
ROSH HASHANAH I

Meeting Our “Author”

Rosh HaShanah arrives majestically at the beginning of the Jewish calendar year, marking the Day of Judgment and start of the Days of Awe. This is an intense time of introspection, prayer, and striving for personal improvement. On Rosh HaShanah, we coronate God as King amidst shofar blasts, and begin the Ten Days of Repentance that culminate in the fast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

There are three Morasha classes on Rosh HaShanah: the first deals with the cycle of the Jewish calendar and God’s Judgment; the second class focuses on the themes expressed in the Rosh HaShanah Mussaf Service: God’s Sovereignty (*Malchiyot*), Remembrances (*Zichronot*), and the Shofar (*Shofrot*). The third class examines two of the experiential components of Rosh HaShanah – the *simanim* we eat on the first night of Rosh HaShanah and the custom of *Tashlich*.

This class will address the following questions:

- ✧ How does God come into the picture on Rosh HaShanah; isn’t this just a Jewish “Happy New Year” celebration?
- ✧ How can these two days be instrumental in determining one’s quality of life for the entire upcoming year?
- ✧ What qualifies Rosh HaShanah to be the Day of Judgment?
- ✧ Why does God judge us on Rosh HaShanah? What are His criteria?
- ✧ Why is our judgment held on the first day of the new year instead of the last day of the year?
- ✧ Why does the Mishnah teach that we are judged on Rosh HaShanah as *Bnei Maron*, a seemingly esoteric Hebrew term?

Class Outline:

- Section I. Introduction: Meeting our “Author”
- Section II. Rosh HaShanah and the Creation of Mankind
- Section III. Judgment on Rosh HaShanah
 - Part A. A Day of Judgment
 - Part B. Judgment for This World, Not the Next
 - Part C. Why is our Judgment on the First Day of the Year Instead of the Last Day?
 - Part D. Three Yardsticks of Judgment
 - Part E. The Principle of Judgment “In His Present State”

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION: MEETING OUR “AUTHOR”

The Jewish calendar begins with what is intended to be a riveting experience for every Jew – Rosh HaShanah. It is a time of keen personal introspection when we are faced with fundamental questions about our existence – *Why am I in this world? What is my purpose? For what am I accountable?* On this day we affirm a core belief of the Jewish people, namely that God, Who created and guides the universe, is our King.

Why would we want to make God King?

There are a number of approaches to this question, and everyone needs to find the one that best speaks to him. The following explanation resonates with me.

There is a scene in Kurt Vonnegut’s novel, “Breakfast of Champions,” that brings home the meaning of God as King. The main character, Kilgore Trout, is having a drink in a bar, minding his own business. Suddenly he senses an awesome presence about to enter the bar. He breaks out into a cold sweat. Who walks in?

Kurt Vonnegut. When the author of the book steps into the novel to visit his character, Kilgore’s perception of his world turns upside down. He realizes that he does not exist independently. Rather, every moment of his life requires a new stroke of the author’s pen. Without the author, he ceases to exist.

He also realizes that his universe exists only in the mind of the author, and that beyond his ephemeral world there is a higher dimension – the realm of Kurt Vonnegut – that is more real than his own.

He also discovers that literally everything in his universe is an expression of Kurt Vonnegut. Because in Kilgore’s world, the author is the only being that has true existence ...

Our finite world is also a work of Creation. Everything in it is an expression of God’s Oneness. Without a new act of Creation every instant, nothing could exist.

While the Vonnegut analogy has its flaws – he’s not God and his creation is only in the realm of ideas – it does teach us, however, that there can be a reality beyond the finite world of our immediate experience. Like Kilgore, on Rosh HaShanah we come face to face with our “Author.” The recognition that God is the Creator and King of the universe has profound significance for the way we relate to life, meaning, and our purpose in this world. To coronate God as our King is to choose transcendence over transience, Infinite over the finite, and reality over illusion. (Based on Rabbi Nechemia Coopsmith, “Hiding from God,” aish.com)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ≈ The central focus of Rosh HaShanah is to crown God as King of the universe. Accomplishing this task demands that we reacquaint ourselves with the reality of God’s existence and what that means to us.
- ≈ On Rosh HaShanah we coronate God as King and acknowledge that we each have a personal mission within His Kingdom for which we are held responsible.

SECTION II. ROSH HASHANAH AND THE CREATION OF MANKIND

Before we can approach the central concept of judgment on Rosh HaShanah, we must first understand the historical context and significance of this day of new beginnings. We find in the *Machzor* (special holiday

prayer book) that Rosh HaShanah is called “*yom hora’at olam* – the day of the Creation of the world”; similarly, it is called “*yom techilat ma’asecha* – the day of the beginning of God’s handiwork.” What is the connection between Rosh HaShanah and the Creation of the world?

1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Rosh HaShanah 11a – Rosh HaShanah is the anniversary of the Creation of the world.

Rabbi Eliezer said, “What is the Scriptural source which teaches that the world was created in Tishrei? It is stated: ‘God said: Let the earth sprout vegetation and seeds of fruit trees ...’ (Bereishit/Genesis 1:11). Which is the month in which the earth is filled with vegetation and the trees are filled with fruit? This is Tishrei for this is when the rainy season begins ...”

תניא ר"א אומר מנין שבתשרי נברא העולם שנאמר
ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע
עץ פרי (בראשית א:יא) איזהו חדש שהארץ מליאה
דשאים ואילן מלא פירות הוי אומר זה תשרי ואותו
הפרק זמן רביעה היתה וירדו גשמים וצימחו...

According to the following Midrash, the idea that the world was created in Tishrei refers not to the start of God’s Creation, but to its pinnacle, the creation of man. The first day of the actual Six Days of Creation was the 25th of the previous month of Elul. It turns out then that Rosh HaShanah is the birthday of mankind.

2. Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah 29:1 – Adam, the first man, was created on Rosh HaShanah.

It was taught in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: The world was created on the twenty-fifth of Elul. The view of Rav agrees with the above teaching of Rabbi Eliezer. For we have learned in the Shofar Benediction composed by Rav: “Today is the day of the beginning of Your handiwork, a memorial of the first day; it is a decree for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob.” On this day sentence is pronounced upon countries – which of them is destined for the sword and which for peace, which for famine and which for plenty; and each separate creature is scrutinized on this day and recorded for life or for death.

Hence, according to this view it comes out that in the first hour the idea of creating man entered God’s mind; in the second hour He took counsel with the Ministering Angels; in the third He assembled Adam’s dust; in the fourth He kneaded it; in the fifth He shaped him; in the sixth He made him into a lifeless body; in the seventh He breathed a soul into him; in the eighth He brought him into the Garden of Eden; in the ninth [Adam] was commanded [against eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge]; in the tenth he transgressed; in the eleventh he was judged; in the twelfth he was pardoned.

תני בשם ר"א בכ"ה באלול נברא העולם ואתיא דרב
כההיא דתני ר"א דתנינן בתקיעתא דרב זה היום תחלת
מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון כי חוק לישראל הוא וגו' ועל
המדינות בו יאמר איזו לחרב ואיזו לשלום איזו לרעב
ואיזו לשובע ובריות בו יפקדו להזכירם לחיים ולמות.

נמצאת אתה אומר ביום ר"ה בשעה ראשונה עלה
במחשבה בשניה נתייעץ עם מלאכי השרת בשלישית
כנס עפרו ברביעית גבלו בה' רקמו בו' עשאו גולם בו'
נפח בו נשמה בח' הכניסו לגן בט' נצטוה ב" עבר י"א
נידון ב"ב יצא בדימוס.

Rosh HaShanah, is inherently a day of judgment because Adam and Chavah were judged that day, as is highlighted in the Midrash. It is true that Adam and Chavah were punished for eating from the Tree of Knowledge – they were banished from Gan Eden, had to work for their sustenance, and Chavah bore the pain of childbirth – nevertheless, the fact that they were granted life was viewed overall as a compassionate judgment and as a sign that they had been pardoned for their transgression.

3. **Ibid. – Rosh HaShanah has always been a day of judgment.**

Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, to Adam, “This will be a model for your descendants: just as you stood before me in judgment on this day and left with clemency, so the future generations of your descendants will stand before me in judgment on this day and will leave with clemency.” And which day is that? The first day of the seventh month [Rosh HaShanah].

אמר הקב"ה לאדם זה סימן לבניך כשם שעמדת לפני בדין היום הזה ויצאת בדימוס כך עתידין בניך לעמוד לפני בדין ביום זה ויוצאין לפני בדימוס אימתי בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש.

4. **Maharsha, Chidushei Agadot, Rosh HaShanah 10b. – God's judgment on Rosh HaShanah is performed with kindness and mercy.**

We conclude from this discussion that Rosh HaShanah was established on the First of Tishrei since the world, specifically man, was created on this day. And on this day Adam was judged for his transgression, and he did *teshuvah* (repented), and God in His mercy, Who created the world, pardoned him. Therefore, our forefathers Avraham (Abraham) and Yaakov (Jacob) were born on Rosh HaShanah through the attributes of kindness and mercy, which is a sign to their descendants that they would be judged together with them through mercy.

יצא לנו מאלו דברים כי לכך נקבע ראש השנה באחד בתשרי לפי שהעולם נברא בו דהיינו האדם ובו בא האדם לדין על שחטא ושב אדם הראשון והקב"ה ברחמים שברא העולם מחל לו וע"כ בו ביום נבראו אבות אברהם ויעקב ע"ש מדת חסד ורחמים והוא סימן לבניהם לבא עמהם ברחמים בדין ביום הזה.

The following story illustrates the connection between the Garden of Eden, judgment, and Rosh HaShanah discussed above.

There's a story told about Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Lubavitch, during the time he was imprisoned on false charges made by his opponents. While he was in the prison, a fascinating encounter took place between the Rebbe and the chief warden. The warden, a man who read the Bible, realized that he had an unusual prisoner, a sage of rare wisdom and saintliness. So he decided to ask the Rebbe a question that had long puzzled him.

“We find in the Bible that after Adam and Eve sinned, God called out to them, ‘Where are you?’ But surely God knows everything. Why then did He call out ‘Where are you?’ He knew where they were. Why did He need to ask?”

The Rebbe looked at the warden with gentle yet penetrating eyes. “Do you believe,” he asked, “that the Bible speaks to every generation, to each of us in fact?” “Of course,” replied the warden. “Well, then,” continued the Rebbe, “it was not to Adam and Eve alone that God was speaking, but to each of us. Perhaps God is right now asking you, who have lived forty-six years on earth: Where are you?”

The warden, hearing his age, and understanding the Rebbe's message, trembled. Rosh HaShanah is the anniversary of the day on which the first human beings – Adam and Eve – were created. God is asking us, as He asked them: "Where are you? What have you made of my most precious gift, the gift of life? Last year you asked to be written in the Book of Life, and I answered your prayer. What have you done with the year I granted you? Where are you?" (From Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, www.parsha.net, Rosh HaShanah 5770)

As the anniversary of man's creation, Rosh HaShanah is also an opportunity to relate to God in a new way.

5. **Rabbi Akiva Tatz, *Living Inspired*, pp. 137-139 – Rosh HaShanah is a time for re-creation.**

As the energy of time cycles through its phases, it reaches peaks which are specific to its seasons. The energy which lends itself to inspiring and revitalizing the "point of beginning" peaks at Rosh HaShanah, the New Year. One who wishes to elevate and amplify his power of new creation, his ability to be always new and self-generating, should utilize the spiritual power of Rosh HaShanah to the fullest ...

Rosh HaShanah is the beginning of the year. The spiritual forces operating at moments of beginning are unique. "*Hakol holech achar harosh* – Everything goes after the beginning." The entire course of any process is determined by its beginning. This is because a beginning is a conception, and conception represents the laying down of the genes which are the blueprint for *everything* which is built later. The spiritual rule is that the closer to the moment of conception, the more potent and critical the forces. A small injury to the human body may not be of major significance in an adult; a fetus during its development is much more sensitive to such an event; and a minute change to the genes may have the most far-reaching results imaginable.

At the moment of conception all details are being coded most potently; it is therefore the most critical moment. No subsequent moment can ever have the intensity and significance of that first moment. The flash of conception contains everything; all later development is simply a revelation of what was created during that first flash.

Rosh HaShanah is the conception of the year and the next ten days are its gestation. That is why these days are so critical to the whole year. That is why a person is judged for *the entire year* as he appears on Rosh HaShanah – the personality as it exists then is the core; it will take supreme effort later to change. Change on Rosh HaShanah is much easier – one can manipulate the "genes" of one's character then. People of spiritual knowledge take extreme care to live perfectly on Rosh HaShanah – the year is being conceived. Many have a custom not to sleep at least during the morning hours; they wish to lay down the genes of the year in consciousness, not oblivion.

What is the source of this special energy? The first Rosh HaShanah ever, which of course must represent its true nature most powerfully, was the day of the creation of man. That day of Creation was the world's first Rosh HaShanah and its climactic event was the creation of the human. That is why the day always retains its power to *re-create* man! When we genuinely and intensely decide to elevate our personalities on Rosh HaShanah, become inspired to live the coming year as higher beings, we are using the day's deeply rooted energy as the day of human creation. The day has the power to energize real change and help a person become unrecognizably different.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ≈ Rosh HaShanah is the anniversary of the Creation of the world. More specifically, though, Rosh HaShanah is the anniversary of the creation of man, the pinnacle of Creation.
- ≈ Once a year we relate to God as newly created beings: just as Adam was judged on the day he was created, so too do we stand before God to justify our existence on Rosh HaShanah.
- ≈ God's judgment on Rosh HaShanah is performed with kindness and mercy.
- ≈ As a moment that taps into the spiritual energy of Creation, Rosh HaShanah is the greatest annual opportunity for self re-creation.

SECTION III. JUDGMENT ON ROSH HASHANAH

As the anniversary of Creation implies, and as the Rosh HaShanah prayer service makes clear, Rosh HaShanah is a Day of Judgment. In this section we will explore more fully the nature of this judgment: why does God judge us on this day and what are His criteria for judgment?

PART A. A DAY OF JUDGMENT

1. **Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16a – While there are four specific times of judgment for the world, Rosh HaShanah is when all people are judged individually by God.**

The world is judged four times a year: On Pesach for the harvest; on Shavuot for fruit trees; on the New Year all of the inhabitants of the world pass before God like *Bnei Maron*, as it is stated: "The One Who created [sees together] their hearts, the One Who understands all of their actions" (Tehillim/Psalms 33:15). And on Sukkot there is judgment for water.

בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון בפסח על התבואה בעצרת על פירות האילן בראש השנה כל באי עולם עוברים לפניו כבני מרון שנאמר היוצר יחד לבם המבין אל כל מעשיהם (תהלים לג) ובחג נידונין על המים.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16b – Everyone falls into one of three categories on Rosh HaShanah.**

Rabbi Cruspedai said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "Three books are opened on Rosh HaShanah: One of totally evil people, one of completely righteous people, and one that includes people with both good and bad deeds [*Beinonim*]. The completely righteous individuals are written and sealed immediately for life. The totally wicked individuals are written and sealed immediately for death. The [sentence for the] individuals with both good and bad deeds is suspended from Rosh HaShanah until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are inscribed for life, if they do not merit, they are inscribed for death."

א"ר כרוספדאי א"ר יוחנן שלשה ספרים נפתחין בר"ה אחד של רשעים גמורין ואחד של צדיקים גמורין ואחד של בינוניים צדיקים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר לחיים רשעים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה בינוניים תלוין ועומדין מר"ה ועד יוה"כ וכו' נכתבין לחיים לא וכו' נכתבין למיתה.

3. Rashi, *ibid.* – What is the definition of “Beinonim”?

["Beinonim"] “Those with both good and bad deeds” – their [deeds] are exactly half and half.

בינוניים. מחצה על מחצה.

This calculation is not as simple as it seems because every action must be evaluated in context and weighed accordingly.

4. Rambam (Maimonides), *Hilchot Teshuvah* (Laws of Repentance) 3:2 – Only God can know the true value of each and every action that we do.

This reckoning is not calculated [only] on the basis of the number of merits and sins, but also [takes into account] their magnitude. There are some merits which outweigh many sins as implied by: “Because in him, there was found a good quality” [I Melachim/Kings 14:13]. In contrast, a sin may outweigh many merits as it says, “One sin may obscure much good” [Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 9:18].

The weighing [of sins and merits] is carried out according to the wisdom of the Knowing God. He knows how to measure merits against sins.

ושקול זה אינו לפי מנין הזכויות והעונות אלא לפי גודלם, יש זכות שהיא כנגד כמה עונות שנאמר יען נמצא בו דבר טוב, ויש עון שהוא כנגד כמה זכויות שנאמר וחוטא אחד יאבד טובה הרבה,

ואין שוקלין אלא בדעתו של אל דעות והוא היודע היאך עורכין הזכויות כנגד העונות.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter provides insight into why only God is capable of evaluating our actions.

5. Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, *Ohr Yisroel*, Siman 31 – Every deed is evaluated by God according to (1) the extent of the positive or negative consequences of the action, and (2) the quality of the effort expended by the person to either perform the action or not.

Every action can be assessed according to the action itself and the person who performs the action:

From the perspective of the action: Every good action is gauged by the results which it produces. A person will be praised for his actions accordingly. To the extent that there are beneficial results, an action will be considered to be qualitatively better. All good actions will stand in his merit. This principle was expressed by our Sages when they said, “A good act has principal [reward] and has fruit [additional reward]; a transgression has principal [punishment] and has no fruit [no additional punishment]” (Kiddushin 40).

From the perspective of the person who performs the action: Every good action is measured by the quality of the effort that goes into its

הלא כל דבר יתחלק ע"פ הפעולה וע"פ הפועל.

מצד הפעולה. יתחלק כל דבר טוב לפי התפשטות פרי. לעומתו יאמר ברוך להעושה. וכל אשר יוסיף תת כחו ... כן יוסיף שכרו. וכמאמרם ז"ל (קדושין מ.) הזכות יש לה קרן ויש לה פירות ... עבירה יש לה קרן ואין לה פירות...

מצד הפועל. יתחלק כל דבר טוב. באיכות עשיתו לפי צער קיומו, כמאמרם ז"ל (אבות פ"ה) לפום צערא אגרא. וכן כל דבר רע. יתחלק באיכות צער שמירתו.

performance, as our Sages teach, “According to the effort is the reward” (Pirkei Avot/Ethics of the Fathers 5). And so too with every bad action, it is judged by the quality of the effort it would have taken to avoid it. The more difficult to avoid, the less severe the accountability, as our Sages have said, “Rabbi Meir said: Greater is the punishment for failing to wear white tzitzit strings than the punishment for failing to wear the blue one [which is more difficult to procure]” (Menachot 43).

To what can this be compared? To a king of flesh and blood who had two servants. He ordered one: “Bring me a seal made of plaster,” and he ordered the other: “Bring me a seal made of gold.” Neither of them listened and neither brought anything to the king. Who should be given the greater punishment? Surely, the one who did not even bring the seal made of plaster!

This is what the Rambam [quoted in source #4 above] means: no individual can estimate the consequences of his actions in order to judge the value of his mitzvot and transgressions according to what they will produce. Similarly, no person can evaluate the great effort that is invested in fulfilling the Torah and mitzvot.

וכל אשר יוסיף צערו כן ימעט בחינתו. כדאמרין (מנחות מ"ג) תניא היה ר' מאיר אומר גדול עונשו של לבן יותר מעונשו של תכלת.

משל למה הדבר דומה למלך בשר ודם שאמר לשני עבדיו לאחד אמר הבא לי חותם של טיט ולאחד אמר הבא לי חותם של זהב ופשעו שניהם ולא הביאו. איזה מהן עונשו יותר גדול? הוי אומר זה שאמר לו הבא לי חותם של טיט ולא הביא. ע"כ...

הן המה דברי הרמב"ם הנ"ל כי אין ביד האדם לידע השתלשלות הדברים לברר ערך המצות והעונות ע"פ התפשטותם. וכן ערך צער קיום ושמירת התורה והמצוה.

PART B. JUDGMENT FOR THIS WORLD, NOT THE NEXT

Rabbi Cruspedai's simple equation of the righteous and the wicked does not seem to fit the reality we see before us. We can all name people whom we would consider thoroughly wicked who live on from year to year; many of us could probably also name righteous people who have died. How then can we understand the judgment of Rosh HaShanah?

1. Tosefot, Rosh HaShanah 16b – If “good” people are granted life, and “evil” people are decreed to die, how is that we see good people dying and evil people living out the following year?

From the understanding that some individuals have the same amount of good deeds and bad deeds [and their sentence is suspended from Rosh HaShanah until Yom Kippur] it is implied that the definition of a righteous person is one whose merits are greater [than his bad deeds] and a completely wicked person [is defined] as one whose transgressions outweigh [his good deeds]. Sometimes, however, the righteous are sealed for death and the totally wicked for life ... Therefore, the definitions of death for the wicked and life for the righteous refer to life in the World to Come.

מדקא חשיב בינוניים משמע דצדיקים קרי למי שזכויותיו מרובים ורשעים גמורים למי שעונותיו מרובים ופעמים הצדיקים נחתמין למיתה ורשעים גמורים לחיים... וכל זה דקרי הכא גבי רשעים מיתה וגבי צדיקים חיים כלומר לחיי עולם הבא.

2. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim Vol. I, p. 103 – The judgment for the World to Come is only upon one's passing, not each year at Rosh HaShanah.**

But this needs clarification, for this judgment concerning the World to Come is not on Rosh HaShanah, rather it is determined only when a person comes to the Heavenly Court after his death.

יש להבין שהדין הזה, לחיי העולם הבא, אינו בראש השנה, אלא רק לאחר פטירת האדם בבואו לפני בית דין של מעלה.

So, if the judgment for a person's status in the World to Come will take place when he dies, what does the judgment for life and death on Rosh HaShanah determine that Tosefot is referring to?

3. **Ibid. p. 105 – There are two aspects of the judgment on Rosh HaShanah: the potential for spiritual growth, and the personal sustenance (health, income etc.) that helps us achieve that spiritual level.**

The establishment of one's spiritual essence [for the coming year] is the judgment on Rosh HaShanah that relates to the World to Come. This is similar to the statement of the Sages found in many places, "Who is destined for the World to Come?" The connotation is that it is not after one's death that a person merits the World to Come, rather, now [in his lifetime] he is already considered as one destined for the World to Come.

His very essence is considered as destined for the World to Come, even though he is still alive in this world, for he is [viewed] as being rooted in the spiritual world, which is considered to be the World to Come. In this way, a person's judgment is related to the World to Come – for on Rosh HaShanah a person's spiritual essence is established according to his level; that is to say he inscribes his own book! And the establishment of the individual's spiritual level [on Rosh HaShanah] determines the corresponding judgment in his personal sustenance [such as health, income, etc.] for the coming year.

קביעת מהותו הרוחנית הוא הדין בראש השנה על חיי עולם הבא... וכן לענין מה שאחז"ל בכמה מקומות "איזהו בן עולם הבא" – אין הכוונה שרק לאחר מותו יזכה לחיי עולם הבא, אלא שעכשיו הוא כבר בן עולם הבא.

מהותו היא "בן עולם הבא", אפילו שעדיין נמצא בעולם הזה כבר הוא משרש בעולם הרוחני שהוא עולם הבא. ועל דרך זה הוא ענין הדין בר"ה על עולם הבא – שבראש השנה נקבעת המהות הרוחנית של האדם על פי דרגתו והיינו האדם כותב את ספרו! ומקביעת מהותו הרוחנית נובע הדין על עניני עולם הזה – על המקרים שיארעו לו בשנה הבאה....

Therefore, a judgment for life means that a person will have the opportunity for a connection to spiritual growth and the concomitant health and resources to support that growth for the coming year. Since the consequences of the judgment ultimately impact one's World to Come, it is viewed as related to the World to Come. Conversely, a judgment for death reflects the lack of connection to spirituality, which is a form of death and detachment from the World to Come.

As an example of how one's general spiritual standing affects one's judgment regarding life's necessities, Rabbi Reuven Leuchter points out a fundamental principle taught by Rabbi Yisroel Salanter. Rabbi Salanter teaches that one sure-fire way to ensure a favorable judgment before God on Rosh HaShanah is to be the kind of person upon whom the community relies. Since such a person's personal needs are by extension required by

the community that relies upon him, his needs will be met in relation to his general spiritual stature as a vital member of the community. (See further Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shor, Vol. II, p. 319.)

PART C. WHY IS OUR JUDGMENT ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE YEAR INSTEAD OF THE LAST DAY?

Understanding the nature of judgment on Rosh HaShanah as related to life in this world rather than reward in the World to Come helps explain the timing of the judgment: why is the Day of Judgment the first day of the new year rather than the last day of the previous year?

1. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. I, pp. 94-95 – On Rosh HaShanah God evaluates the past for the sake of the future.

While it is true that the past deeds of a person determine his judgment on Rosh HaShanah, nevertheless the past is not the main focus, rather the future. The judgment on Rosh HaShanah is not like that of an earthly court which looks at a person's past actions in order to hold him accountable and determine his reward or punishment. Such will be the case on the great and awesome future Day of Judgment upon which we will be judged on all our past actions to determine our ultimate reward and punishment. But the judgment of Rosh HaShanah is of a different sort. The focus is mainly on the future.

Judgment is merely a function of the special nature of the day since it is the “*rosh*” (lit. head) of the year that incorporates the entire year to come. As such, God naturally judges us by virtue of this “head” – He will give us all that we will receive for the needs of the new year. That is what is meant by the expression “Today is the day the world was conceived...” The word “conception” is used to signify that the entire year is created in potential on Rosh HaShanah. And therefore, “today we stand in judgment.”

Let's give an example from the real world. Every factory or retailer has an annual budget. The purpose of fixing a budget is for the future. That is, we deliberate about how to finance the growth of the business in the future. But in order to do so we look back at the productivity of the previous year. There are of course many factors, but one can only allocate resources based upon possibilities that have been determined in the past. As such, one must know the income and expenditures of the past and on that basis prepare for the future. We see then that the purpose of a budget is for the future while it is based on an accounting of the past.

אמנם מעשי האדם שעברו קובעים בדין ר"ה אולם לא העבר עיקר אלא העתיד. דין ר"ה אינו כמשפט בשר ודם שנושפט על מעשיו בעבר ועליו לתת עליהם דין וחשבון, ולפי זה נקבע השכר או העונש. אמנם כך יהיה המשפט ביום הדין הגדול והנורא שבו ידונו על כל מעשה שנעשה בעבר כדי לקבוע את השכר או העונש אבל דין ראש השנה אינו כן, בו עוסקים בעיקר בעתיד.

הדין הוא תוצאה מייחודו של היום, מכיון שיום זה הוא “ראש” השנה הכולל בו כל השנה הבאה, ממילא דן השי”ת במהות ה“ראש” שיינתן לנו מה נקבל לצורך השנה החדשה. זהו “היום הרת עולם” מלשון הריון – ביום זה מקופל כל עתיד השנה הבאה, ולכן “היום יעמיד במשפט”.

נמחיש את הדברים מעולם המעשה. כל מפעל ובית מסחר עורך בכל שנה חשבון התקציב. המטרה בעריכת התקציב היא העתיד, דהיינו מתבוננים איך לכלכל את הצעדים בעתיד, אלא שהמבט הוא לאור המאזן של השנה שעברה, היות ויש דברים רבים הרצויים, אך א”א להתחשב בהם אלא לפי האפשרויות שהוכחו בעבר, על כן צריך ללמוד מה היו ההכנסות וההוצאות בעבר, ולפי”ז לתכנן את העתיד. נמצא שהתקציב הוא לצורך העתיד, אולם החישוב תלוי במציאות העבר.

So too is the judgment of Rosh HaShanah – it is more like a budgetary allocation than a trial.

כך גם דין ראש השנה, הוא כעריכת תקציב ולא כמשפט.

The idea of viewing Rosh HaShanah from a business perspective can also be illustrated with the following analogy:

The very day you receive your MBA degree you get a call from a prominent head-hunter asking if you'd be interested in heading up the sales department of a brand new start-up company for a ridiculously fat salary. After deliberating for a full eight seconds you say, "Sure." Six months later, you're busy as a bee overseeing a staff of 60 salespeople, and business is definitely booming. One day you get a call from one of the higher ups in the firm. It seems there'd been a small oversight when they opened the company – no one ever bothered to actually create an accounting department! No one knows whether the company is actually making or losing money. The call is meant to give you a heads up that after a detailed financial review of each department; there will probably be some downsizing of personnel.

A week later you get a call from "Bob from accounting" explaining that every department head is being asked to prepare for an audit which would determine whether the department was profitable or not. He asks that you gather all available records and present yourself to the pencil pushers in 30 days. You really love your job and have every intention of staying with this firm, so you get real busy doing an internal audit to collect all the data that will show your department is in fact profitable. About two weeks into the process something starts gnawing at you. The numbers aren't really adding up. Seems you're costing the company more than you were bringing in. You're a liability.

So you remain awake night after night trying to figure out what you are doing wrong and how you are going to fix it. Maybe if you fess up to the problems and propose an impressive solution you just might be able to make the case to get another chance to make it right ... The day of the review finds you extremely nervous, but you think that you've created a small window of hope with all the improvements you've made. Bob politely shakes your hand and points to the far corner of the room, where the company CEO himself is seated, already deeply engrossed in poring over your documents; furrowing his brow here and widening his eyes there. You wait just outside the office and finally, after many nail biting hours Bob emerges from the office and says, "I can see that you've been trying, but there is just not enough data to go by. Why don't we give you another ten days to continue to implement your changes and you'll take it up again then with the CEO himself?"

The next ten days become a blur of motion and activity, with every possible nuance of change and improvement cautiously considered and carefully weighed. The big day arrives and you're feeling exhausted, anxious, but just the smallest bit hopeful as you walk into the meeting with the CEO weighed down with armloads of new spreadsheets and sheaves of documents. You immediately launch into your presentation, defending your accomplishments, acknowledging your mistakes, and laying out the perfect strategy to prevent a relapse of unprofitability.

The CEO meticulously examines all your paperwork and after what seems like an eternity he looks up at you and says, "I'm sorry. It's just not enough." You've exhausted every avenue of hope and are about to throw the towel in, when it suddenly dawns on you that the CEO just happens to be your father! You look directly into his eyes and, with sincere commitment, you call out, "I know I didn't really measure up. But, hey Dad, it's me! Could you cut me some slack and gimme a break just this one time?" (Adapted from Facing the CEO, by Rabbi Yerachmiel Milstein, aish.com)

2. Adapted from Rabbi Yerachmiel Milstein, *Facing the CEO*, aish.com – The universe is God's enterprise and we're His employees.

The universe is God's global enterprise and its main product line is good deeds. God created an amazingly beautiful, brilliantly-engineered world which is perfect in so many ways, but is purposefully left lacking in others. God takes His children into "the business" to complete His work.

We of the human race are God's employees. Our job description is clear. Contribute to the enterprise's bottom line to the point of profitability: the spiritual assets must exceed the debits. To ensure the firm's ongoing success, an accounting system is put into place which examines each employee's performance vis-a-vis the company's bottom line. Rosh HaShanah is the time of accounting where each Jew is called before the Heavenly accountants, who weigh every spiritual transaction, good deeds as well as infractions, to determine whether the employee's contract will be renewed for the coming year. Have we even recognized that God is in fact the CEO? On Rosh HaShanah we reaffirm that God is the Creator and Director of the universe, amidst coronating shofar blasts and reflective prayer.

In performing teshuvah, repentance, we figure out where we went wrong, and just as importantly, how we're going to fix it. We arrive on the Day of Judgment with mixed emotions; on the one hand we're optimistic and happy about the prospect to be inscribed for another year in God's majestic world, on the other, we're subdued and introspective, recognizing we still need to advocate for the renewal of the contract – another year of life – because at least we have identified our problems and are prepared to take measures to ensure they don't happen again.

But who can truly say that they've done all they can do as God's employees and are therefore assured of a positive outcome on Rosh HaShanah? Therefore, we are asked to consider our fates as hanging in the balance and we are given until Yom Kippur to more fully examine our moral issues and better implement our fixes and resolutions. We try to account for our shortcomings and transgressions and resolve for them never to recur as we stand before the CEO, God Almighty Himself. Late in the day, we must conclude that for all our teshuvah, we still might find ourselves a tad less than fully qualified for a renewal of our life contracts.

If it may seem that all is lost, we look up and notice that God is our own Father in Heaven. So, during the prayer services of the High Holy Days, we beseech Him, "Avinu Malkeinu – our Father, our King!" *Hey Dad, it's me. I'm your child. I know I erred, but please, give me a break.* What father can resist that kind of sincerity on the part of his beloved child?

PART D. THREE YARDSTICKS OF JUDGMENT

The Mishnah cited above, Section III. A.1, teaches that on Rosh HaShanah mankind is judged as *Bnei Maron*. To what does this term refer? The Talmud and commentaries provide insight into *Bnei Maron*, showing us how God judges us on Rosh HaShanah.

1. Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 18a – There are three possible definitions for *Bnei Maron*.

What is meant by the expression "*Bnei Maron*"? Here it was translated as "*Bnei Amarna*." Reish Lakish explained, "Like the heights of the House of Maron." Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, "Like the soldiers of the House of David." Rabba Bar Bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "All of them are judged at the same time."

מאי כבני מרון הכא תרגימו כבני אמרנא ריש לקיש
אמר כמעלות בית מרון רב יהודה אמר שמואל
כחיילות של בית דוד אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי
יוחנן וכולן נסקרין בסקירה אחת.

2. **Rashi, *ibid.* – How do these three interpretations fit the term *Bnei Maron*?**

“Like *Bnei Amarna*.” Like sheep counted for tithing, filing past in single file through a small opening, two cannot fit through together.

“Like the Heights of the House of Maron” – where there is a narrow path, and there is not enough room for two people to travel alongside one another, and there is a steep valley on either side of the path.

“Like the soldiers of the House of David” – “Like *Bnei Maron*,” i.e. like soldiers in the king’s army. *Maron* is an expression of mastery and lordship; such is the way one counts soldiers as they march out to battle one after the other.

כבני אימרנא: ככבשים שמונין אותם לעשרן ויוצאין זה אחר זה בפתח קטן שאין יכולין לצאת כאחד.

כמעלות בית מרון: הדרך קצר, ואין שנים יכולין לילך זה בצד זה, שהעמק עמוק משני צידי הדרך:

כחיילות של בית דוד: וכבני מרון – כבני חיילות של מלך – מרון לשון מרות ואדנות, וכך היו מונין אותם יוצאים זה אחר זה, בצאתם למלחמה:

3. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, Vol. II, p. 413 – The overall message is one of personal accountability.**

The three analogies are wonderful and the message is clear: at the time of judgment a person stands before his Creator completely alone, totally solitary – he has no plaintiff or witness, for “He is the Judge, He is the Witness, He is the One taking him to court.” He has no one else upon whom to transfer the responsibility [for his actions] or to blame for his failings. At the moment he stands before his Creator in judgment, it’s as if there is no one else in the world except for him. He alone is responsible for all that he did or did not do.

הרי שלשה ציורים נפלאים, והענין ברור: בדין עומד האדם לפני בוראו לגמרי לבד, בבדידות מוחלטת – אין לו טוען ועד, כי “הוא הדיין הוא העד הוא בעל דין.” אין לו על מי לגלגל את חובו ואת מי להאשים בכשלונו, כי ברגע עמדו לפני בוראו בדין הוא כאילו אין עוד אדם בעולם חוץ ממנו, והוא לבדו אחראי לכל מה שעשה ומה שלא עשה.

4. **Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz, “What God Judges Us For on Rosh HaShanah,” www.westmountroutes.com, based on a lecture by Rabbi Zev Leff – The three understandings of *Bnei Maron* reflect three different perspectives by which God judges us.**

Why does a shepherd count his sheep? There are many reasons. First of all, he wants to see if they are all there. Maybe some of them ran away and are no longer part of the flock. Even if they are there, he wants to see if they are healthy. He also wants to see if they have his brand, and are readily identifiable as to whose sheep they are. Similarly, God is looking to see if we are still part of His flock, or if, God forbid, we have run away from Him, and are not part of the flock. And if we are part of the flock – how healthy are we? What good deeds have we done in the past year? What character traits have we displayed in the past year? What kind of ideologies and beliefs do we have? Are we strong in our mitzvah observance, do we do lot of good deeds? Do we learn Torah? Are we strong in our belief? God scrutinizes each and every one of us to see how healthy we are. More than that, do we wear His brand?

At first blush, this seems to encompass everything – what more could be asked of us? But there are still two more aspects. Theoretically, two people can be on the exact same state of being. Both of them can have the exact same amount of good deeds, the same amount of bad deeds, they can have the exact

same character traits, exact same levels of belief in God, lead similar Jewish life-styles, but one will receive a favorable judgment and one will receive a negative judgment. How could that be if they are exactly the same? The answer is that God does not expect us to do good deeds, learn Torah, pray – *and remain stagnant*. He expects us to grow constantly. A human being is called a *mehaleich* – a mover; whereas angels are called *omdim* – stationary, who stand in one place. Angels are created to be who they are, and that is what they are. Animals are similar in this concept. The Hebrew word for animal is *beheimah*. The Maharal explains the word to be a contraction of two words: *bah* and *mah* – meaning, whatever it is, is there. They don't change or grow – except physically. The animal is spiritually programmed; and whatever it is born with, that is what it is. But a human being has to grow and constantly move. Life is analogous to climbing up the downward escalator. If you stand still on the escalator – you will go down. So too is life in this world. You cannot stand still and stagnate – you must constantly be growing. If you stand still, you go down. If you make a little effort, you stay in the same place. If you make a lot of effort, you can move ahead and grow.

Therefore, on Rosh HaShanah, God does not merely judge us in terms of where we are, but He also judges us vis-à-vis where we were. So if this year, we have two people standing on level 37, but last year one was on level 47 and the other was on level 27, they will be judged differently, as one is going up, while the other is going down. One will have a positive judgment because he is progressing, while the other will have a negative judgment because he is regressing. *In Judaism, the main thing is not where you are on the ladder, but what direction you are moving on the ladder!*

The third aspect of the judgment is like soldiers. A person can be on a nice level, and is climbing, but there still is another aspect of the judgment that he must pass. Judaism tells us that each and every individual is created with unique talents and abilities in order to use them productively in this world. God put each and every one of us in this world in order to accomplish certain goals, and He invested us with the potential to be able to achieve that purpose. It is a person's responsibility to reach his potential in life. *In the Mussaf prayer, the text says that God judges "the deeds of each person and his tafkid" – his mission, his purpose.* So what is the difference between deeds and purpose? The answer is that deeds represent all the mitzvot of the Torah that each and every one of us must do – prayer, charity, etc. We are all required to inculcate within ourselves the same mitzvot, the same moral values, etc. But each person in addition to that, has things that are unique to him – talents and capabilities that only he possesses. A person is expected not only to do what everyone else is doing, but to develop his talents and capabilities, and use them in service to God. So this third aspect of judgment sees if we are developing our unique talents and abilities or if we are ignoring them. You might be doing what everyone else is doing, but you are not developing your unique identity.

So those are the three aspects of judgment:

- Like sheep – what level are you on?
- Like climbers – what level are you on vis-à-vis where you were? Are you improving or not?
- Like soldiers – are you developing your unique capabilities and talents or are you ignoring them?

PART E. THE PRINCIPLE OF JUDGMENT “IN HIS PRESENT STATE”

Fortunately for us, God judges us on Rosh HaShanah as we appear before Him on that day. This important principle is related to us in the Torah reading for the first day of Rosh HaShanah. We do not mean to imply that all we must do is simply put on a good face for Rosh HaShanah. Rather what it means is that if we sincerely get in touch with that part of us that wants to get closer to God, then He will deal with us according to that present reality even though He knows that it might not last.

1. **Bereishit, 21:8-17 – God saves Avraham's banished son, Yishmael, based on his sincerity on that day.**

The child grew and was weaned and Avraham (Abraham) made a large feast on the day that Yitzchak (Isaac) was weaned. And Sarah saw [Yishmael] the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born to Avraham, was mocking. She said to Avraham, "Send out this maid servant and her son ..." The idea was very evil in Avraham's eyes on account of his son. God spoke to Avraham, "That which [Sarah said] about the boy and the maid servant should not be evil in your eyes, all that Sarah says to you listen to her voice for through Yitzchak shall your seed be called ..."

And Avraham awoke early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar ... and he sent her away [with Yishmael] and she went and wandered in the desert of Beer Sheva. And the water was finished from the skin and she cast the boy under one of the trees. She went and sat down at a distance of a bowshot from the tree, for she said, "I do not want to see the death of the child." She sat opposite him and raised her voice and wept. God heard the voice of the boy, and then an angel of God called to Hagar from the heavens and said, "What is [troubling] you Hagar, do not be afraid for God has heeded the voice of the child in his present state."

ויגדל הילד ויגמל ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל את יצחק. ותרא שרה את בן הגר המצרית אשר ילדה לאברהם מצחק. ותאמר לאברהם גרש האמה הזאת ואת בנה... וירע הדבר מאד בעיני אברהם על אודת בנו. ויאמר אלהים אל אברהם אל ירע בעיניך על הנער ועל אמתך כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקלה כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע...

וישכם אברהם בבקר ויקח לחם וחמת מים ויתן אל הגר... ואת הילד וישלחה ותלך ותתע במדבר באר שבע. ויכלו המים מן החמת ותשלך את הילד תחת אחד השיחים. ותלך ותשב לה מנגד הרחק כמטחוי קשת כי אמרה אל אראה במוות הילד ותשב מנגד ותשא את קלה ותבך. וישמע אלקים את קול הנער ויקרא מלאך אלהים אל הגר מן השמים ויאמר לה מה לך הגר אל תיראי כי שמע אלהים אל קול הנער באשר הוא שם.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16b – Yishmael was judged in his present state.**

Rav Yitzchak said that a person is only judged according to his behavior at the time of judgment, as it is stated, "God has heeded the voice of the child in his present state" (Bereishit 21:17).

וא"ר יצחק אין דנין את האדם אלא לפי מעשיו של אותה שעה שנאמר "כי שמע אלהים-ם אל קול הנער באשר הוא שם."

3. **Rashi, Bereishit 21:17 – Even though bad things would come from Yishmael, he was judged to be righteous in his present state.**

He is judged according to his actions at this moment and not according to what may happen in the future (Rosh HaShanah 16b). The angels accused Yishmael saying, "Master of the World, how can You provide a well of water for someone whose descendants will kill your children in the future through thirst?" God answered them, "Right now, is he righteous or evil?"

לפי מעשים שהוא עושה עכשיו הוא נדון, ולא לפי מה שהוא עתיד לעשות (ר"ה טז:). לפי שהיו מלאכי השרת מקטרגים ואומרים, רבש"ע, מי שעתיד זרעו להמית בניך בצמא אתה מעלה לו באר? והוא משיבם עכשיו מה הוא, צדיק או רשע? אמרו לו, צדיק. אמר להם, לפי

They responded, "Righteous." He said to them, "I judge him according to his present actions," and that is the meaning of "in his present state."

מעשיו של עכשיו אני דנו, וזהו באשר הוא שם (ב"ר נ"ג י"ד).

4. **Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts for Rosh HaShanah , p. 57 – One should strive to reach a high spiritual level on Rosh HaShanah regardless of whether or not such a state will endure throughout the year.**

We find one of the major foundations of teshuvah (repentance) in God's reply to the angels' question, which our Sages most certainly wanted us to consider at the time of the Torah reading. The Sages wanted to teach us the principle of "in his present state." Even if one's deeds are not of the highest caliber during the rest of the year, one should make every attempt to improve one's ways during the days preceding the Day of Judgment in order to receive a favorable verdict. This is so even if one suspects that he is likely to stumble after Rosh HaShanah and not remain on the same spiritual level. A person is judged "in his present state," and not according to his future actions. Therefore, if a person raises his spiritual level to a higher than normal plane on Rosh HaShanah he will receive a favorable judgment.

The notion of living on a higher level during this time of year has become firmly grounded in Jewish tradition, as the following law demonstrates:

5. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 603:1 – It is customary to adopt extra stringencies during the Ten Days of Teshuvah.**

Even someone who is not normally punctilious about not eating bread made by a non-Jew should nevertheless be so during the Ten Days of Teshuvah.

אף מי שאינו נוהר מפת של כותים, בעשרת ימי תשובה צריך ליזהר.

It should be noted, however, that the practice of living on an exalted plane during this time of year is not just a ruse; we are not simply putting on a good face for the trial. Rather, the hope is that living this way even for a short while will have its influence on the way we live throughout the year as well. That this is the case can clearly be seen from the context in which this law was first formulated by the Talmud.

6. **Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Shabbat 1:3 – Being stringent with oneself during the Ten Days of Teshuvah will spill over into other areas of spiritual growth.**

Rabbi Chiya instructed Rav: If you are able to eat in a state of purity all year then do so, but if not then at least do so for seven days [between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur]. From here Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair derived the following lesson: Zeal leads to cleanliness; cleanliness leads to purity, etc...

רבי חייה רובא מפקד לרב אין את יכול מיכול כל שתא חולין בטהרה אכול ואם לאו תהא אכיל שבעה יומין מן שתא מיכן היה ר' פינחס בן יאיר אומר זריזות מביאה לידי נקיות נקיות מביאה לידי טהרה ...

While the judgment of Rosh HaShanah is sealed for the year to come, nevertheless God still scrutinizes our actions and will adjust for changes in our behavior.

7. **Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 17b – God will match the outcome of our judgment on Rosh HaShanah in line with our conduct during the course of the year.**

“The eyes of the Lord, Your God are upon [the Land of Israel] (from the beginning of the year until the end)” (Devarim 11:12). Sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse.

What is an example of this for the better? If the Jewish people were completely wicked on Rosh HaShanah and were decreed to have a small amount of rain, but in the end changed their ways – to give them more rain would be impossible as it had already been decreed. Rather, God makes that rain fall in the proper time and in the places where it is most needed, each place accordingly.

What is an example of this for the worse? If the Jewish people were completely righteous on Rosh HaShanah and were decreed to have abundant rain, but in the end changed their ways – to give them less would be impossible for it had already been decreed. Rather, God makes that rain fall unseasonably and in places that do not need it.

עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּה - עֵתִים לטובה עֵתִים לרעה.

עֵתִים לטובה כִּיצַד? הָרִי שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל רָשָׁעִים גְּמוּרִין בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, וּפָסְקוּ לָהֶם גְּשָׁמִים מוֹעֲטִים, לְסוֹף חֲזָרוּ בָהֶן. לְהוֹסִיף עֲלֵיהֶן - אִי אִפְשָׁר, שֶׁכֶּבֶר נִגְזְרָה גִזְרָה. אֵלֹא הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹרִידֵן בְּזִמְנָן עַל הָאָרֶץ הַצְרִיכָה לָהֶן, הַכֹּל לִפִּי הָאָרֶץ.

עֵתִים לרעה כִּיצַד? הָרִי שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל צְדִיקִים גְּמוּרִין בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, וּפָסְקוּ עֲלֵיהֶן גְּשָׁמִים מְרֻבִּין. לְסוֹף חֲזָרוּ בָהֶן, לְפָחוֹת מִהֵן - אִי אִפְשָׁר, שֶׁכֶּבֶר נִגְזְרָה גִזְרָה. אֵלֹא הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹרִידֵן שְׁלֵא בְּזִמְנָן עַל הָאָרֶץ שְׁאִינָה צְרִיכָה לָהֶן.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ≈ Rosh HaShanah has always been a time of judgment when God scrutinizes the actions of his creations. It is only one of the “new years” in the Jewish calendar but it is certainly the most personally significant for each individual.
- ≈ Unlike the judgment that will occur at the end of a person’s life, on Rosh HaShanah the scrutiny of the past is for the sake of the future. Since Rosh HaShanah is the day upon which Creation is renewed annually, God judges us to determine how to allocate resources in the upcoming year. God judges our growth, loyalty to His cause, and the extent to which we are maximizing our potential.
- ≈ Getting in touch with the desire to change for the better on Rosh HaShanah is itself a good way to ensure a favorable judgment since God judges us based on how we appear before Him on Rosh HaShanah.

CLASS SUMMARY:

HOW DOES GOD COME INTO THE PICTURE ON ROSH HASHANAH; ISN'T THIS JUST A JEWISH "HAPPY NEW YEAR" CELEBRATION?

- ✧ On Rosh HaShanah, we come to terms with a reality beyond the finite world of our immediate experience. We affirm a core belief of the Jewish people – that God is our “Author,” Who created and guides the universe. We coronate God as King and acknowledge that we each have a personal mission within His Kingdom for which we are held responsible.

HOW CAN THESE TWO DAYS BE INSTRUMENTAL IN DETERMINING ONE'S QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR?

- ✧ The entire course of any process is determined by its beginning. This is because a beginning is a conception, and conception represents the laying down of the genes which are the blueprint for *everything* which is built later. The spiritual rule is that the closer to the moment of conception, the more potent and critical the forces.

WHAT QUALIFIES ROSH HASHANAH TO BE THE DAY OF JUDGMENT?

- ✧ Rosh HaShanah, is inherently a day of judgment because Adam and Chavah were judged that day.
- ✧ Rosh HaShanah is the anniversary of the Creation of the world. According to the Midrash, the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer that the world was created in Tishrei refers not to the start of God's Creation, but to its pinnacle, the creation of man. As the birthday of mankind, Rosh HaShanah presents a wonderful opportunity to tap into the spiritual energy of self renewal.

WHY DOES GOD JUDGE US ON ROSH HASHANAH? WHAT ARE HIS CRITERIA?

- ✧ The universe is God's global enterprise and its main product line is good deeds. We of the human race are God's “employees.” Our job description is clear – contribute to the enterprise's bottom line to the point of profitability: the spiritual assets must exceed the debits. Rosh HaShanah is the time of accounting where each Jew is called before the Heavenly accountants, who weigh every spiritual transaction, good deeds as well as infractions, to determine whether the employee's contract will be renewed for the coming year.
- ✧ God is looking to see how loyal we are to His cause, how much we have grown since last year, and to what extent we are fulfilling our unique destiny.
- ✧ Judgment on Rosh HaShanah is not the same as the final judgment that will take place after a person dies, which determines his future in the World to Come.
- ✧ On Rosh HaShanah a person is judged on the opportunity for a connection to spiritual growth and the concomitant health and resources to support that growth for the coming year.
- ✧ The actual judgment will depend on how we stand on Rosh HaShanah itself.

WHY IS OUR JUDGMENT HELD ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE NEW YEAR INSTEAD OF THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR?

- ✧ It makes sense that God judges us on the first day of the year rather than the last because even though He is judging the past, His purpose is for the sake of determining what role we will play in the future.
- ✧ Rosh HaShanah is the day that God determines the conditions of our lives for the year to come. As the “head” of the year, everything is rooted in it.
- ✧ However, God will readjust the allocation of what He determined on Rosh HaShanah in light of how we act in the course of the year to come.

WHY DOES THE MISHNAH TEACH THAT WE ARE JUDGED ON ROSH HASHANAH AS *BNEI MARON*, A SEEMINGLY ESOTERIC HEBREW TERM?

- ✧ The Talmud relates there are three explanations for *Bnei Maron*: (1) sheep counted for tithing, filing past in single file through a small opening, (2) Heights of the House of Maron – hikers along a narrow path, where there is not enough room for two people to walk alongside one another and there is a steep valley on either side of the path, and (3) like soldiers in the king’s army marching in a line.
- ✧ The basic theme is that we are judged as individuals. We must each take responsibility for whatever we did or did not accomplish during the past year. The three analogies relate to three questions we need to ask on Rosh HaShanah: (1) Like sheep – what level are you on? (2) Like climbers – what level are you on vis-à-vis where you were? Are you improving or not? (3) Like soldiers – are you developing your unique capabilities and talents or are you ignoring them?