

ROSH HASHANA

RABBI M. HOFFMAN – THE FREE FLAME SERVICE  
NEW ROCHELLE, NEW YORK  
(914) 636-7084

I AM AFRAID, TRULY AFRAID. AND, WITH ALL DUE  
RESPECT, YOU SHOULD BE TOO.

ON ROSH HASHANA G-D SITS IN JUDGMENT ON EACH  
OF US. G-D LOOKS AT EACH THING YOU DID AND I DID. G-D  
SCRUTINIZES EACH MOTIVATION. G-D EXAMINES HOW YOU  
AND I SPENT EACH MOMENT. NO RATIONALIZATIONS WORK.  
THIS IS A TIME OF THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH.

WERE YOU A PERFECT PARENT? CHILD, SPOUSE,  
FRIEND, GRANDPARENT, GRANDCHILD, EMPLOYER,  
EMPLOYEE? WERE YOU GREAT? OR JUST GOOD ENOUGH?

AND HOW ABOUT G-D? WERE YOU PERFECT WITH HIM? DID YOU PRAY ENOUGH? THANK HIM ENOUGH?

WE ARE ALL JUDGED ON ROSH HASHANA, WE ARE JUDGED BY A JUST G-D, A G-D WHO WILL DECIDE IN THE END WHO WILL LIVE AND WHO WILL DIE, NOT JUST IN THIS WORLD BUT REMEMBER JUDAISM BELIEVES IN A WORLD TO COME, A WORLD OF INFINITE TIME, A WORLD OF INFINITE REWARD AND PUNISHMENT ALL BASED ON WHAT WE DO HERE. SO I AM SCARED.

IT GETS WORSE. OUR RABBIS TELL US THAT G-D IS NOT A MAN THAT HE ACCEPTS A BRIBE. SO OUR GOOD BEHAVIOR CANNOT WIPE AWAY OUR BAD. IF YOU ARE A

REALLY GOOD PERSON AND YOU DO LOTS OF GOOD DEEDS, THAT'S GREAT AND YOU WILL GET REWARDED FOR THAT. BUT THAT DOES NOT CHANGE THE FACT THAT WE GET PUNISHED FOR THE BAD THINGS WE DO. IF WE ARE GOOD AT ONE THING AND BAD WITH ANOTHER, AND WE WILL GET REWARDED FOR OUR GOOD AT AND G-D FORBID, GET PUNISHED FOR ANY BAD.

I AM SCARED OF THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT AND FRANKLY I HOPE YOU ARE TOO.

IMAGINE YOU ARE STANDING BEFORE G-D, THE BOOK IS OPENED, THE TIME HAS COME TO DEFEND YOUR LIFE. WE FEEL UNEASY. WE FEEL SCARED.

BUT FEAR CAN DEPRESS US, FEAR CAN PARALYZE US.

SO NOTWITHSTANDING THAT WE NEED A GOOD DOSE  
OF FEAR, WE NEED MORE. BUT WHAT DO WE NEED AND  
HOW TO GET THERE?

THERE IS A TECHNIQUE SUGGESTED BY RABBI DR.  
ABRAHAM TWERSKI, ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S LEADING  
PSYCHIATRISTS AND RABBIS.

IMAGINE, SUGGESTS DR TWERSKI THAT A BUSINESS  
MAN HAS RACKED UP HUGE BILLS FOR RAW MATERIALS.  
HE CAN'T PAY. HE CAN DECLARE BANKRUPTCY. BUT  
BANKRUPTCY WILL BE THE DEATH OF HIS BUSINESS. HE  
CALLS UP HIS CREDITORS AND HE SAYS, HONESTLY, "I

DON'T HAVE THE MONEY. ADVANCE ME MORE MONEY. IF YOU DO, I PROMISE, I HAVE GOT A PLAN AND I WILL BE ABLE TO EARN BACK NOT ONLY WHAT YOU ARE LOANING ME NOW, BUT WHAT YOU LENT ME BEFORE." IN OTHER WORDS THE DEBTOR ARGUES THAT IT IS TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE CREDITOR THAT THE LOAN BE EXTENDED.

SIMILARLY, ON ROSH HASHANA WE SAY TO G-D PERHAPS, G-D FORBID, WHEN WE STAND IN JUDGMENT, WE ARE NOT WORTHY. PERHAPS, WHEN WE STAND IN JUDGMENT, OUR SINS OUTWEIGH OUR MERITS. PERHAPS, WHEN WE STAND IN JUDGMENT, WE DO NOT DESERVE ANOTHER YEAR OF LIFE G-D FORBID. BUT THE ONLY WAY

WE CAN DO BETTER AND FIX OURSELVES IS WITH MORE.

WE NEED MORE TIME. WE NEED MORE MONEY. WE NEED

MORE HAPPINESS. IN SHORT, WE NEED MORE LIFE.

WELL, G-D MAY BE MORE MERCIFUL THAN MANY  
CREDITORS, BUT I STILL THINK THAT THERE IS A  
SIMILIARTIY. BECAUSE YOU KNOW WHAT ANY REASONABLE  
CREDITOR WOULD SAY. IN FACT, YOU KNOW WHAT G-D  
WOULD SAY.

“WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE YOU WHY SHOULD THIS YEAR  
BE ANY DIFFERENT THAN LAST? HOW DO I KNOW THAT YOU  
ARE NOT GOING TO TAKE THE TIME THAT I GIVE YOU AND  
JUST DO ALL THE SAME WRONG THINGS AGAIN?”

AND THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF TESHUVA, OF  
RETURNING TO G-D. WE MUST SAY AND WE MUST MEAN  
THAT WE WILL BE DIFFERENT PEOPLE.

YET, THE GOAL SEEMS SO FAR AWAY. WHEN I  
MEASURE MYSELF AGAINST THE JEWISH GREATS AND  
EVEN THE JEWISH NOT SO GREATS, I KNOW I HAVE SO FAR  
TO GO.

AND I KNOW THAT I HAVE TRIED BEFORE AND  
SOMEHOW MY WEAKNESSES ARE STILL HERE. THE SAME  
THINGS I DO WRONG NOW ARE REALLY THE SAME THINGS I  
DID WRONG THE YEAR BEFORE. HOW CAN THINGS BE  
DIFFERENT?

WELL, FIRST I HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN BE DIFFERENT. YOU KNOW, SO OFTEN PEOPLE TELL US THAT CHANGE IS NOT POSSIBLE.

WELL THAT IS ALL A BUNCH OF GARBAGE. WE BELIEVE THAT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. WE BELIEVE THAT CHANGE HAS TO BE POSSIBLE.

NOW I AM NOT SAYING THAT CHANGE IS NATURAL. OBVIOUSLY, THERE IS A HUGE AMOUNT OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE. WE ALL SEEM TO LIKE THINGS THE WAY THEY ARE, EVEN IF THE WAY THEY ARE IS NOT SO GOOD.

WE ARE USED TO OUR LIVES. WE ARE USED TO THE DEVILS WE KNOW. IN FACT, THAT'S AN OLD AND FOOLISH

STATEMENT: THE DEVIL YOU KNOW IS BETTER THAN THE  
DEVIL YOU DON'T. PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF CHANGE.

BUT AS JEWS, WE BELIEVE THAT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE.  
WE BELIEVE IN RADICAL FREE WILL. WE BELIEVE THAT  
PEOPLE CAN AND MUST CHANGE AND DO SO ALL THE TIME.

AFTER ALL, AMONG OUR GREATEST RABBIS WAS RESH  
LAKISH. RESH LAKISH WAS, IN HIS EARLY YEARS, A  
ROBBER.

AND ONE DAY, AS HE WAS ABOUT TO ROB RABBI  
YOCHANAN, A GREAT TALMUDIC SAGE, RABBI YOCHANAN  
TOLD RESH LAKISH HOW MUCH RABBI YOCHANAN ADMIRED  
RESH LAKISH'S STRENGTH. RESH LAKISH, APPARENTLY

WANTING TO RETURN THE FAVOR, TOLD RABBI YOCHANAN  
HOW MUCH HE ADMIRER RABBI YOCHANAN'S LOOKS.

RAV YOCHANAN SENSING AN OPENING, TOLD RESH  
LAKISH THAT RAV YOCHANAN'S SISTER WAS FAR MORE  
BEAUTIFUL THAN RABBI YOCHANAN WAS. HE PROMISED  
RESH LAKISH THAT IF RESH LAKISH WENT AND REPENTED  
AND LEARNED TORAH THAT HE COULD MARRY RAV  
YOCHANAN'S SISTER.

SO, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, RESH LAKISH WENT AND  
REPENTED FROM BEING A HIGHWAYMAN AND BECAME ONE  
OF THE GREATEST TORAH SCHOLARS OF ALL TIME. ALL

FOR THE PASSION HE HAD FOR A WOMAN THAT HE NEVER  
SAW.

NOW, IF RADICAL CHANGE OF THAT TYPE IS  
ACCESSIBLE TO US MERELY BECAUSE OF THE PASSION WE  
CAN HAVE FOR A PERSON OF THE OPPOSITE SEX,  
OBVIOUSLY CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. INDEED, ROSH HASHANA  
RECOGNIZES THAT CHANGE IS BOTH POSSIBLE AND A  
MIRACLE FROM G-D. AFTER ALL, IT WAS ON ROSH  
HASHANA, THAT SARA, WIFE OF ABRAHAM, FINALLY  
CONCEIVED THE CHILD THEY HAD YEARNED FOR FOR SO  
MANY YEARS.

NOW, ACCORDING TO THE TORAH, SARA WAS 90 YEARS OLD. FURTHER, ACCORDING TO RABBINIC LEGEND, SARA DID NOT HAVE A UTERUS.

SO A WOMAN WHO IS 90 YEARS OLD WHO DID NOT EVEN HAVE A UTERUS WAS CAPABLE OF CONCEIVING A CHILD. AND WHEN DID SHE DO SO? ON ROSH HASHANA.

DO WE NEED ANY GREATER PROOF THAT ROSH HASHANA IS A TIME OF MIRACLES THAN THAT TORAH READING WHICH WE READ TODAY?

SO WHETHER YOU THINK, WITH SO MANY PSYCHOLOGIST THAT CHANGE IS SOMETHING THAT ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS REASON OUR WAY TO, OR WHETHER YOU

THINK THAT CHANGE REQUIRES A MIRACLE, EITHER  
COURSE IS OPEN TO YOU ON ROSH HASHANA.

WE KNOW THAT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. WE KNOW THAT  
EVEN IF CHANGE REQUIRES A MIRACLE IT IS POSSIBLE.  
THEREFORE, THERE ARE NO EXCUSES.

WE CAN CHANGE. WE MUST CHANGE. AND UPON  
RESOLVING TO CHANGE, WE CAN ASK G-D FOR A GOOD  
YEAR.