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ROSH HASHANAH: WAKE UP AND TAKE ACTION

Hayom harat olam – today the world is conceived. The midrash teaches us that on Rosh Hashanah the world was first created. And Rosh Hashanah is, in some ways, a giant birthday party – filled with pageantry, food, and gatherings of friends and family. But *hayom harat olam* also signals a sense of serious reflection. Rosh Hashanah is, after all, when all of creation is called to judgment. It is the day on which we are called to take stock of our actions.

But Rosh Hashanah is more than just self-evaluation. The Rosh Hashanah service, in fact, is about providing us with a call to action. The Torah portion for the second day of Rosh Hashanah begins in Genesis 22:1 with God hailing Abraham, who responds with one word: *hineni* – here I am. But *hineni* is more than one's physical location. It is a declaration that one is ready to transform ideals into actions, to concretize one's beliefs into conduct. As Rashi suggested, *hineni* "is the language of humility and readiness." The time for thinking, evaluating and pontificating is over. Now is the time to act.

The parshah goes on to show that *hineni* means not just moving from thought to action, but also reversing course if one is traveling down the wrong path. In Genesis 22:11 an angel interrupts Abraham just as he is about to sacrifice Isaac. How does Abraham respond? "*Hineni.*" The angel tells Abraham to sacrifice an animal instead of his son, and Abraham complies. He obeys God and finds a more enlightened path.

The shofar that we hear on Rosh Hashanah also serves as a wake-up call. Its repeated sharp, piercing blasts are meant to rouse us from the slumber of our lives, to startle us into urgent action.

So what is the wake-up call we need this year? What is the transformative behavior we need to embrace – to stop talking and finally start acting? There are many, but one of the most urgent crises – one we have talked about incessantly but failed to act upon – is caring for the world in which we live. The laws of the Torah reflect an agrarian society with a strong attachment to the Earth. The Torah teaches us that if we don't care for the Earth, there will be serious consequences: famine, drought and disease.

The world desperately needs a comprehensive strategy to preserve its resources. The United States needs to adopt a national energy policy, one that both reduces our consumption of environmentally destructive fossil fuels and promotes the development of clean, affordable energy sources and technologies. In the process, such a policy will generate well-paying, long-lasting "green" jobs.

Our continued use of coal and oil is hastening the effects of climate change – a threat to our very existence. We also must lessen our dependence on foreign oil for the sake of geo-political stability: Our oil addiction props up despotic Middle East regimes that are hostile to Israel and Western values.

We all know that our current energy policy is unsustainable. The imperative of the Torah is that we need to take action. So what can we do? Recycle. Unplug unused appliances. Adjust our heating and air conditioning thermostats by a few degrees. Drive less – or, better yet, carpool, take public transit, bike or walk.

On Rosh Hashanah, may we finally heed the wake-up call and transform our words, our proclamations, and our thoughts into concrete action. May we finally take seriously our obligation to till and to tend God's created world. *Hayom harat olam*: It is up to us to make sure that our world will still be here for our children and our children's children to celebrate.

Source: Rabbi Julie Schonfield