ROSH HASHANA: We and the Judge

□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□‘ □

Rosh haShana is the beginning of the new Jewish year. We will be celebrating the beginning of the year 5783 this coming Sunday night, September 25th at night. Starting a new year is, of course, a reason for celebration, optimism, and happiness. But for the Jewish people, a new year is mainly a very serious event. To the point that the Sages spoke more, much more, about the serious aspects of Rosh haShana than the celebratory aspects of the New Year. The rabbis of the Mishna explained that Rosh haShana is nothing less than the day of judgment (□□□□ □□□). What judgment? The most meaningful one. Judging and evaluating what I'm doing with my life.

And guess who is judging you?

God. And yourself. Or better said: I judge myself in the presence of God.

The trial begins in the morning. When we enter the synagogue on Monday, September 26th, that is, 1 of Tishri, we should visualize that we are entering a courtroom. Our first and most important challenge is to find the Judge. He is there, but cannot be "seen" in a normal way. To see the Judge, to feel His presence, we use the help of our prayers. When correctly understood, the prayers should open our eyes and help us identify God as the King. Why King? Because in the Hebrew mind one of the main roles of the Kings of Israel was to judge his subjects (think, for example, of King Solomon's judgment). The King was the Highest, and final, Judicial instance. Therefore during Rosh haShana –and until the end of Yom Kippur– we repeatedly refer to God in our prayers using a keyword: "MELEKH", which in Hebrew means "King" (or MALKENU, our King) but in the context of Rosh haShana should be understood as "Judge".

The most special event of Rosh haShana, is also aimed at identifying the Judge and making us feel that we are standing in front of Him. I am referring to the blowing of the Shofar, the ram's horn. In ancient Israel, the Shofar was blown when a new King was crowned. In the same way, when hearing the

Shofar on Rosh Hashana we “crown” God, meaning we accept Him as our King and we acknowledge that he is judging us. If we do not take this profound existential idea lightly, when listening to the Shofar we might feel overwhelmed, paralyzed, and shocked, realizing that the Supreme Judge is examining us, and knowing that He knows us better than we know ourselves. We might or crying out of fear, awe, or shame. If this happens, if we tremble inside when hearing the Shofar, it means that the Shofar is working properly and that we are reacting correctly to its sound.

While the Shofar is blown we do not have to admit any guilt, we don’t need to confess or repent, or even ask for His forgiveness (and needless to say, when hearing the Shofar we should not be “asking” HaShem for things!). We are permanently asking God to listen and fulfill all our needs. Except when we listen to the Shofar. The Shofar is a Divine wake-up call. This is the only time that HaShem is calling us, summoning us. When we hear the Shofar, we should feel that the Judge is presiding over the celestial Court that is judging me.