

Joyful Trepidation

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The holiday of Rosh Hashanah demonstrates the uniqueness of Judaism and the Jewish view of life. Virtually all people and cultures take note of a *new year* and mark it in a particular manner.

Most of them approach this time as one of celebrations and partying, as an opportunity to engage in all the physical and emotional indulgences that excite people. Why does the passage of one year and the onset of a new one generate mindless and drunken excess?

The *Jewish* New Year, Rosh HaShanah, is entirely different. While it retains the status of a Festival, it is best described as a time of *seriousness*. According to Judaism, one can be joyful and serious at the same time.

There is a deep and intense *hidden* joy that lies at the heart of Rosh HaShanah. For this is the time of the coronation of the King of the Universe. At first glance, the very notion that man *crowns* G-d is absurd. Hashem is the absolute Ruler of the world by virtue of His being its Creator.

This is expressed in the “*Adon Olam*” composition, whose opening words proclaim, “Master of the Universe Who Reigned before any creature was created.” He is the ultimate King by virtue of His Existence.

Let us be absolutely clear: G-d does not in any way *need* nor does He derive any benefit from our *coronation*. Rather, it is *man* who needs the Kingship of G-d. Hashem, in His Mercy, does not *impose* His Rule on man. The goal of Rosh HaShanah is to transform the latent authority of the Creator into a dominant *living* reality that shapes the behavior of human society.

The immediate significance of Rosh HaShanah is that, on it, the world was created. It brings us great joy to acknowledge G-d and to *appreciate* His Infinite Wisdom, as seen in the natural order and in the magnificence of His Torah.

This is a very *different* kind of joy than the one you will find expressed on New Year’s Eve in Times Square. *That* is a superficial, momentary sensation of excitement generated by overrated pleasures and assisted by the intake of alcoholic beverages, which distance a person from *reality*.

Acknowledging Hashem as the Master of the Universe carries with it an element of *concern*, for the most serious consequence of Divine rule is *judgment*. Aversion to this phenomenon—that we are responsible for our actions and will have to give an accounting for them—causes many people to abandon religion altogether. They may believe in G-d, but do not desire His *intruding* too closely into their lives.

In addition to the theme of G-d’s Kingship, Rosh Hashanah is also known as the Day of Judgment. In one of the day’s most moving prayers we intone, “On Rosh Hashanah it will be inscribed and on Yom

Kippur it will be sealed, how many will pass from the earth and how many will be created; who will live and who will die.”

Because of this, the Hallel (joyous songs of praise) is not recited on this holiday or on Yom Kippur, for “the Book of Life and the Book of Death is open before Him and you would sing Hallel?”

However, even this somber realization does not cause these days to lose their celebratory character. They are days of joy mingled with *seriousness*. Even the consciousness that we are being judged by the King of Kings does not bring us *down*.

Indeed, we should even regard this as good fortune. Rabbi Akiva said, “You are fortunate Israel; before Whom do you purify yourselves and *Who* purifies you? The Holy One Blessed is He.”

We are judged by Hashem, Who is infinite in compassion and Whose only purpose is to enable *us* to get closer to *Him* and thereby achieve the *goodness* He has intended for us. May we merit to experience and *enjoy* it. And may this be a wonderful year filled with all of Hashem’s blessings for us and for all of *Klal Yisrael*.

Shabbat Shalom VeShana Tova.