

# A Yamim Noraim Message

Rabbi Moshe Hauer

Executive Vice President of the Orthodox Union

Dear Friends,

What an unusual period this has been for each of us! For six months our world has been upended, transformed by the coronavirus. We have all had to live our lives differently, and in great measure, far more separately. The limits imposed by the pandemic have drastically changed our interpersonal contacts, affecting our physical interactions outside and inside the home.

This experience has highlighted the value of our relationships. We have become more aware of the hunger we feel for each other's company and friendship, and we notice the joy experienced any time we are able to come back together – even when distanced and masked.

Yet, as the pandemic remains a force to be reckoned with, many of us will find ourselves experiencing the *Yamim Noraim* alone, away from our shul and community. This is a difficult challenge, as it is this season where our shul and communal connection looms largest.

This is the time when we usually come together in shul, seeing each other, raising our voices together in song, and reciting the inspiring prayers along with the *Chazzan's* familiar tunes. So many of us will miss all of that this year.

Prayer at home on these important and holy days will not be easy.

But it will be profoundly effective.

There is a classic Talmudic passage (BT Yevamos 49b) that presents a contradiction between two verses, one that indicates that G-d is always there to hear our prayers (Devarim 4:7; כִּדְ אֱלֹקֵינוּ בְּכֹל (קראנו אליו), and another that speaks of specific times when G-d is available to us (Yeshayahu 55:6;

דְּרִשׁוּ ד' בְּהַמְצֵאוֹ). The Talmud's resolution is to differentiate between the individual and the community. G-d is always available to the community, but not necessarily to the individual. There is, however, a time when G-d is accessible even to the individual, and that is the period of the ten days from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur.

Ironically, it appears that the days when we most value being with our community are the very days when we do not need them the most, the very days when even our solitary voice makes its way before G-d.

Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of man's creation. Man was created alone, as our Sages noted, indicating that every individual is an entire world for whom the entirety of creation would have been worthy. As such – noted מו"ר Rav Moshe Shapira ז"ל – it is fitting that on Rosh Hashana, even as we may stand alone, each of us has G-d's ear. On the anniversary of G-d's creating the world for just one person, every solitary person garners G-d's full attention.

We are hopeful that this modest booklet will provide some support to you as you face a very different *Yamim Noraim*. Along with your local shul and community we stand together with you, yearning, hoping, and praying that the coming year will bring with it great blessing, and allow us to come back together in good health and with profound joy.

With warmest wishes for a *Ktiva vaChatima Tova*, a happy and healthy new year.

Sincerely,

Moshe Hauer

# Reassurance in Uncertain Times

## *Parenting, Pandemics, and the Days of Awe*

By Rona Milch Novick, PhD

Dean, Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration  
Yeshiva University

This has been an unusual year of Yom Tovs. We spent Pesach, *z'man cheruteynu*, quarantined in our homes, captive not to an Egyptian tyrant but a modern virus. As we counted the weeks to Shavuot, we never expected that we would celebrate *Matan Torah* outside our shuls. Now, as we approach the *Yomim Noraim*, and the *chag* of *sukkot*, we are still experiencing isolation and anxiety. We watch the news and the calendar hoping for reassurance that there are better days ahead. Human beings need hope, we need to be able to look forward to positive change. Our children, too, need this. Perhaps even more than adults they need reassurance that this radically different and abnormal September is not the new normal. Children long to hear that although we still struggle in a crisis, and so much has changed, there are things they can count on.

I first noted how difficult providing reassurance can be during crises when I worked with first responders after 9-11. Their children would ask if they were coming home for dinner, a seemingly simple question, and they would freeze, thinking of the hundreds of parents who had, so tragically, not come home. They said nothing. I had an idea for a children's book that would give parents the tools, the words, to reassure, even when nothing seems certain. Decades later, and after many iterations, I was thrilled when Behrman House; *Apples & Honey* Press accepted it for publication. In a bizarre turn of fate *Mommy, Can You Stop the Rain?* was published this April 1<sup>st</sup>, April Fool's Day, in the midst of a global pandemic. It helped me consider and share a recipe for how to

reassure, even when we are far from able to make the world perfect for our children.

COVID-19 has made it particularly hard to find words of reassurance for our children and teens. From when we rock them in our arms, shushing away their discomfort or tiredness, to offering kisses to make their boo-boos all better, to the much more complex reassurance we provide teens when they suffer disappointment or confront the challenging realities of adulthood, it is a parent's job, always, to offer comfort and hope. In the face of a still not fully understood global pandemic, with rapidly changing realities, and as we approach the Days of Awe and another COVID limited *chag*, how can we offer reassurance? Perhaps if we explore the critical elements of parental reassurance, we may find that the approaching *yomim tovim* provide guidance and support for our efforts and that psychological approaches to healthy and health-promoting reassurance are evidenced in our liturgy and holiday practices.

The first key component in providing reassurance is validation. This is the exact opposite of the parental reflex to make things better by denying they are a "big deal". It is so natural to tell a child upset by a COVID related disappointment that the party, trip, visit, etc. was "not that great anyway" or that "a much better one" awaits sometime in the future. This negates the child's feelings of anger, loss, or anxiety, and dismisses as irrelevant their personal reality or truth. It also assumes that in sugarcoating or whitewashing the pain we somehow make it disappear. This is not only

far from the truth, but leaves children feeling unheard and misunderstood. We are often driven to this minimizing stance because we do not agree with our child's or teen's assessment that this is "the end of the world as we know it" or "the worst thing ever". Validation is different than agreement. We can tell our child that we know she feels sad about the party being cancelled without agreeing with her view that it represents a social nightmare.

*Yomim Noriam tefillot* demonstrate how well our sages understood the need for validation and acceptance of negative feelings. As we stand in judgement on the Days of Awe much of our liturgy neither minimizes nor negates our tenuous situation. On Yom Kippur, we accept that we are but the handiwork of *Hashem, ki anu peulatecha, v'atah yotzreynu*, a sentiment also present in the *ki hinei kachomer tefilah*. In the *Utaneh Tokef* that precedes the *kedushah* for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we acknowledge our worry that we are imperfect and have sinned and further relate our powerlessness in the face of pain and destruction. There is no sugarcoating, and often tears as the chazan enumerates the total uncertainty we must accept regarding the hurt and loss the coming year may hold.

But validation is only the first component of reassurance. Parents need to help move children from their worry, anger or anxiety forward in a more positive direction. Reassurance requires the delicate balancing of validation - truly hearing and respecting where a child is – with helping to move the child forward in growth and hope. Reassurance that lingers too long on negative, anxious feelings can quickly devolve into wallowing and self-pity that keeps us stuck. Parents help shift from the negative to a more hopeful future focus by creating a sense of safety that comes from their constancy. Parents in

communicating "I am here, no matter what" send the message that they are willing and able to stay with their child through whatever trials, crises, or stressors arise. To experience such company is amazingly reassuring and empowering. We can manage whatever stress or trauma comes our way, because we are not alone. With young children communicating this element of reassurance often requires parents' physical presence, as we hold their hand during a medical procedure, or offer hugs when they are hurt or sad. As children grow, it is parents' psychological presence and constancy that matters. We want our children to go through life feeling we are with them. We want them to feel our love and support, even when we are not at their side. Even as our children become adults and move with great simcha and anticipation into their own lives, homes, and families, we want them to carry our reassuring belief in them and their abilities, always.

So many of our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur piyyutim voice our wish and need to feel God's presence in our lives. In fact, since the beginning of Elul we have been reciting Psalm 27, *L'David; achat sha'alti me-yet Hashem, otah avakesh, shivti b'veyt Hashem col yimei chaiyai*, praying that our request to live in the house of Hashem for all our days will be granted. As we read the *Malchuyot, Shofarot* and *Zichronot* verses in the Rosh Hashanah Amidah we have endless reminders of God's presence, as the selected *pasukim* chronicle how God was there for our *Avot*, how God remembered us in times of need, and that God, our powerful king is ever-present. We stand in awe and in judgement, but we are reassured that we are not alone.

Along with validation and constant presence, to be effective reassurance must be free from empty promises or unrealistic guarantees. A parent who assures a child of health or safety for their family becomes an untrustworthy

adult when God forbid, illness or accident strikes. This is one of the hardest realities of being a reassuring parent – accepting the limits of what we can make right for our children. True reassurance goes beyond platitudes, it recognizes that we do our children a disservice when we offer that which we cannot deliver. In these times of COVID caused uncertainty, we want to be able to say that we may celebrate Sukkot alone, but for Pesach we will definitely see the family. We may want to promise that graduations will happen in person, that weddings and other simchas will be graced with a myriad of celebrants. The past 6 months have taught us that doing so would be both ineffective and foolhardy.

Our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur *davening* similarly avoids easy answers and hopeful platitudes. While our *tefillot* provide many examples of the presence and power of God, we are offered no guarantees of God's assistance in our personal or communal outcomes. But even without easy answers or guarantees, the final component of reassurance is embedded in all our thoughts and actions during the Days of Awe: we are offered a view of a path forward. After the *Utaneh Tokef* catalogs the many casualties that may occur, we raise our voices to identify three personal actions that can impact our future: *Teshuvah, Tefillah, Tzedakah*. The path forward totally reframes our thinking, from passive powerlessness to active participants in our growth.

This is the final and most powerful component of reassurance. It is the final stage, moving from validation and acceptance, with the comfort of not being alone, to a realistic appraisal of the uncertainty of the future and arrives at the moment when we shift from

passive to active. The final element of reassurance is asking the question – given this reality and all its uncertainty – what can I do, who should I be, how can I grow? When we say to our children, after validating, confirming our presence no matter what, and confronting the unclear future, “how should we handle this?”, or “since we can't have the simcha you hoped for, what should we do instead”, we are offering the greatest reassurance. We communicate life will go on, that we believe in our children's ability to shape a future in spite of challenges.

As we approach a COVID-tinged Days of Awe we need to create for ourselves and our children, days of reassurance and faith. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks defines faith as “the courage to live with uncertainty” and reminds us that “the Torah does not pretend that life is easier than it is”<sup>1</sup>. But our Torah, our liturgy and our rituals help us as parents to recognize and communicate that just as we are here for our children, so is God with us, offering us endless opportunities for growth, and faith. In these uncertain times, and always, it is a very reassuring thought.

Wishing all a Shanah Tovah.

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks: Parashat Emor: Radical Uncertainty. <https://rabbisacks.org/emor-5780/>

# Guidelines for Those Davening at Home

Prepared by Rabbi Josh Flug

Director of Torah Research at Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

The following guide is meant to serve as a guide for Teffila for those who will be at home over course of Rosh Hashana. Local times referenced below can be found at [ou.org/zmanim](http://ou.org/zmanim)

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## Erev Rosh Hashanah

- Candle lighting should take place 18 minutes before sundown. The beracha should conclude להדליק נר של שבת ושל יום טוב.
- Weekday Mincha should be completed before sundown.



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## First Day of Rosh Hashanah

### First Night (Friday Night)

- An abridged קבלת שבת is recited that begins with מזמור שיר ליום השבת. מזמור מדליקין. should also be omitted.
- Both ושמרו and וחדש שופר are recited before the Amidah.
- Ma'ariv Amidah for Rosh Hashanah with proper insertions for Shabbos. There are a number of insertions into the Amidah that are recited throughout Aseres Yemei Teshuva.
- Vayechulu is recited after the Amidah (omitting the beracha "Magen Avos") followed by לדוד מזמור and then Aleinu.
- Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah with proper Shabbos insertions. Kiddush begins with יום הששי. Shehechyanu is recited.
- The traditional symbolic foods (simanim) are eaten on the first night together with their respective יהי רצון.
- Birkas HaMazon should include the insertions for Shabbos and Rosh Hashanah.
- If Ma'ariv was recited before nightfall, Kerias Sh'ma should be repeated after nightfall.

### First Day (Saturday Morning)

- On Rosh Hashanah, the שיר של יום and שיר ליום הראשון are recited at the beginning of davening. Shir HaYichud and Shir HaKavod are omitted when davening without a minyan.
- Shir HaMa'alos is recited after Yishtabach.
- Birchos Kerias Sh'ma for Shabbos (הכל יודוך).
- Shacharis Amidah for Rosh Hashanah with the proper insertions for Shabbos. Avinu Malkeinu is omitted on Shabbos.

- The Torah reading for the first day is Bereishis 21:1-34, the maftir is Bamidbar 29:1-6 and the haftarah is from Shmuel I 1:1-2:10.
- The shofar is not blown on Shabbos.
- One should wait until the third hour to recite Mussaf. If a minyan in the community is reciting Mussaf earlier, one may recite Mussaf once they have started.
- Mussaf Amidah for Rosh Hashanah with proper insertions for Shabbos.
- Those who are davening without a minyan are encouraged to study and recite the piyutim that are added to Chazaras HaShatz, particularly ונתנה תוקף.
- Mincha Amidah for Rosh Hashanah with the proper insertions for Shabbos. Mincha should be recited before shekiyah (sunset).
- Seudah Shlishis should ideally be eaten before the tenth hour and preferably after reciting Mincha. If one did not do so, one may eat seudah shlishis until sunset.
- Preparations for the second day may not begin until nightfall.



## Second Day of Rosh Hashanah

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### Second Night (Saturday Night)

- Candle lighting must be performed after nightfall.
- Ma'ariv should be recited after nightfall.
- Ma'ariv for Rosh Hashanah includes ותודיענו.
- Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah includes Meorei Ha'Eish, Havdalah and Shehechyanu (יקנה"ז). The new fruit should be placed on the table before Kiddush and is eaten after Kiddush. If one does not have a new fruit or new clothing, one may still recite Shehechyanu.

### Second Day (Sunday Morning)

- On Rosh Hashanah, the שיר של יום and אורי ה' לדוד are recited at the beginning of davening. Shir HaYichud and Shir HaKavod are omitted when davening without a minyan.
- Shir HaMa'alos is recited after Yishtabach.
- Birchos Kerias Sh'ma for weekday (המאיר לארץ).
- Shacharis Amidah for Rosh Hashanah.
- The Torah reading for the second day is Bereishis 22:1-22:24, the maftir is Bamidbar 29:1-6 and the haftarah is from Yirmiyahu 31:1- 31:19.
- One should wait until the third hour to recite Mussaf. If a minyan in the community is reciting Mussaf earlier, one may recite Mussaf once they have started.
- If someone davening at home can blow shofar on his own, he should blow the first thirty sounds before Mussaf. The second thirty sounds should not be blown during the silent Amidah. One may blow 70 additional sounds after the Amidah, but there is no requirement to do so.
- If someone else is blowing on behalf of others:

- If the ba'al toke'a (shofar blower) already fulfilled his mitzvah, the berachos ( לשמוע קול ) ל שופר and שהחיינו ) should ideally be recited by one of the listeners. If the listeners are all women, the ba'al toke'a may not recite the berachos; they must be recited by one of the women.
- If the listeners are spread out across a large area, each person can recite his/her own beracha.
- Only 30 sounds are blown.
- If one is going to hear the shofar before the seventh halachic hour of the day, one should wait to recite Mussaf until after hearing the shofar.
- Mussaf Amidah for Rosh Hashanah.
- Those who are davening without a minyan are encouraged to study and recite the piyutim that are added to Chazaras HaShatz, particularly ונתנה תוקף.
- Mincha Amidah for Rosh Hashanah. Avinu Malkeinu is omitted on Shabbos. Mincha should be recited before shekiyah (sunset).
- Traditionally Tashlich is recited on Rosh Hashanah afternoon (not on Shabbos) next to a body of water. If this cannot be performed with proper social distancing measures, one can recite it any time until Yom Kippur. If it was not done before Yom Kippur, there is still some benefit in reciting it until Hoshana Rabba.

### **Motzaei Yom Tov/Tzom Gedaliah**

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- Weekday Amidah should be recited including Atah Chonantanu and the special insertions for Aseres Yemei Teshuva.
- Havdalah consists of two berachos: HaGafen and HaMavdil (no besamim or eish).

# Forgiveness When We Have Not Sinned

**Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon**

Translated by Maury Rosenfeld

Designed by Rav Rimon to explore the nature of forgiveness with family members of all ages

## 1. Shulchan Aruch, 606

To reconcile with your friend on Erev Yom Kippur | לפייס את חברו בערב יום הכיפורים.

🗨️ Why would a person need to reconcile with his friend specifically on the day before Yom Kippur? Why Yom Kippur specifically?

## 2. Mishna Berurah, 606:1

Even though throughout the rest of the year, a person is obligated to reconcile with his friend with whom he has sinned against, if he didn't have the opportunity to do so, he waits to reconcile until the next day. However, on Erev Yom Kippur, one is obligated to fix everything, in order to be purified from all of their inequities, as it says "For on this day, He will atone for you, for all of your inequities."

והנה אע"פ שגם בשאר ימות השנה מחוייב לפייס למי שפשע כנגדו מ"מ אם אין לו פנאי הוא ממתין לפייסו על יום אחר אבל בעיוה"כ מחוייב לתקן הכל כדי שיטהר מכל עונותיו כדכתיב כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם מכל חטאתיכם.

🗨️ According to the Mishnah Berurah, when must one do Teshuvah?

## 3. Yoma 86a

Rav was giving shiur in front of his teacher, Rebbe. In the middle, Rebbe Chiya walked in, and Rav started again from the beginning. Afterwards, Bar Kapra entered, and Rav again started from the beginning. Yet after this, Rebbe Shimon, Rebbe's son, entered, and Rav started from the beginning a third time. Finally, Rebbe Chanina walked in. Rav exclaimed, "How am I supposed to start anew each time someone enters?" He did not start from the beginning this time. Rebbe Chanina was insulted, and on Erev Yom Kippur, Rav approached him to ask for forgiveness, and Rebbe Chanina did not acquiesce!

רב אמר שיעור לפני רבי. באמצע השיעור נכנס רבי חייא. חזר רב על השיעור מתחילתו. אחר כך נכנס בר קפרא – חזר רב על השיעור מתחילתו. אחר כך נכנס רבי שמעון (בנו של רבי) – חזר רב על כל השיעור. אחר כך נכנס רבי חנינא. אמר רב: האם אפשר כל פעם לחזור מחדש על השיעור? לא חזר והמשיך את השיעור. רבי חנינא נפגע. בערב יום הכיפורים, בא רב אל רבי חנינא לבקש מחילה, והוא לא הסכים למחול!

[The Gemara asks about Rebbe Chanina's hesitance to forgive, and answers that there was indeed a specific reason for his doing so.]

🗨️ Why would Rav have to go ask for forgiveness? Why did he do so on Erev Yom Kippur?

#### 4. Tur, Orach Chaim, 606

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- ☞ Why is it imperative to ask for forgiveness on Erev yom Kippur? Learn the commentary of the Tur, you will extrapolate that in order to be forgiven by G-d, it's essential for Klal Yisrael to be united. Yom Kippur is a day of forgiveness, therefore the more our nation becomes unified the more we can be forgiven (Think of a parent's happiness when their children are in concordance).

And each person must accept in his heart on Erev Yom Kippur to reconcile with anyone with whom they had sinned against, as any sins between a person and God, Yom Kippur atones for, though any sins between people, Yom Kippur does not atone for unless there is reconciliation ... and one should do this, so that the heart of all of Israel will be whole, each with his fellow, [so that there will be no room for any accusation or charge on Israel, and so that they will be similar to the angels] ... Just as the angels have peace between them, so too Israel on Yom Kippur, and God hears the testimony against them, and [still] forgives them.

ויתן כל אדם אל לבו בערב יום הכפורים לפייס לכל מי שפשע כנגדו דעבירות שבין אדם למקום יום הכיפורים מכפר ושבין אדם לחבירו אין יום הכפורים מכפר עד שיפייסנו ... ועושין כן כדי שיהא לב כל ישראל שלם כל אחד עם חבירו, [כדי שלא יהיה מקום לקטרג על עם ישראל וכדי להידמות למלאכים]... מה מלאכי השרת שלום ביניהם כן ישראל ביום הכפורים והקב"ה שומע עדותן מן המקטרגין ומכפר עליהם:

- ☞ Can you think of a different – or additional – reason why it's important to ask forgiveness on Erev Yom Kippur specifically?
- ☞ Is there any reason, from what we've seen, that it would be worthwhile to ask forgiveness even if we have not necessarily sinned?

# “Joy and Trembling 5781”

Rabbi Moshe Benovitz

How to use this learning packet:

- These source sheets/table guide will take us through a multifaceted discussion on the themes of joy that appear through the High Holidays (particularly Rosh HaShana).
- The guide is divided into 4 sections. They can be used as a single conversation or assigned to each of the 4 meals over the Chag.
- **The sources are meant to generate discussion, creativity, and debate, not to be comprehensive treatments of the subject material.**
- The first section addresses the dominant themes of the Rosh HaShana experience, as they encourage joy and more solemnity.
- The second and third sections each offer an approach to justify Simcha on Rosh HaShana.
- The fourth and final section explores the significance of Simcha in the Religious experience, and its unexpected prominence in religious devotion.
- **The guide is intended for families and individuals of all ages and backgrounds.**
- Each section contains some basic source material, discussion guides, and exercises.

## ***Section I: Time of Joy?***

- ☞ Which Rosh HaShana experiences are meant to reflect/evoke feeling of joy, and which are decidedly not? (Make your own list. After, reflect on the suggestions below)

### Joy

Festive meals  
More modern liturgy and tunes  
Custom of simanim and Shehechyanu  
Lack of Fasting  
Yaale V'Yavo and status as a Yom Tov  
Tekiah

### Trembling

Liturgy and traditional tunes  
Content of many Piyutim and themes of life and death Judgment  
No Recitation of Hallel  
Teruah

- ☞ Are feelings of joy compatible with the goals of Rosh HaShana?
- ☞ Is it possible for different generations or different communities to experience Rosh HaShana in opposite ways? Is it necessary for everyone to incorporate both joy and trembling in the holiday?

## Key Sources

### Nehemia Chapter 9 Verses 9-10

Nehemiah the Tirshatha, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were explaining to the people said to all the people, **“This day is holy to the LORD your God: you must not mourn or weep,”** for all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Teaching.

He further said to them, **“Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad,** for your rejoicing in the LORD is the source of your strength.”

נחמיה פרק ט פסוקים ט-י,  
וַיֹּאמֶר נְחֻמְיָה הוּא הַתְּרַשְׁתָּא  
וְעִזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן | הַסֹּפֵר וְהַלְוִיִּם  
הַמְבַיְנִים אֶת־הָעָם לְכָל־הָעָם הַיּוֹם  
קִדְשָׁהוּא לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אַל־  
תִּתְאַבְּלוּ וְאַל־תִּבְכְּוּ כִּי בּוֹכִים כָּל־  
הָעָם כְּשָׁמְעוּ אֶת־דְּבַר הַתּוֹרָה:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לְכוּ אֲכֹלוּ מִשְׂמְנֵי  
וְשִׂתּוּ מִמִּתְקִים וְשַׁלְּחוּ מְנוֹת לְאֵין  
נֶכֶן לוֹ כִּי־קִדֹּשׁ הַיּוֹם לְאֲדֹנָינוּ  
וְאַל־תִּעֲצְבוּ כִּי־חִדְוֹת יְהוָה הִיא  
מַעֲזָכֶם:

### Shulchan Aruch 597

One eats, drinks and is merry [on Rosh Hashanah.] We do not fast, whether on Rosh Hashanah, nor on Shabbos Shuva (the Shabbos of Repentance which is between R'H and Yom Kippur). However, people should not eat to complete satiation, so that they do not reach light-headedness, and that the fear of God should remain on them.

שלחן ערוך סימן תקצז  
אוכלים ושותים ושמחים  
ואין מתעניין בר"ה ולא  
בשב' שובה אמנם לא  
יאכלו כל שבעם למען לא  
יקלו ראשם ותהיה יראת ה'  
על פניהם :

### Magen Avraham ad loc

The Bach writes that the Maharshal would not eat fish on Rosh HaShana because they were beloved to him and he wanted to limit his desires...similarly it is written in the name of the Bach not to wear fancy clothes, but to wear simple white garments. It would seem to me that [even] in a place where it is not the custom to wear white garments, one should not wear very fancy clothes. **And in the Hagahos Maimoniyos on Parshas Nitzavim it is written that one should not eat meat or drink wine on Rosh HaShana.**

מגן אברהם שם  
כתב הב"ח שמהרש"ל לא אכל  
דגים בר"ה שהיו חביבים עליו  
(עמ"ש סי' תקפג) ורצ' למעט  
תאותו בדבר מסוים וכ"כ בשל"ה  
ובססי' תקפ"א כ' בשמו הב"ח  
שלא ילבוש בגדים חשובים רק  
לבנים ונ"ל במקום שאין נוהגים  
ללבוש לבנים לא ילבש חשובים  
כ"כ, ובמגמ"יי כ' בפ' נצבים שלא  
לאכול בשר ולשתות יין בר"ה:

### Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashana 32b

Rabbi Abbahu said: The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, for what reason don't the Jewish people recite songs of praise, [i.e., hallel] before You on Rosh HaShana and on Yom Kippur? **He said to them: Is it possible that while the King is sitting on the throne of judgment and the books of life and the books of death are open before Him, the Jewish people are reciting joyous songs of praise?** [Rosh HaShana and Yom

גמרא ראש השנה לב:

אמר רבי אבהו אמרו מלאכי  
השרת לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע  
מפני מה אין ישראל אומרים  
שירה לפניך בר"ה וביום  
הכפורים אמר להם אפשר  
מלך יושב על כסא דין וספרי  
חיים וספרי מתים פתוחין

*Kippur are somber days of judgment whose mood is incompatible with the recitation of hallel.]* לפניו ישראל אומרים שירה?

### Rabbeinu Asher Rosh Hashana §14

So writes Rav Paltoy Gaon: [one should recite in the Amidah and Kiddush] “He who has granted us in love times of joy and festivals for celebration.” However, Rav Hai Gaon writes that it is not our custom to say this. And it is the accepted custom in all communities [not to recite the phrase that acknowledges a time of joy]

### רבנו אשר מסכת ראש השנה סימן יד

וכן כתב רב פלטיי גאון ותתן לנו באהבה מועדים לשמחה חגים וזמנים לששון. ורב האי כתב אין מנהג לומר חגים וזמנים לששון וכן המנהג פשוט בזמן הזה בכל המקומות.

## Section II: Why so Happy?

- ☉ We express joy on Rosh HaShana because we count our blessings. In both the realms of our own experiences and accomplishments as well as the divine providence and kindness we are capable of rejoicing for the good, *for he has granted life, sustained us, and allowed us to reach this time.*
- ☉ What are we most happy about? What are the blessings of our life that justify extreme joy?
- ☉ What were our most proud accomplishments this year?
- ☉ What were our most cherished gifts of this past year?
- ☉ To paraphrase the Talmud cited above: can it be that these lists are open before us and we *don't* express elation and gratitude?

### Source for Thought:

#### Ishay Ribo, “Seder HaAvodah” (The Order of Service)

And thus he would say  
Please, O God, forgive the sins, the wrongdoings and the transgressions  
which I have sinned before You, I and my house  
And if a man could remember  
the graces, the favors  
All the mercies, all the salvations

Thus he would surely count;  
One, one and one, one and two  
One of the thousand thousand, thousands of thousands  
and myriad myriads  
of miracles and wonders  
which You have done for us  
days and nights

יְכַרְךָ ה' אֱמֹר  
אָנָּה ה', כִּפֹּר לַחַטָּאִים לַעֲוֹנוֹת  
וּלְפִשְׁעֵים  
שְׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי  
וְאִם אָדָם הִיָּה יְכוֹל לְזַכֵּר  
אֶת הַחֲסָדִים אֶת הַטּוֹבוֹת  
אֶת כָּל הַרַחֲמִים אֶת כָּל הַיְשׁוּעוֹת

בְּטַח כָּךְ הִיָּה מוֹנֶה  
אֶחָת אֶחָת וְאֶחָת אֶחָת וּשְׁתַּיִם  
אֶחָת מֵאֶלֶף אֶלְפֵי אֶלְפִים וְרַב רַבִּי  
רַבּוֹת  
נְסִים נִפְלְאוֹת  
שְׁעֵשִׁית עִמָּנוּ  
יָמִים וְלֵילוֹת

**Story for Thought:**

*Recently, during an Israel heat wave there were rolling blackouts throughout the country. Many sat in darkening houses, without the comfort of working appliances, lights, or climate control. As quickly as everything shut down, it came back. In that moment, there was a glimpse of recognition. How many intricate processes, both in the history or mankind's technological advancement and in the production of energy in electricity to provide a regular household with its electricity needs, were needed to make the house hum and resume all of these modern "miracles"? Is it not appropriate to make a special seuda of thanksgiving every time we turn on the light, the air conditioner, or access the internet? Or at least once a year?*

**Key Source:****Rav Kook's Commentary on the Siddur, Modeh Ani**

The first appearance of the exuberance of life brings with it the transcendent joy of holy rejoicing, which finds the fullness of its glorious expression through thanksgiving... The teaching that there is an obligation to give thanks through language, particularly through the expression 'grateful acknowledgement' (*modeh*), is derived from two aspects of meaning in this term. One is thankfulness, *todah*, which results from gratitude toward the one who does good; the other is confession, *hitvadut*, which is an acknowledgement of the truth. The two are fit to one another. The first exuberance of life which meets one as they rise from sleep, finding before them a full, new world in all its wholeness and goodness, lifts up the light of the inner intellect to recognize the light and brilliance which lie at the foundation of life. In place of the muddled, physical perspective which is impressed in the nature of flesh, the spirit rises to a clear Divine perspective, **to see the soul of the light of the Life-giver of the world in the splendor of its action.** And moved by his feelings of thanksgiving, man acknowledges the truth, fulfilling the depths of the truth of spiritual awareness, testifying on all the light of life and existence, that it flows from the spring of goodness and its source, from the source of transcendent lovingkindness, which pours out abundant life to all the many worlds and their creations.

ראשית ההופעה של צהלת החיים מביאה עמה את השמחה העליונה בחדות הקודש... ההוראה הלשונית של חובת הודאה, בבטוי "מודה" ביחוד, משותפת היא להודאה מגזרת תודה, הבאה מתוך הכרת הטובה של המיטיב, ומגזרת התנודות והודאה על האמת. ומהדברים מתאימים זה לזה. צהלת החיים הראשונה, הפוגשת את האדם בהקיצו משנתו ומוצא הוא לפניו עולם מלא וחדש בכל מלואו וטובו, היא מרימה את אור השכל הפנימי להכיר את אור החיים וזיוו ביסודו, ותחת ההשקפה העכורה החמרית, שהיא מוטבעת בטבע הבשר, מתעלה הרוח להשקפה אלהית צחה, לראות את נשמת אור חי העולמים ביפעת מפעלה. והאדם ברגש תודתו מודה הוא על האמת, ומקיים את עומק אמתתה של ההכרה הרוחנית, ומעיד על כל אור החיים והיש, שהוא נובע כולו ממעין הטוב ומקורו, ממקור חסד עליון, המשפיע שפעת חיים לכל המון עולמים וכל יצוריהם.

**Key Source:**

Rav Soloveitchik zt"l is quoted similarly in explaining the term "viduy" (confession) in the context of the *Mitzvah* of bringing tithes and gifts to the Beis HaMikdash. What type of confession can there be for good deeds? The Rav explained that true accounting must consider all human endeavor, good and bad. We cannot perform real Teshuva without acknowledging our triumphs, successes, and achievements. These realizations should motivate and inspire, and may also result in no small amount of celebration.

**Section III: Why so Happy? Another Perspective**

👉 Another source for New Year joy is the celebration of our being in the category of those who are judged. We are happy on Rosh HaShana *because* of Rosh HaShana, and our inclusion in its day of judgment.

🗨️ How does the judgment of Rosh HaShana lead to joy?

Potential Avenues for Exploration (Suggested Answers):

1. Being in the presence of the God and heavenly court is itself a form of joy
2. Being worthy of judgment is cause for elation
3. Being granted the opportunity of growth and a clean slate is an invaluable gift

**Source for Thought:****Wikipedia Page for the United States Supreme Court**

[O]f the more than 7,000 petitions the Court receives each year, it will usually request briefing and hear oral argument in 100 or fewer...

**Key Source:****Mishna Rosh Hashana 1:2**

MISHNA: At four times of the year the world is judged: On Passover judgment is passed concerning grain; on Shavuot concerning fruits that grow on a tree; **on Rosh HaShana all creatures pass before Him like sheep [benei maron], as it is stated: "He Who fashions their hearts alike, Who considers all their deeds"**

ראש השנה פרק א משנה ב  
בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון  
בפסח על התבואה בעצרת על  
פירות האילן בר"ה כל באי עולם  
עוברין לפניו כבני מרון שנאמר  
(תהלים לג, טו) (היוצר יחד לבם  
המבין אל כל מעשיהם ובחג  
נידונין על המים:

🗨️ Can the "passing" or "consideration" in the source above be a reason for joy?

**Source for Thought:**

*Steve Kerr is the Head Coach of the NBA's 3 time Champion Golden State Warriors. This year, the Warriors failed to make the playoffs and had an early vacation from the grind of professional basketball. On a recent podcast, Kerr reflected on his emotions watching the playoff games from afar. He said:*

"[W]e kind of want to be there. Like we're missing out games. These games look fun. I think the NBA is doing a great job. The games are competitive, the players look great and yeah, to not be there is actually kind of painful....

**But you know, as a coach, what you really want is you want to be able to have a shot at it as an organization. You just want to swing at the plate and then you kind of you kind of live with, you know, your fate. And as long as everybody is all in and you go for it, you know, sometimes things are going to go your way.**

🗨 Can Kerr's description of a "swing at the plate" be a source of joy?

**Key Source:**

The custom of the world is for one who knows he is entering into judgment he will wear dark clothes and grow his beard as he does not know how his verdict will emerge. But Israel is not like this. They wear white, shave, eat, and drink. They rejoice in the knowledge that God will perform miracles for them

**ירושלמי ראש השנה ז:**  
בנוהג שבעולם אדם יודע שיש לו דין  
לובש שחורים ומתעטף שחורים ומגדל  
זקנו שאינו יודע היאך דינו יוצא אבל  
ישראל אינן כן אלא לובשים לבנים  
ומתעטפן לבנים ומגלחין זקנם ואוכלין  
ושותין ושמחים יודעין שהקב"ה עושה  
להן ניסים.

**Section IV: Happiness Beyond Rosh HaShana**

👉 Happiness and service of God seem to be intertwined and enjoy a profound, deep connection. It would seem critical to hone our skills at experiencing religion through celebration and joy.

**Key Source:****Psalms Chapter 100 Verse 2**

Worship the LORD in gladness; come into His presence with shouts of joy.

**תהילים פרק ק פסוק ב**  
עֲבֹדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה בְּשִׂמְחָה בְּאוֹ  
לְפָנָיו בְּרִנָּה:

🗨 How do we understand the words of King David in Psalms? Is this a commandment? Advice? Permission? A prerequisite for entering his presence?

**Key Source:**

### Talmud Bavli Brachot 31a

On the topic of proper preparation for prayer, the Sages taught: One may neither stand to pray from an atmosphere of sorrow nor from an atmosphere of laziness, nor from an atmosphere of laughter, nor from an atmosphere of conversation, nor from an atmosphere of frivolity, nor from an atmosphere of purposeless matters. Rather, one should approach prayer from an atmosphere imbued with the joy of a mitzva.

גמרא ברכות לא.  
תנו רבנן: אין עומדין  
להתפלל לא מתוך  
עצבות, ולא מתוך עצלות,  
ולא מתוך שחוק, ולא  
מתוך שיחה, ולא מתוך  
קלות ראש, ולא מתוך  
דברים בטלים, אלא מתוך  
שמחה של מצוה.

- 🗨️ What is the difference between laughter and joy in the Talmud's edict?
- 🗨️ Why does prayer depend on a state of happiness?

### Key Sources:

#### Mussaf Shabbos Prayers

May it be you will Lord our God and the God of our fathers, that **you cause us to ascend to our land with joy...**

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו ואלהי  
אבותינו. שתעלנו בשמחה  
לארצנו...

#### Blessing after grain snack

May you rebuild Jerusalem, speedily and in our days. And may you cause us to ascend into it, **and to rejoice in its rebuilding**

על המחיה  
ובנה ירושלים עיר הקדש במהרה  
בימינו. והעלנו לתוכה ושמחנו  
בבנינה

- 🗨️ In each of these two familiar sources we pray for redemption and National restoration. The return to a rebuilt Jerusalem, temple service, and fulfillment of all religious aspiration is central to many of our prayers, hopes, and dreams. Isn't this fulfillment enough, without describing a particular emotional state to accompany the salvation? Put differently, doesn't redemption *automatically and necessarily* imply joy? Apparently not. What is the alternative to an "ascent with joy"? To "*rejoicing* in its rebuilding"? And why would it be lacking?
- 🗨️ If we are meant to be happy through our individual and national redemptive processes, how can we work on this character trait and make sure that we don't forget it when we plan for teshuva and atonement? Which efforts will enhance our ability to serve God with joy?

# Tests of Teshuva

An interactive learning packet designed by Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Schwartz with middle schoolers in mind

**The Dilemma:** Rachel, Rivki, Ronit and Rayzel are really good friends. You might even call them somewhat of a squad. They all hang out at recess, at lunch and even after school at each other's homes. Sometimes they talk about life, sometimes about school and sometimes...about other neighbors and classmates. Just yesterday they were talking about Yom Kippur and realized that they needed to do Teshuva. "Yes!" Rachel offered, "We need to even do Teshuva for talking about Leora and Leah behind their backs. How will we do it?" Rivki suggested that they go up to Leora and Leah and ask for forgiveness for talking about them behind their backs. Ronit disagreed. "Leora and Leah don't know a thing about it. We were just talking. It wasn't right to do but if we tell them that we were talking behind their backs, they will be embarrassed even more!" Rayzel suggested that this was a great question for the Rabbi ...

🗨️ What do you think they should do? Why?

## 1. Bava Kamma, 92a:4

**MISHNA:** Despite the fact that the person who caused damage pays for all of the damage, his Avaira is not forgiven for him in Shomayim until he asks for forgiveness from the victim, as it is stated that Hashem told Avimelech after he had taken Sarah from Abraham: "Now therefore restore the wife of the man; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for you, and you shall live".

מתני': אע"פ שהוא נותן לו אין נמחל לו עד שיבקש ממנו שנאמר (בראשית כ, ז) ועתה השב אשת וגו'

🗨️ Based on the Mishna, what should the girls do?

## 2. Yoma 87a

It is related that when Rabbi Zeira had a complaint against a person who insulted him, he would walk back and forth in the area of the other person, so that the person could come and apologize to him.

ר' זירא כי הוה ליה מילתא בהדי איניש הוה חליף ותני לקמיה וממציא ליה כי היכי דניתי וניפוק ליה מדעתיה

🗨️ Rabbi Zeira made himself available so that it would be easy for the other person to apologize to him. If he was such a great rabbi, why didn't he just forgive the person?

### 3. Chidushei Aggadot, Bava Kamma 92a:2

If Hashem wanted Avraham to daven for Avimelech why didn't He ask Avraham directly? It's because Hashem wanted Avimelech to be the one to ask Avraham, thereby, apologizing in the process.

עד שיבקש ממנו שנאמר השב אשת וגו'. הוציאו מהכתוב הזה בקשת המחילה כי מהראוי שיאמר הקב"ה לאברהם שיתפלל בעד אבימלך אבל אמר זה לאבימלך שיפייס לאברהם עד שימחול לו ויתפלל בעדו וכן נאמר ויקח אבימלך צאן וגו' ויתפלל וכפרש"י שם

### 4. Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim, 606:2

If the person against whom he sinned has died, then he brings 10 people with him to stand by his grave and he says: "I have sinned before the G-d of Israel and against So-and-So I have transgressed." (Remah: And our custom is to request forgiveness on the eve of Yom Kippur (Mordekhai)).

אם מת אשר חטא לו מביא עשרה בני אדם ומעמידם על קברו ואומר חטאתי לאלהי ישראל ולפלוגי זה שחטאתי לו (ונהגו לבקש מחילה בערב יו"כ) (מרדכי דיומא)

☉ Why do we need to ask forgiveness from someone who has died? What is the point?

### 5. Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim, 606:1

In regard to Avairos between people, Yom Kippur cannot forgive until the person is appeased. Even if you only hurt the person in words, you need to appease him. If it does not work the first time, go back 2 or 3 times.

עברות שבין אדם לחברו אין יום הכפורים מכפר עד שיפייסנו; אפלו לא הקניטו אלא בדברים, צריך לפייסו; ואם אינו מתפייס בראשונה, יחזר וילך פעם שנייה ושלישית, ובכל פעם יקח עמו שלשה אנשים

☉ How might this source help "the squad" with its question?

### 6. Chofetz Chaim, Klal 1, 4:12

And even if his friend does not yet know anything about it, he must reveal what he did to him, and ask forgiveness of him for this, since he knows that through him this harm was done him. From this we can understand how much one must take care to guard himself from this pernicious trait [of lashon hara], for if one is steeped in this, G-d forbid, teshuvah [repentance] is almost impossible for him. For he certainly will not remember all of the souls whom he grieved by this lashon hara. And even those people whom he remembers as having stirred up evil against will not know of it, wherefore he will be ashamed to reveal it to them.

אפלו אם חברו אינו יודע עדין כָּלֵל מְזָה, (מח) צריך לגלות לו מה שעשה נגדו שלא כדיון, ולבקש ממנו מחילה על זה, כיון שהוא יודע, שעל ידו נסבב לו דבר זה, (מט) ומזה נוכל להבין כמה יש לו לאדם לזהר ממדה גרועה הזאת כי מי שמטבע, חס ושלום, בזה, כמעט אי אפשר לו בתשובה

☉ Do you agree with the Chofetz Chaim's reasoning? Why or Why not?

### 7. Mishna Berurah 606:3

One should appease the other each time with new persuasions, and at the time of requesting forgiveness one must detail the specifics of how one wronged the other. If, however, the other would be embarrassed by learning the details of the transgression, then one should not mention specifics.

ג) יחזור וילך - ויפייסנו בכל פעם במין ריצוי אחר ובשעת בקשת מחילה צריך לפרט מה שחטא לחבירו אם לא כשיודע שחבירו יתבייש מזה כשיפרט החטא אזי לא יפרט אותו ומי שהוא מבקש מחילה מרבים בכלל אינו יוצא אם יודע שעשה לאיזה יחיד בפרט

Based on the Mishna Berurah, what should the squad do?

Takeaway ideas:

- What does one need in order to do **תשובה** for sins that are **בין אדם לחבירו**?
- What is **מחילה** and how does it relate to **תשובה**?
- What is more important: my **תשובה** or another person's feelings? How can I make these 2 things not be in conflict?

# Towards Positive Peer Pressure

## Torah, Psychology, and the Most Powerful Button on your Cell Phone

a table friendly discussion guide designed by Channah Cohen

*Some of our central concerns in our lives as Jews, and especially during the Yamim Noraim, are our capacity to change our behavior and to engage in a continual process of growth. But we are often unsure how to go about creating positive change within ourselves, and we are often unclear about what has the greatest impact on our behavior... and what we can do about it.*

*In this discussion, we will explore these central issues interactively, with a real study conducted by Roger Cialdini and his research team, and take a deep look at some important Torah sources on the topic.*



Imagine...

- You are an upper middle-class San Diego suburban head of a family.
- Every Sunday, you load into your minivan to drive your daughters to gymnastics classes and your sons to soccer practice.
- You have a nice home with a rolling, well-manicured lawn, and you like to water it every day.
- You leave the outdoor lamp on over your front door each night, to give off the impression of warmth and security.
- Politically and personally, you attest to environmental conservation being a primary value of yours.

And that's where you run into trouble, isn't it? While you SAY that you care a lot about energy consumption, you consume countless water for your lawn and energy for your front light (not to mention your large inflatable pool and the lights you leave on while running out for carpool).

In an attempt to get you to change your energy-spending habits, a team of researchers descend upon your neighborhood, do some observations, and end up leaving a note-hanger on your door providing you with what they believe to be useful and practical information about the benefits of saving energy. Imagining this is happening to you...

🗨️ How much energy do you save (e.g., turning off lights, using less water, using less power) after getting this information pamphlet?

None at all ----- A little bit ---- A fair amount ---- A large amount

Well, in fact (noted the researchers who actually conducted this initiative), the sign has no effect on you whatsoever. Is that what you had expected?

So the researchers return, this time with a different tactic.

They've split the neighborhood into four parts; each part gets a door note-hanger with one of the following four texts.

- Rank them, one to four, one being the *most* likely to persuade you to change your energy consumption habits, and four being the *least* likely.
  - “The majority of Americans have already decreased their energy consumption by 25%. Join them with these simple procedures.” (*social standards*)
  - “You have reported that environmental protection is a value of yours. Help save energy with these simple procedures.” (*value system*)
  - “By these simple procedures, you can reduce your energy consumption by 25%, which can save you up to \$64 a month.” (*cost benefit*)
  - “Following these simple procedures to save energy can help create a cleaner, more livable society for your children and grandchildren.” (*moralistic*)

When the researchers measured each home's energy consumption at the end of the month, they found this order of effect for their persuasion hangers—and the percent of total energy that the homes saved:

1. Social Standards – 23%
2. Value System – 5%
3. Moralistic- 4%
4. Cost Benefit – 2%

🗨️ Can you think of two separate lessons that this role-play teaches us?

You might've come up with...

1. Social norms and standards- what is conventionally called “peer pressure” – has by far the greatest impact on guiding our behavior than almost anything else.
2. If you guessed wrong about which of the phrases was most likely to influence your behavior, you'll notice that we have no clarity about the forces that *really* influence our decision-making. The reasons we *think* should impact our behavior are often not what actually do.

The researchers return to their studio for a final iteration of the social experiment... and, taking the social standards phrase, they change just one word and find that the recipients save the most energy of all.

🗨️ Which word do you think it is? Here's the phrase again:  
 “The majority of Americans have already decreased their energy consumption by 25%. Join them with these simple procedures.”

They change...

- “Americans” to “Californians” and get more effect
- “Californians” to “San Diegans” and get even more
- “San Diegans” to “your neighbors” for maximum effect

🗨 Stop and Think: Why is this the case? Why do social standards have more of an impact on our behavior than almost anything else?



Let's look at what the Torah has to say about this.

Here is an explicit pasuk in Devarim (20:8) that speaks about the impact that one person can have upon another. The context for this pasuk is preparing for battle during wartime; the officials instruct anyone who has newly built a home, planted a vineyard, or gotten married, to leave the battlefield.

But someone else is also allowed to go home:

*The officials shall continue to speak to the nation and say, “Who is the man who is afraid and of soft heart? Let him go and return to his home, and not melt the hearts of his brothers like his own.”*

וְיִסְפוּ הַשְּׂטָרִים לְדַבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם  
וְאָמְרוּ מִי־הָאִישׁ הַיָּרֵא וְרֵךְ הַלֵּבָב  
יֵלֶךְ וְיָשׁוּב לְבֵיתוֹ וְלֹא יִמַּס אֶת־לֵבֶב  
אָחִיו כְּלִבְבוֹ

🗨 What's the Torah worried about here, if we let this man fight?  
The Ramban explains:

The Ba”Hag makes this a negative commandment, that he should not prevent himself from [leaving the battlefield and] returning home, that he does not melt the heart of his brothers like his own. It is [a command with a negative instruction] such as “and he should not eat the flesh”.

וְלֹא יִמַּס אֶת לֵבב אָחִיו  
עֲשָׂאוּ בְעַל  
הַלְכוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת מִצְוֹת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה  
שֶׁלֹּא יִמְנַע  
מִלְשׁוֹב שֶׁלֹּא יִמַּס אֶת לֵבב אָחִיו  
כְּלִבְבוֹ  
וְהוּא כְדֹרֵךְ וְלֹא יֹאכַל אֶת בְּשָׂרוֹ

🗨 How does the Ramban's explanation change how we otherwise would have read the pasuk? Does it make the case for being cautious about peer pressure weaker or stronger?

Here is another source that deals even more directly with social influences:

### Pirkei Avos 1:7

Nittai Ha'Arbeli used to say: distance yourself from a bad neighbor, do not attach yourself to the evil person, and do not despair of [Divine] retribution.

נִתַּי הָאֲרֵבֶלִי אוֹמֵר, הִרְחַק מִשְׁכָּן  
רָע, וְאַל תִּתְחַבֵּר לְרָשָׁע, וְאַל  
תִּתְיָאֵשׁ מִן הַפְּרָעוֹנוֹ

**Rabbeinu Yonah** broadens our understanding of these words:

**Nitai of Arbel says: "Distance yourself from a bad neighbor":** He is speaking to renters of houses and purchasers of servants. As when a person first inquiries about the house and the tightness of the space, he should also ask about the neighbors - if they are bad influences, he should distance himself from them, and if they are good, he should come close to them.

תאי הארכלי אומר הרחק משכן  
רע:  
לשוכר בתים ולקונה עבדים  
אמרו. כי כאשר ישאל איש  
תחלה על דירה ובמקום דוחק  
כך יש לו לשאול על השכנים אם  
רעים הם ירחק מהם ולטובים  
יקרב

🗨 How is Rabbeinu Yonah seeing the social impact of neighbors: as a possibility, or as a certainty?

This brings about great punishment, that nothing else compares to. Because even if he transgresses a great sin, he did one sin; but now he has a portion in all of the sins that the evildoer does [since he befriended him], the many great and huge sins... As it is explained in Avos D'Rabbi Natan 30:3, "Anyone who clings to evildoers - even though he does not do like their deeds - takes 'reward' like them; and one who clings to the righteous - even though he does not do like their deeds - takes 'reward' like them."

ואל תתחבר לרשע  
שהוא עונש גדול שאין כמותו כי  
החטא החמור פשע בו עשה עבירה  
אחת אבל זה בכל העבירות שעושה  
הרשע יש לו חלק בהם ונמצא עושה  
...חטאים רבים גדולים ועצומים  
פורש באבות דר' נתן (ל ג) כל המדבק  
לרשעים אע"פ שאינו עושה  
כמעשיהם נוטל שכר כיוצא בהם  
והמדבק אע"פ שאינו עושה כמעשיהם  
נוטל כיוצא בהם

🗨 Rabbeinu Yonah seems to be very intense here. Can you figure out a way to make what he is saying seem fair?

As a potential answer, picture yourself in the following moral dilemma; it's one that Chazal will weigh in on, too.

You are a peddler, and you end your workday a mile from your home. There are two paths that you can take home today. One will lead you home past some inappropriate things that you really should not be looking at, but that you find pretty enticing. The other path leads you home safely, past some extremely boring hay fields. You are in a good headspace, feeling strong, and you are pretty sure that even if you walk down the first path, you can keep your eyes on the clouds the whole time and not be tempted to look at anything evil; and garner some spiritual reward for passing this test!

🗨 Which path should you choose to take home?

The Gemara (Bava Basra 57b) states emphatically that you should take the safe path home:

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba says: This is referring to one who does not gaze at women while they are standing over the laundry. What are the circumstances? If it is referring to a case where there is another way by which the one walking could reach his destination, then one who walks past the women, consequently placing himself in a situation where he will be tempted to gaze at them, is wicked. Alternatively, if it is referring to a case where there is no other way by which he can reach his destination, then he is a victim of circumstance.

א"ר חייא בר אבא  
זה שאין  
מסתכל בנשים  
בשעה שעומדות על  
הכביסה  
היכי דמי אי דאיכא  
דרכא אחריתא רשע  
הוא אי דליכא דרכא  
אחריתא  
אנוס הוא

And a potential reason is very simple:

Because the *real* trial for you was *not* whether to look at the women. It was *which path to choose* to take home.

🗨️ Can you apply this back to our Mishna from Pirkei Avos, above?

Our most important choice isn't whether to join the bad things that a friend is doing. That is already a step too late. Our most important choice is not to befriend bad influencers in the first place -- to choose good social influences instead of bad ones. And remember our first Rabbeinu Yonah: *whether* the people we associate with will have an impact on us is undeniable. Of course they will. Our responsibility is to set up our social environment to ensure that the way we are impacted is positive.

But, the knife cuts both ways, don't forget that... you have responsibility on both sides of this coin.

To illustrate: one last time, let's go back to those researchers in sunny San Diego.

The researchers wanted to give each home their stats on energy consumption, relative to their neighbors, to increase the positive peer pressure on those who were wasting energy. But now they faced a new dilemma: those homes that were saving *more* than their average neighbors might begin to increase their energy consumption and begin using more water and more electricity.

🗨️ Can you think of a way the researchers could avoid this negative impact?

The researchers added one tiny picture to their energy information sheet that they distributed to these houses. You look at that picture daily. Do you know what it is?

They added: a smiley face.

"Here's your energy rating as compared to your neighbors. 😊"

The smiley implied social approval, which was enough to encourage their energy-saving behavior.

Let's review the two major lessons we can take away from this:

- First – we must understand that our social surroundings *certainly* have an impact on us, more than we easily see or intuit. Our most basic duty is to make intelligent social choices and surround ourselves by good influences and good people.
- Second- we must remember that *we* are the social influencers in *other* people's lives. When we indicate that we approve or disapprove of something, we have a deep and real impact on others' behavior. The most powerful button on your phone is the smiley! Make sure your interactions lead to positive change for someone else.

This lesson is especially true this year. Although we are physically distant, we still have a very direct and real impact on the choices of other people.

What can you take upon yourself, here and now, that relates to one of the two points above – building a nourishing social environment for yourself, or becoming a force for positive change for those around you?