

NO MORE EXCUSES!

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

It's about time we stopped making excuses and took responsibility for who and what we are. It's long overdue. Here we are at the threshold of a new-year and it's all about being honest with ourselves. The degree of our commitment to Torah and Mitzvos will be in direct proportion to how many excuses we make for ourselves in avoiding commitment. The more the excuses, the less the commitment. As Moshe continued his final discourse, he confronted the primary excuses we all use in avoiding commitment and responsibility.

1st & 2nd Aliyot: Moshe presented the entire nation with the basis for our covenant with G-d. Starting with the promise to the forefathers and stretching across 500 years of history, our relationship with G-d had been substantiated through miracle after miracle. Yet, future generations might deny their personal obligation to continue the relationship and its attendant responsibilities. Therefore; Moshe made it absolutely clear that each generation is obligated to educate their children and train them to accept the covenant with G-d. Subsequent generation should not be able to excuse their responsibilities for Torah and Mitzvos due to ignorance.

3rd Aliya: The next excuse Moshe confronted was the modernization of Torah. In every generation there are those who see Torah as archaic and outdated. "Only by grafting new ideas and practices to the stale practices of Torah will Judaism continue to exist and flourish." This excuse for changing Torah's eternal truths will result in the compromise of Torah observance, our land, and our people.

4th & 5th Aliyot: As history will tragically prove, Moshe's warnings would be ignored. Subsequent generations would wonder about the destruction and desolation and, in their search for answers, return to the uncompromised truths and practices of their forefathers.

6th Aliya: As a generation of Baalei Teshuva find their way back, many will be overwhelmed by the seemingly inaccessibility of Torah knowledge. Moshe reassures us that Torah is accessible to all those who truly desire it. Ignorance and a lack of opportunity for learning should never be an excuse.

7th Aliya: Finally, Moshe presented the bottom line. Endowed with free will we must choose properly. In the end, we are responsible for what happens.

Haftorah Summary

The 7th and final Haftorah of Consolation is from Yishaya 61:10 - 63:9. Coming before Rosh Hashana, this selection perfectly focuses us on the intended purpose of the High Holy Days.

We are dependent upon Hashem. He is the source of our protection, well being, and purpose. His constant love and attention is evident in the miracle of our survival and the strength of our limited numbers. As the Navi prepared the hope which allows us to place tragedy in perspective, we prepare ourselves to acknowledge Hashem's providence through Tefilah and justice. There will soon come a time when we, as the Chosen People, will embrace the gift of G-d's special attention. At that time the "...nations will see your righteousness and all the kings your glory..."

Glory and honor are the byproducts of devotion and commitment. Our responsibility in the coming days is to "...recount G-d's mercies and praises..." Our goal is to acknowledge G-d and for G-d to proclaim "...Surely they are my people... (63:8)

Tefilah Changes for the Ten Days of Repentance

Starting with Maariv this coming Sunday evening, the first Tefilah of Rosh Hashana, there are some basic changes in the Shemone Esreh, that must be noted. These changes will stay in affect through Neilah at the conclusion of Yom Kippur. The purpose of these changes is to focus us on the unique nature of our relationship with G-d during the 10 Days of Repentance.

We are told that during these 10 days, starting with Rosh Hashana and ending with Yom Kippur, Hashem is available to hear our pleas for understanding, forgiveness, and mercy. Although G-d is always available to listen to our prayers and concerns, during the next 10 days He will "clear His calendar" so that He is even more available. The philisophical and mathematical difficulties in explaining "more or less available" when describing an all powerfull and timeless entity such as G-d are obvious. However; we, as time bound and mortal beings have no other choice but to describe G-d in familiar and understandable terms.

G-d is the Creator; G-d is King; G-d is Judge. It is true that the judicious and kingly responsibilities of the Creator are constant and never ending. It is true that His unlimited love and compassion allows us 24 hour a day access to His attention and concern. Yet, we need to couch G-d in imagery and terms that are more human and less awesome.

"The Torah speaks in the language of mortals".

Even more so is our need to schedule G-d into our busy lives. Very few of us are actively aware of our ever present and most intimate relationship with G-d. We are content to manage our relationship with Him at given times in specified places. Certainly, when looking to evaluate and renegotiate the terms of that relationship, we need to schedule an appointment. Certainly, if we are to be judged and sentenced for the weighty issues of health and prosperity, we need to have a specified time to focus our total attention and energy. This is what the coming 10-day period is all about. All relationships need periodic tune-ups. The 10 Days of Repentance is our spiritual tune-up with the Mechanic. The changes in the Tefilah capture this concept and focus us on the immediate needs of our relationship with G-d.

The Actual Changes

There are four additions and two changes in the Shmoneh Esreh. The four additions are in the first three brachos and the concluding three brachos of the Shmoneh Esreh. It's best to pay attention to the siddur and follow the published instructions.

The idea is to include in the first three standard blessings, that begin every Shmoneh Esreh, the focus of the Yomim Noraim. The first blessing brings to the forefront that we assume the right of speaking directly to the Creator because we are the grandchildren of Avrohom, Yitzchak, and Yakov. We use "proteksia" to get in the front door. At the same time we accept that our "Yichus - lineage" is the best argument in support of our requests for "life". Therefore; we include this understanding in the 1st blessing with the words, "Zachreynu L'Chayim - Remember us for life." The underlying theme is humility on our part, and dependency upon others and Hashem for the future.

The second blessing describes the might of the Creator, Whom we are addressing, and we include a second addition praising the uniqueness of G-d's mercy. The verse "Mee Chamocha - Who is like You" describes the G-dliness of a Creator who will do almost anything to insure life for His children.

The first of the changes takes place in the 3rd blessing, that is also standard for every Shmoneh Esreh. This bracha describes the sanctity and uniqueness of G-d. Therefore; we exchange the description of the Creator as " G-d who is holy" to the "King who is holy". During this time G-d is first and foremost the King / Judge, and it is imperative that we refer to Him by the proper designation. Because this is a change in the actual bracha, if we forget to make the change we must repeat the Shmoneh Esreh. If we forget the other change or any or all of the four additions we do not repeat the Shmoneh Esreh.

The 2nd change is in the 11th blessing and applies to the weekday prayers only. The change focuses us on the concept of justice by eliminating the adjectives of "love and righteousness". The theme of justice is included even without the change, and therefore doesn't necessitate repeating the Shmoneh Esreh, if we should forget.

The final two additions are placed in the last three Brachos of the Shmoneh Esreh. The underlying theme of those blessings is appreciation and acknowledgment of the constancy of Hashem's benevolence, and the opportunity to speak directly to Hashem. We are grateful for being the Chosen People with the permission to address the Creator directly and regularly, and we express this understanding as the standard closing to our audience with the Creator. Therefore, we include in this closing our plea for good life and happiness for ourselves, our families, and all of the Jewish people. This we recognize as an extension of G-d's love and concern.

The coming Ten Days of Repentance should be discussed and viewed seriously. We are unique among all nations in how we understand the concept of the "New Year" and the yearly opportunity to establish a stronger and more intimate relationship with the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

As much as the customs and expectations of this time direct us to our personal relationship with G-d, His expectation is for us to spend as much, if not more, time and energy rebuilding our personal relationships with each other.

May the coming period of time be filled with growth and understanding in all our relationships. It's really up to each one of us, so let's do it together.

The Rosh Hashanah Musaf - an overview

The Musaf service incorporates the main Mitzvah of the day, the sounding of the shofar. It is organized in three basic parts. At the onset of Musaf the Brachot on the Shofar will be made, followed by the shofar being sounded 30 times. During the repetition of the Amidah, the shofar will be sounded another 30 times, broken up into 3 soundings of 10 blasts each. At the conclusion of the Musaf, the shofar will be sounded a total of 40 times broken up into 30 and a final 10 blasts.

The reason for a total of 100 blasts has to do with the mother of the evil general Sisra, who cried because of her son's death 100 times. The manner in which the blasts are carried out relates to the minimum fulfillment of the Mitzvah, as well as the 3 basic themes of the Musaf davening.

The minimum requirement is the first 30 blasts. These are a combination of notes that accommodate all the different opinions as to how the shofar should be sounded.

The next 30 follow the 3 themes of the Musaf. 1. Malchios - G-d as King; 2. Zichronos - G-d remembering all deeds as well as the merits of the forefathers; 3. Shofros - the concept of the shofar as found in the scriptures.

At the conclusion of each theme, the shofar is sounded 10 times. The final 40 blasts are intended to complete the compliment of 100 blasts.

The various sounds of the shofar are intended to imitate crying or sighing. Much is written on this theme, but succinctly put, we view our day in court as awesomely fearful, yet hopeful. The emotions are running high and they are right at the surface. The shofar is the collective cry of the Jewish people as they approach the Judge of Judges with the simple plea, "forgive us, not because we are deserving, but because you are our father; and a parent has no choice but to forgive.

The Shofar "Ten"

The ten messages of the Shofar as explained by Rav Sadiah Gaon

1. . Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of creation and G-d's mastery over creation. The sounding of the shofar are the trumpets proclaiming the coronation of G-d as King over all.
2. . The decree of a King is heralded by a trumpet blast. G-d who is King decrees, "Improve your ways!"
3. . It reminds us of the giving of the Torah and encourages us to rededicate ourselves to our

original covenant with G-d.

4. . The blasts of the Shofar bring to mind the ancient words of all the Prophets who directed us with loving encouragement and criticism. Their words had the awakening quality of a shofar blast.
5. . The sounds of battle and the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash are recreated in the blasts of the shofar. We fervently pray that this year G-d should deem us worthy of rebuilding His home and returning us to Eretz Yisroel.
6. . The ram that replaced Yitzchak on the Alter is framed in the blasts of the shofar. We remind ourselves and G-d of the extraordinary merits and devotion of that moment. Tradition has it that it is the shofar from that very same ram that will be sounded upon the arrival of Mashiach.
7. . The warning blasts meant to awaken the sleeping to the dangers of attack. For us it is a wake up call to do Teshuva and avert the dangers of the growing distance in our relationship with the Creator.
8. . Tzefania the Prophet refers to the final judgment day as "...a day of the shofar..." Today's blasts are a warning of that impending moment.
9. . The shofar reminds us of the coming of Mashiach. "...the Great Shofar will be sounded..."
Yishaya 27:13
10. . It reminds us of Techiyas Hamaysim - the resurrection of the dead. Yishaya 18:3

Good Shabbos.

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