

Zichronot: Does God have Selective Memory?

1) Leviticus 23:24

<p>Speak to the Israelite people thus: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts.</p>	<p>דָּבַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָּכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן זְכוֹרֹן תְּרוּעָה מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ.</p>
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2) The Koren Sacks Rosh HaShana Mahzor, p. 609

Remembering is usually a past-oriented process. But in Genesis we read three times of God remembering: “God remembered Noah” and brought him out on dry land. “God remembered Lot” and saved him from the destruction of the cities of the plain. “God remembered Rachel” and gave her a child. God remembers for the future. (Lord Jakobovits)

3) The Koren Sacks Rosh HaShana Mahzor, p. xxvii-xxviii

My predecessor Lord Jakobovits made a profound comment about Rosh HaShana. Given that it is the start of the Ten Days of Repentance, surprisingly it contains no explicit confessions, no penitential prayers. These form the text and texture of Yom Kippur but not Rosh HaShana. Why so? Because, he suggested, *teshuva* is driven by two different mindsets: commitment to the future and remorse about the past. Rosh HaShana is about the first, Yom Kippur about the second. *Rosh* means “head” and the default position of the head is looking forward not back. The placing of Rosh HaShana before Yom Kippur means that our determination to act better in the future is prior to our feelings of remorse about the past. To which we might add that this is why we blow the shofar on Rosh HaShana. The shofar, too, turns our attention to what lies ahead, not behind.

4) Professor Marc Zvi Brettler “Zichronot: Asking an Omniscient God to Remember”

Praying for God to Forget

This image of a forgetting God or a God that overlooks our faults is helpful in this season where we are asked to take stock, to take repentance seriously. After all—who can repent if we imagine an all-remembering objective deity? What’s the point? We might repent successfully, but can God truly “forget” and neglect the wrong things that we have done in the previous year, and totally erase them from the divine memory?

It is indeed much easier to change our ways if we imagine that God, like us, engages in selective memory—and might be convinced to forget the wrongs we have done in the previous year. So quite ironically, on one level, the real message of the festival’s early name of Yom Hazikaron, “the day of remembrance,” is that we hope that God will indeed forget.