

ROSH HASHANAH



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PART 1 - HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOM HADIN



ASKING HASHEM FOR CHAIM

As we know, *Rosh Hashanah* is not a time for making requests. *Rosh Hashanah* is when we express our desire for Hashem to succeed and for Hashem to have *nachas* from His world. Hashem wants to have *nachas* from His world. You should know that Hashem *does* have *nachas* from this world. But there are different types of *nachas*: there's plain *nachas* and there is *nachas kodesh*. What Hashem wants from the world is *nachas kodesh*, and I will explain what this is. Hashem wants people to recognize Him, to acknowledge Him, and to become closer to Him. That is why, in spite of there not being many requests on *Rosh Hashanah*, there is one request that was inserted into the *shemoneh esrei* itself. We say זכרנו לחיים, and we ask *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to grant us life, because He is a *melech* who is חפץ בחיים - He desires that we should live. Hashem actually wants us to live. That's a very big *chiddush* considering that we are talking about Yom Hadin. You know, if you knock on a *gevir's* door and you say, "Could you help me out?" you hope he will give you something because you are collecting for a good cause. Then somebody tells you that this particular *gevir* loves the cause that you are collecting for. That's a very big *brachah* since he will probably give generously.

Likewise, on *Rosh Hashanah*, we say to Hashem זכרנו לחיים and then we request that we should be written בספר החיים. Why? למענך - for Your sake, Hashem. Then, shortly after - still within the first three *brachos* of the *shemoneh esrei* - we say, מי כמוך אב הרחמים, who is like You, Merciful Father, זוכר יצוריו, Who remembers His creations לחיים - for life. Hashem remembers. In His mercy, He remembers them for חיים. So at least we have the mention of life. At the end of the *shemoneh esrei*, once again, we make a request for life. Over there we say, וכתוב לחיים טובים, please write us for a good life. Then, in the end of שים שלום, we ask to be written in בספר חיים, in the book of life, פרנסה טובה, and for a good *parnassah*. Ah, we remembered *parnassah* all of a sudden! And it says again, אנחנו וכל עמך בית ישראל לחיים טובים, again לחיים טובים. So we need to analyze that. Two requests, two places; two in the beginning, two at the end, making a total of four times where we ask Hashem for חיים, for life. What's the difference between the first two requests for חיים and the last two requests for חיים?

WHAT IS A "GOOD" LIFE?

The most recognizable difference is that in the first part of *shemoneh esrei* we ask for life. In the second part of *shemoneh esrei*, at the end, we ask for חיים טובים, a good life, not just life. That begs to be understood. Why doesn't it say זכרנו לחיים טובים right in the beginning of *shemoneh esrei*? Why does it say Hashem remembers us ברחמים לחיים טובים at that point of the tefilla? What is the *pshat*? What is the meaning?

There are a number of answers to this question. But I'm going to share with you something fundamental that you can take with you this *Rosh Hashanah*.

There are two *gemaros* in *Rosh Hashanah*, one is דף ט"ז עמוד א and one is דף ט"ז עמוד ב. The first *gemara* quotes the *braisa* of R' Yishmael which says that everybody is judged on *Rosh Hashanah* and their sentence is meted out, but it is decided and sealed on *Yom Hakippurim*. So the judgment is on *Rosh Hashanah*, the decision is on *Yom Kippur*.¹ However, דף ט"ז עמוד ב, the second *gemara* quotes the famous statement of the Amora, R' Kruspedai, that there are three *sefarim*, three books that are opened on *Rosh Hashanah*, one for *tzaddikim*, one for *resha'im*, and one for *beinonim*, middle-of-the-road people.² The second *gemara* says that on *Rosh Hashanah* the *tzaddikim gemurim* are written into the book of *tzaddikim gemurim*, the *resha'im gemurim*, the wicked people are written into the book of *resha'im gemurim*, and the *beinonim* wait until *Yom Kippur*. How can we reconcile these two *gemaros*? The first one that brought the *braisa* of R' Yishmael says that everybody (including the *beinoni*) is judged on *Rosh Hashanah* and sentenced (sealed) on *Yom Kippur*, and the second *gemara*, that quoted R' Kruspedai's opinion, says that both *tzaddikim* and *resha'im* are judged and sealed on *Rosh Hashanah* and the only ones waiting to be sealed until *Yom Kippur* are the *beinonim*.

ARE YOU REALLY A BEINONI?

And lest you think, "Oh, at least I'll be the middle-of-the-road guy," I will share a story with you. One year, on *motzei Yom Kippurim* in Telshe *yeshiva*, as is the custom in many places, when the people finished *ne'ilah*, the *yeshiva* broke out in song to thank Hashem that they merited to be alive and to pray that next year they should be in

¹ מתני' בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון וכו', וגמ' וכו', דאמר רבא: האי תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל היא, דתנא דבי רבי ישמעאל, בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון: בפסח - על התבואה, בעצרת - על פירות האילן, בחג נידונין על המים. ואדם נידון בראש השנה, וגזר דין שלו נחתם ביום הכפורים, וכו'.

² אמר רבי כרספדאי אמר רבי יוחנן: שלשה ספרים נפתחין בראש השנה, אחד של רשעים גמורים, ואחד של צדיקים גמורים, ואחד של בינוניים. צדיקים גמורים - נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר לחיים, רשעים גמורים - נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה, בינוניים - תליין ועומדין מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים, זכו - נכתבין לחיים, לא זכו - נכתבין למיתה.

Yerushalayim. So they sang and they made a circle for dancing. Rav Gifter, the *rosh yeshivah*, detected that there was a little lightheartedness pervading the *oilam*, the people, and he was very displeased with that. He felt that he needed to give a little *tochachah* to set the boat straight. He walked up to the bimah and he gave a bang. He had a very loud voice. He must have had a built-in microphone in his hand too, because the place went completely silent. He said in *yiddish*, "I detect a little atmosphere of 'Whew, it's over, glad to see the back of *Yom Kippur*, of the *yamim hanora'im*.' So you were all probably thinking that you were *beinonim* and you certainly got a good decree today. Let me share with you a story, from the great *gaon*, world-famous *gaon* and super *tzaddik*, Rav Chaim HaLevi Soloveitchik, of whom the world trembled in awe. He was once walking with Reb Leib Volkemir during the 10 days of *teshuvah*, and Rav Chaim gave a *krechitz* (an Oy sound). Reb Leib turned to Reb Chaim and said, 'Reb Chaim, *vos krechitz dir* - why are you groaning? You are at least a *beinoni*, so you can have a good *Yom Kippur*! What is your concern?' And Rav Chaim said, "Oy, who knows if I am a *beinoni*? Who knows if I am a *beinoni*?" So if Rav Chaim HaLevi Soloveitchik wasn't certain he was a *beinoni*, don't convince yourselves that you are *tzaddikim gemurim*! You should behave with a little seriousness, a little *koved rosh*."

THE DIN OF OLAM HABA

So, returning to the two gemaros, the Vilna Gaon gives an answer in his commentary on *Shulchan Aruch* (see Rama, Orach Chaim 582:9)³ which happens to coincide with the *shitah* of *Tosafos*. The explanation he gives is that there are two judgments on *Rosh Hashanah*.⁴ The judgment for *olam habo* occurs on the first day and the judgment for *olam hazeh* occurs on the second day. On the first day, your *neshamah* is judged to determine where you are holding in regard to your *olam habo*. This means as follows. We all know why we came to this world - we are on a journey to *olam habo*.

We are not going to *olam hazeh* as our destination; we are moving through *olam hazeh* to get to *olam habo*. We all want to enter the spiritual gateways and be welcomed into *olam habo*. That's the piece of the rock, that's the future that anchors all of our

efforts to serve Hashem. Every year, Hashem judges you, "Where do you stand insofar as your *olam habo*?" That's your *neshamah*. Where are you holding? Have you lost ground? Have you gained ground? Have you advanced in your *olam habo*? Where do you stand? For that, Hashem weighs all of your actions and all of your thoughts and makes that determination of where you stand.

By the way, in a similar way, a person could get a sense of his *olam habo* from his *neshamah yeseirah* that he receives on *Shabbos*. On *Shabbos* we get an extra *neshamah*. What is this extra *neshamah*? Is it like a pimple? Is it an appendage? What is the function of this extra *neshamah*? Hashem gives you a dose of your own *olam habo*, מעין I can get a taste of my own *olam habo*. A person who is in tune with *Shabbos* and knows how to accept (and spend) his *Shabbos*, could really get a sense of his *olam habo*. Now, it does fluctuate by the week. So every year, on *Rosh Hashanah*, Hashem looks back at your whole year to see where you stand, and you get a piece of real estate 'upstairs.'

THE DIN OF OLAM HAZEYH

And then, there is another *din*, the *din of olam hazeh*. How are you going to make it through next year? Will you be healthy, will you be sick, will you be emotionally healthy, will you be emotionally sick? How much sadness will you have in your life? How much strife will you have in your life? How much *shalom bayis* will you have in your life? How much lack of *shalom bayis* will you have? How much *menuchas hanefesh* will you have? How much *shalvah* will you have in your life? You could make it into *olam habo* because of the *din of olam habo*, but in the *din of olam hazeh* you might not make it. Every year I like to think back on the whole year: how did I do this past year in *olam hazeh*? I am overwhelmed by so many kindnesses of Hashem, Who gives so generously! Now, that still does not mean you are a great *tzaddik*. Do you know why? Because it could be that in your judgment of *olam habo* you came up very short, and you don't have enough "points" or "mileage" to get a hotel stay upstairs. You don't have any free nights. Over there, they give you real estate based on your points.

We all know that we like to travel first class. You've got to have a lot more points to travel first class than to travel economy. Sometimes you don't even have enough points to get a trip. So all the airlines play this little *shtick*, before you land, when they give you a credit card application booklet with a pen. Of course, they want you to spend money, but they will throw some miles to entice you to sign up. So you may get some "points" in the *olam hazeh* even though you may not be a *tzaddik*. So, while in your *olam habo* you may not be doing too well, regarding your *olam hazeh*, Hashem may say, "I'm going to give you a good life." On the other hand, you could have a person who has a much greater *olam habo*, a phenomenal *olam habo*, but he doesn't have a good *olam hazeh* - for whatever reason, he wasn't *zoche* to *olam hazeh*. These are the two separate judgments that you experience.

³ הגה ונהגין שכל אחד אומר לחבירו לשנה טובה תכתב (טור)

⁴ ונהגין כו' תכתב. כי מש"ש שלשה ספרים כו' היינו לחיי ע"ה כמ"ש תוס' שם ודלא כהר"ן שכת' לעה"ז וצדיקים ורשעים בדין דהא אמרינן ואדם נידון בר"ה וגזר דין כו' אלמא אין החתימה אלא ביה"כ ומתני' בכל אדם מיירי וכן מש"ש תבואה שאירע בה קרי' כו' אדם כו'. החליט הגמ' בכל אדם אלא דחיי עה"ז שיון בכל אדם אלא דאע"פ שנכתב אם חוזר בע"ת נקדע הגזר דין ונכתב ונחתם ביה"כ לטובה וזהו התועלת דאינו נחתם עד י"ה"כ ש' שב בנתיים כו' וזה שמבקשין בע"ת וכתבנו כו' ליקדע גזר דין ויכתבנו לחיים ולכן אין לאומרו ונחתם אלא תכתב, עכ"ד. ובלקוטי הגר"א (עמ' 350) נתפרש יותר וז"ל, "דברי רבי כרוספדי מיירי לענין דין לעוה"ב, ואומר שנפתחים שלשה ספרים, לצדיקים הכתיבה והחתימה היא בראש השנה, וכן לרשעים. ואילו הבינוניים תלויים ועומדים, ואצלם אף הכתיבה היא ביה"כ. אבל המשנה וגם הברייתא מדברים לענין דין העוה"ז, ובדין זה כל האנשים שיון, שבר"ה יכתבון וביום צום כיפור יחתמון. וכן התפילות שתקנו לומר בעשרת ימי תשובה, מחולקים הן בין ג' ברכות ראשונות, שהן בקשות על עוה"ב, ולכן אומרים "זכרנו לחיים", וזכר יצוריו לחיים ברחמים", ולא מבקשים "לחיים טובים". ואילו בג' האחרונות נתקנו לבקש על הדין בעוה"ז, ועל כן מבקשים לכתב לחיים טובים, "בספר חיים ושלום ופרנסה", עכ"ד.

GIVING HASHEM NACHAS

Now you can understand that in some places we daven for the *olam habo*, and in other places we daven for the *olam hazeh*. In the first three *brachos* of *shemoneh esrei*, we daven for our *olam habo*. Over there we say, זכרו לחיים - “Hashem remember me, remember us, for Life, וכתבו בספר החיים, let us be written in the Book of Life, in *olam haba*. Grant me *olam habo*, Hashem.” Now, of course we say, למען אלקים חיים, I want to be in *olam habo*, Hashem, not for my own sake. I want to be in *olam habo*, Hashem, so that You have *nachas*. If a *yid* gets to *olam habo*, do you know how happy Hashem is? That one of these fellows, these little soldiers that He created and placed into this dangerous, dark world, filled with a huge *yetzer hara*, this little soldier fought his many battles and still made it to *olam habo*?! You should know that Hashem has tremendous *nachas kodesh* from that! Hashem wants to give out *sechar* for *mitzvos* like nothing else! When Hashem gives a person *sechar*, he becomes so close to Him, being in *olam habo* - you become close to Hashem, and that’s Hashem’s great will. Hashem wanted to do chessed with you, and He wants to do chessed with you. So therefore you say, למען אלקים חיים - “I know You want to help out, Hashem, You want to do chessed; please, remember us.” Over there, in *olam habo*, there is no such thing as חיים טובים and not טובים. Any *helek* of *olam habo* is incredibly good!

“A LIFE” VS. “A GOOD LIFE”

Now in the latter part of *shemoneh esrei*, you are davening and asking for חיים טובים, which is a whole new subject. There are many people who have life, which for most of them means that their hearts are beating, but, unfortunately, they can’t move too much, they don’t sleep well, they are not physically well or at rest, they have no *menuchas hanefesh*, and so on. For example, think about last *Rosh Hashanah* when Hashem said, ומי יטרף מי ישלי - *who is going to have a year of upheaval and who will have a peaceful year*. Some of you argued with your parents this year, some of you had strife with your wives, some of you had strife with your fellow men, some of you had an unrestful and unpeaceful time when you couldn’t sit straight and focus on your mission in this world. That’s *rachmanus*. There is no *rachmanus* bigger than that. And then there are some of you who went through this year of the coronavirus pandemic and were petrified over illnesses and over developing illnesses. There are still people who are petrified of this. So how much fear you would have was also decided by Hashem last year on *Rosh Hashanah*. How much worry you should have and how much worry you shouldn’t have. You have to know that. A person has to know this.

That’s what you ask Hashem for in the second part of *shemoneh esrei*: you want חיים טובים - a *good* life. Asking for חיים טובים is an unparalleled request. Having a hard time breathing or breathing on a breathing machine, or not being fully functional, or not having the ability to walk - all of this was decided on *Rosh Hashanah*. There are some people who had fresh minds, but their bodies were broken down; their feet, for example, weren’t granted *chaim tovim*. Some people’s hands weren’t granted *chaim*, some people’s backs weren’t granted *chaim*, some people’s hearts and minds had many challenges. That was all decided last year - that they weren’t going to get חיים טובים.

But you have to know that the quality of life is as important as, or more important than, life itself. If you exist but you have no *chiyus* in this world, that’s a *rachmanus*. How many people do you know who have *chiyus*, and they feel alive in this world? I see people, young people. They play ball, they feel alive; they play music, they feel alive; they hear music, they feel alive; they do exercise, they get their endorphins going, and they feel alive; they eat a good meal, they feel alive. Lots of things determine a person’s *chiyus*. But they have no *chiyus* from any spirituality. They have no *chiyus* out of a *tefillah*, out of *davening*. They have no *chiyus* out of learning. They have no *chiyus* out of *mitzvos*. The *mishnah* in *Avos* (6:7) tells us גדולה תורה - *Torah* is great, הם, ובעולם הזה ובעולם הבא שנאמר כי חיים הם, *Torah is a source of life for those who articulate it with their mouths*. If you learn *Torah* silently you will gain no *chiyus* from your *Torah*. If you articulate the *gemara* you learn, then you stand a chance to be able to acquire some *chiyus*.

LIFELESS LEARNING

I was in Lakewood not long ago when everything was closed. I was sitting in a *beis midrash* and there was a young boy behind me. There weren’t many people in that *beis midrash*. The young boy was learning *gemara* out loud continuously. I was convinced that he was learning with somebody over the phone. Then I turned around to have a look. I couldn’t tell if maybe he had one of those wireless earbuds in his ears, so when he walked by me, I asked him, “Excuse me, who were you learning with?” He said, “Nobody.” I said, “You are a very wise young man for learning out loud. You should know you were *gebentsht*; you were blessed with tremendous *hatzlachah*. You didn’t hear clearly the *chiyus* that you had from that learning.” But I did hear it. So many people learn and it sounds like they are learning in the morgue - not in the anteroom - but in one of those refrigerated chambers where they lay the dead bodies. You listen over there but you don’t hear anything. Do you know why? Because there is no life there. Similarly, you see a person sitting by a *gemara*, who gets no *chiyus* from it. Do you realize that this is the tragedy of tragedies? It’s like להבדיל אף, compared to a guy who comes to a restaurant and they serve him smoked beef. They serve the guy a meal that’s worth at least \$250. The guy is sitting there and he looks exactly like the cow in the farm chewing on his grass. Have you ever seen a cow eat food with joy? No. If you’ve watched animals, you’ve never seen them eating with a *geshmak*. They never stop eating - they are always eating - but they never exhibit any *geshmak*. And I’m sure a lot of people feel bad for their animals, so they buy them *Dinovite* and beef and biscuits. They serve them fresh meat and they figure, “Ah,

my dog is going to enjoy the fresh meat!” A dog doesn’t know the difference between fresh meat, *alte* bones, or rotten meat with maggots, or your Dinovite. They don’t know the difference!

BEGGING HASHEM FOR CHAIM

A person has to realize that if that’s how you learn, then you’re really dead - it means that you didn’t get any *chaim* last year on Rosh Hashanah. Do you know why? Because you never even asked for *chaim*. When you said חיים טובים you said, “Hashem, I mean three things: I mean, חיים טובים ופרנסה טובה, I mean פרנסה טובה and also פרנסה טובה - that’s all I need Hashem!” Wait, but you already said *parnassah*. If you look at the end of *shemoneh esrei*, first you say *parnassah* and then you say חיים טובים. *Chaim Tovim* doesn’t mean *parnassah*. חיים טובים means to enjoy. Torah is something that is so exciting and could bring a person to such levels of euphoria; you could feel amazing from learning Torah! When you hear about *tzaddikim* who learn 12, 13 hours a day, even more, you have to understand how they do it. I know of a *talmid chacham* who learns every single night until a quarter to four, and he doesn’t come to *Shacharis* at two in the afternoon. He is there in the morning for the first *seider*. How do I know? Because he always calls me. Many times he calls me. He is one of our *talmidei chachamim*, one of the *kedoshim* that we are *zoche* to support, and he *davens* for different people and then he calls me, maybe once a week, to ask me, “Are they better yet?” And when I tell him no, he’s always surprised. “I *davened*, I just finished *davening*, after a whole day of learning.” You know how many hours a day that man learns? He goes home from the *shul* at a quarter to four in the morning! I used to ask him when he called me, “Are you on the way to *shul* now?” He would say, “No, no, I’m going to sleep. I’m going home to sleep now. I’m a little tired.” You’re a little tired?! You should be a lot tired! You know how he does that? Because he’s excited about his Torah. That person is *zoche* to such חיים טובים - you can’t even imagine! Do you know why? I have no *safek* that he begs Hashem for it. He says, “Hashem, I want physical life and I want חיים טובים, I want to have joy from *mitzvos*.” The more joy you have from *mitzvos*, the bigger bang you get for your buck.

REAPING THE BENEFITS

You go to an average person and you say to them, “Do you want to give \$100 to *tzedakah*? You could put it in some *tzedakah* where you are not going to get a big bang for your buck, or you could put it in a *tzedakah* where you get a big bang for your buck.” You understand? The bigger bang you get for your buck, the more *sechar* and the more joy and benefits you are going to reap. You know what learning *Torah* with *simchah* is compared to learning *Torah* like a *meis*? That’s the difference between night and day!

Have you ever seen a person *daven* and be excited to have an opportunity to talk to Hashem? Hashem wants to hear from me! And this person does it *behislahavus*. That’s amazing! That is absolutely amazing! Therefore, when you *daven* this year, in the first part of *shemoneh esrei*, say, “Hashem, may we be *zoche* to *olam habo*,” and in the second part you ask for *chiyus*, חיים טובים. Of course you want to have חיים טובים, physical life: you should be healthy, you should be wealthy, you should have *kol tuv*. But you want to have some *chiyus* from your Judaism, your *yiddishkeit*. You want to have inner joy, you want to be floating a little bit, but if you don’t ask for it, you are surely not going to get it, and if you don’t yearn for it, you are surely not going to ask for it. You have to yearn for it, you have to think about it, you have to ask for it. Don’t settle for just a couple of pennies, a couple of dollars, aim for something big - ask Hashem for *chiyus* for your *neshamah*, for your *chaim* in *olam hazeh*, so you could earn a tremendous bang for your buck for yourself.

PART 2 - FINAL PREPARATIONS - HASHEM CAN BRING MIRACLES

THE CONTRADICTION OF ROSH HASHANAH

We spoke before about how a person is in a ‘*matzav of nes*’ before Rosh Hashanah. He’s in a very serious *matzav*, where he needs a miracle to survive the judgment of Rosh Hashanah. The question is, what does a person rely on? Chazal tell us that what he relies on is that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is going to make a *nes* for him. And the *emes* is that every person is *botei’ach* in Hashem, and Klal Yisrael is *botei’ach* in Hashem to help them get through the judgment. Now the question is, how do you resolve the conflict between the fact that we face the *yemei hayirah vehapachad* (the Days of Awe) and the fact that we have *bitachon* in Hashem? We find, for example, that we don’t say Hallel on Rosh Hashanah or on Yom HaKippurim. Chazal tell us (Rosh Hashanah 32b): מפני מה אין ישראל אומרים שירה לפניך, why don’t we say *shirah* (Hallel) on Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim? And the answer is, because אפשר מלך יושב על כסא דין וספרי אפשר מלך יושב על כסא דין וספרי חיים – *Is it possible that while the King is sitting on the throne of judgment and the books of life and the books of death are open before Him, the Jewish people are reciting joyous songs of praise?* So how could you say *shirah* in such a *matzav*?

The Rambam (Perush Mishnayos, R”H 4:7) explains this.⁵ The days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippurim are ימי עבודה והכנעה ופחד ומורא מה’ ויירא ממנו – days of spiritual labor, submission, and fear; one should be in awe of Hashem and fear Him. These days are called *Yamim Hanora’im*, awesome days. A person should approach Rosh Hashanah בכבוד

⁵ העובר לפני התיבה ב"ט של ראש השנה כו' לא התקינו זה אלא בעת צרה לפי שהיו שומרים לאותו שהיה מתפלל שחרית שלא יתקע בשופר וכשהיו משלימין התפלה היו השומרים הולכים לדרכם ולפיכך אותו שהיה עובר לפני התיבה להתפלל תפלת מוסף היה תוקע. ואמרו ובשעת ההלל לפי שלא היו קורין הלל לא בראש השנה ולא ביום הכפורים לפי שהם ימי עבודה והכנעה ופחד ומורא מהשם ויראה ממנו ומברך ומנס אליו ותחנונים ובקשה כפרה וסליחה ובכל אלו הענינים אינו הגון השחוק והשמחה

ראש, with seriousness, and he has to be more aware than the rest of the year that he is standing before Hashem, that he is being judged on this day. Therefore you can't say Hallel, because Hallel demands a day of *simchah*. The Rambam's lashon is that Rosh Hashanah and Yom Hakippurim are not days of *simchah yeseirah*.⁶ Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippurim are ימי התשובה וירא ופחד – days of repentance, fear and apprehension. So the question is, what is the nature of these days? I thought we were *botei'ach* baHashem? Right? A person is *botei'ach* baHashem. On Rosh Hashanah we eat, we drink, we have nice clothes and get dressed up.

NOWHERE TO FLEE

The Brisker Rav offers us a resolution of this. This is what he said. One of the great *paytanim*, Rav Shlomo ibn Gavirol, wrote a *piyut* called *Kesser Malchus*, that goes like this: אלקי, my Hashem, אם עוונתי מנשוא גדול – *if my sin is too great to bear, what shall I do?* If you sentence me to death, לך איחל – *I will hope and look toward You*, ואם תבקש לעונתי – *and if You are going to seek out my sins*, אברח ממך – *I am going to run away from You*. To where? אליך – *to You*. And I am going to try to hide from Your anger. Where? בצילך – *in Your shadow*. So the Brisker Rav asked, what is the *pshat* over here? If You are going to seek out my sins, I'm going to run away to You, if You are going to want to punish me, I am going to run away to Your צל. How does such a thing work? The Brisker Rav explained that the Rambam writes the same *lashon*, saying, these are days of מברח – *fleeing from Hashem*, ומונס אליו – *and escaping to Him*. So we ask, which one is it? Is it fleeing **from** Him or is it escaping **to** Him?

Lichora, these are two contradictory concepts, no? The Brisker Rav said that the *inyan* is as follows. A person has to be aware during the entire *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom HaKippurim* that he is being judged. He's in the court, and he has to know that the situation is one where he wants to flee.

I have walked a number of people to jail after court cases where they were sentenced to periods that were too long. Every one of them said to me the following thing, "Do you think I should run?" That's what they asked. I thought of this Rambam *besha'as maaseh*. They all considered escaping. Everybody who is being sentenced to spend years in prison doesn't want to go like a sheep. You know what he always thinks? "Maybe I should escape. Go to Mexico. Go to Canada. Run to *Eretz Yisrael*. I don't want to be stuck in prison." I understand them 100%. And then every time I was with somebody, they always decided there was nowhere to run, because they would be looking over their shoulders all their lives. They didn't want to be people who had escaped. So ultimately, they didn't try to escape and they went like a *shepsale* to the prison.

The feeling that a person has to have on *Rosh Hashanah* is that he has to flee. "I want to flee because I am facing the ultimate court case." But then he has to come to the realization that there is nowhere he can flee to. There is nowhere he can escape to. So you know what he does? He then throws himself on Hashem, and he walks like a *shepsale* to the sentence. I don't mean that he walks like a *shepsa'le* to the fodder, but what he does is, he throws himself at the feet of Hashem and he says, "Hashem, I'm relying on You. Hashem, the only hope that I have is that You are going to have *rachmanus* on me, and therefore I can rely on You."

EVERYONE IS LOOKING FOR PROTEKTIYA

I always give a *marshal* of this. A guy comes to court and he knows that he's being charged for a very serious crime. His lawyers tell him, "You know, they don't want a plea bargain. It's not *pashut*." He says, "What am I looking at?" They say, "20 years to life." *Shrek*. Then he gets marched into the courtroom. When he looks at the judge, he realizes that this judge is a relative; he's an uncle of his. He doesn't want to say anything, he keeps quiet. Now, does he now feel like he's scot-free? No. Do you know what he feels? He thinks, "I'm in good hands. I'm in the best hands possible." Even so, throughout the whole court case he is petrified.

I once went to a court case where a Hungarian doctor, an elderly fellow, was being tried. They were prosecuting him for ripping off Medicaid. For every patient who came into his office, he would bill Medicaid for a colonoscopy. If a guy came in for his throat, he'd say, "Get a colonoscopy," and then charge Medicaid a few grand. The guy had racked up bills for a few million dollars. They had a break in the middle of the case. The guy was nervous. I walked out, and he followed me. He called me over to the side and said, "Can you go speak to the judge on my behalf?" I said, "Why's that?" He said, "The judge likes you." The judge had made some sharp remarks in the middle of the proceedings, and I said something in response. The bailiff came over and told me, "You're not supposed to talk." I said, "Tell the judge that I just said I'm impressed by the sharp line he gave." So the bailiff went back and whispered in the judge's ear. The judge banged his gavel and said, "The rabbi in the back is highly impressed by my sharpness." So the doctor figured that now I had an in with the judge. "Maybe you could go speak to him for me?" I said to him, "Where were you during the war?" "World War II? No, no, I never hurt any Jews." I said, "I'm sure of that." I thought to myself, "I'm sure you didn't help any, either." But I didn't say anything to him. Instead, I said, "I don't know how to win this judge over." But it shows you how a person looks for something he can rely on. He was grasping at straws, hoping I would be his agent.

CONDITIONS NEEDED FOR BITACHON

But when it's *taka* your father sitting as judge – the *Ribbono Shel Olam alein* is judging you – even though it's a very serious case, you trust that it's going to result in the best possible verdict. *Zogt* the Brisker Rav, *bitachon* only

⁶ אָבֵל ראש השנה יום הכפורים אין בהן הלל לפי שהן ימי תשובה ויראה ופחד לא ימי שמחה ותרנה (משנה תורה, הלכות מגילה וחנוכה ג' ו')

works if a guy understands how serious his *matzav* is. If a guy comes into court with a cavalier attitude, playing around, eating potato chips and saying, “Tell me a joke,” then it’s out of place. You’re being judged right now! You could see the biggest lowlifes come to court, and they all get dressed up in suits. Sometimes it looks like a monkey in a suit; it doesn’t look like they’re serious. I’ve seen guys with long hair – I’ve seen lawyers stuffing the guy’s hair down into his suit jacket so it shouldn’t look so long, so he should look like a *sug ben adam*. You try to make a good impression. But if you have a cavalier attitude, that’s not *bitachon*. Don’t say to yourself, “I’m sure it’s going to work out fine.” No. A person has to come to a *matzav* where he feels the seriousness of the *yom hadin*, but *af al pi ken*, even so, “I rely on Hashem. My hope is that Hashem is my judge, and the relationship that I have with Hashem is *אין לתאר ואין לשער* – so deep and close that I trust it outweighs whatever accusations there may be against me.”

The *avodah* of *Rosh Hashanah* is to strengthen your relationship with Hashem, despite the fact that you are facing such serious charges. You understand how serious the *matzav* is, but *Rosh Hashanah* is not the time for *teshuvah*. The main *avodah* of *Rosh Hashanah* is to strengthen your relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. How do you do that? First of all, for the first time in your life, you take Hashem seriously. That’s the first thing. You say, “*HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, You are the Boss. You are in charge. *אין עוד מלבדו*, there is no one else in charge but You.”

EXERCISES OF HODA’AH ON R”H

You can do this throughout the day, whenever you are *davening* or whenever you have a moment. When your mind starts to wander, pick an area of your life and focus on recognizing that Hashem is in charge of it. For example, think about your health. How do you see yourself? Do you think you’re a healthy person? Most people do. Even when they clearly need serious help, they imagine they’re healthy, and when they get sick, they’re surprised. I’ve seen people who weighed 350 pounds and couldn’t imagine why they got sick. People live terrible lifestyles, and then when they get sick, they wonder, “Me? Why did I get sick?” That’s how people are. Some people rely on the fact that they eat eggs, while others rely on the fact that they don’t eat eggs. Some rely on drinking coffee, while others rely on not drinking coffee. One guy relies on taking vitamins, another on not taking vitamins. Everyone has his own theory. “I have a good doctor. My mother did this. I watch myself. I take care of myself. I exercise.” Everybody has his *shtick*, but much of it is *dimyon*, an illusion. Most people are not nearly as healthy as they imagine.

My *rebbe*, HaRav Meir Halevi Soloveitchik, zt”l, once explained this to me. You could ask: Are most people healthy, robust individuals, or are most people actually somewhat weak? Rav Chaim, his grandfather, once said, “Most people are *nisht gezunter menschen*, most people are not particularly healthy, they are *shvach*, they’re weak.” And he brought a proof: When you see someone who is exceptionally healthy, everybody points him out and says, “Now that is a healthy person!” The very fact that people remark on it shows that it is not the norm. So whatever you may tell yourself, you have to stop and think about your health and realize that it, too, is entirely in Hashem’s hands.

CORONATING THE KING WITH HODA’AH

Think about your entire body, starting from the top of your head and working your way down. If you still have some hair left on your head, think about the fact that Hashem hasn’t “mowed the lawn.” You think it’s a joke? There are many people who suffer from alopecia, a condition that causes hair loss, sometimes over the entire body. I’ve encountered numerous people with alopecia, *bachurim* and girls, and it’s frightening. Some of them look great because they have nice *sheitelach*. Some look better than others. But the only reason you still have hair on your head is because Hashem is keeping it there, not because you use the right conditioner, or because you use some sweet-pea, cotton-tea shampoo that they charge you \$50 for. I used to have a *talmid* whose brother was in the business of selling these fancy shampoos. He told me, “I sit in my basement and pour junk into clean bottles, and then I put a label on the outside saying ‘Almond Extract Exotic Shampoo’ or ‘Exotic Flower Shampoo.’” He charged \$20 for a little bottle. He gave me about five bottles, and I ended up throwing them all in the garbage. After using the stuff twice, I figured out it was junk. And it really was junk. But the world was buying it from him like it was gold. So if you have hair on your head, realize that it’s there because Hashem is keeping it there.

If your hearing works, that’s amazing. Do you know how many people can’t hear properly? Do you know what a huge business hearing aids are? Do you know how many people have problems with their eyes? Think about it. How many parts of your body do you even know about? Some of you may be more educated than others, so you know how many different parts there are in the eye and how complex the system of sight is. Think about how *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is *mamash ein od milvado*, directing every tiny detail, including the thousands of connections in your brain. It’s tremendous. And think about emotional health. Do you know how many people struggle emotionally? How many people can’t act their age or are challenged in ways they can’t control? Some people suffer from paranoia. They’re constantly worried about what everybody thinks about them. They think everyone is talking about them, or they’re so concerned that people might talk about them that they begin acting strangely. Sometimes people simply can’t control their behavior.

I once spoke to an autistic child whom I was able to communicate with. I asked him, “Are you aware of what you’re doing?” He was sitting there spitting and gesticulating in all kinds of unusual ways, while communicating with me using a card. I asked him, “Are you aware of what you are doing?” “Of course,” he said. “I’m a *halachadige shoteh*. That’s my *onesh*. This is my *tikkun*, to be in this world, in this *matzav*, and to have a *tikkun*.” Each of us is placed by Hashem in this world with our own circumstances and our own story.

Now think about your shoulders, your neck, and your back. Think about the people you know who suffer from neck pain and back pain. Do you know how many people have backaches? It's unbelievable. Think about your heart. Think about your lungs. Say, "*HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, You are the *Melech*. You are the only One who takes care of me, 100%." Then think about everything Hashem provides for you: your food, your clothing, your home. You think your parents provide it? Hashem provides it. That's how you are *mamlich* Hashem, how you accept Hashem as your King.

When you *daven*, that's what you should be thinking about. You want to know what to think about? Instead of sleeping or thinking, "I'm too tired," think about these things. Instead of thinking, "I want to go to 7-Eleven and get my jalapeño potato chips," think: "I'm a little nobody. I was born premature. I should still have been in an incubator, but Hashem took me out, and Hashem raised me."

THE AWARENESS OF DEPENDENCY

You have a nice smile because Hashem is taking care of you. You could have been born disfigured. There are many people who live with disfigurement. You have to thank Hashem for everything. A person should thank Hashem for his teeth, for his taste buds, for his throat. That's what it means to be *mamlich* Hashem over yourself, to recognize Hashem as King over every aspect of your life.

Say, "Hashem, You have taken care of me until now, and I'm relying on You to continue taking care of me." When you say to Hashem, *Ten pachdecha aleinu*, that's what it means. You are saying, "Make me aware that I am completely dependent upon You, that I need You every single second. Hashem, I want to do Your will. I want to give the *kavod* to You."

STOP WITH THE SHTICK, IT'S ALL HASHEM!

Then go through all the things that happen in your life. How many run-ins have you had with people? How many people have harmed you? How many times have you encountered an anti-Semitic policeman, or gone to an airline check-in counter and faced a service agent who treated you badly? You think, "This guy is an anti-Semite. He hates me." No. It's Hashem. It may look that way, but ultimately, it's Hashem.

Not long ago, I was at an airport check-in counter with someone, and they wouldn't let him on the plane. We hadn't arrived particularly early, it was a big flight, and time was pressing. One letter in his name on the ticket was different from the name in his passport, so the service agent wouldn't let him board. Let's say that instead of "David," it said "Dovid." The A was an O. I asked the guy, "Do you think this is a different person?" He said, "I don't care whether it is or it isn't. The rules are that the names have to match. If even one vowel is different, he can't get on the plane." The person with me said, "That guy is an anti-Semite." The agent had a German accent and that blond-haired, blue-eyed look. I said, "It's Hashem. This is all Hashem. Don't say it's anti-Semitism. It's Hashem." I told him to check again, but no, the names really didn't match. So I called the travel agent and told him the problem. He said, "Don't worry about it." Within 30 seconds, he went onto his computer, changed the spelling on the ticket from the A to the O, and said, "Tell the guy to look at his computer now." The service agent looked, the names matched, and the person was allowed on the plane. Then the agent told us, "I did you a favor. If I had let you through, you would have gotten stuck in Europe. They wouldn't have let you continue, and they might not even have let you come back." All because of this seemingly insignificant detail. I had no doubt that he had done us a favor. But it was Hashem who did us the favor through this person. Everything is from Hashem.

We think we have our *shtick*. We have miles. We have this strategy and that strategy. Everybody thinks he's on top of his game. But there isn't a single thing in your life that doesn't come from Hashem, and you have to acknowledge that. Your parents give you a gift? They're the means through which Hashem gave it to you. When an ATM spits out \$60, you don't hug the machine and say, "Thank you for the 60 bucks." Why not? It just gave you \$60! When your parents give you something, of course you should thank them and give them a hug. You have to be *makir tov* to the person Hashem sent to give it to you. Hashem gave you that *shaliach*, and of course you have to be *makir tov* to them. But ultimately, you recognize that what you received came from Hashem.

APPRECIATE THAT EVERYTHING IS RUNNING

That's what you do throughout *Rosh Hashanah*. Think about your house and how many things could go wrong with it. Think about bedbugs. Not long ago, another *yeshivah* had bedbugs. It was a nightmare that went on for months. The problem went away and then came back. All kinds of people come to my house. Who knows where they come from? Maybe they'll bring bedbugs with them. The place could be loaded with bedbugs. But it isn't, because Hashem watches over us. That's the only reason.

Think about every *prat*. Mildew, bacteria in the air, mold. Do you know how many people have their houses ruined by mold? Somebody called me last year and told me they had bats in their home. Bats! The only pests we ever had in our roof were bees. I once went to the door leading to the roof and saw a beehive almost the size of me. It reached all the way up to the roof, and the roof there is high enough that you can stand up. Hashem took care of it. I didn't have to call anybody. I understood that Hashem sent the bees, and Hashem would take care of the bees. *Baruch* Hashem

for that. Think about how many things can go wrong in a house. It could boggle your mind. Fires happen. A couple in Boro Park recently had a fire, and tragically, they both died. They were wonderful people. Do you know how it started? By mistake, they left their barbecue on at the back of the house. *Nebach*. You think we don't make mistakes? We make mistakes all the time, but Hashem watches over us.

So go through the different areas of your life. Think about how you sat down with a *Gemara* and were able to understand a few lines. Some people have tremendous difficulty, but you were able to comprehend something. Maybe you could sit for 20 minutes, maybe half an hour, maybe an hour, maybe even an hour and a half. Think about the *kochos* that Hashem gave you. Some people can barely stay focused for two minutes. Their minds are all over the place, and they have very little control over their thoughts. Then think about your *parnassah* and the food you have. Think about the fruit, the vegetables, the meat, the chicken, the bread, the tuna fish. Think about everything Hashem has given you over the course of a year. Everything is accounted for down to the last penny. It's almost impossible to comprehend. Think about every area of your life, and you could spend the entire *Rosh Hashanah*, from beginning to end, simply being *makir tov* to Hashem.

FINDING HASHEM IN EVERYTHING

Think about how much enjoyment you had from your food. Think about how many days you didn't have a virus, how many days you felt well and your body functioned normally. That *sugya* alone could occupy you for half of *Mussaf*.

Malchiyos, *Zichronos*, and *Shofros*: that's what it's about. People don't know what to *daven* for. אימתך עלינו פחדך עלינו. We want to be happy with Hashem, but at the same time to realize that everything is from Hashem. There is nothing else. Hashem *Echad*. That's the *avodah* of *Rosh Hashanah*, and that's the basis of your trust in Him. If you are with Hashem on *Rosh Hashanah*, you can rely on Him.

Don't spend the time thinking about *niggunim*. I once asked a guy, "What do you think about?" He said, "I think about *niggunim*." A lot of people have told me, "My old *aveiros* always pop up. All the *aveiros* I did in my life come into my mind while I'm standing there during *Mussaf*." Some people try to sleep. Some people try to escape. They can't sit still because it's hard for them. But a person has to think. Think about the fact that on *Rosh Hashanah*, Hashem is going to decide how much ability you will have to concentrate this year, how well you'll be able to focus and go from one *sugya* to the next. That itself is something to *daven* for. Think about how much *ruchniyus* Hashem gave you this past year, how much knowledge, how much *chizzuk*, and how much intellectual grasp you had of these ideas. Think about how much *chaim* you had last year and how much *misah*. How alive were you with *Yiddishkeit*? How conscious were you of the *tafkid* for which you came into this world, and how much of the time did you lose sight of it? Thinking about these things is what brings a person to *bitachon* in Hashem.

If you do that *avodah* on *Rosh Hashanah*, there's no *safek* in my mind that it will change your year. Maybe it will be the beginning of a real relationship with Hashem. Can you maintain that awareness all the time? No. Are you holding by שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד? No. Even some people who practice *Shivisi* simply picture the name of Hashem in front of them. But that by itself doesn't mean they have a relationship with Hashem. A relationship means recognizing that Hashem is involved in the smallest details of your actual life.

Hashem gave me a little patch of skin near my little finger that is always somewhat dry. I don't know why. It's one small area, maybe the size of a dime, but it's always there. Every time I look at it, you know what I do? I thank Hashem. I say, "Hashem, this hand is great. The rest of the hand is great. Thank You, Hashem, that You didn't put this on the outside of my hand. That would have been worse." Everybody would see it and have something to say. People love to point these things out. "Oh, look at your hand." "Oh, I didn't notice. Thank you!" You know what I mean? What did you have to tell me that for?

THINK ABOUT AND RECOGNIZE THE CHESED

I can't even tell you the foolish things people say to me. "Did you ever notice you have a pimple on your nose? It's really sticking out." Thank you. What should I do? You're a doctor? You want to take it off for me? But Hashem does these things for you, and Hashem sends you messages. Do you know how many people have eczema? Millions. Eczema and other skin conditions can be a major problem. What about pimples on the back? If everybody took off their shirts, you'd be amazed at what people have on their backs. Do you know how many creams people have to use and smear on their skin? That's the reality. A person has to thank Hashem for every single thing.

But the *avodah* of the day is not simply to thank Hashem. It's not primarily about gratitude. The *avodah* of today is *hakarah*, the recognition and appreciation that it is Hashem Who does all of this for you. There is nothing but Hashem. Everything is from Hashem. אין עוד מלבדו. If you have that *hakarah*, that's called being *mamlich* Hashem. תמליכני עליכם. Hashem says, "Make Me King over yourselves." Everyone should be *mekabel* not to talk. I'm serious. I want a *taanis dibbur* here from the minute you wake up until after *davening* [speaking to his talmidim]. Just until after *davening*. You want to know what to do? I'm telling you what to do. Look in the *siddur* and, for once, actually think about what you're saying.

We're going to begin the *tefillos* of *Rosh Hashanah* with *Maariv* next Friday night, *im yirtzeh* Hashem, and we're going to *daven* with tremendous concentration, thinking about every single word together. But the point is not to say it out loud. The point is for everyone, perhaps for once in his life, to really think about what he is saying. I remember the age at which I first sat down and thought about every single word of the first *brachah* of *Maariv*. I'm embarrassed to tell you, so I won't share how old I was. I had *davened* an awful lot of *Maarivs* before I finally woke up and said, "You know what? Let me take a look at what I'm actually saying." I had thought about the second *brachah* earlier, because *ahavas Torah* was already my *sugya*. But the first *brachah*, what does it really mean? I knew how the sun works. I knew how the moon works. But I hadn't grasped the meaning of the *brachah*.

Rabbosai, let's get into this. Let's do the job. We have a *Yom Tov* like no other, and we have Someone to rely on.