IS ALL WELL?

The Mishna Rosh HaShana opens by telling us that the Jewish calendar has four New Years.

Apart from the "new year for years", which is the date we celebrate next week, the trees have a new year in the month of Sh'vat, Nisan has one for kings and festivals, and a new year for animal tithes is in Ellul.

The secular calendar has a number of analogies - there are the academic, the parliamentary, judicial, the financial and taxation years, and others.

These new years are not just random and arbitrary. The secular new years reveal the ideal pattern of values and priorities - quality education (marked by the academic new year), good government (the parliamentary new year), the rule of law (the judicial new year), the economy (the financial new year). A quality society has its priorities right.

The Jewish new years tell us what matters in a religious community such as Judaism - wise government (marked by the new year for kings), concern for Nature and the climate (the new year for trees), fairness to animals (the new year for animal tithes) and - above all - physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual human health (the new year for years).

The Tanach asks, "...Is it well with you? Is it well with your spouse? Is it well with the children?..." (M'lachim Bet 4:26). As Rosh HaShana looms ahead, these are questions we should all be asking about our society and our selves. OZ