

We are in the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. It has a technical component of waking up early and saying selichos, saying Ovinu Malkeinu, etc. But this is primarily supposed to be a time for introspection – of taking time to think about what we are doing and where we are headed in our lives. Most bochorim don't even know what introspection is. In case you are unfamiliar with it, it means to look inside yourself. It is called 'cheshbon hanefesh'.

There is a big difference between the cheshbon hanefesh done by someone of my age and by someone of your age. We are at different stages of life. But the common denominator is deciding where avodas Hashem fits into one's life – how much we use avodas Hashem as a way of defining who we are.

At Mincha of Yom Kippur, we read the story of Yonah Hanavi. Yonah is on a boat voyage and a powerful storm hits the sea – the ship is about to capsize. The sailors notice something very peculiar. The storm is localized right around the boat. In the distance all around, they see that the sea is calm. This is very atypical of sea storms. They figure something must be wrong about the boat itself – or someone within the boat. They come around to Yonah who is sleeping below deck and ask him a series of interesting questions: what is your profession, where do you come from and which nation do you belong to?

The first question about his profession is understandable. Because people often define themselves that way – their very identity is derived from their job and how they make a living. It isn't just a way to pay the bills. It is their whole essence.

The next question also is valid – which country do you live in. Because many people define themselves by where they come from geographically. They often say "I'm an American" or "I'm British", etc. Then they ask: which nation do you belong to – which society, which culture do you identify with? The sailors want to know: who is this man? But the sailors never bother to ask Yonah about his religion – his belief system. For them, this is not a way of defining who a person is. But Yonah corrects them – he only mentions his religion because nothing else defines him. Who is he? He is a Jew who defines himself by his yiras shomayim. This is the only definition that matters.

Yonah doesn't say he is a Yehudi – rather he is an Ivri. He is making a statement that he is separate and distinct from the world like Avrohom was. This is how Yosef was identified by the sar ha'ofim and sar hamash'kim – Yosef was an Ivri – he wasn't really like the rest of us Egyptians. Why not? Because a Jew defines himself by being a yorei Hashem.

We spoke a number of times on Rosh Hashono about kabbolas malchus shomayim. Rosh Hashono must come before Yom Kippur because before I think practically about how to structure my life and my identity around yiras shomayim, I need to appreciate Who Hashem is and why I need to devote my life to serving Him in the first place.

Let's say you have a slave. His life revolves around doing the wishes of his master. The more he gets to know his master and develop a relationship with him, the more he can intuit what pleases his master and what displeases him.

A Jew doesn't define himself by his profession. He is Ivri – he is different. He defines his essence not by his country of origin and its culture but by his avodas Hashem. This is the dominant theme that is at the center of our cheshbon hanefesh. We first put in place the

recognition the Hashem is the source of our existence, He runs the world, and is the source of all value. This is ahavas Hashem – making Hashem the highest value in our lives.

The kind of cheshbon hanefesh a person makes will depend on his stage in life. At an earlier stage, I made a decision as to how my life was going to revolve around serving Hashem. At this stage in my life, my cheshbon hanefesh is to reflect on that decision – was it a good way to decide, and did I carry it through properly?

For younger people, the cheshbon hanefesh is very different. It is about defining my basic identity and my life-long goals. Is my life going to be defined by a pursuit of money? Or by the pursuit of more spiritual goals?

Many years ago, after publishing my book on Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, I was asked to speak at a certain shul. At the end of my talk, there was a question and answer session about all the feminist issues in Yiddishkeit, and one woman made a very insightful comment. She said: rabbi, there is one basic difference between us. You are committed to keeping the Torah, I am resigned to it. She was absolutely right. To some people, Torah is the center of their life, everything else is peripheral, and everything else has to be made to fit that central priority. But for many people, their career is the center of their life, or their social standing in the community is central, and Torah and mitzvos become problems and obstacles. Their Yiddishkeit has to be worked around so that it doesn't interfere too much with the central issue in their lives which is something else.

These are two vastly different ways of looking at a life of Torah and mitzvos. Which is the primary goal and which are the obstacles? Does the person want to be fabulously wealthy and the Torah is a sort of obstacle course which needs to be navigated? Or does a person primarily want to be close to Hashem and develop a relationship with Hashem, and everything else like parosoh is an obstacle which needs a solution? This is the kind of cheshbon hanefesh that you are making in your stage in life. How essential and central is the fact that I am a Torah Jew and take Torah seriously? Some people think Torah is a problem. Torah is not the problem – it is wonderful, beautiful life. Each night in maariv we say Hashem taught us the Torah and that it is our life. We are pre-occupied with it throughout our day – as we know Tosfos in Berachos daf 11 says. Hashem expects that Torah be the central definition of our lives.

Hashem told us at Har Sinai that we are a mamleches kohanim and a goy kodosh. This defines what it means to be a Jew. Yonah said to the sailors that there may be all kinds of nations and cultures out there, but my nation is defined as a mamleches kohanim and a goy kodosh.

When I read all the various notions of what it means to be Jewish in the non-frum Jewish world, it is invariably a combination of being liberal and enjoying typically Jewish food like bagels and lox. They never mention that it is being totally devoted to serving Hashem and living a life of kedushoh. We represent Hashem to the world. How? Not by being liberal.

Last week, a tremendous tragedy struck the liberal Jewish world on the first night of Rosh Hashono. A Jewish woman who was on the Supreme Court of the United States passed away – Ruth Ginsburg. The liberal Jewish press spoke of her as being on the level of somewhere between Hashem and Moshe Rabbeinu. It was reported in the news that in a Reform Temple, a woman who received the haftarah on Rosh Hashono

decided to recite passages taken from Ruth Ginsburg's speeches instead of from sifrei Nevi'im.

What made Ruth Ginsburg a Jewish figure? It is simply the fact that she was liberal. Did she keep Shabbos? Kashrus? No. The only Jewish thing she did was acknowledge Yom Kippur by delaying the opening Supreme Court session for Yom Kippur. Nothing else.

We say no. We are in this world to be a spiritual nation with spiritual goals. Liberal Jews like to throw around the phrase "tikkun olam". But what changes the world, what really fixes the world? Look at the rest of that sentence: 'l'saken olam b'malchus Shakai'. When the world accepts malchus shomayim – that Hashem runs the world – this will perfect the world. This is what makes us Jewish and nothing else. Hashem created the entire world and chose us as His representatives in this world to live a spiritual life with spiritual goals.

When we make a cheshbon hanefesh as we approach Yom Kippur, we should keep in mind that not only is Hashem the King Who forgives and pardons us. We also say He is the king over the entire Earth and He has sanctified Klal Yisroel to be His representatives. It all goes together.

Hashem created everything in stages. All human beings have a tzelem Elokim, but of the human race, only one small nation who descended from Avrohom Ovinu will be chosen to be Hashem's representatives. This is what has to go into your cheshbon hanefesh. You are at a stage in life when you are planning your life and trying to figure out all the big decisions that will come – getting married, raising a family, supporting a family. But first you have to figure out who you are, what is the center of your life, and who you want to become.

There is a very foolish idea coming from the world of psychology which is completely against the Torah. It's called finding your 'inner self', or 'getting in touch with your inner self', and this is supposed to make you psychologically balanced. But the Torah says there is no such thing as an inner self. You create yourself – you make yourself and mold yourself into who you choose to be. You can make goals and you actually plan on becoming the kind of person who you want to become. That is the essential cheshbon hanefesh we make.

We look at a number of elements in teshuvoh. In addition to the individual actions we did or neglected to do in the past and resolve to improve, it is vital to ask ourselves what kind of person we have been till now, identify which parts of ourselves aren't good, and make a plan – how we can take tangible steps to make ourselves better going forward. We aren't stuck with an unchangeable 'inner self'.

It all comes out of the fact that Rosh Hashono precedes Yom Kippur. We go from Hashem being ruler over the entire world, to the ruler who forgives and pardons. Before we get to teshuvoh we have to internalize malchus shomayim. Where does it fit into our life that Hashem runs the entire world down to the finest detail?

People have a difficult time acknowledging that they are not in control. They put so much time and effort into building something, or achieving something they want, and they don't realize that if Hashem doesn't want it to succeed, it simply won't happen. It is a straightforward posuk in Tehillim. You can go to the best doctor with the most advanced medical techniques, but it doesn't mean you will be cured. Of course you have to do your best to take care of your physical needs and your health, because it won't happen by itself. But you can't guarantee your own success – Hashem makes that decision. That is understanding malchus shomayim.

But it is more than just accepting Hashem's authority and being afraid of punishment. The next step is having ahavas Hashem – realizing that Hashem is the source of all value and that our relationship with Hashem is the most valuable thing in this world. How do I connect to Hashem? Through Torah. Understanding malchus shomayim is Rosh Hashono. Following through and bringing malchus shomayim in my life, this is Yom Kippur. This is when we look at ourselves and begin to think in the long-term – what practical steps need to be taken to make malchus shomayim real in my life?

Coming to Yom Kippur, we say selichos and we hopefully understand what we are saying. They are supposed to make us think. And in each stage in life, we think in different terms. At your stage in life you should be thinking: what role will Hashem play in my life and how am I truly identifying as a Jew with the mission to be a mamleches kohanim and goy kodosh.

We have to take pride in our chosen status as Hashem's representatives. As Shmuel Hanovi told Shaul, there is no room for humility and feelings of inferiority before the king of Amoleik. You are the king of Yisroel who carries Hashem's message in this world. We are Hashem's treasured nation.

These are primarily days of cheshbon hanefesh – beyond all the technical aspects of Aseres Yemei Teshuvoh and Yom Kippur. When you are young and you are planning your life, make sure Hashem is in the center of your life and everything else is peripheral.