

Spiritual Accounting

Thought for the Day

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Tomorrow evening is the start of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year. This is a time of self-examination and introspection, referred to in Hebrew as “spiritual accounting”. We look at the year gone by and ask ourselves how we might have done better, and many of our prayers on these days list the many ways in which our actions fell short of ideal.

It’s interesting that these prayers take for granted that we got things wrong – or if you like, that we’re all human. Judaism is a religion of this world; we don’t go in – much! – for reciting declarations of our faith; instead we concentrate on living our lives by the rules set down for us. And most of these rules are about relations between people, not between us and God.

That is why at this time of year we’re told it isn’t enough to pray for forgiveness; if you want to make a fresh start, you have to go to the person you wronged and make your peace with them. That can be a tall order – just think back through all the people you might have offended or hurt or slandered or ridden roughshod over. Could you go and look them in the eye and ask their forgiveness?

Perhaps that really is too much to ask. So perhaps the idea is just metaphorical. But there is still a lot we can learn from it: to put ourselves in the place of those affected by what we do; not just to pursue our selfishness or superiority regardless of others; to put right any wrong if we are able to do so.

That’s probably still a lot to ask, but why should we regard the human condition as a battle to be top dog? Only a *dog* can be top dog!

So as members of the *human* race, shouldn’t we be governed by *humanity* – that is empathy and cooperation – and let’s resolve that in our dealings with others, the worst of next year should be at least as good as the best of last.