

The Choice Is Ours

Elul, the month before Rosh Hoshana, is one of the most intense times in Jewish life. We review our lives and strive to become closer to G-d and our G-d given potential.

The day before Rosh Hoshana has unique significance and special laws and customs. We sound the Shofar in Synagogue every weekday morning during Elul except for Rosh Hoshana Eve. Why?

Kabbala sees here a reflection of a cosmic process. It imagines that just before Rosh Hoshana the world “goes to sleep.” This does not mean that the world stops functioning, anymore than our bodies cease to exist when we sleep at night. However, the inner Divine Will which purposefully animates the world temporarily recedes. For the day before Rosh Hoshana, this Will ponders and evaluates creation, just as Jews reflect during this period on their lives.

On the first morning of Rosh Hoshana, the Shofar loudly resounds. The world is aroused from its slumber, and our souls are given renewed strength.

The powerful and particular Jewish message here is that G-d requires our effort, our Shofar cry to “remind” the world and its inhabitants of the need and possibility of transformation. There are numerous Jewish viewpoints about why G-d created the universe, but they all agree that the creation of humankind was the final goal. In the central metaphor of the High Holiday liturgy, G-d is “Avinu Malkeinu,” a Father-King, who needs our love, adoration, and cooperation to achieve His purposes.

The Talmud Rabbis referred to people as “Shutafim LaKadosh Baruch Hu,” G-d’s partners in physically and ethically maintaining the world. G-d created the world from chaos, with no external compulsion, only with the desire to bestow goodness. We have the same possibilities before us. We have radically more choices than we generally imagine. We can shake off the burden of guilt and the dullness of routine and find new purposefulness in our work, our intimate relationships, our families, our commitment to social justice, our Jewish observance and spiritual growth.

Elul, the wonderfully encouraging month before Rosh Hoshana, is a time to imagine: If I could forget the frustrations of past failures, what would I now try? If we were not so scared of being hurt or ignored, who might we ask for forgiveness, for a new state? If I was not so positive that “I’m not a religious person,” what new experiences might I try? If we trusted ourselves more, what goals might we set for the coming year?

This is what it means for the Book to be open, for the Father/King to be approachable, and for life and death, sickness and health to be undecided matters. Because of the awesome newness of these Days, much is in our hands.

Shana Tova

A good, healthy and happy New Year

Rabbi Weintraub