

# Tishrei – Beginning Again

*The questions which appear in this font are prompts for reflection in thought, speech, song, writing, visual art, movement, or any other form of expression.*

*Rosh Hashanah is not mentioned by name in the Torah. It is mentioned in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 29 as “a Shabbat commemorated with sounding the horn” and “a day of sounding the horn.” Here is the only other mention of Rosh Hashanah in the entire Tanach (Hebrew Bible).*

***How might we prepare ourselves to experience a Rosh Hashanah inspired by the passage below?***

## **Nehemiah 8:2, 9-10, 12**

On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Torah before the congregation, men and women and all who could listen with understanding.

Nehemiah the Tirshata, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were explaining to the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Eternal your G!d: you must not mourn or weep,” for all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Torah.

He further said to them, “Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the Eternal is the source of your strength.”

Then all the people went to eat and drink and send portions and make great rejoicing, for they understood the things they were told.

## **נחמיה פרק ח**

וַיָּבֵיא עֶזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה לְפָנֵי הַקְּהָל  
מֵאִישׁ וְעַד־אִשָּׁה  
וְכָל מִבִּין לִשְׁמָע  
בַּיּוֹם אֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי  
וַיֹּאמֶר נַחֲמִיָּה הוּא הַתַּרְשָׁתָא  
וְעֶזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן הַסֹּפֵר וְהַלְוִיִּם  
הַמְּבַיְנִים אֶת־הָעָם לְכָל־הָעָם  
הַיּוֹם קֹדֶשׁ־הוּא לִיקוּק אֱלֹקֵיכֶם  
אַל־תִּתְאַבְּלוּ וְאַל־תִּבְכוּ  
כִּי בֹכִים כָּל־הָעָם כַּשְּׁמַעִם אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה  
וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לְכוּ אֲכָלוּ מִשְׂמֵנִים  
וּשְׂתוּ מִמֵּתֻקִּים  
וּשְׁלְחוּ מְנוֹת לְאִין נָכוֹן לוֹ  
כִּי־קֹדֶשׁ הַיּוֹם לְאֲדָנֵינוּ  
וְאַל־תַּעֲצֹבוּ כִּי־חֲדָוֹת יְקוּק הִיא מְעַזְכֶּם  
וַיִּלְכוּ כָל־הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל וּלְשִׂתוֹת וּלְשַׁלַּח מְנוֹת  
וּלְעִשׂוֹת שְׂמִיחָה גְדוּלָה  
כִּי הִבִּינוּ בְּדִבְרֵים אֲשֶׁר הוֹדִיעוּ לָהֶם

***How can we best prepare for our deeds and hearts to be judged?***

## **Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 16b**

R' Cruspedai said in the name of R' Yochanan: Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah: One of totally evil people, one of completely righteous people, and one that includes people with both good and bad deeds [*beinonim*].

The completely righteous individuals are written and sealed immediately for life. The totally wicked individuals are written and sealed immediately for death. The [sentence for the] individuals with both good and bad deeds is suspended from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur.

## **תלמוד בבלי - ראש השנה טז:ב**

א"ר כרוספדאי א"ר יוחנן  
שלשה ספרים נפתחין בר"ה  
אחד של רשעים גמורין  
ואחד של צדיקים גמורין  
ואחד של בינוניים  
צדיקים גמורין  
נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר לחיים  
רשעים גמורין  
נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה  
בינוניים תלויין  
ועומדין מר"ה ועד יוה"כ

<p>If they merit, they are inscribed for life, if they do not merit, they are inscribed for death.</p>	<p>זכו נכתבין לחיים לא זכו נכתבין למיתה</p>
<p><i>Yalkut Shimoni (Gathering of Simon) is a medieval compilation of midrash on Tanach.</i> <b>How can we cultivate the kind of confidence shown here, that we will be judged favorably?</b></p>	
<p><b>Yalkut Shimoni, Deuteronomy 825</b></p> <p>What nation is like this nation, that knows the nature of her G!d?! Usually, when a person must appear before the court, they wear black clothing, cover themselves in black, and let their hair grow and nails grow, for they do not know the outcome of the judgment. But not so Israel, who wear white [clothing], wrap themselves in white, cut their hair and nails, and eat and drink and rejoice on Rosh Hashanah, knowing that G!d, blessed be He, does miracles for them and produces a favorable judgement for them, tearing up their decree of [harsh] Din.</p>	<p><b>ילקוט שמעוני - דברים תתכ"ה</b></p> <p>איזו אומה כאומה זו שיודעת אופיה של אלוה בנוהג שבעולם אדם יודע שיש לו דין לובש שחורים ומתעטף שחורים ומגדל שערו ואינו חותך צפורניו לפני שאינו יודע היך דינו יוצא אבל ישראל אינן כן אלא לובשים לבנים ומתעטפין לבנים ומגלחין שערן ומחתכין צפרניהן ואוכלין ושותין ושמחין בראש השנה לפי שיודעין שהקב"ה עושה להם נסים ומוציא דינם לכף זכות וקורע להם גזר דינם</p>
<p><i>Why and how might we achieve this enigmatic balance between Din and simcha (joy)? What does this ancient midrash suggest about the nature of Judgement, sin and forgiveness?</i></p>	
<p><b>Exodus Rabbah 46:4</b></p> <p>Israel says: "Lord of the universe, You have said to us: 'House of Israel, like clay in the potter's hand, you are in My hand' (Jer. 18:6). Even though we sin and make You angry, do not abandon us, for, 'we are the clay and You are the potter' (Is. 64:7). Come and see, this potter creates a jug and leaves a stone in it as it is taken out of the oven. If someone puts liquid in the jug, it leaks from where the stone is, and the liquid is lost. Who caused the jug to leak and lose its contents? The potter who left the stone in it!"</p>	<p><b>שמות רבה מו:ד</b></p> <p>אמרו ישראל רבון העולם אתה הכתבת לנו הנה כחומר ביד היוצר כן אתם בידי בית ישראל לכך אע"פ שאנו חוטאים ומכעיסים לפניך אל תסתלק מעלינו למה שאנחנו החומר ואתה יוצרנו בא וראה היוצר הזה אם יעשה חבית ויניח בה צרור כיון שיוצאה מן הכבשן אם יתן אדם בה משקה מנטפת היא ממקום הצרור מאבדת את המשקה שבתוכה מי גרם לחבית לנטף ולאבד מה שבתוכה היוצר שהניח בו את הצרור</p>
<p><i>R' Dov Ber ben Avraham of Mezritch (1704 – 1772), also known as the Maggid of Mezritch, was the foremost disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and was chosen as his successor to lead the early Chasidic movement. He did not write any books, but his students' teachings are gathered in anthologies such as Torat HaMaggid.</i></p>	

<b>How can we work with our tendencies to judge, and transform them into more fruitful patterns?</b>	
<b>Torat HaMaggid on Rosh Hashanah</b>	<b>תורת המגיד על ראש השנה</b>
All who judge Israel are judging the blessed G!d, as it were, for He is unified with us.	כל הדנים את ישראל דנים כביכול אותו יתברך כי הוא אחדות עמנו
<i>R' Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira (1889 –1943), was the Grand Rabbi of Piaseczno, Poland, who wrote several important Chasidic works and established the yeshivah (seminary) Da'as Moshe in 1923, one of the largest Chasidic yeshivot in Warsaw at the time. During World War II, he led the underground efforts to maintain vibrant Jewish life in the Warsaw Ghetto. After the liquidation of the ghetto, he was murdered by the Nazis at the Trawniki work camp. His collection of sermons on the Torah and festivals, Esh Kodesh (Holy Fire) was discovered after the war, in the rubble of the ghetto.</i>	
<b>How might we choose to conceive ourselves, in both senses of the word?</b>	
<b>Esh Kodesh on Rosh Hashanah 5702/1941</b>	<b>אש קודש על ראש השנה - שנת תש"ב</b>
The time for Teshuvah is Rosh Hashanah, the time of the creation of the world, because Teshuvah...is also creation.	זמן תשובה הוא בראש השנה זמן בריאת העולם מפני שגם תשובה...בריאה היא
<i>R' Jill Hammer, PhD, is a contemporary author, teacher, midrashist, mystic, poet, priestess and co-founder of the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute. Her Jewish Book of Days is a profound guide through the calendar, in tune with both our own wisdom tradition and the movements of nature.</i>	
<i>In this book, she writes of our season: "Born from a seed, the tree bears seed. The land spends itself to create what will thrive next spring...We use the growth of past seasons to sustain a new one...Rich with the fruits of the year, we prepare to be winnowed down to a single seed: the new beginning of our lives" (pp. 369-70).</i>	
<b>What is fruit we have borne, and what is the seed we are being winnowed down to?</b>	
<i>R' Yisroel ben Eliezer (c. 1700 – 1760), known as the Ba'al Shem Tov, or Besht, was a mystic, healer and teacher who lived in the Ukraine and founded the Chasidic movement (Chasidut). Chasidut is very diverse, but all Chasidim see themselves as followers of the Besht and his teachings.</i>	
<b>What does this teaching mean for what happens on Rosh Hashanah itself, and how can we best prepare ourselves for this unique opportunity?</b>	
<b>Ba'al Shem Tov on Rosh Hashanah 45</b>	<b>בעל שם טוב לראש השנה ויום כיפור מ"ה</b>
All of the thoughts falling on a person on Rosh Hashanah are the writing [in the Books of life, death or <i>beinonim</i> ], whether for good or bad, G!d forbid! The evil thoughts need to be sweetened through battling our evil impulse which is bringing these thoughts down on us, through awakening our free choice or through self-sacrifice.	כל מה שיפול לאדם מחשבות בראש השנה הם הכתיבה הן לטוב הן שפל חס ושלום והמחשבות רעות צריך להמתיקם ולעשות מלחמה עם היצר הרע שהוא מפיל במכוון המחשבות האלו וימתיקם בשם ערעור בחירות או במסירת נפש

***How might this story from the Kedushat Levi impact our experience of the Shofar this year?***

***Do we dare to cry out from a primal place inside ourselves, a place before there is language or reason?***

**Kedushat Levi – Selected Teachings**

(translation adapted from Green et al, Speaking Torah)

There was a king who sent his only son to a distant land, for some reason known only to him. As time passed, the son became accustomed to the ways of the villagers among whom he lived. He became a coarse person, and he forgot the niceties of life with the king. Even his mind and his innermost nature grew coarse...

One day the son heard that the king was going to visit the province where he lived. When the king arrived, the son entered the palace where he was staying and began to shout in a strange voice. His shout was in wordless sound, since he had forgotten the king's language. When the king heard his voice, and he saw that he had even forgotten how to speak, he was filled with Compassion for his son. This is the meaning of the voice of the Shofar.

**קדושת לוי - לקוטי תורה**

מלך אחד ששלח בנו יחידו לארץ מרחקים  
על איזה טעם כמוס שהיה אתו  
והנה הבן הזה ברוב הימים  
שהורגל בין אנשי הכפרים  
נעשה איש שובב ושכח בנימוס המלך  
ונתעבה שכלו ונתעבה טבע טבעותיו  
...  
הנה ביום אחד שמע הבן שיבוא המלך  
למדינה זו שהבן בתוכה  
והנה כשבא המלך אז בא הבן בתוך פלטר המלך  
וצעק בקול גדול ומשונה  
ורק בצעקת קול  
כי שכח הדיבור של המלך  
ואז כששמע המלך קולו  
וראה ששכח אפילו הדיבור  
נתמלא רחמים על בנו  
וזה ענין הקול של שופר

*R' Avraham Yitzchak Kook (1865 – 1935) was the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel and a giant of both mysticism and Jewish law, who synthesized Lithuanian and Chasidic perspectives. Shemonah Kevatzim (Eight Collections) are writings drawn from his mystical notebooks, written during the period 1904 – 1919. After decades of mystery, they were first published in 1999.*

***In preparation for Yom Kippur, how can we best implement the practice instructions Rav Kook offers here?***

**Shemonah Kevatzim 2:150** (transl. Yehudah Mirsky)

One who grieves constantly for their sins and the sins of the world, must constantly forgive and absolve themselves and the whole world, and in so doing they draw forgiveness and a light of Chesed onto all of being, and bring joy to G'd and to all creatures.

And they must first forgive themselves, and afterwards cast a broad forgiveness over all, the nearest to them first, on the branches of the roots of the soul, and on their family, their loved ones, their generation and their world, and all worlds... and thus is revealed all the good that is hidden away in everything...

**שמונה קבצים ב:קנ**

האדם הכואב תמיד על עונותיו ועונות העולם  
צריך הוא תמיד למחול ולסלח  
לעצמו ולעולם כולו  
ובזה הוא ממשיך סליחה ואור חסד  
על ההויה כולה  
ומשמח את המקום ומשמח את הבריות  
ובתחילה צריך למחול לעצמו  
ואחר כך הוא ממשיך מחילה כללית על הכל  
וכל הקרוב קרוב קודם  
על ענפי שרשיו מצד הנשמה ועל משפחתו  
אוהביו דורו עולמו וכל העולמים  
...  
ומתגלה כל הטוב הגנוז בכל

*Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772 – 1810) was the great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidut. He originally attracted a small but ardent following, but his followers are now a large grass-roots movement with great influence across the Jewish world. Sefer HaMiddot, composed in 1810, is an ethical work by Rebbe Nachman, edited and published by his leading disciple, Reb Noson of Breslov (1780 – 1844), who led the Breslov movement after Rebbe Nachman's death in 1810.*

***How might we include “evildoers” in our experience of Yom Kippur?***

**Sefer HaMiddot: Teshuvah 1:96, 102**

Through Teshuvah of an individual, the individual is forgiven, and the whole entire world. When the Jewish People fast, they are not answered until evildoers are included in the union.

**ספר המדות על תשובה א:צו, קב**

על ידי תשובת יחיד מוחלין לו  
ולכל העולם כולו  
כשישאל מתעניין  
אין נעניו עד שיהיו עם רשעים באגדה

*How might we interpret the broken pieces of the first tablets being placed in the Holy Ark, which lay at the very center of the Mishkan, and hence of our national consciousness?*

***What would it mean for us to carry our own broken tablets with us, in our personal Holy of Holies, along with our new and complete ones?***

**Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 14b**

The [complete, second] tablets and the broken tablets were placed in the Ark.

**תלמוד בבלי - בבא בתרא יד:ב**

לוחות ושברי לוחות  
מונחים בארון

*R' Dov Ber ben Avraham of Mezritch (1704 – 1772), also known as the Maggid of Mezritch, was the foremost disciple of the BeSHT, and was chosen as his successor to lead the early Chasidic movement. His disciples spread Chasidism beyond Ukraine, to Poland, Galicia and Russia. He did not write any books, but his teachings are gathered in anthologies such as Or Torah and Maggid Devarav LeYa'akov.*

***In our daily lives, how might we access our excitement, enthusiasm and desire, and direct them to service of the Creator and all life?***

**Or Torah on Parshat Toldot**

It says in the Talmud, “In the place that Ba'alei Teshuvah stand, completely righteous people do not stand” (Brachot 34b). I heard an explanation: A Ba'al Teshuvah is greater because they already know the excitement and enthusiasm of sins, and when they make Teshuvah and engage in Torah and mitzvot, they do everything with great enthusiasm and desire. For they know enthusiasm well, unlike a righteous person who never encountered it.

**אור תורה על פרשת תולדות**

איתא בגמרא  
במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין  
צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין  
ושמעתי טעם אחד שבעל תשובה יותר גדול  
מפני שכבר הכיר חימום והתלהבות עונות  
וכשעושה תשובה ועוסק בתורה ובמצוות  
עושה הכל בהתלהבות וחשק גדול  
מפני שידוע היטב ענין ההתלהבות  
מה שאין כן הצדיק  
שלא הכיר זה מעולם

According to the Rambam (Maimonides, R' Moses ben Maimon, 1135 – 1204), the process of the mitzvah of Teshuvah is as follows:

- 1) Ceasing the behavior in question;
- 2) Regret;
- 3) Confession;
- 4) Resolution to act differently in the future.

Confessing our wrongdoings is certainly important, especially on Yom Kippur. But Rav Kook, in Ein Ayah (The Falcon's Eye), his commentary on sections of the Talmud, suggests an additional practice.

**Ein Ayah on Mishna Ma'aser Sheini 5:10**

The Torah has given us a path of awakening: a person needs to also rejoice themselves sometimes by articulating the good deeds that they have done, in the appropriate measure, in order to strengthen their heart in [Divine] service.

**עין איה על משנה מעשר שני הי:**

נתנה לנו התורה דרך להתעוררות שצריך האדם שישמח גם כן לפעמים בביטוי שפתיים על מעשה הטוב אשר עשה וכפי המדה הראויה לחזק לבבו בעבודה

Our final source is this “Positive Confession” written by R' Avi Weiss, inspired by Rav Kook.

**How might you adapt it to reflect your own needs this Yom Kippur?**

**What do you want or need to acknowledge, thank and praise yourself for at this time?**

We have loved	אָהַבְנוּ
We have blessed	בְּרַכְנוּ
We have grown	גָּדַלְנוּ
We have spoken positively	דִּבַּרְנוּ יָפִי
We have raised up	הֶעֱלִינוּ
We have shown compassion	חִסְנוּ
We have acted enthusiastically	זָרְזַנוּ
We have been empathetic	חֲמַלְנוּ
We have cultivated truth	טַפַּחְנוּ אֱמֶת
We have given good advice	יַעֲצַנוּ טוֹב
We have respected	כִּבְדְנוּ
We have learned	לָמַדְנוּ
We have forgiven	מָחַלְנוּ
We have comforted	נַחַמְנוּ
We have been creative	סָלַלְנוּ
We have stirred	עוֹרְרַנוּ
We have been spiritual activists	פָּעַלְנוּ
We have been just	צָדִיקְנוּ
We have longed for the Land [of Israel]	קוִיְנוּ לְאֶרֶץ
We have been merciful	רַחַמְנוּ
We have given full effort	שָׁקַדְנוּ
We have supported	תָּמַכְנוּ
We have contributed	תָּרַמְנוּ
We have repaired	תִּקְנְנוּ