

## Shanah Tovah

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From *Hidden in a Holiday*, by Jan R. Urbach:

A verse from Psalm 81 is featured prominently in the Rosh Hashanah evening service: *Tiku bahodesh shofar, bakeseh l'yom chageinu*, “Sound the shofar on the new moon, in the time appointed for our festival day.” The word *bakeseh*— translated here as “at the appointed time” — can also connote concealment...

...This idea of hiddenness is a powerful entree into the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah... Rosh Hashanah is a joyful festival celebrating renewal, and it is also *Yom HaDin*, the Day of Judgment, filled with *pachad* (terror) and *yirah* (fear and awe). Moreover, the fact that Rosh Hashanah is celebrated in the autumn teaches us that the “newness” we seek is a hidden one. Overt, external renewal happens in the spring; the renewal that occurs in autumn is underground...

...The liturgy of Rosh Hashanah challenges us to face the mysteries of life and death, of justice and judgment, but it doesn't help us solve them. The prayer *U-Netanah Tokef* raises the most challenging questions of meaning, justice, and the vulnerability and uncertainty of life; it answers them by saying only, “But You are Sovereign, God, living and eternal.” The text offers no explanation of God's ways; it simply affirms God's eternal existence and presence, veiled in mystery.

This is the beginning of teshuvah and it paves the way for our next steps. Even as we shift our vision from ourselves to focus on God, we learn something about how to see ourselves. As we confront and celebrate the

hiddenness of God, we begin to see ourselves, too, as fundamentally hidden and mysterious. At some point in the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we will be ready to delve into the deepest parts of our souls and reveal what is hidden there...

...Concealed within us are not just the things we find shameful, but also hidden potential, creativity, talent, yearning, and complexity. To be an unknowable mystery is one of the ways — perhaps the most profound way — in which we are *b'tzelem Elohim*, created in the image of God. Before we rush to uncover and reveal what is hidden within, the Rosh Hashanah liturgy allows us to simply stand in awe, and more than a little fear and trembling, at the mystery.

*Tiku bahodesh shofar, bakeseh l'yom chageinu.* “The shofar of renewal is blown within the hiddenness of the festival day.” (Psalms 81:4) The renewal, *teshuvah*, comes through our growing sensitivity to and treasuring of that which is hidden: the subtle hidden meanings of the themes of the holiday, the non-obvious in the world around us, the unknown and unknowable within the self and, most importantly, the One Who is hidden in everything.

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