

Message: Rosh Hashana 2026: Joy in the Presence of the King

שָׁנָה טוֹבָה חֵבֵרַי

Shana tova, khaverai.

A good year to you all, My Friends. It's a joy to be together today.

Today is Rosh Hashanah. This day is known by several names. It is observed with joy and celebration, and it is observed with awe; reverence, admiration, fear, or wonder in the presence of something vast and powerful. This plurality of meaning is one of the themes of the day.

רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה Rosh Hashanah- Head of the year
יוֹם תְּרוּעָה Yom Teruah- Day of shouting/blasting
יוֹם הַדִּין Yom Hadin- The Day of Judgement

Rosh Hashanah literally means 'head of the year', and it is the beginning of the civil year of the Hebrew calendar. It is not the only new year in Judaism. There are 4 different 'new years' in Judaism, and each one deals with a different aspect of life. 15 Shevat for trees (Tu B'Shevat), 1 Nisan for kings and festivals, 1 Elul for animals and tithes, and 1 Tishrei (Rosh Hashanah) for the civil year.

So, in a civil sense, Rosh Hashanah is a new year, so...

Happy New Year! Shana Tova!

Rosh Hashanah is the pinnacle or peak or top of the year (all things that rosh means) because it is the first of the high holy days, and it is the day when we stand before the King. This is both a joyous celebration because, **IT'S THE KING**, and a time of judgement because, in the presence of the King of the Universe, we become fully aware of everything we have **AND** everything we have not done.

For example, there are people in whose presence I am tall. Most of those people are children, but, to them, I'm a pretty tall. However compared to someone properly tall, like a pro basketball player. In the presence of Michael Jordan, I would be judged to be a short dude.

{height images}

On Rosh Hashanah, our righteousness is similarly judged in the presence of the King and His righteousness. However, this isn't like our height being judged on the Shaq scale. We are talking about our righteousness being judged against the standard of the King of the Universe, and we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Thankfully, God is mercy and truth.

Rosh Hashanah is not a day of repentance, per se. It is a day that should inspire repentance. Rosh Hashanah wakes us from our slumber with a loud shofar blast, calls us to assemble before the King, and in His presence we should become aware of the status of our souls. The ya'min no'raim, the Days of Awe, is a time of repentance so that we will be judged for life when we stand before the King again on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, when the price is paid for the lives that have been lived.

{title}

Standing in the presence of the King is something I have been thinking of a lot lately. This is obviously because of the season we are in with Rosh Hashanah and The Days of Awe and Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah is a time when we focus on how we stand with the King, and look forward with anticipation of when we will ultimately stand in the presence of the King. However, this is also on my mind because of the loss of people I love, and because of the fear of losing people I love, because death is also a time when we stand before the King.

Regardless of the circumstance in which we find ourselves in the presence of the King, the level of our joy in the presence of the King is directly related to the life we live.

What Are We Made Of?

How do we stand before the King? Whether we stand before the King in this life or the next, we stand before the King. I would like to spend some time this morning talking about who and what we are.

There's a scene in the movie 'Guns and Moses' where they are sitting shiva for a man who was killed. The rabbi who is the main protagonist in the film says the following about him:

{insert clip}

Alan Rosner didn't have a soul.

He is a soul.

He had a body.

And now it's on all of us to be his hands and feet in this world, performing deeds of kindness in his name

~Rabbi Mo Zaltzman

He is a soul. He had a body. This is a statement rich with meaning.

I want us to wrestle with this for a bit because it is an important concept to grasp. Our eternal nature is the soul. Our temporal nature, the part of us that exists within time, is the body. We see this illustrated for us in scripture.

*the dust returns to earth, as it was,
and the spirit returns to God, who gave it!*

Ecclesiastes 12:7 (CJB)

The Hebrew used there for spirit or soul is ruakh.

Neshamah- נְשָׁמָה

Nefesh- נֶפֶשׁ

Ruach- רוּחַ

There are three words which developed the meaning of “soul” in the Tanach : *Neshamah*, *Nefesh*, and *Ruach*. *Neshamah* and *Ruach* both refer to the breath; the life that emanates from our bodies and without which our bodies cannot live. *Nefesh* is the essence of who we are.

Hebrew refuses to flatten the inner life into a single term.

We even see this concept illustrated by Yeshua when He says to one of the men being crucified next to Him,

“Yes! I promise that you will be with me today in Gan-‘Eden.”

Luke 23:43 (CJB)

David Stern explains in the Jewish New Testament Commentary that,

Gan-Eden, literally, “Garden of Eden” in Hebrew, is a Hebrew expression for “Paradise,” which is the English transliteration of Greek *paradeisos*, the term used in the Septuagint at Genesis 2:8 to translate *Gan-Eden*. Paradise, or *Gan-Eden*, are terms used to refer to the dwelling place of Adonai. In Hebrew we

would call this **Shamayim** (Hebrew: שָׁמַיִם *sh'mayim*, "heavens"). According to the Bible, it is the dwelling place of God and other heavenly beings.

So, when our soul is no longer in our body, it is with the Lord. Our soul is in **gan-eden**, in paradise, in **shamayim**, in heaven. This is the **Olam Haba**, the world to come, when we are present with the Lord, and he rules and reigns. The Kingdom of Heaven.

So we are always confident—we know that so long as we are at home in the body, we are away from our home with the Lord; for we live by trust, not by what we see. We are confident, then, and would much prefer to leave our home in the body and come to our home with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:6–8 (CJB)

What we see fairly clearly here is that when we are separate from the body, when our body ceases to live, a part of us is present with the Lord.

We have a body. We are a soul.

The soul is not a separate entity from our body. As a human created by God in His likeness, our soul is an inextricable part of us- **in life**. Death is the dividing force that returns our soul to the presence of Hashem- to **gan-eden**.

The Heresy of Gnosticism

Now I want to be explicit here. I am NOT embracing any form of Gnostic dualism.

Essentially, the gnostics believed that all that mattered was knowledge and the soul, which carried that knowledge after death. They did not value Biblical truth. They were especially into secret or esoteric knowledge, i.e. new words.

They believed the principal element of salvation was direct knowledge of the supreme divinity attained via mystical or esoteric insight. Many Gnostic texts deal with illusion and enlightenment. What did not matter to the gnostics was sin and repentance.

Gnostics held this material existence, the body, to be evil. The body, and what you did in the body, did not matter at all. They believed that it doesn't matter what you do. All that matters is what you believe.

This heresy began to seep into both Judaism and the church in the second century. However, even though it was rejected at the time, it has continued to

fester within normative theology ever since. That is why some of this might not sound like much of a problem to some of you because many traditions have incorporated gnostic concepts into their systematic theology. Just believe the right thing or say the right words, and you are saved. It doesn't really matter what you do.

However, the Bible does not embrace or promote dualism or pluralism or gnosticism. Be skeptical of 'isms' and 'ities'. These beliefs are fundamentally opposed to Biblical truth. Salvation is way more than belief and knowledge.

Believing the right thing without doing the right thing means nothing. Ya'akov, the leader of the community of believers in Yeshua in Jerusalem, and a brother and Talmid of Yeshua, addresses this in his letter.

You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe—and shudder! But do you want to know, you empty person, that faith without works is dead?

James 2:19–20 (CJB)

Believing the right thing is great, but you have to do the right things with that knowledge. This transitions nicely into the Biblical way to understand the nature between the body and soul. The Biblical way to think about the relationship of the body and soul is 'echad'.

Biblical Echad

Strong's Hebrew: 259. אֶחָד (echad) -- One, single, first, alone, unity

The most famous usage of the word echad is in the shema, which is the central proclamation in Judaism and one of the most important commandments according to Yeshua HaMashiakh. It is also what Ya'akov was just talking about.

*“Sh'ma, Yisra'el! Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad
[Hear, Isra'el! Adonai our God, Adonai is one];*

Deuteronomy 6:4 (CJB)

This word is also used to define what happens to a couple in a Biblical marriage.

and they are to be one flesh.

Genesis 2:24 (CJB)

וְהָיָה לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד

This is way more than just coming together (yakhad יַחַד) or a singular entity (yakhid יַחִיד). Echad's usage in scripture suggests a more complex understanding of oneness than just a singular entity or element. Ekhad is like fusion, which is the merging of different elements into a union.

This understanding of ekhad has implications regarding the nature of God, but it also has implications regarding our nature as human beings. Hashem created us in His likeness. As long as we are living, we are one unified being that is composed of different parts. One part is temporal, and one part is eternal. When we are living, we are both soul and body in unity.

Consider these further words of Ya'akov:

Indeed, just as the body without a spirit is dead, so too faith without actions is dead.

James 2:26 (CJB)

What we do with the body and why we do it is what actually matters in this life.

Here is the final conclusion, now that you have heard everything: fear God, and keep his mitzvot; this is what being human is all about.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (CJB)

What we do with the body (with the life that we have) and why we do it (which is the faith that we demonstrate with our actions) is what actually matters in this life. The expanse of our knowledge or the details of what we believe matter, but they do not matter more than what we do. It's not about what you believe or what you know. Those things matter, but what matters more is what you do. When we stand before the King, what we did in our body in this life that we live is all that matters.

What we do in ha'olam hazeh echoes in ha'olam haba'ah. What we do in this life echoes in eternity.

Revisiting the words of Ya'akov:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no actions to prove it? Is such "faith" able to save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, and someone says to him, "Shalom! Keep warm and eat hearty!" without giving him what he needs, what good does it do? Thus, faith by itself, unaccompanied by actions, is dead. But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions!

James 2:14–18 (CJB)

Most of this chapter of James is a rebuttal against gnostic beliefs because, even at this early stage, the gnosticism of the gentiles was making its way into the community. I encourage you to read the whole book and consider it for yourself. What Ya'akov is doing here is admonishing his readers to live lives that demonstrate their faith. Faith without works is dead. It is of no value. Likewise, works without faith has no value. You need both, working together in echad.

Rav Sha'ul taught this principle as well. In his letter to the Philippians he talks about the value of living a life of faith.

It all accords with my earnest expectation and hope that I will have nothing to be ashamed of; but rather, now, as always, the Messiah will be honored by my body, whether it is alive or dead. For to me, life is the Messiah, and death is gain. But if by living on in the body I can do fruitful work, then I don't know which to choose. I am caught in a dilemma: my desire is to go off and be with the Messiah—that is better by far— but because of you, the greater need is to stay on in the body. Yes, I am convinced of this; so I know I will stay on with you in order to help you progress in the faith and have joy in it.

Philippians 1:20–25 (CJB)

Sha'ul is not writing these words looking towards some distant, far off, potential future. This isn't 'some glad morning'. This isn't hypothetical. He is being pragmatic and realistic. Sha'ul is facing the reality of his death. He is already in prison in Rome, and he does eventually die there under the Roman Emperor Nero.

Sha'ul is not concerned with his eternal state. He is confident in it. He knows he will be with Mashiakh, in the presence of the King, and he knows it will be good because Yeshua is good. He is joyful at the prospect. Sha'ul also wants to maximize his time in his body to do the most work for Messiah that he can possibly do. He is joyful at this prospect too. Alive or dead, Sha'ul will honor the Messiah, and he will be joyful either way.

Don't miss this point, this life is the only opportunity you have to live for Mashiakh. Ultimately, standing before the King should motivate us to live faithfully now. Our purpose is to honor Adonai, keep His mitzvot, and demonstrate our faith through how we live. What we do in *ha'olam hazeh* echoes into *ha'olam haba'ah*.

In his letter to the Corinthians, which was written before he was imprisoned for the last time, Sha'ul says this about being home with the Lord or away from home in the olam hazeh.

Therefore, whether at home or away from home, we try our utmost to please him; for we must all appear before the Messiah's court of judgment, where everyone will receive the good or bad consequences of what he did while he was in the body.

2 Corinthians 5:9–10 (CJB)

So live for the King so that you can stand in His presence in joy.

Joy in the Presence of the King

One of the things in this life that brings me tremendous fulfillment is music. It is truly one of Hashem's great gifts. It shouldn't surprise you that I listen to a lot of Jewish music, and one of the most popular mainstream artists is a guy named Ben Tzur. After October 7, he, like many Israelis, has been turning to the God of Israel. The horrors of that day and the incomprehensible difficulties that have followed it have sparked a revival. There's an 'Israel Guys' podcast where they also talk about this in much greater depth, and you can find that link in my notes. So, Ben Tzur started wearing tzitzit, and it has changed the nature of his music in a fundamental way.

The recording is good, but this live clip is a little overwhelming. Let's watch it, and I will talk you through it.

{אהבת השם}

אהה, ה' מֶלֶךְ ה' מֶלֶךְ
ה' יִמְלֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד
ה' יִמְלֹךְ (לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד)

*Ahh, the Lord is King, the Lord has reigned.
The Lord will reign forever and ever.
The Lord will reign (forever and ever).*

טאטע שומר עליי,

Daddy (Yiddish) watches over me.

This isn't religious music, and this is a stadium full of regular Israelis. These are not the religious or outwardly observant, but listen to their words. Notice the fervor with which they are singing them, and notice the joy on their faces.

I see this as joy at the prospect of living under the loving protection and guidance of the King.

Therefore, let us confidently approach the throne from which God gives grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:16 (CJB)

How do we do this? How do we boldly go before the throne of the King with confidence in His grace and mercy and compassion?

1. Recognize the King
2. Live According to His Mitzvot
 1. Love the King
 2. Love your neighbor
 3. Repent When We Miss the Mark

Here is the final conclusion, now that you have heard everything: fear God, and keep his mitzvot; this is what being human is all about.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (CJB)

This is the simple point of this teaching today. The level of our joy in the presence of the King is directly related to the life that we live. Regardless of when we stand before the King, in life or death, if we want to be people who look forward to the presence of the King, we have to be people who live lives that honor the King.

Conclusion

This Rosh Hashanah, as we come before the King and begin our time set aside for repentance, I encourage you to take a good, long look at the life you have been living. Would you be confident to stand before the King? Would you have joy in the presence of the King? Does the life your soul has lived in this body reflect your faith? Is that faith placed in Hashem or in something else?

The King loved this world, all of us, so much that he sent Yeshua so that the world through Him would be saved. Through His life, death, and resurrection Yeshua made a way for us to approach the throne of the King in confidence, with joy. If you have not placed your faith in Yeshua, I invite you to do so today. Right now. You have a body. You are a soul. I admonish you to give all of yourself to Him today.

Shana tova, v'shabbat shalom.

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