

ROSH HASHANAH

One of the central phrases in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy appears after the shofar is blown: הַיּוֹם הָרֵאשִׁית עוֹלָם — Hayom harat olam

It is commonly translated as, "Today is the birthday of the world." But this translation softens the depth of the original Hebrew. The word harat does not mean "birth," but "pregnancy." A more accurate reading would be: "Today, the world is pregnant."

Rosh Hashanah, then, is not a celebration of a world already formed—it is a call to shape the world that is yet to be. A world that is not yet just. Not yet whole. Not yet healed.

The Hasidic teacher, Rebbe Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, interprets the phrase הַרְתָּ עוֹלָם—"pregnant world"—through a play on words. The word olam, usually translated as "world," shares a root with he'elem, meaning "hidden." He teaches that the world is pregnant with mercy, with compassion, with divine presence—but these things are hidden, like a child in the womb. The role of human beings, he suggests, is to reveal what is hidden. To bring into the world that which already exists in potential.

Our world is overflowing with potential. It is rich with human capacity—for justice, for compassion, for courage. But that potential remains hidden, under the weight of apathy, inequality, and fear.

Rosh Hashanah calls us to be partners in creation—to be midwives to justice.

It is tempting to treat the world as fixed, as though its systems and structures are immutable. But Jewish tradition insists otherwise. The same God who created the world and declared it "very good" left it unfinished. Creation is ongoing—and human beings are invited to be its stewards and shapers.

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Society requires participation. It requires care. And it requires moral clarity. To believe that the world is pregnant is to believe that change is always possible—that better is always within reach.

We recite these words following the blowing of the Shofar. It is a wake-up call to the injustices around us. It is a call to organize, to repair, to build. The world is pregnant—but what will it give birth to?

That depends on us.

Will we birth a society in which all people are treated with dignity, regardless of race, gender, ability, or immigration status?

Will we work for economic structures that support the vulnerable, rather than reward only the powerful?

Will we move beyond tribalism and invest in real intergroup partnership—across faiths, across communities, across lines that too often divide us?

Or will we retreat into passivity, allowing the potential of this moment to remain unrealized?

Rosh Hashanah is the day when we stand in judgment—not just for what we have done, but for what we could still do. It is a judgment not only on our past, but on our willingness to engage with the future.

The world is always pregnant. It holds within it seeds of justice—but they do not grow on their own.

Our task is to nurture them. To bring them into the world.

May this be a year of responsibility, of action, and of justice made real.