

# Teachers' Guide for Rosh Hashanah Source Sheet

## 1 2

Historically Rosh Hashanah is the time of the Creation of Adam and Eve (according to Rabbi Eliezer – see source 9). It was also on this date, while Moshe was on Mount Sinai praying for forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf, that G-d's Mercy was shown and He heard and answered Moshe's prayers. The days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur have been set aside as days for forgiveness ever since.

The Torah, in describing Rosh Hashanah, mentions only the sacrifices and the festival nature of the day, and the blowing of the Shofar. The concept of judgment and 'New Year' does not appear in the Torah, but is first explained in the Mishna (sources 4-5).

## 3 4

This section of Nechemiah describes the return to Israel from Babylonian slavery. This was a new beginning for Israel and the Jews. The refugees who returned from exile were mainly poor, uneducated and many of them were intermarried. In this section Ezra inspires and educates the people to observe the mitzvot and divorce their non Jewish wives. From this beginning the new Jewish state was created with the Second Temple as its focus. It is appropriate that this occurred on Rosh Hashanah, the time of Creation and new beginnings.

## 5

Rosh Hashanah is one of several New Years that have halachic significance. It seems that there is no direct connection between the 'New Year' of Rosh Hashanah and its significance as 'Day of Judgment'. (There does not necessarily have to be any connection between the two. For example the New Year for trees is on 15<sup>th</sup> Shevat but the Day of Judgment for trees is on Shavuot). According to the Mishna, Rosh Hashanah is the New Year for agricultural and seasonal reasons rather than because it was the day of Creation. See the Nesivos Sholom (source 19) for a deeper connection between creation, New Year and judgment.

## 6

The Mishna describes the four annual Days of Judgment. How these relate and connect to the final judgment after a person's death or the judgment of the world at the end of days, (or even the relationship between judgment for crops and the judgment for the people who eat those crops) is beyond the scope of this source sheet.

On each of these days of judgment we offer (in the Temple) something relevant. On Pesach the Omer of barley (crops). On Shavuot the Two Loaves of wheat (which in certain respects is considered similar to a tree in Talmudic literature). On Succot there is a special water offering poured on the altar (symbolizing rain) as well as rituals with willow branches, which require large quantities of water to grow. On Rosh Hashanah we offer our lives (our breath) with the Shofar blasts.

## 7 8

There seems to be a contradiction between these two sources. We do not sing Hallel because of the trepidation of the judgment. On the other hand, we dress nicely in white clothes to show that we are confident that the judgment will be favorable.

One answer is that there is a difference between happiness and confidence. Being happy is inappropriate on the day before judgment. By displaying confidence, however, we make ourselves worthy of a good outcome. Just as the 'apple and honey' and other *simonim* that we eat on Rosh Hashanah demonstrate our confidence of a positive outcome, so too our clothes and behavior demonstrate this same confidence.

## 9

The Ran explains that according to the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer that the world was created in Tishrei, Rosh Hashanah is an appropriate time for judgment because Adam was judged with mercy on that day. He asks, however, according to Rabbi Yehoshua, who says that the world was created in Nissan, why should Rosh Hashanah be a day of judgment? The Ran gives two answers. Firstly it gives people time to take stock, examine their deeds and repent before Yom Kippur (and for the righteous, who don't need G-d's mercy, they can be already judged and sealed for life). Secondly, he says, perhaps while Moshe was on Mount Sinai praying for forgiveness for the Jewish people from the sin of the Golden Calf, there was a change in G-d's attitude on Rosh Hashanah which preceded the full forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

(See diagram after source 17 for a time line of events on Mount Sinai).

**10 11**

Our prayers on Rosh Hashanah reflect the duality of creation. The world was created in potential, and actuality. Rabbeinu Tam explains that on Rosh Hashanah we are commemorating the 'thought' of creation, the 'remembrance of the first day'. From our perspective the physical creation did not occur until six months later in Nissan. However, since G-d is beyond time (and created time when He created the universe) we can understand that these two events occurred simultaneously, but when they were brought into creation (from our perspective) they were separated in time.

**12 13**

The Talmud and the Midrash have alternative chronologies of the sixth day of creation:

Only the last 4 hours are the same in both lists. The difference of the description of the final hour is crucial to our understanding of and relationship with Rosh Hashanah. The mercy shown according to the Midrash is the basis of our hope and prayer on the 'day of judgment'. All the literature ignores the Talmud's version which is not the result we hope for and expect from the judgment of Rosh Hashanah.

**14 15 16**

Mankind is the 'completion' of the world because it is the purpose of creation. Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of judgment and mercy. We have two very different explanations of what that mercy was.

The Aruch Hashulchan understands that mercy is defined as spreading punishment over time. (This also explains how G-d 'forgave' the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf, yet the Talmud says that we are still paying the price for that sin.

The Shlah asks why Adam wasn't forgiven completely, since he spent 130 years repenting and trying to fix his sin. His answer is based on the kabbalistic understanding of the purpose of creation, which is for G-d to give of His Goodness to His creations (in this case mankind). In the Garden of Eden before the sin, Adam and Eve's bodies were not completely physical. Therefore they would have been able to earn that goodness without going through the process of dying. After the sin, only the soul is able to enjoy that goodness and only after separating from the body. Therefore death is not a punishment but a necessary consequence of the sin. The mortality of humanity shows G-d's mercy in that it allows us, after death, to enjoy the ultimate goodness which is the purpose of creation.

## 17 18

Historically Rosh Hashanah was the time of our freedom from the slavery of Egypt (even though we didn't leave until Pesach). This freedom is recreated every year on Rosh Hashanah and symbolized in the Shofar blasts, which represent freedom from the Evil Urge, freedom from sin and G-d as King; free to do as He pleases with us and with the world.

## 19

The entire world is judged on Rosh Hashanah, even things that have no free choice. Clearly, therefore, the judgment is not about whether a person has made the right choices in the past year, or has done the right things.

Everything in Creation was made to fulfill a Divine Plan. On the anniversary of Creation G-d prepares an 'annual report' giving a breakdown of how well the 'company' of the universe is doing. There is a complete 'stock-taking' of each component of creation to evaluate its efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the 'corporate goals'.

The judgment of Rosh Hashanah is not judging 'good' or 'bad', which are free choice issues, but rather the yearly 'stockholders meeting' where each component of the 'company' must justify its effectiveness over the past 12 months, and for the coming year.

(for another d'var Torah based on this idea see:

[http://www.torahlab.org/calendar/article/a\\_beginning\\_a\\_middle\\_and\\_another\\_beginning/](http://www.torahlab.org/calendar/article/a_beginning_a_middle_and_another_beginning/))

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