



# NYBR Chaplaincy Newsletter

## Looking Out — Looking In: Insights of Judaism

Volume 3, Number 1

Elul 5769 & Tishrei 5770 September - October 2009

### Greetings from the New York Board of Rabbis and Your Chaplain



The 700 plus members of The New York Board of Rabbis send you greetings as the Jewish New Year begins.

This newsletter launches the third year of *Looking Out—Looking In: Insights of Judaism*. We intend to provide a range of materials for you, the reader, in the coming year. Some of the information included will be more basic, to make sure that each reader has a fundamental understanding of the various Jewish holy days. Some readings will be advanced to further encourage spiritual growth. **All the articles are intended to be appropriate for ALL Jews, whether Conservative, Hasidic, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Reform or Unaffiliated.** The NYBR doors are open wide and this newsletter reflects that openness.

This year we are reaching out to many of the chaplains with whom the NYBR works closely. A number of them have contributed to this edition. **May you and your family be written and sealed for a good, healthy and happy 5770. Shanah Tovah**

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#### Thoughts for Month of Tishrei

#### Month of Inward focus on Renewal & Inner Growth (*Teshuvah*)

**From:** Gateway to Happiness; Rabbi Zelig Pliskin; Aish HaTorah Publication (1993)  
**Recommended by:** Rabbi Zvi Max – New York State DOCS Chaplain

#### On Change

“Rabbi Chayim Mordechai Katz, the late *Rosh Hayeshiva* (Principal) of *Telshe Yeshivah* (school of learning), used to say that even in spiritual matters one ought to ‘take pleasure in his portion.’ It is very easy focus on your lack of Torah knowledge, lack of good deeds, lack of concentration during prayers, faults and errors. When one does so, one becomes saddened and lacks the energy and enthusiasm to accomplish more. Hence, you should also remember how much you have learned (even a small amount is precious), the good deeds you have done, the time you did concentrate during prayers, and your good character traits. As long as you refrain from arrogance and conceit, this will supply you with the needed encouragement to continue improving.”

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### 5770 High Holiday Schedule

- September 18  
Rosh Hashanah begins at sundown
- September 19 & 20  
Rosh Hashanah
- September 26 — Shabbat Shuvah
- September 27 – Yom Kippur  
begins at sundown with Kol Nidrei
- September 28 — Yom Kippur
- October 2 — Sukkot  
begins at sundown
- October 3 & 4 — First two days of Sukkot
- October 5 — October 9 Chol Ha'moed  
Sukkot (intermediate days)
- October 10 — Shemini Atzeret
- October 11 — Simchat Torah

## SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
<i>Sept</i> <i>14</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>19 RH</i>	<i>20 RH</i>
<i>21</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>27 KN</i>
<i>28 YK</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Oct</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3 SK</i>	<i>4 SK</i>
<i>5 CM</i>	<i>6 CM</i>	<i>7 CM</i>	<i>8 CM</i>	<i>9 CM</i>	<i>10 SA</i>	<i>11 ST</i>

## Rosh Hashanah - The Jewish New Year (September 19 and 20, 2009)

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is observed as the time when a new chapter in life is written, all our lives are evaluated, when the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are punished. Hopefully, during the Ten Days of Repentance, we redeem ourselves through the performance of good deeds and humbly turning our hearts to God's will. For these reasons, Rosh Hashanah is also known in Hebrew as *Yom Hadin*, Day of Judgment.

The holiday begins, as all other Jewish Holidays, at sunset of the preceding day (Rosh Hashanah begins this year sunset on September 18). This tradition of starting our days at sunset is according to the sequence of creation described in Genesis 1:5, "And it was evening and it was morning: One day." A special benediction is recited over the lighting of the candles, followed by the *Sh'hekheyanu*, the traditional prayer of thanksgiving. The date in the Hebrew calendar of Rosh Hashanah is the first day of the month of Tishrei.

The prayer book used during both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known by its Hebrew name - the *mahzor* - literally, 'cycle.' Its liturgies include selections from the *Torah* (written law) and from the ancient teachings of Judaism known as the *Talmud* (oral law), as well as *piyutim*, religious poems composed over the centuries by rabbis and scholars, by religious philosophers, and by great Sephardi and Ashkenazi poets such as Yehudah Halevi, Solomon Ibn Gabirol and Elizer Kalir.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 1)

## On *Teshuvah* (renewal, inner growth, repentance)

- “Not a single person in the world never makes a mistake. There is no shame in a person’s saying he made a mistake. But to stubbornly refuse to admit you made a mistake is shameful.” [Pele Yoatz by Rabbi Elizer Papu, Kushtandia, 1824] Page 221
- “Anyone who works on self-improvement will find faults. An honest look at ourselves will show we are not on as high a spiritual level as we thought. Do not be excessively upset about this for it is a universal experience and should not disturb your peace of mind to the degree it will prevent you from further growth.” Page 223
- Rabbi Mordechai of Lekhivitz said in the name of his father, “*Teshuvah* (Repentance) should be with joy. If repentance is sincere, the person will be joyful even though he is humble. If repentance is insincere, the person will be depressed and irritable and will react with anger toward people who speak with him.” Pg 229
- “The Dubner Magid offered the following parable: A king owned a magnificent diamond which accidentally sustained a deep scratch. The royal diamond cutters said no amount of polishing would remove the flaw entirely. Bone one expert volunteered, “I can rectify the flaw in a manner that will render the diamond more valuable than before.” The king told him to go ahead and with great skill he engraved petals of a rose on the diamond. The deep scratch served as the stem of the flower. Similarly, said the Dubner Magid, skill can transform negative traits into virtues. A person can utilize his mistakes and faults in positive manner so that he will gain even more than he would have otherwise.” Page 226

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(Continued from page 2)

Rosh Hashanah is also known in rabbinic literature as the day on which the world was created; therefore, it is referred to as the birthday of creation. Three times during the worship services we repeat the declaration: “This day the world was called into being; this day all creatures of the universe stand in judgment before Thee.” This universal aspect of the Jewish New Year is emphasized also in the Holy Day prayer recited several times: “May the whole of humanity be united in a single covenant.” What a majestic ideal we encounter here! We pray not for ourselves alone; in Judaism we acknowledge that the faith of humankind and the destiny of every human being as a child of God are bound in a single common lot. Therefore, another Hebrew name for Rosh Hashanah is *Yom Ha’zikaron*, the Day of Remembrance, when one remembers one’s duty to God and one’s neighbors.



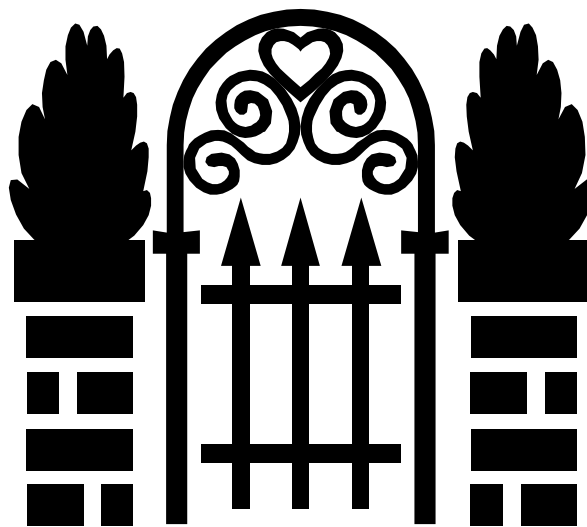
Yet still another Hebrew name for the holiday is *Yom Te’ruah*, Day of Sounding of the Shofar. A shofar is a ceremonial ram’s horn which is sounded on Rosh Hashanah during the services. The sound of the shofar is a wake up call reminding us that Rosh Hashanah carries a personal challenge and an intimate message to every individual. Often, the sound of the shofar expresses prayers and feelings within ourselves which words cannot convey. The mitzvah of the day is to hear the sounding of shofar, not to actually sound it. On Shabbat traditionally there is no sounding of the shofar.

Holiday bread known as *Challah* is often circular this time of the year to remind us of a crown, the majesty of the Creator and the continuous nature of life. Traditionally we dip the bread, apples or other food in honey to express the wish that the coming year be sweet.

## Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement (September 28)

Yom Kippur falls in the Hebrew calendar on the tenth of Tishrei and is the high point of the penitential season. It is one of the most sacred day in our calendar. It is often called *Shabbos Shabboson* – Sabbath of Sabbaths. The original theme of Yom Kippur is stated in Leviticus (the third book of the Bible) 16:30 – “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before HaShem.”

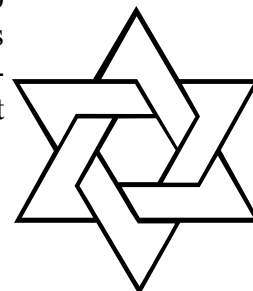
We should have already begun turning away from our old ways and toward God; a turning toward the positive people in our lives and away from those that may have led us astray; and most important, a turning toward our true selves. It is important to remember that Yom Kippur is not only about turning away from the negative but is a positive turning as well. Yom Kippur is supposed to lead from inner thought to outer deed. Hopefully we can translate our belief into a positive behavior on this path of return.



The Gates of Repentance are always open.

*Vidui* – Confession. Judaism believes very strongly in personal responsibility. Seeking such spiritual and moral cleansing requires no priest, no agent, no lawyer, no rabbi, and no mediator to intercede for her/him. Every person becomes his/her own pleader, her/his own defense attorney. Jewish tradition asks that every person approach God with a “new heart and new spirit” with the hope that God will tip the scales toward forgiving mercy. In Judaism the willing and sincere heart is the golden key that opens the palace of eternity as an answer to prayer. It is important to remember that before we ask God for forgiveness, we seek it from those we have wronged even if we believe that we were right. It is a recognition of our imperfections — something all of us should examine.

We fast on Yom Kippur in obedience to the biblical command, “And you shall afflict your souls.” However, refraining from food and water is not sufficient in itself. The purpose of the fast is to elevate us above our mundane daily practices, to cast out our faults, to relinquish all acts that offend God’s law and to substitute *ma’asim tovim* (good acts) in their place. A powerful formula is suggested in our liturgy for the achievement of this high purpose: *Te’shuvah* (Repentance), *Te’fillah* (Prayer) and *Tze-dakah* (charity – righteous giving). These make us worthy to converse with the Divine Spirit and to establish a closer kinship with God. Yom Kippur reminds us that these three actions ARE within the grasp of everyone. These actions constitute a true blueprint for anyone who is determined to build a better life – no matter what circumstances confront us.



"May you be inscribed for a happy, a healthy and a sweet new year!"  
Solution to Word Search:

## The Ten Days of Repentance

The period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known by two special phrases: (1) *Aseres ye'mai te'shuva*, "Ten Days of Penitence," and (2) *Chesbon hanefesh*, "Taking stock of the soul." This is the period to look within and repent with the hope and prayer of being sealed in the Book of Life. The Sabbath during this period is known as *Shabbat Shuvah* – the Sabbath of Turning – and is named after a verse in the *haftarah* (prophetic reading recited after the Torah is read) "Return O Israel to *HaShem*, your G-d" (Hosea 14:2). It is sometimes also known as *Shabbat Teshuvah* – Sabbath of Repentance.

As Yom Kippur approaches, all Jews are expected to seek forgiveness from any persons they may have wronged and offer forgiveness unconditionally in return. Repairing relationships with those whom we have hurt or may have hurt us should be given priority. Prior to sunset on the eve of Yom Kippur a festive meal is customary. As we conclude the meal, the mood grows somber. *Yizkor* (memorial) candles are lit in memory of the deceased.



## Sukkot-Sukkos – Festival of Booths (October 3—9, 2009)



On the eve of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei, four days after Yom Kippur the holiday of *Sukkot/Sukkos* begins. Known as the period of rejoicing, the holiday of joy, *Sukkot* has this significance because it is celebrated during harvest time and symbolizes the hope that the coming year will be one of growth. As we sit in the simple *sukkah*, we are reminded that Judaism teaches us that true happiness is found not in what we have, but whom we have in our lives. It is the origin of the universal Holiday of Thanksgiving.

*Sukkot* is one of three pilgrimage festivals (Passover and Shavuot are the others). *Sukkot* celebrates the fall harvest and reminds us of the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert, using thatched structures as shelters. Therefore, Jews throughout the ages have been commanded to build a booth, or *sukkah*, in celebration of this holiday. Further, this holiday is also known as the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles. The holiday also reminds Jews of God's awesome nature and humanity's vulnerability.

The *sukkah* is a small booth covered by branches of trees and plants, so that the sky and stars are visible above. During the first seven days of the holiday, meals are eaten in the *sukkah* in the company of family and friends. We also make an effort to invite those who are alone and in need of human contact.

*Sukkot* is marked by the use of the lulav and the etrog (a citrus fruit). The lulav is made up of a palm tree branch surrounded by leaves from myrtle and willow trees.



(Continued from page 3)

## On Prayer

“If your mind strays while praying, do not give up trying to concentrate. Rather, as soon as you realize that you are not concentrating on what you are saying at that moment begin concentrating.” (Vilna Gaon – rabbi who died in 1797 and whose comments have been published on nearly every one of the important Jewish classical sources; cited in *Chayai Hamussar*, vol 1., page 151) Pg 225

“A relative of the Chofetz Chaim [a great rabbi & author who died in 1933] once complained he was unable to pray with proper concentration. The Chofetz Chaim replied, “During a regular season, merchants carefully examine the grain they wish to buy. But during a drought they are happy to buy what they can and do not scrutinize the grain carefully. Likewise, in previous generations when everyone prayed, the quality of the prayers was carefully scrutinized. But during the present generation the examination is more lenient.” (page 227)

## Shemini Atzeret (October 10, 2009)

*Shemini Atzeret* is the holiday which is celebrated on the eighth day, counting from the beginning of Sukkot. In Israel, it is celebrated for one day, which is a combination of *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*. In the lands outside of Israel, including here in the United States, *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* are separated, with *Shemini Atzeret* being celebrated on the eighth day, and *Simchat Torah* being on the ninth day. Reform Jews often follow the Israeli calendar. *Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah* is considered separate from Sukkot so no *lulav* or *etrog* are used on these days.

On *Shemini Atzeret*, in addition to the *Yizkor* memorial prayers, a special prayer for rain is recited. Our ancestors, who were predominately farmers, depended upon rain to facilitate the growth of their crops for the year ahead. However, this prayer also symbolizes our realization that not only economic fate is dependent on God, but our entire destiny.

## Simchat Torah (October 11, 2009)



The ninth day of this period is known as *Simchat Torah*, the day of rejoicing in the Law. It is the most joyous day of the whole festival and one of the most colorful Jewish holidays. On the eve of *Simchat Torah*, and again in the service the following morning, all the Scrolls of the Torah are taken from the Ark and carried around the synagogue in a procession. Thus we show our love for the Torah and recognize it as our most prized possession.

This is the day on which we read the last chapter of the Book of *Devarim/Deuteronomy*, the Fifth Book of the Torah/Bible, and immediately thereafter, we begin reading the first chapter of the Torah in the Book of *Bereshet/Genesis*. This symbolizes that for the Jew the Torah never ends, and that it remains a source of learning and living Judaism.

### High Holiday Word Search by Rabbi Susan Gulack

M	A	H	A	R	V	E	S	T	A	S	H	L	I	C	H	M	Y
Y	O	T	N	E	M	E	N	O	T	A	U	M	Y	R	T	L	E
B	W	I	L	L	O	W	E	K	I	N	S	C	E	C	N	A	D
R	I	S	B	E	D	F	F	K	O	R	A	H	N	A	P	P	H
T	S	H	U	V	A	H	P	U	S	H	T	O	O	B	Y	N	A
C	S	R	O	S	H	H	A	S	H	A	N	A	H	,	H	E	R
I	A	E	T	A	E	E	G	A	L	P	L	I	F	E	T	W	O
T	C	I	L	A	H	Y	O	R	U	P	P	I	K	M	O	Y	T
R	R	A	D	U	M	E	R	C	Y	L	B	O	O	K	N	E	T
O	I	F	N	A	L	D	T	A	S	E	W	E	L	U	L	A	V
N	F	O	R	G	I	V	E	N	E	S	S	H	O	F	A	R	☺
E	I	U	T	N	E	W	Y	W	A	S	H	A	L	L	I	F	T
E	C	R	A	R	!	H	A	R	O	T	T	A	H	C	M	I	S
R	E	P	E	N	T	A	N	C	E	H	A	K	A	D	E	Z	T

### When you circle all the words in the puzzle, a message will remain!

(Note: Many letters are used more than once. If you need help, the words are at the bottom. The solution is found on page 4.)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the month before Tishrei. It is a time of preparation. During Elul it is traditional to make lists of people we have offended and ask for \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ literally means the \_\_\_\_\_ of the year. It occurs on the first and second days of \_\_\_\_\_. On Rosh Hashanah we gather to hear the \_\_\_\_\_, which is made of a \_\_\_\_\_'s horn. This reminds us of the \_\_\_\_\_ that was offered in place of Isaac. We ask God to have \_\_\_\_\_ on us for the sake of our ancestors. We hope to be written for a good \_\_\_\_\_ year in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

In the *U'netanah Tokef* prayer we say that \_\_\_\_\_ (repentance), *T'fillah* (prayer) and \_\_\_\_\_ (charity) avert the evil decree. (*Tzedakah* literally means righteousness, although we usually think of it as money given to charity.)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Prayer) literally means to judge oneself. We must examine our deeds and commit to changing our ways which is called *T'shuvah* - \_\_\_\_\_. On Rosh Hashanah we eat \_\_\_\_\_ dipped in \_\_\_\_\_ in hopes for a sweet \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is the ceremony where we symbolically throw our sins into a body of water. "Though your sins be as red as Scarlet, I will \_\_\_\_\_ them as white as wool."

The time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is called the \_\_\_\_\_ Days of Repentance, *Asseret Yemai Tshuvah*. On \_\_\_\_\_ we gather to ask for forgiveness. It is called the Day of \_\_\_\_\_. It is traditional to \_\_\_\_\_, not to wear leather, nor to bathe. When we come home at the end of Yom Kippur it is traditional to start building a \_\_\_\_\_ right away. This is because Sukkot starts \_\_\_\_\_ days after Yom Kippur, on the 15th of Tishrei.

On Sukkot we \_\_\_\_\_ in the Sukkah which are \_\_\_\_\_ which people lived in at the time of the harvest. Sukkot is called the Festival of the \_\_\_\_\_, because this is the time of year when the crops are brought in from the fields. We take the four species called the \_\_\_\_\_ and the Etrog and hold them together as we pray for rain. The lulav consist of a branch from a \_\_\_\_\_ tree (which grows dates), two branches from a \_\_\_\_\_ tree, which grows near water, and three branches from myrtle bushes. The \_\_\_\_\_ is also called a Citron. Palm is tall and straight like a spine, willow leaves are shaped like lips and \_\_\_\_\_ leaves are shaped like eyes. The Etrog (\_\_\_\_\_) represents the heart. This reminds us that we serve God with our whole body.

The High Holy Day season ends with *Shmini Atzeret* (the eighth day of assembly) and \_\_\_\_\_ (rejoicing with the Torah). On this holiday we take the Torah Scrolls out of the ark and \_\_\_\_\_ with them. We also finished reading the book of *D'varim*, and began the \_\_\_\_\_ again.

Elul Rosh Hashanah forgiveness head Tishrei shofar ram sacrifice mercy new book life T'shuvah Tzedakah T'fillah Repentance apples honey year Tashlich wash ten Yom Kippur Atonement fast Sukkot four eat booths Harvest Lulav palm willow Etrog Myrtle citron Simchat Torah dance Torah

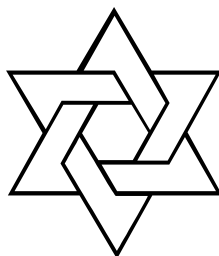
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of New York



(Continued from page 6)

“The Chofetz Chaim used to say that when you feel heavy-hearted, you should speak to the Almighty just as a child speaks to his father. One does not need formal prayers for this, rather speak to your Heavenly Father in any language you wish.” Pg 255

### On Despair & Hope

“Even when you are in the midst of great suffering, do not give up hope’ (*Pirke Avos* 1:7; Rashi) Life situations might at times seem so bleak and desperate that you see no hope in the future. You tell yourself things like, ‘My life is a terrible mess and I do not think it will ever improve.’ Such thinking leads to very painful feelings. The Sages advised us never to give up hope. Ask yourself, ‘What proof do I have that things will never improve?’ while you might not have a guarantee that things will be better, you can never be certain that they will not improve. It is ludicrous to give up hope when in a very short time your whole situation might change dramatically for the better.”

Pg 372

## A Lament by the Inmates at Coxsackie CF. Written on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, 5769

At last our past has caught up with us.

Because of our desires we have lost our freedom.

Cry me a river, build me a bridge and get over it!

Despair and depression, deep loneliness fill our days.

Every day is filled with memories of the past.

Future is what we are longing for.

Green is the color I'm sick of seeing.

History has repeated itself again and again.

Israel has been destroyed and we,  
too have repeated our shortcomings.

Justice does not always prevail.

Keep doing the same thing, keep getting the same result.

Long days alone in my cell.

Must we dwell on suffering?

N o-o-o-o! We must keep hope alive!

Overcome it!

Prevail over it!

Questioning our past actions leads to better choices.

Realizing repeated choices are what  
lead to re-incarceration.

Save us, Oh Lord, from ourselves! *Shema Yisrael!*

Thank you for trusting us with another day.

Understand how far we have come.

Victorious with Your help.

We will overcome our pasts

X out our past mistakes.

Yearn for a better future.

Zealously, we turn to You!