



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

ROSH HASHANAH: A NEW BEGINNING

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



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

This module will address the following questions:

- **How does G-d come into the picture on Rosh HaShanah; isn't this just a Jewish "Happy New Year" celebration?**
- **How can these two days be instrumental in determining one's quality of life for the entire upcoming year?**
- **What is the rationale for G-d judging us on our new year – Rosh Hoshana?**
- **Why is our judgment held on the first day of the new year instead of the last day of the old year?**

Rosh HaShanah and the Creation of Mankind

Before we can approach the central concept of judgment on Rosh HaShanah, we must first understand the historical context and significance of this day of new beginnings. We find in the Machzor (special holiday prayer book) that Rosh HaShanah is called "yom hora'at olam – the day of the Creation of the world"; similarly, it is called "yom techilat ma'asecha – the day of the beginning of God's handiwork." What is the connection between Rosh HaShanah and the Creation of the world?

Before we tackle this question, let's begin with another interesting aspect of Rosh Hoshanah.

The Process of Creation:

SOURCE 1: TORAH- VAYIKRA 23:23

Speak to the Israelite people thus: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with **"shofar blasts"**.

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ
יְהִי לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן זִכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ

Q: Notice that the Jewish New Year is actually marked from the seventh month of the year, not the first. Without knowing this unusual fact, we would intuitively associate the first month of the year with the New Year. Why do you think the New Year is in the 7th month?

Let's ask another question to help us move closer to some understanding of the holiday and help with an answer to our first question:

Q: Also, although the Rabbis call this day Rosh HaShanah, it is curious that the Torah describes it as a "Day of Blowing". What aspect of the day you think that description is hinting at?

If you came up with the concept of "Being Called to Judgment" you are on the right track, but how does that really dovetail with the idea of the New Year, new beginnings and creation?

What happened on Rosh Hoshana?

SOURCE 2: *Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Rosh HaShanah 11a – Rosh HaShanah is the anniversary of the Creation of the world.*

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

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

The Talmud assumes we all know that Rosh HaShanah is related to creation, because the world was created at that time. But let's get more precise and explore exactly what was created on Rosh HaShanah, the 1st of Tishrei.

SOURCE 3: *Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah 29:1 – Adam, the first man, was created on Rosh HaShanah.*

It was taught in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: **The world was created on the twenty-fifth of Elul. (5 days before RH)** The view of Rav agrees with the above teaching of Rabbi Eliezer. For we have learned in the Shofar Benediction composed by Rav: "Today is the day of the beginning of Your handiwork, a memorial of the first day; it is a decree for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob." **(RH-First of Tishrei)**

In the first hour the **idea of creating man entered God's mind**; in the second hour He took counsel with the Ministering Angels; in the third He assembled Adam's dust; in the fourth He kneaded it; in the fifth He shaped him; in the sixth He made him into a lifeless body; **in the seventh He breathed a soul into him**; in the eighth He brought him into the Garden of Eden; in the ninth [Adam] was commanded [against eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge]; in the tenth he transgressed; in the eleventh he was judged; in the twelfth he was pardoned. **(All of this happened on 1st of Tishrei – RH)**

תני בשם ר"א בכ"ה באלול נברא
העולם ואתיא דרב כההיא דתני ר"א
דתנין בתקיעתא דרב זה היום תחלת
מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון כי חוק
לישראל הוא וגו'

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

So, we see that man was created on Rosh HaShanah, and was simultaneously judged on it. So the day has a dual essence of creation and judgment. At first glance these are two opposite energies, judgment usually being about the past and creation being about the future.

Q: How do you think both of these ideas can come together?

SOURCE 4: *Ibid.* – Rosh HaShanah has always been a day of judgment.

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

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

Q: What can be learned from the fact that creation and judgment happened on the very same day, linking them together forever?

If you have an answer great! If not, let's take a short digression that might help us come up with an answer.

A Deeper Look at The Creation of the World

SOURCE 5: *Talmud Rosh Hashana 10b*

It was taught: Rabbi Eliezer said, "The world was created in Tishrei." (**fall**)...Rabbi Yehoshua said, "The world was created in Nissan." (**spring**) (Rosh HaShanah 10b).

The Talmud actually concludes on page 27a that the world was indeed created in Nissan, springtime -- at the time of Passover

Q: If the world was created in the springtime, why would G-d set our Rosh Hoshana in Tishrei (sept), the seventh month of the year?

SOURCE 6: *The Commentator Rabbeinu Tam on Talmud Rosh Hashanah 27a*

Rabbeinu Tam says, "Both views are 'the words of the living God' [both are true]. One may say that in Tishrei God **thought** to create the world, but He did not **actually do so** until Nissan." (Tosafos, Rosh HaShanah 27a, s.v. "K'man matzlinan")

By the fact that G-d set Rosh HaShana in Tishrei, we learn (according to Rabbeinu Tam) two things, that there was a creation in "thought" and then "deed", and that G-d decided that it was appropriate for Rosh HaShanah to commemorate the creation in thought.

Q: Why do you think G-d would want to emphasize the creation of the world in thought, when most of us would probably have stressed the creation in deed!? (in springtime)

Q: And furthermore, what do you suppose it means to create the world first in “thought” and why would that take precedence over the creation in deed?

Thought represents the pure blueprint, the “way it ought to be”, before the inevitable concessions that we make to making things work in the physical world. A world created in thought represents G-d’s pristine plan for mankind, and each year He calls us back (through the shofar) to this lofty dream.

SOURCE 7: *Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Living Inspired, pp. 137-139 – Rosh Hashanah is a time for re-creation.*

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

Rosh HaShanah is the beginning of the year. The spiritual forces operating at moments of beginning are unique. “Hakol holech achar harosh – Everything goes after the beginning.” The entire course of any process is determined by its beginning.

The energy of Rosh HaShanah is new creation, and the opportunity for all of us is to become literally “born-again Jews”, just like Adam and Even on that fateful first Rosh HaShanah.

Q: With this understanding can you guess how judgment fits in to creation? What are we being judged upon? The past? Or, is it really the future?

SOURCE 8: *Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. I, pp. 94-95 – On Rosh HaShanah God evaluates the past for the sake of the future.*

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

But the judgment of Rosh HaShanah is of a different sort. The focus is mainly on the future.

Judgment is merely a function of the special nature of the day since it is the “rosh” (lit. head) of the year that incorporates the entire year to come.

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

הדין הוא תוצאה מייחודו של היום, מכיון
שיום זה הוא “ראש” השנה הכולל בו כל
השנה

Usually, we think about judgment as punitive in nature. However, the judgment of Rosh HaShanah is all about love, G-d’s reaching out to us yearly to try and re-create us with even more potential and opportunity. (based upon sincerely wanting to embrace and elevate life)

SOURCE 9: Judgment of Love, Creation and Re-Connection. Rabbi Shnuer Liadi

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

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

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

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

Now is the time to embrace the year ahead and fulfill all the dreams that G-d is waiting for us to "Want". **We will be judged on the sincerity and depth of our desire to be the best that we can be this New Year!**