

# A SHUL AT HOME

A COLLECTION OF SERMONS

BY RABBI LEWIN

דַּע לִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עוֹמֵד



THE NORTH SHORE SYNAGOGUE

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

In times of crises, trouble, and uncertainty, one looks for that safe, familiar, comforting environment – our shul.  
This year, like no other year that we can remember, we don't have that luxury. The shul is closed because of lockdown while friends and neighbours of many years are nowhere to be seen.  
Everyone has to stay at home.  
Isolation and inoculation are the only way we're going to beat this virus. However, we know that we will soon have the all-clear by the government. Our shul will have plenty to celebrate and once again it will be the focal point of Jewish activity not only here on the North Shore but throughout the country and worldwide.  
Social, cultural, and intellectual activities will complement prayer meetings and we look forward to a most exciting new era in 5782 and beyond.  
On behalf of The Board, Rabbi Lewin, Chazan Zvi, office staff and all our families we wish you a safe, healthy and sweet new year - Shanah Tova u'metuka and we look forward to seeing you at our earliest function.

*Ken Wolfsohn*  
President



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# ROSH HASHANAH 2021 / 5782

One of the names of Rosh Hashanah, is Chag Hakese- the hidden festival. This is because it is the only Chag where the moon is hidden. But there is a deeper reason. Rosh Hashana is a day of judgement, what will be in the coming year? I am often asked how was Rosh Hashana? My answer is, "I don't know." Who knows what the year will bring?  
The Hebrew year of 5780/1, corresponding to 2020/2021 has been unprecedented in living memory. Who would have thought that we would not be at shul for Pesach or Rosh Hashana? That we would celebrate the seder by ourselves? Now we have the unthinkable situation with so many communities around the world not being able to

attend shul for Rosh Hashana. We have been forced to turn our homes into shuls and each of us into a the Rabbi and Chazzan of our home shuls.  
It is my hope that the booklet that I present to you that based on sermons I have delivered at the North Shore Synagogue, will provide you with words of inspiration and reflection for the holy days that are upon us. May your prayers recited in the confines of your homes, rise up to the Heavenly Throne, and may the decree of this Pandemic be torn up so that we can once again meet in person in our shuls and communities. Wishing you a Shana Tova Umetukah.

*Rabbi Paul Lewin*



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# ROSH HASHANAH

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Wishing you a Shana Tova Umetukah.

## **Rosh Hashanah traditions – a quick overview**

### **What Is Rosh Hashanah?**

Rosh Hashanah is the **start of the Jewish New Year**. It falls during September over two days and begins a month-long celebration including Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

The date of Rosh Hashanah is the **first and second of Tishrei** and commemorates the creation of Adam and Eve, the pinnacle of creation. Adam and Eve also ate from the Tree of Knowledge and were judged on this day. Thus, Rosh Hashanah becomes the day of judgement for their descendants.

### **What happens on the Festival?**

Firstly we celebrate the start of the New Year with family and friends. We eat traditional foods such as round Challah bread, shaped like a crown and apples dipped into honey, over which we bless family and friends for a Shana Tova Umetukah - a sweet and good year. Fish and meat are eaten, with a focus on sweet foods for a sweet new year and we do Tashlich.

Secondly, we start the New Year by **crowning Hashem, King of the world** and that we are His subjects. This is highlighted in prayer texts recited in shul, as well as by blowing of the Shofar, sounding like a trumpet heralding the King.

## The Shofar sounds and its meaning

The special mitzvah of the day is to **hear the Shofar**.

The Shofar - traditionally a ram's horn - (any horn besides a cow's horn can be used). The reason for the ram is to remind us of the ram that was offered by Abraham on Mount Moriah, during the story of the binding of Isaac - known as the Akeidah.

The tradition is to hear **100 sounds throughout the day**.

Over the two days, we will sound the Shofar one hundred times each day.

The Shofar is not sounded on Shabbat. Since it is a musical instrument, there was a fear that people would carry the Shofar to an expert to learn how to blow it.

**The Shofar sounds are four in total:**



**Tekiah**,: a straight note

**Shevarim**, a broken note of three short blasts

**Teruah**, a staccato of nine quick notes

and the **Tekiah Gedolah**, an extended straight strong sound to complete the set of blasts.

## The Rosh Hashanah service

We use a different prayer book called a **Machzor**. The word, Machzor, means to return – that we return to this prayer book every year. One can also suggest that through this prayer book we return to Hashem. The curtains and the Torah covers are changed to white to symbolise the holiness of the year.

The service structure follows the normal Shabbat service with **two major differences**:

1. The sounding of the Shofar.

2. The longest silent Amidah prayer, which highlights the three key themes of the day:

- Malchuyot – Kingship - crowning Hashem, King of the world.
- Zichronot – Remembrance- that Hashem remembers our actions.
- Shofarot – Shofar sounds - that the day is filled with sounds of the Shofar.

## Rosh Hashanah Seder/ Simanim

A Sephardi tradition on both Rosh Hashanah nights is to have a Rosh Hashanah Seder. This tradition has entered into Ashkenazi homes as well. The Seder is made up of various fruits and vegetables to bless the new year, otherwise known in Hebrew as the 'Simanim' - the symbols. For example, the famous apple and honey for a sweet new year. Another tradition is to have a word play with certain vegetables and fruit. For example, the Hebrew word for carrots is **Gezer**, which is similar to **Gezeira**, a decree. We offer a prayer that this year the decrees be blessed and positive. Another vegetable we eat is beetroot – in Hebrew, **Selek**, which is similar to **Lsalek** - to remove. We pray that our enemies and negativity be removed from us. My personal favourite is to have celery sticks and place raisins in them. We then pray that this year we merit a raise in salary!

## What do I wear on Rosh Hashanah?

It's customary to **wear white on the High Holy Days**, white is a symbol of **purity**, we are coming to our King,

pure. This also explains why the curtains in the shul, on the Bimah, Ark and Sefer are dressed in white.

## Do I light candles on Rosh Hashanah?

Yes, we light candles on this festival, just like every other festival and Shabbat.

As Rosh Hashanah is two nights, we need to light candles on the second night as well. This needs to be from a pre-existing flame. The way to do this - before the Chag festival begins - light a candle that can burn for 48 -72 hours and use the existing flame to light the candles. The easiest method is to use a yearzeit candle.

Here is the blessing to say over the candles on both nights

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקנו מלך העולם, אשר קידשנו במצותיו להדליק נר של יום טוב

*Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu bimitzvotav vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov.*



If first night is Friday night the blessing is:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקנו מלך העולם, אשר  
קידשנו במצותיו להדליק נר של שבת ויום  
טוב

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-  
olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu  
l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat v'yom tov.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King  
of the universe, who has sanctified us  
with His commandments, and has  
commanded us to kindle the light of the  
Day of Remembrance.

And after this blessing we say,  
Shehecheyanu.

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקנו מלך העולם, שהחינו  
וקימנו והגעינו לזמן הזה

*Barukh ata adonai elohenu melekh  
ha'olam, shehecheyanu, v'kiyimanu,  
v'higiyanu la'zman ha'zeh*

Meaning: Blessed are you, Lord our God,  
King of the universe, who has kept us alive  
and sustained us and let us reach this time.

### Why do we have two days of Rosh Hashanah?

In the Torah, we are told that Rosh  
Hashanah is only one day, the first of the  
seventh month (Lev 23:24), this created  
a problem. In the days before the Jewish



calendar was fixed, the months were  
determined by sighting the new moon.  
Witnesses would travel to Jerusalem and  
testify before the Beth Din - the Jewish  
court - that they had seen the new moon.  
The Beth Din would then declare that  
the new month had begun. This worked  
for all months except for Tishrei. Since  
Rosh Hashanah falls on the first day of  
the month, there was no time for the  
messengers to tell the community when  
Rosh Hashanah started. As a result of  
this problem, the Jewish People, kept  
two days of Rosh Hashanah, as they were  
worried they may miss the festival.

Today we have a fixed calendar, however,  
the tradition remains to keep two days of  
Rosh Hashanah.

### Why say Shehecheyanu on the second night?

One of the most powerful blessings we  
have is the blessing of, Shehecheyanu, we  
thank Hashem that we are alive and able  
to celebrate this new festival or event.

This blessing is said either after the  
blessing for lighting the candles or over the  
Kiddush wine as part of the declaration  
recited at the start of the festival.

It is also recited before we engage in a  
mitzvah for the first time in a year. For  
example, the first time we sound the  
Shofar, shake the Lulav or eat Matzah.

The question is, what to do on the second  
night? We have already enjoyed one day  
of Yom Tov. We have already heard the  
shofar. Why then do we recite the blessing  
of Shehecheyanu on the second night?

An answer is that it relates to Kavod Yom  
Tov - to honour the second day of Yom  
Tov. If we don't say the blessing, we are  
stating that the second night/day is not  
important.

On the other hand, we have already  
acknowledged that we're thankful for the  
gift of being alive for this festival. The  
custom therefore, is to add something  
new to the second night, either a new  
fruit or new clothes.

### Why do we have a round challah on Rosh Hashanah?

Every Shabbat we eat braided challah,  
yet on Rosh Hashanah, we change the  
shape to round. This is because the  
year is **round**. Rosh Hashanah is full of



**symbolism**, especially food, and eating  
round challah is another one. On Rosh  
Hashanah we crown God the King and  
the round challah looks like a crown. We  
are **crowning God as our King**.

### What is Tashlich?

Tashlich is a ceremony performed in  
the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah. If the  
first day Rosh Hashanah is on Shabbat,  
then we perform the ceremony on the  
second afternoon. The tradition is to  
gather beside a source of flowing water  
and symbolically cast our sins into the  
waters.

The second reason behind the tradition  
is to crown Hashem, King of the world.  
In days gone by, a king was anointed at  
a river. The symbolism was that in the  
same way as the river is sustaining of  
life, may the king's reign bring life to his  
kingdom.

### Is there a special greeting for Rosh Hashanah?

Yes! We wish one another, *Shana Tova  
Umetukah*, "May you be blessed with  
a sweet and wonderful year filled with  
happiness and health".



# THE FOODS OF ROSH HASHANAH

Jews take food seriously. It's therefore no surprise that the Yom Tov table should not be an important addition to the Jewish experience. Over the centuries we have introduced many dishes and foods to our Shabbat and Yom Tov table. Imbedded in the choice of food and the tastes are messages that Judaism wishes to impart. Here are a number of foods that we eat over Rosh Hashanah. Some of these insights are from the book, *Vedibarta Bam* by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky.

## 1. Apples in honey

The tradition is to dip a piece of apple into honey and offer a prayer that the year ahead be one that is good and sweet - Shana Tova Umetukah.

Why do we use an apple? A number of reasons have been suggested.

- i) An apple is round and that the year should be blessed with sweetness from the beginning to the end.
- ii) A second reason is that the Jewish People are compared to an apple orchard. The act of dipping the apple into honey is a means of blessing the Jewish People with a sweet new year.
- iii) A third reason, which is truly fascinating, is that the apple is a unique fruit. When an apple is cut horizontally there are five grooves with pits encircled by ten small dots. The numbers 5 and 10 correspond to the Hebrew letters of ך and ה, which are the first two letters of Hashem's name. According to tradition, it was with these two letters that Hashem created the world. We mention in the Mussaf prayer that on Rosh Hashanah we celebrate the birthday of the world. Thus, eating an apple is the most appropriate

fruit, as embedded in it is the name of Hashem whom we coronate as the King of the World.

Honey in Hebrew is, 'Devash' - דבש. The numerical value of Devash is 306, which is the same value as אב הרחמן, merciful father. By dipping the apples into honey we are praying that Hashem will act as a merciful father and bless us with a sweet year. By dipping the apples into honey we are asking Hashem to judge us with mercy.



## 2. Pomegranates

Another fruit that we enjoy on Rosh Hashanah are pomegranates. Here too, we have a deep insight. In order to eat a pomegranate one first has to remove the outer shell and pick out the seeds. We learn two very important messages from this action.

- i) We are asking Hashem to discard the wrongdoings of the year and only pick out the good we have done.
- ii) We look at the world around us and declare that within the world there is good and bad. We will strive to find the fruit and discard the peels.

## 3. A round challah

*See previous article.*

# ROSH HASHANAH FINDING THE REAL ME

## The King and the Seeds

There once was a king who had no children. He was much beloved by his people and as he aged the question was who would replace him. The advisors and the king devised a plan. They would source the top ten candidates for the job and give them a test. The candidates arrived at the palace and were given a bag of seeds. "Plant the seeds and in one year whoever has the best garden will be the new king after I die." There was great excitement as the ten contestants worked on their gardens. The media reported the achievements and whose garden was the best and producing the best flowers. The excitement was electric, except for one guy. No matter what he did he could not succeed. He tried different soil, different locations. No matter what he did or whom he consulted, he could not grow even a weed!!

The year ended and the gardens were magnificent, bets were placed on who was the most likely to be the new king.

And then the shock, the King made his decision - the one whose garden had not produced a single leaf would be the new king. Pandemonium erupted in the court. The King explained, "When I handed out the seeds I'd had them boiled. Not one of them would grow. The test was to see how you would react. And you know what? You all knew that there was a problem, but you all chose to replace the seeds so as

not to be shown up, except for this man. He stuck to what I asked, he is someone we can trust to lead the kingdom!"

The message is clear, we're all gifted in some way.



Many of us however, instead of looking at ourselves, look at others, noticing that their patch is blossoming. Maybe I should change my seeds, maybe I should replace who I am to be like them. Maybe I should sell my soul.

Rosh Hashanah reminds us that this is not what Hashem wants. He wants us! In the Unetaneh Tokef, we read that Hashem judges us 'kivnei maron' - like the sheep who are counted one at a time. On Rosh Hashanah, there is only me and Hashem.

There is a famous story about the famed Rebbe, Rebbe Zusia of Anipol (1718-1800), who was asked, "If he could swap places with one person who would it be?" His answer was astounding. "No one!"

"Wouldn't you want to swap with Moses or Abraham?"

"No," replied Reb Zusia, "Because the world would still have only one Moses and only one Zusia."

In the world of virtual reality where everyone's perfect lives are displayed on Facebook and Instagram, Rosh Hashanah reminds us that in the eyes of Hashem, who really counts, is me.

# ARE YOU A FLY OR A BEE?

One of the most beloved rituals that we perform during the year - we dip apples into honey and wish each other a happy and sweet new year.

I have two questions regarding this custom:

1) Why apples?

2) Why honey and not sugar or chocolate?

Obviously, there is a reason why this particular combination was chosen.

The Hebrew word for apple is, *'Tapuach'* and is mentioned in the Song of Songs as a metaphor for the Jewish People. As we can see at the shops, apples come in many different colours and flavours. This may teach us that although there are different types of Jews, we are connected at our core – excuse the pun.

Honey too, has a slightly different flavour depending on where the bees procure the nectar. Honey has a prominent place within Jewish thought and practice. The land of Israel is called the land of milk and honey. Honey is sweet and is connected to the study of Torah.

There is a beautiful tradition, that when a child starts school, we write the letters of the Torah with honey and then we hold the child's hand, tracing the letters with his or her finger. The child is encouraged to taste the honey and an association and deep connection is formed between the Torah and the child. The parent prays that this association will deepen over time.

When it comes to Torah, there is the scroll and then there is the general term of Torah that covers all aspects of Jewish learning and scholarship. As with Torah, so with honey. The fact that there are so many different honey tastes, means

that you can always find one that's right for you. So too, with Torah! There are different interpretations to the Torah, there will be those who connect to the more rational explanations of Torah, while others will be drawn to the more spiritual mystical traditions.

This is the explanation that I normally offer.

However, I would like to add an insight that I heard from Kivi Bernard, a motivational business speaker and a Torah observant Jew. Kivi quotes his father, who explained that there are two flying insects that will enter a home, a bee and a fly. There is however, a major difference between the two. A fly can enter the most magnificent home, the most beautiful garden and it will find the dung – a negative.

On the other hand, a bee can be in the most inhospitable place but will find a flower - the positive. What is the nature of the bee? Its entire existence is to produce sweet honey, however, if it gets angry and



stings, it will die. The bee is about giving sweetness, as soon as it becomes angry, it's no longer a bee and loses its right to existence.

This year, as we dip our apple into the honey, let us make a commitment to engage with the sweetness of Judaism.

## YOM HADIN -

### JUDGING AND JUDGEMENTS

Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the New Year – is a day on which we do not party and celebrate the start of a new year but are called before the heavenly courts and are judged for our actions.

We stand before the *'Kisei Hakavod'* - the Holy throne - we are judged before God. What does the judgement look like?

For many of us, if we were the judges of ourselves, we would have a high standard. We would traditionally judge ourselves far more harshly than God will ever do. As such, I thank God that it is God who judges me and not my peers, nor myself.

I have had many conversations with congregants who have cried to me that this or that has happened to them because they are being punished. I have always responded that I don't know how God works the system – far greater minds than mine have failed – even the great Maimonides poetically described that if all the world were the parchment and all the oceans ink, he would not be able to properly explain the system (Laws of Repentance 5:5). But we accept that the Judge is fair, and his judgement is true.

Secondly, we are aware that we have a choice in life to be a fly and focus on the garbage or a bee and find the flowers - the beauty in every situation. Be a bee and enjoy the honey.

I can reveal a small secret --- the way we judge others is the way that we are judged. Let me repeat, that the way we judge others is the way that we are judged.

Allow me to share with you a powerful story.

An elderly father was sitting in a chair at an Aged Home, staring at the window, his son was sitting with him. The father looks to his son and asks him – “What is that?” the son responds with kindness, “Dad, that is a crow.”

“Oh,” says the Dad. He sits quietly and then looks at the son, “What is that?” again the son answers, “A crow, Dad.”

“Oh,” says the father.

Again the father asks, “What is that?”

This time the son, a bit more flustered answers, “Dad, I told you, it's a crow!”

“Oh,” says the father.

A few minutes pass by and again the father asks, “What is that?” This time the son almost explodes, “How many times must I tell you, it's a crow!!!”

With that the aged father looks at his son and nods his head. Slowly he rises from his chair and leaves the room. The

son is bewildered and a little ashamed for shouting at his father. The father returns with a tattered looking book. He sits down, wets his finger and thumbs through the book until he finds the page - he motions to his son to read the entry. It is a diary entry dated April 7th 1962;

*“Today I went with my son to the park. He is growing up so quickly he is already two and speaking so beautifully. We ran and played until he saw a crow. “What is that?” he asked me. “A crow,” I said. “What is that?” he asked again. I kissed him and replied, “A crow.” Twenty-one times he asked me the question until he got it, and each time I kissed him.”*

The son looked up to his father with tears flowing down his cheeks.

What has become of us that we become so angry when people don't remember? I know it's difficult emotionally to deal with parents who are ageing and the child has to swap places with the parent. But why do we become so aggressive?

However, it is not only in the area of personal relationships that we have become so closed minded.

We are so bombarded with information that everyone feels they are now a resident expert. We know more and more about stuff, but do we really know what is going on?

Let's imagine we were playing God today and we are the judge. What would we focus on as we judged ourselves? *Oh, let's have a look at this Lewin character of 2021, hmmm, I see that in 1999 he was pictured drunk and in 2010 he expressed an opinion on Twitter. Oh, I do not believe that we can accept your candidature.*

Really!! Because I was rude to someone twenty years ago? Or because of a Tweet?

But that is not me anymore!

However, it is on the public record and very hard to expunge. What is even worse is that we base our entire view upon that particular soundbite.

I am so thankful that God does not judge me by that standard.

### **The challenge**

We need to learn the art of judging people favourably. To realise that people grow up and change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. We need to know that very often the person we see is not the person, rather it is a celluloid image of that person.

If you ask me what frustrates me? This is one of them. That a person refuses to investigate another person. To challenge the stereotype that we may have of that person. As Jews, we have suffered from that exact same treatment. We know how it feels to be treated based on a perception.

I will never forget the first time I had a serious conversation with Rabbi Yehudah Amital. Rabbi Amital, was a man larger than life, a survivor who built the Har etzion Yeshiva. However, because my Hebrew wasn't fluent, I felt I couldn't go to talk to him. When finally I had built up the courage, I apologised that it took me so long to come and talk and build a relationship. In his indomitable style he responded – in English, “Your loss!” And he was right. I missed out by not trying to engage with him earlier - something I regret to this day.

To judge a person favourably and to give them the benefit of the doubt is one of the great challenges of our time. It doesn't

mean I have to like them, but at least to see where they are coming from and not to dismiss them before they have had a chance to defend themselves. We lose when we judge too quickly.

May Hashem judge us favourably and grant us a sweet and healthy new year.

## **THE CALL OF THE SHOFAR**

On Rosh Hashanah, we gather in shul to Crown God King of the World. The act of coronation, involves our participation, our engagement and our acceptance. This act is repeated yearly because we forget. We are so consumed by what is happening in our lives that we completely lose track of time and what is important.

Rosh Hashanah is a reset button. By acknowledging that there is a King and Creator, we acknowledge that there is purpose, meaning and importance to each and every one of us. And even if we do not see it, Rosh Hashana reminds us, that we play an important part in the story. A part that may only be revealed in years or even generations to come.

### **The Shofar calls to us**

What is she saying? What is the message of the distinct sounds of Tekiah, Shevarim, Teruah and Tekiah? Four distinct sounds. On the surface, the first and last sound the same.

What is the significance of these sounds?

Why do we have different combinations of all the notes and sometimes we skip the shevarim or the Teruah?

May we learn to reserve our judgement until we have the facts, and until that stage, grant a person the benefit of the doubt. For that is surely how we wish to be judged and treated.

The answer is that the Shofar is calling to us. She has a message that she wishes to share. What is she saying?

### **1. The Shofar as a Coach: Tekiah, Shavarim, Teruah and Tekiah**

As a coach motivates his team, the Shofar acts as the life coach motivating and pushing us to become a better version of ourselves.

The Tekiah a long sharp straight sound, functions as an alarm - Wake up!!!

Shevarim are three broken notes. Shevarim comes from the Hebrew root, 'shavar', meaning broken. It is time to break the paradigm that you find yourself believing. Look at yourself, look at the world see what is broken, look at what is broken in the world, in our society and in our lives.

The next sound is the Teruah - nine sharp blasts. They are a call to action. Nine sharp blows. The Shofar - coach pushes us to perform and correct. To do better.

And the final Tekiah sound, a straight sound, fixed, improved, stronger. The problem has been resolved. The situation corrected and things are better than before.



## 2. The Shofar as a reality check. Tekiah, Shavarim, Teruah and Tekiah

Sometimes there is only Shevarim sounds. Tekiah. The Shofar calls us to action. Something is not right. The situation is broken. But the situation cannot be fixed. No matter what we do, we cannot improve the situation. But that does not mean we should not acknowledge them. Just because we cannot fix the problem, does not mean that we should bury our heads into the sand.

We blow the Tekiah at the end of the set, to say although there are things that are broken within our lives, that does not mean that we should be paralysed and frozen. The Tekiah at the end coaxes us to move on. We bracket the shevarim-the brokenness, we acknowledge the problem but we are not paralysed by it. We move on, we search for a solution but are not frozen in time.



## 3. The Shofar as a mentor Tekiah, Teruah Tekiah

And then there are times we need the creative energy of a Teruah, a call to action. "Let's change the world!" The sound of the Teruah, which consists of 9 sharp staccato sounds, moves us to action.

Get up and make the difference. Be the change and improve the world.

This idea is expressed by the Hebrew root of the word shofar שפר which comes from the Hebrew לשפר - 'Leshaper' - to improve. The Shofar is a call to action. The driver. The Shofar is the teacher who sees the potential in the student and calls them to improve who they are.

The Call of the Shofar is a personal call to us all on how to live our lives. What message do you hear when the Shofar is sounded?

# LESSONS IN EDUCATION

The start of a new year. Once again, we gather in shul and prepare for the beginning of a new year. What messages should we highlight at the start of this year? One of the most important lessons that I learnt over the course of the year is that the Machzor and Siddur are more than prayer books. Of course, that is their primary role, to assist us in our prayers and in appreciating the enormity of the day. However, probably even important is the reason for the texts that are chosen. The rabbis who authored the prayers and chose the texts that we read had important messages that they felt we needed to hear.

I have always wondered why it was that the Torah readings of Rosh Hashanah were the stories of Abraham and not those of Creation and Adam and Eve in the garden. Although Judaism believes that this was the birthday of the world – hayom harat olam - Adam was formed. He sinned and was judged.

That text is not chosen, rather we have on Day One, the story of the birth of Isaac and the expulsion of Ishmael and today, the story of the Akeidah. If we add the haftarah for Day One with its focus on the birth of Samuel and today, with Rachel weeping for her children, we see

that the Sages of old felt that on Rosh Hashanah, the focus has to be on the children.

We could even suggest that Rosh Hashanah is even more important than Pesach, to educate our children.

**What are the lessons that we are being asked to absorb and share?**

**1. Never give up on a child.** When Isaac was born the text describes great tension in Abraham's family. To such an extent, that Abraham is forced to send Ishmael away. Sarah was worried about the spiritual damage being done to Isaac. She reacted as a caring parent would, to protect her young son. Abraham follows the advice of Sarah, sends Hagar and Ishmael away. However, Abraham still maintains a link with him. He never gives up on his son. Later, when Abraham journeys to Mount Moriah for the Akeidah, he brings Ishmael with him. Ishmael later will return to the family and together with his brother, Isaac, attend to the funeral arrangements of Abraham. A child will go through periods of rebellion -don't shut that door - even if you have to remove them for the spiritual safety of the family.

**2. Be involved with your child's education.** In the Parasha of the Akeidah, we see that Abraham is active in all the areas of the task; he saddles the donkey, he carries the wood, he walks with his son etc. This was the toughest challenge of his life, but he carried it out without complaint and brought his son with him every step of the way. Abraham succeeded in instilling in his son the



lessons of Judaism, of service to Hashem and keeping the mitzvot. Judaism is not easy. There are constant challenges and questions. It is not cheap. We speak of the Jewish tax, the costs of Jewish education, kosher food, lost business opportunities. But the reward is great.

Isaac could only succeed in his Jewish journey, knowing that his father was with him every step of the way. Enthusiastic, even when the demands were tough. We don't have to go through an Akeidah experience, however, we do have a Pesach clean-up every year, donations to Jewish charities, expenses to pay. We learn from Abraham, that when we embrace the challenges, we come through them, more importantly, our little people are learning from our approach and enthusiasm, or lack thereof.

### **3. When Abraham and Isaac head to the Akeidah, they journey with two men.**

According to the midrash, these two were, Eliezer and Ishmael. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik explained homiletically, that they represented the nations of the world. There are times when we certainly journey with our fellow man in the world, but there are times when we must separate, to climb the mountain and serve our God. We then return to journey once again.

From Sunday to Friday, we march together with our co-workers, doing our job to make a success and make the world a little bit better. On the other hand, there is a part of us that is different, and we need to celebrate that part too. As Jews living in the modern world, this model of Abraham and Isaac is



imperative. There are times that we need to separate, for we have our own special Jewish side to nurture and celebrate. In the same way as times when we need to cancel arrangements with friends because of family commitments, we have our Jewish commitments as well.

### **4. Listen to our children**

In the Haftarah of Day One we read of the birth of young Samuel, the prophet. In a later story, a young Samuel hears the word of Hashem. He wakes the old High Priest Eli, and tells him what he heard. Only for Eli to shoo him back to bed. God does not communicate with children! In today's world, we empower our children to speak up. Of course, we are there to guide and advise, we are the adults, but there are times when we get it wrong. There are times when our children have a better understanding and insight into what is happening. Often the world moves past us and when we look up, we are behind. We need to make sure our relationships with our children are solid, safe, and secure - they need to know their parents are a safe space. We may not be happy with their decisions, but they need to know they can tell us even if we have to respond.

### **5. Make time for yourself, your child needs you.**

In the story we read about Hagar, a woman consumed with sadness. She'd been forced from her home into the desert with little food or water and her son was sick. She reached the end of her coping strength and we find her crying. Hagar, is at the end of her rope, when an angel appears, forcing her to look up. When she did, she saw a well, making her

able to nurse her child back to health. It was a stranger, helping Hagar through trying times that restored her spirit and ability to care for her child.

### **6. RUOK?**

In the story an angel appears to Hagar, comforts her and helps her to see - be the angel for someone! We all are carrying a lot. If we look up we can see people who need a helping hand. A quick phone call or text. A hello on the way, can make a world of difference. Not only to the person, but so many others too. That unknown angel may have been spiritual or human. We'll never know. Be the angel in someone's life. You never know the difference an RUOK? can make.

Our prayer books are a treasure-trove of wisdom. When we spend time in shul reading and reflecting on their words, we're astounded by the depth of meaning and teachings. So, take time out, come to shul, immerse yourself in the beauty of the service and the embedded messages.

Education is a lifelong process. It involves parents, teachers and community - a dialogue between student and master. The student learns to master, and the master becomes the student. Together they hike up the mountain to greater heights of understanding.

On Rosh Hashanah we are commanded to hear the call of the shofar. The shofar was heard on two mountains. These two mountains have given us so much in terms of education; Mount Moriah where it all began and Mount Sinai, where we heard the voice of Hashem bequeathing to us the Torah and the script of our religion.

# YOM KIPPUR

## What is Yom Kippur?

Yom Kippur is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. The day is filled with repentance, confessions and prayer.

Let's try to unpack this day

1. Why do we have Yom Kippur 10 days after the start of the New Year? Surely we didn't transgress so badly?
2. What's the history of Yom Kippur and when was the first one?
3. How does the day work?
4. What is the meaning behind the Kol Nidrei service?
5. What is Neilah?
6. What can't I do in Yom Kippur?

## 1. Let's begin

Yom Kippur falls on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei. This is exactly 365 days since the start of the previous year. The Hebrew calendar runs on the sighting of the moon making a lunar year 354 days long. The solar year is 365 days. The Jewish calendar is a combination of the two calendars, since the pilgrim festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot are also agricultural in nature. Pesach must fall in Spring, Shavuot, at the beginning of the harvest season and Sukkot, at the end of the harvest season. The problem we have is that the Pilgrim festivals are related to the solar cycle and there is an eleven day gap each year between the Lunar and the Solar year. As such, the lunar year will drift back by eleven days relative to the solar year.

In order to balance the calendar and to allow for the festivals of Pesach,

Shavuot and Sukkot to fall within the parameters of the agricultural year, a leap year is added seven times in nineteen years. What we have then is that Rosh Hashanah is the start of the new lunar year and Yom Kippur, which is 364 days after Rosh Hashanah of the previous year, is the last day of the previous solar year. This therefore makes sense that on the last day of the year, we should ask forgiveness for the sins of the past year i.e. 365 days not 10!

We thus have a new insight, that Yom Kippur is an atonement, not of the current year, but of the past solar year of 365 days! (This idea I read in works by Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, one of the great modern commentators on the Tanach.)

## 2. The history

According to the Torah, the Jewish people received the Torah on the 6th of Sivan. Moses then went up the mountain for 40 days to receive the Torah. He returns on the 17th of Tammuz to find the people worshipping the golden calf. He smashes the tablets and then for 40 days prays for forgiveness. This is granted and Moses once again has to ascend the mountain to receive the second set of tablets. He is on the mountain for another 40 days.

The date of his return is the 10th of Tishrei, the first Yom Kippur. It was on that day that the sin of the Golden Calf was forgiven, this imbued the day as one of reconciliation and forgiveness and the day became known as Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement or the day of At-one-ment.

## 3. How does the day work?

The day begins at sunset, with a moving ceremony called, Kol Nidrei. Two Torah scrolls are removed from the Ark and paraded around the synagogue. The community asks forgiveness for the sins that we transgressed over the past year.

The Torahs then stand next to the Chazan who leads the community in the declaration called, Kol Nidrei - all vows and promises that we made this year, may they be annulled and cancelled. To highlight its importance, this declaration is made three times.

The day is spent in prayer. Each of the services adds another dimension to the day. The evening service contains many Selichot - penitential prayers - and we invoke the 13 attributes of mercy revealed of Moses in the aftermath of the Golden Calf. During the day more Selichot are recited. The highlight of the day is the Chazan's repetition of the Mussaf service. In addition to the normal prayers we re-enact the drama of how the High Priest - the Kohen HaGadol - would perform the Yom Kippur service. At Mincha, the afternoon service, we read the story of Jonah with its themes of repentance.

The final prayer service is called, Neilah. At the moment of the closing of the Heavenly Gates, we come again before Hashem, to beg for forgiveness. The atmosphere changes to a desperate plea for repentance. The day ends with the sounding of the Shofar. The day is over and we wish each other a Shana Tova.

There are five prohibitions on Yom Kippur:

1. No eating and drinking
2. We don't wear leather shoes

3. No anointing perfumes

4. No washing

5. No sexual relations.

The reason for them - we wish to atone for the sins of the year by afflicting our bodies through Yom Kippur, a day unlike any other. Jews are drawn to her and attending the service can transform a person. Over 100 years ago, the German Jewish philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig, went to shul on Yom Kippur. He was completely disconnected from his Judaism. Going to shul for Kol Nidrei was his swansong and farewell to Judaism. He walked into the shul. When he left he was changed, he reconnected to his Jewish roots. He later wrote one of the greatest books on Judaism, the Star of Redemption.

May this year's Yom Kippur, bring purity and forgiveness, reconnection and recommitment and lead to an increased interest and growth in your Judaism.

## 4. Why do we need a Yom Kippur?

**Kol Nidrei**, the most magical and meaningful service. A night that draws us into an experience with ourselves and our Maker. A time to evaluate that which is important to us. This is a time where we are all being called to task. To answer questions about ourselves and our abilities. In essence, Yom Kippur, on a certain level is election night.

And although we are not being voted on by our peers we are in a similar position as a candidate who is challenging for political office.

Allow me to explain.

A candidate needs to present a case to the voters as to why they should be the

chosen one for the position. They will inevitably present a detailed list of their achievements to back their candidate. They will present their plans for what they wish to achieve in their role. They will present positions, inspire the crowds with a vision of what can be if they are in charge. They will spin the positive. They may however choose to run a negative campaign, I am better than him/her because I have/ I can/ I will/ they can't.

But they are not judged in a vacuum. For suddenly, scandals, pictures, videos, audios, emails emerge, calling into question our candidates core values, their judgement, their menchlichkeit. Supporters and detractors will attack and defend.

One of the fascinating stories to emerge was the vile audio of Trump on Friday. It is disgraceful and disgusting. And he took to the stage and apologised.

Let us study a law in Maimonides laws of repentance: Chapter 2:2 What is Teshuva?

A sinner will leave the sin and will remove such thoughts of the sin from his heart and thoughts. He will commit never to commit this sin again...He will display remorse for what he has done... and he will not return to this sin again... He needs to verbally confess... if he offers lip service and does not want to change – he has achieved nothing.

We thus see that there are three stages to the teshuva process.

- 1) Acknowledge the sin
- 2) Confession of the sin
- 3) Accept never to act or say or do the said behaviour again.

The person must be contrite and recall the sin always.

Now this is where the discussion gets interesting. According to the Rambam, steps one two and three were done in a public confession. How do we respond? Do we look at him and say, a leopard doesn't change its spots? Or do we say that was then this is now, eleven years have passed. He has acknowledged the error of his ways and has shown remorse. I leave that for you to decide.

But what of us? We too are standing before an audience asking to be elected - in our case to be granted this year. We too present a review of our achievements and set our goals for the year. And then we are confronted with that scene from the past. That audio taken of us saying xx about someone. And this deed which we may have even forgotten stands before us. What do we say? Yes, that was me then but I have changed, I am different. That me is wrong, this me would never say or do



that. Now, I am not speaking here of an offence that has punitive repercussions. I am not saying that the paedophile can say these words and there are no consequences for what has transpired. We need to distinguish between words and deeds and repercussions of our actions. I am speaking on a level which is not going to be brought before the courts.

Will we too offer the three steps of the Rambam? And then we have to deal with the nagging question, “Will they believe me? Will they accept my apology as sincere or view it as forced?”

Maybe the best answer to that question is what happens tomorrow? When we are presented with the same scenario how do we respond? That says the Rambam, is the greatest sign that one's repentance has been sincere.

But what about all those sins that we are about to confess, that we know that He knows, that we know that He knows that we are going to be saying these same words again. Asking forgiveness for the same sins as we said last year. In fact, there is an AL CHET FOR A FALSE CONFESSION!! The answer is when I say these words, have I changed in even the smallest way? And if the answer is yes, then I have not uttered a false confession.

King Solomon said, sheva yipol Zaddik vayikom - seven times will the zaddik fall but he will get up. The Zaddik is not the one who never sinned but rather the one who sinned and got up until he had corrected the flaw.

Thus we see Yom Kippur as the ‘day of atonement’ for ones sins. A time to change who I am. But for what sins do I confess? I saw the following article written by a Muslim woman about the

power of Yom Kippur. Let me share it with you.

## Farhana Rahman

*Farhana Rahman is the Director of Communications of ZCast, and Marketing Director of Kaipule.*

*As a child, I was brought up in a family-oriented Jewish neighbourhood in New York. As such, I was always a friend of the Jews, and a fan of their cultural practices. Despite the fact that I went to public schools, the great majority of my teachers were Jewish in both Elementary and Junior High. Heck, I grew up assuming only Jews were allowed to be teachers, because that was all I saw. And it was awesome. They beautifully instilled their loving values onto the mixed groups of students. Aside from family gatherings, the only place where I wasn't surrounded by Jews was at the mosque.*

*Through my Jewish neighbors, friends, teachers, and acquaintances, I learned a great deal about the many Jewish holidays. I found the holidays fascinating, because of the stories, symbolic practices, songs, and of course, the feasts. My family only celebrated the two Eids, and those celebrations weren't all that different from typical family gatherings. I can't say I found either one of the Eids to be special, though I heard it is always special in Muslim countries.*

*Anyway, I memorized the significance of Jewish holidays by associating one word with each of them. Purim = costumes; Pesach = matzah; Sukkot = sukkah.*

*Yom Kippur — that's the, “Sorry” holiday. “Atonement” was too complicated a word when I was younger. Anyway, I quickly picked up on how everyone asked me (and each other) for forgiveness, in their own special ways. The practice itself*

helped rekindle, strengthen, and even start friendships.

### **Did I need a Yom Kippur?**

I never had to observe a holiday like Yom Kippur, which meant I never had to ask anyone for forgiveness. Then again, I didn't really feel the need to, because I was always a goody-two-shoes. I felt that whenever I did tell anyone off, they totally deserved it, because it typically came after a series of offenses that I previously let slide.

Although I respected the holiday, I figured I didn't need a Yom Kippur. That changed after I unknowingly broke the heart of an angelic Jewish woman. For the sake of this post, I will call her, "Shoshanna".

### **About Shoshanna**

Shoshanna was a teacher in my Elementary school. She happened to be Orthodox. Everything about her mannerisms, voice, and the way she spoke was literally like a Disney princess. Although she wasn't one of my teachers, we quickly became friends, and would talk about life before classes started, and during lunch. I looked forward to the heart-to-hearts each day.

### **The Turning Point**

One Friday, after school (I was probably 9 at the time), my father took me to the mosque. Please note: It was a great mosque that never taught to hate. Anyway, I was chatting with a bunch of friends after prayers were done, right outside of the mosque. I was telling them something about my Jewish friends. At one point, I heard a man's voice behind me saying something very bizarre.

"Don't talk to Jewish people. They steal land".

I turned around, and wasn't able to make out who said it, but the words stuck. And it scared me.

I was scared the whole weekend. My mind was all over the place. Jews steal land? I go to a school that's full of Jews! Do they know my father owns a house? The school knows my address! Does that mean they will steal my parents' house?! Maybe I should warn my parents! But I don't want to scare them...

I kept the burning secret inside, and waited till Monday. I figured I had to talk about it with an actual Jew, to just find out what the heck that was about.

Shoshanna would be perfect! We talk about everything!

### **The Dreadful Monday**

Shoshanna walked over to me, and asked me about my weekend. She looked exceptionally adorable that day, and she probably even knew it because she was glowing more than usual. I remember — her eyes looked extra bright. I decided to tell her what happened, and hear what her thoughts were on why that man said that.

"Someone said I am not supposed to talk to Jewish people because they steal land."

She froze.



Her glow instantly vanished.

Her face turned red, and her eyes began to water.

"Oh", she said. She took a step back. Her eyes watered even more.

"Oh", she said again. She took many more steps back, then just turned and walked away.

She never looked at me again. Never spoke to me again. She did her best to avoid me, so I didn't feel threatened. I didn't understand why.

### **The Guilt**

I decided to not talk about what the man said with anyone else ever again. It somehow made my friend sad — no way was I about to bring it up with anyone else. I only learned why it made her sad late in my teens. Yes, I was very sheltered. And yes, that goes to show how I really was never taught to hate.

But once I learned of the ugly side of things, I felt like such a monster. My mind was at it again. Shoshanna must think I am a radical. She must think I am a raging anti-Semite. She must have figured I was a terrorist-in-training. She must have been so afraid and disgusted of me. Shoshanna hates me!

I wanted to set things straight. I started looking for her, but couldn't find her. I figured maybe she made aliyah. Yes, that must be it. She must be alive and well — happily living in Israel by now.

Each year, in the days leading up to Yom Kippur, the raging need to ask Shoshanna for forgiveness would hit me HARD. But I didn't have any way to reach her. It was nearly impossible to find her prior to social media. Even after the rise of social networks, I couldn't find her anywhere. I jumped whenever I came across anyone with her

(very common) last name, but no one knew her.

The fear started kicking in. Was she even alive?

### **2016 – The Turning Point**

Although I lightly dabbled in activities pertaining to peace / coexistence / tolerance / solidarity / etc for many years, 2016 turned out to be my big year. I had several viral Facebook posts, speaking engagements galore, and seized many opportunities. With each step along the way, my heart wanted to tell Shoshanna, "Look at what I'm doing! I'm not a terrorist! I'm not an anti-Semite!"

My best friend, mentor, and boss, Hillel Fuld, encouraged me to try to look for her again. I had more contacts than ever before at that point. It was worth a shot. For the final time, I wrote a (now private) post on Facebook, asking if anyone knew someone by her name. I included her picture from the Year Book from 1995 — the year I graduated elementary school.

There were many shares of that post. Many of my friends, new and old, started looking for her. Close, but no cigar.

My friend, Hillel Kuttler, of Seeking Kin, went above and beyond trying to locate Shoshanna. The one roadblock was the fact that I wasn't sure of her first name. Only her last name was listed in the Year Book. I had an idea of what her first name could be. I told him — and he ran with it. He made countless calls, searched countless databases, and spent many weeks trying to find her. He was only able to unearth the fact that Shoshanna no longer worked as a teacher. I told him early on, that if he were to discover that she passed away, I'd rather not know. At one point, I began to wonder if that was becoming the case. Was he shielding me from the truth?

Found!

*A few months later, my 5th grade teacher, Ms Gloria Golden, messaged me, saying she has Shoshanna's number. Oh my God. Within a matter of minutes, I had Shoshanna's office number.*

*She has indeed taken on a new profession. I called the number and a receptionist answered. Shoshanna was not available to speak at the time, but the receptionist was kind enough to give me Shoshanna's direct line. Oh my God.*

*I dialled the number and heard Shoshanna's sweet voice for the first time in over 20 years.*

*"Hello?"*

I told Shoshanna that I had been a student at that public elementary school in 1995, and would appreciate a few minutes to speak to her. I asked her if it was a good time. She said, "I'll call you back in a few minutes, okay?"

Those were the longest few minutes of my life. It was only about half an hour, but it felt like eternity. I wasn't sure if she actually would call back. But she did. And I poured my heart out.

- I told her everything;
- *How we used to talk.*
- *What happened at the mosque.*
- *The way my mind was working the whole weekend.*
- *My intentions when I told her what happened years ago.*
- *Her reaction.*
- *All my activities since then.*
- *I told her that I had no idea if she even remembered anything about me or*

*what happened, but I hope she could find it in her heart to forgive me for hurting her feelings.*

### **Shoshanna speaks**

*You know", she said, "I don't remember a lot from that time, but I do vaguely remember the incident. I am so proud of you. I am proud of everything you have done, and what you have become. We need more of you. Of course I forgive you. I am so flattered you searched for me..."*

*Shoshanna went on praising me, and offered many words of encouragement. She made me promise to keep in touch, and insisted we must lunch soon.*

*That was when I knew I had my friend back.*

### **Yom Kippur — 2016**

*This Yom Kippur will be the first one in over 20 years that doesn't hit me hard. I got the forgiveness I needed most, and the world instantly became brighter as my shoulders got lighter.*

*I'm far from perfect, and I know there are other people that I need to ask for forgiveness. I have every intention of doing so. But nothing will be nearly as monumental, as impactful, or as meaningful as the feeling that came out of hearing Shoshanna telling me that she forgives me.*

*My heart is at ease. I wish this amazing feeling to one and all.*

May this Yom Kippur bring you the same feelings that Farhana experienced.

May our teshuva be sincere and may God elect us all for a good year.

**G'mar Hatima Tova!**

## **DRASHA FOR YIZKOR 2019**

The catchphrase in the world today is self-esteem, I need to feel good about myself. The theory was that this would produce a generation of more fulfilled human beings, proud of who they are and will make the world better. This has not been the case. In fact the opposite is true. We have created a generation that is more self-obsessed. Society was quick to embrace the notion that everyone's feelings need to be respected and honoured to prevent the loss of self-esteem. Barney the dinosaur sang to children, "*Oh you are special, everyone is special in his or her way*". Lady Gaga sang: "*Just love yourself and you are set, I'm on the right track baby I was born this way.*" Whereas previous generations grew up with Pinocchio being taught, "*Always let your conscience be your guide.*" The children of today hear, Elsa, from Frozen sing, "*No right no wrong, no rules for me, I'm free! Let it go!*" This is expressed in popular culture in the songs in the television programmes:

Self-realisation and personal happiness are the buzzwords of today. And they stand on the opposite end of Judaism. Judaism teaches us that your self-realization lies in consonance with God, and that any attempt to placate your ego through the pursuit of personally defined happiness is bound to fail. The mitzvot challenge us to bend our will to His, for through it will we find happiness. Judaism put a block on what we are allowed to eat, when we can do what we want, with whom we can have

an intimate relationship. Judaism demands much from us. And this demand is at odds with the worldview that we are exposed to on a daily basis.

We recently read the story of the Akeida, one of the most important and central texts in Judaism. The story itself is one of the most morally challenging that we have, yet is front and centre in our belief system and is highlighted over the High Holiday period.

Abraham takes his son, Isaac, up the mountain, as per Divine decree, binds him and attempts to sacrifice him to Hashem. An angel appears and warns him not to. That he had won the case that Isaac will not only live, but will carry his name and legacy forward.



What are we to make about this story? It is such a hard one for us to hear and to relate to.

I believe that this story is highlighting our journey in the world. The world will look aghast at what we are doing, how can you separate your child from the world? Remove him from his needs. What right do you have to force your beliefs on your child?

### Why is this story so important?

Because it teaches us that when it comes to our values, not only are we asked to make a sacrifice but that our children will be asked to do so too. We are asked to make the sacrifice. Of course we have a choice. We can opt out. All we have to do is stop teaching our children. But if we believe that our Judaism is important and I believe we do, then we must be willing to teach our children.

As parents, we are the custodians of our collective past, carefully transmitted from generation to generation, if we want to ensure that this is passed to the future generations. To paraphrase President Ronald Reagan, who spoke about freedom, when we speak about Judaism, "Judaism is never more than one generation away from extinction. We don't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what once was a Jewish community.

In Judaism there are only two directions, forward and backward. Are we moving towards something or away? When we look at our children, how do they compare in their commitment to the community and their Judaism? But before we bemoan our children, look backwards at our parents and grandparents? What values were bequeathed to us?

**1. Life has a purpose:** We believe in a Divine Creator, who has a plan for us. We thus care about what we do. Our ancestors care about what we do. Our children care about what we do and God cares about what we do.

**2. You can do it.** We are not victims. Judaism teaches that we are responsible for our actions. Yom Kippur is all about acknowledging what we did wrong and making amends. Judaism also taught us long before Nike, that we can 'just do it'. We are created in the image of God and this means that we have the ability to create, make and do.

**3. Judaism is unique.** We are born into the most unique and incredible religion and culture. Be proud of what we are, what we have achieved and gifted the world. Be grateful for being born Jewish. Know your roots, defend them, be grateful for them and add to them.

**4. Kol Yisrael Areivim ze lazeh,** we are all in this together, we are brothers and sisters. Family.

Ben Shapiro shared the following powerful story (The right side of history

217-218). One night he was putting his daughter to bed. She looked at him and asked, "Daddy, will you always be my daddy?"

Of course.

"But," she clarified, "One day I will be older. And really old people die. So will you still be there?"

I don't like to think about death with regard to my own parents, let alone with respect to my children. And while I am a believer in the Afterlife, there's no real way to know. I don't know what comes after this. No one does.

Are we specks blinking in and out of existence, leaving no trace?

I don't think we are! I think that the history of Judaism shows that our parents live on in us- that when we accept our past, when we learn the lessons they teach us, when we recognise their wisdom even as we develop our own, we become a link

in the chain of history. Our parents never die so long as we keep the flame of their ideals alive, and pass that flame along to our children.

As we pause the service today for Yizkor, we remember our parents and grandparents. They did so much to till the fertile soil and build the community and lives that we live today. It is our job to carry on the tradition. It is our job to push the task forward - to bequeath to our children the gift of community, of family and tradition. Until now, we have focussed on what Hashem thinks of us. Now, the question we have to ask is, "what say our parents and grandparents? Are we giving them the nachas that they deserve?"

If we do, then we will be truly deserving of Hashem's blessing. We choose life, we choose community, we choose traditions so that our children may live and our community can continue into the future.



# A SUMMARY OF THE YIZKOR DRASHA 2016

Yizkor, for many, is one of the holiest times of the entire year. It is a call to recall the giants of our family and of the past. It is a time to reflect on their contributions and ours to see what was achieved in their lives and where we are in ours.

I would like to dedicate the drasha this morning to two giants of our people whom we lost over the course of this year, Eli Weisel and Shimon Peres. For most of us these two names have been part of our conscious mind, two names that have highlighted the story of the Jewish People in the 20th century, the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel.

These two men led remarkable lives, they experienced remarkable events, events that have not transpired in human history and have transformed the way we think of the world.

Both men are unremarkable, they were not taller, brighter or better than anyone else. Yet, providence tapped them on the shoulder.

Eli Weisel, became the voice for those who could no longer speak, the voice for those whom the Nazis tried to silence. And it was through his still voice that he rallied the world to remember and never forget.

Shimon Peres, made Aliyah before the war, he was the operations man, the logistics man, the unremarkable back room deals man, whom history should have forgotten, and yet his name appears in lights. A man who did not serve in the armed forces of Israel but shaped them. He was a dreamer, a realist, and his story

is the story of the State of Israel, which he served to well into his nineties.

## What messages do we glean from their lives?

1. Never say that you have done it. Eli Weisel may have felt that he had done it by surviving the Holocaust, when he wrote his first book, when he built a family. But he never stopped, there was always a new project. The Jews of Silence- those Jews trapped behind the Iron Curtain, the ambassador to remind the world of the horrors of the Holocaust, to educate tens of thousands of children when he spoke at the March of the Living and other projects. He never retired - there was more to do.

Shimon Peres too, never said enough, he had been a career man, having worked with every Israeli Prime Minister from



David Ben Gurion to Bibi. He had dealings with every American President from Kennedy to Obama. And then at the spritely age of 82, he became Israel's 9th President, the elder statesman, a position he served with dignity for nine years, retiring last year at 91. He was the father of innovation, the building of the nuclear facility at Dimona, nano technology and many other projects. He too never said that was done.

2. Setbacks and tragedies are not an excuse. The world does not owe us anything. Both men showed the strength of character to continue, even when faced with horrific odds- never give up, there is always a way. It is easy to find excuses why not to do something, another to ignore them and do.

3. Both men bore the mantle of history and wore it with pride. They saw in their role a service to the community of klal Israel- a service that has no retirement date. Of course there is more that we can say and much will be written about these two giants of our people.

However I would like to issue three challenges today;

## 1. Taking Action

Peres and Weisel were all people of action. They didn't just talk about what they were going to do. They did it.

## 2. Long-Term Commitments

The tenacity and commitment of Peres and Weisel to their cause is a lesson we can apply to our lives. Their accomplishments didn't take place in a single day. They worked day in and day out for their cause. What are our long-term commitments?

## 3. Having the Proper Attitude

Being action-oriented is not only about doing what is right, but doing it with the proper attitude.

Our teshuva of Yom Kippur is a time for action and contemplation about our personal approach and behaviour.

Chart a new course of action for yourself. Say to yourself: 'What concrete actions can I take to change from being the person I've been to the person I wish to become?' Do those things you always said you wanted to do. Be that person you said you always wanted to be.

May our prayers be heard on this Yom Kippur. May our teshuva be sincere and may we and our families merit to be sealed for a year of health, happiness and blessing.







**The North Shore Synagogue**  
**Rosh Hashanah 2021 - 5782**