



Our Day of “Everything”

As a heavenly shofar wails, the angels shiver. Gripped with fear, they loudly shudder that “the Day of Judgement is upon us ...” This vivid scene, depicted in the famed Musaf piyyut known as ונתנה תוקף powerfully captures the magnitude of Rosh Hashana, as well as its universalism. The resonance of this day isn’t limited to our people or even to our world. The heavens themselves shake and tremble as Hashem’s sovereignty permeates everything.

Though Yom Kippur is a uniquely Jewish day marking our divine gift of teshuva, Rosh Hashana, by contrast, possesses a more international flavor. In the continuation of ונתנה תוקף we remark וכל בני אדם יעברון לפניך כבני מרום. Every homo sapien passes before Hashem. He is the shepherd, and we are His sheep, and we pass, one by one, under His divine gaze.

But, Rosh Hashana is even broader than a day of international judgement. It is not just international, but is also cosmic. After blowing the shofar we announce היום יעמידים, במשפט כל יצורי עולמים, every living creature in every world is “judged” by Hashem. As we don’t know the nature of Hashem’s “judging” otherworldly creatures or inanimate objects, this phrase is more metaphoric than actual. However, this image of Hashem scrutinizing every being

of every sphere stretches Rosh Hashana well beyond our own planet. This is the day everything was created, thousands of years ago. It is also the day that everything is annually “recreated”, and bristles with new divine energy. Our world isn’t the only stage of Rosh Hashana. This day plays out on a bigger stage.

So, this is not a day to “sink” into Jewish particularism, but to let our imaginations sail broad and wide and to revel in the vastness of this “Day of Everything”. On this day we merge with the cosmos, praising and coronating the King of Kings.

OUR DAY

Yet despite its vastness and despite its cosmic sweep it is *our day*.

Dovid Hamelech underscores the Jewish nature of Rosh Hashana with an iconic pasuk. He first describes the universality of the day תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה.... The term “keseh” encompasses multiple meanings, one of them an allusion to the phonetically similar word כסא, which means a throne. Hashem is the eternal Monarch, this is His day of sovereignty, and we coronate him with our shofar.

Having established the glory and regality of this day, Dovid subsequently emphasizes that this day is חגיגתנו *our* [Jewish] festival. He concludes by dubbing it חק לישראל הוא

משפט לאלקי יעקב , or a seminal Jewish experience . While initially addressing the universality of this day, Dovid Hamelech quickly pivots to the uniquely Jewish features of Rosh Hashana.

A midrash illustrates the Jewish influence on this universal day. Convening in Heaven in anticipation of Rosh Hashana, the angels inquire of Hashem about the commencement of Rosh Hashana. Hashem responds that both He and they will await the announcement of the Sanhedrin of Yerushalayim. This cosmic day, which swirls throughout the universe, can only begin when a Jewish Sanhedrin determines that a new moon has appeared. This is *our day* and only we can launch it.

WE ALONE KNOW

It is also *our day* because we, alone, are conscious of its vaunted nature. To this point in history, we alone have embraced malchut Hashem. Though, on this day, every creature is judged and thereby subject to malchut Hashem, we alone, are aware of the proceedings and we alone, actively coronate Hashem. Without our coronation the day would be flawed. We alone crown Hashem on this world with our regal shofar. We alone know, and we alone are fortunate to know **אשרי העם ידעו תרועה!**

CONVERSION

It is *our day* for a third reason: we alter the complexion of the day.

The introductory section of *zichronot* paints a very gloomy situation. On this day Hashem registers all human activity. He doesn't forget and everything is recorded. Not only is personal conduct scrutinized but nations are judged, and historical



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ועל המדינות בו יאמרו איזו ויעל לחבר ואיזו לשלום.

This is a very intimidating specter. All behavior registered, no conduct overlooked, and no action forgotten. Broken-hearted, we sigh **אשרי איש שלא ישכחך** while sadly acknowledging that we continue to forget Him. At this stage the day feels overwhelming and crushing.

Suddenly the tefilla “shifts” and, with it, the entire tone of *zichronot* transitions. Instead of harping upon the magnitude of divine judgement or the intimidation of divine scrutiny, we evoke the great love between Hashem and our people, and the numerous Covenants of Jewish history. We convert the day from a recall of human sin into a recall of Jewish memory. We speak of His love for us, His compassion, and His numerous commitments and Covenants.

In conclusion, we remind Hashem that we are a loving wife who blindly followed Him into the desert of faith. Not only are we His wife but we are also His beloved child, nicknamed both Yakir and Efra'im, a ילד שעשועים, who brings Him endless delight. On this day every human being walks before Hashem as a sheep. We aren't sheep. We are *family* and we expect Hashem to treat us that way.

The original voice of fear and trepidation is replaced by a voice of love and confidence. Yom Hazikaron has now evolved from a day of judgement into a day of historical memory. The inevitability of our national destiny and the immutability of Jewish history grants us confidence to successfully navigate this day.

OUR DAY, OUR DUTIES

Our day comes with duties. We, alone, know that it is the day of Everything. We are the caretakers of Hashem's presence in this world and the safeguards of human welfare. On Rosh Hashana we must daven for those who cannot or will not. We must daven for a world searching for itself and lost in a crisis of identity. We must daven for a world which has suffered centuries of secularization and struggles to hear the voice of Hashem from behind the screen

of empiricism and cultural skepticism. The fate of every person, and humanity at large, hangs in the balance of this day and, sadly, hardly anyone is aware. We are. And we must pray.

Even amongst the Jewish people there are so many who need our tefillot. So many for whom Rosh Hashana is merely a national holiday celebrating a new year. So many who aren't aware of the power and the glory of this day. So many to pray for.

Most importantly we daven that, one day, all of humanity will see Hashem. It *will* happen and this one day a year affords us a small taste of things to come. As we constantly exclaim in our tefilla, they will gather in Yerushalayim and exclaim

ה' אלוקי ישראל מלך ומלכותו בכל משלה

It is impossible to daven for a future which you don't believe can occur. Rosh Hashana is a day of judgement, of gravitas of tefilla and underneath it all, faith. Faith that redemption will relandscape our world. Faith that people will hear the voice of Hashem. The world doesn't seem to be veering that way, but redemptive belief is never rational. It is deeply lodged within the Jewish heart and within our collective historical imagination. It is a sweet rhythm which continues to play, as



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the world struggles, on its way to Yerushalayim. Hear the song. On this day it plays louder. Hopefully we will continue to turn up the volume.

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