



Choosing G-d, the Rosh Hashanah Perspective 2019

The Rosh Hashanah Perspective is dedicated in memory of Moshe Morris ben Nagiah HaKohen, may his soul be uplifted and his memory a blessing.

It is not a coincidence that we read the Torah portion of Nitzavim on the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah. Parshas Nitzavim has some of the most fundamental principles in all of Judaism. Some examples include free will, the necessity for unity between the Jewish people, the ultimate redemption, and the practicality of the Torah throughout all of time.

The Parsha begins with a statement from Moshe: *“You are all standing today before G-d. From the tribal leaders, elders, officers, to the men, women, young children, converts, woodchoppers, and the water carriers. All of you may have a profound relationship with G-d.”*

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the day **“Hayom”** is referring to is Rosh Hashanah. Moshe explicitly states the many different types of Jewish people, ranging from Great Rabbis to children, to teach us that when we hear the Shofar and recrown G-d as our King, we are all equal in the eyes of G-d. If you pray to G-d earnestly and with genuine sincerity, you can develop a profound and everlasting bond with G-d.

Each time after we hear the Shofar during the davening, we say the words *“Hayom Haras Olam—today is the birthday of the world.”* As it is the day that Adam was created, it is the birthday of the purpose of the world: mankind.

However, the Avudarham (*a Spanish commentary, Rav David ben Yosef Avudraham*) on Rosh Hashanah asks a question: the translation of the words “*Haras Olam*” actually means “*pregnant forever.*” The translation is found in the Pasuk in Yirmiyahu (20:17), where he deploras the day he was born: “*I wish I remained Haras Olam (“eternally in utero”) in my mother’s womb.*”

Meaning that Yirmiyahu wished his mother’s pregnancy would not have ended in his birth. So, what does Haras Olam really mean? Does it mean the birthday of the world, or does it mean perpetual pregnancy and lack of delivery?!

There is an anecdote to explain this. Once there was an older man, who was known for being very wise. One of the young boys of the village decided to test his wisdom, so he formulated a plan. He would capture a butterfly, hide it in his hands, and ask the wise man if the butterfly was dead or alive.

If the wise man said the butterfly was alive, the boy would crush the butterfly in his hands so that when he opened his palms, the butterfly would be dead. However, if the wise man said the butterfly was dead, the boy would open his hands and let the butterfly go free. No matter what the wise man said, he will make a fool of him.

The young boy came to the wise man and asked him, “*Sir, if you are indeed as wise as everyone believes you to be, please tell me whether the butterfly in my hands is alive or dead.*” For a mere moment, the wise man thought before staring straight into the boy’s eyes and replied, “***My son, whether the butterfly is dead or alive depends on you. It is within your hands!***”

The Avudarham explains that the translation of “*Hayom Haras Olam*” is up to us. Only we can decide if this will be the birthday of the world, and the year where we give life to our potential, hopes, and dreams.

Or the opposite, heaven forbid if this will be the year that our potential stays perpetually in utero and a year that our lives stay stagnant, passive, and stationary.

Our life is in our own hands, like the butterfly within the young boy's palms.

It is up to us — and us alone! — to choose what we do with it.

It's now perfectly clear why Parshas Nitzavim is read right before Rosh Hashanah. As the Pasuk says (30:19), *"Today, I place before you life and death, the blessings and the curses. You shall choose life so that you and your children will live."*

Moshe in his final address is telling the Jewish people to choose G-d and embrace life, as they are one and the same. As Dovid Hamelch says in Tehillim (36:10), *"With You, G-d, is the source of life; it is in Your light, we will see our light."*

Choosing G-d and embracing life means constant growth, development, and advancement. When we grasp onto G-d, He gives us a glimpse of our true capabilities and potential, which will motivate us to aim higher and reach further than we ever thought possible.

As you hear the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, and crown G-d as the one and only true King, close your eyes and affirm your decision. You must decide to choose advancement over stagnation, to choose your potential over hopelessness, to choose ambition over apathy, and to choose G-d, so that you may embrace life.

May we all be blessed with a year of purpose and meaning.

A year of strength and health. A year of true happiness and prosperity!

*Ksiva V'chasima Tova L'shana Tova Umesuka,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*