

Points to Ponder  
Rosh Hashana 5775

**Why don't we say Vidui on Rosh Hashana?** - Rav Kook (Midbar Shur) ztl. noted that a student of the late great Rav Saadiah Gaon once observed his Rebbe rolling in the snow in order to engage in a process of Teshuvah (called Gilgul Sheleg). He asked the Rebbe what he had done that made him want to do that. Rav Saadiah answered that he had come to an inn and was refused service. When it became apparent who the guest was, the owner of the inn begged Rav Saadiah for forgiveness for not recognizing who his illustrious guest was. Rav Saadiah felt that if the owner of the inn could be so filled with remorse that he begged forgiveness for not recognizing another mortal how much more so must we be remorseful for not recognizing Hashem's presence. Rav Kook notes that this is what Rosh Hashana is all about. It is the prelude to Selichos –before we recite Vidui we need to be fully clear to whom we are reciting the Vidui.

**Apples on Rosh Hashana** – We know that we dip an apple in the Honey for the sweet new Year but why apples? Rav Zvi Elimelech Shapira ztl. the Tzvi L'Tzaddik, explained that Tapuach (the word for apples) is an abbreviation of the words Tisgalin Pisgamin v'Somrun Chiddushin (reveal the hidden and say new ideas). The Tzvi L'Tzaddik explains that when one offers new Torah ideas s/he is building new worlds in partnership with the Almighty so to speak.. The Talmud explains that according to Rabbi Eliezer, the world was created in Tishrei and so we eat apples in order to remind us to study Torah diligently and create new vistas and build new worlds through Torah study.

**Tears on Rosh Hashana** – There is a debate between the Gra and the Ari as to whether one should shed tears on Rosh Hashana in prayer. Many of the great heroines who pepper Rosh Hashana day seem to shed many tears for different requests supporting the pro-crying position but what leads Elkana (1<sup>st</sup> day Haftorah) and even Hashem (second day Haftorah) to ask Chana and Rachel Imeinu to limit their crying? Rav Dr. Norman Lamm Shlita identified the tears of Sisra's mother as useless tears for opportunities lost. Rav Binyamin Eisenberger Shlita identified the tears of Chana and Rachel Imeinu as tears of Teshukah – of desire – where the desire not to let the hope be gone carry the day. Such tears are good for the Jews...

**Peninah acted L'Shem Shomayim (Haftorah of First day)** – The Talmud tells us that although the Novi is quite harsh in the treatment of Peninah's insulting comments to Chana her co-wife, her intentions were pure. How could that be? What she did was SO hurtful? The Maharal explains that her intentions were pure in order to achieve that which she felt was her Tachlis. Similarly, when two co-wives are tzoros –it is sad indeed – because both enter major competition in order to make sure that she is doing HER Tachlis. Unfortunately, one's Tachlis cannot be built on another's hurt feelings.

**Sit here with the Donkey (Akaida Torah reading of second day)** – Why is the donkey so important to the Akaida story? The Talmud (Pesachim 49b) quotes Rabbi Akiva who used to note that in his early years if he were to see a Talmid chacham he would bite them like a Chamor – like a donkey. Panim Yafos explains that the Donkey can get marrow out of a bone without breaking it. The trick is the stubborn focus of the Donkey on its goal. Same is true of Yisochar who is identified as a donkey due to his pure stubbornness in keeping the word of Hashem. Avraham too, remained stubbornly focus on carrying out the word of Hashem. Like the Donkey, Avraham reminds us that despite the challenges around us, every Jew's ultimate success comes when s/he acts with an eye toward the real goals in life – following the word of Hashem.

**Scaring the Satan** – The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 16a) notes that we sound the Shofar with both Tekiyos before Shmoneh Esrai and those during the Mussaf in order to confuse the Satan. **Rav Kook ztl.** explained that the two approaches highlight the two ways that a person approaches Hashem on Rosh Hashana – as an individual and as a member of a community. When a person is measured in both contexts, the Satan becomes confused in his approach to us.

**Yom HaDin - Ramban** records that the idea that Rosh Hashana is Yom HaDin is an oral tradition handed down from generation to generation from Adam Harishon who, according to one version of the Talmud, was born and committed original sin on Rosh Hashana. **Rav Hershel Schachter Shlita** often commented that there are some critical homiletical messages to be learned from the original sin. They include:

- 1) According to one *midrash* if Adam *ha'rishon* would have waited until *leil Shabbos*, he would have been permitted to eat the fruits of the *eitz ha'daas*. He could not even contain himself for a few hours. We all have to train ourselves to realize that it is not that essential to have instant gratification. Hashem created us all to enjoy the world but it is not that absolutely necessary to have pleasure all the time. The Jewish farmer plants a tree and he does not eat of its fruits until a few years go by. The *shochet* slaughters an animal but he does not eat of the meat until he first checks the lung. It is not that terrible to postpone a bit having pleasure from the world.
- 2) The reason Adam and Chava could not control themselves and sinned by eating from the *eitz ha'daas* is because the fruit seemed so delicious and appealing. When we read the *pessukim* in *parshas Beraishis*, the Torah gives the exact same description with respect to all the trees in *Gan Eden*. They were all delicious and appeared very appealing. But we always have the attitude that the grass is greener on the other side. We always think that "stolen waters are sweeter". To the *reshaim*, who have violated *aveiros*, the *yetzer ho'rah* appears like a strand of hair (*Sukkah* 52a). They realize that they did not get any more pleasure from doing the *avairos* than they would have had doing the *mitzvot*. To the *tzaddikim* who never violated the *avairos*, the *yetzer ho'rah* appears as if it were a gigantic mountain. They conjure up in their mind an image of what tremendous pleasures one would certainly receive if he were to violate the *avairos*. But the truth of the matter is that any forbidden pleasure has a parallel in the realm of *heter* (*Chulin* 109b). One can enjoy *olam ha'zeh* by keeping *mitzvot* to the same extent that the *reshaim* enjoy doing *aveiros*.
- 3) When Hashem confronted Adam *ha'rishon* and told him that he would be punished for having sinned, He says "*ki sho'mata l'kol ish'techa*". The *midrash* understands that expression to mean that Chava coaxed her husband to eat along with her from the forbidden fruit by crying in front of him. Very often we sin because we give in to social pressure.