

Rabbi Magal's drashot for 5787

Edited September 2, 2026

Erev Rosh Hashanah

Friday evening, September 11, 2026

Haverim yekarim, my dear friends... Tonight we gather at the edge of a new year — a night of beginnings, of possibility. And we do so on a date that carries its own weight in American memory - **September 11th.**

A date that lives in our collective minds and memory, a date that shaped the way we understand vulnerability, courage, and the preciousness of life.

We don't need to dwell there tonight, but we also cannot pretend it is not present. It's in the air with us — a quiet undertone, a reminder of how fragile and also how resilient the human spirit can be. And maybe that's precisely why Rosh Hashanah arriving on this date matters. Because this holiday asks us to hold both truths at once: **the world breaks, and the world begins again.**

Memory and renewal.

Grief and hope.

Endings and beginnings.

Dateline's Lester Holt just announced his new podcast called *Before & After with Lester Holt*.

The NBC journalist revealed his major career update. Holt's podcast premieres on September 14 and aims to examine "moments that divide a life into before and after." He will interview people who had life changing moments, and will have them share those turning points and how they renewed themselves "after" --for a whole new beginning.

And that brings me to the heart of my drash tonight and my theme for these High Holy days this year, endings and beginnings — this dance between what is closing and what is opening.

Rosh Hashanah is always a threshold, but this year I've been thinking about how endings are not simply closures; they are clarifying. They show us what has been essential, what has shaped us, what we carry forward. And beginnings are not simply fresh starts; they are invitations. They ask us to step into the next chapter with intention, with courage, with curiosity.

This year's Hebrew letters that spell out the year 5787 — ***Taf-Shin-Peh-Zayin*** — hold a gift inside them. If you take the last two letters *Peh* and the *Zayin* together, you get פז — ***paz***. A word of **radiance**, of **refined gold**, of something precious that has been burnished and polished by time and experience.

What a hopeful message for 5787...that inside this year, inside these letters, inside our lives, there is ***paz*** — a radiance that doesn't come from perfection, but from refinement. From living. From remembering. From beginning again.

Maybe that's the spiritual alchemy of this moment: We stand on a date that reminds us of profound loss, and we enter a holiday that insists on profound possibility. We hold the memory of what has been broken, and we listen for the shofar that calls us toward what can yet be healed. We acknowledge the shadows, and ...we choose to walk toward the radiance — the *paz* — that is already waiting inside the new year.

But *Paz* is not the gold of wealth or ornament;

no -- rather, it is the gold of the soul, the spiritual radiance that emerges when we polish our deeds, our intentions, and our relationships with care. You may remember that each year I shine the copper pots my father gave my mother... OK. They aren't gold, but I can make them shine after the year's grime has dulled them. This idea of looking for the glow, the renewed shine, is something like how we get rid of the dust of the year on our souls and shine them up back to their original purity.

(Show the shiny polished side of the bowls)

Tonight, as the gates of the new year open before us, we are invited to notice the **inner gold** within ourselves and within one another. To trust that beneath the dust and *shmutz* of daily life of the past year, something luminous remains — waiting to be revealed, refined, and shared.

5787 calls us toward ***peulah zakah***, toward actions burnished by compassion and integrity, toward inner radiance.

It calls us to listen for the shimmer in each moment, to greet the world with the quiet courage of those who know that holiness is not distant. It glows here, in this community, in this place, in this hour.

May the **Shekhinah's paz-light** meet the light of our own hearts. May it soften what has grown hard, illuminate what has been hidden, and guide us gently toward one another.

Rosh Hashanah is a night of thresholds. We stand between what has been and what will be, the reflection of the past year and the dream and intentions for the year just now unfolding. We hold the sweetness and the ache of transition. And we trust that the year ahead carries its own ***paz - shining light***, waiting to be discovered.

So tonight, as we cross this threshold together, may we honor the past without being held captive by it. May we welcome the new year with open hearts and steady breath. **May we trust that endings can be teachers, and beginnings can be blessings.**

May we enter 5787 with openness, curiosity, and hope — ready to discover the gold within ourselves, ready to offer blessing, ready to shape a year that shines. And may the radiance of *paz* — the gold refined through experience — shine through each of us as we step into 5787.

Taf shin Peh zayin - תהא שנה פז זקרת — May this be a year glowing with golden radiance. *Shanah tovah u'metukah* — may it be a year of sweetness, courage, and light.

Saturday morning, September 12, 2026

First Day Rosh Hashanah —

The Community: Returning, Renewing, Rising Together

Remember how when we were children the end of summer vacation always arrived too soon?! We may still feel that sense of time passing too quickly. There are things we didn't get to, books we didn't read, friends we didn't call although we meant to stay in touch, diet and exercise programs we weren't consistent in following. There is regret.

And yet...there is also a quiet excitement—because returning home as children meant going back to a new year of school, sports, and fun activities with friends, and now, for us, Rosh Hashanah is the end of our spiritual summer vacation. It is our communal return to purpose, to rhythm, to community.

Each year I write out the letters in Hebrew that represent the year. As I said last night, this new year 5787 written in letters is תשפ"ז — *Tav, Shin, Peh, Zayin*. Hidden within them is פז — *paz*, the word for refined gold, for **radiance, for the inner glow** that emerges only after something has been shaped, stretched, tested, and polished. Yesterday evening, we stepped into this new year 5787 through the intimate doorway of personal transition—the tenderness of endings, the shimmer of *paz*, that refined gold hidden in the letters תשפ"ז. When I shared my idea on my Rabbinical listserve, I heard back from other rabbis that they had not noticed that word in the Hebrew letters of the new year and thanked me for the inspiration.

Each High Holy Day season presents us with a sense of new beginnings as the old year ends and we look back and do a *heshbon hanefesh* – a soul accounting of our actions, regrets, and achievements. We also now have the opportunity to look ahead and express our hopes and goals for this next year just starting.

As I look toward June 2027, when my full-time role as your rabbi will come to an end, I feel the tenderness of that chapter coming to a close even though we still have many months of celebrating together. I feel gratitude for all we have built together. There is also sadness in letting go of the daily rhythm of leading, teaching, and shepherding this community.

And there is also hope—hope for the new ways I will continue to be present, hope for the new voices that will rise, hope for the next chapter of our shared story. Being ***Emerita*** means remaining in community with a small role of support, perhaps teaching one class or helping out with a project. Itzhak and I consider ourselves a part of this congregation and will continue to participate in some way as synagogue leadership will move to a new clergy person as the congregation's spiritual leader by next summer and next High Holy Days.

But I am still fully present and active and invested in serving as your spiritual leader right now with great energy. I have offered a different theme for each of the 21 High Holy Day seasons that I have led for this congregation. This time I have two themes: Endings and Beginnings as well as the image of ***paz***, a year that invites us to notice the shining pure gold within our experiences, even the difficult ones. A year that asks us to trust that transitions—though tender—can reveal new brilliance. A year that reminds us that endings contain a spark to prepare us for what comes next.

As I step toward my own transition to a new role, I feel that radiant glow – that *PAZ* - of what we have created together. I feel the shimmer of what is emerging. I feel the golden glow of this community—its strength, its compassion, its resilience—ready to shine in new ways.

Today, on the First Day of Rosh Hashanah, our lens widens. We turn from the personal to the communal—from my own transition to the story of this community and the sacred work we share.

And our tradition gives us a powerful model for communal returning: **the story of Hannah**, which we heard today as Sheldon Hersh chanted the Haftarah verses from the Book of Samuel. Hannah begins in heartbreak—her prayers unspoken; her voice trapped inside her grief. But she prays with her whole being.

She creates a new path for herself and for the people. Her prayer becomes the blueprint for Jewish prayer itself, especially the personal prayer of the heart that we have as the silent prayer during the Amidah, the Standing prayer.

Hannah teaches us that communities grow when individuals find their voice. Communities rise when people step forward. Communities renew themselves when they allow new leadership, new forms of prayer, new courage to emerge.

This year, our community is entering such a moment.

My role will shift next June as I take on the role of Emerita. Yours will expand. Lay leadership will grow. Over the next few months, guest rabbis will bring new voices until a new spiritual leader will arrive to guide the next chapter of this beloved congregation.

This is not a loss. It is a **Hannah moment**—a moment of rising, of finding voice, of shaping the future with courage.

Our tradition reinforces this rhythm. When we finish a book of Torah, we say: **חזק חזק ונתחזק — Hazak, hazak, v'nit-hazek.** Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another.

And then—without pause—we begin the next book.

Jewish time insists that endings and beginnings are intertwined. We do not close one chapter without opening the next. We do not mourn without also imagining. We do not let go without also reaching forward.

And this year, the letters of the calendar themselves call us toward radiance. **תשפ"ז — a year of paz**, a year of refined gold or glowing radiance.

A year that asks us to polish our communal strengths, to refine our shared purpose, to let the inner glow of this congregation shine in new ways.

We are finishing a book together. And we are already beginning the next one. In Israel they, and we with them, have finished counting the days of captivity, and have finished the time of funerals and first months of mourning for those brutally taken on October 7, 2023. And already, they are rebuilding homes, and celebrating weddings, composing songs, and finding new ways to find meaning and plan for a future, that God willing, will lead to peace, not a naïve peace, but a courageous peace. The prophetic vision is one where Jerusalem is a city of peace. I pray that Israeli leadership will honor that vision and enable all people to live with peace and protection.

May 5787 be a year of inner gold for each of us. May its radiance guide us gently forward.

May this be a year of communal courage, communal radiance, communal renewal. *Hazak hazak v'nithazek*—may we strengthen one another as we rise together.

L'shanah tovah. May we be written and sealed in the book of living fully.

Sunday evening, September 20, 2026
***Kol Nidrei* —**
Grief, Forgiveness,
and the Torah's Endless Cycle

Kol Nidrei is the night when the heart feels its heaviest. It is the night of promises made and broken, of relationships strained, of truths we avoided, of grief we carry quietly. It is the night when we acknowledge that endings sometimes come through loss—loss of certainty, loss of connection, loss of loved ones, loss of the future we imagined.

And yet, Kol Nidrei is also the night of release. We loosen the knots of regret. We soften the grip of self-judgment. We make space for forgiveness—of others, and also of ourselves.

Tonight, we stand in the long shadow of Jewish memory. We remember the Israelites at the edge of the Jordan River, preparing to enter the Land without Moses. The greatest leader they had known was about to die. The future they imagined—with Moses guiding them into the Promised Land—was not the future they received.

The Torah does not hide their grief. It says: “*The people wept for Moses for thirty days.*” They mourned the end of a relationship, the end of a chapter, the end of a dream.

And then—after thirty days—something remarkable happened. They rose. They crossed the river. They began again under the leadership of Joshua.

Jewish tradition teaches us that grief and creation are neighbors.

That endings and beginnings share a border. That the death of Moses and the birth of the world belong in the same breath.

We see this most clearly on **Simchat Torah**. On that final holiday of the whole High Holy Day season we will read the final verses of Deuteronomy—the death of Moses, the closing of his leadership, the end of his relationship with the people. And then, without delay, we will roll the scroll back to **Bereishit**, Genesis, the first book of the Torah, the first breath of creation.

Kol Nidrei is that borderland. We stand between what has been and what will be. We hold grief in one hand and creation in the other.

And this year, the letters of the calendar whisper their own teaching: I repeat this at every service, since not everyone comes to every service during these High Holy days, and I really want to bring this message: **תשפ"ז** — *paz*, the letters spelling out the year 5787 contain the letters *peh*, *zyin*, that spell *PAZ*. Refined, radiant, glowing gold. Gold is forged through pressure, through heat, through transformation. It is the metal of resilience, of endurance, of radiance born from struggle. It doesn't lose its shine.

Tonight, we acknowledge the refining fires of the past year. We acknowledge the griefs we carry. We acknowledge the endings we did not choose, and the promises we made that we could not fulfill.

And then -- and NOW -- we begin again.

Kol Nidrei invites us to release what binds us. To forgive what burdens us. To trust that new light will emerge.

May this night soften our hearts. May it refine our souls. May it reveal the *paz*, the inner gold, that has been waiting to shine.

May we each be written and sealed in the Book of Life, that shining record of all our words and deeds.

Monday, September 21, 2026
Yom Kippur Morning —
Endings, Beginnings, and the Courage to Create

Yom Kippur morning is the moment when the world feels quiet enough for truth. It is the hour when we ask not only who we have been, but who we might yet become! It is the day when we imagine the world as it could be—if we were brave enough to change, generous enough to listen, hopeful enough to begin again.

We have chosen to read from the words of Moses in Deuteronomy, the last book of the Torah, about all of us gathered together, *Atem nitzavim hayom kulchem*, a powerful message of the whole community receiving the ethical teachings to pass on to future generations. However, there is another Torah reading in the traditional afternoon Avodah service that is worth mentioning. It gives us one of the most powerful images of renewal in all of Jewish tradition: **the two goats of Yom Kippur**—one offered on the altar, one sent into the wilderness.

The ritual teaches us that transformation requires both: We must let go and release what harms us. And we must hold tight and reclaim what heals us.

The prophet Isaiah deepens this teaching. We heard some of the prophet's words chanted by Sheldon this morning. The prophet tells us that Yom Kippur is not about affliction or fasting alone. It is about breaking chains of injustice, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and repairing the world with our own hands.

Isaiah says: "*Then your light will burst forth like the dawn.*" Think of that **paz-light**, your refined gold, your inner radiance—that will shine.

Yom Kippur morning is that dawn.

Think of a time when you ended a chapter in your life—when you moved to a new city, began a new job, entered a new relationship, or stepped into a new identity. There was fear. There was excitement. There was the sense that you were standing at a threshold, holding both the weight of the past and the promise of the future.

Yom Kippur morning is that threshold for the world.

The number changes—5787—and with it, our sense of time shifts. We say goodbye to the challenges and heartbreaks of the past year. We look forward to new ways of living, new ways of connecting, new ways of healing. We let go...and we build. We release...and we begin.

As individuals, as a community, as a nation, and as Jews in the world, we stand at a turning point. We carry the wisdom of what has been. We face the unknown of what will be. And we trust that creation is always possible. Even with challenging news from Israel, even with incidents of anti-semitism, even with disturbing stories that rock our sense of fairness and even cause us doubt and fear....Yet, we balance that knowledge that all is not yet unfolding according to the ideals we seek with hope for new possibilities ahead.

We cannot stand here today without acknowledging the deep pain that continues to reverberate through the Jewish world after **October 7**—the horror of that day, the trauma carried by Israelis, the fear carried by Jews everywhere, the grief that has not yet found complete rest or resolution.

We cannot pretend that rising antisemitism around the world has not shaken us—on campuses, in public discourse, in social media, in places we once felt safe.

This is a year when our hearts are pulled in many directions. We feel a deep, unbreakable connection with the people of Israel—even when we

struggle with some of the decisions or results of actions taken in the past few years.

This tension is not a failure. It is a sign of moral seriousness. It is the sign of hearts that refuse to shut down. We are human beings who feel empathy for human suffering anywhere.

In the 1970s, I was a tour guide in Israel. I walked the streets of Jerusalem, Jericho, Bethlehem, north and south of the country with groups of visitors from many lands and backgrounds, explaining history, politics, culture. And I thought I had answers. I thought I understood the conflict. I thought I knew what peace required.

But the world has changed. Israel has changed. The conflict has deepened in ways I could not have imagined then.

We pray that all people want to live a good life and find peace. We pray for peace—not a naïve peace, not a simplistic peace, but a courageous peace. We pray that all want to see their children grow up to fulfilled lives. We pray that the future can be different from the past. We pray that hate can be softened and transformed to mutual understanding and coexistence. In two weeks, during Sukkot, I will speak more about the current situation, and will refer to books and dialogues that may help us widen our perspective and understanding.

And so we return to the internal name of this year: תשפ"ז — *paz*.

A year of refined gold. A year of radiance. A year that asks us to refine our actions, to polish our compassion, to let our inner light guide us toward justice, toward kindness, toward hope.

When we finish a book of Torah, we say *hazak hazak v'nit-hazek*. Let us be strong, and let us strengthen each other. That's how we begin again. May 5787 be a year of courage, curiosity, and creation.

May we honor what has been, embrace what is emerging, and step together into the new chapter of our journey.

This afternoon beginning at 1:30 I will lead a discussion in our library downstairs for those who wish to remain in the synagogue all day on how we learn about endings and beginnings from our tradition and how we experience those endings and new beginnings in our own lives.

There will also be books about the themes of the High Holy Days available for you to read in the library during the break.

May the radiance of *paz* guide us toward peace—within ourselves, within our community, and across the world.

L'shanah tovah, tikateivu v'techatemu.

(Remind everyone about the Book of Life and seal in the lobby).

May we be written and sealed in the Book of Living Fully in this new year.