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# ROSH HASHANA

תשפ"ו

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לעז"נ • נח רפאל ז"ל בן ר' יוסף חיים הכהן • ישראל ז"ל בן ר' ישעיה הלוי

## The Eye Sees, the Heart Desires

After the *brachos* and *klalos* of last week's parshah, Moshe Rabbeinu reminds *klal Yisrael* of the severity of *avoda zara*, warning them that they have seen *avoda zara* that is detestable.

Moshe continues and asks them if perhaps there is among them someone whose heart is even now turning away from Hashem to go and worship the gods of those nations.

The flow here seems difficult to understand. If *avoda zara* is an abomination, so revolting and detestable, as Rashi explains — then why would the heart of any Jew turn away from

Hashem to bow before mere sticks and stones? Yet Moshe Rabbeinu warns:

“Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or an entire family or tribe, whose heart is already turning away from Hashem...”

The Brisker Rav explains that the answer lies in the very first word of the pasuk: “וּתְרָאוּ” — you saw. The power of sight is profound. What we see leaves a deep impression on us. Even when something is objectively repugnant, once the eyes behold it, the heart begins to desire it. That is why Moshe warns so sharply — because vision shapes the heart.



## Divine Upgrade

The well-known Gemara in *Rosh Hashanah* 16a relates:

מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם.

We declare Malchiyus on Rosh Hashana to make Hashem king over us.

The words seem simple and straightforward, but Rav Aharon Kotler brings out a deeper message. He teaches that the essence of Malchiyos is not just proclaiming Hashem as King outwardly, over the world at large, but rather cultivating a deep trust in Him. This trust

arises from the recognition that Hashem's *hashgachah* of the world is personal and precise — not general or abstract.

As such, *bitachon* isn't just an idea; it's transformative. We rest fully in His care, like a child relying on its mother. When we internalize this trust, crowning Hashem as King becomes heartfelt and personal. And when we bring Him into every moment of our lives, we live differently — elevated lives.

It's a lifelong mission to maintain this

awareness constantly, but realizing its truth and strength is vital. When you consciously focus on Him, the results can be truly amazing.

A month ago, I booked a round-trip ticket for my family, to spend time with my in-laws for Succos. I was excited that we were all set to go.

But last week, my brother-in-law was booking his flight, and called me because he wanted to be on the same flight:

“I think you made a mistake,” he said.

“No, I didn’t. I checked Google Calendar. October 15th — that’s fine. Shemini Atzeres is the 14th. I’m good.”

“I’m sorry,” my brother-in-law said. “You’re 100% wrong.”

And sure enough — I was wrong. I had booked my return flight for Simchas Torah.

And to make things worse, I had booked Basic Economy — the kind of ticket that says in big, bold letters, over and over, “NO CHANGES. NO REFUNDS. NO MODIFICATIONS.”

I was frustrated, but I figured I would try to work with United. After speaking to five reps, I wasn’t getting very far.

Later that night, I felt a ray of hope. One rep said, “Miss your flight and call back the day of.”

I told that to my wife. You can imagine her thoughts on this “strategy.”

Trying again, I finally heard something different. “I can waive the upgrade fee and just charge the fare difference,” I was told.

Which cut the cost in half.

But something inside me said, maybe I can do better. It was still a lot of money, and I felt, if Hashem is in control, He’s in control of this as well. No matter how many “no’s” I got, it’s Hashem on the other side of the line.

So while the rep was waiting for an answer, I politely asked:

“Can I speak to the supervisor?”

She put me on hold, and I reminded myself — this isn’t United Airlines. It’s all Hashem.

And as Rav Shach teaches in the name of Rav Chaim Brisker, the limit, the end of where we can stretch our *bitachon*, is just where Hashem begins. I felt this was no exception.

As the Chovos Halevavos tells us — that Hashem is behind everything — I realized I wasn’t on the phone with United, I was on the phone with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. I was talking to the Eibishter Himself — just disguised as a woman in a United shirt with a little gold pin.

So I said Tehillim in my head. Asked Hashem for help. Reminded myself that I truly believe Hashem can waive all the fees, despite the bold black print about “non-changeable” when I bought my ticket.

And so, the supervisor got on the line. I told her the story calmly, respectfully, and asked one last time. With this mindset, I didn’t feel I needed to be aggressive, get frustrated, or prove my case.

She came to the phone and said, “Sir, I understand your situation, but unfortunately the most we can offer you is to waive the fee.”

And I said, realizing I’m talking to G-d, “I made an honest mistake. I simply ask you, from your kind heart, to see if you can consider waiving all the fees. It was a mistake I simply couldn’t prevent — the calendar had the wrong info. Please see if you can help me.”

She paused.

“You know what, sir? I’m going to make a one-time exception for you.”

I wasn’t sure if my ears were working properly.

I was excited and thankful. I asked her, “What made you change your mind?”

“You reached the right lady on the right day,” she said.

And I thought: Indeed, that’s what she feels, and she’s correct — but I knew better. I had reached Hashem on the right day at the right time.

When I changed my attitude and truly believed there’s nothing out of Hashem’s orbit — that’s when He was ready to shift things around and literally make an open miracle.

If you’ve made it this far in reading, it’s important to note: You may think this was an impressive story, but it has nothing to do with me — it has to do with Hashem, with the Torah, with Yiddishkeit.

The point of this story isn’t to show that Hashem performed an incredible favor or a small miracle for me through

*bitachon*. Rather, as we prefaced with the *yesod* of Rav Aharon, the point is to illustrate that *bitachon* is real and accessible for everyone. It’s not a miracle, it’s not magic, and it’s not only for tzaddikim. It’s trusting the *yesod* of Rav Shach, as explained by Rav Chaim Brisker — which cannot be repeated enough — that where our *bitachon* ends is where Hashem only begins.

It’s not magic, and Hashem isn’t a vending machine; often the answer is “no.” However, when things don’t seem to be in our favor, we can recognize that it’s all Hashem — that everyone else is a pawn, a chess piece He is moving around. In this way, by realizing that this is how Hashem created the world, our perspective shifts, and we begin to see the hand of Hashem in everything.

The theme of Rosh Hashanah is Malchiyos. It means taking Hashem and putting Him in the center of our lives, into the daily grind. It’s crowning Him, saying: *Hashem Melech*. It’s not United, it’s not the supervisor, it’s not my boss, the CEO, the circumstances, it’s not me — it’s all Hashem.

There’s so much we need and ask for — health, *parnassah*, children, *nachas*, happiness, shidduchim, *refuah*, clarity, success. On this day, we fortify ourselves with the knowledge that Hashem is not just the Melech HaOlam, but מלך שלי, *my king*. When you bring Hashem into the picture, anything can happen. Even after you get fifteen “no’s,” He can turn it into a “yes.”



## Our Rich Uncle

Perhaps one of the greatest paradoxes of the year is Rosh Hashanah. On the one hand, there is the strongest sense of fear — literally for our lives. The heavenly courts are judging the upcoming year. It's real. The ministering angels themselves are trembling. One can nearly faint from the words of Unesaneh Tokef — so real, so severe, so acute is the judgment taking place on this day. Every aspect of our well-being is being decided today.

Yet, at the very same time, while all this is happening, we sit down to a Yom Tov seudah. And not only because we can't go hungry for forty-eight hours — but because we are obligated to. The Navi Nechemiah tells *klal Yisrael* on Rosh Hashanah:

יאמר להם לכו אכלו משמנים ושתו  
ממתקים ושלחו מנות לאין נכון לו כי קדוש  
היום לאדנינו ואל תעצבו בייחודות ה' היא  
מעוזכם.

*Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for the day is holy to Hashem. Do not be sad, for the joy of Hashem is your strength.*

How do these two conflicting components coexist on one of the most monumental days of the entire calendar?

This is a well-known, much-discussed question. I once heard a beautiful

approach in yeshiva (from R' Alex Herbstman), which I see brought down and elaborated upon in the sefer משנה שכייר:

Imagine a man who has nothing.

He lives in a tiny, broken apartment. The ceiling leaks. The winter winds whistle through the cracks. His meals? Just enough bread and water to keep him alive. He is shivering, hungry, lonely — and then one day, the mailman knocks on his door.

It's a registered letter.

He opens it, probably thinking it's another bill. But as he reads, his heart starts to race. His wealthy uncle in America passed away — *rachmana litzlan* — without children. And in his will? He left every penny — every building, every investment, every account — to this man.

The money is already deposited. All he has to do is show up at the bank and claim it.

He's so overwhelmed with joy that he even tips the mailman, just for being the messenger of such life-changing news. Without delay, he packs up, travels to the big city, and heads straight for the bank.

Now replay this exact story, where a man in the same situation receives a similar letter — except this time the inheritance is overseas, in Australia.

The letter says he must travel there

personally to receive it. The journey is long, exhausting, dangerous — across seas, through deserts, with sleepless nights, hunger, and difficulty along the way.

The man shrugs and says, “I’m not interested.”

His neighbor hears about it and yells at him, “Are you crazy? This is a fortune! Risk the trip — it’s worth it!” But the man waves him off.

And yes, he’s a fool. But no one can punish him. If he doesn’t want to claim his inheritance, it just remains unclaimed.

We too have a wealthy relative.

Not in America, not in Australia — but in *shamayim*. HaKadosh Baruch Hu Himself.

As Shlomo HaMelech writes, “אני לדודי דודי לי” — we are bound to Hashem in the deepest possible relationship. And He left us an inheritance, greater than all the treasures of the world: The Torah. Through it we merit eternal life — a life that Chazal say is worth more than the entire life of this world combined.

The mere fact that Hashem chose us and gave us His Torah showcases His deep love for us. He has our best interests at heart. Yes, there is judgment, but it is born of love, and His desire is to give us everything.

Not just as a loving Father, but also as the word אלו — the הכנה for Yom HaDin — reminds us: אני לדודי דודי לי. Usually translated as “I am to my

beloved, and my beloved is to me,” but literally, דודי means “my uncle.”

And what’s a *dod*? What’s an uncle?

Whether or not we have a rich uncle, when we think of an uncle, we think of someone who cares. Someone kind and giving. And what’s unique about this bond is that an uncle is different from a father. A father disciplines. A father makes sure you brushed your teeth, did your homework, behaved properly. An uncle? He doesn’t do that. He shows up every once in a while — with gifts, with hugs, with kisses — and just wants to see you happy.

So yes, there is דין and there is trepidation. Yes, Hashem is our Father and King who judges us on Rosh Hashanah, meting out דין וחשבון. The heavenly courts are in session, we pass under the divine staff, and a verdict is rendered on this awesome day. We say *malchuyos* and crown Hashem as King, declaring: “*Hashem melech, Hashem malach, Hashem yimloch*” — He was, He is, and He will always be.

But there’s another element. He is also our uncle — the rich, loving uncle who just wants to give, to shower us with brachah. The King is our loving relative. The King is our *dod*.

On this Day of Judgment, our Uncle is waiting for us to take the goods. We don’t have to travel far, we don’t face risk or danger. Everything is right here, waiting for us — ובהרת בחיים. We choose Him, His Torah, His inheritance. We show Him our true interests

and our heart's desires. And with that, we can be בטוחים בדין — confident that we will have a meritorious verdict. Because when we choose Him, He chooses us. He needs us — to be *mamlich* Him, to spread His light and glory

through Torah and the sanctification of His Name.

All we need to do is claim the inheritance our דוד has entrusted to us — the accessible fortune He continues to leave for each and every one of us.



## Not as Planned

As little boys and girls, we are all taught from a young age to be on our best behavior on Rosh Hashanah. After all, the Gemara (*Kerisos* 6a) teaches us:

אמר אביי השתא דאמרת סימנא מילתא  
היא יהא רגיל איניש למיכל ריש שתא קרא  
ורוביא כרתי סילקא ותמרי

*Abaye said: Now that you have said that a sign is a meaningful matter, a person should be accustomed at the start of the year to eat gourd, fenugreek, leeks, beets, and dates.*

These foods were chosen because they grow and multiply quickly, serving as a good omen for the deeds of the upcoming year.

Following Abaye's teaching, we eat the *simanim* — the leek, the carrots, the beets, even a raisin and celery (raisin salary) — to begin the year with a good sign, so that goodness and blessing will overflow into the rest of the year. So we must act externally our best as well. Be *mevater*, don't become angry, frustrated or petty. Be big, refined, and don't let anything or anyone bother you.

But what happens when the circumstances aren't as perfect as we hoped for, which all too often happens? When things don't go as planned, and we feel the Satan trying so hard to test us? Do we say, "Oh no, that must be a bad sign for the year?" What if we're really trying our best, but by the time Yom Tov begins we're overworked and tired, and we slip — does that mean it's a bad omen for the year?

The sefer מילתא סימנא (page 149) offers a deep and relevant perspective on this very question. We all wish the *simanim* and our Rosh Hashanah experience could be perfect. But life, with its relentless nature, is not always that way — and that, too, carries meaning.

He quotes the the Nesivos Shalom, the Slonimer, who tells of a tzaddik who, on the night of Rosh Hashanah, experienced one mishap after another. His cup spilled, his bread slipped to the ground, and his food burned. In light of מילתא סימנא, his family grew anxious. "What does this mean? Surely these are bad signs for the year ahead!"

But the tzaddik's face was glowing, filled with joy and serenity. When his family asked how he could remain so calm in the face of such ominous signs, he replied:

"People make a mistake. They think that the small events that happen on Rosh Hashanah are signs of what the year will bring. But the real sign — and the one that actually shapes the year — is the joy and the trust a person carries in his heart on Rosh Hashanah, knowing that Hashem will show him mercy like a loving father."

He continued, "It's human nature to be affected by what happens. If something upsetting happens, the heart feels heavy; if we see or do something that hints at prosperity, we feel uplifted. That is why we set out *simanim*, the

foods and actions of a *siman tov*.

But, said the tzaddik, the true *siman*, the true foundation, is the inner feeling. When a person places his trust in Hashem, that trust itself draws down kindness. So when these "accidents" happened to me, they did not trouble me in the slightest. They carried no weight at all.

The same is true for us in the imperfect situations we may encounter. Yes, *סימנא מילתא* — signs matter. But the Gemara also tells us, *רחמנא לבא בעי* — Hashem desires the heart. Whatever happens in those less-than-ideal circumstances, it only becomes a "bad omen" if we lose ourselves. But if we hold on to Hashem, if our heart is with Him, can there be any better *siman* for the year than that?



## Unlocking the Door

The well-known reason we read the parshah of the *akeida* on Rosh Hashana is to arouse Hashem's mercy and to recall the boundless *mesiras nefesh* of Avraham Avinu, who was prepared to offer his son for the sake of the King. But there is another beautiful reason: To remind us of the power of tefillah.

The Maor VaShemesh writes that the word *שרה* from the *pasuk* "וְהָיָה פֶקֶד אֶת" is

*roshei teivos* שוֹפֵר ראש השנה. This alludes to the fact that on Rosh Hashana, through the shofar, we are granted an unparalleled opportunity to transform reality — to break the boundaries of nature itself. Just as Hashem turned Sarah Imeinu, who was barren, into a mother, so too can we, through the power of the shofar on this awesome day, unlock that which seems sealed.

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