



I am Rosh Hashana and I am running for Precedent of the great United State of Mind. I want to be your Precedent! Your exemplar, your paradigm, your model.

Once upon a time, nearly four millennia ago, our forefathers had a dream. They stood at the foot of a trembling mountain, felt the volcanic power beneath them and they envisioned a future. They envisioned a homeland, a land promised to them as their birthright, a land in which every human being would be finally experience freedom.

Finally experience freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom from fear, and freedom from want.¹

Amidst fire and trumpets they presented the people with a constitution, and they called it Torah, and willingly our people bound ourselves to the Law. And they said, “Together we threw off our chains. Together we marched out of tyranny. Together we crossed through the sea. Together we defeated our enemies. And

¹ Franklyn D Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms

together we will walk, with our heads held high, into that Promised Land, the United State of Mind, the Integrated Situation of Being, the Balanced Welfare of Self, the Unified Republic of Responsible Personhood.

I am Rosh Hashana and I am running for Precedent. On Rosh Hashana the blast of the shofar awakens our highest allegiance to goodness and godliness. It awakens us to our obligation to serve a Higher Power.

You who are a nation of priests, you who are a holy people, you who are descendants of those who had the courage to argue with God, to wrestle with angels, to dream of freedom, to break their chains, to defeat Amalek, to cross a wilderness to arrive in this place, I ask you:

When you lift your eyes to the hills, from whence does your help come?

Your help comes from Adonai, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, in every subsequent moment of doubt you remember that our holy book begins not with Abraham the first Jew. It begins not with our exodus from Egypt and the birth of our nation, but with the creation of everything. Rosh Hashana is the birthday of the world. The shofar reminds us of the pounding of asteroids, the roar of the primordial sea, the scraping of tectonic plates, the rumbling of the earth as it birthed mountains, the crash of thunder. Judaism is a global religion. Judaism is a Leadership Development Program fine-tuned and tested over thousands of years in every imaginable circumstance, under supervision of God, for the service of humankind.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, in every subsequent encounter you remember that our tradition had the audacity to proclaim that every person is made in God's image, and therefore every face you see is a reflection of the divine, even the face in the mirror, your own reflection, is filled with original light. You are here for a reason. You serve a purpose. God created you because God needed you. You are what God needs. And so is he. And so is she.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, in every subsequent discouragement, you will recall that on this day which is the birthday of the world, you are also reborn, and you can start again. Despite the accumulated baggage, we can receive the blessing of holy wonder anew. We have only to pivot to become aware of the glow that surrounds the world. We have only to peak under the veil of materiality

to glimpse the radiance, to awaken to radical amazement. “To see a World in a Grain of Sand And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand And Eternity in an hour.”² *Shecheyanu, v’kiyamanu, v’higiyanu lazman hazeh!*

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, in every subsequent hesitation, you will vibrate with the echo of the first time Israel heard the Shofar at Mount Sinai, before the giving of the Ten Commandments, and how the people shouted, *Na’aseh v’nishmah!* We will do and we will hear! And you will be bolstered by the *hineini* that resonates through your bones. I am here! I am ready! For if not you, then who? And if not now, then when? For the biggest mistake a person can make is fearing making one.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, in every subsequent wavering of hope, you will remember that the last time Israel will hear the shofar call will be at the ushering in of the Messianic Age. That despite the terror, the fear, the backstabbing and backsliding, overall we are moving forward. Life and goodness will triumph!

We are at a pivotal moment in history. We stand here this day between the two climactic events of revelation at Sinai and redemption. We have not yet been to the mountaintop, as the prophets have. But we have stood at the foot of the mountain. And we have been to the bottom of the sea.

We are still at the bottom of a sea. We have not yet reached that dazzling shore, as our prophets promised. We are still trudging from here to there, the walls of water on either side. We are still in the midst of crossing over. And when our children needle us with the words, “Are we there yet? Are we there yet?” The answer is, “We are not there yet, but we are getting closer. Every step, we are getting closer.”

The very first time you crossed a street on your own two legs, someone said to you “Look both ways.”

We are in the midst of the sea. The ground is uneven. The terrain is muddy and strewn with rocks. Slowly but surely, we will cross over. Rosh Hashana is a crossing over.

² William Blake

We don't know what awaits us when we get there. We don't know what leviathans we may face. We need each other, our strength in numbers, to bolster our courage, to hold firm our resolve.

We have not yet reached the mountaintop, but we have seen the bottom of the sea, and we are crossing through together. We will not turn back! Our past deeds, our transgressions, our habits, our mistakes, our addictions and seductions, they pursue us like Pharaoh's army, but the mud of the seabed snares the wheels of their chariots, and we push on, stepping determinedly from one slippery rock to the next.

We have not yet reached the mountaintop, but we have seen the bottom of the sea, and we are crossing over together. And as we cross through, we do as we were taught when we were young, standing on the curb. We look both ways. We look to the far right and we see the constitutionalists. We look to the far left and we see the socialists. We look straight down the middle and we see the pillar of cloud, and we ask from whence does our help come?

We look to the right, we look to the left, and we look to the heavens.

Our help comes from Adonai, Maker of Heaven and Earth. God will not allow your foot to falter. The Guardian of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. God will guard your going out and your coming in from now and to eternity.

The very first time you crossed a street on your own two legs, someone said to you "Take my hand."

We look right, we look left, and we look down.

Whose hand are you holding? Bernard Meltzer once said, "There is no better exercise for your heart than reaching down and helping to lift someone up." Who are you holding up? And who is holding you up?

I am Rosh Hashana and I am running for Precedent. And I can promise you, with Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, there will be an accounting for yesterday and accountability tomorrow. Rosh Hashana is all about taking stock.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, you will take personal inventory, and responsibilities for gifts misused, time misspent. As Hannah Senesh wrote in her diary in 1940: “I want to make a confession, to give an accounting to myself, and to God. In other words, to measure my life and actions against the lofty ideals I’ve set for myself. To compare that which should have been with that which was.”

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, we will remember how we collectively gathered by the shore in the afternoon light, cast our bread onto the waters in *tashlich*, emptied our pockets of the *chametz* that was stuck in there, cleansed ourselves of our crumbiness, fished our hidden deeds out of the depths and let the waves lap our ankles, wash our hands, and renew our intentions. And that inner path which is so often paved with remorse, regret, grief and guilt will be zamboni-ed to gleaming.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, in every subsequent petty argument, you will compare your complaints to the frightening words of the *Unatana tokef* prayer, which declares: “On Rosh Hashana it is inscribed and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. How many shall pass away? Who shall live and who shall die? Who by fire?” And you will be distressed over the hostages burnt alive by terrorists. “Who by water?” And you will be devastated over the drowning of hundreds of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. “Who by sword?” And you will be dismayed by gun violence, by massacres and homicides of stabbings, shootings, bombings. “Who by wild beast?” And you will be distraught by crocodiles lying in wait. “Who by famine and who by thirst?” And you will be disconsolate by the sheer number of poor there are, without access to clean water, starving.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, you will consider these frightening questions and wonder, “Should this thing that is upsetting me right now really matter so much? In light of ‘who will live and who will die?’” And you will choose mercy over revenge, empathy over grudge, affection over isolation. And the shofar will resound in you like a battle cry, stirring you to rise up and take action, to be the voice for those whose voices have been silenced, stolen, snuffed out.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, we will reinstate our original ideals of sharing and fairness, of justice and hope.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, in every subsequent trial, we will remember that repentance, prayer and righteousness avert a severe decree. So we will pray. We will repent. We will conduct ourselves in righteousness.

On Rosh Hashana the Book of Life is opened and the quill is prepared.

The rabbis call Rosh Hashana “Coronation Day.” Coronation of God as Sovereign over us. On Rosh Hashana we remember we have a Sovereign! God is not your servant. God is not there for you to say, “Give me this. Give me that.” And surely if you think that God is your servant, and that the purpose of prayer is to order God to fetch things for you, and the purpose of ritual is slipping the heavenly valet a twenty for some special service, then you will be faced with many disappointments.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, you will remember that God is not your servant, but you are God’s servant. That God doesn’t work for you, but you work for God. And as Alan Morinis taught, “your hardships are just a day’s labor in the fields of the Lord.” Rosh Hashana is Coronation Day, the day we remember our relationship with the Transcendent.

The rabbis say that Adam and Eve were both born on Rosh Hashana.

Rabbi Mark Greenspan wrote, “Rosh Hashana symbolizes all of life. Each day has an unlimited potential for good and evil. Like the first human beings, we are born, we develop, we rebel, we obey, we are judged, and we are forgiven. Each day is an opportunity to create a new universe for ourselves and for others. There is no yesterday or tomorrow, only *hayom*, only today. *Hayom!* Today is the day that counts.”

It is written in the Torah, “In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts. You shall bring an offering of fire to Adonai.”³

And that offering of fire is none other than the enthusiasm of your heart. Enthusiasm that is fueled by gratitude. Energy and light is pouring into you and rushing through you at every instant. You can feel it in the thrum of your blood.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, you can “lift yourself out of the heavy lethargy or frantic worry that can paralyze your life.”⁴

³ Leviticus 23:24-25

⁴ Alan Morinis

And with Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, I cannot promise you a chicken in every pot, or a car in every garage⁵, but I can promise you a hand to hold as we cross over rough terrain, a hand to hold as we cross through an uncharted wilderness, a hand to hold as we cross through the sea under spacious skies, toward that oasis of amber waves of grain and purple mountain majesties and fruited plains, and brotherhood, and sisterhood. I can promise you a hand to hold as we cross over, one day, from this world to the next, and like the sliver of a new moon which emerges out of the darkness of night, we will return.

The ground under our feet is holy. The world glows with God's presence. This is a day of joy! As Rabbi Arthur Wascow said, "Joy in knowing there is a Judge who cares about transgression, a justice to which we are responsible. And joy in knowing that the judge is full of motherly and fatherly compassion." This is a day of joy because we are leaving our bad habits and returning to our ideals. We are freeing ourselves. Repentance is the loosening of chains that weigh us down. Gratitude gives us wings. On Rosh Hashana, that which was broken has the opportunity to become whole again. That which was shattered by stress and anxiety, worry and fear, pain and hurt, that which is pulled in a thousand directions, spinning a hundred full plates, balancing on a beam, is finally uncluttered and focused, becoming one United State of Mind, aglow with gratitude.

This is a pivotal year in our history, but we will cross through, you and I, hand in hand, yes we will look to our right at the rough waters there, and we will look to the left at the rough waters there, and we will look ahead to the pillar of cloud guiding us through, and we will look up to the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and we will look down and see whose hand we are holding.

Whose hand are you holding? Hold someone's hand. Let us hold hands, each one of us. Move toward the center if you are sitting on the side, and hold someone's hand. Whose hand are you holding? Look both ways. Look to your right and see whose hand is there. Look to your left and see whose hand is there. Hold my hand.

⁵ Herbert Hoover

Let this moment be your Precedent. Let this moment be your exemplar, your paradigm, your model, your standard for every subsequent trial and decision. You are not alone. We will cross through together.

Once upon a time, nearly four millennia ago, our forefathers had a dream. They stood at the foot of a trembling mountain feeling the volcanic power beneath them and they envisioned a future. And they said, "Together we threw off our chains. Together we marched out of tyranny. Together we crossed through the sea." Together. And we will too.

With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent, we shall overcome many obstacles. **With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent** we'll walk hand in hand to a glistening shore. **With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent** we shall all be free. **With Rosh Hashana as your Precedent** we shall live in the great United State of Mind, serene with inner peace, moving ever forward toward that time when all shall live in peace.

We shall live in peace.
We shall live in peace.
We shall live in peace someday.
Deep in my heart,
I do believe,
We shall live in peace someday.

Osei Shalom.

Osei Shalom.

Osei Shalom bimromav.

Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu.

V'al kol Yisrael. V'imru, Amen.