



HIGH HOLIDAYS

Rosh Hashana 1

Headaches and Flat Feet: How The Head Of The Year Heals

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HEADACHES AND FLAT FEET: HOW THE HEAD OF THE YEAR HEALS

ABSTRACT

How important are the details of life?

When looking at the big picture, the small details can often be overlooked and seem trivial. So when we celebrate the *Rosh* -- the head -- of the year, we certainly have a birds eye view of the entire year. But what happens to the details? Do they matter.

Does the heel matter as much as the head?

Doctors assert that headaches could be caused by one's feet, or the shoes one wears on those feet. The Torah has always taught this. And has indeed captured it in the blowing of the Shofar.

Sound the shofar on the New Moon, on the appointed time for the day of our festival. For it is a statute for Israel, the judgment of the G-d of Jacob.

In the "head" of Israel, and the "heel" of Jacob, lies the power of being a Jew.

And of blowing the Shofar.

With humor, medical and scientific insights into the head and heel of the human body, and the analysis of a cryptic verse in the Rosh Hashanah prayer, this sermon presents a powerful New Year lesson to us all about the key to a successful year: Fusing the head and the heel, the big and the small.

1. The Head of the Year

Gut yom tov and a *gut yor!* A *kesiva v'chatima tova!* A happy and sweet new year!

Rosh Hashanah is literally the head of the year. Like the human body, the year has a head -- a central nervous system -- which controls and directs the entire body, all the days of the year. From head to heel, from head to toe, everything that happens during the year, even the lowest detail, the bottom of the foot, is directly impacted by the head of *Rosh* Hashanah.

This immediately teaches us about the power and potency of this awesome day: The decisions and resolutions you make today have the ability to affect your entire year! All your activities and involvements throughout the year, down to the last detail, is controlled by the Rosh Hashanah "central nervous system."

That is why we invest so much energy and effort in trying to maximize this High Holiday, because when the “head” is in the right place, it will ensure that the entire body of the year will be healthy and sound, and live up to its greatest potential.

2. Do the Details Matter?

But, this presents the opposite question: Do the details of the heel matter that much?

Often when you are looking at the big picture, the small details can be overlooked and seem trivial. So when we are celebrating the *Rosh* -- the head -- of the year, we certainly have a birds eye view of the entire year; we have our eyes on the big picture. But what happens to the details? Do they matter.

The heel is certainly controlled and impacted by the head. But, is the opposite true as well? Do the heels of the year, the lowly, small, seemingly trivial details of our lives, also affect the head of the year? Do our little, heel-like actions of everyday life really make a difference?

And therein lies the true power of Rosh Hashanah, reflecting the true power of Judaism in general: G-d is in the details. Our focus on this awesome day is not just on the “head” and birds eye view, but also on the details, even the smallest ones.

3. Head Over Heels

I want you to close your eyes and look back at your past year, 5779. Picture all the big moments, the milestones, the highlights. Think of all the great things you accomplished, whether it be in your personal, professional, or spiritual life. Perhaps you had a child or a grandchild; perhaps you or your child got married. Maybe you started a new company or got a new promotion; maybe you completed a major project. Possibly you took upon yourself a new Mitzvah; or studied a new section of Torah.

These big, major, significant, memorable moments of the past year, 5779, would be comparable to heads. Like a head, the head of the body, the head of a corporation, the head of a year, these accomplishments, milestones and achievements are leaders, directors, affectors that make waves and have massive impact on the body of your year and life.

Now I want you to close your eyes and think of the small, tiny, seemingly negligible and insignificant things of your past year, 5779. These things may be so forgettable that they slip your mind. But try. Think. Picture. Reflect. Recollect. Remember. Maybe it was a short phone call with a parent or conversation with a coworker. Perhaps it was a penny you gave to charity. Who knows, maybe it was little private laugh (or cry) you had with your spouse. These small, tiny, seemingly forgettable, trivial pixels of 5779 would be comparable to heels. Like

a heel, underfoot and underestimated, these glimpses in time go unnoticed, uncelebrated, and even undesired. Who wants to be a heel?

Today is *Rosh* Hashanah, not *Eikev* Hashanah, today is the *head* of the year, not the *heel*. But, as with the human body, and human life, the head is only as strong as its heel. And, as we shall see, just as the head affects and influences the whole body, down to the heel, so does the heel, and the entire body, affect the head as well.

This fascinating phenomenon is contained within the blowing of the Shofar. And in the biology of our very corporeal physiology.

Before we get scientific, however, let's get humorous.

4. A Real Headcase (Joke)

Yankel had suffered from really bad headaches for the last 20 years.

He eventually decides to go and see a doctor.

The Doctor said, "Yankel, the good news is I can cure your headaches. The bad news is that it will require surgery. You have terrible heels, which causes you to walk unbalanced, your legs putting massive amounts of pressure on your spine, which in turn pulls on your lower cerebellum, generating intense cranial stress and one storm of a headache.

"The only way to relieve the pressure is to remove parts of your heels. You won't be able to walk again, but your headaches will disappear."

Yankel was shocked and depressed. He wondered if he had anything to live for. Either unbearable headaches or no more walking.

He had no choice but to go under the knife. The surgery cost him \$65,000.

When he left the hospital, he was without a headache for the first time in 20 years, but he felt like he was missing an important part of himself. He couldn't walk.

As he was pushed down the street, he realized that though he couldn't walk, he felt like a different person. His head worked. He could think. He could focus. He could live. He could make a new beginning and live a new life. Yankel was inspired and determined to face the future with optimism, making the most of his head, albeit without the use of his heels.

Yankel saw a high-end men's department store and thought, "That's what I need... A new suit. Sure, I can no longer walk, but my head is clearer than a Shofar blast. I will wear the best clothes the world has to offer to demonstrate how much life means to me."

He entered the shop and told the salesman, “I’d like the best, most expensive suit you’ve got.”

The elderly tailor eyed him briefly, staring at his feet, and said, “Let’s see... size 44 long..”

Yankel laughed, “That’s right, how did you know?”

“Been in the business 60 years!” the clothier said.

Yankel tried on the suit. It fit perfectly.

As Yankel admired himself in the mirror, the salesman asked, “How about a new shirt?”

Yankel thought for a moment and then said, “Sure.”

The salesman eyed Yankel and said, “Let’s see... 34 sleeves and 16-1/2 neck.”

Yankel was surprised, “That’s right, how did you know?”

“Been in the business 60 years.”

Yankel tried the shirt and it fit perfectly.

Yankel was feeling incredible. Though he could not walk, he also wanted new, designer shoes to show how his condition would never limit his style.

The salesman said, “Let’s see..... a size 10 triple-E shoe would be perfect for you.”

Yankel laughed. “Ah ha! I got you! I’ve worn a size 8 single-E shoe since I was 18 years old!”

The salesman shook his head. “You can’t wear a size 8 single-E. A size 8 single-E would press your heels terribly, causing your legs to push up against the base of your spine and give you one storm of a headache!”

5. Headaches are Afoot

Can bad shoes contribute to headaches? This question was posed on Quora, the online crowdsourced Q&A platform.

Pieter van Dijkhuizen, a medical doctor and PhD student of paediatric immunology, gives the following answer:

I’d say yes. The reason is that a common form of headache is the so called muscular tension headache. This form of headache arises from cramps in the muscles of your neck attaching to the skull. The pain is frequently described in this way as well, arising from the neck and forming a tension around the head. It’s usually not accompanied by any other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, photophobia, phonophobia

and the like.

Now, while this form of headache may just be an isolated fact, it sometimes arises due to another problem, such as abnormalities of the vertebral curve (e.g. scoliosis) or of the legs (leg length discrepancies). But sometimes an abnormal gait pattern may be the culprit and this in turn can be induced by bad shoes.

The key in understanding here is that our musculoskeletal system is really one piece and a problem at any level may cause symptoms at any other level (sometimes without even causing symptoms at the level the real problem is at).¹

And this from a Daily Mail article titled, **ARE YOUR HEADACHES CAUSED BY FLAT FEET? DOCTORS SAY COUNTLESS SUFFER FROM THE PROBLEM.**

Like one in five adults in the UK, Rachel has flat feet. While most sufferers experience no real problems, Rachel is one of the many thousands who suffer headaches and other problems as a result of the effect that flat feet have on your posture.

‘With every step we take, we load our body weight through our feet,’ explains Rina Bimbashi, a podiatrist at the London Foot & Ankle Centre.

‘If you have flat feet, you are likely to be rolling in with each step, so your muscles are working harder and longer to keep your body stable.

‘This can set off a chain reaction, from the calf muscles up the leg to the knee and thigh, through to the abdomen and lower back. Consequently, you have poor posture and very tight, over-worked muscles.’

Poor posture is linked to approximately one in four severe headaches, says Dr Mark Weatherall, a neurologist at the Princess Mary Migraine Clinic at Charing Cross Hospital, a leading specialist centre.

...Our feet are what ground us, so if someone has severely flat feet then the whole body is likely to become out of kilter.

‘Severe posture-related headaches or migraines are triggered when the brain is unable to process all the signals it is being sent.

‘For some people, the trigger may be an overload of sensory signals from lights. For others, it may be connected to poor posture.

‘The muscles in all parts of the body are constantly sending information to the brain about what they are doing, and signals from overloaded muscles can disturb the brain.

¹ <https://www.quora.com/Can-bad-shoes-contribute-to-headaches>

The brain then releases chemicals which cause blood vessels around it to expand and become inflamed - and it is this process that causes the throbbing pain.’

Scientifically, it seems, that even as the head impacts and affects the rest of the body, the rest of the body, even the lowest, furthest parts, impacts and affects the head.

6. Rosh Hashanah Preceding Science

Long before these scientific discoveries, Rosh Hashanah, at the beginning of time, taught us this message -- of the symbiotic relationship between head and heel, between the big picture and the small one.

And this helps us explain a cryptic verse, a verse that is the Rosh Hashanah prayers and Kiddush excerpted from the Book of Psalms.

7. Statute for Israel, Judgment for Jacob

תקנו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו כי חוק לישראל הוא משפט לאלקי יעקב

*Sound the shofar on the New Moon, on the appointed time for the day of our festival. For it is a statute for Israel, the judgment of the G-d of Jacob.*²

Thousands of pages have been written expounding upon these two verses. What is *b'chodesh*? What is the *appointed time*? How does this tie into Shofar and Rosh Hashanah?

Let us focus our collective hearts and soul on understanding the latter verse, *For it is a statute for Israel, the judgment of the G-d of Jacob.*³

At first reading, the verse seems redundant: *For it is a statute for Israel* seems to say the same thing as *the judgment of the G-d of Jacob*?

At second reading, one notices that the verse first uses the name Israel, and then transitions to the name Jacob. Why the change?

At third reading, the verse seems to be contradicting itself: *a statute, a chok*, is a supra-logical axiom from G-d. As the word itself hints, it is *chokak*, engraved into our beings on an inherent, intrinsic level. *A judgment*,

² Psalms 81:4-5.

³ See Rosh Hashanah 8b for alternative interpretations.

or *mishpat*, however, is the exact opposite: it is a logical law based on jurisprudence, legal procedure, and precedence. It is not an engraved *chok* but a lawfully decreed *mishpat*.

Mitzvot are generally divided into three categories: Eidut, or testimonies, Chukim, statutes, and Mishpatim, judgements. Eidut categorize the commemorative Mitzvot, like Shabbat and Yom Tov, that bear witness and testify to events that occurred on these days which connect us with the divine. Chukim are Mitzvot, like Para Aduma and Shatnez, that embody our supra-logical, engraved, inherent oneness with the divine. Mishpatim are logical Mitzvot, like not stealing and not killing, that demonstrate the legal, lawful, structured connection with the divine.

Yet, here, the first half of the verse seems to suggest that Shofar is a *chok*, while the second half implies that it's a *mishpat*.

What makes this even more perplexing is that Shofar seems to actually be one of the Eidut, a Mitzvah that testifies and bears witness to G-d and the creation of the world. Indeed, the verse literally states that Shofar is a Mitzvah that serves as a reminder: Speak to the children of Israel, saying: *In the seventh month, on the first of the month, it shall be a Sabbath for you, a remembrance of the shofar blast [zichron teruah] a holy occasion.*⁴

One of the reasons given for the Mitzvah of Shofar is to remember the ram offered at the Akeidah in Yitzchak's stead, a ram created during the twilight of the first Rosh Hashanah.⁵

Why then does the verse refer to Shofar as both a *chok* and a *mishpat* and not an *eid*? And which is it, an engraved supralogical *chok* or a logical *mishpat*, the two of which seem to be mutually exclusive?

8. Israel and Jacob, Head and Heel

The key lies in the two different names for the same person used by the verse, Israel and Jacob, or Yisrael and Yaakov.

The letters of Yisroel, **ישראל**, spell **לי ראש**, “a head to me.”⁶ The letters of Yaakov, **יעקב**, spell **י עקב**, “heel” (plus the letter *yud*).⁷

The name Israel embodies and symbolizes the “head” aspects of life and divine service. The name Jacob embodies and symbolizes the “heel” aspects of life and divine service.

⁴ Leviticus 23:24.

⁵ Pirkei Avot 5:8. See also Pirkei D'rabi Eliezer ch. 32, connecting the Akeidah to the Shofar blast.

⁶ Pri Etz Chaim Shaar HaLulac chapter 1. Shaar HaPesukim Vayishlach 32:29.

⁷ Etz Chaim Shaar 3 chapter 2. Pardes Shaar 23 in its erech. Torah Ohr beginning of Parshas Vayeitzei.

The head, the leader, the prime essence of the entire body, is associated with the level *chok*, the highest levels which are engraved into our core being. That's why the verse opens, *For it is a statute for Israel*, on the level of Israel, the head, the Rosh, everything is an engraved, inherent, innate statute.

This is well understood by way of metaphor of the human body. The head is critical part of life. Every part of the body is necessary, but life cannot survive without the head. Many parts of the body can be amputated (G-d forbid), but not the head. The head is like a *chok* - engraved into and one with our very beings. More: it is who we are. Without it, we aren't.

But then the verse continues: *the judgment of the G-d of Jacob*. Judgment, law and order, minutiae and detailed structure, are associated with Jacob, *yud eikev*, the heel. The head does not suffice. For life to be complete we must have the full body, all the way down to the heel. Again, the metaphor lies in our own bodies: a little pressure on the heel, a little cut on the bottom of the foot, affects the entire body. True, one cannot amputate a head, but neither can a head walk without heels.

And the converse positive is just as true: Just a healthy head inspires the entire body down to the heels, healthy heels elevate the head itself, manifesting the lofty *chok* concepts of the head into the detailed *mishpat* laws of everyday life.

And all of this is achieved by the *Sound the shofar on the New Moon, on the appointed time for the day of our festival*, which leads into *For it is a statute for Israel, the judgment of the G-d of Jacob*.

9. Conclusion: What Is Your Inherent Expansiveness? How Will You Create?

Now, as we are about to perform the great, monumental Mitzvah of Shofar blowing, I want us to once again close our eyes. Only this time, instead of remembering the past year, 5779, let us picture the coming year, 5780.

Close your eyes and look ahead to the coming year, 5780. Picture all the big moments, the milestones, the highlights, the goals, the dreams and aspirations you want to accomplish. Think of all the great things you will do, whether it be in your personal, professional, or spiritual life. Perhaps you will endeavor to start, build, or grow your family. Maybe you will finally start that new project or company you always dreamed of. Maybe you will complete that project you started a while back. Hopefully you will take upon yourself a new Mitzvah; or study a new section of Torah,

These big, major, significant, memorable moments of the coming year, 5780 are “head” based activities. Like a head, the head of the body, the head of a corporation, the head of a year, these accomplishments, milestones and achievements are leaders, directors, affectors that make waves and have massive impact on the body of your year and life. And, today, on Rosh Hashanah, we establish and energize these heads.

Now let us close our eyes and think of the small, tiny, seemingly trivial and insignificant things you look forward to in the coming year, 5780. These things may be so forgettable that they slip your mind. But try. Think. Picture. Project. Envision. Imagine. Maybe it will be a short phone call every Friday wishing a parent or child or coworker

Shabbat Shalom. Perhaps it will be a penny you give to charity, every day. Who knows, maybe it will be a little private laugh (or cry) you will share with your spouse.

These small, tiny, seemingly forgettable, negligible pixels of 5780 are “heel” based activities. Like a heel, underfoot and underestimated, these glimpses in time go unnoticed, uncelebrated, and even undesired. Who wants to be a heel?

And yet, G-d is in the details. G-d equalizes the large and the small, the big picture and the small one. The most miniscule of details can change the world. Like the butterfly effect, one small act, word or thought can tip the scales and bring personal and global redemption.⁸

So who wants to be a heel? Anyone who wants to walk, that’s who. Certainly anyone that is meant to run, dance, jump up and down with joy.

As we listen to the Shofar, let us remember its inherent *chok*, and how it resounds in all of the laws (*mishpatim*) of nature and creation, from head to heel. Let us remember that the head informs the heel, and the heel empowers the head.

This is the secret key to a successful life: To take the grand majestic vision of Rosh Hashana -- and *li rosh* of Yisroel -- and have it inform the details and minutiae of the heel of our lives -- *yud eikev* of Yaakov. And vice versa.

To appreciate the importance of every detail in relaizing the big picture. If one detail of the heel is missing, the entire body, even the head, is compromised.

Sound the shofar on the New Moon, on the appointed time for the day of our festival, which leads into For it is a statute for Israel, *the judgment of the G-d of Jacob.*

A kesiva v’chatima tova and a gut gebentht yor!

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⁸ Rambam Laws of Teshuva 3:4.