

Dear friends, as we approach Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, I wanted to share some thoughts ahead of 5780.

There are many Jewish New Years, four, to be precise. Each to commemorate a different cycle as described in the Mishna of Tractate Rosh Hashana Chapter 1. But when focusing on our human cycle, there are 2 New Years.

The first, the “real” New Year, the one we celebrated since the times of Moses, before even we left Egypt, is the 1st of Nissan, exactly 15 days before Passover. “This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you.” (Exodus, Ch. 12, verse 2). The second New Year, on the 1st of Tishrei, was actually never mentioned as such in the Torah- “Yom Zikaron” (Day of Remembrance) or “Yom Teruah” (Day of Shofar blowing)- nothing about a new year. Celebrating this date as the Jewish New Year came much later, based on the belief this is the time the modern world was created the day where all of humanity is judged and sentenced for the following year.

The two New Years are exactly 6 months apart.

One at the beginning of spring, it makes sense to celebrate during the renewal and growth of nature. No better time to celebrate new beginnings, when the world goes through a process of rebirth, when everything blooms, and when the days are longer and warmer.

The other, exactly the opposite- a time when we feel the effect of shorter, colder days and know where we are headed: when nature shows signs of decomposition towards the slow transition from fall to winter.

This raises a serious question: from the two Jewish New Years, why do we usually emphasize the fall New Year? The Rosh Hashana everyone identifies as the New Year seems pretty depressing and not in concordance with nature !

To me, that’s exactly the brilliance of Judaism: understanding that without decomposition there is no rebirth, without fall there is no spring. It’s easy to celebrate the New Year during spring, just walk outside, and you’ll get inspired. But to identify a new cycle during the fall, to understand that even biologically, a seed that sprouts requires to decompose first, is truly the beauty of our outlook on life. Our optimism is based on the fact the during the hardest times, we know this is where it all begins. Not only when things are good for us, our people and the world. But also when things get rough, when everything feels doomed.

This should give us inspiration as individuals, communities and as a nation. To understand the New Year is exactly where it is supposed to be : when the potential of life fails to be visible to the naked eye. And that’s exactly when we should remembering (Zicharon) and looking into our souls and ask ourselves what is our responsibility- our individual and collective judgment (Yom Hadin). We blow the Shofar because we want to wake up during a time where everything seems to be going to sleep. We blow to Shofar to proclaim our outmost positive & optimistic belief that the world will once again renew itself and we will be part of it, in 6 months to celebrate. With more food of course.

Wishing you and your loved ones Shana Tova, Hatima Tova and Hag Sameah !

Arie, Ruth & family

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