

## A Fresh Start

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

The *Rama* (*Orach Chaim* 582:9) writes that on *Rosh Hashanah*, people should wish each other, "*Leshanah tovah tikoseiv*. May you be inscribed for a good year."

The *Mogen Avrohom* (*ibid.*) adds to the wish that we offer to each other. He says that we should wish others, "*Leshanah tovah tikoseiv veseichoseim*," that they should not only be written for a good year, but also that their good fate should immediately be sealed.

He explains that this is because upon their judgment on *Rosh Hashanah*, the *tzaddikim* are immediately written down in the Book of Life and sealed there. *Beinonim* (see *Rosh Hashanah* 16b) are penciled in, so to speak, and when they do *teshuvah* and add sources of merit to their account, they are granted a *shanah tovah*. We are to view others as *tzaddikim* and extend to them the greeting that is appropriate for *tzaddikim*.

The *Taz* (*ibid.*, 4) adds that although we should view other people as *tzaddikim*, every person should view himself as a *beinoni*.

Someone who is able to view others as *tzaddikim* conveys that he has undergone *teshuvah* and thus can view others favorably and want the best for them. Someone who wishes others, "*Leshanah tovah tikoseiv veseichoseim*," indicates that he is no longer encumbered by *middos ra'os*. He has reached the level of *anovah*, humility, that is praised. This indicates that he has been successful in achieving *teshuvah*.

The *Gemara* (*Avodah Zorah* 20b) cites Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi, who holds that *anovah* is the highest level a person can reach. *Tosafos* (*ibid.*) quotes a *Medrash* (*Maseches Derech Eretz Rabbah* 7), which states that three attributes are equal to each other: *yiras chet*, *chochmah* and *anovah*, fear of sin, knowledge and humility. He explains that a person cannot attain one level without the others; a person who is humble is also a *yorei chet* who has *chochmah*.

The *Gemara* in *Maseches Taanis* (30b) discusses the concept that the most joyous days for *Klal Yisroel* are the fifteenth of *Av* and *Yom Kippur*. The *Gemara* explains that it is easy to understand the greatness of *Yom Kippur*, because on that day, Jews can be forgiven for their sins, as evidenced by the fact that the second set of *Luchos* was delivered to *Klal Yisroel* on *Yom Kippur* after they had repented for the sin that caused Moshe to break the first set.

It would seem that the two attributes of the day are intertwined. Not only was the re-giving of the *Luchos* on *Yom Kippur* a sign that *Klal Yisroel* had been forgiven for the *chet ha'Eigel*, but by being given the *Luchos*, we were once again granted the power of the Torah. Torah raises us and brings us closer to Hashem.

A person who dedicates his life to Torah becomes sanctified, as his life takes on added significance. Just as *teshuvah* allowed the *Dor Hamidbor* to recover after the *Eigel*, it allows the sinner in our day to return to Hashem's embrace.

We seek to become closer to Hashem. Torah is the prime means of accomplishing that.

This is why as *Rosh Hashanah* begins, we greet people in a way that indicates humility, for by displaying that we are humble, we are also showing that we have reached the other levels of human achievement and are *yerei chet* who have *chochmah*, Torah knowledge. On the night when we do things to remind us of the need to rectify ourselves to be able to pass judgment on the impending *Yom Hadin*, we do this as well.

Following the *shofar* blasts of *Malchiyos*, *Zichronos* and *Shofaros*, we ask Hashem to look at us "*im kevonim im ka'avodim.*" Either view us as children and pity us as a father pities his offspring or look at us as slaves and recognize that our gaze is fixed upon You until we find favor in Your eyes and are judged favorably.

Thus, we recite twice daily the *kappitel* of *L'Dovid*, for it refers to our *bitachon* in Hashem: "*ori veyishi,*" our light and hope. Even as others abandon us, seek to entrap us, and declare war on us, "*bezos ani voteiach,*" we maintain our faith that Hashem will assist us. During the *Yomim Noraim* period, as the *Soton* seeks to prevent us from getting closer to Hashem and disparages us before Him, we believe that He will look upon us with kindness and love.

*Rosh Hashanah* is the day when our fates are decided. The day is awesome and frightening. Everything that will happen in the coming year is decided on this day.

With gratitude for the good we have enjoyed in the past year, we stand at the onset of the new year like poor people, begging for our needs. We seek sources of merit that will shield us from the *din*, from anguish and agony, and from tragedy and despair.

We ask for life, for as healthy as our diet is, and despite doing exercise, there is no guarantee for good health. The price of food and many basics have risen so high that many people are unable to make ends meet. There is little we can do about it. We look for *menuchas hanefesh, shidduchim, nachas*, good health, and more, knowing that on *Rosh Hashanah* our fates for the upcoming year are decided.

We stand before Hashem and say that we have examined our actions of the previous year and will do what we must to merit the gift of another year.

How do we earn a better year?

How does a person arrive at *teshuvah*? Doing so requires conducting a *cheshbon hanefesh*. We subject our deepest selves to scrutiny and review how we acted throughout the year. Then we set about correcting our character flaws and rectifying the mistakes and errors of judgments we made.

We think about the times we were apathetic about performing a *mitzvah*, and if there was an *aveirah*, we must remove its stains and resolve to be more serious about the *mitzvos* and the Torah.

*Teshuvah* is humbling, as it reminds us of our place in creation and prompts a greater appreciation of Hashem's role in one's life.

*Teshuvah* returns us to where we were before we sinned. It sets us on the path we should have been on and provides us the energy we need to be properly and thoroughly engaged.

*Teshuvah* triggers an outpouring of sincere *tefillah*. With a fresh awareness of how small and helpless we are in the face of life's frightening precariousness comes a spontaneous outpouring of *tefillah*. We proclaim Hashem's supremacy over all of existence. We thank Him for His daily kindnesses, and we beg that we merit His continued generosity.

*Middos tovos* and proper ethics are prerequisites for *teshuvah*, for *ga'avah* prevents a person from recognizing his shortcomings and his dependence on Hashem. A conceited person is not able to reach the level of understanding required to draw himself closer to his Master. He remains entrenched in sin and self-indulgence, even as he goes through the motions of religiosity.

*Ga'avah* derails an individual from properly preparing for *Rosh Hashanah* and from becoming a special person.

*Ga'avah* prevents a person from helping others. An arrogant individual looks down upon others and views them askance, with a measure of scorn and hate. His negative *middah* keeps him from using his gifts to help others. He views others as somehow deficient and inferior to himself.

This is what the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:8) refers to when he writes, "*Baalei teshuvah darkan lihiyos shifeilim va'anavim b'yoser.*"

In the face of the *yeitzer hora's* plots against our repentance, we have to offset the many challenges that prevent us from becoming better people. One of the most effective strategies, the *Gemara* tells us, is *chochmah*.

The *posuk* in *Mishlei* states, "*Emor lechochmah achosi at.*" The *Gemara* in *Maseches Brachos* (17a) explains that the ultimate purpose of *chochmah* is *teshuvah* and *maasim tovim*.

In order to overcome the *yeitzer hora*, we have to strengthen our ability to use *chochmah*. Only with *chochmah* can we subdue the *yeitzer*, as the *posuk* (*Mishlei* 24) states, "*Betachbulos ta'aseh lecha milchamah,*" in fighting your enemy – the *yeitzer hora* – you have to use *chochmah* to outwit him.

*Chochmah* is acquired by learning Torah, which touches our inner core, raises us, and puts us back on course, following the literal translation of the word *teshuvah*, to return.

The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a) states that *Rosh Hashanah* is the day when Yosef was freed from the Egyptian jail, as well as the day that marked the end of crushing slavery for the Jews in Mitzrayim. Thus, in addition to being a day of judgment, *Rosh Hashanah* is also a day of redemption. On this day, we can all be released from enslavement to the *yeitzer hora* and to the web of desires that ensnares us. The *avodas hayom* and the day's built-in redemptive power can return us to an earlier, more ennobled state.

Once a person reaches that higher level of spiritual awareness brought on by *teshuvah*, he realizes that he is not superior to other people, who were created just as he was, *b'tzelem Elokim*. His eyes open to the plight of the many people in this world who are in need of assistance, evoking his sympathy and compassion. As part of the spiritual growth triggered by *teshuvah* and *tefillah*, he has a growing awareness that it is not enough to care for himself and satisfy his own indulgences. He must share his blessings with others.

The *baal teshuvah* has attained a new level of contentment reserved for those who are humble and walk in the path of Hashem.

When *teshuvah*, *tefillah* and *tzedakah* flow naturally, a person indicates that he has reached the level of observance required to prevail in the *din* of *Rosh Hashanah*. Thus, with our hearts focused on implementing the lessons embedded in these words, we proclaim, "*Useshuvah usefillah utzedakah maavirin es ro'a hagezeirah.*"

We work to reach that level and find favor in Hashem's eyes, so that He will bless us all with a *kesivah vachasimah tovah*.

But then there are those who, as hard as they try, feel that they have not been able to return to a life without sin and blemish. What are they to do? Should they give up? Is it possible that *teshuvah* wasn't meant for them?

The *novi* Yirmiyohu speaks to such people in the *haftarah* we read on the second day of *Rosh Hashanah*.

The *novi* proclaims (*Yirmiyohu* 31:17), "*Shamoa shomati Efraim misnodeid. I have heard Efraim moaning. He is saying, 'Yisartani va'ivaseir k'eigel lo lumod. You have rebuked me and I have accepted Your punishment like an untrained calf. Hashiveini ve'ashuvah ki Atah Hashem Elokey. Bring me back and I shall return.'*"

The *Bais Haleivi*, in his *peirush al haTorah* in *Parshas Vayishlach*, as an addendum printed on the bottom of the page, says that *Klal Yisroel* asks

Hashem to help us return to Him with *teshuvah*. We say that we are *k'eigel lo lomud*, like an uneducated calf.

The *Bais Halevi* explains that we say to Hashem, "Please don't punish us. As a young calf, who has no idea about where to go, we have been whipped as we have veered from the proper path, but we are not able to get back on. We are lost. *Hashiveini*. Please, Hashem, bring me back. Return me to the proper path, but without the whip. Show me the way. Show me where I should be going and how I should behave, *ve'ashuvah*, and I will return and remain on the path You have charted for me."

*Teshuvah* is for everyone. We all want to return to Torah and behave as Hashem intended for us. At times, it is difficult for us to right ourselves and we require painful reminders.

There is a concept in *halacha* of *kofin oso ad sheyomar rotzeh ani* (*Rambam, Hilchos Geirushin 2:20*). Even if a Jew proclaims that he does not want to follow *halacha*, if he is beaten and submits and declares that he will do what is incumbent upon him, we accept his declaration. The *Rambam* (*ibid.*) explains that "*rotzeh hu la'asos kol hamitzvos ulehistracheik min ha'aveiros, veyitzro hu shetakfo, vekivon shehukah ad shetoshash yitzro ve'omer rotzeh ani...*" Every Jew wants to observe the *mitzvos*, but his *yeitzer hora* overcomes him. Therefore, when the evil inclination is beaten down and the person says that he wants to do the *mitzvah*, we accept his declaration as if he willingly observed the *halacha*.

Everyone essentially wants to do *teshuvah* and return to Hashem's embrace, but some find it difficult to overcome their habits and the *yeitzer hora*, which

leads them astray. They feel removed from *kedusha* and Torah and fear that they can never rid themselves of their addictions and sins. If they would only call out, "*Hashiveini!* Hashem, help me. Bring me back," then *ve'ashuvah*, they would be able to return. No one should ever give up on themselves, and we should never give up on anyone.

"*Zeh hayom techilas ma'asecha.*" *Rosh Hashanah* is not just the commemoration of the first day of creation, but an opportunity to experience creation anew, and in the process renew our own personal circumstances.

On *Rosh Hashanah*, we *daven* for a year of new beginnings that will improve our experiences over the past year. We seek to merit a year of positive developments for ourselves and our families, keeping sadness and failure in the past.

We examine ourselves and, instead of being upset that we are not as good as we would like to be and were not able to realize all of our goals, we recognize that even if last year didn't turn out as good as we would have wanted, this year can be different.

*Hayom haras olam.* Today is the day of creation. Not just back when the world was created 5,783 years ago, but also today and now. *Hayom yaamid bamishpot kol yetzurei olamim.* Today, the forces of creation are strongly present, as Hashem judges all His creatures and decides what type of year they will have. The day of *Rosh Hashanah* marks a new start for everyone. The realization of the new beginning provides us with the confidence that we are never stuck in a rut. With *teshuvah*, we can climb out of the mess we got into and be granted a new and better life during the year ahead.

*Rosh Hashanah* provides us with an awareness that allows us to believe that we can change. Everything can change. We can do it over.

In the *shofar's* plaintive wail, we hear echoes of the blasts that were sounded at *Har Sinai*, when *Klal Yisroel* was formed into the nation of *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*. The *shofar* then proclaimed a new beginning. The world had reached its destiny. Ahead was much hope and promise.

The *shofar* was also blown at *Yovel*. When we blow it on *Rosh Hashanah*, it hints at the independence of the *Yovel* year, the collective song of freedom chanted by so many released slaves going home to begin life anew. The earth, as well, joins in the process, as land returns to its original owners in *Yovel*. We are reminded that we can all start again. We can get a fresh start, a new lease on life. Whatever happened in the past will stay in the past. It won't weigh us down. We can get rid of the things that didn't go right, the things we did wrong, and the mistakes we made, and begin anew, unencumbered.

Last year, we drove an old jalopy, with old tires, bad seats, roll up windows, and a leaky radiator. Last year, we were a regular at the mechanic, fixing and patching. This coming year, we can have a brand new beauty, in perfect running order, without any of the problems we had last year getting from place to place. It all depends on us: how we *daven*, how we learn, how we conduct ourselves. Learn some *mussar*. Learn the *Rambam's Hilchos Teshuvah*. Listen to a couple of *shmuessen*. Make up your mind that *Tof Shin Pey Gimmel* will be your break-out year.

If you believe it, then it will be. Believe in Hashem. Believe in yourself. And you'll be well on the way.

May we all be granted a new lease on life, and a year of *brocha, hatzlocha, aliyah*, good health, *nachas, parnossah*, and everything good.

*Kesivah vachasimah tovah.*