Shana, the Day of Judgment, a holy and awesome day, surely we have other events and images to focus on! Why specifically this memorial to the mother of Sisera?

Indeed, there is nothing more genuine, more painful, than a mother crying over the death of her child. This is the symbol, the epitome.

On Rosh Ha-shana we pray that our prayers will not be uttered from our mouths outwards, as empty utterances, but rather as expressions of an inner truth, emerging from the innermost recesses of our heart.

This applies not only to our prayers on this day, but in fact to all of our Divine service.

Indeed, "Truth is the essence of Your word, and all Your righteous judgments are eternal" (Tehillim 119:160).

[This sicha was delivered on Rosh Ha-shana 5759 (1998).]

From: Aish.com [newsletterserver@aish.com] Sent: Sept. 07, 2004 Subject: High Holidays - Three Steps to Genuine Change
http://www.aish.com/hhelul/hheluldefaul/Three_Steps_to_Genuine_Change.asp
THREE STEPS TO GENUINE CHANGE
BY REBBETZIN TZIPPORAH HELLER

Getting free from the prison we've erected around ourselves.

One of the most harrowing pictures I ever saw appeared in Newsweek. The camera caught a glimpse into a life that had, in many senses, vanished before it even began. A child, who could not have been more than three or four years old, was carrying building materials. We would call him a pre-schooler; in today's Sudan, he -- and his parents -- are slaves.

He can be purchased by just about anyone; someone looked at him and saw two arms that will grow larger and stronger. It is not likely that they saw a mind or a soul. In the Newsweek interview, the child had no idea of the name of his country or his village. Looking at him from my home in Jerusalem, I mourned for his childhood far more than he did. I silently wished that he would somehow be able to return to himself and learn that he is more than his two strong arms.

In the course of our lives, we close doors to higher and deeper selves and sometimes forget that we, too, are more than earners, spenders, and travelers through life. Our thoughtless enslavement to mindless routine can leave us without much of a relationship to our souls. In a materialistic society, it is all too easy to view others as competitors. As toddlers we observed that when you have three cookies and give one away, all you have left are two. From that point onward we are afraid to give.

The problem is that the soul, unlike the body, thrives on giving, and on the love that is its offspring.

We also tend to become so self-involved that the G-d we all intuitively knew as children (children almost always believe in G-d, unless they are taught not to) becomes more and more removed from our moment-to-moment consciousness. We act as though we are more than mere creations. This alters our sense of dependency on the Creator and the concomitant realization that we are beloved recipients of endless free gifts. We end up amoral, with no one to account to for our lives. Like the child in Newsweek, we don't know where we are or who we could be. The solution is teshuva, which means "return" (not "repentance" or "becoming more religious"). Through teshuva we learn to re-establish a relationship as G-d's creations. It is a way in which we learn who we are, and where we are.

How does it work? There are three primary steps. Let's go through them one by one.

CONFESSION

The first step is confession to G-d. In concrete terms, this means examining our lives and honestly admitting to our mistakes and to the possibility of having wasted opportunities for growth.

One method of doing this is to divide your life into eras (childhood, teen years, young adulthood, marriage, career, parenting, middle-age, etc). Spend time with a notebook going over each era. The question you should be asking yourself is: "What did I learn from this?" -- not: "How did I feel?" nor: "Whose fault is it?" which are ultimately irrelevant to our process.

We can examine the effects of our positive experiences -- e.g. When I volunteered in the special ed camp, I learned that people are beautiful in more ways than I had ever known. Or the effects of negative ones -- e.g., When I see my mother's face today, as I review what happened when I was 16, after I said what I knew would pierce her as deeply as a knife would, I know how empowering destruction feels, and how damaging it is for all of us.

This process can take a few hours, and might be wise to divide over several days. When you finish, review what you have learned. When you look at the negative things you have done, look for patterns. Is impulsivity the reason that you made bad choices? Perhaps the culprit is an insatiable need to find validation. (Remember, if this is the case, we are not out to blame anyone. We are out to discover our highest and most authentic self.)

Once you have a sense of what the patterns look like, you can confess not only the actions that you now regret, but also the underlying causes of choosing those actions.

With teshuva, G-d opens doors that we may have locked years ago, erasing the negative impact of our choices. The purpose of this confession is not to tell G-d something that He doesn't know. It is to help us regain our identity, by seeing ourselves as we are, and asking G-d to help us heal the damage we have done to ourselves.

We can't erase the imprint of our choices, but G-d created teshuva even before He created the world. It is the one creation that is not locked into the rule that "time only flows in one direction." When we do teshuva honestly, G-d reverses time and

opens doors that we may have locked years ago, erasing the negative impact of our choices.

REGRET

The second step is regret, which entails a disassociation with negative patterns to the point where they are demystified and repugnant. Let us look at two scenarios to understand why regret is so essential to the process of return.

Scenario 1: Howie was a relentless hunter. As a college student, his prey was any girl who attracted him. As he grew older, he realized that he wanted the stability of married life and settled down with Bev. Last week he met Mark, his old roomie, in the airport waiting area. They both were headed to Detroit on a plane that was delayed. As they caught up with each other and reminisced about their college days, Howie waxed nostalgic about his macho conquests.

Scenario 2: Same beginning as Scenario 1, but with one critical difference: One evening after the kids had gone to bed, Bev opened up to him and told him how other men had treated her like an object, and how she had never trusted anyone until she met him. That night Howie couldn't sleep. He realized how much disillusion and distrust he had sowed, and how much pain he had left behind him. When he met Mark later in the week, the last thing he wanted to bring up was his past. It was something he had to deal with, and the time and place was certainly not the airport lobby.

Regret and guilt are not the same thing. Guilt creates paralysis. Regret creates redefinition. Guilt is passive - e.g. I can't deal with this right now. I think I'll eat chocolate and go to sleep. Regret is active (eventually Howie called his rabbi and asked about what the next step should be). Regret leads to release from the prison of self-limiting behavior. Guilt goes nowhere, and is so unpleasant that we tend to blame anyone available -- just to liberate ourselves from its violent grip on our souls.

RESOLUTION TO CHANGE

The third step is making changes within you that are so real that the old patterns will slowly fade. Eventually the day will come when old choices are just plain unappealing. This is analogous to our no longer biting a friend who annoyed us as was our practice at the age of two. How do we change our patterns? There are various ways that are recommended by different sages over the course of the centuries. None of them are meant to be "The Only Way." Use whatever works for you, and recognize that as you change, methods that worked at one time in your life may not work forever. You will need to change methods now and again.

Method 1: Daily Accounting

This method was developed by the 19th century Baalei Mussar (ethicists):

1. Once you identify your patterns, and you sense which traits are the underlying cause of your errors, learn as much about the trait as you can. For example, if you find that time and again anger has been the cause of misjudgments that you regret profoundly, try reading Rabbi Zelig Pliskin's book "Anger: The Inner Teacher." If there are several problematic traits, you may have a lot of reading to do. If you spend serious time in transit, listening to the many tapes available [see <http://www.aish.com/audio/>] on almost any trait may be a very worthwhile investment.

The point of gathering information is to find a sentence that really resonates. This should become your mantra, so to speak. Using anger as our example, the phrase "Don't be reactive. Be the person you want to be" may speak to you. (It speaks to me.) If you wish to work on several traits, you will have several sentences.

2. Get a notebook. (That makes you feel good already!) If you are working on four traits, begin by structuring four pages as follows: On the top of the page write your key phrase. Underneath it, divide the page into seven sections, leaving a large margin on the left side of the page. Write the days of the week on top of the seven sections. In the left-side margin, write the name of the traits you are working on -- e.g. Anger, Dishonesty, Insensitivity, Arrogance. (Notice that I have presented the traits negatively rather than positively. The first one on the list is the trait that matches the key phrase on top of the page.)

3. Every day of "week one," look at the key phrase first thing in the morning. Repeat it a number of times. At the end of the day, pencil in the number of times you forgot that phrase in the course of the day, by writing one dot for each error. Even though you are not dealing with traits 2-4 as intensely this week, review your day and write in the number of slip-ups that have taken place.

4. The next week, put the first trait on the bottom and move the second trait to the top, so that within a four-week span, you would have had each trait as the central one on the list.

5. Does it seem childish? Yes! Does it work? Yes -- and with startling rapidity. Within 40 days, you will begin to see dramatic results, even with traits that you have lived with your entire life. Of course if you don't continue the process, the results fade, but it is an amazing method.

Method 2: Maimonides' Method

1. Picture yourself in a moment of failure due to your inability (or lack of desire) to overcome whatever negative trait(s) are the source of your difficulties. Now picture yourself responding to the same situation in an entirely different way. It is important to actually visualize these two scenes so that the emotional self, which is moved by imagery, will be as involved as the intellectual self.

2. Ask a critical question: Since the gap between how I would like to respond and how I actually respond is so great, what can I do concretely today to narrow the gap? For example, if I tend to fly off the handle when my plans are ruined by other people's choices, today I can decide that no matter how upset I am, I won't raise my voice. Although I have not yet come close to saying only the correct response, or judging people favorably, this is, however a good first step.

3. Be careful to see that the steps are small enough to be comfortably attainable, and big enough to actually generate change.

4. Once you are at home with the first step, be sure to take a second step.

5. Go beyond where you would like to be. For instance, if your problem is anger, aim at serenity, not merely at "not losing my temper."

There are two advantages to this method. One is that it works, with rare regressions. Secondly, you are working from the "outside in," which allows you to be less defensive than if you had to confront your devils directly. The "disadvantage" is that, as you can see, this requires a long-term commitment.

Method 3: Turn to G-d

The third method is radically different than the other two. It is the method recommended most by the Hassidic masters.

Don't focus on yourself. Don't chart your behavior. Turn to G-d directly, openly, passionately, in your own language. Ask Him to free you from the prison you have erected around yourself. Tell Him where you have been, what you have done, and how you now know that you have done great harm to yourself and to others. Tell Him about the times you have tried to change and failed, and how you now acknowledge that He loves you and has given you life, and that only He can help you.

Make this a daily practice in which you include Him in every aspect of your journey.

The last month of the Hebrew calendar, Elul, is called the Month of Compassion and Forgiveness. It is a time when we have more capacity to draw close to the Almighty than any other month of the year. It is a time when we can return. As Rosh Hashana approaches, let us use the time to also approach other people with compassion, and see them in the way that we ourselves would want to be seen by G-d. Let us ask forgiveness from those whom we have wronged, and by doing this, fill our world with compassion and grace. In memory of my father,

George Herman Kestel

This article can also be read at: <http://www.aish.com/hhelul/hheluldefault/>

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Sept 14, 2004 7:02 AM To: Peninim Parsha

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

PARSHAS HAAZINU

My Torah shall drop as the rain, my speech shall flow gently like the dew. (32:2) Moshe Rabbeinu uses the simile of rain and dew to describe the Torah. The commentators, each in his own unique manner, expound on the comparison of Torah to these natural gifts of Hashem. Sforno emphasizes the relationship of the mekabeil, receiver/student of Torah, to the Torah. Both rain and dew have a beneficial effect on the earth, providing the water it needs so that the seeds may grow. Rain may come down to earth in torrents. Dew, in contrast, lands gently on the earth in a thin layer.

Sforno posits that both the average person and the erudite, brilliant scholar are capable of comprehending the Torah. The difference between the two is in their level of understanding and ability to grasp its lessons and profundities. The average Jew will absorb Torah on a superficial level. His grasp does not exceed his reach. He understands and appreciates Torah within the constraints of his intellectual acumen. This concept of Torah is compared to tal, dew, which benefits and enhances the earth on a gentle and limited level. The intelligent, advanced student of Torah, who plumbs its profundities and resolves its mysteries, is compared to the rain. Strong rain is driven to the earth with force, which, at times, overwhelms the land. The Torah overwhelms the mind of the scholar, just as it captivates and penetrates the soul of the wise man, who is capable of appreciating its depth and the wonders of Hashem's teachings.

How is it possible for the same item to have two distinct incongruous effects on people? How could Torah be compared to gentle dew and also to strong rain? Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita, cites Ibn Ezra in his preface to his commentary to Sefer Koheles, who compares Hashem's influence, His spiritual flow, to the rays of the sun. We see with our own eyes that some objects become brighter in the sun, while people turn darker in its rays. The sun is the same; the objects are different. Likewise, among people: There are those to whom Torah is overwhelming and compelling, due to its depth and wisdom. To others, Torah is simple and gentle. It all depends on with what capabilities and attitude one approaches it.

Attitude plays a critical role in success in Torah. One must have a great desire to achieve success in Torah and be willing to work hard to achieve his goal. The individual who takes it easy -- sitting back and waiting for the Torah to enter his mind -- will only develop a peripheral knowledge of Torah. I recently read a powerful story about a young boy's resolve to study Torah, related in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's, *Touched By A Story 2*.

The story is about a thirteen-year-old survivor of the Holocaust. As a child, he did not have the opportunity to study Torah beyond the primary courses taught in the local cheder. His desire had always been to go to yeshiva gedolah to study Torah in depth, but his hopes were not realized as a result of the war. He spent his youth differently than others. As a young boy, he was witness to his parents' execution. He then became a victim of Nazi cruelty himself. Forced to run away and hide, he survived on grass and hay.

With the liberation, he was thrown into a new turmoil. With no home and no family, he finally made it to the American shore, alone and lonely. Lucky to be befriended by a family, who, albeit kind, could not understand his plight, the next two years were at best bittersweet, filled with sadness and pain.

His dream to become a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, continued to burn fiercely in his mind. He visited a number of schools, hoping to be accepted as a student. Alas, no one was interested in teaching Aleph Bais to a thirteen-year-old boy. He was frustrated. All he wanted was to learn Torah, and no one was willing to give him a chance. He was about to give up, but decided one more attempt could not hurt. He would try one more yeshiva.

He walked into the principal's office and presented his case. Giving it all he had, he mixed emotion with logic and a little begging. The principal seemed genuinely concerned, and the young boy felt he might finally have made a dent. He would be accepted as a student in this yeshiva.

Just as his hopes soared, however, the rug was pulled from under him, as the principal said, "We would love to have you attend our school, but there is nowhere that I could place a thirteen-year-old boy whose proficiency level does not extend beyond the Aleph -Bais."

Crushed, the young boy looked back at the principal and, with dejection written all over his face and with tears streaming from his eyes, he said, "I accept the rejection. It is something I have become accustomed to hearing. I ask you only for one favor. Could you please write me a note stating that I came to you and asked to be accepted in your yeshiva, so that I could learn Torah, and you told me that it is ridiculous for a thirteen-year-old boy to be studying in the same class with kindergarten children. Please see to it that when I die the Chevrah Kadisha, Jewish burial society, buries me with that note in my hand. This way I can come before Hashem and tell Him that I at least tried to the best of my ability to learn Torah!"

When the principal heard this heartrending plea from the boy's mouth, he jumped up from his chair, embraced the boy and together they cried. The very next day, the thirteen-year-old boy was learning Torah with boys who were nine years his junior. He did not care. He finally was doing what he always strived to do - learn Torah. Today, he is a talmid chacham who, for almost a half of a century, has been teaching Torah to earnest young men in Yerushalayim who, like himself, want to achieve Torah scholarship.

A G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He. (32:4)

In the Talmud Taanis 11A, Chazal explain the meaning of tzadik v'yashaar hu, "righteous and fair is He"; Hashem metes out exacting justice to the righteous for their misdeeds, while He rewards the wicked for their merits, so that He does not deprive the tzadikim of eternal life in the next world. They add that at the time of a person's departure to his eternal home, all of his earthly deeds also take leave of him. The Heavenly Tribunal then says to him, "Did you do thus and thus at such and such place on such and such day?" He responds, "Yes." He is then told to sign his name to attest to the veracity of the record of his deeds. Moreover, the individual is matzduk es ha'din, ratifies the judgment he will receive, telling them; "You have judged me correctly." This is the idea behind fairness and righteousness: everybody gets his due - and he accepts it.

Let us try to understand Chazal. This occurs in the Olam ha'Emes, World of Truth. There are no games there, no shtick, no lies. Why is a person asked anything? Is

there a possibility that one might not recognize his own actions? Is it necessary to respond in the affirmative and to sign in testimony and agreement? What are Chazal teaching us with this idea?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, explains that in this world our perspective is limited to time, place and sensory perception. Everything we do has an enormous effect on our surroundings, on the people with whom we deal and on those we influence. We do not realize this, however, because we cannot perceive anything beyond the boundaries that being made of flesh and blood establish for us. Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, explains that only Hashem Yisborach can mete out justice in a righteous and just manner. When He gives retribution, He takes every variable into consideration. Every smile, every tear, every bit of joy, and every drop of sadness: all factor into Hashem's accounting of a situation and His retribution.

This process is beyond man, given his physical limitations. In the World of Truth, our perception becomes eminently clear, the past and future are no longer incongruent tenses. They can now be viewed as parallel with the present. Suddenly, the actions that appeared "reasonable" from the earthly perspective have now taken on a completely new image. More people are involved: ramifications are magnified and extended. The individual no longer recognizes his actions for what they were before. Could these be his actions? Is it possible that what he sees now is the consequence of his actions? Against his will, he must accept the new reality, the picture perfect of his earthly activities. "Yes," he acknowledges, "these are my activities."

Likewise, when a person acts in a positive manner, whether it be carrying out a mitzvah, performing an act of lovingkindness, or any good deed, the picture in the Olam ha'Emes also changes. He will see the incredible long-term effect of his positive actions, whom they inspired, how their influence spread out in many ways. He is then asked to affix a signature affirming his actions. That signature is the moment of truth. He now confronts the overwhelming reality of his actions. He sees the incredible good, and that is reassuring, but he also sees the extent of his misdeeds. The realization that all of the terrible consequences of his actions are before him -- and they are his sins -- is in itself the greatest punishment. When we are confronted with the truth - the extent - the effect - the overwhelming negativity resulting from our misdeeds, we realize the depth of our sins and recognize their severity. What we thought was a simple infraction has now become a sin of epic proportions.

As we begin a new year filled with aspirations, hope and renewed vigor to serve Hashem in the prescribed and correct manner, we should keep all this in mind. The good deeds that we perform are magnified beyond anything we can fathom. Regrettably, our negative activities have a similar effect. Our decision concerning which path we choose - that of reward or that of punishment - is a decision we must make here and now.

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. (32:7)

Moshe Rabbeinu's theme is very clear: Klal Yisrael is an am naval, a vile nation, whose shortsightedness and ingratitude play a role in its malevolent attitude towards Hashem. The cure is equally simple: reflect upon the past; study the glorious history of a nation under G-d's direction and beneficence; and realize that what has occurred in the course of world history was all regulated by Hashem for His People. We wonder why the Torah focuses on yemos olam, the days of yore. Should it not have said me'oraos olam, the happenings of the world? What about the timeline during which these occurrences took place needs to be emphasized?

I think the Torah is teaching us a compelling lesson in history and gratitude. We must judge history corresponding to the backdrop of yemos olam, time period during which the historical endeavors and occurrences took place. Upon judging the people of history, we must do so through the prism of the time frame of that period.

Having said this, I feel it is necessary to focus on a topic that has long been ignored. If Moshe Rabbeinu tells us that studying the past will cure our ingratitude and that lessons gleaned from a previous generation will be therapeutic for our shortsightedness, perhaps we should also follow this advice.

American Jews of the post-Holocaust period are the beneficiaries of a rich legacy of Torah that was transplanted on these shores by the udim mutzalim me'eish, "firebrands saved from the flames," survivors of the European conflagration known as the Holocaust. America today is replete with Torah from coast to coast: Yeshivos of every genre; Torah chinuch for girls; kollelim; Jewish outreach centers; Day Schools in most communities, even in some of those communities where years before a Torah school was nothing more than a dream -- or a nightmare. It has not always been like this.

Sixty-five years ago, America was a spiritual wasteland, barren of Torah, bereft of schools, with a critical shortage of leadership that was capable and willing to lead.

When the survivors of the Holocaust came to these shores, they did not concede to apathy and depression. They were acutely aware that they were spared for a reason: to build Torah in America. Together, with a handful of devoted rabbinic and lay leadership, they transplanted European Torah to American youth. They planted the seeds that have sprouted and flourished with unprecedented Torah study and mitzvah observance.

Do we know who they were? Do we care? Have we ever taken the time or interest to study their lives, to delve into the challenges, trials and tribulations they overcame to build Torah for us? Or, in contrast, have we attempted to distance ourselves from them, because they would probably not fit in our present day Torah milieu? Zechor yemos olam! Remember the backdrop of that time period. Reflect on with what our predecessors had to contend: Who were their adversaries? What was public opinion? What was the effect of the economy? Of what did the spiritual landscape consist? Now, after we have factored in all of the above, we shall have a more profound appreciation of the vicissitudes they faced, the challenges they overcame, and the circumstances over which they triumphed. Whatever we have achieved in the area of Torah is in no small part attributed to their mesiras nefesh, self sacrifice - blood, sweat and tears. Indeed, we stand on their shoulders.

For it (the Torah) is not an empty thing from you. (32:47)

Rashi interprets this to mean that we toil in Torah for a good reason. Much reward depends on it, for Torah is our life. In an alternative explanation, Rashi says that there is nothing empty in Torah. Every word in Torah can be expounded upon. To substantiate this idea, he cites the pasuk in Bereishis 36:22, "And the sister of Lotan, Timna...and Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, son of Eisav." Chazal ask, why would a noblewoman such as Timna, who was Lotan's sister, settle to become a concubine? They explain that she said, "I am not worthy to become a wife to him. If only I could become his concubine!" Why did the Torah go to such lengths to inform us of this? It is to teach us the praise of Avraham, that rulers and kings would desire to cleave to his seed. This demonstrates how a few innocuous words in the Torah teach us a significant lesson.

It would seem that Rashi is implying that in order to become aware of Avraham's eminence, we need Timna's affirmation. Consider the facts that Hashem refers to Avraham as G-d - fearing and that the Torah records many episodes concerning Avraham Avinu that depict his exemplary character and virtue. What concern is it to us what Timna thinks?

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, cites his father the Telzer Rav, Horav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, zl, who explains that while Timna's praise does not add anything to Avraham's stature, the Torah nonetheless takes human nature into consideration. Any respect given to a person, regardless of the source, means something to people. An individual's esteem is elevated in our eyes when we see the respect accorded to him by others. If Avraham's esteem was elevated in the eyes of people as a result of Timna's respect for him, then it is worthy of being recorded in the Torah.

Rav Eliyahu Meir adds his own thoughts to the matter. The Torah is not simply conveying to us Avraham Avinu's virtue, it is also teaching us the importance of relating the greatness of a tzadik. While we are certainly aware of Avraham's righteousness, every incident adds to his distinction, and that is important to convey. When we see how far the Torah goes to relate the piety and character of a tzadik, we will be inspired to give a tzadik his proper esteem.

We see from here that the way we treat our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, is the way others will emulate. Thus, before we point an accusing finger at the average Jew and demand a greater degree of derech eretz for our Torah leadership, we should set the standard.

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