

# High Holy Days Q&A

Answering the Ys

The kit that explores, provokes,  
inspires and informs.

Whatever you think about  
Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur,  
think again.



High Holy Days q & a  
is inspired by aish UK  
020 8457 4434





High Holy Days 2008

Dear Friend

We are well aware that, for many, the 'High Holy Days' are not as inspiring as they could be. We hope the High Holy Days q & a kit helps provide you with a stimulating insight into this extremely special occasion.

Jewish life is about asking questions and exploring the answers and this is what our q & a kits are all about.

Whether you read through these cards alone or with the family, at home or at synagogue, we very much hope that you will discover more meaning and relevance in the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We trust that the 'black' card will help inject even greater significance into your new year's meal.

This kit is one small example of the countless initiatives we take to inspire Jews, especially young disinterested ones, to connect with our heritage that is so meaningful and enriching.

Whether it be through: poignant trips to Israel and Poland; informative events at schools and universities throughout the country; engaging explanatory services at aish and other communities; and numerous educational activities at our centres around the country; aish works tirelessly and passionately to promote Jewish commitment amongst the younger generation that is our future.

The UK Jewish community is facing an ongoing crisis with a 50:50 chance that our children will not marry someone Jewish (JPR and Board of Deputies research). However, aish is proud of its record: over 90% of our alumni marry Jews (MORI research).

Unfortunately, a letter can only provide you with a limited flavour of the countless activities we undertake with over 10,000 young Jews each year. We welcome you to come and see our work.

Wishing you a healthy, fulfilling and enlightening new year.

Yours truly

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Q

How can we ensure we have High Holy Days and not High Hollow Days?

a

Through asking relevant questions and delivering inspiring answers.

For too long, Jewish education has been about “you should”, “you must”, and “you can’t”.

But people invariably want to know “why?” And “what’s the point?”

We hope the following is an engaging and enthralling set of questions and answers, to assist you in having a truly thought-provoking Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

This season should not be deterring people, but turning them on to the beauty of Judaism, its intellectual challenges and potent contemporary relevance.

Throughout history, under all circumstances, Jews in every corner of the globe have gathered on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to reaffirm our dreams for a better world and our personal commitment to be partners in its building.

This is not another guide to the High Holidays to add to the pile, nor a comprehensive prayer book. Due to constraints of space, it cannot even attempt to do full justice to the issues raised.

We do hope it provides a starting point. Some food for thought to make these High Holidays a little easier to reach this year for you and your family.

We would appreciate your feedback because there is no question we can do better.

Q

Is our New Year get-together anything more than a party?

a

Every culture celebrates the New Year differently. For us it's about taking stock of the past, thinking deeply about the present, refocusing for a better, more fulfilling year to come...

And eating. Ideally with family and friends.

Eating is an opportunity. We can just fill our stomachs, or we can charge ourselves up with the energy to achieve meaningful things. When we make time to share ideas about deeper issues in life – like where we're going and who we're trying to become – we upgrade the meal into something memorable. The traditional Dvar Torah or 'words of wisdom' is rooted in this concept.

These cards could be used at the table to stimulate discussion too. Alternatively, they could be used in shul for extra insights into the service.

Q

Why apple and honey?

a

An apple is healthy. Dip it in honey and it also tastes sweet.

There are two types of good in our lives – the things we clearly recognize as good, and those that may be for the good, but don't feel that way. So when we ask God for a sweet year, we're asking Him not only to do what's good for us, but to help us 'taste' that goodness too.

Customs vary as to other Rosh Hashanah foods, each of which is symbolic of some aspect of goodness we hope for in the year ahead. By focusing on the subtleties of taste, and even the names of the foods,<sup>1</sup> each community has its way of 'tasting' and asking for the potential blessing to be part of our year ahead.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Talmud Kritut 6a.

<sup>2</sup> For a list of some common foods and blessings see this article: [http://www.aish.com/hhRosh/hhRoshDefault/abcs\\_of\\_rosh\\_hashana.asp](http://www.aish.com/hhRosh/hhRoshDefault/abcs_of_rosh_hashana.asp)

# Blessing your children

Place your hands on your child's head and say the following:

**For a girl:**

*Yesimeich Elo-him KeSarah, Rivka, Rachel VeLeah.*

May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

**For a boy:**

*Yesimcha Elo-him KeEphraim VechiMenashe.*

May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe.

**For both:**

*Yevarechecha Ado-nai veyishmerecha.*

May Hashem bless you and look after you.

*Ya'er Ado-nai panav eilecha viychuneka.*

May Hashem show His goodness to you and guide you.

*Yisa Ado-nai panav eilecha veyasem lecha shalom.*

May Hashem turn His goodness to you and make your life peaceful and complete.

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Being a parent is the closest we come to experiencing how God looks at His children. Endless effort, patience, and even pain... but we never abandon our love for our children, and we always want the best for them too.

We all hope our children will have what we have and more: greater success, greater wealth, a great career. With this blessing, we express one extra dream: that they be greater people too. Kinder, more caring than us; better Jews and better people. That each generation build on the achievements of the last.

We bless our daughters with the selflessness of the four great women who began the Jewish journey. We bless them that they emulate the readiness to sacrifice so much for what is right, and merit seeing families and homes that radiate light and goodness to the world.

We bless our sons with the ability to follow the example of Joseph's children, Ephraim and Menashe, who remained loyal to their Jewish family values despite growing up in a foreign culture. We bless them to live like these two Biblical brothers who exemplified harmony and love for one another.

(To print out the full text for boys and girls:

<http://www.aish.com/graphics/shabbos/children.pdf>)

**May He bless you as you bless your children!**

Q

Celebration? Or judgement? What's Rosh Hashanah all about?



# a

Rosh Hashanah is about celebrating the creation of the world and the unlimited potential of human endeavour. It's about who we really are. And it's about the big Picture.<sup>1</sup>

Rosh Hashanah, 'Day of Judgment', commemorates the day man was created,<sup>2</sup> and transports us back into the Garden of Eden. We become 'new beings' and have the same choice as Adam: instant gratification or meaningful eternity? Where are our priorities?

Adam 'hid' from God, who called out to him: "Where are you?"<sup>3</sup> That question still reverberates within each one of us today. And we have the privilege of answering it again as every New Year begins.

Yes, there is some discomfort involved. But Jewish living challenges us to rise above our comfort zones to face the most important questions of our lives.

What do we really value in life? How would we like to see the ideal world? Are we living for it? What are our dreams? Our playing small does not serve the world.<sup>4</sup>

On Rosh Hashanah we dream... of what we really, truly want, and who we can become. It is on that basis that our year ahead is judged. Perhaps it touches our "deepest fears"<sup>5</sup>, but it can also be the greatest thrill as we come face-to-face with the self we could really be.

Rosh Hashanah is the opportunity to stop and evaluate, recalibrate and refocus. It's a precious gift to connect to our deepest selves. It is true re-creation – the ability to transform ourselves.

<sup>1</sup> Expressed throughout the third and fourth blessings of the Rosh Hashanah Amidah.

<sup>2</sup> Cf: Talmud Rosh Hashanah 12b and Tosafot Rosh Hashanah 27a. S.v. "Lema'an."

<sup>3</sup> Genesis, 3:9.

<sup>4</sup> See Mishnah Sanhedrin 37a.

<sup>5</sup> Marianne Williamson, quoted in Nelson Mandela's 1994 inaugural speech.

Q

Not my idea of fun!  
Why celebrate New Year  
praying?

# a

Imagine receiving an invitation to spend 20 minutes with the world's most powerful person. Once you get over the surprise, you start thinking about what you're going to discuss.

Yachts, swimming pools, private jets...

But maybe you'll also realize you have an incredible opportunity to make a real difference. This person has the resources, if you can come up with the right vision. You could help alleviate famine, raise education standards, cure diseases...

The meeting may not actually change the world, but it would certainly transform you.

On Rosh Hashanah, we have an invitation. An audience with One far more powerful than all the billionaires who've ever lived.

Prayer is our presentation.

Prayer is the ultimate human expression of the universal longing to connect to the Infinite. But it is also very much a measure of who we are. What we ask for speaks volumes about who we really are.

So we ask for the ultimate;<sup>6</sup> for a perfect world... world peace, the elimination of evil, Mankind uniting with a sense of common purpose and destiny, bringing the world to perfection...

We could just raise our glasses this New Year, but prayer – and specifically prayer with our fellow Jews in shul<sup>7</sup> – gives us the chance to raise our sights.

<sup>6</sup> See Rosh Hashanah liturgy.

<sup>7</sup> Talmud Berachot 8a.

Q

Why do the prayers talk  
about unrealistic goals?  
Let's be practical!

# a

“I have a dream that my four little children... will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

Martin Luther King Jnr. did not see his dream come true, but the world has changed because of people who believed enough in their dreams.

A person who dreams is a person who cares.

We Jews also have a dream. Into a pagan world, governed by might instead of justice, where infanticide and gladiator sport were the norm, entered a strange people with an even stranger dream...

“...To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both Divine and human, of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person... of peace as an abstract ideal, and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without the Jews it might have been a much emptier place.”<sup>8</sup>

For 3,500 years our ancestors lived with dreams of a Godly world. They held fast through intense persecution and never gave up. Many never lived to see the fulfillment of those dreams. The world still has a way to go... but it is a far better place as a result.

Rosh Hashanah is the day we remind ourselves of those dreams. We internalise who we really are and what we are personally willing to commit to achieve them.

It is a day to recharge ourselves with Jewish pride.

And to keep dreaming.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Johnson, “History of the Jews”, Epilogue.

Q

Why not just pray for what I want? Why follow a Siddur?

# a

There are two types of prayer.

Firstly, we can turn to God whenever we want and ask for whatever we want.<sup>9</sup> He understands every language. He knows our deepest desires.

Secondly, there's also *Tefilla* – the formatted prayers in the prayer book – allowing us to tap into the heartfelt longings of the Jewish nation.

The Hebrew for “to pray” is *lehitpalel*, a reflexive verb meaning to judge oneself.<sup>10</sup> When we ask God for life, we hear an echo: Why? What are you planning to do with another year?

The fixed prayers help us answer that question. They express a commitment to a life that is not just about us. By focusing a little higher than our immediate material or other needs; by thinking more deeply about the good we can do with that extra year or extra money... perhaps it will then actually become more fitting for us to receive it.<sup>11</sup>

We're telling God, “I care about what You care about. I'm Your partner.”

Rosh Hashanah is not about personal requests. It's about becoming the type of person more worthy of the goals we seek. We aim to grow more focused on what is ultimately better for us and for the world.

And therein lies the secret of prayer.

Not because God needs it.

Because we do.

<sup>9</sup> See Nachmanides, *Sefer HaMitzvot*, Positive Commandment 5.

<sup>10</sup> Exodus, 21:22, and Psalms, 106:30.

<sup>11</sup> See *Derech Hashem*, Section 4, Chapter 8.

Q

All the prayers say the same thing – “God is King”. What does that have to do with me?



# a

In the modern world, the notion of a king may seem somewhat outdated. However, calling God King has little to do with power or control. The Hebrew word for political control is "*moshel*". "*Melech*" – king – represents a different aspect altogether.<sup>12</sup>

It's like a conductor enabling a symphony orchestra to function harmoniously with each musician playing his or her own unique role.

Sub-atomic particles comprise the atom, atoms form molecules, molecules cells, and a group of cells can produce the miracle of human life.

Each limb, each cell has a role to play without which the whole would be incomplete.

This is how Judaism envisions the perfected Messianic world. We can achieve far more as an organic whole than we can as separate beings. Each nation has a role to play in this 'body'. Each community is a vital limb. Each family, every individual, can contribute something of unique and infinite value.

When we realize that everyone and everything has its place in the world, we no longer hate.

We embrace difference rather than fear it. We are not threatened by others but see them and ourselves as irreplaceable partners in the grand concerto of humanity.

Accepting God as King on Rosh Hashanah is to wholeheartedly commit to this vision and our place in it.

<sup>12</sup> See Vilna Gaon and others on Genesis, 37:8. Also see explanation of Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, "Shabbat Malketa", page 11, to Talmud Megillah 14.

Q

Why is Rosh Hashanah also called “The Day of Remembrance”?

# a

When a person suffers from severe memory loss, they have no context for anything. Life just becomes an incomprehensible, disjointed series of unconnected events.

Chief Rabbi Professor Sir Jonathan Sacks notes there is no Hebrew word for history. Yet the word for memory – “*zachor*” – or its derivatives, appears dozens of times in the Torah.<sup>13</sup> What’s the difference?

History (his story) happened to someone else in the past. Memory is mine. Who I am right now. Memory shapes the way I look forward. Our lives are a continuous chain of memories. When we introduce ourselves, we recount memories so people understand who we are. In interviews, we recall our finest moments.

The Rosh Hashanah service is divided into three main sections: *Malchuyot* – about God’s kingship, *Zichronot* – focused on ‘memories’ of the great moments in Jewish history, and *Shofarot* – the impact of the *shofar*.<sup>14</sup>

*Malchuyot* depicts the unity of that perfect world. *Zichronot*, memories, are the context defining who we are in that world.<sup>15</sup> When we recall our collective memories before God, we position ourselves as another link in the Jewish people’s voyage through history. We see our lives in the context of our ancestors standing at Sinai committing to live for a perfect world. We continue the legacy of those Jews who died in defence of a better world.

The memories of *Zichronot* are beyond nostalgia. They lift us out of the smallness of our limited lives, raising us to see ourselves as part of the unravelling tapestry of the great Jewish journey.

<sup>13</sup> Essay, “History & Memory”, The Chief Rabbi’s Passover Haggadah, page 27.

<sup>14</sup> Tractate Rosh Hashanah 16b.

<sup>15</sup> For an explanation of *Shofarot*, please see next card.

Q

Why do we blow  
a Shofar?

# a

A child cries when they see something wrong with the world. An innocent belief that things could be better.

We should never lose that child's cry. The child we once were... That's the shrill, broken voice of the *shofar*. As the *shofar* calls us from the outside, we hear it resonating from within.

Yes, we may have strayed over the years, fallen out with a few people, not enjoy the best family relationships, but we still care. We're still good. Something deep inside us wants more meaning.<sup>16</sup>

The *shofar* produces three distinct sounds:<sup>17</sup>

1. *Tekiah* – one long, straight blast.
2. *Shevarim* – three medium, wailing sounds.
3. *Teruah* – 9 quick blasts in short succession.

*Tekiah* is the sound of confidence and truth. We set our values straight and remind ourselves that ultimately, God runs the world.

*Shevarim* is the sobbing cry of a Jewish heart – yearning to connect, grow and achieve. And *Teruah* is an alarm clock, shaking us out of our apathy to act and care.

The *shofar* brings us clarity, alertness, and focus. It connects us to our deepest selves. So we're not fooling anyone when we declare our grandiose visions or our part in a glorious history. Because Judaism is belief in God, but also very much belief in Man.

Somewhere deep inside us is that child longing for perfection; that voice telling us we can make the world a better place...

This Rosh Hashanah, when you listen to the *shofar*, close your eyes...

And hear who you really are.

<sup>16</sup> Maimonides, Laws of Teshuva, 3:4.

<sup>17</sup> Talmud Rosh Hashanah 33b.

Q

New Year's resolutions!  
How do we translate  
grand visions into  
real life?

# a

Hopefully we've had a meaningful, powerful Rosh Hashanah. We've been inspired to dream and commit ourselves to be better people.

Now what?

The 10 days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur are our opportunity to improve and 'tip the scales'.<sup>18</sup>

It's the time to make our plan for the year and list those small steps that will take us there.

What do we want to change?

Can we be a little more considerate in our relationships?

How can we take God a little more seriously?

Unlike our results-oriented society, Judaism gives us points for effort. It's not "all or nothing" and God knows very well that no-one is perfect.

And we know we can all become a little better.

Each step along the journey is valuable in its own right.

We have these precious 10 days as a launch pad for the year ahead. A sense of direction and perspective. With our ideal vision in place, we can use the next week, building up to Yom Kippur, to improve just a little and become better Jews, better people...

If we never stop and think about what we're living for, will we ever achieve anything we really and truly want?

Now is the opportunity to take the first step.

<sup>18</sup> Maimonides, Laws of Teshuva, 2:6.

Q

What's the relevance of  
Yom Kippur?



# a

A couple fight and drift apart. Neither is willing to take the first step, each blaming the other. Eventually, one realizes there's a choice: accept my own weaknesses and take responsibility for my part, or let arrogance slowly destroy the relationship.

Apologising for the pain caused, they ask to work together to rebuild the relationship. There is still a long and painful road to full reconciliation, but taking responsibility is that crucial first step. This is Yom Kippur.

We have drifted from God. We have not appreciated the gift of life; not moved ourselves to deeper levels of Godliness; not taken Him seriously.

But much worse, we have been blaming... life is no good; too challenging. If only He would split open the ceiling and say hello, it would be so much easier to believe. We blame Him for not filling our lives with the goodness others have...

On Yom Kippur, we stop blaming and start taking responsibility. Did we really want less challenges? If He split open the ceiling would we really change, or would we find some other excuse to run away? If He filled our lives with more goodness, wouldn't we just fail to appreciate it as we do with all we have right now?

It's hard to take responsibility,<sup>1</sup> but it's also a very deep pleasure. It lifts us from pettiness to greatness. And when reconciliation comes, the couple embrace, crying for their mistakes and overjoyed to be together again. It is a highlight of their relationship for years to come.

This is Yom Kippur. A day of reconciliation between us and our Father in Heaven. It is the highlight of the year.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Talmud Avodah Zarah 17a.

<sup>2</sup> Based on an article by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt:  
([http://www.aish.com/hhyomk/hhyomkdefault/Yom\\_Kippur\\_A\\_Day\\_of\\_Reconciliation.asp](http://www.aish.com/hhyomk/hhyomkdefault/Yom_Kippur_A_Day_of_Reconciliation.asp))

Q

What's all this  
fasting business?

# a

Judaism doesn't advocate abstention. We relish physical pleasures and aim to leverage them for higher purposes.

But we all face a constant battle between our natural biological instincts and our higher desires.

Soul versus body.

Sometimes we delay instant gratification for a long-term goal... and sometimes we don't. Sometimes, in a moment of anger, impulse, or temptation, we can ruin a relationship, or do something we regret. Our head tells us it's a bad choice, but our heart overrules, and – insanely – we do it anyway.

On Yom Kippur, we live as a soul without a body.

Angels for a day.

When we feel the body screaming, "I'm hungry!" we politely tell it it's going to have to wait; its chances of survival are pretty good.

On Yom Kippur, we live free of our physical drives, liberated from our lusts, and torn from our tempers. Free to be alone with our higher ambitions and deeper yearnings.

Of course it's up to us. If we choose to focus on our empty stomachs, we'll be counting the minutes till it's over. But if we allow ourselves to spend the day as genuinely elevated spiritual beings, we'll be wishing it could last so much longer than 25 hours!

It's an incredible opportunity to evaluate our actions and choices, and to create a new vision of what we can improve for the year ahead.

Q

Kol Nidrei – why is annulling vows the dramatic intro to Yom Kippur?

# a

If we only understood the power of words...

Beyond the functional use of sharing ideas and discoveries, language is also the primary medium for human expression and relationships. Words allow us to reach out to others, and others to see into us.

The act of Creation is described as, "God said"<sup>3</sup> – speech creates realities. Then God entrusted His world to Man, - a "speaking soul".<sup>4</sup> Human speech creates realities too.<sup>5</sup> To break one's word is to violate that trust; to violate the very soul of our humanity.

Words spoken impulsively can hurt, destroy, deceive, or mislead. And when we can't, or won't, deliver, we disappoint those who relied on us.

On Kol Nidrei, as we prepare to face God, and look at ourselves in the mirror, we accept the fact our words may have let us, and others, down. Painfully, we have to publicly annul our word, because our word may not actually be trustworthy.

What would the world be like if we could trust everything everyone said? If commitments were for real, and forever?

What would our lives be like if everyone could trust us? If we could trust ourselves?

Many communities have the custom of pledging charity after the Kol Nidrei service. Others do so in the days leading up to Yom Kippur.

If Kol Nidrei is a painful reminder of our failings, it can equally remind us of the potential power of sincere commitments and pledges. You have our word on that!

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Genesis, 1:3.

<sup>4</sup> Targum Onkelos to Genesis, 2:7.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Nefesh HaChaim, Section 2.

Q

Vidui/Confession – is it  
all about guilt and sin?

# a

Much of our religious vocabulary is derived from other cultures – sin, repentance, confession, etc. The English language is rich with a cultural iconography that spans centuries of religious experience but not Judaism, and its terms are inappropriate for capturing Jewish ideas.

Jewish thought has never embraced the idea that man is ‘guilty’, fundamentally sinful, or bad. Even the word “sin” is not an accurate translation of “*chet*”, which means “missing the target”.<sup>6</sup> Our target is Good, because each of us is made “in the image of God”.<sup>7</sup> Godliness is at the core of our being. Doing what’s right is so fulfilling because it expresses our deepest desires.<sup>8</sup>

Confusion, impulse, and arrogance all lead us off track. With sometimes disastrous consequences, but they don’t make us bad. With *vidui*, we regret what we’ve done. Not who we are.

Tell a child they’re bad and we lower their self-esteem and motivation. Tell them they’re good; that a certain behaviour is not for them, and they can feel empowered to grow and improve.

“*Teshuva*”<sup>9</sup> does not mean “repentance” as much as it means to “return”.<sup>10</sup> To do good, to be Godly, is simply to get back to being who we really are.

*Vidui* begins the process of shedding those actions that are not for us. We strike our chests as if to say, “it’s my bodily impulses, not my inner being”. It expresses God’s empowering belief in the goodness of Man. And our knowledge that we are great enough to do better.

<sup>6</sup> Judges, 20:16. <sup>7</sup> Genesis, 1:27. <sup>8</sup> See Maimonides, Laws of Divorce, 2:20.

<sup>9</sup> Teshuva is identified in many sources (e.g. Maimonides, Laws of Teshuva, Chapter 2) as a four-part process involving regret, abandoning the damaging act, articulating the regret (*vidui*), and a commitment never to repeat it.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Jeremiah, 31:16-17.

Q

Why say the Vidui  
again and again?



# a

Actually, we probably don't say it enough! That might sound odd – after all, we repeat the same list of mistakes 10 times in 25 hours...

But is one day enough to examine an entire year? Is one week?

Like everything else in life, the more we do something the better we become at it. A musician's masterful creativity can only come from hours of repeatedly following an expert formula.

The *vidui* is our expert formula, covering every possible angle of human failure and shortcoming.

The first time we read the *vidui*, it is 'someone else's list'. Maybe a few categories here and there have some relevance to us. Hopefully, each time we look at the list, our recall can be more expansive, bringing into focus new areas of weakness and new pathways for growth.

The *vidui* formula focuses not so much on specific acts as on root causes.<sup>11</sup>

We speak of problems resulting from general carelessness, physical temptation, speaking without thinking, and so on. We may recall a time we shouted at a colleague, an occasion we said something hurtful, and we begin to identify a pattern. As more acts emerge under a single heading, we start gaining insight into possible areas of growth.

No two musicians will play the same piece in exactly the same way, and no two people will experience the *vidui* in the same way.

Each *vidui* we recite should enrich our inner score, helping us clarify and illuminate our own personal symphony for the new year ahead.

<sup>11</sup> Rabbi E. E. Dessler, *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 2, page 94.

Q

The magic wand – how do “repentance, prayer, and charity” work?

# a

In the epic prayer “*Unetane Tokef*”,<sup>12</sup> we declare repentance, prayer, and charity to be the three keys to success over the High Holy Days.

*Teshuva* (repentance or return) means to become more authentically ourselves. Prayer re-establishes our relationship with God, and charity expresses our care for others. But they are even more powerful – they can even “undo the harmfulness of the decree”.<sup>13</sup> They can reverse Divine judgement. It may seem obvious that inner transformation or prayer could achieve this. But charity?

In Jewish tradition, charity is held in such high esteem that the Talmud declares it “equal to all other commandments”.<sup>14</sup>

It is easy to think of our wealth and possessions as ‘ours’, and not for anyone else. But the Jewish view is that these gifts make us powerful. They offer us the potential to make a real difference in the world.

To give to others is to become a partner with God in creating the ideal world.<sup>15</sup> A person who keeps his money to himself withholds not only from the world, but ultimately prevents his own deepest self-actualisation. There is no magic here.

It’s actually quite simple. If we are sincerely willing to improve (*Teshuva*), to maintain a relationship with God (prayer), and to start making ourselves Godly people (charity),<sup>16</sup> then we are on the right path to repairing our relationship with ourselves, with God, and with our fellow human beings.

<sup>12</sup> A medieval prayer composed by R. Amram of Mainz, as he lay fatally injured for refusal to convert to Christianity

<sup>13</sup> See end of “*Unetana Tokef*” prayer.

<sup>14</sup> Talmud Bava Batra 9a.

<sup>15</sup> See Midrash Tanchuma, Deuteronomy, Re’eh, 18.

<sup>16</sup> See Maimonides, Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandment 8.

Q

Who are we fooling?  
Saying sorry for things  
we know we're going  
to do again?

# a

Imagine two teenagers who have become involved in drugs, knives, gangs, and crime. Their parents desperately try to get through to them, to explain how they're ruining their futures, affecting those around them...

One child storms out, slamming the door behind him. The other sits there attentively and says, "I know you're right, but I also know I'm weak and change is very difficult. I don't know if I can or will change much this year, but I do know you love me and care about me. And I know what you're suggesting would be better for me."

The second child takes his parents – and himself – seriously, so his chances for improvement are likely to be better.

It's the same when we stand before God on Yom Kippur. We could pretend we're fine and just 'slam the door in His face.'

But that would just be fooling ourselves.

Or we could turn to Him and say we know His model is better for us. We know we'd be better – and more true to ourselves – if we didn't get angry, didn't gossip... but we also know we're human and have our weaknesses.

Change is not easy.

Whether in our relationships with family, other people, or with God Himself, we may not be living up to our inner greatness. Far from it. But as long as we're sincere about starting our journey,<sup>17</sup> we're not fooling anyone.

The key is to start...

<sup>17</sup> See Rabbi E.E. Dessler, *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, page 113.

Whether you would like to receive information on other aish q & a kits or offer support, please fill in this card. We also know that we can always do better, so any suggestions would be much appreciated.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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This High Holy Days q & is dedicated in loving memory of Rashi Raizel Bas Reuven.

