

A letter for Rosh Hashanah 5774

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

During the month of Elul, the days when God's compassion is revealed and His forgiveness immanent, each and every Jew, male and female, is called upon to return to God—to do *tshuvah*. The two days of Rosh Hashanah are a time for what is known as general *tshuvah*, through our accepting upon ourselves the yoke of Heaven. The remaining days of *tshuvah* (from Rosh Hashanah up to and including Yom Kippur) should be dedicated to particular *tshuvah* by rectifying our path in life and our behavior. Our generation, already a generation replete with *ba'alei tshuvah*, has been given the great task of uniting personal and individual *tshuvah* with communal and public *tshuvah*. It is not enough that we return to the Torah and its commandments in our private space, as individuals. We are called upon to rectify our public space, to create a society and Jewish state that are guided by the Torah of Israel. This task—our communal acceptance of the yoke of Heaven—must occur peacefully and pleasantly, illustrating the phrase from our liturgy, "His sovereignty they accepted willfully."

The three communal commandments

Our *tshuvah* as a society follows the three commandments that guide communal life in the land of Israel. The three verses that describe the three communal commandments are: "Place, you shall place, upon you a king," "You shall annihilate the memory of Amalek," and "They shall make Me a Temple."

- ▶ Our first task is to appoint a rectified leadership that will guide the Jewish people with Torah, with the ultimate purpose of appointing a king whose status transcends the other governmental branches and whose life is dedicated to elevate the entire nation, imbuing it with a consciousness of nullification before the Almighty.
- ▶ Our second task is the war against Amalek—subduing, and vanquishing all enemies of the Jewish people, and eradicating evil around the globe. Rectified leadership follows the Torah principle of, "Justice, you shall pursue justice," culminating with the annihilation of Amalek and the upholding of global justice.
- ▶ Our third task is the construction of the third Holy Temple in Jerusalem, from where the Divine Presence will dwell amidst the Jewish people and, through them, upon all peoples of the earth. The Temple and the Divine service conducted therein are based on the principle that, "You shall be earnest with *Havayah* your God" directing us to perform all Divine service with consummately simple earnestness.

On Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to eat *simanim*, foods whose name suggests a particular blessing or idea with which we would like to usher in the new year. To the edible *simanim*, it is appropriate to add linguistic ones—words or phrases, whose numerical value alludes to the number of the approaching year (discounting the thousands)—in our case: 774.

In reference to the three communal commandments, their one-word names, king (**מלך**), Amalek (**עמלק**), and Temple (**מקדש**) together equal 774.

In addition, the key words in the three verses directing the communal commandments—"Place, you shall place a king over you," "Justice, you shall pursue justice," and "You shall be earnest with *Havayah* your God"—are "king" (**מלך**), "justice" (**צדקה**), and "earnest" (**תמים**), whose combined value is also 774!

The threefold blessing

The greatest of all blessings in the Torah is the threefold Priestly Blessing whose three blessings correspond in order to the three communal commandments.

- ▶ The first blessing, "May God bless you and safeguard you" (**ברך יהוה וישמך**) corresponds to appointing a king. The king is entrusted with the financial and physical security of the people. When the Jewish people choose leaders that follows the Torah way, God blesses them from above with affluence and security.
- ▶ The second blessing, "May God shine His countenance upon you and give you grace" (**יְאַר יְהוָה פָּנֶיךָ אֲלֵיכָ וַיִּתְּפַנֵּךְ**) corresponds to the commandment to eradicate Amalek. Amalek casts doubt upon

faith (Amalek [עָמָלֶךְ] equals doubt [פַּקְדָּה] in Hebrew). It is the Torah that frees us from doubts and the Torah's source is described as "God's countenance." By engaging in Torah, we find grace and favor in the eyes of God and our fellow men.

- ▶ The third blessing, "May God bring His countenance to you and give you peace" (ישא ייְהוָה פָּנֵינוּ אֱלֹהִיךְ וַיֵּשֶׁם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם) corresponds to the commandment to build the Temple. It is in the Temple that we can see God's countenance, face to face, and the Holy Temple in Jerusalem is the central House of Peace, for the entire world and all its inhabitants.

The first words from each blessing are: "Bless" (בָּרָךְ), "Shine" (גַּדֵּל), "Bring" (אֲשַׁלֵּח) and their combined numerical value is 774! This *siman* is particularly relevant for us to have in mind whenever we hear or recite the Priestly Blessing during the coming year.

Charity is a constantly flowing river

Another *siman* of the new year guides us in creating a conduit for blessings in the coming year. 774 is the value of the verse, "And charity is a constantly flowing river" (ואהזקה בְּנֵת לְאִתָּה).

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lida, the author of the Tanya, explains that this verse describes how charity is like a flowing river, carrying on it the revelation of the soul's very essence (called the "constant" part of the soul) in the heart's inner chambers. Revealing the soul's very essence brings with it personal redemption, while performing the three public commandments reveals the very essence of our communal soul, bringing about universal redemption.

Love of God and love of Israel

A final and most endeared *siman* for the new year is that 774 is the value of "eternal (or, worldly) love" (אהבה עולמית) together with "great love" (אהבה רבתה).

God's love for us is both eternal and great. To explain its nature, the giants of Chassidut said that if we could combine all the love felt by all parents towards their children, it would still be nowhere near the love that God has for a single Jew, even if that individual is a sinner.

God's love for us is complemented by our love of God, as promised by the verse, "You shall love *Havayah* your God." Our love of God divides into a number of different levels, the first of which is called "worldly love" (אהבה עולמית)—simple and earnest love that dwells in every Jew's heart and is awakened by contemplating how God gives life to all. One level higher is "great love" (אהבה רבתה)—a tremendous yearning for God that allows the soul to transcend the body, granting it a taste of the reality of the World to Come in the form of "pleasurable love" (אהבה בתענוגים). Still higher is a second form of "eternal love" (אהבה עולמית), whereby love of God becomes our eternal, native state.

The perfection of our love for God manifests in our love of Israel—loving those [the Jewish people] whom our Beloved [God] loves; loving each and every Jew, even if he or she is distant or detached.

Our love of Israel empowers us to give charity, like a constantly flowing river of goodness, fostering our unity as a people and enabling us to perform our communal duties, the three public commandments.

The main thing is that we act and in the coming year, we must increase our love of Israel, and do our utmost to bring about the performance of the three public commandments.

Let it be known that increasing amounts of charity and spending all our treasures on the three public commandments are the vessels that can hold all the blessings we wish for in the coming year.

Siman tov vemazal tov yehei lanu ulechol Yisrael with the true and complete redemption, with the Mashiach who will come and redeem us immediately.

With blessings for a *ketivah vachatimah tovah* (a good inscription and seal) and for a good and sweet year for the entire house of Israel