From Naomi Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement: A Revolution in the Name of Tradition*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2019, pp. 289—93.

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## Our Preparations for the Day of Judgement

From the beginning of the month of Elul the sound of the *shofar* calls to us each day: Awake! Wake up, you sleeping ones! The Day of Judgement is nearly upon us!

With trembling we ask: how have we prepared ourselves for the terrifying Day of Judgement?

The first prayer with which we begin the Amidah of Rosh Hashanah is: 'Remember us for life, O King who desires life, and write us into the Book of Life, for your sake, O living God.'

'Remember us for life'. May God, blessed be he, grant us the power to unite earthly life with the actions that humanity requires. 'For your sake'—because they are for you, for us to do your will, which results in a worthy life. O King who desires life, as the King of Kings wants for us.

But how does one arrive at such a life? How does one prepare to live such a life?

In the holy book *Tiferet shelomo* we find that the main preparation for Rosh Hashanah is to ensure that unity and friendship reign among the Jewish people, as our great poet says in Psalms 34: 'Who is the man who is eager for life, who desires years of good fortune. Guard your tongue from evil, your lips from

deceitful speech. Shun evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.'[4] We see that it does not say, 'who is eager to enjoy life' [*heḥafets baḥayim*], but rather 'who is eager for life' [*heḥafets ḥayim*], who desires the ultimate aim. 'Who desires years of good fortune': who loves the days, who sees good and happiness and the joy of life in every moment. We don't say, like people with a non-Jewish outlook, 'as opposed to fearing God', but rather exactly the opposite: the joy and love of life are the surest, quickest means of attaining the fear of God.

To understand this we should begin with 'Guard your tongue from evil'. One must see and master the word, and through it, the thought. Never to speak ill of another person. This demands constant vigilance from us, which begins with mastery of the tongue.

'And your lips from deceitful speech'. Truth must always be in our utterances; where we have nothing good to say, 'we must learn the difficult art of silence' (Samson Raphael Hirsch). The second way of achieving the fear of God is through 'shunning evil'. Keep your distance from evil, avoiding all things that might lead to it. Set boundaries even where things are in fact permitted, and do good. Do not miss any opportunity to do something worthy. 'Do': it isn't enough to have good intentions, but one must actually realize these intentions, and do good things.

First one must 'shun evil', and only then, 'do good'. One must not sweeten transgression by using it as a means for a good end, on the one hand sinning against the commandments of the Torah and on the other hand fulfilling them. Transgressions are forgiven only when the sinner has the opportunity to sin again and resists. They are not forgiven because of a good deed.

Only after we have fulfilled the obligations to the Creator do we say 'seek peace and pursue it'. We must seek peace among people—chase it, even to the point of self-sacrifice. But we must never sacrifice 'Shun evil and do good' for the sake of peace, in fact we must be prepared to live in a state of war with all of humanity if they disturb the peace we have made with the great and holy Creator.

*Tiferet shelomo* continues: 'With trumpet and the blast of the *shofar* raise a shout before the Lord' (Ps. 98: 6). To raise a shout, in Hebrew *hari'u*, is from the root *re'ut*, or 'friendship'. If you hear the *shofar* in a state of love and friendship,

[4] *Tiferet shelomo* (*Splendor of Solomon*, published 1867–9) is a classic work of hasidic literature by Rabbi Solomon Rabinowicz (1801–66), the founder of the Radomsk hasidic dynasty. Schenirer was married at the end of her life to his grandson, Rabbi Yitzhak Landau.

you will merit standing in the presence of the Lord, with no prosecutor able to damage your case.

'Trumpets' are instruments that call human beings together; with the *shofar* God calls to humans and it is with a trumpet that humans call to one another in God's name, one human being to their fellow human beings, to obey and serve him faithfully.

All nations must learn the Jewish truth, that trumpets—the call between human beings—must be combined with the *shofar*—the call from the Creator.

If we want God to heed our call and aid us in earthly matters, we must first heed God's call, to guide our interests according to his will, heeding the sound of the *shofar* on Mount Sinai. In order for him to help us, he must first be our king—'before the King, our Lord'.

As we make the correct preparations for the great Day of Judgement, we must not forget that it is also for us a Day of Remembrance, on which all of our thoughts, words, and deeds of the whole year are remembered on high.[5] It is also a Day of Remembrance insofar as one Jew remembers to pray for another, as our sages say: 'When one person prays for another, the one who prays receives help first' [BT *BK* 92*a*].

But what should we be praying for?

'One thing I ask of the Lord, only that do I seek, to sit in the House of the Lord all the days of my life' [Ps. 27: 4]: this verse we proclaim enthusiastically from the beginning of the month of Elul until the end of the service on the last day of Sukkot.

We understand that King David did not literally mean that he wished to sit in the House of the Lord all day, since even the priests do not spend the whole day in the Temple. He meant that everywhere, every place we sit, should be as holy as the House of God. As it says in Deuteronomy: 'Since the Lord your God moves about in the midst of your camp . . . let your camp be holy' [Deut. 23: 15]. Every part of our lives must be sacred, a reflection of the sanctity of the House of God.

On the Day of Remembrance we must also remember others. My Bnos, Basya, and Bais Yaakov daughters must demonstrate their love and friendship for their sisters by showing them the way to the fear of God, to true repentance, which can only be approached through confession, spiritual introspection, and remorse. But each of us must first do our own spiritual work, a true and complete repentance, and only then may we turn to work on behalf of others.

[5] Rosh Hashanah is known as the Day of Judgement (*yom hadin*) and the Day of Remembrance (*yom hazikaron*).

This work is with our estranged sisters, and we must never rest until we gather them all under the banner of our Torah.

In this regard we must not forget the printed word, which holds such great promise for us. This is why it is such a sacred obligation for every Bnos, Basya, and Bais Yaakov girl to circulate our very own publications, the *Bais Yaakov Journal* and *Kindergarten*, to every Jewish home.

And when we achieve that, we will surely achieve purity and forgiveness on Yom Kippur and with true joy will we build our sukkah, and we will fulfil the commandment of 'You shall rejoice' [Deut. 16: 14] with all of our heart.[6]

And our Bnos motto, 'Worship the Lord with joy!' [Ps. 100: 2], will become the motto of all the Jewish daughters of the entire Jewish world.

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The month of Tishrei, during which the most significant Jewish holidays are observed, begins with Rosh Hashanah. This is the first day of the year, which reminds us of the obligations that Judaism imposes on us, and awakens us to the holiness and purity of the work we do for God during the whole year.

On this great day, the images of many women pass before our eyes: Sarah, Hannah, Rachel, who are all role models for us in our own life experiences.

Take the matriarch Sarah, who so longed to have a child from whom would come the people of Israel. When the angels came to her to relay their tidings that her wish was about to be granted, she, a 90-year-old woman who had already despaired of a child, could not contain her laughter. She just couldn't understand how it could happen to someone her age. Only after she actually gave birth to a son did she see that she had been wrong. 'God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears this will laugh at me' [Gen. 21: 6];[7] everyone will laugh, not believing that her longing was fulfilled in such an unnatural manner. She also saw that the world would have a hard time comprehending her child's descendants, who would always be bitterly mocked. But this did not bother her. On the contrary, she saw in this the great mission that her descendants, pursued and scorned, would nevertheless carry out among the family of nations. Precisely 'on Rosh Hashanah was Sarah visited' [see BT *RH* 10*b*], on Rosh Hashanah she heard the news that she would have a son, Isaac, whose name means laughter. On Rosh Hashanah she was shown how negligible and small human calculations are in the

[6] The verse 'You shall rejoice in your festival' is associated with Sukkot.

[7] Although the JPS 1985 has 'laugh with' instead of 'laugh at', it is clear that Schenirer, who felt the mockery of others so acutely, here intends 'laugh at'; my translation reflects this understanding.

face of God's will. The first day of the year must implant in every Jew this same conviction, which must guide every act, even if the whole world stands in mocking opposition.

With this episode, the matriarch Sarah plays an important role on Rosh Hashanah in the lives and thoughts of her children. Jewish girls have much to learn from her about how to implant these ideas in young hearts in order that later Isaacs may blossom.

And who Isaac truly was is something we also learn on Rosh Hashanah: 'After these things' [Gen. 22: 1]. After Isaac grew up and understood what his parents, Abraham and Sarah, learned from his birth, God showed himself to Abraham and commanded him to sacrifice his beloved son on the altar. Abraham did not hesitate for the slightest instant, taking Isaac, the son he loved so dearly, to Mount Moriah in order to sacrifice him to God. Isaac, who was still young and had hardly begun to drink from life's goblet, knew where he was being taken, but never doubted that he would fulfil God's command, even himself carrying the wood with which he would be burned.

In our awe at Isaac's extraordinary greatness and iron determination to fulfil God's will, we also get a glimpse of how strong and solid must have been the influence of his mother Sarah. How deeply her ideas must have been rooted in his heart, if he was ready at every instant to sacrifice himself and give up his young life to serve God.

On Rosh Hashanah we are clearly shown how we must act in educating our youth during the whole year, and what we must implant in their hearts so that they may be worthy of being children of our great ancestors.

Let us truly learn from this as much as we can.