

# ROSH HASHANA - OF CREATION AND OUR KING

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

Rosh HaShana, the Jewish New Year, begins this year at sunset on September 10, 1999, and ends at nightfall on Sunday, September 12, 1999. Rosh HaShana is a solemn holiday, as the entire world is judged and the world's fate for the coming year is decided. We spend a large portion of the day engaged in prayer, proclaiming G-d's kingship and His rule over the world. (See III:14 for more on this topic.) This proclamation is an affirmation of our acceptance of G-d's divinity and rule over us. It expresses our feelings: that we try to bide by His dictates, and that adherence to His word guides our lives. The expressions of G-d's kingship also serve as a reminder of past events.

Rosh HaShana, the beginning of the Jewish new year, is the anniversary of the creation of the world. In the Rosh HaShana prayers, we recite "This day is the beginning of Your works, the commemoration of the first day." The Talmud tells us (Rosh HaShana 27a) that our basis for reciting this verse in the prayers is the opinion of Rabi Eliezer, who said that the world was created in Tishrei.

However, the meaning of "creation of the world" is not as clear cut as it may seem. The Talmud (Rosh HaShana 31a) writes that on Friday, we recite the verse "G-d will have reigned, He will have donned grandeur" (Psalms 93) because His work was completed on that day and He then ruled over them. Rav Gedalia Schorr explains that G-d created the rest of the world before creating mankind on Friday. However, the title of King was not appropriate for G-d until the creation of man. He further explains that Rosh HaShana is actually the anniversary of the creation of man, and hence the completion of creation. For this reason, we say, as mentioned above, that this day, Rosh HaShana, is the beginning of your works. This beginning, Rav Schorr says, is the beginning of G-d's rule as king, which commenced with the creation of Adam.

Why is it that the kingship of G-d, so to speak, did not begin until the creation of humankind? Humankind has the ability to reason, to apply logic, and to make choices. The path which a person wants to follow is in his hands. He can choose to accept the rule of G-d, and conform his actions to the word of G-d. A person can also choose to disregard G-d, and instead follow his own desires and cravings, and pursue a path that is not in accordance with the dictates of G-d. A true king is not a dictator. A king is a ruler whom the people, out of their own free will, have decided to place at their head. A king leads when his subjects accepts his monarchy, and agree to follow his command without being forced to do so. Before the creation of Adam, there were other creations. There were other living creatures. However, none of these creatures had the power to choose G-d as their ruler. Only humankind has the intellectual capacity to make such a choice, one based on free will. Only

with the arrival of Adam could G-d be appropriately "called" king.

Rosh HaShana, therefore, is not just the anniversary of creation. It is also the anniversary of the "start" of G-d's reign over humankind. Our proclamations of G-d's kingship recall that Adam, the first human being, was the first royal subject, who accepted G-d as his king. On Rosh HaShana, our prayers should reaffirm that choice that Adam made. We should express our acceptance of G-d as our King, as the Supreme Being who we stand in judgement before on this day. By expressing our acceptance of G-d as our King, we vividly demonstrate that any actions done by us that were not in accordance with G-d's word were not acts of rebellion. These actions were lapses in our devotion; they were indulgences for which we gave in to our evil inclination, against our better judgement. By expressing our acceptance of G-d as King, we are in essence asking G-d to give us a year befitting subjects who yearn to be loyal, who have strived to be loyal, and whose sins should not be viewed as acts of insurgence, but rather errors which we regret. May each and every one of us merit to see such a year, full of health, happiness, and blessing.