



At Columbus Torah Academy, students are able to connect strongly to the Jewish holidays and our heritage. A few of our students share Divrei Torah as we approach Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

learn * experience * celebrate

Small Acts Bring Us Closer, Gabriela Ilin, 9th Grade



When you think of Rosh Hashanah, one of the first things that usually comes to mind - after dipping the apple in the

honey - is blowing the Shofar. We hear the shofar a total of 100 times in shul on Rosh Hashanah, but something that's very important about the shofar is the shape and the way it is blown.

If you have seen a shofar before, you know that there is one broad end, which is attached to the animal's head, and one narrow end which is the tip of the horn and where one blows into the shofar.

One is not allowed to change the shape of the horn because the Torah states that it should remain in the same shape as it was when removed from the animals.

Another halacha says that in addition to not being able to make any physical changes to the shofar, one must also not turn the shofar around and blow from the broader end.

While the first halacha makes sense, this second one seems a little silly, who would do that? But there is a deeper meaning to this halacha.

When Bilaam was hired by Balak to curse the Jewish people, he said in amazement, "Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov mishkenotecha Yisrael" — "How goodly are your tents O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Israel" Rashi comments that Bilaam was amazed when "he saw that the openings of their tents were not lined up with the other." Why was he so impressed by their "openings"?

Rabbi Baruch of Mezibush explains that Hashem urges the Jews to do teshuva by saying : "Pitchu li petach kechudo shel machat ve'Ani potei'ach lachem petachim shetiheyu agalot nichnasot bo" — "Make a small opening like that of the head of a needle, and I will open for you an opening through which caravans can enter."

What this means is that if a Jew simply does a small act towards beginning to do teshuva, Hashem will see him doing his part, and help him reach his goals in becoming closer to



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Hashem.

So when Bilaam said, "You Jews are so lucky; your opening and Hashem's opening are not 'lined up' to each other. You only have to put in a little effort, and Hashem opens for you the vast gates of teshuvah."

If your G-d loves you so much, how can my cursing possibly have an effect?" He was saying it with envy and praise.

Back to the Shofar - we always blow through the smaller end, because this symbolizes that if we wake up and do teshuva, you can grow much closer to Hashem and be greatly rewarded for a small step in the right direction.

A Look at Teshuvah, Lila Gisser, 12th Grade



The Chagim are rapidly approaching. With all the cooking, cleaning, and preparations that must be done, it is hard to make time

for self reflection and Teshuvah. When I think about Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, I feel intimidated by the amount of physical and emotional preparation that I have to do. It is one thing to help my mother make soups and salads. It is another to admit all of my sins to Hashem and be judged in front of the King of all kings. When looked at in this perspective, teshuvah may seem impossible to attain. Teshuvah may seem threatening, when in reality, it is anything but threatening.

During the chagim, we say the phrase Avinu Malkeinu which means our Father, our King. Teshuvah can be seen through the lens of Avinu, or Malkeinu. Avinu is the father who wants a close relationship with his children. Avinu is the one who forgives lovingly and draws us close with open arms. Avinu is Hashem wanting us to connect with Him and come back to Him. Malkeinu is the king. Malkienu is

the judge who will punish us when we don't do teshuvah. Malkeinu is waiting to seal those who do not wish to repent.

Teshuvah can be looked at in either of the two perspectives. During the upcoming chagim, we can try to see the Avinu who wants to love us and wants us to be close and connected. We should try not to look at the tefilah as a threat. We should try not to look at Teshuvah as a threat either. We should see it as an opportunity to better ourselves, to grow in our closeness to Hashem and return to the ways of Torah and Mitzvot. When we realize that Hashem is our loving father, doing teshuvah seems less like a threat and more of a counseling session for your relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. When a problem occurs in a relationship, the only way to solve it is communicating. Teshuvah is our way of communicating and working out our problems with Hashem.

We should merit only success and happiness this year and all the years to come. Shana Tova and Chag Sameach.



Wake Up Call, Bina Newman, 12th Grade



"Mine," a teammate calls and hits the ball but instead of passing it to the setter, the ball goes straight into the bleachers.

We are in the third set of a volleyball game. The score is twelve to twenty. The other team has won both previous sets, and if we lose this one, the game is over. Our coach calls a time-out.

"We can beat this team," she says. "We need to call the balls and go for it. We cannot give up on the ball. You guys are capable, you got this, let's turn this around."

She is right. We got this, we're going to beat this team. We get the ball, I pass to the setter who sets it right to the hitter. The ball slams down to the other team's court. Serve after serve we slowly make our way up, and win the set. And then another. And we take the win.

We knew we had the capability of winning. We should have been able to do it on our own, but sometimes one gets distracted or stuck in their head. In those situations, you need a powerful pep talk to function as a wake-up call.

We see a similar lesson with Adam and Chava. When Adam and Chava were created they were both naked. But the Torah relates that they were not ashamed. When they violated Hashem's command and ate from the Tree of Knowledge, their eyes were opened, and

they realized they were naked, so they sewed together fig leaves and made aprons for themselves. Suddenly, they heard the voice of Hashem and they hid. Hashem called out to the man and said to him, "Ayekah?" — "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid" (Bereishit 3:1-8).

Often in life, we forget about our mission. We get so caught up in ourselves that we forget that it is all from Hashem. We shouldn't have to wait for something bad to happen, or a miracle to recognize that Hashem is always there. We shouldn't have to wait for Hashem to call out and say "Ayekah?— where are you?" or "Wake up," to recognize our nakedness without Hashem.

Adam was living in Gan Eden, and when he opened his eyes he thought he was happy and successful and that he was in charge. When Hashem called out to him he realized that it really was all from Hashem and he was "naked."

We know we need to do teshuva. But sometimes like Adam in Gan Eden, or on the volleyball court we get distracted or lost. Let us use this time of year as a wake-up call. The shofar blast is there to call us out of this slump. To recognize our mistakes and return to Hashem. Use the shofar this Rosh Hashana as a pep talk from Hashem, as a wakeup call to do teshuva.



Rosh Hashana & Shabbos, Areah Goldstein, 12th Grade



This year, the first day of Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbos. As we know and it's specified in the gemara, we don't blow shofar on

Shabbos as there is a concern people will practice with it and there is also the carrying of it issue when there is no eruv.

People wonder whether it is a good or bad sign for the Jewish people when the Jewish calendar falls out this way.

The Aruch Laner (Rav Yaakov Ettlinger in the 1800s) researched this question and found that throughout Jewish history, both major good and bad events occurred when Shabbos and the first day of Rosh Hashana coincided. As some examples, he saw that while both temples were destroyed when this occurred (bad), he also saw that the Jews were forgiven for the sin of the golden calf and that the Jews entered the land of Israel in miraculous fashion (good) when the two coincided. So, is it a good or a bad thing?

The Aruch Laner gave the answer, "it depends," and he explained his conclusion with a parable.

A supposedly loyal officer of the king had surprisingly committed a treasonous offense and the angry king sentenced the man to death. Many came to the officer's defense but the king refused to relent and the day of execution had come. In a last ditch effort to spare the officer, the officer's wife came and begged and pleaded with the king explaining that the officer was really a loyal person as this was one lapse in judgment.

She further tearfully asked the

king to please not make her a widow and her kids, orphans. The king was touched by the woman and commuted the sentence of the officer. A year later, almost the exact same situation happened with a different officer and this time, the officer from prison asked his wife to go to the king and try the same strategy as the year before. However, when the second woman came before the king, the king had refused her request and the death sentence stood. Why the different reactions? The king noticed on the woman bruises and when he looked into the matter, he found that second woman had been abused by the husband which meant the only reason she had come to beg for her husband's life was out of fear, and not love and concern.

The aruch laner explains that in a year when Shabbos and the first day of Rosh Hashana coincide, it is actually Shabbos itself which comes and testifies on behalf of the Jewish people. From there, Hashem is able to see how we acted and treated the holy Shabbos. If we loved Shabbos, kept Shabbos and cherished Shabbos, Shabbos can be an even better defender than anyone or anything. But if we didn't observe Shabbos, disgraced Shabbos and ignored Shabbos, then we would pushing Shabbos to stand in the place of the Shofar when we really have no business doing so. Rav Yitzchok Kolodetsky, son in law of Rav Chaim Kanievsky, teaches us from this lesson the importance of resolving to go into the new year with adding on to our shabbosim from the previous year as a way to show Hashem that we want and aim to not only be better Jews but to desire to be closer to Hashem on His holiest day. Kesivah Vichasima tova to one and all!

