

Rosh Hashanah: The Tipping Point

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Abstract: Rosh Hashanah is the tipping point. Rosh Hashanah is the time we reclaim responsibility for both the direction and the misdirection of our lives. There is still plenty of time to chart a new course. We can still choose to tip the balance of our lives in the direction of greater happiness and fulfillment and emotional connection and physical wellness. As the Torah portion for this Shabbat lovingly exhorts us -- bacharta bachayim -- choose life!

More than any other holiday, it is the coming New Year celebration, Rosh Hashanah, that reminds me I am a part of nature, and nature is a part of me.

Within nature, the promise of change is everywhere you look. Fall is coming. The leaves have already begun to turn from green to red and orange. Birds are starting to head south. The days are getting shorter. Animals are storing their food. In the early morning when I walk my dog, Shadow, the warmth of summer is giving way to the crisp chill of fall. Change is in the air we breathe.

And so it is with us. Change is everywhere. Like birds, animals, and leaves, we too feel the same cosmic imperative for change and transformation. The year that is both 2007 and 5767 is quickly coming to an end. From some deep-seated biological place, we know it's time to turn over a new leaf.

With every Rosh Hashanah comes the awareness that we are, or are going to be, a year older. But are we going to be a year wiser? The high holy days are our annual season to revisit our choices over the past year, and the prices we paid as the consequence for those choices. This is our annual time to reflect on what brought us the most joy in the past year, what brought us the most regret, and what we can learn from both. No one says this is easy to do. But if we want to move forward, we must know from where we have come. If we want to move forward, we must first look back.

Did you know that the symbol in the zodiac for the Hebrew month of Tishri, the month of both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, is that of a scale? It makes perfect sense. Life is like a scale. Every Yom Kippur, we surely pray that our good deeds outweigh our misdeeds. And the challenge of life is to find the right balance, to consistently tip the scale in the right direction.

Rosh Hashanah is the tipping point. Rosh Hashanah is the time we reclaim responsibility for both the direction and the misdirection of our lives. There is still plenty of time to chart a new course. We can still choose to tip the balance of our lives in the direction of greater happiness and

fulfillment and emotional connection and physical wellness. As the Torah portion for this Shabbat lovingly exhorts us – *bacharta bachayim* – choose life!

Of course, the task before us as we move through the High Holy Days is to summon up the courage to resolve what things in our lives have really got to change. We are not perfect and never will be. But we are evolving – we are slowly but surely moving in a better direction. That is as it should be. Because the world is evolving. Because even God is evolving. And we, and nature, and God are one. And God teaches us that we can find our spiritual direction by aligning ourselves with nature and by paying close attention to what the leaves, the animals, the trees, and the water that is all around us can teach us.

Please join me in this magnificent prayer by Rabbi Vicki Hollander:

We are told,
Go to flowing waters and
Cast away our crumbs,
Remnants of
That which sustains us.

We are told,
Go and learn from the water.
For the water's face appears serene,
While beneath,
She teems with life,
Entire worlds unseen,
Reminding us
It is time to look within ourselves.

We are told,
Go and learn from the water.
We are likened to fish.
They rise to feed,
And sometimes are caught,
Reminding us
We, too, are easily ensnared,
Trapped in nets of life,
And eaten.

How to survive the meshes of the mundane?
How to swim in the waters?
How to go beyond eating the crumbs thrown to us?
For we be not fish, but humans,
The nets we weave for ourselves.

We are told,
Go and learn from the water.

For she contains
Remnants of primeval floods, forms of chaos,
Reminding us
Of layers within ourselves
That rise and swell,
Forces of darkness that struggle to
Dim the forces of light

We are told,
Go and learn from the water,
A mirror of our body.
Go to waters which live.
For the waters' movement
Reminds us that staying in one place without replenishment
Bears stagnation,
Even death.

We are told,
Go and learn from the water.
For just as the waves dance with the shore
And are drawn by the moon's beckoning,
So, too, do we dance with spirit,
Drawn by the light beyond,
Reminding us
It's time to travel to our source.

As the year is birthed yet again,
We are urged to look at water,
To learn from her and to listen well.

And we come
And cast that which weighs us down,
And release it to the water,
That we might leave the shore
Lighter,
Cleansed,
Kissed by waters' lips.

A step closer
Toward coming home.

May the coming New Year of 5768 release us from all that weighs us down. May the coming New Year fill us with wisdom and illumination. May the coming New Year be a new and fresh start, full of good health and inner peace.