

Kol THE VOICE OF Barrack

Tishrei: The Value of a Second Chance

The first day of school, September 2nd, has been on my mind for months. Over the course of the summer, and with an increased intensity over the last two weeks, I had been imagining and planning for the first day of school alongside the dedicated Barrack team. The design of the day, the schedule of how everything would work, the set-up of outdoor lunch, where we would be standing at drop-off and how we would welcome students to school, had all been discussed and prepared. We were ready. But the night before, the remnants of Hurricane Ida wreaked catastrophic damage and flooding in our area, and we were forced to cancel opening day.

We had to reimagine and revamp with an updated plan and approach, and give the first day of school a second try the following day.

As we prepare for the new year, this notion of trying something for a second time is relevant and timely. Rosh Hashanah is unique among the Jewish holidays in that while many holidays are observed outside the land of Israel (in the diaspora) for two days but only one day in Israel, Rosh Hashanah is observed for two days even in the land of Israel.

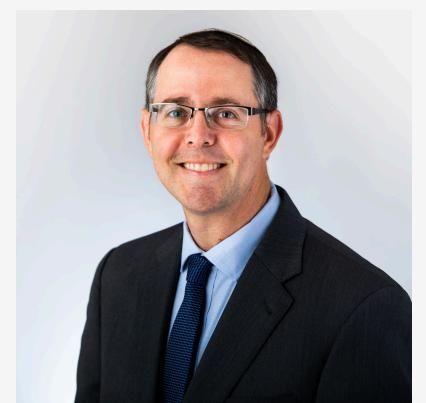
The origins of this practice date back to a time when the Jewish calendar was not yet fixed like it is today. During this period, Rosh Hodesh (a new month) was announced based on the testimony of witnesses (Mishna Rosh Hashanah). These witnesses would appear before the court in Jerusalem and only after their testimony of seeing the new moon was accepted, would the new month be established. Minus cell phones, Zoom or WhatsApp, fires would be lit on mountain tops throughout the land of Israel (one at a time) to ensure the message was passed to the whole community and beyond its borders. In this manner (and in later years via messengers) people were notified of the new month and then knew on which days holidays would fall.

Rosh Hashanah, however, posed a problem. While most Jewish holidays occur in the middle of a month, Rosh Hashanah is observed at the beginning of a month. How would the message of the new month reach everyone outside of Jerusalem, and how could we guarantee that even those in Jerusalem might not, mistakenly, desecrate the holiday if witnesses did not appear at the appropriate time?

Eventually, the practice in Israel evolved so that Rosh Hashanah was observed for two days (Mishneh Torah, Kiddush Hachodesh, 5:7-8). This practice also led to two streams of thought regarding the length of time we observe Rosh Hashanah. For some, Rosh Hashanah is considered to be a holiday that is a *יומא אריכתא* / *Yoma Arichta* / one long day. For others, each day is distinct and exists as its own day (this is why we still say *Shehecheyanu* on the second night but add a new fruit to the meal, just to make sure our blessing on something new is legitimate).

While I find the history and the *halacha* (Jewish law) around this issue to be fascinating, I am drawn to it even more so now on the heels of preparing so intensely for an opening of school on September 2nd and then having to decide that it would take place on September 3rd. Why?

Kol Barrack (The Voice of Barrack) is a periodic publication that recognizes the new month in the Jewish calendar. In this edition, Head of School Rabbi Marshall Lesack shares his thoughts about the value of second chances in this new year.



Rabbi Marshall Lesack '97
HEAD OF SCHOOL

Rabbi Marshall Lesack is the Head of School at Barrack Hebrew Academy. He previously served as the Principal of the Claire and Emanuel G. Rosenblatt High School at Donna Klein Jewish Academy. Rabbi Lesack is passionate about Jewish day school education and strives to create environments and communities where young people are valued, supported, and able to become the leaders of tomorrow.

In addition to spending time with his family, Rabbi Lesack loves to play basketball, go camping, and travel.

mlesack@jbha.org

Because even if these days felt like one long day (they did!), they also provided me (and I believe our team as well) with some additional perspective. I could appreciate September 2nd for what I hoped it would be and what it actually was, learn from that experience and prepare even further, and then approach September 3rd with an updated focus and energy. Perhaps, I could make September 3rd even better than what September 2nd might have been.

Sometimes in life, we are given the opportunity to prepare and plan, only to have to pivot because of circumstances out of our control. But if we are lucky, we get to reflect on the experience, take what we have learned, and try again.

As we prepare to celebrate this 48-hour holiday of Rosh Hashanah, I hope we can find meaning and value in the opportunity of another day. Whether we envision it as one long day or two distinct days, let us take advantage of that second 24-hour period of time. May it be used for introspection, for a focus on what was and what could be, and a vision for how we can be a better version of ourselves. May we honor the reality that in this fast-paced world, we are given the chance to give something important another try.

Wishing you and your families a healthy, happy, and sweet new year.

Shana Tova U'metuka. שנה טובה ומתוקה