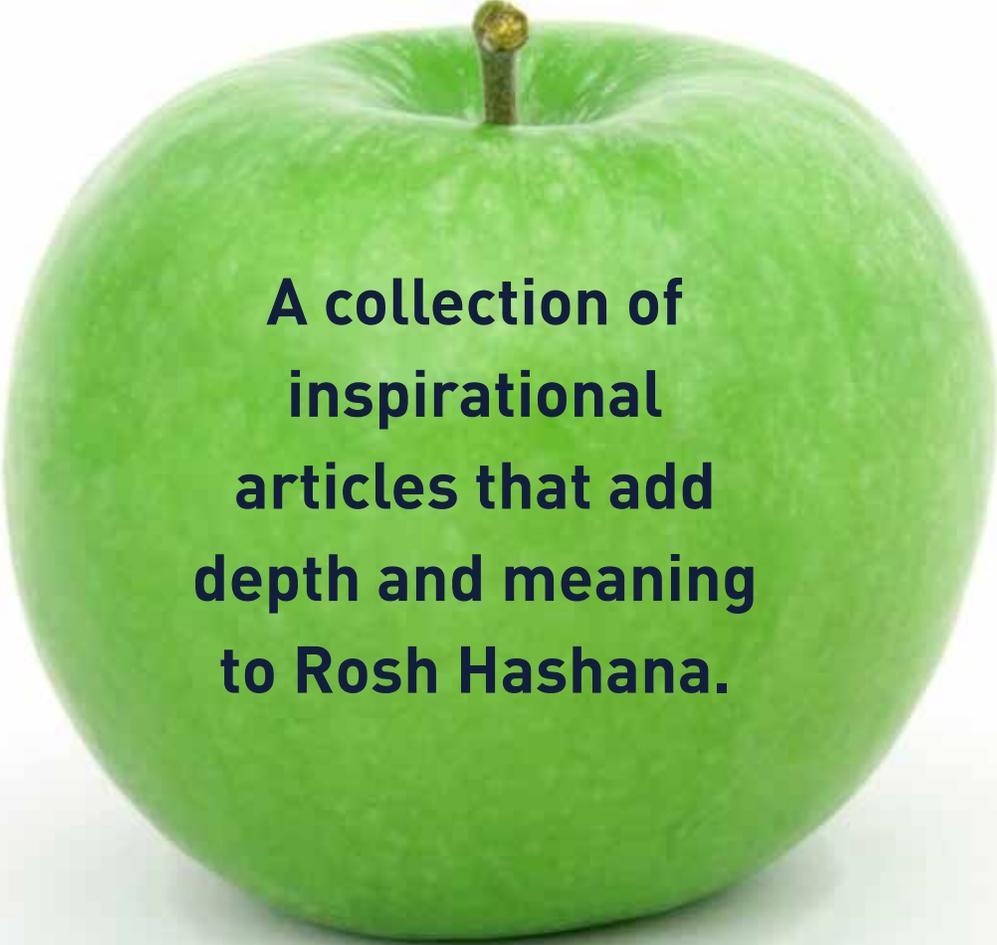


The Pardes
**Rosh
Hashana**
Companion



**A collection of
inspirational
articles that add
depth and meaning
to Rosh Hashana.**



Our Prayers. To What End?



Leon Morris

Rabbi Leon A. Morris is the President of Pardes.

The most distinctive element of the liturgy of Rosh Hashana is the unique structure of the Musaf service. The Musaf Amida is comprised of nine blessings. The first three blessings are standard, *Avot, Gevurot, Kedushat HaShem*, as are the last three blessings, *Avodah, Modim and Shalom*. Generally, on Shabbat and Yom Tov, we insert a single blessing about the holiness of the day, *kedushat haYom*, in the center, bringing us to a total of seven blessings. However, the Rosh Hashana Amida places three blessings in the center:

- *Malchiyot* (on the theme of God's sovereignty)
- *Zichronot* (on the theme of what God remembers)
- *Shofarot* (on the theme of revelation)

Each of those three blessings is an artful construction by itself, incorporating ten verses from Tanakh on a single theme, as well as a series of shofar blasts, before a concluding blessing. We read in Mishnah Rosh Hashana 4:6:

אין פוחתין מעשר מלכיות, מעשר זכרונות, מעשר שופרות.
רבי יוחנן בן נורי אומר, אם אמרן שלוש שלוש, יצאין מזכירין
זיכרון ומלכות ושופר של פורענות. מתחיל בתורה, ומסיים
בנביא רבי יוסי אומר, אם השלים בתורה, יצא.

One must not recite fewer than ten verses about *Malchiyot*, ten verses about *Zichronot* and ten verses about *Shofarot*. Rabban Yochanan ben Nuri says: if one recited three of each of them, he has performed his obligation. One may not make any mention of any verse of *Zichronot, Malchiyot, or Shofarot* which alludes to divine punishment. One begins with Torah and concludes with Prophets. Rabbi Yosi says: If one concluded with Torah they have fulfilled their duty.

This Mishnah helps to shape a beautifully crafted “*minyan*” of verses on the theme -- three verses from Torah, three verses from Writings (specifically from Psalms) and three verses from Prophets, culminating with one final verse from the Torah to equal ten.

The unique form of the Musaf Amida is striking, weaving together blessings, shofar blasts and a collection of verses from Tanakh as one unified liturgical rubric. It is as if the Machzor is suggesting that prayer, study and ritual are all indispensable components of a robust Jewish life of service and devotion.

Both the Babylonian Talmud as well as the Jerusalem Talmud seek to discern the Mishnah's insistence on ten verses for each of the three sections. In Rosh Hashana 32a we read:

הני עשרה מלכיות כנגד מי? אמר ר' לוי כנגד עשרה הלולים
שאמר דוד בספר תהלים... דכתיב בהו הללוהו בתקע שופר.
רב יוסף אמר כנגד עשרת הדברות שנאמרו לו למשה בסיני.
ר' יוחנן אמר כנגד עשרה מאמרות שבהן נברא העולם.

To what do these ten kingship verses correspond?
R. Levi said, to the ten times the word halelu occurs in Psalm 150.
R. Yosef states that they correspond to the Ten Commandments.
R. Yochanan says that they correspond to the ten utterances that God used to create the world in Genesis chapter 1.

In the Jerusalem Talmud, (Rosh Hashana 4:7), two additional possibilities are considered:

כנגד עשרה וידוים שאמר ישעיה (ישעיהו א) רחצו הזכו הסירו
וגוי למדו היטב דרשו משפט וגו'... כנגד שבעה כבשים פר
ואיל ושעיר.

This corresponds to the ten calls for confession of Isaiah "wash yourselves clean; put your evil doings away from My sight..." (1:16-18). Alternatively, they correspond to the ten sacrifices offered on Rosh Hashana - 7 lambs, a bull, a ram and a goat.

Since the Mishnah didn't provide a reason for its insistence on ten verses, both Talmuds seek to find a correspondence to the number ten that lends additional meaning to the literary artistry of this prayer. The themes they associate with the number ten are not mutually exclusive: praise, commandness, creation, confession and the desire for closeness. Indeed, they are at the intersection of what it means to be human and to be engaged in a life of faith.

Perhaps these associative themes on the number ten are connected to the literary construction of the three blessings themselves discussed above. The three blessings of *Malchiyot*, *Zichronot* and *Shofarot* appear to deliberately link the notions of prayer, ritual and text study. The discussion about the meaning of the number ten is a way of asking "to what end?" When we shape a Jewish life that is comprised of prayer, ritual and study, what is it we accomplish? For some it will be a means of closeness— to God, to others, or to the Jewish people (drawing from the ten sacrifices). For some it will be a form of praise and gratitude, thankful for the gift of life and everyday miracles (drawing from David's ten praises). For some it will be a reminder that life is about duty and responsibility (drawing from the Ten Commandments). For some it will be about the ability for renewal and change at every moment (drawing from the ten confessions of Isaiah).. For some it will be about a consciousness of the world at large, how small we are and how gifted with the opportunity to contribute to it.

May this new year be one that helps us to continue shaping a life of service and devotion, and to find within that connection, commitment, and creativity.



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"Simanim" Symbols at the Rosh Hashana Meal



Howard Markose

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The *Shulchan Aruch* (Yosef Karo's 16th century code of Jewish Law) teaches that on Rosh Hashana one places certain foodstuffs on the table that hint in some way to prayers and hopes for the coming year. Karo, quoting Abaye from the Babylonian Talmud (Keritot 6a), introduces seven foods, for which, based on the words of Rav Hai Gaon (9th century CE Babylonia), we make particular declarations of hope.

- *Rubia* (our fenugreek), so that our merits be multiplied;
- *Cartee* (our leek or cabbage), so that those who hate us will be cut off;
- *Silka* (our beets), so that our enemies will just go away;
- *Tamarei* (our dates), so that those who hate us will just stop it;
- *Kara* (our gourd), so that the decrees against us will be ripped up and our merits will be read before God to our benefit;
- *Rosh keves* (a sheep's head), so that we will be the head and not the tail.

In English, the different foods don't quite connect with the wishes that accompany them. In Hebrew, however, we are engaged in a kind of a game, a play on words. The word *rubia* sounds like the word *harbeh* - 'many' - leading to the wish that our merits be many. The words *cartee* and *silka* sound like the Hebrew words *caret* and *salek* which mean 'cut off' and 'go away', respectively, wishing that these actions fall upon our enemies and those who hate us, and so on. You get the idea.

Rabbi Moshe Isserles, the Rema, who lived in 16th century Poland, submitted his own foods for consideration, the best known of which is, of course, apples and honey, whereby we say, "May it be Your will, O God, to make this coming year a good and sweet year." His added the pomegranate, which has many, many seeds, wishing that we rack up many, many

zechuyot – credits.

The 20th century commentator, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen Kagan, the Hafetz Hayim, wrote, "this is the formula for foods which also 'work' in other languages, each country with its own language." His final suggestion is that we display the head of a fish on our dining table, 'so that we may be fruitful and multiply like fish.'

It is with Kagan's comment in mind that Jews have come up with many multilinguistic renditions of foods to be eaten on Rosh Hashana, such as raisins and celery, hoping for a 'raise in salary'; or a beet (may we beat back our foes); yogurt (may it be a 'gut yohr'); or a banana (a hope for a 'bon anne').

In collaboration with my nephew Yossi Hoffman who is quite the pun-master, we would like to suggest that certain foods appear over Rosh Hashana with what we consider an appropriate prayer, request or wish recited along with it. The entries submitted below call for both a working knowledge of *Hebrew and English, as well as a pretty good sense of humor in order for the wishes to have a chance to be fulfilled.

- Upon spreading *חמאה* on our round challot we say, "May this year be butter than last!"
- The vegetarian upon drinking juice declares, "May this be the only *מיץ* I will partake of all year!"
- When we eat *אפונה* we say, "May God bring peas to the world."

Lettuce hope that everyone *תהיה* healthy and happy new year!

*Hebrew Food Vocabulary List:

חמאה – chem-ah – butter
מיץ – meetz – juice
אפונה – ah-foo-nah – peas
תהיה – **chah**-sah – lettuce

The Agony of Uncertainty



Alex Israel

Rabbi Alex Israel teaches Tanakh and is the Director of the Pardes Community Education Program & Summer Program. Alex is the author of I Kings: Torn in Two and II Kings: In a Whirlwind, both published by Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

One of the most surprising sources for the shofar is the biblical figure, Sisera's mother. When the Talmud probes the appropriate intonation for a shofar, it starts by explicating the biblical name for Rosh Hashana – "A day of *Teruah*" (Num 29:1):

'A day of Teruah for you': The Targum translates this as 'Yom Yevava - a day of sobbing' based on the verse: 'At the window Sisera's mother looked out, and sobbed (va-teyabev).' (Rosh Hashana 33b)

Why bring a source for shofar from one of Israel's most ardent enemies? And who is Sisera and who is his mother?

The background is a period in which Sisera, the formidable Canaanite general has oppressed and wrought havoc in northern Israel for twenty years. Led by the prophetess Devora and her general Barak, Israel retaliates and defeats the Canaanite army. Sisera flees and is killed. But Sisera's mother doesn't know this. She awaits his arrival from the battlefield. In the words of Devora:

Through the window peered Sisera's mother,
Behind the lattice she sobbed:
'Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why so late the clatter of his wheels'
She too replies to herself:
'They must be dividing the spoils,
A damsel or two for each man'
(Shoftim 5:28-30)

Sisera's mother is crying. Why? That morning her beloved son went out to battle. She expects him to come home victorious, just like every other battle that he had fought. Sisera had never suffered defeat; but today, Sisera is late home. The possibilities gnaw at her mind. She paces up and down, staring repeatedly out of the window, squinting

into the distance for a distant image, a cloud of dust, which may signify the approach of his chariot. Hours go by and she hears nothing. No word. "They must be dividing the spoils" she says to herself, in attempt to reassure herself. But she knows it is just an excuse. "Behind the lattice, she sobbed."

We have all experienced it as kids. Our parents yelling at us because we arrived home late, hours after the time they had expected us. We have been at the receiving end of those impassioned speeches about how our mothers were "worried sick," phoning the neighbors and all. What is the emotion behind the sobs of Sisera's mother?

It is the psychological turmoil of endless possibilities, of not knowing, in which are we consumed with a paralyzing sense of dread, frantic worry and a panicked onslaught of wild speculations. The worst scenarios come to mind. This agitation is truly unbearable. After all, once we discover what has really happened – for good or bad - we find a way to move forward, to spring into action. But the experience of waiting for the doctor's diagnosis, for the test results, for the phone to ring; that tension is more difficult than coping with the news.

Sisera's mother cries in that intense trauma of uncertainty, with its dark guesswork. These are her tears.

And this is the voice of the shofar on Rosh Hashana. When the Books of Life and Death are open before God, all the options are open. What shall my fate be this year? "Who will live and who will die... who will be lowered and who raised?" We stand, precarious and uncertain, and we cry and pray, just like Sisera's mother. Or perhaps the shofar gives voice to our cries.

Wishing you, your families and all of Israel a Shana Tova!

Promises, Promises:

Getting acquainted with ourselves and with God on Rosh Hashana



Daniel Reifman

Rabbi Dr. Daniel Reifman teaches Talmud to the Pardes Kollel. He is a fellow at the Bar-Ilan Institute for Advanced Torah Studies and has published and lectured widely on Jewish Medical ethics.

My grandmother, of blessed memory, was well into her eighties, with wizened features and wispy white hair, when she overheard a strange voice calling her name one day at the supermarket. She was astonished when the man who called out to her introduced himself as an old friend from high school, someone she hadn't seen in over 60 years. "How did you recognize me?", she gasped. "Why Sylvia," he said, "you haven't changed a bit."

I think about this story every year around Rosh Hashana, because it reflects the degree to which we remain fundamentally the same person over time, even though we perceive ourselves changing significantly as we mature and age. Yet the Days of Awe challenge us to think about change, to look back at the past year and forward to the next ask ourselves: Who have we been? Who would we like to be?

The way that change complicates the very concept of identity has been discussed by philosophers since antiquity. A classic example is the paradox of the ship of Theseus, whose boards are replaced one by one until nothing of the original remains. But the problem of change often has weightier implications as it relates to the identity of a person. We may feel sure in identifying someone as a long-lost friend, but if that friend were being tried in court, would we consider him to be the same *person*, as deserving of punishment as if he had committed the crime yesterday? Conversely, is it possible, through the process of *teshuvah*, repentance, to become someone different?

In addressing such questions, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur proposes that what we think of as identity is really the combination of two sets of factors. The most obvious elements that preserve a person's identity over time are his physical or constitutional features: even as one's appearance changes, either naturally or by choice, there are invariably some physical attributes – height, gait, voice, mannerisms – that stay the same. These features constitute what Ricoeur calls "sameness", as distinct from "selfhood", which is established by those attributes that are not inherent in

one's physical being. These include a person's patterns of behavior, her skills and avocations, her likes and dislikes, her relationships and commitments. These attributes, too, may either remain unchanged or evolve over time, but they are no less significant than a person's physical attributes in defining her identity.

Ricoeur's concept of selfhood sheds new light on a traditional custom in the days before Rosh Hashana to perform a legal ceremony of *hatarat nedarim*, the absolution of vows and other commitments from the past year that one may not have lived up to. Ricoeur cites the act of keeping a promise as an example of something that preserves an individual's selfhood over time: whatever else about him may change, the promise holds him to a particular mode of behavior.

However, some promises serve as vehicles of both continuity and change. For instance, a *nedar*, vow, is a means of committing oneself to a new path in life, often as a way of discontinuing harmful or sinful behavior; it is as much a break with one's past self as a commitment to remain consistent in the future. Hence we find several biblical characters who utter vows at pivotal moments in their personal development: Jacob upon waking from his dream at Beth-El (Gen. 28:20-22), Hannah when pouring out her heart in prayer for a child (I Sam. 1:11). Vows are emblematic of our own efforts to seek out a better path as we consider who we have been and wish to be. Yet these efforts often fall short, and we find ourselves – our all-too-familiar selves – regretting that we had taken on these commitments.

For all that we associate Rosh Hashana with a process of self-assessment, a study of the Rosh Hashana liturgy actually yields remarkably little in the way of introspection (in contrast with the Yom Kippur liturgy, which is all about introspection). Rather, the focus of our prayers on Rosh Hashana is almost entirely on God and His majesty. To the extent that humanity features at all, it is in our roles of recognizing and proclaiming His sovereignty and being subject to His judgment. Thus alongside questions about our

own identity at the turn of the year, Rosh Hashana presents a particularly acute problem of confronting the divine: how do we know this God whom we are anointing as our king?

In the Rosh Hashana liturgy, God too is characterized by a type of commitment. In the *zichronot* ("remembrances") segment of the *Musaf* service, among the many things that God remembers are his commitments, both to humanity as a whole, in saving Noah and his family from the flood, and to the Jewish people, in making Abraham's descendants a great nation. God's relationships with Noah and Abraham represent two historic covenants that God makes with humankind, hence the *zichronot* section concludes, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God... who recalls the covenant."

Yet the mode of commitment that characterizes God in

these passages is fundamentally different than the mode of *neder* – a vow. Throughout the Bible, God's commitments are expressed not as *nedarim* but rather as *shevuot* – oaths. A vow marks a break in the development of the self over time. A *shevuah* represents the continuity of the self before and after the act: the oath-taker commits to maintaining his ways, to upholding an established relationship or mode of behavior. The mode of *shevuah* epitomizes the most basic elements of God's identity, namely that He is above time and immune to change.

With the passing of each year, we confront the challenges and limitations of our time-bound existence, but we celebrate the everlasting God who preserves and reigns over all of creation.

The Challenges of Cynicism



Tovah Leah Nachmani

Tovah Leah Nachmani teaches Bible and Relationships at Pardes. She served as an educational director at Livnot U'Lehibanot and Ayeka and is a certified reflexologist.

וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד, וַיִּגְמַל; וַיַּעַשׂ אַבְרָהָם מִשְׁתֵּה גָדוֹל, בְּיוֹם הַגְּמֹל אֶת-יִצְחָק. וַתִּרְאֵהוּ שָׂרָה אֶת-בֶּן-הָעִרְבֵי הַמִּצְרִית, אֲשֶׁר-יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם--מִצְחָק. וַתֹּאמֶר, לְאַבְרָהָם, גֵּרֶשׁ הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת, וְאֶת-בְּנָהּ: כִּי לֹא יִרְשׁ בֶּן-הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת, עִם-בְּנֵי עַם-יִצְחָק. וַיִּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד, בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם, עַל, אֹדֶת בְּנֹו. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְרָהָם, אֵל-יִרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל-הַנְּעִר וְעַל-אֲמֹתֶיךָ--כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלַיךָ שָׂרָה, שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ: כִּי בְיִצְחָק, יִקְרָא לָךְ זָרַע. וְגַם אֶת-בֶּן-הָאִמָּה, לְגוֹי אֲשִׁימוּנֹו: כִּי זָרְעֶךָ, הוּא.

The child grew and was weaned, and Avraham made a great feast on the day on which Yitzhak was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Avraham, mocking.

And she said to Avraham, "Cast out this servant woman and her son, for the son of this servant woman will not be heir with my son, with Yitzhak."

The matter appeared extremely bad in the eyes

of Avraham on account of his son. Therefore God said to Avraham, "Let it not be bad in your eyes on account of the young man and on account of your servant woman. All that Sarah will say to you, obey her voice, for in Yitzhak will seed be called unto you. And also the son of the servant woman will I make into a nation, for he is your seed." (Genesis 21:8-13)

What can we learn from the Torah reading on the first day of Rosh Hashanah - the expulsion of Hagar and Yishmael from Avraham's household? There are endless takeaways to consider, but the one I want to think about is **the challenge of cynicism, and how we are all a bit cynical.**

The Torah reading begins with the miraculous birth of the longed-for child, to 100 year old Avraham and 90 year old Sarah; an astounding fulfillment of a Divine promise. God had promised Avraham: "I will maintain My covenant with Yitzhak" (17:21)

When Yitzhak was born, Avraham still viewed Yishmael as his beloved son. But when Avraham threw a feast to honor Yitzhak's weaning from infancy to early childhood,

Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Avraham mocking (מִצְחָק). (21:10)

Yishmael was not adding to the joyous laughter (צחוק) of Sarah (21:5-6). Yishmael, a young man by then, was mocking (מִצְחָק) his brother. Yitzhak's very name means laughter. (יִצְחָק – *he will laugh*). These closely related words are worlds apart: laughing is about rooting for the team, while mocking is about jeering the rival.

In the language of the *Midrash*, Yishmael was behind the tent 'shooting arrows' at his young brother during the weaning feast. Does the *Midrash* propose that a son of Avraham could be shooting real arrows at his brother?!

Perhaps the *Midrash* intends to say that Yishmael was threatening his brother. Possibly, Yishmael was shooting poison comments about Yitzhak's nerdy adherence to his father's teachings. Because cynical, ridiculing words, like poison arrows – can also destroy. One cynic can ruin an entire class. A cynical media report, when we don't have access to dependable information can poison our thinking.

Yishmael did not want to accept his place in the family, where Yitzhak would lead in a covenantal role. (17:21) Instead, Yishmael defiantly belittled Yitzhak in a way that made Sarah demand from Avraham: "Banish that servant-woman and her son, for the son of that servant-woman shall not share in the inheritance [of the covenant] with my son Yitzhak." (21:10)

Yishmael will not inherit the responsibility for the Land. But as God tells Avraham: "I will make a nation of him". In fact, Yishmael will become "a great nation" (21:13,18), free to pursue his own Divine calling as a son of Avraham, to become a generous and giving nation, and a pursuer of peace.

The matter distressed Avraham greatly, concerning his son" (21:11). Compassion is about seeking the root of goodness in all people, in all behavior, all beliefs, justification in all 'narratives'. Avraham is the symbolic embodiment of compassion, loving kindness or '*hesed*'. This is what enables Avraham to become the father of many nations (אב המון גוים).

But Avraham has a life partner. God instructs Avraham to listen to voice of his wife Sarah, whose character embodies judgment, decisiveness, or '*din*'. It is a painfully sad decision Avraham is forced to make, but it is necessary:

Whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Yitzhak that offspring shall be continued for you (21:12)

The happy ending to our Rosh Hashana story is that Hagar and Yishmael both end up returning to Avraham.

For Hagar: After Sarah's death, Avraham again marries. According to the Midrash, his new wife Ketura is none other than Hagar, renamed Ketura because her deeds were now as sweet as incense, *Ketoret*. (Rashi on Genesis 25:1)

For Yishmael: When Avraham dies, Yishmael returns to bury his father, together with Yitzhak. An act of acquiescence, Yishmael shows honor not only to his father but to his father's wishes, that he remain part of the family. (Genesis 25:7-11) Both Hagar and Yishmael learned life lessons from the harsh consequences of their cynicism.

For Us: The cynical voice of Yishmael comes to echo our own inner voice of cynicism. The exiling of Yishmael from the household of Avraham invites us to consider: How is our own cynicism harming our chances for fulfilling our legacy of peace, at home and beyond? Does cynicism have a remedy?

Most of the time, we enthusiastically aspire to increasing our compassion. But on Rosh Hashana - "the Day of Judgment", we eat and drink festively in our homes in celebration of our ability to admit our mistakes, return to our best selves and then stand in judgment.

Hagar and Yishmael's story that we read on Rosh Hashana invites us to banish our own cynicism and get back in the game.

For Reflection:

1. Who or what in my life do I struggle with cynicism?

What first step can I take to eliminate my own non-constructive cynicism? Who or what would I like to understand better?

2. Healthy skepticism does not equal cynicism. Serious questioning and constructive critique are trademarks of Jewish learning.

Who do I trust to give me reliable perspectives about Jewish learning, and about Israel?

3. In what situation – with my family, work-colleagues or others – have I exercised too much '*hesed*' or compassion? Too much '*din*' or strictness?

Reflecting on my own actions, where would I benefit from more strictness? More compassion?

Don't Get Stuck in the Thorns



Yaffa Epstein

Rabba Yaffa Epstein was a long-time member of the Pardes faculty and staff and is currently the Director of the Wexner Heritage Program at the Wexner Foundation.

One of the most intense moments of the Rosh Hashana Service is the reading of *Akeidat Yitzhak*, the binding of Isaac, where Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his beloved son for God. Much ink has been spilled about this tragic and transformative story, and particularly why it is read on Rosh Hashana.

One important element of connection is the ram that Abraham sacrifices in the place of Isaac, and the Jewish people blowing the shofar, the ram's horn on Rosh Hashana.

This link is made explicitly by a beautiful *Midrash* in Vayikra Rabba 29:10.

There, the *Midrash* explains the verse in Genesis 22:13, where after God has told Abraham not to sacrifice his son, we are told:

(יג) וַיִּשָּׂא אֲבָרְהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה־אֵיל אַחַר נֶאֱחָז בְּסֹבֶרֶךְ בְּקִרְבָּיו וַיִּלֶךְ אֲבָרְהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַחַת בְּנוֹ

When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.

In fact, there is actually great significance in the words **caught in the thicket by its horns** – in that this is a metaphor for the Jewish people.

The *Midrash* says:

This teaches us that the Holy Blessed One showed our father Abraham the ram tearing itself free from one thicket and getting entangled in another. The Holy Blessed One said to Abraham: 'In a similar manner are your children destined to be caught by sins and entangled by troubles, but they will

ultimately be redeemed through the horns of the ram.' Hence, it is written: *The Lord God will blow the horn* (Zechariah 9:14).

There are two beautiful points that this *Midrash* is making. Firstly, it is not simply that the ram was caught by its horns in the thicket, but that the ram was repeatedly getting itself stuck. Just as it managed to free itself, it found its horns stuck in the next thicket. The *Midrash* says this is a metaphor for the Jewish people, who repeatedly find themselves caught in their sins and mistakes.

How true this statement is! Many times in our lives, we are stuck in some problem or another, and just as we are getting over that problem, just as we are making progress, we find ourselves caught up in another issue, and another. It feels as though we can never change, grow, or move on.

Yet, the *Midrash* tells us, through the sounding of the shofar, we actually can and will be redeemed. Change is possible!

Moreover, what is it about the *shofar* specifically that allows for this transformation? Perhaps the meaning lies in the idea that the ram, and metaphorically the Jewish people, is being caught in the thicket, in our troubles by our horns. Indeed, the horns of the ram can only remain stuck when the ram keeps its head down, entangling the horns again and again.

The cry of the shofar however, reminds us to raise our heads; to have faith in our potential to change. Thus, with our heads raised, we will not have our horns stuck in the thicket, but rather will be able to see more clearly, and avoid those pitfalls that allow us to stay stuck. We transform ourselves and bring a transformation to our lives.

What is perhaps even more remarkable is the end of this *Midrash*. The *Midrash* gives another example of us being stuck in exile, but then surprisingly concludes with the following statement:

כָּל יְמוֹת הַשָּׁנָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹסְקִין בְּמִלְאֲכָתָן וּבְרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה נוֹטְלִין שׁוֹפְרוֹתֶיהֶן וְתוֹקְעִין לְפָנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְהוּא עוֹמֵד מִכֶּסֶּא דִּין לְכֶסֶּא רַחֲמִים וּמִתְמַלֵּא עֲלֵיהֶם רַחֲמִים, אִמְתִּי בְהַדְּשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי.

Rabbi Abba the son of Rav Papi and Rabbi Yehoshua of Sichnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: All the days of the year, Israel is busy with its work, and on Rosh Hashana they take their shofars and blow them before Hashem and He gets up from the throne of justice to the throne of mercy and fills them with mercy.

The *Midrash* here is suggesting that not only is the shofar a reminder to us to lift up our heads, but actually when we put down our *melacha* -our work and sound the shofar, we are able to have a profound effect on God as well. We are able to allow for God to move from the throne of pure justice to the throne of Mercy.

The shofar then, is a wake-up call to us to have faith in our own potential for growth and change, and simultaneously, a call from the Jewish people to God to say that we want to put down all of the extraneous elements of our lives, and to focus on relationship with the Divine.

Repairing Watches, Repairing Souls



Levi Cooper

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The Rosh Hashana experience is punctuated by the shofar blasts that are key to the soundscape of the morning synagogue services. Our sages explained that this act reminds the Almighty of the Binding of Isaac, recalling the dedicated fidelity of our forebears and invoking ancestral merit. The sages also explained that the shofar acts like an alarm clock, waking our slumbering souls and acting as a call to renewed commitment to God. To be sure, clock metaphors abound in Jewish tradition.

When Rabbi Shlomo Shapiro of Munkács (1831-1893) reached marriageable age, he travelled with his father, Rabbi Elazar of Łancut (1808-1865), to meet his prospective bride, Haya Frima Rivka (d. 1887), daughter of Rabbi Yekutiel Shmelke of Sasów (1800-1861). After marriage arrangements were agreed upon, the young groom and his father began the journey back to their hometown. Along the way they made a detour to visit the hasidic master, Rabbi Meir'l of Przemyślany (1783-1850).

Rabbi Meir'l welcomed the visitors and in the course of the conversation he noticed the new pocket watch that the young

groom was sporting. To this day, in many traditional Jewish communities, a groom receives a watch as a present from his prospective in-laws, though there is no requirement in Jewish law to give such a gift. Spying the glistening new timepiece, Rabbi Meir'l took the opportunity to comment on its symbolism:

A watch is like a human being: When it is new, it keeps time faithfully, just as the watchmaker intended. As the years pass, it may break – not the hands or the face, but the delicate balance wheel or hairspring may become worn, or specks of dirt may disrupt the fragile mechanism. Maintenance and adjustment might be necessary. The only solution is to take the timepiece to a watchmaker, who opens the watch and disassembles it into a myriad tiny pieces until he locates the problem. After he has identified the issue, fixed whatever needs to be repaired, and cleaned the insides, the watchmaker takes all the pieces and puts the timepiece back together again. Once again, the watch keeps time faithfully.

Rabbi Meir'l unpacked the parable:

This is the nature of a person: God creates people to live their lives faithfully. Alas, specks of dirt enter our delicate souls and disrupt our spiritual mechanism. The only solution is break down our egos, identify our failings, cleanse our souls, and then reconstruct ourselves.

Rabbi Meir'l took the parable a step further by drawing a parallel between the watch/human image and the shofar blasts on Rosh Hashana:

“This process” – referring to the deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of the watch/soul – “is indicated by the way we sound the shofar.”

When we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana, there are three types of sounds: *teki'ah*, *shevarim*, and *teruah*. A set of shofar blasts is always bracketed by a *teki'ah* at the beginning and a *teki'ah* at the end. Rabbi Meir'l explained:

We begin with a *teki'ah* – a single, pure, unbroken blast. As we deal with the vagaries of life we become a *shevarim* – a broken blast that bespeaks fragmentation and loss of purity and wholeness. At that time, we must become a *teruah* – a sound broken into innumerable, tiny pieces. Only after we have truly become a *teruah*, can we then reconstruct the pieces and sound the *teki'ah* once again, indicating that we have returned to the original, pure, unified, and divine self.

With that Rabbi Meir'l concluded the parable and its explanation, leaving a lesson in the minds of all present as they pondered the symbolism of the watch.

And then Rabbi Meir'l leaned over to the father of the groom, Rabbi Elazar of Łancut – himself a hasidic leader and a scion to a famous hasidic family – and he added in a still, silent voice:

All this, I said to the young lads who are just beginning their journey in the service of the Almighty. A leader, however, must take a different approach.

In my imagination I can conjure up the image of Rabbi Meir'l as he looked deep into the eyes of his colleague Rabbi Elazar of Łancut and continued:

Leaders should not announce their failings to all, lest they precipitate depression amongst their charges, or create a gloomy atmosphere that would undermine their own ability to lead. Indeed, the appropriate approach for leaders is indicated in a verse from the Torah: 'And when you convoke the congregation you shall blow long blasts and not short ones' (Numbers 10:7).

Rabbi Meir'l explained:

Moses – the paragon of Jewish leadership – was instructed to appear before the community as a *teki'ah*, an unbroken, pure blast of the *shofar*; not as a fragmented *teruah* blast.

Thus according to Rabbi Meir'l, leaders should not broadcast their shortcomings, rather they should present themselves as shining examples for all to follow

Meditating on the whispered words of Rabbi Meir'l of Przemyślany, I can't help but wonder whether his vision is appropriate for our day. Perhaps in our times leaders who honestly recognize their frailties and who are open about the challenges they face might provide more inspiration than an untainted – but unreal and essentially dishonest – person. The inner fragmentation of a leader is undoubtedly a challenge that should not be ignored. Leaders who conscientiously and scrupulously confront the vicissitudes of life, who tackle their shortcomings, who aspire to grow, develop, improve – surely these are the leaders we seek to emulate.



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Who is Judging Me?



Yiscah Smith

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I've been reflecting on the theme of judgment during Rosh Hashana, and its relationship to the "mitzvah of the day" – the blowing of the shofar.

The Torah refers to this day as Yom Teruah – The Day of Blowing the Horn (Num. 29:1) – but does not define what is intended by that primal sound. Some have seen the sounding of the shofar as a fanfare to mark God's coronation.

In the Oral Tradition, it is on this day that God created Adam and Eve (Lev. Rabba 39:1). Hence, each year on Rosh Hashana we pause to acknowledge the anniversary of the creation of humankind, uniquely created in the Image of God. But the Oral Tradition goes further, applying the name Yom HaDin – The Day of Judgment (Mishna RH 1:2). This is because on the very day that Adam and Eve were created they sinned, were judged and expelled from Eden. With that sin, human mortality began. Every year since, on that day, God judges each human being and decides whether to continue blessing that individual with life, or not.

For a while now I have been contemplating and reflecting on these themes. I keep asking myself, what does this mean specifically to my unique journey? I ask myself who in fact is judging and what is being judged? For some, the answers may be obvious. However, this is no longer obvious to me, and perhaps no longer to some of you as well. "To pray" in Hebrew is *lehitpalel*. However, this really does not mean to beseech or to request. Rather, the etymology of the word derives from "to judge", and the word is in the self-reflexive. **To enter into the prayer space on Rosh Hashana, is to enter into the space of self-judgment.**

The Piaseczna Rebbe teaches that this is an opportunity

to seek deep inside of oneself, through quieting the mind, an encounter with the Divine Presence. It is the path to an immanent, intimate and personal experience, rather than a transcendental one. Instead of tirelessly attempting in vain to connect with an idea, a theology, or someone else's interpretation external to ourselves, may I suggest that this year, we embark on our annual pilgrimage in a new direction.

I invite all of us to focus inwardly, attempting to hear that "still small voice" within each of us that always speaks but is not always heard. There are of course no guarantees and it would be of no value to even conjecture where this will lead. However, I feel compelled to suggest that we enter this new space where the "deeper self" – the soul, the part of each one of us that is the very Image of God, the Divine Presence within.

Within this internal space we may experience judgment quite differently; each of our lives will be judged. But what we are about to enter is a space where it is each one of us judging ourselves.

I hope that the blowing of the shofar will remind us of that primal voice deep inside of our core, in the very marrow of our existence, seeking to discern if we indeed want to live, really **live** this coming New Year, calling out to reclaim all those moments of living that we lost this year.

I hope that the blowing of the shofar will arouse within all of us to gently request God to guide and inspire us to live a life worthy of the blessing of Life. A life dedicated to encountering the Divine Presence, the *Shechinah*, both within each one of us and within others around us.

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