

LET'S LEARN CHASSIDUS

With Rabbi Shais Taub



ONE THING— HOW MANY ROOMS DO YOU LIVE IN?

TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT ROSH HASHANAH

First, Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is not actually called “New Year,” or even “Beginning of the Year,” but rather *Rosh Hashanah*, “Head of the Year.” Maybe we’re so used to hearing it that it loses meaning to us but let’s slow down for a minute and think about these words. A head is a body part—like a heart, like a stomach, like a foot. If we had a holiday called Stomach of the Year you would notice that, wouldn’t you? So we have a day called Head of the Year. But what does that mean? That’s one question.

Second, there’s a chapter of *Tehillim* that we’ve been saying twice a day now since the beginning of Elul—Chapter 27, “To David: Hashem is my Light.” We say it for 50 days—from Rosh Chodesh Elul to the seventh day of Sukkos. It’s sort of the “High Holiday Season Anthem.”

In it, Dovid Hamelech says to Hashem, “*Achas sha’alti*, I’m only asking

for one thing...” but then proceeds to ask for a whole bunch of things (that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life; to see the pleasantness of Hashem; to visit His Temple every morning; that He will hide me in His tabernacle on the day of calamity; He will conceal me in the secrecy of His tent; He will lift me up on a rock”). That’s a lot of stuff. So why does Dovid say he’s asking for “one thing”? He’s trying to pull a fast one? Not likely.

If Dovid has many requests to make, why doesn’t he just say so and not pretend there’s “one thing”? That’s our second question.

HOW MANY ROOMS DO YOU LIVE IN?

The Rebbe once told a story (*Toras Menachem* 5710, p. 14) about two brothers. One was rich and the other was poor. The “poor” one (and now I will say “poor” in quotes because we understand that “poor” just means from the most superficial perspective) had to marry off his daughter and needed money for the expenses. He traveled to visit his “rich” brother and to ask for a gift or a loan.

When the “poor” brother came to the “rich” brother’s home, the “rich” brother took his “poor” brother on a tour of his big house. “This is



the room where I sleep. This is the room where I eat. This is the room for receiving guests. What do you think of all this, my brother?"

The "poor" brother sighed and said, "My dear brother, I am sorry that you have to live like this—a different room for each activity. In my house, I have *cheder echad*, one room."

How many "rooms" are in your "house"? How many different areas of life do you maintain? Here is business and here is family and here is fun and here is spirituality. Even when we do good things—we *daven*, we learn Torah, we do *mitzvos*—it feels like another "room" to add to our already complicated lives.

The word for it—and I am not judging or condemning *chas v'shalom*—is a lack of integrity. Integrity doesn't mean what people think it means—honesty. Integrity means just as it sounds—to be "integrated." In this sense, it means integrated with one's own self. When you are *one* person with *one* set of values running straight through everything you do... *that* is integrity! When I am the same "me" whether I am eating, sleeping, praying, paying bills, or driving carpool... *that* is integrity.

Integrity means living all of life in *cheder echad*, "one room"—or perhaps we should call it a "room of Oneness."

BE WHOLE

As detailed in *Hayom Yom* for Tishrei 3-8, the Maggid once taught his students the deeper meaning of *teshuvah*. He quoted the verse "*V'shavta ad Hashem Elokecha*," (*Devarim* 4:30 and 30:2) which means "Return to the L-rd your G-d" and explained that it actually means to return so thoroughly that the Divine name Hashem connoting miraculous transcendence becomes to you like the Divine name Elokim which indicates the power of Hashem in the natural world.

Reb Zushe said that this was far too lofty a teaching for him to understand so he decided to break



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down the five letters of the word *teshuvah* into an acronym with each letter standing for another concept.

The first letter, *taf*, he said, stands for “*Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha*, Be whole with the L-rd your G-d” (*Devarim* 18:13.)

What does it mean to be “whole”? Pretty much the opposite of being fragmented, of living life in “many rooms.” Being whole means being integrated.

So how do I start to do *teshuvah*, which means to return to my innate holiness? By being whole and complete and integrated. By living life in one room.

THE SPLIT

When Herbert Weiner who was a Reform rabbi at the time was doing research for a book he later called *9 1/2 Mystics* he met with the Rebbe twice.

At one point in his second meeting, Weiner blurted out that all of the Chabad people he had met have a “naive look in their eyes....” “What you see missing from their eyes,” said the Rebbe, “is a *kera*, a split!”

The Rebbe then hesitated for a moment and continued, “I hope you will not take offense, but something tells me you don’t sleep well at night, and this is not good for ‘length of days.’ Perhaps if you had been raised wholly in one world or in another, it might be different. But this split is what comes from trying to live in two worlds.”

Weiner continued to ask the Rebbe many questions and at the end of their meeting, Weiner asked one last question:

“Many Jews today are searching. They want to return. What would you say to them to help them find their way?”

The Rebbe paused for a moment. “I would say that the most important thing is ‘no compromise.’ I would send to them the words spoken by the prophet Elijah (*Melachim I* 18:21) ‘How long will you jump between two opinions?’”

So this split, this fragmentation, is our problem. But how do we become integrated? How do we become whole?

DEBT CONSOLIDATION

What’s debt consolidation? You take

all your debts and roll them into one easy monthly payment.

Well, how many of us live a life where we are constantly working to pay off dozens of different “creditors”? I don’t mean actual creditors, although I suppose I mean them too. I mean that all of us have all these problems.

So, for instance, if you wanted to pray for a bunch of stuff on Rosh Hashanah, if you could give Hashem your “list,” so to speak, you’d have plenty of stuff to put on it, right? Go ahead. Think about your list.

So we have a lot of problems. We have a lot on our list.

So wouldn’t it be nice if we could do some “debt consolidation”? Wouldn’t it be nice if we could all come to shul on Rosh Hashanah with all these problems and leave with just one problem to worry about?

The *mashpia* Reb Shmuel Greinem Esterman, the first *mashpia* in the original Tomchei Temimim in the city of Lubavitch, was known to say at *farbrengens*:

A man met his friend who looked worried. “What’s the matter?” he asked.

“I’m drowning in troubles,” the poor fellow replied. “I have a daughter who is of marriageable age, and I have no way to marry her off. Firstly, I must arrange a dowry. Secondly, there’s the cost of the wedding. Thirdly, I must provide gifts for the bride and groom. And finally, I have to pay for the musician and other services.”

“How much will all of that cost you?” his friend queried.

“It will cost 300 rubles,” he replied.

“Ah, in that case, you have only

one problem. How to get 300 rubles!"

Greinem would then explain that we all think we have *lots* of problems. It sure *looks* like it. We have challenges in all sorts of different areas of life... marriage, job, kids, health, hobbies, money... and that's just my own life! Look at the world! *Oy, vey!* There is so much going on!

Ah, but that's the un-integrated way of looking at it.

Really, we all just have *one* problem. We have *one* challenge.

Remember we asked why Rosh Hashanah is called the "Head of the Year"?

The Rebbe said one Rosh Hashanah that there are two manners of healing the body. One manner is by healing the symptoms of a particular organ or limb and the other is more "holistic," to treat the entire person as a whole. When we treat the symptom, the underlying causes can remain and crop up elsewhere. When we treat the whole person, this prevents the symptoms from returning.

Rosh Hashanah is called the "Head of the Year" because the year is like a living thing. Imagine that everything that will happen to you in 5781 is another limb of this body. Every second of the coming year is like another cell.

Now, we can try to arrange every cell and every limb and every organ on its own. We can make our list of all the things we need this year...

Or we can go straight to the "head," to the "nerve center" of the

entire body, and when the head is healthy, the whole body is healthy. We can focus on "*one* thing" and change "*everything*."

Now we can also understand why Dovid Hamelech says he's only asking for "one thing" even though he goes on to enumerate his list. Dovid is teaching us the secret of how to pray, how to talk to Hashem. We all have our lists. But put your

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list aside for a second and say, "Hashem! I only want ONE THING! In fact, as I stand here today I can see how all my life I have been looking for this ONE THING. Life pulls me in so many directions and it *looks* like I am looking for many things... but that's not the real me. The real me is looking for ONE THING, for YOU. That's all I want. And when I have YOU, then I will have everything else that I need—sustenance, health, a

happy family, fulfillment, purpose. Everything falls into place. I just need ONE THING."

YOUR NEW LIFE

I want to leave you with one last story. A guy is driving along, alone in his car, one night on an empty highway. He is depressed beyond words, thinking how miserable he is and about everything that's wrong in his life. Suddenly, he hears the voice of Hashem.

"You're looking for a new life?" asks Hashem.

"Yes," he says, in awe.

"Well, you're in luck today," says Hashem, "because I happen to have a new life, and it can be yours for a reasonable price."

"How much?"

"How much have you got?"

"I've got 20 dollars in my pocket."

"You're in luck," says Hashem. "The price of a new life today happens to be exactly 20 dollars."

"But that's everything I've got," the man protests. "If I give you all of my money, how will I buy gas for the car?"

"A car?" says Hashem, "Oh, I see. The price for your new life is 20 bucks and your car."

"But if I give you my car, how will I get to work tomorrow?"

"Work?" says Hashem, "You have a job? The price of your new life is 20 bucks, your car and your job."

"But if I give you my job, then I won't get paid. I need to pay the mortgage this week."

"A mortgage? You mean you have a house? I hate to tell you this, but

the price of your new life just went up. It's 20 bucks, your car, your job and your house."

"But where will my family live?"

"Family? You've got a wife and kids? The price of a new life is 20 bucks, your car, your job, your house, and your wife and kids."

At this point the man decides to shut up.

"Are you willing to take it?" asks Hashem.

The man nods. Hashem takes everything, and He is about to give the man his new life. "But one thing," says Hashem. "Before I give you your new life, there's something else I want you to do for me."

The man nods again.

"See this 20 dollars?" says Hashem, "It's not your 20 dollars.

It's My 20 dollars. But I want you to take it from Me, and I want you to be My emissary to spend it as I would. And you see this car? It's not your car. It's My car. But I want you to drive it to the places where I would go. And this job: I want you to go to work and earn a paycheck. But it's not your job. It's My job. And I want you to behave there as I would. And this house is not your house. It's My house. But I want you to use it the way My house should be used. And this family—this wife and these kids. They're not your family. They're My family. But I want you to take care of them for me the way that I would. Can you do all of that?"

The man nods.

"Then here is your 20 dollars, your car, your job, your house, and your

family. And here is your new life."

After a year like we just had, where so much happened and there are so many things on our minds, it's time to remember what we really need.

ONE THING.

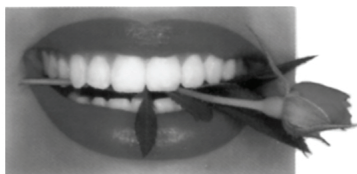
And when we remember that, we have EVERYTHING.

May Hashem grant each of us a good, sweet, happy, healthy new year in all that we need. ❧

Based on Rosh Hashanah 5716, Hisva'aduyos vol. 15, pp. 16-17 and Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5715, Hisva'aduyos vol. 14, pp. 304-307. The two farbrengens were one week apart and the Rebbe refers back to the Nitzavim-Vayeilech farbrengen in the Rosh Hashanah farbrengen.

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