



# TORAH WEEKLY

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Rosh Hashana 5781

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## A Taste of Torah Big Choices for a Big Day

by Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky

As we approach the holy and awesome day of Rosh Hashanah, many of us have the same frustrating thoughts playing back and forth in our heads.

Rosh Hashanah has arrived, and we will spend a long time at shul accepting Hashem's sovereignty and all that entails. We will then spend the next ten days repenting for our shortcomings of the past year and promising to fix them. Yom Kippur is the climax of this process, as we receive forgiveness.

The troubling thought is: "What is the point of telling Hashem and myself that this coming year I will behave differently, when I know that it may very well not be the case? My old habits are likely to return faster than I would like."

We can question further. If Hashem sees the future and knows that it will not last, is our entire repentance considered fraudulent and not accepted by Hashem?

These thoughts are too fundamental to be ignored. Let us face them head on and try to clarify this troubling topic.

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (1892-1953) opens up this discussion with an essential distinction on the topic of free will. He explains that there are two different levels of choices that we make as we traverse life.

Some decisions are very minute choices which don't make create much difference to the general trajectory of one's life. Other decisions, however, can literally spell the difference between living one type of life or another.

For example, deciding how to spend a Sunday morning, while an important decision, is unlikely to affect much else. Choosing a career path, however, will set a person's trajectory in a particular direction that will have life-altering effects.

Rabbi Dessler explains that Rosh Hashanah is a day for major decisions, not smaller choices. On this holy day, the individual has an opportunity to totally change and redefine his core values. He can become a changed person with his ideals. He can clarify his purpose in this world and what his mission is. That choice will redefine his entire essence.

During the year, a person may make many poor choices which he later regrets. But one must bear in mind that those are small, non-life-altering choices which do not take away at all from the big picture of what a person wants to do with his life, which is the focus of Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah, a person makes a choice about what he wants to do with his life, with all his personal ideals and goals. One's day-to-day decisions don't necessarily change those ideals. Rather, they result from momentarily forgetting those ideals and making a wrong turn.

There is no fraud in this system. It's honest repentance on a big scale. While a person will exercise free will and will have successes and failures throughout the year, the big picture will always remain sincere and pure.

If a person utilizes Rosh Hashana correctly, he will find himself constantly checking throughout the

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## Stories for the Soul

### The Sound of Silence

Rabbi Shlomo Rabinowicz, the first Rebbe of Radmosk, Poland (1801-1866), picked a learned and pious man to be *ba'al toke'a* (the person assigned to blow the shofar). The man studied the laws related to shofar and the proper thoughts and intentions he should have while blowing it, and spent much time preparing for his lofty task. However, when Rosh Hashana arrived, the *ba'al toke'a* could not coax a single sound from the shofar. After numerous attempts, another man, not nearly as learned or pious, arose to take his place. This fellow easily provided the requisite blasts of the shofar with little trouble.

The *ba'al toke'a*, needless to say, was quite disturbed and saddened by his failure. After the prayers concluded, the Rebbe told him the following parable: A nation wished to honor its king by presenting him with a glorious new crown. The people gathered the most beautiful gems for the crown and tried to commission a goldsmith to make the crown. Yet every goldsmith turned them down out of concern that he might damage or not do justice to the precious gems. Finally, a master goldsmith accepted the job and was given a month to work on the crown. The goldsmith studied each gem from every

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