

CHOOSING

We are living in the time of the final “sorting process of the souls” (the *birur hanefashos*), which will prove the situation of each our souls, which will show how loyal each of us really are to Hashem. It is the time of history where Hashem is asking each person to decide where he is placing his heart. Each person now is being asked this question: Do you *truly* want to connect yourself with Hashem? Whose side are you really on? Whom and what do you associate yourself with? Do you want an internal kind of life, a life of seeking Hashem Himself, His Torah, and the fulfillment of His mitzvos, and doing His will, completely?

Moshe said, “*Who will be for Hashem, and come towards me?*” In the times we live in today, this “sorting process of the souls” is now underway for every single Jewish soul. Each Jew today must decide where the depths of his heart lay. If one considers himself to be loyal to Hashem today, that means he must be willing to go against the direction that the entire world is taking today.

Hashem isn't asking each person today to jump into the sea, like Nachshon ben Aminadav. Only a few individuals can be on that level. What is being asked of each person today is to change the general direction of his life. If a per-

son today wants to follow the direction of the rest of the world, he will fall together with them, with the newer and more advanced that it becomes, with the newer *Yetzer Hora* appearing everywhere. But if one takes the opposite direction that the world is taking today, and he decides in the depths of his soul that his heart belongs to Hashem, to His Torah, and to doing His will, and he is willing to go against the rest of the world – then he is fulfilling exactly what Hashem is asking of a person to do, and that is how he will be saved.

As long as a person tries to stay within the lifestyle of the world while somehow attempting to fight the *yetzer hora*, he will be engulfed by the powerful amount of evil that surrounds him, because the evil today is a much bigger threat than it was to us in previous generations.

In contrast, if one makes sure that the way he lives is not like the way of the rest of the world, and he truly searches for Hashem, Torah, and doing the *ratzon Hashem* - he will be saved, and he will merit to be written for a truly “good” year.

But if one hasn't yet decided deep down where his loyalties lie, and he isn't ready to live differently than the way the rest of the world lives – he will be subject to the pressures of the *yetzer hora*, who gets stronger every day, whose sole desire is to seek a person's destruction. We

need the supernatural help from Hashem in order to overcome the new *yetzer hora*, but that is exactly what Hashem expects from us to do.

In the times we live in, it is an entirely new Rosh HaShanah each year, because each year is so fundamentally different than the year before it, due to the renewed *yetzer hora* each year. The level of *ruchniyus* of the generation drops with each passing year. The change which Hashem wants to see from each of us is to change over our life totally.

We need to clarify to ourselves what our life is about, what we truly want in life, to see if we truly want to become close to Hashem, if we truly desire a Torah life. And the emphasis is on if we *truly* want it - as opposed to trying to ‘get the best out of both worlds’, using various “*heterim*” (halachic leniencies) of all kinds. Instead, we need to really seek truth, to seek a life of closeness to Hashem.

May we be *zocheh* to make that fundamental change, of remaining loyal to Hashem in the coming year, and then we can be written in the book of the complete *tzad-dikim*, for a truly “good year”, in which we will seek closeness with Hashem: **וואני קירבת אלקים לי טוב**, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*”

Q&A – ROSH HASHANAH

QUESTION What are the main thoughts to think about on Rosh HaShanah, and especially during the *davening* of Rosh HaShanah?

ANSWER On Rosh HaShanah, our beginning point (*nekuda raishis*) becomes revealed. One should connect himself to the very first, beginning point in the *nefesh* (soul), and it is called the point of *p'shitus*, simplicity. As a hint, the *halachah* is that ideally the *shofar* should be "*pashut*" (smooth, simple) hinting to *p'shitus*. From becoming connected to one's own *p'shitus*, one becomes connected to Hashem through that *p'shitus*. Thus the inner aspect of the *avodah* of this day is to become connected in the depths of the soul **to a simple sense of Hashem, which goes above all logic and reasoning**. The higher space of our soul is *p'shitus*, a simple connection to Hashem that comes from simply sensing Hashem in an earnest and non-intellectual way, while the lower space of our soul uses *harkavah*, "complexity", where we think deeply and analyze. We are meant to go back and forth between these higher and lower modes of our *nefesh*. On Rosh HaShanah, though, we mainly need to be using our mode of *p'shitus*, our simple connection with Hashem from sensing Him "simply" without thinking into this deeply and without analyzing what this means. Then we can retreat back to our lower mode, *harkavah*/complexity, by thinking deeply about how Hashem created the world, and for what purpose, so that we can accept His rules.

QUESTION What is the difference between the judgment on the first day of Rosh HaShanah and the second day of Rosh HaShanah? And on which day of Rosh HaShanah is Klal Yisrael judged collectively, i.e. if the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt this year?

ANSWER As is known, the first day of Rosh HaShanah is called *dina kashya*, "strong judgment", it is the judgment on one's spiritual situation for the coming year, it is the day of judgment for the *tzaddikim*. The second day of Rosh HaShanah is called *dina rafya*, "weak judgment", it is the judgment over one's physical situation and it is the judgment day for those who aren't *tzaddikim*. The first day of Rosh HaShanah is the judgment for anything collective, while the second day of Rosh HaShanah is for anything specific.

QUESTION Why do we *daven* throughout the year, if everything that will happen this was anyways decreed on Rosh HaShanah and sealed on Yom Kippur? How do my *tefillos* help, if it was already decreed on me what will happen this year?

ANSWER The Gemara says that a person is judged on Rosh HaShanah, and according to one view, one is judged every day of the year. Even more so, a person is judged every moment. This means that any good decree on Rosh HaShanah can be held back from a person due to sins. We find this concept by Yaakov Avinu, who was concerned that his sins will hold him

back from receiving Hashem's blessings of protection. It is the same vice versa: The Gemara teaches that if anything harsh was decreed on a person *chas v'shalom* that Rosh HaShanah, the decree can be removed, when a lot of people *daven* for that person. The *tefillah* of an individual can also remove a bad decree on a person, when one's *tefillos* are accompanied with complete *teshuvah*. This accesses the spiritual revelation of Yom Kippur [which removes any harsh decrees from Rosh HaShanah]. This is especially the case **when a person davens with tears, which has the power to tear up any harsh decree**. This is **even more effective when a person davens at special opportune times of the year (an eis ratzon)**. That is why our *tefillos* can always help eliminate any harsh decrees on a person and merit us to receive our due portion. Even more so, **if a person is close to Hashem and has an earnest relationship with Him, his tefillos can enable him to receive any blessing that wasn't decreed on him on Rosh HaShanah, because such a person has gone above the dimension of time** [so he receives from Hashem in a way that is not limited to any certain special times of the year].

QUESTION What should be our our main thoughts should be throughout the day and the *tefillos* on Rosh HaShanah? And, is it proper if one *davens* for personal requests on Rosh HaShanah?

ANSWER [PART 1] You can contemplate the following. (1) "*Ha-yom Haras Olam*" – Rosh HaShanah is the day when the primary creation, the human being, was created. (2) Who created all of this? Hashem, Whom there is none other besides. (3) For what did He create it all for? What is the purpose of it all? So that we become close to Hashem, and thereby reveal Hashem in His creation. This is the intention behind the concept of *Malchiyos* on Rosh HaShanah [declaring Hashem's dominion over the entire Creation.] (4) The intention behind *Zichronos* on Rosh HaShanah is that one should try as much as he can to remember all of the different deeds he committed this year. (5) The intention behind *Shofaros* is that one should improve his deeds, by doing complete *teshuvah*. Included in this is for one to clarify his aspirations and his purpose in life, and to take upon oneself a resolution for the coming year.

[PART 2] "*Rosh HaShanah*" contains the word "*rosh*", "head", from the word "*raishis*", the beginning point. On this day, a new start is revealed. It is the revelation of a beginning point. Therefore a person should connect himself to the "beginning point" of the soul, which is called *p'shitus*, the "simplicity" of our *nefesh*. As a hint, the Gemara says that the more *pashut* (**smoother** and simpler) a *shofar* is, **the better the shofar** is. From connecting to *peshitus*, a person becomes connected to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, amidst this *peshitus*-simplicity. Therefore, the inner *avodah* **on this day is to become connected, in the depths of one's soul, to a simple sense of the Creator, which is above all reasoning and logic. One needs to progress and regress, back and forth,**

between two different states [as follows]. For part of the time, one should be connected with this *pshtus*, by ascending higher towards Hashem from that simplicity, *pshtus*. For the other part of one's time, one should retreat back into his thoughts, by thinking of the fact that Rosh HaShanah is the day when the world was created, and that there is a Creator, and that He created it for a purpose, which is for His creations to accept upon themselves His dominion. One should also remember his deeds and repent over them, and to once again accept Hashem's rule over him.

[PART 3] It is customary to recite the *piyutim* (liturgies), which a large chunk of it that describes the greatness of the Creator. When one opens his *nefesh* towards this, one can feel a pleasure in contemplating the Creator's greatness, verbally expressing this greatness with words of praise to the Creator. This is an additional part of the closeness to Hashem which is revealed on this day. There is a way of connecting to Hashem on this day though *pshtus*/simplicity, as explained earlier, by thinking simply of Hashem and the simple thought that He created the world, and there is also a way of connecting to Hashem on this day by speaking of His greatness, as expressed through us, His creations. This is the implication of *HaYom Haras Olam*, on this day the world was created.

[PART 4] When it comes to personal *tefillos* on Rosh HaShanah that one has, each person should act according to his current level. If one is at the level in which he feels a need to **daven for personal requests on Rosh HaShanah**, than it is proper for him to do so. This, however, should only be done in addition to what all that was said above, because **davening for personal requests should not become the main part of Rosh HaShanah**.

QUESTION Is there a deeper meaning of the customary *Simanim* (symbolic foods) which are eaten on the night of Rosh HaShanah which we say accompanied with the *Yehi Ratzon*?

ANSWER On Rosh HaShanah, we are able to access the level that is called *rosh*, the "head". There is a general level of *rosh* and an individual level of *rosh*. When we say "May we be a head and not a tail," that is the general level of *rosh*. The more specific implication of *rosh* (head) is that we can always find the "head" point in everything, the point of good that is in everything, because everything is good at the root, at its "head" (*rosh*). From this power, we can extend Heavenly blessing to everything else that branches out from that root. We can connect to this concept in the areas of thought, speech, and action. In our thoughts, we connect ourselves to this concept by thinking of the point of good that is found at the root of each thing. In our words, we connect to this concept by saying the *Yehi Ratzon*. And in our actions, we connect ourselves to this concept by eating the respective *simanim*.

QUESTION What's more important to Hashem on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur – *davening* a long *Shemoneh Esrei* and

asking Hashem for things? Or davening a shorter *Shemoneh Esrei* so that we can be able to say all the *Piyutim*?

ANSWER You need to act according to your *cheilek* (your personal share that's meant for you to do) and that's the main thing!

QUESTION How can a person know if he's acting according to his personal *cheilek* (portion), his unique *shoresh neshamah* (soul root)?

ANSWER The more a person acts *lishmah* (with purer motivations) the more he will reach his personal *cheilek* on this world, because through acting *lishmah*, a person removes all the layers of him that are shelo *lishmah*.

QUESTION How can we be so focused on the *davening* and on the words we are saying, and also be calm? How can we feel closer to Hashem through *davening*?

ANSWER Think about what you have gained until now, and also think of what you're missing. Throughout these days, keep going back and forth in your mind between focusing on what you have gained with what you still need.

QUESTION How do we have more *bittul* to Hashem and how do we make Him into the *Melech* over us?

ANSWER By making a small *kaballah* to do one thing every day that goes against your *ratzon*, and to do it because you want to do the *ratzon Hashem* over your *ratzon*.

QUESTION Should a person go to Uman for Rosh HaShanah?

ANSWER Every *chassid* has to abide by what his *Rebbe* tells him. Regarding going to Uman, even for the *chassidim* of R' Nachman there was an argument if he meant only those who live outside Eretz Yisrael or if he meant even those living in Eretz Yisrael to go to Uman for Rosh HaShanah. As it is known, there are Bresslover *Chassidim* who don't go to Uman and they make a gathering in Eretz Yisrael. But in general, **every person needs to know where he davenes better and where he will be able to talk more naturally to Hashem, and it is in that place where he should daven**.

QUESTION Every year I fly to Uman for Rosh HaShanah. Last year all the flights were closed at this time, but this year the flights are open, and this year there are all kinds of corona rules to follow upon entering Uman and leaving. One of the rules is that if a person isn't vaccinated, he needs to have a smartphone so that he can get an APP confirming if he's in quarantine from the moment he arrives. Special kosher phones were made for this purpose so that a person doesn't need to use a smartphone. However, the very fact that they are asking an entire G-d fearing *tzibur* to come with smartphones is making me re-think my decision to go...

ANSWER If going to Uman requires you to have a smartphone, do not go at all.

ROSH HASHANAH There is an argument in the *Kadmonim* (the earlier works of our Sages) about how a person should daven in Elul and especially on Rosh HaShanah: Can a person daven for his own private requests? Since Rosh HaShanah is a day to *daven* for the revelation of *Malchiyos* (to reveal Hashem as King over the world), is one also allowed to daven for his own needs? There were views which held that *davening* for private requests is being self-absorbed, and therefore it is not suitable to *daven* for oneself, during Elul and Rosh HaShanah. Reb Yisrael Salanter zt"l said, though, that it depends on the level of the individual: If a person is not yet on the level of being concerned only for the *Malchus* of Hashem and he cannot identify that much with the pain of the *Shechinah*, the lack of feeling revelation of Hashem's Presence in the world, then he should not focus his *tefillos* on the revelation of *Shechinah* (*Malchiyos*), and instead, he should *daven* on Rosh HaShanah for his needs.

The purpose of the *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah is *Malchiyos*, and not *Zichronos* and *Shofaros* (which awaken our merits so we can have a good year). The primary *avodah* is *Malchiyos*, which is to *daven* for the revelation of Hashem as King upon the world – and this is a *tefillah* that comes from our *lishmah* aspect, which is altruistic and it doesn't seek its own benefit. But there is another *avodah* of Rosh HaShanah, *Zichronos* and *Shofaros*, which are *tefillos* for us to have a good year. The purpose of course is *Malchiyos*, but practically speaking, most people are not on the level of desiring only *Malchiyos*. People have needs that they want from Hashem, and they are not ready to totally surrender their will to Hashem and not think about their needs at all on Rosh HaShanah and only desire for the *Shechinah* to be revealed.

Only a few individuals transform totally on Rosh HaShanah and they leave their self totally becoming totally altruistic and not thinking about their own needs at all. Very few are like R' Elazar Ben Dordaya, who attained his share in the World To Come quickly when he met his moment of truth. Almost all people, without exception, are not on that level. A person needs to serve Hashem based on the actual level he is on.

Of course, there is a great light, a great revelation, during Elul and Rosh HaShanah, and we all get inspired, each on our own level. The environment becomes more inspiring (through the nice *davening*, the seriousness, the singing, etc.) and there is something more inner as well during these days, which inspires us on an inner level and not just with external inspiration from the outside. But Reb Yisrael Salanter said that the level of most people is that they need to *daven* for their own private requests, and to be honest with themselves that they are not yet on the level of being concerned only for *Malchiyos*, thereby making sure to *daven* for themselves too. If we would *daven* only for *Malchiyos* and not for ourselves at all, we would be *davening* only superficially and it wouldn't be truthful. However, it should certainly bother us that we aren't yet on the higher level. We should not become complacent with ourselves and say, "This is the reality – this is the level I'm on. I have aspirations, but *l'maaseh* (practically speaking), I'm not 'holding there'." That should not be the attitude! Rather, it should certainly bother a person when he knows that he is not yet at the truthful level of aspiring only for *Malchiyos*.

The truth is that the wish for *Malchiyos* is really the nature of our *neshamah*, because our *neshamah* is naturally drawn to doing Hashem's *ratzon*. But that nature is able to become very covered over under many layers throughout the years. Since *Malchiyos* is the purpose of our *avodah* on *Rosh HaShanah*, even if we are not actually at that level, it should still bother us that we are not mainly concerned with *Malchiyos*, with our purpose.

Rosh HaShanah is mainly about *Malchiyos*, but to our chagrin, most of us are not mainly concerned about restoring the *malchus* of Hashem to the world. On one hand, we must realize that this is the level we are at, so we should not fool ourselves by thinking that we really do want it so badly. Therefore, Reb Yisrael Salanter said that our practical *avodah* is that we should indeed *daven* for our own needs on Rosh HaShanah. But on the other hand, it should still bother us that our main concern on Rosh HaShanah isn't about *Malchiyos*.

If it bothers us why we aren't mainly concerned about *Malchiyos*, the pain we have will at least make us become connected to *Malchiyos*. The more these things bother us – and the more we *daven* to Hashem that we should be *zocheh* to leave that self-serving part of ourselves – the more our *tefillos* on Rosh HaShanah will connect us to the purpose of Rosh HaShanah, to *davening* for the *Malchus* of Hashem.

At whatever level one is at, one must be *someiach b'chelko*, happy with what he has. If a person is bothered that he's not at the higher level of only desiring the *Malchus* of Hashem on Rosh HaShanah, then he should be happy with the fact that it bothers him! *The fact that you are bothered by this is already an accomplishment.* Whatever level you have reached, be happy with your level - and at the same time, make sure to aspire for a higher level, to desire the *Malchus* of Hashem. (0134_תפילה)

...One of the major pieces of advice on how to be *zocheh* to a good judgment is that if a person made sure to place Hashem's existence in front of him throughout the rest of the year, he merits a good judgment on Rosh HaShanah. This is accomplished when a person feels during the year that Hashem is the King of all Kings – when one surrenders himself to Hashem as his King, and he willingly accepts Hashem's Kingship over himself. But a person has to want this earnestly. A person has to be ready to give up his whole will for Hashem. Some things a person is willing to give up for Hashem, but there are some things a person has which he is not so willing to give up for Hashem... To accept Hashem as King over you means to willingly accept Him as your King who rules over you, to nullify your will to Him completely, and not because you feel forced to so in any way. If you feel forced at surrendering yourself to Hashem, this is not called accepting Hashem as King over you. The more you accepted Hashem's *ratzon* over your *ratzon* throughout the rest of the year, by letting His *ratzon* rule over you, that is what it means to get close to Hashem, and this is the deepest way to be *zocheh* to the very best judgment. The point is not to "use Hashem" so that we save ourselves from a harsh judgment. Our intention should be that we want to earnestly accept upon ourselves the *Malchus* of Hashem over ourselves, because we seek the truth: Because we are desiring to reveal Hashem onto the world! (תפילה_097_ומלך עלינו מלכויות)