

## **Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch Class Based on “The Book of Life: A Transformative Guide to the High Holidays” 2022**

1. On Rosh Hashana it is inscribed and on the fast day of Yom Kippur it is sealed... (U’Nitaneh Tokef, High Holiday Machzor)
2. ...some are careful not to eat egozim (walnuts) on Rosh Hashanah. This is because the gematria (numerical value) of the Hebrew word “egoz” is the same as the numerical value for the word chait (sin)... (Rama Orach Chaim 583:2)
3. If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when? (Avot 1:14)
4. Each and every person has merits and sins. A person whose merits exceed his sins is [termed] righteous. A person whose sins exceed his merits is [termed] wicked. If [his sins and merits] are equal, he is termed a Beinoni...Just as a person's merits and sins are weighed at the time of his death, so, too, the sins of every inhabitant of the world together with his merits are weighed on the festival of Rosh Hashanah. If one is found righteous, his [verdict] is sealed for life. If one is found wicked, his [verdict] is sealed for death. A Beinoni's verdict remains tentative until Yom Kippur. If he repents, his [verdict] is sealed for life. If not, his [verdict] is sealed for death. (Mishneh Torah, Teshuva 3:1,3)
5. We have learned that Rosh Hashana commemorates God’s Creation of the world in thought. But holidays in Torah are never merely about commemoration; they are also about reexperiencing the essential aspects of the day we are remembering. It stands to reason then that Rosh Hashanah is a time for us to focus on our own power to create in thought. What are we creating? Contrary to common belief, Rosh Hashana is not the day when we determine the way our future will unfold. Rather, Rosh Hashana is our precious opportunity to create our ideal potential for the coming year, and that is a very different thing. This idea about Rosh Hashana being a day of potential is implicit in the Talmud’s teaching that on Rosh Hashana it is decided how much rain will fall, but where it falls will depend on the Jewish people’s behavior during the year. Both factors in the outcome will matter, of course – the ideal potential tells us the maximum rainfall but the specific way it’s actualized will determine whether it helps our crops grow or simply causes flooding. However, for now, we are focused on the special significance of Rosh Hashana, which is the judgment about ideal potential. No matter what we do afterwards, what we receive during the year will be limited to the maximum potential we were granted on that day. (The Book of Life Part One Chapter 2 “The Last Laugh”)
6. ...Rabbi Eliezer who said the world was created in Tishrei...and Rabbi Yehoshua [who said the world was created in Nisan]. Rabbeinu Tam says they are both [correct]: You can say that in Tishrei [God] thought about creating the world, but didn’t create it until Nisan... (Tosefot Rosh Hashana 27a)

7. Rosh Hashana is Hayom - The Day of Din, The Day of definition and The Day of optimal potential for the year ahead. On Rosh Hashana, we have the ability to access our higher level of free-will, which can help us overcome all our personality defects, our addictions, and our obsessions, in an instant. On Rosh Hashana, we can define ourselves in our mind in our own unique way and in the context of God's reality, so that we are granted the most empowering potential for the year ahead. On Rosh Hashana, we can overcome an entire year of actions that might have otherwise sealed us for spiritual death. On Rosh Hashana, we can tap into the power of Teshuva and in an instant, choose the kind of person we want to become – a person who is a Tzadik – righteous and good, someone who accomplishes all of their goals and dreams in life, and someone who lives a life of meaning in the context of God's world, His reality, and His eternal significance. Rosh Hashana is the opportunity of a lifetime, and while no one, not even God, can compel us, we all can take full advantage of The Day. There is none other like it on the calendar, and there will never be another one this year, ever again. Listen to the shofar and allow it to wake you up to reality. Do Teshuva by making a choice in your mind's eye about what kind of person you truly want to be. And make that choice in the context of God's reality. This is the secret to taking full advantage of the gift that is Rosh Hashana, the secret to making the coming year a sweet one, full of accomplishment, happiness, success, and the secret to a meaningful life! (The Book of Life, Part One Chapter 5, "Conclusion to Part One Rosh Hashana")
8. See #3-4 above.
9. The mitzvah of the confession of Yom Kippur begins on the day's eve, before one eats [the final meal], lest one choke to death in the meal before confessing. (MT Teshuva 2:7)
10. That is why Yom Kippur is such a precious gift. God does not expect us to measure up to Abraham. He asks us only to devote one day – Yom Kippur - to restoring our relationship with Him. In this spirit, it is related that the Berditshever Rebbe would sit down prior to Yom Kippur with a list of "transgressions" he felt that God had committed against him during the year. He would declare to God: If you forgive me for my transgressions against you, I will forgive you in return! I do not believe he was being blasphemous or making a deal with God. Rather, he was expressing the mutual acceptance which characterized their relationship, a bond he considered unbreakable because it was unconditional. It was a mutual acceptance, of God being found, b'himatzo, during the time when he is to be found. In other words, the Berditshever looked at our relationship with God in the same way King Solomon viewed marriage – a relationship of acceptance and love. (The Book of Life, Yom Kippur Chapter 4 "Unconditionally")