

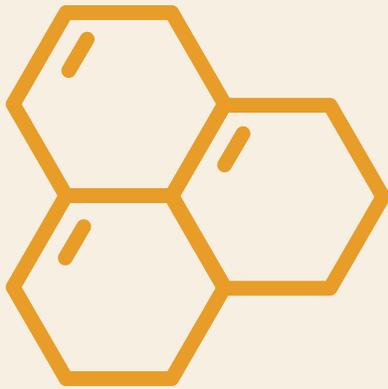
בי"ה

Bringing the High
Holidays Home:

MEANINGFUL READING FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAYS



mitzvahsociety.org



Dear Friend,

The High Holidays are upon us. With a global pandemic still prevalent, it is perhaps more relevant than ever to provide a meaningful and uplifting high holiday experience. Although many will not be able to join High Holiday services in person, we at Mitzvah Society are determined to provide everyone with an opportunity for tapping into the inspiration of the High Holidays. We are proud to present -title- as a means for you to discover the meaning and lessons of the High Holidays.

There is an old story told of a chassid in Eastern Europe, traveling on foot on the way to see his Rebbe. A wagon passes by, and upon seeing this chassid walking along in the winter cold, the driver offers him a ride. Gladly accepting, the chassid hops into the back of the wagon. Finding a place amongst the barrels in the back, the Chassid realizes that the driver is transporting barrels of vodka. Still feeling the cold in his bones, the Chassid turns to the driver and asks if he can have a cup. The driver pleasantly agrees, and the Chassid warms himself up with the strong spirits. And so this Chassid made his way to the Rebbe.

Upon arriving at his Rebbe's court, the Chassid gathered his fellow Chasidim around him and shared the important lesson he had learned on his trip.

"When I first sat in that wagon," the Chassid explained, "I was freezing cold."

"I realized right away that there was vodka around me," the chasid said smilingly, "and that it would provide a welcome warmth and respite from the winter elements. However, so long as the vodka stayed in the barrel, I remained cold. I had to consume the vodka – I had to internalize the vodka, for it to warm me up."

"The same is with the messages and lessons of the High Holidays, continued the chassid, "the stories and meaning surround us, but it only becomes meaningful when we internalize that inspiration!"

Wishing you a happy, healthy sweet new year, and a meaningful and uplifting High Holiday experience – that will warm you through and through!

RH Day 1

Article 1

THE LONG BLAST

Three Sounds

The best-known sound in Jewish tradition is that of the shofar. One long blast is called tekiah. Three short blasts are called shevarim. Nine staccato blasts are called teruah. The blasts are sounded in that order, and the tekiah is then sounded again at the end of the sequence—the single long blast bracketing the other two. What is the significance of repeating this sound?

Wordless Sound

Let's first talk about why we sound the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. If we have something to say on this holy day, why don't we just say it? To trumpet wordless sounds evokes images of cavemen from times when language was nascent and man's verbal capacity was too limited to convey complex ideas. We now know how to articulate our thoughts in language. So why don't we?

The fact is that we articulate plenty during these Days of Awe. We stand for hours on end, turning page after page of prayer and plea. But there is a level of emotion that cannot be articulated, a depth beyond words. That chamber can be accessed only through wordless sound.

Every language has an equivalent for the word "ouch." Yet, no matter which language we speak, when we experience very intense and pervasive pain, we just scream. We don't say "I am in pain." We don't even say "ouch." Instead, we emit a shout so guttural that it communicates pain beyond words.

The same is true of emotion. Some feelings can be communicated through poetry. Deeper emotions, with a glance. Sometimes emotions are so intense that they evoke tears of joy. Some emotions are so powerful, so deep, that all you can do is sigh and say "Aaaah."

Then there is the emotion that is beyond articulation. Even wordless sound can't capture it. That is what we feel on Rosh Hashanah. Our bond with G-d is so deep, vast and pervasive that no humanly emitted sound does it justice. Instead, we use an instrument. It blasts an opening in our hearts powerful enough to release torrents of deeply

held and long-repressed emotions. It blasts an opening in our souls through which untapped yearning for G-d cascades.

Replenishing the River

There is a metaphor given for this transformative experience: You one day realize that, as a result of ecological and climatic factors, your river has run dry. How do you refill it? You dig for a wellspring. And when you reach it, the water rushes to the surface and refills your river. The river will now run at full force again; perhaps it will be even fuller than before.

Our relationship with G-d sometimes runs dry. Throughout the year, we don't notice that the water levels are dipping. There is still plenty of water left in the riverbed, so we don't take note. But when the river runs dry, we can't keep lying to ourselves. We have to sit up and take notice.

On Rosh Hashanah, we take a peek at our river and discover that it is dry. We need to replenish the connection, but from what source can we fill ourselves up? We need to find a new source, because the old well has run dry. This is why we dig deep into our souls, to a place that is as yet untapped, a place that is beyond articulation, to tap a new, fresh, hitherto unexperienced connection with G-d.

In the Holy of Holies

This is why the moment of the shofar sounding is so spiritual and uplifting. We can feel the shofar strum the strings of our soul. We can feel the vibrations deep within, and the stirring release of powerful connections. This is why many Jews who don't frequent the synagogue throughout the year make a point of attending on Rosh Hashanah. How can we miss it? It is the most meaningful and powerful experience in the repertoire of our tradition.

We stand silently and listen, evoking the memory of the high priest in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. He too stood silently, breathing not a word. When he stepped out of the Holy of Holies, he chanted a short prayer, but in the room he was silent.

The connection he felt with G-d in that holy space was indescribable. Beyond words and beyond sound. When he stood there, he was not a private individual. He represented the entire nation. Every soul was within him. And the reverence expe-

rienced by him then reverberated to every soul in the nation, especially to those who were present in the Temple at that time.

We don't have the Temple today, and aren't able to experience the connection with G-d that was present then. And though we await its rebuilding every day with the coming of Moshiach, it is not here yet. In the meantime we must make do with an alternative. The closest we can get to that experience is the wordless inarticulate blast of the shofar.

The Repeating Blast

We now return to the repetition of the tekiah, the single long blast. Of the three sounds, the long blast is the least articulate. Though the other sounds are also wordless, they have character. The shevarim is a groan. The teruah is a sob. They communicate a message that tells us what to feel. The tekiah is just a cry. A deep piercing wail that says nothing. It comes from the depths, and has no message beyond a simple "I am here."

The groaning and sobbing indicate remorse for having allowed our river to run dry. The tekiah is the blast that strikes a wellspring to refill it. The first tekiah is the agonizing cry from our depths. The second tekiah is G-d's response from above. Just like our yearning emerges from our depths, G-d's response emerges from His depths.

From the straits I call to G-d; from a vast expanse G-d responds.¹ Our first blast calls out to G-d from the straits, the deep confined place that has not yet been tapped. The Divine response comes from the celestial wellspring that abounds with love and forgiveness. It is the wellspring that we sought to tap with our blast. The first blast gives voice to our desperation. The second blast gives voice to His answer.

To bring it all together, the sounds of the shofar communicate the following message: Tekiah, we are desperate for G-d, and yearn for G-d from our depths. Shevarim and teruah, we are broken-hearted over having allowed our relationship to run dry. Tekiah, G-d responds with love and says, "Return, My children, return. No matter where you roam, you can always come back home."²

RH Day 1

Article 2

PERFECT VISION

By Sara Esther Crispe

From Chabad.org

I always thought I had perfect vision. I have never needed glasses, and always passed every eye exam with flying colors. But it appears I somehow cheated. As it turns out, I hardly have any vision in my right eye.

The eye doctor explained that all along, my left eye has been compensating. So much so that the weakness never appeared. This did, however, explain why I have no depth perception. For one can only see layers to something with the balance of both eyes. It also gave me a very rational reason (finally!) for why I often bump into things when I walk, not to mention that I walk at an angle and slowly push whoever is walking alongside me into the gutter.

One can only see layers to something with the balance of both eyes. From a Kabbalistic point of view, the left eye symbolizes the idea of judgment, *gevurah*, whereas the right eye is that of *chesed*, lovingkindness. Not great to think that I have been lacking in my lovingkindness when I look at things. But, if I am honest with myself, it shouldn't come as that much of a surprise. I am tough on myself, and I am tough on others. That has always been how I "see" things.

Enter Rosh Hashanah, where for the past month I have been giving and receiving blessings for a good and sweet new year, "shanah tovah." And I have been doing my best to prepare myself for this month of holidays where we are judged, forgiven, and—G-d willing—sealed in the Book of Life for the new year. And while I have thought about my past, and resolved to be healthier, happier, nicer, more patient and other positive qualities in the new year, it recently occurred to me that a sweet new year is not just about what happens during the upcoming year, but how I choose to think about it and thereby see it.

I have taught this concept many times before, but this year it really hit home. Rosh Hashanah literally means "the head of the year," as Rosh Hashanah begins the Jewish new year. But the word for

year, shanah, is also the three-letter root of the word shinui, which means "to change." Chassidic philosophy teaches us that the beginning of the new year requires a shift, a change of head space. Newness takes place when we look at things in a fresh way, in a different way, through new lenses. Change how we think, change our perspective, and we will see the world around us in a new light. Change ourselves, and our lives will change.

Change ourselves, and our lives will change My visit to the eye doctor revealed to me how easy it is to think something is okay, that something is in perfect working order, when in truth it really needs help. How true this is in so much of my life—that only when I delve deeper do I discover that something was lacking that needing tweaking. And just having that awareness, that knowledge, allows us to begin the healing process. And the sweetness that we hope for in the new year will, in part, come from how sweet we choose to see our lives, and how much we work to sweeten the lives of others. For my eyes, this means giving my left eye a bit of a break while I work to strengthen my right one. Not an easy feat, but only by working on a weakness does it have a chance to change.

So as we enter Rosh Hashanah, our New Year, may we all be blessed to have the strength and clarity to look at our past to glean lessons and direction, and with a fresh perspective and new consciousness look to our new year and recognize the opportunities that await us. And may we all truly have a shanah tovah umetukah, a sweet and good new year.

RH Day 1

Story

HOLDING G-D IN HER HANDS

By Tzvi Freeman

From Chabad.org

Once, I saw G-d.

It was on the holy day of Rosh Hashanah, but I wasn't in the synagogue. I was in a hospital on

that very wet morning, in a sterile and depressing geriatrics rehab ward, where a few old bubbies had gathered to hear the sounding of the shofar (the ram's horn sounded on the Jewish New Year).

Every year I do this—blow shofar in the hospitals. Every year, at least one person cries.

This year there was a bubbeh who didn't seem so old. She was very with-it. The sight of a shofar filled her with excitement. She poured out to me memories of her childhood; it seemed the past had just come awake for her. She had grown up steeped in chassidic warmth and soul, and even here in Vancouver it had never left her.

She recited the blessing, and I began to blow the shofar softly but clearly. The tears began to come. I'm used to that already; I just keep going. But when I finished, that's when it was obvious that G-d was there in the room. Because she was talking to Him.

"Oy, zisseh G-tt! Tayereh, zisseh G-tt! Mein zisseh G-tt!"

She was crying and she was holding G-d in her hands. The hands of an old bubbeh holding an infinite, timeless G-d.

She called Him "ziss." I had never heard that before. "Ziss" I had heard applied to desserts and to grandchildren. The Psalms of David and the Song of Songs talked about the Almighty in that way. But this was an old bubbeh. Her voice had that tone of love and compassion, yet she was filled with awe. She was crying with sorrow, with joy, with pain, with longing . . . yet her words were sweet ecstasy.

I can't translate those words she said. It doesn't work in English. "My dear sweet G-d." It just doesn't happen.

Because in English you don't talk to G-d the way a wife talks to her beloved husband, a husband who went away on a distant journey and you never knew if he would return, and now you're suddenly in his arms. Like a mother talks to her small, sweet children, and like a daughter talks to her father who she knows will never abandon her. All in one. In English there is no such thing. But in the Yiddish of her childhood, she could say it.

For me, her cries smashed through the most profound journeys of the philosophers, popping them

like a child pops bubbles in the air, like shadows disappear in the sunshine. They had no meaning here. They are ideas. This is G-d. The real thing. This was revelation. Something the old bubblies had back there, back then. Something we had lost. Almost.

I had to leave to go to the synagogue. She was still in tears. I discovered I was smiling. You'll think I'm insensitive, but I was helpless before this deep, uplifting joy that just arose from inside.

She cried. I was full of joy. Why shouldn't I be? I had just seen G-d face to face. Unzer zisseh G-tt.

RH Day 2

Article 1

FORGET THE RABBI

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

From *theyeshiva.net*

The Last Wish

On Rosh Hashanah night, the Kazaks captured the rabbi, the cantor and the president of the synagogue, and granted them a final wish before they would be put to death.

The Rabbi: All year round I prepare for my Rosh Hashanah sermon. You can't kill me before you let me present this sermon and get it out of my system.

"OK," proclaimed the Kazaks. "We will allow you to give the sermon." They turned to the cantor. "How about you? What is your final wish?"

"For 364 days a year, I prepare for my cantorial presentation on the High Holidays. For this year I composed many new brilliant and extraordinary compositions. You have to let me sing them before you kill me."

"Granted," said the Kazaks. "And you," they said, turning to the president, "what is your final wish?"

"Kill me first," he said.

Sermons and Melodies

It's been a longstanding tradition among Jewish

communities the world over, to employ for the High Holiday services cantors, often accompanied by choirs, to entertain, engage and inspire the multitudes of crowds flocking to synagogues during the three days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

In many a congregation, the cantor embodies the primary focus of the High Holiday experience. As in a concert or opera, the cantor's choice of melodies, his cantorial skills and manipulation of sounds and pitches constitutes the zenith of the services. Especially if the musical presentation is coupled with a rabbi who knows how to tell a good joke or bring a tear to the eye, it is a hands-down success story.

"Spit not in the well from which you drink," suggests the Talmud. I should be the last one to find fault with this phenomenon, since I, too, am employed by a lovely community in New York to serve as a cantor and pontificator. Yet a moving thought from the great master the Baal Shem Tov concerning this "cantor" and "rabbi" phenomenon may be worthwhile for all synagogues and all of us to reflect upon.

An Angry Lion

The Baal Shem Tov, one of the most profound thinkers in the history of Jewish spirituality (1698-1760), once shared this following allegorical story.

Once upon a time, says the Baal Shem Tov, the lion grew furious with all of the other jungle animals. Since the lion is "the king of animal life," and is most powerful and dominant, his ire evoked deep fright in the hearts of the other animals.

"What should we do?" murmured all the animals at an emergency meeting. "If the lion lets out his anger, we are all done."

"No worries," came the voice of the fox, known as the wiliest of animals. "In the reservoirs of my brain are stored 300 stories, anecdotes and vignettes. When I present them to the lion, his mood will be transformed."

A wave of joy rushed through all the animals as they embarked on a march toward the lion's home in the jungle, where the fox would placate him and restore the friendly relationship between the lion and his subjects.

The Fox Forgets

During the journey through the jungle pathways, the fox suddenly turns to one of his animal friends and says, "You know, I forgot 100 of my entertaining stories."

Rumors of the fox's lapse of memory spread immediately. Many animals were overtaken by profound trepidation, but soon came the calming voice of Mr. Bear.

"No worries," he said. "Two hundred vignettes of a brilliant fox are more than enough to get that arrogant lion rolling in laughter and delight.

"They will suffice to do the job," agreed Mr. Wolf.

A little while later, as the extraordinarily large entourage of animals was nearing the lion, Mr. Fox suddenly turned to another colleague. "I have forgotten another 100 of my anecdotes," lamented the fox. "They simply slipped my mind."

The animals' fear became stronger, but soon enough came the reassuring voice of Mr. Deer.

"No worries," he proclaimed, "One hundred fox stories will suffice to capture the imagination of our simple king."

"Yes, 100 jokes will assuage the lion," agreed Mr. Tiger.

A few moments later, all of the hundreds of thousands of animals were at the lion's den. The lion rose to his full might and glory, casting a fierce gaze at all of his subjects, sending a shiver through their veins.

The Moment of Encounter

As the moment of truth arrived, all of the animals looked up with beseeching eyes to their bright representative the fox, to approach the lion and accomplish the great mission of reconciliation.

At that very moment, the fox turned to the animals and said, "I am sorry, but I forgot my last 100 stories. I have nothing left to say to the king."

The animals went into hysteria. "You are a vicious liar," cried they cried. "You deceived us completely. What are we to do now?"

"My job," responded the fox calmly, "was to persuade you to take the journey from your own nests to the lion's nest. I have accomplished my mission. You are here. Now, let each and every single one of you discover his own voice and rehabilitate his own personal relationship with the king."

Lacking a Personal Relationship

This story, concluded the Baal Shem Tov, illustrates a common problem in institutionalized religion. We come to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, or any other time of the year, and we rely on the "foxes" – the cantors and the rabbis – to serve as our representative to the King of Kings.

"The rabbi's sermon today was unbelievable," we often proclaim after services. "He is really awesome." Or, "That cantor? His vibrato just melted my soul." These clergy all-too-often become the "foxes" who know how to get the job done for us.

Yet, sooner or later, we come to realize that the foxes, with all due respect, don't really have what it takes to address the king on behalf of you and me. Each of us must discover his or her own inner voice and inner passion and spirit, and speak to G-d with a distinct and unique.

Cantors and rabbis during the High Holidays (and the rest of the year) ought to view themselves as the Baal Shem Tov's foxes: Their function is to persuade and inspire people to leave their own self-contained domains and embark on a journey toward something far deeper and more real. But each and every one of us must ultimately enter the space of G-d alone.

So this Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, don't rely on any foxes. Speak to G-d directly. With your own words, with your own soul. Heart to heart, from your truest place to His truest place.

RH Day 2

Article 2

BROKEN NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

By Naftali Silberberg

From Chabad.org

New Year's resolutions are an accepted part of society. These resolutions are made by all sorts of people, regardless of their values or religion. The Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, is no exception — it is traditionally a time for positive resolutions

in the realm of Torah and mitzvot.

As we know all too well, many resolutions don't last very long. A study I found on the internet suggested that by the time summer arrives, more than half of all New Year's resolutions taken on January 1st have been long forgotten.

What is the secret to maintaining our resolve in the long term?

What is the secret to maintaining our resolve in the long term? The desire for the next year to be more fulfilling than the past one is a basic human characteristic. While the human being has many natural needs and desires, both physical and emotional, a feeling of mission and accomplishment is perhaps the most basic human need. Regardless of degree of affluence or social status, a person who feels accomplished is a happy person and a successful person, and vice versa. This is what distinguishes the human from the animal, as Solomon writes, "The spirit of the Man is that which ascends on high, and the spirit of the animal is that which descends below to the earth."¹ Whereas the animal is primarily concerned with its coarse and base "earthly" needs and desires, the refined human is constantly seeking to ascend yet higher, realizing that as much as he or she may have accomplished, there is always plenty of room for improvement.

But here lies the problem. A resolution which is predicated on satisfying one's own needs will be broken as soon as the person feels another, more pressing, need or desire. Yesterday, I may have decided that the most important thing for me is to wake up early every day to exercise, but as I lie in bed this morning after having gone to sleep at 1:00 a.m., I suddenly feel that my sleep is infinitely more important than exercise! One human need can always cancel out another human need.

The Torah's approach to positive resolutions, however, is quite different. The resolve to change one's ways is an integral part of the mitzvah of teshuvah (repentance), and teshuvah is not at all based on the human emotional need for improvement. Teshuvah isn't, "Oh my, I've had another lousy year, I feel lousy, I got to be better." Rather, teshuvah is the realization that our purpose on this world to serve our Creator, and unfortunately, we are not serving G-d to the best of our abilities. Teshuvah means regretting our past indiscretions because they violated G-d's will, and resolving to be a true servant of G-d's in the upcoming year.

A commitment which results from genuine teshuvah will be lasting, because after accepting upon oneself the yoke of Heaven, no other "pressing" human desire will interfere with the firm resolution to be a servant of G-d.

"Israel will be redeemed only through teshuvah. However, the Torah has guaranteed that at the end of the Exile the Jews will do teshuvah and be immediately redeemed."² Let us repent properly; and may we usher in a sweet new year, the year of our sorely awaited Redemption.

RH Day 2

Story

A NOVEL AUDIT

From meaningfullife.com

With the approach of Rosh Hashanah as we close the past year and welcome the new, what better time for auditing our experiences in the past year so that we can better them in the year to come. Each one of us does so in our own personal way. Yet, there is something we can all learn from Moshe the innkeeper who employed a unique method of accounting.

The Baal Shem Tov's students once asked how to prepare for the High Holidays. He sent them to observe the simple innkeeper, Moshe. The students took a room in his inn, and waited to discover the answer to their question. At midnight before Rosh Hashanah they heard Moshe rustling about in the front room. They peeked out and saw Moshe taking down two large notebooks from the shelf. He sat down on a small stool, lit a candle, and began reading from one notebook.

The notebook was a diary of all the misdeeds and transgressions the innkeeper had committed in the course of the year – the date, time and circumstance of each scrupulously noted. His "sins" were quite benign — a word of gossip one day, oversleeping the time for prayer on another, neglecting to give his daily coin to charity on a third — but by the time Moshe had read through the first few pages, his face was bathed in tears. For more than an hour Moshe read and wept, until the last page had been turned.

He then opened up the second notebook. This, too, was a diary — of all the troubles and misfortunes that had befallen him in the course of the year. On this day Moshe was beaten by a gang of peasants, on that day his child fell ill; once, in the dead of winter, the family had frozen for several nights for lack of firewood; another time their cow had died, and there was no milk until enough pennies had been saved to buy another.

When he had finished reading the second notebook, the tavernkeeper lifted his eyes heavenward and said:

"So you see, dear Father in Heaven, I have sinned against You. Last year I repented and promised to fulfill Your commandments, but I repeatedly succumbed to my evil inclination. But last year I also prayed and begged You for a year of health and prosperity, and I trusted in You that it would indeed be this way.

"Dear Father, today is the eve of Rosh Hashanah, when everyone forgives and is forgiven. Let us put the past behind us. I didn't always do what was asked of me and You didn't always do what was asked of You. I forgive you and you forgive me, and we'll call it even."

YK

Article 1

YOM KIPPUR: YOUR INNER CHILD

By: Rabbi Simon Jacobson

From meaningful life.com

A few days ago my good friend sent me a picture of himself as a young boy. Pure. Innocent. Beautiful. Vulnerable.

This friend had grown up in a fractured home. Estranged from abusive parents he was excited to discover a picture from his childhood.

But my friend's anguished words brought tears to my eyes. "What happened to that little boy?" he asked with resignation dripping from his words.

"I look at myself today and don't recognize that child. Not the wonder in his eyes, not the simple smile on his lips. Not his clear complexion. That small, innocent child is lost forever..."

I hung up the phone and wept. Not for the lost child, but for something far deeper: For my friend's self-induced certainty that his purity is lost, when in truth it is right there inside of him, and I, for one, am able to see it.

Was it a coincidence that this incident happened just as we are about to enter Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year? Rhetorical question.

Yom Kippur was the only time of the year when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. All year round no person ever entered this holy place. Anyone entering would not survive. Like a blinding light, the exposed spirituality of the place could not be contained and consumed all who entered.

Even when the High Priest would enter on Yom Kippur, it was only for a short while and after extensive preparations. Furthermore, he entered bound in ropes to drag him out if he carried any blemish and would perish as he entered!

What exactly is the Holy of Holies and why was it so inaccessible? What is the significance of entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur?

The mystics explain that Yom Kippur – which the Torah coins "achas b'sheno" (lit. once a year) – refers to the "achas," the oneness and unity of the innermost dimension of the soul – yechida sheb'nefesh.

The soul as it were is comprised of five dimensions, one curled into the next: The surface level of the soul is Nefesh – sensory life. Layer two is Ruach – emotional life. Next is Neshomo – intellectual life, Chaya – transcendental and finally Yechida – oneness – the pure essence of the soul. Yechida, oneness, is the pintele yid – the inner dot, the purest point of your most intimate self. The inner child of innocence.

Our most tangible experiences are on the outer layers of the soul; what our surface senses and basic consciousness can perceive. But our truest and most meaningful experiences are on the inner levels of the soul, the deepest of them all – on the yechida level.

However, the deepest recesses of the soul are shrouded within its outer layers, which in turn are

encased in the hard crust of the physical body and material universe.

This is the story of our lives. We are born pure and innocent children. Children who dream enchanted dreams, believe that everything is possible and expect the most. Vulnerable children – unpolluted and uncorrupted. Then life's challenges being to seep into our experiences. We slowly (some faster than others) learn about deceit, disappointments and unrealized expectations. As the years roll on the outer layers of our soul and the body's shell harden, innocence lost and expectations lowered. As we experience harsher realities many of our dreams and idealism wanes, until many of us come to a point of silent resignation, distracting ourselves with outer stimulation, anything that will relieve our existential loneliness. Some develop sharper tools like cynicism.

As much as we crave intimacy which resonates deep within us, the sad fact is that sensory stimulation consumes our daily lives, obfuscating our innocent essence, to the point that our inner life is most often left wanting if not plain starving.

So is there hope? Can we reach our inner child?

The answer is yes, but it is not a simple process.

Entering the souls' holy of holies is not a light matter. We don't enter there at will and without great care. Being the purest place in your heart and the most intimate dimension of the soul, yechida (the holy of holies) is extremely sensitive. Every subtle move, even the slightest quiver, has a dramatic impact on that most tender of places in our psyches. Observe a newborn child's' ultra sensitivity to touch and surroundings. This is why abuse that touches our intimacy, especially as young children, has such devastating consequences. By means of analogy: A strand of hair on your sleeve is harmless, but in your eye it is highly irritating. Our outer organs are protected from bacteria, but exposing our internal organs requires a highly sterilized environment. The subtler and purer the place, the greater the care necessary to preserve its pristine character.

But one day a year we are given the power to enter our holy of holies. And we enter with great care: We fast and suspend, as much as possible, our immersion in the material world. We spend the day in prayer and clothed in white – all to set the proper ambiance to enter the holiest place in our souls.

That one day is Yom Kippur – the day of the fifth dimension (hence, five prayers), when we celebrate yechida: The one and only day in the year when each of us has the power to access our innocence. On this day you can become like the High Priest and enter your own holy of holies.

On Yom Kippur you return to your child, to your innocence, to your purest place. But this time, the innocence and exuberance of the child comes joined with the seasoning and experience of an adult. [One of the most awesome sights is to witness the fusion of adulthood and childhood. Observe an elder who still maintains the twinkle – the spunk, enthusiasm and possibilities – of youth].

And therein lays the power of Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur tells us that your child is never lost. Perhaps concealed. Maybe deeply concealed. Your child may be hiding. After your child has been hurt and disappointed, after he or she has seen how cruel people can be – your child goes into hiding. What emerges is an adult with a metal sheet of armor, an extensive and complex battery of defense mechanisms, protecting the vulnerable child from the pains of the world. Sometimes the child is so well concealed that the "mature adult" cannot even see his own child within.

But then we are given a day like Yom Kippur, when we are able to open the doors, and peer inside. And as we do – the child within is given the power, permission and strength to peer out back to us.

Can you see your child?

Even the most cynical among (and within) us has a pure side. Even the most jaded has a moment of truth. Yom Kippur teaches us the most vital message of hope: Never give up on your self – on your inner, pure self. No matter how challenging your life has become, no matter how worn down you are, despite your bitter disappointments, losses and wounds – your inner child always remains intact.

Even if you give up on everything, never give up on that pure child that lies embedded within you. That child – the holiest part of your heart and soul – may be your last vestige of your greatest potential, and the last refuge of hope.

If nothing else – one day a year hold on to what is

most dear. Give your child, your soul, a chance to speak to you.

Cherish your child. Protect her. Nurture her tenderness. Above all, be kind to her. After all, she is you – the best of you.

Last night I presented a workshop on Yom Kippur. My friend's lost hope in his inner child planted an idea in my mind which I subsequently suggested to the audience: As a Yom Kippur exercise to access your own innocent essence, find a childhood picture of yourself and study the photo. Then juxtapose it over your life today. Ask yourself: How far have I wandered from my own innocence? How much purity have I lost? How did I get from there to here? And how can I retrieve that purer part of myself? Ask G-d to help you find ways to reclaim your own innocence.

And perhaps, perhaps – as the Yom Kippur curtain closes with setting of the sun and the child goes back into hiding, she will feel a bit safer to show her face more often than just once a year.

The next day I called my friend and told him: Your painful hopelessness has given hope to a few hundred people.

I could feel the warm smile on the other end of the line.

YK

Article 2

TESHUVAH, TEFILLA AND TZEDAKAH

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

From Chabad.org

The following talk by the Rebbe is about the difficulties of translation itself.

The act of translation assumes that for every word in one language, equivalents can be found in another. But this may be untrue, especially when we are dealing with ideas that are central and unique to Judaism.

We may then fall into the error of equating a Jewish idea with one drawn from another culture

when the two are in fact dissimilar, even opposite.

This is the case with the three words constantly on our minds during the Ten Days of Teshuvah. In English they are repentance, prayer and charity.

How far these differ from their Jewish counterparts – teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah – the Rebbe emphatically explains.

The Service of the Ten Days

We express the hope that on Rosh Hashanah G-d blessed us with a "good and sweet year" to come, a year made fruitful by children, health and sustenance.

But there is no limit to goodness and blessing. Thus, during the Ten Days of Teshuvah we have the opportunity through our service, to cause G-d to grant us yet greater benefits from His "full and expansive hand."

What is this service? It is, as we say in our prayers, "repentance, prayer and charity" which avert evil and bring the good. But the words "repentance, prayer and charity" are misleading.

By thus translating the Hebrew terms teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah we are led into a false comparison of these three elements of the religious life as they exist in Judaism and outside it.

In fact, there are crucial differences. Teshuvah is not repentance. Tefillah is not prayer. And tzedakah is not charity.

Teshuvah and Repentance

"Repentance" in Hebrew is not teshuvah but charatah. Not only are these two terms not synonymous. They are opposites.

Charatah implies remorse or a feeling of guilt about the past and an intention to behave in a completely new way in the future. The person decides to become "a new man." But teshuvah means "returning" to the old, to one's original nature.

Underlying the concept of teshuvah is the fact that the Jew is, in essence, good. Desires or temptations may deflect him temporarily from being himself, being true to his essence.

But the bad that he does is not part of, nor does it affect, his real nature. Teshuvah is a return to

the self.

While repentance involves dismissing the past and starting anew, teshuvah means going back to one's roots in G-d and exposing them as one's true character.

For this reason, while the righteous have no need to repent, and the wicked may be unable to, both may do teshuvah.

The righteous, though they have never sinned, have constantly to strive to return to their innermost. And the wicked, however distant they are from G-d, can always return, for teshuvah does not involve creating anything new, only rediscovering the good that was always within them.

Tefillah and Prayer

"Prayer" in Hebrew is not tefillah but bakashah. And again these terms are opposites. Bakashah means to pray, request, beseech. But tefillah means, to attach oneself.

In bakashah the person asks G-d to provide him, from above, with what he lacks. Therefore when he is not in need of anything, or feels no desire for a gift from above, bakashah becomes redundant.

But in tefillah the person seeks to attach himself to G-d. It is a movement from below, from man, reaching towards G-d. And this is something appropriate to everyone and at every time.

The Jewish soul has a bond with G-d. But it also inhabits a body, whose preoccupation with the material world may attenuate that bond.

So it has constantly to be strengthened and renewed. This is the function of tefillah. And it is necessary for every Jew.

For while there may be those who do not lack anything and thus have nothing to request of G-d, there is no-one who does not need to attach himself to the source of all life.

Tzedakah and Charity

The Hebrew for "charity" is not tzedakah but chessed. And again these two words have opposite meanings.

Chessed, charity, implies that the recipient has no right to the gift and that the donor is under no obligation to give it. He gives it gratuitously, from

the goodness of his heart. His act is a virtue rather than a duty.

On the other hand tzedakah means righteousness or justice. The implication is that the donor gives because it is his duty. For, firstly, everything in the world belongs ultimately to G-d. A man's possessions are not his by right. Rather, they are entrusted to him by G-d, and one of the conditions of that trust is that he should give to those who are in need.

Secondly, a man has a duty to act towards others as he asks G-d to act towards him. And as we ask G-d for His blessings though He owes us nothing and is under no obligation, so we are bound in justice to give to those who ask us, even though we are in no way in their debt. In this way we are rewarded: Measure for measure. Because we give freely, G-d gives freely to us.

This applies in particular to the tzedakah which is given to support the institutions of Torah learning. For everyone who is educated in these institutions is a future foundation of a house in Israel, and a future guide to the coming generation. This will be the product of his tzedakah – and his act is the measure of his reward.

Three Paths

These are the three paths which lead to a year "written and sealed" for good.

By returning to one's innermost self (teshuvah), by attaching oneself to G-d (tefillah) and by distributing one's possessions with righteousness (tzedakah), one turns the promise of Rosh Hashanah into the abundant fulfillment of Yom Kippur: A year of sweetness and plenty.

YK
Story

THE YOM KIPPUR DRUNK

As told by Yanki Tauber

From Chabad.org

Those who arrived early at the village synagogue

on Yom Kippur eve could not but notice the man sleeping in a corner. His soiled clothes, and the strong scent of alcohol that hovered about him, attested to the cause of his slumber at this early hour. A Jew drunk on the eve of the Holy Day? Several of the congregants even suggested that the man be expelled from the synagogue.

Soon the room filled to overflowing, mercifully concealing the sleeping drunk from all but those who stood in his immediate vicinity. As the sun made to dip below the horizon, a hush descended upon the crowd. The Rebbe entered the room and made his way to his place at the eastern wall. At a signal from the Rebbe, the ark was opened, and the gabbai began taking out the Torah scrolls in preparation for the Kol Nidrei service.

This was the moment that the drunk chose to rise from his slumber, climb the steps to the raised reading platform in the center of the room, pound on the reading table, and announce: "Ne'um attah horeita!" Apparently, the crowded room, Torah scrolls being carried out of the open ark, seen through a drunken haze, appeared to the man as the beginning of hakafot on Simchat Torah! The drunk was confusing the most solemn moment of the year with its most joyous and high-spirited occasion.

The scandalized crowd was about to eject the man from the room when the Rebbe turned from the wall and said: "Let him be. For him, it's already time for hakafot. He's there already."

On the following evening, as the Rebbe sat with his chassidim at the festive meal that follows the fast, he related to them the story of Reb Shmuel, the Kol Nidrei drunk.

On the morning of the eve of the Holy Day, Reb Shmuel had heard of a Jew who, together with his wife and six small children, had been imprisoned for failing to pay the rent on the establishment he held on lease from the local nobleman. Reb Shmuel went to the nobleman to plead for their release, but the nobleman was adamant in his refusal. "Until I see every penny that is owed to me," he swore, "the Jew and his family stay where they are. Now get out of here before I unleash my dogs on you."

"I cannot allow a Jewish family to languish in a

dungeon on Yom Kippur," resolved Reb Shmuel and set out to raise the required sum, determined to achieve their release before sunset.

All day, he went from door to door. People gave generously to a fellow Jew in need, but by late afternoon Reb Shmuel was still 300 rubles short of the required sum. Where would he find such a large sum of money at this late hour? Then he passed a tavern and saw a group of well-dressed young men sitting and drinking. A card-game was underway, and a sizable pile of banknotes and gold and silver coins had already accumulated on the table.

At first he hesitated to approach them at all: what could one expect from Jews who spend the eve of the Holy Day drinking and gambling in a tavern? But realizing that they were his only hope, he approached their table and told them of the plight of the imprisoned family.

They were about to send him off empty-handed, when one of them had a jolly idea: wouldn't it be great fun to get a pious Jew drunk on Yom Kippur? Signaling to a waiter, the man ordered a large glass of vodka. "Drink this down in one gulp," he said to the Reb Shmuel, "and I'll give you 100 rubles."

Reb Shmuel looked from the glass that had been set before him to the sheaf of banknotes that the man held under his nose. Other than a sip of l'chayim on Shabbat and at weddings, Reb Shmuel drank only twice a year — on Purim and Simchat Torah, when every chassid fuels the holy joy of these days with generous helpings of inebriating drink so that the body should rejoice along with the soul. And the amount of vodka in this glass — actually, it more resembled a pitcher than a glass — was more than he would consume on both those occasions combined. Reb Shmuel lifted the glass and drank down its contents.

"Bravo!" cried the man, and handed him the 100 rubles. "But this is not enough," said Reb Shmuel, his head already reeling from the strong drink. "I need another 200 rubles to get the poor family out of prison!"

"A deal's a deal!" cried the merrymakers. "One hundred rubles per glass! Waiter! Please refill this glass for our drinking buddy!"

Two liters and two hundred rubles later, Reb Shmuel staggered out of the tavern. His alcohol-fogged mind was oblivious to all — the stares

of his fellow villagers rushing about in their final preparations for the Holy Day, the ferocious barking of the nobleman's dogs, the joyous tears and profusions of gratitude of the ransomed family — except to the task of handing over the money to the nobleman and finding his way to the synagogue. For he knew that if he first went home for something to eat before the fast, he would never make it to shul for Kol Nidrei.

"On Rosh HaShanah," the Rebbe concluded his story, "we submitted to the sovereignty of Heaven and proclaimed G-d king of the universe.

Today, we fasted, prayed and repented, laboring to translate our commitment to G-d into a refined past and an improved future. Now we are heading towards Sukkot, in which we actualize and rejoice over the attainments of the 'Days of Awe' through the special mitzvot of the festival — a joy that reaches its climax in the hakafot of Simchat Torah. But Reb Shmuel is already there. When he announced the beginning of hakafot at Kol Nidrei last night, this was no 'mistake.' For us, Yom Kippur was just beginning; for him, it was already Simchat Torah...."



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