

The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b) teaches: Three books are opened on *Rosh Hashanah*--one for the righteous, one for the wicked, and one for *Beinonim* / those in the middle. The righteous and the wicked are inscribed immediately, while a *Beinoni* is given ten days to repent; then he is inscribed either with the righteous or with the wicked. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*R.H.* 1:9) quotes the same teaching, but adds: Does *Hashem* not know the future? He does, but He judges a person as he is in the moment. [Until here from the *Yerushalmi*]

What is the *Yerushalmi* asking, and how does it answer its own question? (It does not appear to be asking the well-known, general philosophical question: Does man really have free will if G-d knows what he will choose? If that is the *Yerushalmi*'s question, its answer is not adequate.) Also: Why is there a book for *Beinonim* at all? Is it not enough that they will eventually be inscribed in the book of the righteous or the book of the wicked?

R' Yisrael "Salanter" Lipkin z"l (1810-1883; founder of the *Mussar* movement) answers, as explained by R' Shlomo Hoffman z"l (1922-2013; Israel), that the *Yerushalmi* is asking: What is the point of waiting ten days for man to repent? Surely *Hashem* knows that a person cannot change a lifetime of bad habits or bad choices in only ten days!

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The *Yerushalmi* answers: *Hashem* judges a person as he is in the moment. *Hashem* does know the future, but He does not use that knowledge when judging man. Instead, He looks at each person's current situation and evaluates the likelihood that the person will repent. *Hashem* considers, for example: Based on a person's current circumstances, the choices he is making now, and the influences he is surrounding himself with today, is there a reasonable chance that he will mend his ways and begin taking a better path? If so, *Hashem* gives him a chance.

It follows, R' Yisrael writes, that what a person needs to do in order to succeed in his judgment is not to complete the *Teshuvah* process, not to change everything about himself that needs changing, but to begin to repent, to show *Hashem* that he is aware that he has shortcomings and he is bothered by them, and to become a person who is in the process of doing *Teshuvah*. This is why there is a separate book for *Beinonim*--because being a *Beinoni* is a category of its own, neither righteous nor wicked. A *Beinoni* is on the road to *Teshuvah*, he is prepared to do *Teshuvah*, but he has not completed his *Teshuvah* and will not perfect himself before *Yom Kippur*. This is what *Hashem* is looking for when He judges a person as he is in the moment.

R' Hoffman adds that this answers a question that many ask: The reality is that people fall back into (most of) their bad habits immediately after *Yom Kippur*. What, then, was the point of the whole *Teshuvah* exercise, and how can we say that we have repented? The answer is that we are not expected to become perfect by the time *Yom Kippur* comes around. Rather, all we are being asked is to be on the road to *Teshuvah*, to sincerely acknowledge, to care about, and to be bothered by our shortcomings. Then we are called people who are "*Osin*" / "doing"--in the present tense--*Teshuvah*, and we can be inscribed for life "on credit," with the expectation that we will continue advancing step-by-step along our new path.

(Ohr Yisrael #30 & Va'adim B'inyan Osin Teshuvah)

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Hashem is King!

Rosh Hashanah is called the “*Yom Ha’din*” / “Day of Judgment,” yet we barely mention our sins or *Teshuvah* in the day’s prayers, and we do not recite *Vidui* / confession on this day. Instead, the *Rosh Hashanah* prayers focus on recognizing *Hashem* as our King. Why is that an appropriate focus on the Day of Judgment?

R’ Moshe Sternbuch *shlita* (formerly rabbi in Johannesburg, South Africa; now *Rosh Av Bet Din* of the *Eidah Ha’charedit* in Yerushalayim) explains: The *Gemara* (*Yoma* 86b) speaks of two types of *Teshuvah*. One is *Teshuvah mei’ahavah* / repentance motivated by love for *Hashem*; the other is *Teshuvah mi’yir’ah* / repentance motivated by fear of *Hashem*. R’ Sternbuch explains that every sin has two components: (i) the wrongful act that the person did and (ii) the fact that the person felt distant from *Hashem* and therefore was able to sin. If a person were aware of being in *Hashem’s* presence, he would not be able to sin.

R’ Sternbuch continues: When one’s repentance is motivated by *Yir’ah* / fear, he regrets the wrongful act and hopes not to be punished for it, but he does not seek to regain his closeness to *Hashem*. In contrast, one who repents due to *Ahavah* / love not only regrets his wrongful act--he regrets and seeks to bridge the distance between himself and *Hashem* that made sinning possible.

The *Gemara* says that one who repents due to *Yir’ah* merits that his intentional sin (“*Meizid*”) is downgraded to an unintentional sin (“*Shogeg*”). But why is a person who sinned unintentionally held liable at all? Because, writes R’ Sternbuch, even an unintentional sin would be impossible if a person were sufficiently connected to *Hashem*. Likewise, a person whose repentance is only due to *Yir’ah* is not sufficiently connected to *Hashem*.

On *Rosh Hashanah*, R’ Sternbuch concludes, we do not focus on repentance for individual sins. Rather, the order of the day deals with the big picture, which also is the first step in *Teshuvah*--reconnecting with *Hashem*. Once we genuinely acknowledge *Hashem* as our King and recognize that He is watching over us and providing for us at all times, regret and *Teshuvah* for all sins--intentional and unintentional--will follow naturally.

(*Shu”t Teshuvot V’hanhagot* II 296)

We wish our readers a

✎ Ketivah Va’chatimah Tovah! ✎

Shofar

R’ Moshe ben Maimon *z”l* (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: Although blowing the *Shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* is a decree of the Torah [*i.e.*, we would be required to blow the *Shofar* just because the Torah says so, even if we had no inkling of its meaning], it does hint something to us. It is as if the *Shofar* says: Awaken, awaken, from your sleep, you who are sleeping! You who are sleeping deeply, get up from your deep sleep! Search your ways, return in *Teshuvah*, and remember your Creator! You who forget the truth because of the nothingness that fills man’s days, you who are mistaken all of your years, pursuing empty things that are of no real use and will not save you--look at your souls and improve your ways; let each one leave his bad path and his thoughts that are not good!

(*Mishneh Torah: Hil. Teshuvah* 3:4)

The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a) says, “Let your *Zichronot* / remembrances come before Me (*Hashem*). How? With the *Shofar*!” R’ Tzaddok Hakohen Rabinowitz *z”l* (1823-1900; *Chassidic Rebbe* in Lublin, Poland) writes: This is the same idea as *Rambam’s* teaching that the *Shofar* says, “Awaken, awaken, from your sleep.” How so? Because we read (*Tehilim* 121:5), “*Hashem* is your shadow.” Therefore, when a person awakens and remembers *Hashem*, *Hashem* remembers him as well.

R’ Tzaddok continues: This is the meaning of the *Gemara’s* statement that the *Shofar* “mixes up” the Prosecuting Angel. Our Sages say that the Prosecuting Angel and the *Yetzer Ha’ra* are one and the same. The primary *modus operandi* of the *Yetzer Ha’ra* is to send a person thoughts, dreams, and fantasies that distract him from remembering *Hashem* and why man was created--*i.e.*, to serve *Hashem*. The *Shofar* awakens man and foils that plan.

(*Resisei Lailah* #35)

R’ Avraham Moshe Rabinowitz *shlita* (*Skolya Rebbe* in Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes: The blowing of the *Shofar* is a meeting between the *Borei* / Creator and the *Nivra* / created thing (as *Rambam* writes, “Remember your Creator!”). The difference between the words “*Borei*” (בּוֹרֵא) and “*Nivra*” (נִבְרָא) is that the former has a *Vav* and the latter has a *Nun*. When the Jewish People stand before the Creator and draw Him downwards into their lives, it is as if they stretch the *Vav* of *Borei* into a final-*Nun* so that “בו” becomes “בן” / son--*i.e.*, we reveal that we are His children.

R’ Rabinowitz adds: The *Gematria* of “*Uru yesheinim*” / “Awake sleeping ones” is the same as the *Gematria* of “*Teru’ah*.” It therefore is fitting that *Rambam* says that *Shofar* “hints” to the idea of awakening from our sleep.

(*Hadrat Melech* p.41)