

## **ROSH HASHANAH "GLEANINGS"**

*(Excerpts were taken from Shorashim as well as from Israeli weekly publications)*

The Rosh Hashanah *machzor* (the prayer book used by Jews on the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) says, "Today is the birthday of the world. Today all creatures of the world stand in judgment." Besides being the birthday of the world (Adam and Eve), the Mishnah contains the second known reference to Rosh Hashanah as the "day of judgment".

The Talmud states that three books of account are opened on Rosh Hashanah, wherein the fate of the wicked, the righteous, and those of an intermediate class are recorded. The names of the righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life and they are sealed "to live." The intermediate class are allowed a respite of ten days, until Yom Kippur, to reflect, repent and become righteous; the wicked are "blotted out of the book of the living forever."

This is the time of year during which we are to atone for both our individual – and on Yom Kippur, our communal – sins committed over the course of the previous year, before God literally closes the books on us and inscribes our fates for the coming year. God's rule over humanity and our need to serve God are stressed time and again over the course of the holiday.

Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian writer, once said, "Everybody wants to change this world; nobody wants to change themselves." I disagree. I think we do want to change. We want to become the people we were meant to be, the people we are capable of being. Many of just don't know how. On Rosh Hashanah we can attain freedom from that which restricts and restrains us. Our rabbis teach us that Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the day Josef was released from prison in Egypt (Talmud,

Rosh Hashanah 10b). This is no mere coincidence; it's a reflection of the power and potential for becoming free on this day.

## **Resolutions versus Wishes**

Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, was a Chassidic Rebbe in Poland who served as the Rabbi of the Warsaw Ghetto and after surviving the uprising he was later shot dead by the Nazis in the Trawniki labor camp.

In his spiritual diary called *Tzav V'Ziruz*, filled with incredible human insight and advice, he has the following entry:

If you want to know if you you've progressed on your spiritual path over the years, the way to judge is to look at your resolution - at your *inner drive* - and not at your wishes. Only the inner drive with which you work to attain your desired goal is called resolution. But if you don't work but rather just want, this is not called resolution. It is just some wish that you wish for yourself to be blessed with that desired objective. For example, the pauper who works to sustain himself, this is a drive, because he is doing something constructive toward it. But the wish that he'll find a million dollars is just a wish to be rich and not a resolution. Every Jew would like to be a *tzadik*, a righteous person, but this is no more than a wish; he'd like to wake up in the morning and suddenly find himself a *tzadik*. Only the level and state of being that you seriously work toward can truly be called a resolution.

The secret to real change, says the Rebbe, is to be honest with ourselves and to distinguish between our wishes and actually making resolutions. There are countless things we claim to want to change about ourselves. We want to eat more healthy, be more patient, spend more time with our children, find time to volunteer, go to minyan more often, learn more Torah, do acts of kindness and so on.

The secret to change is to stop wishing and to start making real resolutions. We claim to want to do them but the truth is they are just wishes. We wish to wake up one morning and find ourselves suddenly doing those things. The secret to change is to stop wishing and to start making real resolutions. Personal growth is the result of making a plan, spelling it out and holding ourselves accountable to keeping to it. When you make a resolution, when you formulate a plan, you need to know where the pitfalls lie and what is likely to try to knock you off your course.

A plan, a resolution, has to be articulated to be serious. We can put it down on paper, set it as a reminder in our phone or simply repeat it out loud to ourselves over and over but it isn't real, it is just a wish, not a resolution unless it is formally verbalized, articulated or recorded in a way that will make us more likely to follow through.

Share your resolution and plan with your spouse, a family member, or a trusted friend. Ask them to help you formulate a plan and hold you accountable to your commitment.

Leadership expert Robin Sharma once said, "Don't live the same year 75 times and call it a life." Let's not sit Rosh Hashanah after Rosh Hashanah and fill our hearts and minds with wishes that will dissipate as quickly as the sound of shofar. Let's not sit before the Judge who knew us since we are born and knows what we are capable of, crying because of the missed opportunities and what we could have been. Today, right now, like Josef, let's walk out of prison and set ourselves free to become the people we know we can be.

Shana Tova

Dan

