



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

MAKING GOD KING THIS ROSH HASHANAH

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



Rosh Hashanah is known to all as the “Day of Judgment”, and we are familiar with the image of every human being coming before God, like sheep before the Shepherd, in judgment.

Q: Yet, what is the nature of this judgement? What are we being judged upon?

Most of us would probably say that we are being judged upon our deeds of the past year, and what that means for the year ahead. The Talmud below would seem to concur:

SOURCE 1: *Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah 16b – Everyone is Judged on Rosh Hashanah*

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

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

You would imagine that we spend the day immersed in prayer and repentance, begging God for a judgment for life and all its attendant blessings. (like we do on Yom Kippur) Yet, on Rosh Hoshana we celebrate, eat and drink and are dressed in our finest clothes.

Also, you would think that if we are settling accounts from the prior year the time to do that would be the last day of the last year, not Rosh Hashanah, which is the first day of the New Year. That's like giving last year's report card on the first day of the new school term!

Q: Why do you think the day of Judgment occurs on the first day of the New year, it seems incongruous with the idea of a fresh start which the new year inspires!?

Q: Even more surprising, is that even during the prayer services, almost no mention of our sins is made, nor our pleas for forgiveness uttered. Shouldn't we be begging God to overlook our past mistakes, giving us another lease on life in the year ahead?

Instead, we leave all mention of mistakes and teshuva (repentance) aside and focus on how we would like the world to be:

SOURCE 2: *Rosh Hashanah Silent Amida (Holiness of God's Name) Artscroll Siddur. P. 299*

...Let all works revere You and all creatures prostrate themselves before You. **Let them all become a single society to do Your will wholeheartedly**...grant honor to Your people, praise to those who revere you....And so, too, the righteous will see and be glad, the upright exult...**Iniquity will close its mouth and all wickedness will evaporate like smoke....Then You, Hashem will reign alone over all Your works, on Mount Zion**, resting place of Your glory; and in Jerusalem your Holy city...

Q: What kind of world does this sound like to you? What does it have to do with Rosh Hashanah?

Consider this most beautiful poetic prayer giving voice to our most fervent hopes for the future of mankind:

SOURCE 3: *Rosh Hashana Silent Amida (Holiness of the Day) Artscroll Siddur p. 300*

Our God and the God of our forefathers, reign over the entire universe in Your glory; be exalted over all the world in Your splendor, reveal Yourself in the majestic grandeur of Your strength over all the dwellers of Your inhabited world. **Let everything that has been made know that you are its Maker, let everything that has been molded understand that You are its Molder, and let everything with a life's breath in its nostrils proclaim: Hashem, the G-d of Israel is King, and His Kingship rules over everything...**

Q: These prayers are certainly spiritually stirring, but shouldn't we be fixing up our actions from the past year if we want to merit a good judgment in the year ahead?

Perhaps we are looking in the wrong direction. We asked above why Rosh Hashanah was set to be the first day of the New Year if it really is a day of looking back at past actions. From the prayers, perhaps we can suggest it is a day of looking forward.

Maybe the Judgment is of a different sort entirely, not about misdeeds but about something else, something more future oriented?

Q: What do you think that might be?

If you answered becoming a better person, I think you are on the right track.

Q: Considering the words of the Amida, how do you think this direction might be summarized in a more global context? Can we come up with a central theme encapsulating this idea?

The dominant theme of Rosh Hoshana is creating a world where God is King - in short bringing about the Messianic Era.

SOURCE 4: *Rabbi Gedaliah Shor, Ohr Gedalyahu, Moadim, p. 2 – The principal task of a person on Rosh Hashanah is Making God King.*

A person's foremost task on this day is to focus on accepting upon oneself the sovereignty of God. **The degree to which one accepts God's reign determines how meritorious he emerges in the day's judgment.** For this reason, **we do not find mention of personal requests in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy**, rather the majority of the prayers focus on honoring Divine Kingship.

עיקר תפקיד האדם יום הזה לקבל
עליו מלכות שמים, וכפי מה שמקבל
עליו מלכותו יתברך כן הוא יוצא זכאי
בדין, ולכן ראינו כי בתפילת היום אין
האדם מבקש על צרכיו הפרטיים, אלא
רוב התפילות הם על כבוד מלכות
שמים.

Although a person must deal with the reality of his/her shortcoming during the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, one's vision on RH should be directed towards taking a wholehearted stand for God in this world. That is what we are judged upon. How much do we want to bring about a world where the goodness and truth of God is real and obvious to all mankind? This is really our job as the chosen people; no less than leading the world to the Messianic Era!

This is all very apocryphal, but how does it relate to you and me?

SOURCE 5: *Talk by Rabbi Simcha Barnett - The Candidate*

Imagine you are a staffer on the Presidential campaign of a rare individual, of sterling character, unique vision for America and mankind and an unwavering commitment to truth and fairness, not to mention a platform of policies that has the potential to literally transform our planet. You would do anything in your power to promote his campaign and administration and your deepest desire and wish would be to serve in the greatest post in his future administration of which you were capable. Nothing else that you may have done in life would pale in comparison to what you could be doing by devoting your life to this cause. God is our Candidate and our King, **and on Rosh Hashanah the clarion call of the Shofar reverberates within our souls beckoning us to seek recreation, to be born-again Jews with the goal of bringing God's transformational platform into the world in the year ahead.**

Most people would like to change the world, they just don't think that they have the ability or the resources to do the job, particularly the wisdom.

The Jewish People have a real leg up in this department; We have the "Platform", our Holy Torah, which has the know-how to change the world. The first commitment ALL JEWS need to make is to get to know our platform, in order to make a difference.

Consider another source from the Rosh Hashanah prayers:

SOURCE 6: *Rosh Hashanah Mussaf Service – Verses of Kingship Excerpt Artscroll p. 457*

So said Hashem, the King of Israel and its Redeemer; Hashem of Legions: **"I am the first and I am the last and aside from Me there is no other god"** (Isaiah) **And it is said, The saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge Esau's mountain and the Kingdom will be Hashem's.** (Ovadiah) **And it is said: "Then Hashem will be King over all the world, on that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One. (Zechariah) And in your Torah it is written: Hear , O Israel, Hashem our God, Hashem is One."** (Devarim)

These are the last of 10 verses of Kingship which makes up the first and most important part of the Mussaf Prayer. (a central prayer of the Rosh Hashanah service). Through these verses we “make God King” so to speak.

The first few verses above are taken from the Prophets and are very messianic in nature. However, the last verse should be very familiar to all of us. It’s the Shema which we say twice a day in our prayers. As the final verse selected it is meant to express God’s kingship in the clearest way. Yet, it seems to be a little vague and not so prescriptive regarding action.

Q: The Rabbis consider reciting the Shema a statement of accepting the yoke of G-d’s kingdom upon us. How does reciting the Shema practically advance the theme of making God King over the world?

The Shema exhorts us to bring God into every aspect of our lives, “unifying our thoughts, emotions and actions” under the umbrella of God’s dominion; That’s real sovereignty – true kingship!

SOURCE 7: *Talk by Rabbi Simcha Barnett Making God a Felt Presence in One’s Life*

I remember when I was first married and my wife brought home our son from the hospital about a year after we stood under the chuppah. I found myself thinking about them often. You know when I was single, and even during the beginning of that first year of marriage, I don’t remember carrying around the thought of others so often in my head. Slowly, as our relationship and love grew, she/they gained a permanent foothold in my brain and in my heart that made me approach all my decisions differently. No longer was it all about me, but about us. My wife and child became a felt presence in my life which informed my choices. Each morning when we say the Shema we are trying to make God a deeper felt presence in our lives and in our deeds. Then, throughout the day we may begin to see God’s hand more regularly in our lives. At night, with a renewed sense of gratitude and connection we say the Shema once more. And, so it goes. This is the practical daily approach to making God King.

The Jewish approach to changing the world has always been to change ourselves first. It all starts with a commitment to “Making God King” on Rosh Hashanah, when each of us is mystically recreated with new spiritual potential for the year ahead.

Some things to consider:

Q: How can I make God a more felt presence in my life?

Q: What can I do to advance His agenda for the Jewish People and humanity?

Q: What responsibility do I have in contributing to solving the world’s problems? Is there a uniquely Jewish approach to this task?

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