

The Light of Rosh haShana

Rosh haShana – Rav Hanan Schlesinger

A ship in the night close to shore. Stormy seas. No moon, pitch black. Heavy rain pelts the ship. The surf becomes rougher. Unknown danger lurks below - a sand bar, or hidden underwater rocks, but the captain has no idea. He does not know where he is. And suddenly darkness turns into light. The beam of a lighthouse shines. A bright light pierces the darkness. The ship is illuminated, the captain now knows where he is, and can easily avoid the perils of the sea. Danger is no longer, simply because the powerful light coming from afar has allowed the captain to see where his vessel lies in relation to the landmarks in the distance and to thereby chart a safe course.

In the psalms it is said that "God is my light and my salvation", and our rabbis comment that "my light" refers to Rosh haShana, while "my salvation" refers to Yom Kippur. Rosh haShana is meant to serve like the illuminating beam of the lighthouse that simply allows us to see where we are - and in doing so makes all the difference in the world. You see, Rosh haShana is all about self-knowledge. It provides us with the framework and equipment and atmosphere to see where we are in God's universe. If you can't see yourself for who you really are, you are in spiritual danger. If you are fooled by your public image, your material success, your social standing and thereby become complacent, you've lost it. You don't even know that something has to be done. It's hard to be as brutally honest as we should be in evaluating where we are. We have trouble seeing ourselves for who we really are. So we can't know where we have to go and how to get there because we don't know who this creature is that we call ourselves.

The light of Rosh haShana allows us to judge ourselves. That's what it's all about. Judgment Day means that God facilitates us judging ourselves as He would judge us. For Him to judge - what good is that for us? Having us judge ourselves - that's a different story. When it comes from us, when we adopt God's judgment as our own, then it is meaningful because we will do something



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about it. When we embrace our judgment by judging ourselves as God would, it becomes a powerful force for self improvement.

That's when the light of Rosh haShana leads us to the salvation of Yom Kippur. You can't be saved until you see exactly where you are, until you admit and accept the sometimes bitter truth. But once you do, you are on your way to making yourself a better person.

Allow the light of Rosh haShana to help you illumine your soul. Use the light to take a long hard look at yourself. Everything depends upon it.



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