



# **aish.com's** **High Holiday Reader**

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# A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

BY RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS

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THE MOST IMPORTANT TIME OF THE JEWISH YEAR IS  
OFTEN THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD. HERE ARE ALL THE  
BASICS YOU NEED TO KNOW.

The High Holiday period actually begins in Elul, the Hebrew month preceding Rosh Hashana. Elul is an important period of introspection, of clarifying life's goals, and of coming closer to God. Because when the big day of Rosh Hashana comes, and each individual stands before the Almighty to ask for another year, we'll want to know what we're asking for!

ON THIS "DAY OF  
JUDGMENT," WE  
EACH STAND  
BEFORE GOD  
AND OFFER OUR  
BEST CASE FOR  
BEING "CREATED  
ANEW."

During Elul, many people perform a daily *cheshbon* -- [a spiritual accounting](#) -- where we step back and look at ourselves critically and honestly, with the intention of improving.

In order to arouse us to this task, it is the Ashkenazi custom to blow the shofar every morning after prayers during the month of Elul.

Historically, this month has great significance, because it was on the first day of Elul that Moses -- following the sin of the Golden Calf -- ascended Mount Sinai to receive a new, second set of stone tablets. Forty days later -- on the seminal

Yom Kippur -- Moses returned to the people with tablets in hand, signaling a repair of the breach between the Jewish people and God.

High Holiday preparations intensify on the Saturday night before Rosh Hashana, when we recite "Slichot," a special series of prayers that includes the powerful "[13 Attributes of Mercy](#)."

## ROSH HASHANA

Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year, commemorating the creation of Adam and Eve, the first human beings. On Rosh Hashana, the Books of Life and Death are open on the heavenly desk. On this "Day of Judgment," we each stand before God and offer our best case for being "created anew" -- i.e. granted another year of life.

The morning before Rosh Hashana, we perform "*Hatarat Nedarim*" -- annulling all vows. This enables us to enter the new year with a clean slate.

The essential mitzvah of Rosh Hashana is to hear the [Sounding of the Shofar](#). The shofar blasts represent three distinct themes of the day:

1. It is the sound of the King's coronation
2. It is the sobbing cry of a Jewish heart
3. It is an alarm clock, arousing us from our spiritual slumber

The shofar is also mindful of the biblical story of Abraham binding his son Isaac, when a ram was caught in the thicket and sacrificed in Isaac's stead. We blow a ram's horn to recall the great act of faith in God performed by Abraham and Isaac; tradition records that this event occurred on the day of Rosh Hashana.

The shofar is not blown when Rosh Hashana falls on Shabbat.

A central part of Rosh Hashana is the festive meal. During the High Holidays, a round challah is used -- symbolizing fullness and completion. We dip the bread into honey, and also an apple into honey, symbolizing our prayer for a sweet new year.

On [Rosh Hashana](#) we also eat a series of foods that symbolize good things we hope for in the coming year.

It is customary to greet others with the words: "*L'shana Tova -- Ketivah vi-chatima Tova.*" This means: "For a good year -- You should be written and sealed in the good (Book of Life)."

The "Tashlich" prayer is said on the first afternoon of Rosh Hashana by a pool of water that preferably has fish in it. These prayers are symbolic of the casting away

of our mistakes. When the first day of Rosh Hashana falls on Shabbat, it is said on the afternoon of the second day.

While the decision for "another year of life" is handed down on Rosh Hashana, the verdict is not "sealed" unto Yom Kippur. Therefore, the 10 days from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur are a crucial period when most peoples' judgment "hangs in the balance." During these ["Ten Days of Repentance,"](#) we engage in intense introspection, and are particularly careful with our speech, actions, and mitzvah observance.

## YOM KIPPUR

Following the Golden Calf, Moses pleaded with God to forgive the Jewish people. Finally, on Yom Kippur, atonement was achieved and Moses brought the second set of Tablets down from Mount Sinai. From that day forward, every Yom Kippur has carried with it a special power to cleanse the mistakes of Jews (both individually and collectively) and to wipe the slate clean.

[Yom Kippur](#) is thus the holiest day of the Jewish year. In order to help us achieve a high spiritual level, there are five areas of physical involvement which we remove ourselves from on Yom Kippur:

1. eating and drinking
2. washing
3. applying oils or lotions to the skin
4. marital relations
5. wearing leather shoes

YOM KIPPUR IS  
THUS THE  
HOLIEST DAY OF  
THE JEWISH  
YEAR.

The Yom Kippur fast begins at sundown, and extends 25 hours until the following nightfall.

Though Yom Kippur atones for transgressions against God, this does not include wrongs committed against our fellow human beings. It is therefore the universal Jewish custom -- sometime before Yom Kippur -- to apologize and seek forgiveness from any friends, relative, or acquaintances whom we may have harmed or insulted over the past year.

The High Holidays are followed five days later by [Sukkot](#), a holiday of immense joy, where we express our complete trust in God, and celebrate our confidence in having received a "good judgment" for the coming year.

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# MY LIFE LIST

BY RABBI YAAKOV SALOMON

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## THINGS TO DO WHILE YOU'RE ALIVE.

TAKE ADVANTAGE  
OF THE HIGH  
HOLIDAY SEASON  
AND CONSIDER  
WHAT YOU WOULD  
LIKE TO  
ACCOMPLISH  
THIS YEAR.

I know of 67 people who would like to build an igloo.

There are at least 4050 people who say that they intend to "be a better friend" than they have been.

And 5996 others plan to start waking up when their alarm clocks goes off. These are just three of the items that members list as life goals on the Web site 43Things.com. In the past three years, more than 1.2 million idealists have signed up and posted their customized lists of things they would like to accomplish on this world before they die.

Sky diving ranks 24th in popularity, but the leading life goal is quite predictable: weight loss.

The idea of having people ponder their mortality and then charting their life's road map has truly arrived. Besides the millions of people who publish their lists on Web sites, millions more are buying and reading

best sellers like, *"1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die,"* and *"1000 Places to See Before You Die."*

And let's not forget Visa's popular ad campaign called, "Things to Do While You're Alive."

It seems that people are coming to terms with the reality that life is precious, finite, and made for productivity.

Of course, not everyone's definition of achievement is the same. The lists are testimony to that. Living with the head hunters of New Guinea or retracing the route of Marco Polo through all of the Middle East, Asia, and China may be fulfillment to some, while pulling 101 great pranks or re-structuring your closets at home may be dreams come true to someone else. No matter. To each his own. People want to get things done, and making these *Life To Do* lists seems to help.

Considering one's objectives and designing a plan of action is nothing new to Judaism. In fact, it's the hallmark of the annual process that Jews engage in before Rosh Hashana. It is an integral part of making a spiritual inventory of what our time, effort and resources should be invested in. Ideally, this soulful stock-taking should really be a constant, ongoing, almost daily process where, with the proper awareness, a person would always know what his Life List looks like and what items need some additional attention. Those who live their lives with that level of cognizance are always seeking to better themselves and are getting the most out of life.

FORGET THE IGLOO  
AND THE COYOTE.  
YOU'VE GOT  
IMPORTANT THINGS  
TO DO.

But you and I know few people whose lives are permeated with that kind of dedication to self-improvement. Somewhat more common are those who take advantage of the High Holiday season and, at least once a year, give some pause to what they would like to accomplish. So, if the reflective mood hits you, take out that yellow pad of paper and write, "My Life List" on it. Then write -- just write -- any idea that comes to mind. Don't filter and don't falter -- just write. The ideas may seem silly, impractical, superficial, or out of reach, but this is not the time to sharpen your editing skills. If it strikes you that you might want to shoot pictures at a friend's wedding or invite 50 people for dinner -- write it down.

After you have compiled this unedited list of your potential life goals, put the list away for at least 24 hours. You need a full day of breathing space before you can return to the job. Now examine the list again with

a fine eye and delete the impossible stuff. Imagine that your best friend is reading your list. Which items would he/she immediately declare as undoable? Take only those out.

Finally, feel free to add any additional goals that strike your fancy now.

But allow me to add one more point. Take advantage of the opportunity by making a majority of your targets truly meaningful ones.

There's nothing wrong with becoming a world class sudoku player, learning how to whistle while standing on your head, or memorizing the lyrics to every Lynryd Skynyrd song ever recorded. And perhaps a few of those "less serious" objectives should be included on your list. But why spend the bulk of your time on the frivolous or the mundane? Why would owning a coyote qualify as a goal in life? Rosh Hashana is the time when Jews worldwide seek ways to crown the Almighty as the king of the Universe. Reflecting on your purpose on this planet and then actualizing your quest to reach that end may just be the greatest way possible to coronate Him.

Tithe your earnings, intensify your prayers, call your folks and your grandparents, keep Kosher for a month, affix a mezuzah to your door, donate blood, attend a lecture series, have a catch with your son once a week, bring soup to Nursing Home residents, make a date with your soul, learn how to say, "I was wrong," drive with courtesies, smile -- the list could on forever.

But we won't go on forever. Maybe now would be a good time to get started. Forget the igloo and the coyote. You've got important things to do.

Have a wonderful... and productive new year.

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# ROSH HASHANA DREAMING

BY RABBI SHAUL ROSENBLATT

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## GOD IS OFFERING ANOTHER YEAR OF LIFE. WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH IT?

ROSH HASHANA  
REMINDS US TO  
DREAM.

"I have a dream..." -- a phrase immortalised by Martin Luther King. "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character..." It was a dream that he did not live to see realized; a dream that is still not realized. But a man who dreams is a man who cares. And a man who cares is a man who makes a difference.

We Jews also have a dream. A dream that we have dreamt for almost 3500 years. And Rosh Hashana is the day that we remind ourselves of that dream.

You would think that on the awesome Day of Judgment, "who will live and who will die, who by fire and who by sword," you would think that we would pray for forgiveness, for health, for a year of life. But if you look at the essence of the prayer service, you will see that we ask for none of this.

What do we ask? We ask that God perfect

the world. We ask for unity amongst people. We ask for harmony. We ask for the destruction of evil and justice in response to righteousness. In short, we ask that God bring us the Messianic Age. It's all lovely stuff, but at first glance, it seems a little out of place on Rosh Hashana.

In fact, it's exactly what Rosh Hashana is all about.

We stand before a loving God, our Father. Every Father wants their child to live a long, healthy and prosperous life. And so, like any good father, He is offering us another year. The question is whether we are interested. The year is on offer, but what are we going to do with it? Are we living for something that matters? Or are we concerned about our next lollipop? Are we striving to be great, or meandering towards mediocrity?

Rosh Hashana is there to lift our sights, to remind us to dream. And to dream of great things -- peace, love, justice... Why

bother dreaming of anything less? By dreaming grandiose dreams, we remind ourselves that life really does matter. This is not just another year of drudgery. It is a year in which we can accomplish great things. We remind ourselves that we really do want another year, another opportunity to strive towards making a difference.

Rosh Hashana is a day to ask the all important question: What am I living for? If we know what we are living for and it is something that matters, God will give us life. If we're wasting life, God may give us a little more to waste, but then again, He may not.

Let's not take the chance. On Rosh Hashana, let's make sure we have a dream.

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# NEW BEGINNINGS

BY DINA COOPERSMITH

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**ROSH HASHANA PRESENTS A CELEBRATION OF A NEW YEAR AND A FEARSOME DAY OF JUDGMENT AT THE SAME TIME. HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THIS CONTRADICTION?**

Rosh Hashana is a paradox. On the one hand it is a celebration -- the sweetness of a new year, along with festive clothes and special foods. On the other hand it is a day of judgment: "Who will live and who will die?"

There are more puzzling elements to Rosh Hashana. The holiday includes the first and second of the Ten Days of Repentance, culminating in Yom Kippur. And yet the prayers of Rosh Hashana mention nothing about repentance. There is no confession of our sins, no regret about the past. So is Rosh Hashana a day of repentance or not?

And if we are being judged for our behavior this past year, then we'd expect to see at least a few days of repentance coming before the day of judgment, not after.

Why are we judged on the first day of the New Year? Wouldn't it be more fitting to be judged at the end of the previous year? Some way to celebrate a Happy New Year

-- go on trial!

All these inconsistencies demand further investigation.

## **SPIRITUAL ENERGY**

Every holiday in the Jewish year has a certain spiritual energy and potential which is responsible for creating the holiday. In essence, every year we travel through the cycle of holidays and come again to that same event and point in time, with its spirit and potential intact.

For instance, on Passover we come around to the time of freedom from bondage. All aspects of God's redemption are available to us again each year, as they were when the Jewish people left Egypt. Other holidays follow the same pattern.

So what historical event are we commemorating on Rosh Hashana? What is the energy inherent on the first day of

Tishrei?

In the prayers of Rosh Hashana we get a hint:

*This is the day of the beginning of Your creation, a memorial of the first day ... today is the conception of the world.*

It seems that the world was created on Rosh Hashana!

Tradition tells us that man was created on this day, and this is where our calendar begins. We date back to Day One of creation of man.

*This is the day of the beginning of creation, like Rabbi Eliezer said: "In Tishrei the world was created." (Talmud, Rosh Hashana 27a)*

There is actually a Talmudic dispute whether the world created on Rosh Hashana or on Passover. The resolution:

*"In Tishrei, the initial thought to create came up in [God's] mind, but it was not brought into creation until Nissan." (Tosfot Rosh Hashana 27a)*

What does this mean? Does God need to take the time to first plan and then execute? God is above time, and the *concept* of time wasn't even created until the fourth day of creation along with the sun and the moon! This cannot be a literal description of events. What is the Talmud's resolution of the creation-day dispute teaching us?

On Rosh Hashana, God created the

concept of the world, the blueprint, the plan. It is a day for re-conceiving ourselves anew, a time for planning and re-creation, not for the execution.

Every Rosh Hashana we enter into this inherent energy of pre-creation once again, to the time before all time began, before existence came into fruition. On this day there is no past, only potential. It is a new beginning, a fresh start when we can envision the world anew.

Why is there no repentance on Rosh Hashana? No regret, no mention of sins? Because there is no past to regret and repent for. We are recreated today from scratch, with an empty slate.

## A NEW PLAN OF ACTION

The prayers on Rosh Hashana focus instead on God's reign, on God's renewal of His kingdom for another year. God judges His world and the creatures within it on this day, determining their worthiness and their circumstances for the new year.

Since this judgment is not based on our past, for we are standing at a brand new beginning, what then is it based on? How does God decide whether we are signed in the Book of Life?

Rosh Hashana is the time to envision your future and determine how you want to direct your ambitions and desires in being a part of God's kingdom this year. Who do you want to be? What goals are you committed to investing in and what are your plans to make them happen? The

judgment isn't based on the past, it's based on our inner commitment and vision for the upcoming year.

On Rosh Hashana, since the world starts anew, we can transcend our past limitations and reach for the stars. We can choose new goals and redirect ourselves toward greater purpose and meaning, as individuals and as a nation. We can choose life.

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# FACING THE CEO

BY RABBI YERACHMIEL MILSTEIN

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**“HI, IT’S BOB  
FROM  
ACCOUNTING.  
PLEASE  
PREPARE FOR  
AN AUDIT.”**

Why doesn't Rosh Hashana come after Yom Kippur? Wouldn't it make more sense to first have our sins forgiven on Yom Kippur, and then go and face the heavenly tribunal on the Day of Judgment all bright eyed and bushy tailed?

Let's get a handle on this by using the following business model.

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 overseeing a staff of 60 salespeople, and business is 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.

"I KNOW I  
DIDN'T  
REALLY  
MEASURE UP.  
BUT, HEY  
DAD, IT'S ME!"

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. Hey, unlike the new rookie replacement they'd be likely to hire in your place, at least you know where the hemorrhage is and how to stop it.

You start to tinker and make some changes here and there, examining every possible improvement with great interest, sensitivity and insight. And with each change you implement you can actually begin to feel things turning around for the better.

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 in his eyes and, sobbing uncontrollably, 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?"

## HOLIDAY SEASON

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. Perfection reigns in the coral reef, at Yosemite and in the ingenious design of DNA. Yet pockets of imperfection exist where children go hungry and illness

causes much misery. Like any prosperous, good father, God takes His children into the business to complete His work and gives them the extra money they need to feed the starving, the wherewithal to cure the ill and strength to uplift the infirm.

In fact, the Hebrew word for charity is *tzedaka*, which comes from the word "justice." Charity is all about rectifying the pockets of injustice where the wealth seems to be spread unevenly. This one hasn't enough money and his brother has got a little extra. The charitable deed rights the wrong and justice prevails.

We're God's employees and 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-à-vis the company's bottom line.

Rosh Hashana is the day of accounting where each Jew is called before the heavenly accountants who weigh every spiritual transaction, as well as every infraction, to determine whether the employee's contract will be renewed for the coming year. It is for this reason that Jews traditionally spend Elul, the month preceding Rosh Hashana, carefully examining their every action to see how it impacted the overall spiritual profitability of the enterprise, God's universe. In performing *teshuva*, repentance, we figure out where we went wrong and just as importantly how we're going to fix it.

And on the Day of Judgment we arrive at the synagogue somewhat frightened, subdued and introspective, but ready to plead for the renewal of the contract -- another year of life -- because at least we have identified the problem and have taken measures to make sure it doesn'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 Hashana? 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. On Yom Kippur, we are so consumed by the uncertainty of our fate that we can't even think about eating or drinking. We try to account for our sins 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 *teshuva* we still might find ourselves a tad less than fully qualified for a renewal of our life contracts. Just when it seems that all is lost, we look up and notice that God is our own Father in heaven. So in the final prayer service of the High Holy Days, we beseech Him, "Avinu Malkeinu -- our Father, our King!" *Hey Dad, it's me. I'm your son. I know I messed up but please, this one time, give me a break.* What father can resist that kind of sincerity on the part of his beloved child?

So He forgives us but asks us to undergo one more challenge. "Now that we've made



up, you and I, why don't you come on over to My house and see if you can get along with your siblings as well."

The holiday of Sukkot is all about leaving our permanent abodes and moving into a house with walls as sturdy as you want to make them, but one where the roof -- the separation and barrier between us and God -- is intentionally only loosely covered. This makes it God's house. We are further commanded on Sukkot to take the four species, each symbolic of a different type of Jew, and hold them together every day of the holiday. After restoring our relationship with the Almighty, He invites us into His home where we are asked to unify with all the Jewish People and live harmoniously as one big family for a full week.

Now that we've reunified as a family, God is loath to have us leave after seven days and longingly asks us to hang around for another day which we call Shmini Atzeret, "the eighth, extended day" of the holiday. And, the next final day of this holiday is called Simchat Torah, "the happiness of Torah." We dance ecstatically holding the sacred Torah scrolls close to our bodies while we circle the *bimah*.

According to the Jewish mystics, Simchat Torah is not so much that we happily celebrate the beauty of our Jewish Torah, but that once we have restored our relationships with our Father and our brothers and sisters, it is the Torah and by extension God Himself, Who joyously celebrates us, His beloved children.

What a month! What a way to start the year!

*Rabbi Yerachmiel Milstein is a senior lecturer for Discovery Productions and is the Executive*

# SPIRITUAL TRAINING CAMP

BY DOV MOSHE LIPMAN

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## HOW THE NY GIANT'S TRAINING CAMP CAN GET YOU READY FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAYS.

I recently visited the Super Bowl Champion New York Giants training camp in Albany, NY with my campers from Sportstar Academy to watch the team practice. What a mesmerizing experience. It was the perfect preparation for the Jewish month of Elul, which leads up to Rosh Hashana.

Here are some of the pointers I gained.

### REPETITION

I couldn't believe how many times the team repeated the most basic plays and drills. Quarterbacks, including Super Bowl MVP Eli Manning, would stand under center, call some signals, receive the ball from the center, take a few steps back and throw to a target -- over and over and over again. When the offense and defense came together for scrimmaging, they did not run any complicated plays. They ran the most basic run and pass plays -- over and over and over again.

These were the Super Bowl champions! Why waste the time doing this?

The more times you review and practice,

the more successful you'll be when it truly matters - whether it's in a regular season game or in the defining moments of the Super Bowl.

How many of us show up to synagogue for Rosh Hashana and crack open their High Holiday prayer book for the first time? How many of us have no idea what Rosh Hashana is really about and just show up at shul rather clueless? The month of Elul is our training camp; now is the time to start preparing the most basic aspects of the holiday. (For starters, visit [Aish.com's](http://Aish.com's) [High Holiday](http://High Holiday) site a few minutes each day.)

### REHABILITATION

I'll never forget seeing two Super Bowl heroes -- wide receivers David Tyree and Plaxico Buress -- on exercise bikes and working with trainers, and not on the practice field. Both of them have injuries and spend hours a day in rehab trying to strengthen their knees and get into playing shape.

At the end of the practice they looked no less tired or sweaty than the players who were running all of the full drills. They are

committed to playing football and putting in months of effort to heal. If they would just get on the field on opening day without this effort they'd fail and re-injure themselves very quickly.

We are spiritually injured. We have all messed up throughout the year and have glaring flaws which we tend to overlook and ignore. God has given us this month of Elul for rehab. And rehab takes time, work, and sweat.

If we try to approach God on the High Holidays with the plan to be better without having gone through any rehabilitation, we'll fall flat on our faces, re-injure ourselves and mess up again very quickly. The only chance we have to make a lasting change in our lives is if we first rehab ourselves during this month by trying to make slow and gradual changes for the better, and then get on the field and play intensely once the High Holidays arrive.

Now's the time to start addressing our flaws and make those adjustments.

### TRYING TO MAKE THE TEAM

There was an entire group of players at the training camp who were different than the rest. They were undergoing more grueling drills than the others. They didn't have assistants, no fans calling out their names, and they were carrying the more veteran players' equipment.

These were the rookies who are trying to make the team.

When you are trying to make the team there's nothing you won't do. The month of sweat and effort at training camp is well worth it if you can impress the coach and be named to a professional football team.

During the High Holidays, decisions are being made regarding our future during the upcoming year. We all dream of making the team, but how many of us put forth the necessary effort to deserve it? Now's the time to "impress the coach" and demonstrate to God - and to our ourselves - just how committed we are to being the best we can be, and to do whatever it takes to merit a year of life and success.

The New York Giants are working tremendously hard to play their best this season and win another Super Bowl.

It's time we get to work too.

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**SPIRITUAL  
REHAB TAKES  
TIME, WORK, AND  
SWEAT. AND WE  
NEED IT.**

# GROWTH WORKSHEET

BY RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS

**THE HIGH HOLIDAYS ARE ALL ABOUT PERSONAL GROWTH. HERE ARE KEY AREAS THAT WILL MAKE THE GREATEST DIFFERENCE IN BUILDING OVERALL SPIRITUAL HEALTH.**

*"The world stands on three things: On Torah, on the service [of God], and on acts of kindness." (Ethics of the Fathers, 1:2)*

A chair or table needs at least three legs to stand on. In the spiritual world, this is true as well. Every human being has three primary relationships in life: with yourself, with God and with others. Success and balance is required in all three.

Rosh Hashana is the time for getting our lives in order, correcting our mistakes, and making a plan for the future. With that in mind, here's how these three pillars translate to our life today:

1. Torah = Pursuit of Wisdom
2. Service of God = Spiritual Connection
3. Kindness = Kindness

## **PURSUIT OF WISDOM**

To get started on your High Holiday growth program, try asking yourself some of the following questions, relating to "pursuit of wisdom:"

- When I read or watch TV, is the content

something that will make me a better person?

- Do I regularly waste time?
- Have I clearly identified a set of life-long priorities?
- What am I afraid of? How do those fears hold me back from pursuing my dreams?
- Do I have a role model in my life?
- Do I value the wisdom and life experience of my parents and teachers?
- Do I have friends who regularly provide me with honest feedback?
- Do I respond well to criticism, or do I get defensive?
- Do I readily admit when I'm wrong?
- To what extent do I rationalize my mistakes?
- Is there any mistake that I commit

- Is there any mistake that I commit habitually to the point where it no longer bothers me?

- Is there one question about life that I yearn to have answered?

- How could I spend one hour each week pursuing wisdom?

### SPIRITUAL CONNECTION

- Do I give the same concern and attention to my spiritual health as I do to my physical health?

- How would I define my relationship with God?

- In what ways do I struggle with the Jewish understanding of God?

- In general, do I view events in my life as random occurrences, or as powerful spiritual messages?

- How do I relate to the idea of prayer? Do I pray? Does it work?

- Do I spend time appreciating the beauty of nature?

- Do I ever feel isolated and alone?

- Do I respect idealistic people, or do I think they're naive?

- Do I ever compromise my human values for the sake of monetary gain? For career advancement? For acceptance by others?

- In the past, why have I not stuck to my goals?

- Is there anyone who could help me

achieve what I want in life? Why have I not asked for their help?

- How could I spend one hour each week nourishing my soul?

### ACTS OF KINDNESS

- Am I regularly concerned about the needs of others?

- How often do I put my own needs on hold in order to help others?

- Do I sometimes intimidate others, or take advantage of the weak and vulnerable?

- Do I give tzedakah (charity) regularly? Do I give gladly or begrudgingly? Am I careful about selecting the best recipient?

- Do I volunteer my time and resources to help others in need? Do I make that an important part of my week?

- Am I careful to keep my word?

- Do I conduct business in a fair and honest manner?

- In business and relationships, do I look for the win-win solution?

- Do I genuinely feel good, or feel bad, when I hear about another person's success?

- Do I gossip and talk negatively about others?

- Do I lose patience with others and get

angry? Can I identify those situations where I'm most likely to get angry?

- Do I ever use language that is rude, harsh and obscene?

- Am I jealous of what others have? Do I think somehow I am more deserving?

- Do I ever invade another's privacy by looking or listening to something private?

- Have I ever betrayed the trust of a friend?

- Do I listen with empathy and compassion when someone has a problem?

- Am I careful never to embarrass or insult others?

- How could I spend one hour each week giving selflessly to others?

# MAKING GOD KING

BY RABBI NECHEMIA COOPERSMITH

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## WHO IS THE MASTER OF *YOUR* UNIVERSE?

The primary theme of Rosh Hashana is making God King. This is the central focus of Machzor prayers: "Reign over the entire world with your glory... and appear in the splendor of your majestic might over all who dwell on earth... and all who have breath in their nostrils will say, 'God, God of Israel, is King and His Kingship rules over all.'"

What does it mean "to make God King"?

Kingship is the dominant, unifying purpose that serves as the driving force behind something. For someone who is constantly plugged into an iPod, spends every available dollar on purchasing the latest cds and reads only Rolling Stone magazine, music is the king that rules his or her life.

Making God King means waking up every morning with the central, overarching goal in one's life to get close to God. All decisions and actions would strive to be in concert with this fundamental

consideration: will this bring me closer or further away from God?

But 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 them. 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.

If Kilgore could reach out of the pages of the book and touch his author, he would have a mind-blowing, transcendental experience. For that moment, Kilgore would peel back the layer of his fictional universe -- and reveal the root of all reality. He would move beyond the Matrix.

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. The only true, real existence is the Infinite, as Maimonides states, "And God, your Lord, is true (Jeremiah, 10:10) - i.e., He alone is true and no other entity possesses truth that compares to His truth. This is what the Torah says, 'There is nothing else but Him' (Deut. 4:35), meaning, aside from Him, there is no true existence like His" (The Foundations of Torah, 1:4).

This is the meaning that God is King -- He, alone, reigns supreme in the universe because He is the only reality there is.

Thus God is One -- meaning the one and *only*; there is nothing else but God. Making God King means choosing transcendence over transience, Infinite over finite, reality over illusion.

## NO HIDING

How can we make this practical? By realizing we are not the king of our universe. We can never run away and hide from God. There is no corner where He cannot be found.

Rebbetzin Feige Twerski gives a simple and effective tool that helps to increase our God-consciousness in our daily life. Ask yourself several times a day while doing whatever you're doing, "Is God comfortable here?" Does He feel at home while He joins your family around the dinner table? Does He like spending time with you and your spouse? Is He happy being with you at work? Listening to your phone conversations? While you surf the Internet?

By frequently asking this question throughout the day, we can increase our awareness that God is right here with us, and come to realize that by coming out of our hiding places, we acquire our ultimate independence.

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MAKING GOD  
KING MEANS  
CHOOSING  
TRANSCENDENCE  
OVER  
TRANSCIENCE,  
INFINITE OVER  
FINITE, REALITY  
OVER ILLUSION.



# WEIGHT LOSS AND *TESHUVA*

BY AYELET

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## GETTING IN SHAPE, PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY.

Once again, my clothes don't fit. Yep, the same ones that fit just fine three months ago. Perhaps they all shrank? A likely culprit: the dryer did it. I'd like to believe it myself, rather than blaming it on chocolate. Such a lovely thing chocolate is, why attach bad memories to it?

I've been watching my weight. I've watched it so well, it hasn't gone anywhere. Matter of fact, I've accumulated more of it, just by watching it! These skills are acquired, mind you.

The truth is, I know the reasons why I gain weight. I eat too much. I don't exercise enough. Plain and simple, no complications.

And I know the formula to fix the problem. It works every time: Eat less, exercise more. But as many times as I gain and lose, eventually I go through the same routine over and over again.

This pattern of failure sure doesn't help to get me motivated to try again. This same problem can often sabotage the process of teshuva, returning to be the best person I can be.

Considering I can't even seem to stay on a diet, how can I honestly say I'll never repeat my past mistake and stay committed to a life-changing mission?

### NO QUICK FIX

With both weight loss and teshuva, it's not about quick fixes, but about a lifestyle change.

On some crazy diets I've tried, I push myself beyond my limit, and the first day is very successful. Then the second day is a little less successful. Each day afterward is just a spiral path downward until the diet has failed me again.

It's the same with my unsuccessful attempts to conquer my bad habits. I start my teshuva 'diet' and go on a strict plan to stop immediately. And the first day I am very successful. But just like that crash diet, my teshuva process crashes as well.

Crash diets don't work. Fly-by-night teshuva doesn't work either. Losing weight means changing my eating style and pattern, relating differently to food, and integrating exercise and healthy habits

into my life. Doing teshuva means recognizing my behavior patterns that don't work, working on letting go of them, and integrating good character traits into my life.

This year, my list of Rosh Hashanah Resolutions will include: 'Get in Shape!' And I figure, the same basic principles that will get me in shape physically, will also get me back in shape spiritually:

**1. Believe in Myself:** Why bother trying to lose weight or do teshuva if I don't think I can accomplish my goals? I need to believe in myself enough to really give it all I have and try my best to make it happen. So my first step is to believe that no matter what, I can do this!

**2. Make a Plan:** It is very easy to say 'I want to lose weight,' or 'I want to be a better person,' but without a clear plan and goal, I don't know where I am heading, and I can't possibly find my way there. With specific planning and setting goals, I can map out the right way.

**3. Take Small Steps:** If I take on too much at once, I'll burn out very quickly. By cutting out all of my favorite treats, or by cutting out all possible slander and gossip from my life, I know I'm setting myself up for failure. I am not going to be an angel overnight. Lasting change comes in small steps. So the first day, maybe it will be no chocolate after 6 pm, or no speaking about anyone else in any negative way before 2 pm. Once I can handle that, I can make bigger changes. Slow integration is the key to long-term effects.

**4. Think of the Big Picture:** That brownie

might taste good now (really good!) but how will I feel when I weigh myself? That clever and witty yet very hurtful remark might bring a few laughs right now, but how will I feel when my relationships are affected by my lack of sensitivity towards people's feelings? By not going after the instant gratification, I can look at the big picture and see how my choices will affect me later on. I can live without the brownie. I can love without the hurt.

**5. Make Lifestyle Changes:** Successful weight loss and *teshuva* can only be accomplished by a true change in my lifestyle and behavior pattern. By integrating new habits into my life, I am not just going on a diet that might last a day or maybe if I'm lucky, a month. I am making changes in who I am and how I relate to food. I am also making those soul choices that will transform the way I relate to myself and others.

**6. Resist Temptation:** The easiest thing, of course, is to avoid temptation. But temptation is everywhere. By being aware of surrounding temptation, I can be prepared to fight it.

**7. Get Over Minor Setbacks:** Okay, I had a donut! So what? Get back on the program and don't turn minor set-backs into major ones. The problem is that I tell myself, *It's all over. I might as well have the rest of the dozen.* Growth is a slow journey of a few steps forward and a couple of steps back.

**8. Monitor Progress:** With weight loss, each week I can weigh myself and see

CRASH DIETS  
DON'T WORK.  
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WORK EITHER.

how I'm doing. I can look back and see what's working and what's not. With *teshuva*, a great way to monitor progress is with '*Cheshbon HaNefesh*' a daily accounting of the soul where I sit down for five minutes each night with a notebook and pen, and I look back at my day and see where I accomplished my goals, where I was challenged, and in what areas I need to try harder tomorrow.

**9. No Giving Up:** Sometimes it's hard and I'd like to quit. That's when I pray to God to give me the strength, the resolve to persevere, and the clarity to know that my goal is too important to ever stop trying. This year, may we all have success in our endeavors to get in shape, physically and spiritually!

*Ayelet lives in Jerusalem and is also known as "The Kosher Komic". She often travels to bring her Kosher Komedy routine to communities worldwide. More information can be seen at: [www.KosherKomedy.com](http://www.KosherKomedy.com).*

# YOM KIPPUR: A DAY OF RECONCILIATION

BY RABBI SHAUL ROSENBLATT

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## STOP THE BLAMING AND START TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

ON YOM KIPPUR,  
WE STAND  
BEFORE GOD AND  
SAY, "GOD, WE  
ARE THE  
PROBLEM IN THE  
RELATIONSHIP,  
NOT YOU."

A husband and wife fight and they grow apart. Neither is willing to take the first step toward reconciliation, so the rift deepens. Each one blames the other for the problems in the relationship.

But as time goes on, one of them realizes that there is a choice to be made: accept my own weaknesses; take responsibility for my own role in this discord -- or allow my arrogance to contribute to the slow breakdown of the relationship.

He approaches his wife, apologizes for the pain he has caused her and asks that they work together to bring the relationship back to the way that it was all those years ago. There is still a long and painful road ahead before complete reconciliation, but the willingness to take responsibility for one's own mistakes is always the crucial first step. As long as both are in the blaming mode, they will find no common ground. Once they move from blaming to accepting responsibility, there is a hope of move forward.

This is, in essence, what Yom Kippur is about.

We have drifted away from God over the past year. We have not taken pleasure in His world in the way we know we should. We have not moved ourselves into deeper levels of Godliness. We have not taken Him seriously.

But worse, we have been blaming. We blame God because life is no good. We blame Him for making things so difficult for us. We blame Him for not revealing himself more; if only He would split open the ceiling and say hello, it would be so much easier to believe in Him. We blame Him for not giving us all the things that other people have and not filling our lives with the goodness that He could.

We blame.

Yom Kippur is about stopping the blaming and start taking responsibility. Is life really no good, or is it just that we are unwilling to make the effort to appreciate? Do we really want God to take away all of our challenges, or don't we think that overcoming challenges is what gives us our deepest sense of personal fulfillment? If God split the ceiling and said hello, would

we really believe in Him, or would we just find other excuses to run away? And if He filled our lives with more and more goodness, wouldn't we just fail to appreciate it in the way that we fail to appreciate all the goodness that we have right now?

On Yom Kippur, we stand before God and say, "God, it's not your fault." We take responsibility. We are not who we should be, so life is not what it could be. We are the problem in the relationship, not You.

Hard as it might be to accept responsibility for the problems in a relationship and begin the road of reconciliation, it is also a very deep pleasure. It lifts you out of your own pettiness and toward the realms of greatness. And when the reconciliation comes -- the couple embraces, crying for how they have hurt each other, how they have missed each other, how joyous they are to be together once again -- it is a highlight of the relationship for years to come.

As a day of reconciliation between the pure human soul and its Father in Heaven, Yom Kippur is the highlight of the year.

# I'M SORRY

BY HESHY FRIEDMAN, PHD

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## THERE CAN BE NO PEACE WITHOUT APOLOGY.

In 2005, teenager Ryan Cushing threw a 20-pound frozen turkey from a speeding car, as part of a prank. The ice-hard poultry crashed through the windshield of a bypassing car, crushing the face of Victoria Ruvolo, a woman from Long Island. It took numerous painful surgeries to rebuild her face. In the courtroom, Cushing cried uncontrollably as he apologized to Ruvolo. He kept repeating "I'm so sorry" to his victim.

### A TRUE APOLOGY INDICATES STRENGTH.

Ruvolo, instead of seeking retribution, actually comforted Cushing in the courtroom; the prosecutor said that he had never seen such a forgiving victim. Cushing's sentence was six months in jail; it could very well have been 25 years had Ruvolo not shown compassion and forgiveness, asking the judge to exercise leniency.

Judaism emphasizes the importance of *teshuva* (repentance), from the Hebrew root meaning "return." But what is perhaps often overlooked is that the return it envisions is a two-way street. An apology

does not count as repentance unless it is sincere, heartfelt, and has the ability to lead to genuine forgiveness. *Teshuva* is about renewing a relationship that has been sundered, not simply curing one party's guilt. It is about curing a hurt that has caused a rift between parent and child, husband and wife, brother and sister, friend and friend. It returns things to the way they used to be.

With some schools of psychology, apologies today are not so in vogue. They have tried to remove "guilt" from our lexicon. "Suppress it!" they say. But in truth, when we refuse to admit, the regret simply festers inside.

Judaism emphasizes "healthy guilt" -- where you maintain the sense that you're a good person, while acknowledging that in this case you used bad judgment and made a mistake.

Many people do not apologize because they are afraid of being seen as weak. A true apology, however, indicates strength.

An apology is a magnanimous act, for it involves taking a bold and difficult step, perhaps at great emotional cost. A sincere apology allows both parties to move on, stronger than they would otherwise have been.

## REGRET AND REMORSE

A proper apology must show *both* regret and remorse. Remorse without an apology may mean there is no opportunity for healing. Apology without remorse is ineffective.

Often, regret derives from the fact that one was caught doing something wrong. Had the individual not been caught, s/he would not feel sorry. Whereas remorse is about being truly sorry for causing another person pain, and an understanding that the act was morally wrong. It has to demonstrate a commitment to genuine change. Which, after all, is what *teshuva* is really about.

Maimonides, in his classic work, *Mishneh Torah*, describes the steps for doing *teshuva*: there has to be admission and regret over the misdeed. The individual must confess the sin to God, regret it, and resolve to never do it again. If someone has hurt another person physically or financially, the offender must pay the victim. The perpetrator must also ask the victim for forgiveness.

Only when the aggrieved party receives such an apology -- that the perpetrator both regrets it and feels it was wrong -- will there be the possibility of true forgiveness.

Further, the apology has to be contrite, not accompanied by a litany of excuses. We're all familiar with conditional apologies such as: "If anyone has been hurt by my actions, I am sorry," or "I am sorry you feel this way," or "I didn't do it on purpose. I had a hard day and I didn't realize what I was doing. And why are you so sensitive about this, anyway!?" These do not indicate genuine remorse and therefore do not truly heal.

## GET OVER IT

The professional world today is increasingly recognizing the importance of apologies. Legal scholars argue that sincere penitence is superior to punishment as a way of resolving mutual grievances, and that many legal disputes arise in the first place only because there had not been an apology. Medical schools now teach future doctors to apologize when they make a mistake, and a growing number of businesses are apologizing for manufacturing defective products or polluting the environment.

On one level, the aggrieved party has to cooperate to allow the peace to happen. If someone apologizes, accept it. Don't leave it lingering over their head. Give them the freedom to move on. Actually, in Jewish law, one must try to apologize three times. After that, if the (sincere) apology is not accepted, it now becomes the other person's problem.

Learning to forgive is a technique to elevate one's long-term level of happiness. Research indicates that many mental

"WHO IS  
MIGHTY? ONE  
WHO CONVERTS  
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FRIEND."

health problems, such as stress and even physical ailments, result from anger and the obsession with "getting even" for an offense.

So try to think of someone you may have wronged. Even if the other party is partly to blame, give him or her a call. "Who is mighty?" asks the Midrash. "One who converts an enemy into a friend." It takes great courage to say, "I am sorry for what I did and I regret it. Please forgive me."

*Heshy Friedman, Ph.D. is Director of Business Programs at Brooklyn College.*



# OTHER PEOPLE'S TEARS

BY SARA YOHEVED RIGLER

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## BREAKING THE EMPATHY BARRIER THIS YOM KIPPUR.

"I don't care how you view the Disengagement politically," I thundered into the phone at my American friend, "but how can you not be devastated by 9,000 Jews losing their homes, their jobs, their whole way of life?"

It was three weeks since the images of weeping Gush Katif residents being led - or carried -- away from their homes had sent me into paroxysms of grief, but, like most of my Israeli friends, I was still smarting. Every day my email carried pleas -- for diapers, snacks, or sweaters against the Jerusalem chill for the refugees, many of whom had left with only the clothes on their backs. I hung up the phone indignant at my American friend's apathy to their plight.

I sat down at my computer, clicked on my internet news, and read the horrifying reports about flooding in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I read about families stranded on their roofs, the chaos in the Superdome, and the anxiety of evacuated New Orleans residents who had no idea if their homes still stood. "This

is terrible!" I muttered to my husband, shaking my head. Then I got up, made myself a late-night snack, and went to bed.

Where was my empathy? Why was I devastated by 1600 families losing their homes and jobs in Gush Katif, but not by the tens of thousands of families rendered homeless and jobless in far-away New Orleans? Physical distance had conspired with an existential difference between me and the residents of New Orleans -- even the Jewish residents -- to leave me feeling concerned, but not disconsolate.

### PLURAL PRAYER

It's human nature to empathize with others only to the extent that we identify with them. Had I had an elderly parent in a nursing home anywhere, the reports of bloated corpses in New Orleans nursing homes would have driven me to tears. Lacking such an identification, I read my internet news, shook my head, and went about my business.

How is it possible to break the empathy

barrier? To feel the pain of people we don't identify with? To weep for other people's tears?

One of the antidotes that Judaism offers is: plural prayer. Most of the Jewish liturgy is phrased in the first-person plural. In the most important Jewish prayer, the *Shemona Esrai*, we pray that God will grant us healing, livelihood, forgiveness, redemption, etc.

This is not just a literary convention. According to Jewish mysticism, all Jews constitute one collective soul. The spiritual reality of the Jewish People is that we are all cells in the same spiritual body. To make collective prayer real, it helps to visualize a cross-section of the Jews whom one is praying for. For example, when praying for Divine wisdom, I visualize the doctors whose judgment can make the difference between life and death for their patients, the teachers whose approach can educate or destroy their students, the social workers, the engineers, the parents, the students, the writers, the lawyers, the musicians, etc., all of whom need that influx of Divine wisdom to properly fulfill their tasks.

The Arizal, the great 16th century Kabbalist, recommended that when one prays in the *Shemona Esrai* for the world's complete redemption, upon reciting the words, "for Your salvation we hope all day," one should visualize oneself praying together with all Jews everywhere. This includes: Jews who are much older/much younger than you; Jews in Australia, Alaska, Hawaii, and Hungary; Jews politically to the left and to

the right of you; Jews at every point in the religious spectrum from Hasidim to agnostics; and Jews who are despicably poor and brazenly rich.

The more one prays for all types of other Jews, the more one will empathize with them. Plural prayer breaks the empathy barrier.

### OTHER PEOPLE'S SINS

Plural prayer is particularly conspicuous in the Yom Kippur liturgy. In the *Shemona Esrai* of Yom Kippur, the worshipper finds himself confessing to 44 sins: devaluing parents and teachers, speaking *lashon hara* (gossip), insulting others, breaking promises, acting arrogantly, etc. As the worshipper mentions each sin, he beats his heart in regret. In fact, confessing sins without truly regretting them is one of the 44 sins.

Now, I can feel remorse for 41 of these sins, but there are always three that I don't relate to at all: "stalking a fellow Jew," "taking a vain oath," and "joining a lewd gathering." When years ago, I asked how I could sincerely confess to sins that I have not committed, Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller explained that we confess in the plural, "For the sin that we have sinned before You..." Surely some Jew somewhere in the world has committed that sin.

This explanation left me in an untenable position. Some Jew somewhere in the world is participating in lewd gatherings, and I have to regret the sins of that low-life?

THE SPIRITUAL  
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THIS YOM KIPPUR,  
LET'S AWAKEN TO  
OUR SHARED  
IDENTITY.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to empathy is our critical nature. The sentiment, "I would never do such a thing," builds a high wall between us and our relatives, neighbors, co-workers, and friends who do indeed manifest weaknesses that we do not share.

If, for example, you are such a paragon of honesty that you never even conduct private phone conversations on your boss's time, then how can you identify with co-workers who pilfer pens and envelopes from the office or executives who embezzle funds from the corporation? During the Yom Kippur service, how can you possibly pronounce the words, "We have stolen," and allow the plural pronoun to lump you together with pilferers and embezzlers?

Rebbetzin Heller explains our commonality with all Jews as follows:

*Visualize the thief. What are his battles? He's possibly battling against his upbringing, his education (or lack thereof), his environment, and his own passion for acquisitions. And he's losing! Make no mistake: he's losing his battles; the Torah condemns his dishonesty.*

*Now think of your own inner battles. Have you ever lost a battle? Your battles are not the same as his battles, but if you have ever lost one of your battles, that's what you have in common with him.*

One of the sins we confess to on Yom Kippur is judging others harshly. This Yom Kippur, perhaps on your way to synagogue, take time to think of a Jewish individual or

group that you judge harshly. Then tear the wall down. Think of your own lost battles, and of theirs, and open your heart to a "we" that includes them.

This Yom Kippur, whether or not we're sufficiently familiar with the liturgy to pray *Shemona Esrai*, let's pray for all Jews everywhere. Let's cry for our own lost battles and for the lost battles of all other Jews. Let's weep for the suffering of all of us. As we plead in the final blessing of *Shemona Esrai*: "Bless us, our Father, all of us as one..." Because we are one.

This Yom Kippur, let's awaken to our shared identity. Among us there is no such thing as other people's tears, only our collective tears.

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