

# SILVER

FROM THE LAND OF ISRAEL

A new light on the  
Sabbath and Holidays  
from the writings of

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# ROSH HASHANAH ראש השנה

## Revealing the Inner Force of the Soul

תִּקְעוּ בַחֹדֶשׁ שׁוֹפָר, בַּכֶּסֶה, לְיוֹם הַגָּנוּז (תהילים פא:ד)

“Blow the shofar on the new moon, in the hidden time, on our festival day” (Ps. 81:4).

In the new start of the year, the force of renewal bestows holiness to living things, similar to the hour when they were first created. The inner force hidden in our soul is also revealed, advancing the soul in thought and deed.<sup>1</sup>

(*Mo'adei HaRe'iyah*, p. 60)

<sup>1</sup> Rosh Hashanah is the only holiday occurring at the beginning of the month, when the moon is hidden. For this reason the verse refers to Rosh Hashanah as the festival that takes place at “the hidden time.” The call of the shofar is a call of renewal, a call to reveal the soul’s hidden inner forces.



## Unity and Repentance<sup>1</sup>

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**A**S WE STAND before the start of a new year, it is incumbent upon us to examine our deeds and aspire to the path of *teshuvah* (repentance), a path that brings redemption and healing to the world.

The Jewish people have become divided into two camps, through the categorization of Jews as *Charedi* (religious) and *Chofshi* (secular). These are new terms, which were not used in the past. Of course, not everyone is identical, especially in spiritual matters; but there was never a specific term to describe each faction. In this respect, we can certainly say that previous generations were superior to ours.

By emphasizing this categorization, we obstruct the path toward improvement and growth in both camps. Those who feel that they belong to the religious camp look down upon the secular camp. If they think about *teshuvah* and improvement, they immediately cast their eyes in the direction of the secularists, devoid of Torah and mitzvot. They are confident that full repentance is required by the irreligious, not by them.

The secular Jews, on the other hand, are convinced that any notion of penitence is a religious concept, completely irrelevant to their lives.

It would be better if we would all concentrate on examining our own

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Mo'adei HaRe'iyah*, p. 58, originally published in the journal *HaYesod*, 1933.

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defects, and judge others generously. It could very well be that others have treasure-troves of merits, hidden from sight. We should recognize that there exists in each camp a latent force leading toward goodness. Each camp has much to improve upon, and could learn much from the positive traits of the other camp.

Let us be known to each other by one name – *Klal Yisrael*. And let our prayer be fulfilled: “וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּלִבָּם אֶתְּחַת לְעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנְךָ בְּלִבָּב שְׁלָם” – “May they all become *one brotherhood*, to fulfill Your Will whole-heartedly” (from the High Holiday liturgy).



## The Teshuvah of Rosh Hashanah<sup>1</sup>

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THE PRIMARY THEME of the month of Elul and the High Holiday season is *teshuvah* – repentance and return to God. Yet if we examine the Rosh Hashanah prayers, there is no mention of sin or penitence. There are no confessional prayers, no promises to improve. Instead, the Rosh Hashanah prayers deal with a completely different subject: universal acceptance of God's sovereignty. How does this aspiration fit in with the seasonal theme of *teshuvah*?

### ✪ FROM MY STRAITS

Before blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, we recite the verse from Psalms:

מִן־הַמַּצַּר קָרָאתִי יְיָ, עָנַנִי בַּמְרִקָב יְיָ. (תהילים קיח:ה)

From my straits I called out to God; He answered me and set me in a wide expanse. (Ps. 118:5)

The verse begins with narrow *straits*, and concludes with wide *expanses*. What are these straits? These are our troubled, even suffocating, feelings of failure and disappointment with ourselves. However, with God's help we are

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Mo'adei HaRe'iyah*, p. 60.

able to escape to “wide expanses.” Our sense of confinement is eased and our emotional distress is alleviated.

This progression from the narrow to the wide is also a good physical description of the principle mitzvah-object of Rosh Hashanah – the shofar, which gradually expands from a narrow mouthpiece to a wide opening.

✦ FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE COMMUNITY

Rav Kook, however, did not explain this progression from narrow to wide in a psychological vein. Rather, he likened it to the contrast between the *prat* and the *klal*, the individual and the collective. There are the narrow, private issues of the individual. And there are the broad, general concerns of the community and the nation.

*Teshuvah* takes place on many levels. We all try to correct our own personal faults and failings. The nation also does *teshuvah* as it restores itself to its native land, renewing its language, culture, and beliefs. And the entire world advances as it learns to recognize God’s moral rule and sovereignty.

The shofar, with its gradually widening shape, is a metaphor for these ever-expanding circles of repentance and spiritual progress. The order, however, is significant. Our individual *teshuvah* must precede the universal *teshuvah* of the *klal*. During the month of Elul, we are occupied with rectifying our own personal faults and errors. But on Rosh Hashanah our outlook broadens. We yearn for the *teshuvah* of the Jewish people and the ultimate repair of the entire universe. We aspire “to perfect the world under the reign of the Almighty, when all humanity will call out Your Name” (from the *Aleinu* prayer in *Musaf* of Rosh Hashanah). From the narrow straits of personal limitations, we progress to the wide expanses of universal perfection.