

THE NEUROLOGY OF TIME

On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: how many shall pass on, and how many shall be born; who shall live, and who shall die... who shall rest, and who shall wander... who shall be impoverished, and who shall be enriched; who shall fall, and who shall rise...

From the Musaf prayer for Rosh Hashanah

“**G**t’s all in the head,” is a fairly accurate description of every man’s reality. If you stub your toe and cry out in pain, it is only because the event has been detected by your brain and your brain has so chosen to so react to the experience. Everything you sense, know, and feel relates to the universe between your ears; any action you take is first conceived, considered, and executed inside the head.

And whatever occurs within the head has a profound effect upon the external person: An injury to the brain, G-d forbid, or the alteration of its chemical constitution, will affect the function and behavior of the entire body. Neurologists have even learned to evoke certain external responses, or improve the function of a certain faculty, by stimulating the corresponding area of the brain.

What is true of the human being is also true of another of G-d’s creations: time. Time, too, has a body and a brain, a persona and a mind.

We are accustomed to regarding time as a string of segments: second follows second, hour follows hour, Monday follows Sunday. Special days—Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Passover—each have their place in the sequence of days and months mapped out by our calendar, preceded and followed by the “ordinary” days that separate them. This, however, is a most perfunctory perception of time, just as a description of the human body in purely physical terms—hair, skin, bone, blood, flesh, sinew, and brain tissue classified solely by their spatial juxtaposition to each other—is a most superficial vision of man.

Time is a complex organism whose various organs and faculties interact with each other, each fulfilling its individual function and imparting its effect upon the whole. G-d created the whole of time—every age, millennium, century, year, and second of it—as a single, multifaceted body. It is only that we, finite and temporal creatures that we are, encounter its “limbs,” “organs,” and “cells” one at a time, regarding the past as passed because we have passed through it, and the future as yet to be because we have yet to experience it.

Just as time, as a whole, constitutes an integral organism, so it is with the various time-bodies designed by the Creator of time as distinct components of the universal time-body: the day, the week, the month, the year, etc. Each of these has its own “head,” a neurological center which generates, processes, and controls the stimuli and experiences of its “body.”

So if we learn to be sensitive to the structure of time, we can transcend the sequential timeline of our lives. If, upon entering the “head” of a particular time-body, we imbue it with a certain quality and stimulate its potential in a certain way, we can profoundly affect the days and experiences of that entire time-body, whether they lie in our “future” or our “past.”

FORTY-EIGHT HOURS

The two days of Rosh Hashanah—the name literally means “head of the year”—are 48 hours that embody an entire year.

On Rosh Hashanah we recommit ourselves to our mission in life, reiterating Adam’s crowning of G-d as king of the universe,¹ a commitment that becomes the foundation for our service of G-d throughout the year. Rosh Hashanah also commences the “ten days of *teshuvah*” which culminate in Yom Kippur—days especially suited for soul-searching and undertaking new initiatives, since resolutions made on these “neurological” days of the year are far more effective: Having stimulated the brain, the body readily follows suit. On Rosh Hashanah, we also pray for life, health, and sustenance for the year to come; for, in the words of the *u’netaneh tokef* prayer, Rosh Hashanah is the day on which “all inhabitants of the world pass before Him as a flock of sheep,” and it is decreed in the heavenly court, “who shall live, and who shall die... who shall be impoverished, and who shall be enriched; who shall fall, and who shall rise.”

It’s all in the head. On Rosh Hashanah we enter into the mind of the year; our every thought, word, and deed on this day resonates throughout its entire body.²

1 See citation from *Zohar* on p. 10, and the next two essays in this chapter, *The Man in Man* (pp. 8–16), and *To Will a World* (pp. 17–24).

2 Other “heads” of time include Shabbat, the nerve-center of the weekly cycle, which both sublimates the past week’s endeavors and empowers those of the following week; and the monthly mind of *Rosh Chodesh* (“head of the month”), every moment of which has a profound influence on the entire month.