

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may 5787 bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

The Torah never states that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment. The Torah calls this holy day "Yom Zichron Teruah" – the day of remembering the sound of the shofar. The Talmud states that there are three themes for Rosh Hashanah: Malchiyot, Zichronot, and Shofrot. The basic message is that God will remember us through shofar blasts. What shofar blasts are we to remember to connect with Hashem? As usual, Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org clarify the connections.

The sounds of the shofar accompanied us at Har Sinai during the Revelation. Rabbi Fohrman reminds us that during the Revelation, a very loud and long shofar blast precedes Hashem's voice in the darkness. We cannot see Hashem – our contact is entirely through the shofar blast and God's voice emerging and reciting the beginning words of Aseret Dibrot. God clearly states that no human may see His face and survive. God is not of our world. He exists in a different world, one that to us appears as a dark world covered with water and with wind blowing across. (We read of this world in Sefer Bereishis, at the beginning of chapter 1 and later after the flood when Hashem unwinds creation before creating it again for Noach and his family.)

In many ways, the story line of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is consistent with the Jewish view of the relationship between God and humans. The hero of the movie tells his companion to keep her eyes closed and face down when the bad guys summon God. By refraining from looking, they survive while everyone who looks melts away. The only way to survive entering God's world is to stay away – do not look and do not attempt to participate in Hashem's world. The only way that a human can encounter Hashem and survive is by listening to God's voice – in Gan Eden, at the Revelation – and by listening to His voice in shofar blasts. Zichron Teruah means that we observe Rosh Hashanah by remembering the shofar blasts at the Revelation. Rosh Hashanah reminds us of the encounters of our people with God in Gan Eden and at the Revelation. This essence of this holy day is to connect with our Creator by recalling how He connected with our ancestors in Gan Eden and at the Revelation,

We connect with Hashem again on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, when we read chapter 22 of Bereishis – the Akeidah. At the end, instead of sacrificing Yitzhak, Avraham finds and sacrifices a ram. We connect with Avraham and Hashem by using a ram's horn as a shofar. After Avraham sacrifices a ram, God renews His promises to Avraham of countless descendants and of other nations blessing themselves through Avraham's relatives (22:17-18).

In connecting with our Creator on Rosh Hashanah, we acknowledge His Kingship and remember our connections, especially to Hashem's promises to our avot and the messages of the Revelation. Looking at Rosh Hashanah as a day of judgment may be looking at the day in reverse. Ideally, Rosh Hashanah is a day of new opportunities – a time to connect with Hashem, a time to become a better person, a time to remember the ways that our prophets have taught us to come

close to God. A person who follows all the mitzvot and performs all the korbanot or prayers, but does care for the less fortunate members of society, misses the important lessons of the Torah and our tradition. Hashem does not need or want our korbanot – He wants us to do a better job of caring for those less fortunate than we are. As Micah tells us in Hashem's name: "What Hashem seeks from you: only to perform justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."

As we enter Rosh Hashanah, may we all take advantage of the opportunity to connect with Hashem and dedicate ourselves to keeping Hashem in our lives during the coming year. A frequent message in our Torah is that our God loves each of us and wants us to keep Him in our lives, our hearts, and our daily communications. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander reminds us that the personalities we remember on Rosh Hashanah all came through trials in their lives. May their stories inspire us to seek better times for ourselves, our families, and our fellow Jews – in our local communities, Israel, and elsewhere during these challenging times.

The High Holy Days were always extra special with my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l. Even in an extra large venue such as a high school auditorium, the space seemed small when Rabi Cahan shared his insights with the congregation. Although Rabbi Cahan spoke without notes when leading a Torah discussion (his normal Shabbat morning procedure), he wrote out his High Holy Day messages – which tied together numerous themes. I hope that some day his family will collect and publish these wonderful messages of inspiration.

Ketivah v'chatima tovah,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Rosh Hashanah: The Faith of Survivors

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone 5787 (2026)

Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney Australia dedicate the Ohr Torah Stone Devrei Torah for Rosh Hashanah to mark the yahrzeit of Harry Sher, z"l.

There is something striking about the personalities whom our tradition places before us on Rosh Hashanah.

In the Torah readings, the Haftarat, and even in the prayers surrounding the sounding of the shofar, we encounter individuals who have endured extraordinary hardship. These are not people who have traveled through life untouched by suffering. Quite the opposite. Again and again, we meet people who have experienced their own Gehinnom — their own moments of darkness and profound uncertainty.

Sarah knows the anguish of childlessness. Year after year, she lives with longing, disappointment, and the painful question of whether the future she desperately desires will ever come to be.

Hagar is banished from her home and sent into the wilderness, where she reaches the horrifying moment in which she believes that she is about to watch her son die before her eyes. Unable to bear the sight, she moves away and cries.

Yitzchak experiences something almost unimaginable. The beloved son for whom Avraham and Sarah had waited so long is bound upon an altar, with the knife raised above him. The Torah tells us very little about the psychological aftermath of the Akeidah. Yet it is difficult to imagine that a person could pass through such an experience unchanged. Yitzchak emerges, in a very real sense, as a survivor of a near-sacrifice.

Like Sarah, Hannah too knows the pain of childlessness, year after year of longing and unanswered prayer. She, carries that pain into the sanctuary, seeking comfort and connection with God, only to be misunderstood by Eli, the spiritual leader of the generation, who initially mistakes her silent prayer for drunkenness.

There are also the Bnei haGolah, the exiles living in the diaspora who carry the trauma of shattered national life, having witnessed the devastation of their families, destruction of their communities, and the abuse of their wives and children.

And then, immediately before the sounding of the shofar, we recite Psalm 47, a psalm attributed to the sons of Korach. They emerged from a family story of rebellion and catastrophe. Their very presence within our liturgy reminds us that a shattered past need not determine the future.

What do all of these personalities have in common?

They have all suffered. They have known fear, loneliness, disappointment, and loss. Their worlds have been shaken.

And yet none of them allows suffering to become the final chapter of the story.

Despite the darkness, they continue to seek a relationship with God. Despite their questions, they continue to believe that life possesses meaning and purpose. Despite what they have experienced, they refuse to surrender the moral and spiritual commitments that give their lives direction.

This is one of the deepest messages of Rosh Hashanah.

Faith is not reserved for people whose lives have unfolded according to plan. Religious commitment does not require us to pretend that pain is not painful, or that trauma leaves no scars. The heroes of Rosh Hashanah are not untouched people. They are wounded people who continue to walk forward.

They teach us that the question is not simply what happens to us. The question is what we choose to do with what has happened to us.

That message speaks with particular power to our generation.

Across the Jewish world, both collectively and personally, so many of us have been confronted with vulnerability and mortality. We have seen lives overturned in a moment. We have watched families experience unimaginable loss. We have discovered, once again, how fragile the assumptions upon which ordinary life is built can be.

There is no religious value in denying any of that pain.

Rosh Hashanah asks something different of us.

It asks whether, after confronting the fragility of life, we can still choose to live with purpose. Whether, after witnessing darkness, we can still choose to bring light. Whether, after experiencing disappointment, we can still pray. Whether, after discovering how uncertain the future can be, we can still commit ourselves to building it.

Sarah does.

Hagar does.

Yitzchak does.

Hannah does.

The Exiles do.

The sons of Korach do.

Their lives are not defined only by what they endured. They are defined by what they became after enduring it.

Perhaps that is why these are the people whom Jewish tradition brings into the synagogue with us on Rosh Hashanah. As we stand before God and contemplate the uncertainty of the year ahead, we are reminded that human beings possess an extraordinary capacity to rebuild, to believe, to create, and to recommit.

Not because we have escaped difficulty, but sometimes precisely because we have passed through it.

The shofar does not call us back to a world without scars. It calls us to take those scars with us and nevertheless move forward — to reconnect with God, to recommit ourselves to the Jewish story and our people, and to embrace again the moral responsibilities for which we were placed in this world.

The personalities of Rosh Hashanah remind us that even after one has walked through a personal Gehinnom, a meaningful future remains possible.

Perhaps, after everything we have experienced, creating that future is not merely possible.

It is our responsibility and opportunity.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone.

Rosh Hashana: “Renew Our Days as of Old,” Continuity and Renewal in the Process of Repentance

By Rivki Yisraeli *

“On Rosh Hashana, on Rosh Hashana,

A rose blossomed in my garden.

On Rosh Hashana, a white boat

Came suddenly to anchor by the shore.

On Rosh Hashana, on Rosh Hashana,

Our hearts responded in prayer and song:

May this year be beautiful and bright,

A new and different year, beginning tonight...”

Naomi Shemer’s cheerful children’s song captures a feeling that accompanies all of us as we approach the beginning of a new year.

The desire to start afresh: to erase the pain, the anger, the mistakes, and the troubles of the past year and begin anew. It is like opening a fresh, clean notebook at the beginning of a new school year. How many hopes and expectations fill that moment, how many dreams and how much romance.

But can we really begin anew and leave behind the old notebook, filled with scribbles and mistakes?

Is it really right to turn a new leaf and erase the past?

It is told that when the Maggid of Mezritch, Reb Dov Ber, was a five-year-old boy, a fire broke out in the family home and completely destroyed it. His mother burst into tears at the sight of the fire, and the child tried to comfort her: “Mother, you have no reason to be so upset over the loss of the house. After all, it is something physical and transient.” His mother replied, “I am not crying over the loss of the house. I am crying because our family genealogy, recorded on a scroll tracing our lineage all the way back to [the Mishnaic scholar] Rabi Yochanan the Shoemaker, was burned.”

The boy, Dov Ber, said, “Don’t worry, Mother. I will start a new family lineage...”

This story, too, speaks to the tension between tradition and renewal. The child, Dov Ber, looks toward the future, toward a new beginning, toward the family lineage that he will now set out to establish. His mother, by contrast, looks to the past, to the lineage of which they are the continuation. Preserving the past — one's family lineage, one's deeds that have brought him to the moment in which he now stands — is essential.

It is neither possible nor right to erase the past. We continue from the place we have reached, carrying with us everything in our "backpack." Inside this "backpack" are our "genealogies" — our own deeds and those of our forefathers, from generations past down to this very moment. And from here, we can continue onward and begin anew. We can make a change, turn a new leaf, and repent, but only if we make room for and accept the place where we are now, without erasing what came before.

Psychology, too, teaches us that when a person embarks on a new course in life — whether he moves to a new home, changes jobs, adopts a different lifestyle, or sets out on shlichut — the change will be healthier and more stable if there are certain things that he can carry forward with him, rather than completely erasing everything that came before.

The process of repentance, and the desire for change, will be deeper and more enduring when a person learns to recognize both his shortcomings and his strengths as they have been until now; knows what to leave behind and what to take with him; understands that who he is today is the sum total of the actions, emotions, and experiences accumulated in his "backpack" thus far; and does not disown them, but carries them with him as he takes the step toward turning a new page in his life.

In the Rosh Hashana prayer, we pray: *"Bring us back to You, O Lord, and we shall return; renew our days as of old."*

Renewal draws upon the days that came before, and from there we continue onward with prayer and with hope.

* Family Support and Resilience Coordinator at Ohr Torah Stone's Straus-Amiel Rabbinical Emissary Training Institute.

<https://ots.org.il/rivki-yisraeli-on-rosh-hashana/?pfstyle=wp>

Rosh Hashanah: The Beginning of a New Beginning

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2020

"All beginnings are hard..." Rashi

I once asked a young Rosh HaYeshiva about a phenomenon that I found to be at odds with a famous statement by Rashi. *"All beginnings are hard."* Clearly Rashi says "all" and that means every beginning is open for examination. I asked him, *"How come it is that we find at the beginning of the Yeshiva Zman, that start of the year there is great enthusiasm, everybody is psyched, and then after a while that energy begins to wane? It should be the opposite! The beginning should be unsteady and low energy and then the momentum and steam should build up after that!"*

That was my simple question. He gave me an answer that was so sharp, that if I told you it was said by the Kotzker Rebbe you might be tempted to believe it, but it wasn't. He said, *"For many it's not the beginning at the beginning, it's already the end!"* Ouch!

How often have we witnessed that the Bar Mitzvah, in spite of the enormous amount of money spent on the affair, rather than being a launching of a career of Torah and Mitzvos, ended up sadly being a goodbye party for G-d!? Tragically, a wedding can be the same, an end rather than a beginning. Rosh HaShana too is a big blast but we want it to last! How does one ensure that it's a beginning and not an end?

Rebbe Nachman says, "A person should turn to his Creator and declare, 'Today I begin to cleave to YOU!,' because everything goes after the start. (Now even if he has disappointed himself before with many false starts.) Either way, if before it was good then this time it will be better and if it has not worked out well before, then for certain he needs to make a brand new start." In another place he says that a person has to begin and begin and keep beginning, sometimes many times in the same day.

Perhaps this is what is hinted at in the sound of Shofar on Rosh HaShana. Maybe this is the message. In order to have qualified as having fulfilled the Mitzvah of hearing the Shofar, it's not sufficient to hear one single long blast. One must also hear some combination of the two broken sounds which include three half note sobbing sounds and/or a nine beat short staccato sound and then that has to be followed and concluded by another long single blast. That is the series that is required to have heard the Shofar. What is the message implied in this Morse Code Message?

The beginning may be a blast but it is not enough to carry us through to the very end. One needs to start and start again and again, and sometimes many times in one day. Those are the short and broken sounds. Then after trying and trying and beginning again and again there is a breakthrough and the original beginning after stuttering and stopping and beginning again is finally realized. Then that initial blast, the launching, was not an end at all, but rather **the beginning of a new beginning.**

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5781-rosh-hashana/>

A Silent Rosh Hashanah

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2009

Occasionally, the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat. And so, after a month of blowing shofar in anticipation of this great day, we celebrate the first day of Rosh Hashanah in silence. For most of us, this is greatly distressing – the very character of the day and our experience of its profundity are created through the blowing of the shofar, and we must sacrifice this for what seems like a minor concern – lest a person might forget and carry the shofar in the public domain. But does this make sense? Why must the entire Jewish people give up blowing the shofar because of how one or two forgetful individuals who live in communities with no eruv will act?

I believe that there is a deep message in this silence. A central part of our character, our human essence, is to do, to act, to create. This quality is, in fact, central to the day of Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah is not the day the world was created, but the day that human beings were created. Created in the image of God, with a Divine mandate to follow and partner in God's act of creation – *"fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the seas, and the birds of the heaven, and over every living things that moves on the earth."* And on the anniversary of this day, on Rosh Hashanah, we must give an accounting for how we have lived up to this awesome responsibility – have we done all we can to partner with God, to create, to build, to make the world a better place?

But on this Shabbat, on this Rosh Hashanah, we are told to pull back. Our creative impulses must be reined in because someone could sin, someone could be hurt. We cannot allow the pursuit of the good and the right to bring about the hurt of others. We must be sensitive even to the slightest possibility of offense, no matter how remote it seems. It is specifically when we are striving for greatness and following our loftiest visions that we must be exquisitely sensitive to those around us, to the presence of others in this world.

The Talmud in Makkot tells us that Micah the prophet distilled the entire Torah to 3 principles – *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love loving-kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Micah 6:8). The character of *tzniut*, humility, is the awareness that one is not the center of the universe, that God exists, the others exist, and one must comport oneself with this constant awareness. We all know that there are people who in their pursuit of abstract ethical causes are callous to the actual individuals that they work with or are serving. It is exactly when one is pursuing justice and loving kindness that one must be the most careful to walk *bitzniut*, to think about and attend to the needs of those around him or her.

I am a person who is always running somewhere – to give a class, to learn Torah, to go to shul. Looking back on this year, I cannot remember in any specific instance what I was running for. But what I can remember, what stands out most clearly in my mind, is the times that I stopped running and held the door for someone, or stopped to ask someone how she was doing, or stopped to help someone carry a baby in a stroller down the subway steps. Those were moments of real kedusha, of real holiness. And I also remember all those times that I did not stop, when what I was doing was too important to take out a minute to say hello, or to give a poor person some spare change, or when I bumped into someone and mumbled a quick apology as I hurried by. Looking back on those events, I can only wonder how important that thing I was running to really

was, and how important it could have remained after I had been so inattentive to the needs and the presence of another human being.

This quality is the quality of *tzimtzum*, of contraction, the quality that preceded creation. For a world to exist, God had to pull back from absolute perfection so that space could be made for others, so that existence could be so multifaceted, so richly complex. When we create we, too, have to make sure that our creation is more than just an extension of ourselves. How much do we involve others in our plans, collaborate, listen to other perspectives and reflect upon them? How much do we truly value the unique contributions that our spouse, our friends, our colleagues can make? How much do we make room for the values of others, particularly when they differ from our own? This type of complex, rich creation can only come after the first powerful act of *tzimtzum*.

On Shabbat, on this first day of Rosh Hashanah, we contract ourselves, we pull back on our single-minded pursuit of the true and the good to make space for others. And on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, when we blow the shofar and give expression to our yearning to create a world that is right and that is good, we know that we must go about this task *bitzniut*, with full sensitivity to those around us, so that the world we create will be world of richness and of beauty.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2009/09/the-silent-day-of-rosh-hashana/>

Insights from Chassidic Tradition

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

[Ed. note: Rabbi Katz is on hiatus for July and August. His outstanding parsha messages, including insights from the Chassidic tradition, will resume when he returns.]

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

Changing the Channel: Thoughts for Rosh Hashana

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In his short story, "The Last Channel," Italo Calvino portrays a man who has been deemed to be insane. When this man watched television, he kept clicking his remote control button without watching any program for more than a few seconds. At some point, he started to take the remote control panel outside his house. He clicked it at buildings, stores, banks, neon signs, and at people.

But this man claimed that he was not at all deranged. In his defense, he stated that he kept clicking the remote control button because he did not like what he saw! He was looking for the "true" program, a program without drivel and artificiality and hypocrisy. He asserted: *"There is an unknown station transmitting a story that has to do with me, MY story, the only story that can explain to me who I am, where I come from and where I'm going."*

This man flashed the remote control button because he was looking for the "real" program, the "real" city, his "real" self. He wanted to turn off the chaos and senselessness around him and was certain that if he kept clicking the remote button he would at last find the "right" channel.

While the man in Calvino's story seems to have crossed the line between sanity and insanity, his desire for self-understanding and for the perfection of the world were not insane at all. Don't we all wish we had a remote control button that we could click and make everything right, find the "real" picture, the "real" world that makes sense to us. When we confront lies and hatred, violence and injustice, hedonism and meanness — wouldn't it be nice to have a button to click to change the channel to a better picture?

In some ways, the shofar of Rosh Hashana serves as our remote control button! It evokes a world yet in progress, a vision rooted in antiquity, fixed in the present, and arching into the distant future. It alludes to a "real" world, a finer world.

The original shofar dates back to the story of the Akeidah, when Abraham was called upon to bind Isaac on a sacrificial altar. The story teaches that God does not want child sacrifice. We are to demonstrate our faith not by murdering our children but by strengthening them in life. At the end of the episode, Abraham noticed a ram caught in the brambles by its horns. He offered the ram as a sacrifice in lieu of Isaac. The shofar blown on Rosh Hashana evokes memories of the Akeidah.

At the conclusion of the Akeidah narrative, the Torah informs us that Abraham and his retinue “*rose up and went together to Be’er Sheva.*” Why is this detail provided? Why do we need to know where Abraham went after the Akeidah?

If we look at the passage just before the recounting of the Akeidah, we find that “*Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Be’er Sheva, and he called out there in the name of God Lord of the Universe.*” The Akeidah was a setting of trauma, terror, spiritual confusion. Such a crisis could have broken anyone. But Abraham clicked his remote control button. He went back to Be’er Sheva and reconfirmed his faith in God Lord of the Universe. He found inner serenity, the power to transcend the vicissitudes and trials of life. He clicked on to a better channel! When faced with overwhelming crisis, it is right and proper to return to our starting point, to our essential selves, to our rootedness in our faith. The shofar prods us to seek a firm and grand framework for life.

Just as the shofar harks back to the Akeidah story, it also reminds us of the Revelation at Mount Sinai. That dramatic occasion was accompanied by “*thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the sound of a shofar exceedingly loud.*” The voice of God was heard by the trembling assembly. But we might ask: with all the thunder and lightning and voice of God, what need was there for the sound of a shofar?

The shofar’s essential sound is a “*teruah.*” The Torah refers to Rosh Hashana as Yom Teruah. The shofar is alluding to something mysterious and profound.

A teruah is a sound without words, a crying plaintive sound that does not verbally articulate anything. The shofar is symbolic of human feelings and thoughts that are too deep for words. The teruah transcends glibness; it pushes away banalities and pretenses. In a sense, it is a remote control button that allows us to penetrate beyond surface successes and failures, prompting us to think more carefully about our lives, about the world we live in. **The teruah is the sound of self-understanding...and the sound of protest against an imperfect world and an unjust society.** [Emphasis added]

And yet another symbol: **the messianic age will be introduced with the sounding of the shofar.** The shofar calls to mind the utopian vision of Judaism. We do not believe humanity is condemned to live forever with injustice, corruption, hatred and war. We may look at our contemporary world and be overcome with discouragement. The shofar reminds us: click the remote control button! A better time will surely come, redemption will emerge, a messianic age beckons to humanity. [emphasis added]

The shofar suggests a grander, truer vision of who we are and who we can become. It cries out to us to keep striving for a better society and a better world. It invites us to strengthen our faith in the Almighty...and in ourselves. One day, we will find the right channel.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/changing-channel-thoughts-rosh-hashana>

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Rosh Hashana

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

A rabbinic tradition has it that Rosh Hashana marks the date of the creation of Adam and Eve. It was on the sixth day of the week, Friday, and the sun was shining. But soon the sun began to set and the world darkened. Since this was Adam and Eve's first day on earth, they had never before experienced night. When darkness set in, they were terrified. Would this darkness last forever? Was the world coming to an end?

Then they experienced sunrise...and the return of light. It was the seventh day, Shabbat. A Midrash states that Adam was so grateful that he composed a Psalm, *Mizmor shir leyom ha-Shabbat*: *"It is good to give thanks to the Lord and sing praise to Your name most High. To declare Your love in the morning and Your faithfulness at night."*

The psalm's message: we declare God's love in the morning when the sun shines, when things are going well; but when it's night, when times are frightening, we rely on God's faithfulness to see us through.

Just as Midrash ascribes a prayer to Adam, the Talmud (Berakhot 26b) ascribes a prayer to Abraham: Abraham instituted the morning prayer (shaharit) after witnessing the destruction of the wicked city of Sodom. Whereas Adam prayed after experiencing physical darkness, Abraham prayed after witnessing spiritual darkness. Both had to learn to overcome moments of perplexity and see the dawn of new and better times.

Interestingly, the Torah readings on Rosh Hashana are not about Adam and Eve. Although they were the parents of humanity, our attention on Rosh Hashana centers on Abraham and Sarah, spiritual founders of our people. The readings include the episode of the Akeida, the binding of Isaac. As the story unfolds, God prevents Abraham from sacrificing Isaac and blesses Abraham for his faithfulness. Abraham sacrifices a ram as a token of thanksgiving. Our sounding the shofar (ram's horn) on Rosh Hashana is reminiscent of the Akeida story.

The Torah reports that after the Akeida, Abraham *"named that site Ado-nai Yireh (God will see)."* Abraham's immediate response to the Akeida was that *"God sees,"* i.e. God cares, watches over human life. When Abraham was walking with Isaac toward the mountain, he must have been filled with impending grief. He was entering a situation of "darkness" when the death of Isaac seemed imminent. But then "light" ensued. Isaac's life was spared. The future now looked bright.

But the name of the site was changed to Ado-nai Yeira-eh, *"the mountain where God will be seen/experienced."* In rabbinic tradition, this was the future site of the Temple in Jerusalem. The spiritual center of the Israelites would be exactly at this spot where God's providence shined on Abraham and Isaac. The message: we experience God when we've faced darkness and emerged into light, when we've overcome obstacles, when we've met obligations in spite of challenges.

On Rosh Hashana, we recall the events of the past year. We enjoyed many things for which we are grateful. But we also experienced dark and difficult moments, personally and communally. We have been distressed by the rise of anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, anti-democratic values. We have been troubled by the hatred and violence that afflict humanity. The message of Rosh Hashana is realistic...and optimistic. Life has times of profound grief and darkness. But the dawn will come, sunshine will prevail, God will be experienced in love and light.

Sephardic congregations introduce the evening service on the first night of Rosh Hashana with a poem by Abraham Hazan Gerondi, Ahot Ketana. The poem's refrain is: *May this year and its curses come to an end; the poem concludes: may the new year begin with its blessings. Amen ken yehi ratson, May this be the will of God.*

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Rosh Hashanah -- Experimenting With Excellence

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are special days. These ten days are an opportune time for closeness in all our relationships. During these ten days we make changes in the text of our prayers; we also make changes in our behavior as we strive to be the best we can be. Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch (603) tells us that it is appropriate for people to live to a higher standard during these ten days, even if we know that after the ten days we will revert to our former behavior. There are various applications for this concept, all of which deserve thoughtful consideration.

One application is when we know we are doing something wrong and for these ten days we try to do things right. The obvious question is, "Do we really think we will trick G-d into thinking we are better than we really are? If we will revert to our old behavior right after Yom Kippur, what is our effort really worth?"

Rav Matisyahu Salomon zt'l explained with a story. Imagine a simple couple receiving a letter from the king that he will be visiting their cottage on a certain day. Their first reaction is one of joy, "The king is coming to visit!" Then the woman starts to worry. She says, "Our house is so simple; we are not wealthy. It is awful that the king will see us like this." The husband considers the problem and then says, "Yes, but the king knows that and he still chose us to visit. So, everything is fine just the way it is." The woman says, "True, but if the king just wanted to visit us the way we are, why would he send us a letter to let us know in advance?" The husband agreed, "Apparently, although he knows we aren't the fanciest, he is still interested in visiting us. But he let us know in advance so that we can prepare the best we could."

Indeed, they did. They cleaned and improved the best they could in preparation for the king's visit.

Similarly, Hashem knows our shortcomings. Temporary improvement does not trick Him. Yet, because he alerted us that He would be spending special time with us during these ten days we are expected to improve as best we can.

A second application of this principle of temporary improvement is regarding mitzvos that have different standards. We might well be used to a lower, kind of acceptable, standard. But out of respect for this special time of closeness, we are encouraged to experiment with a higher standard. Maybe it will stick, maybe it won't. By trying to step out of our lower standard habits to explore something greater, we create positive energy. Change and positivity are in the air. It is a good way to experience these special days.

A third application of this principle of temporary improvement applies to mitzvos that are really not obligatory at all. Only people who live sacred lives practice these observances. Yet, during these special days it is appropriate for us to consider observing them. What is the point? Allow me to explain with two stories.

One of my fond memories from growing up is when my mother cooked meals for neighbors who were in need of support. Sometimes it was for a joyous occasion; they had been blessed with a newborn and the mother was recovering. Sometimes it was for a shiva house. Invariably the families appreciated the thoughtfulness and support.

What made these occurrences so meaningful to me was that my mother would always check if the family had any special dietary requirements. Occasionally, there was an allergy to consider. But most often it was a stringency in kashrus that my mother would accommodate. The message I heard from her careful devotion to each person's stringencies was, "These are not our stringencies, but we treasure them nonetheless."

When we observe stringencies during these special days, we are saying that these stringencies aren't weird or fanatical. They are admirable and are part of the observances of the collective Jewish people. Such temporary observance puts us in the same value system, even if we revert to normative observance immediately after Yom Kippur.

A friend of mine told me that when he was learning in Lakewood (BMG) he would sit in an aisle seat and the Mashgiach, Rav Nosson Wachtfogel zt'l, would sometimes take note of what he was studying. One time Rav Wachtfogel noticed that, although he was in the middle of the sefer Mesilas Yesharim the previous week, this week he was back at the beginning. Rav Wachtfogel paused him and asked, "What happened?" My friend explained that the author, Rav Luzzato, himself writes that the first part of the book is normative Judaism, while the second part of the book is only for people of higher standards. "So, when we got to the part meant for higher standards," my friend explained, "we stopped, and began again from the beginning."

Rav Wachtfogel disagreed. Sure, the second part of Mesilas Yesharim is of a higher standard. But "you should learn it. Expose yourself to it. It is part of Torah."

As we begin the precious days from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur it is customary to accept to do things to a higher standard during these days. It does not mean necessarily that we will maintain that standard after Yom Kippur. But for this time period we step things up and experiment with excellence. It may be in observances or in our interpersonal interactions. For these ten days we strive to explore a higher standard. When we do we bring about closeness and merit for us and the entire Jewish people.

For Family Discussion:

– Is there a mitzvah you already do, but on autopilot, where you could "experiment" with a higher standard – even for just these ten days?

– The author's mother accommodated stringencies that weren't her own, and the message was "these aren't our stringencies, but we treasure them nonetheless." Where else in life could that attitude apply — respecting a standard you don't personally keep?

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful New Year,

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Rosh Hashana – Activating My Potential

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

As we approach another year, we begin again the process of introspection and repentance. We want to grow and change ourselves in some way. Yet, there are so many meaningful ways to improve and grow. How do we decide where to focus our efforts? What would be meaningful before G-d on Rosh Hashana?

The mitzvah which symbolizes Rosh Hashana is the mitzvah of Shofar. The wailing sound of the Shofar is our wake-up call to repent and prepare for the New Year. One would not be remiss in saying that the Shofar Blowing is the highlight of the Rosh Hashana service. Jews from all backgrounds seek to hear the Shofar on Rosh Hashana, and many shuls have extra Shofar Blowings, to ensure that even those who have young children and cannot attend services can still hear the Shofar. Yet, as we listen to the wail of the Shofar, we must wonder what it means. What is the significance of this mitzvah? Is it just a wake-up call or is there something more?

The Medrash Vayikrah Rabbah, Chapter 29, teaches us that the mitzvah of Shofar is indeed much more than just a wake-up call. This mitzvah carries a very special merit to protect us on the Day of Judgement. The Medrash discusses why Rosh Hashana, the Day of Judgement, is on the first day of Tishrei. In §3, Yehuda b'Rebi Nachman explains that this day was chosen because of the Shofar. As G-d prepares to sit in judgement, He initially seats Himself on a Throne of Justice. At the time when the Jewish people take their Shofars and blow before G-d, G-d leaves the Throne of Justice and seats Himself on a Throne of Mercy. At that point, G-d is filled with mercy towards us and turns the Attribute of Justice itself into Mercy.

The Eitz Yosef (ibid.) explains that Yehuda b'Rebi Nachman is referring to Medrash in §9. Rebi Berachya tells us that when the Torah refers to the month of Tishrei as the *ChodeshHashevi'i* – the seventh month, the Hebrew phrase *ChodeshHashevi'i* can also be translated as the Oath Month. This is because it was during this month that G-d swore to Avrohom that his descendants would be great and powerful. When did G-d make this oath? After the Binding of Isaac (Bereishis 22), G-d said to Avrohom, *“By Myself, I swear that since you have not withheld your son your firstborn that I will surely bless you and I will increase your descendants like the stars of the sky and like the sand that is on the edge of the sea and your children will inherit the gates of their enemies.”* The Binding of Isaac was at this time of year.

The Shofar reminds us of Akeidas Yitzchak -- the Binding of Isaac. After G-d told Avrohom that he had passed the test and he should not slaughter Yitzchak, Avrohom looked for an alternate sacrifice. He saw a ram caught in a thicket and brought that ram as a sacrifice instead. The Shofar, which is ideally made from a ram's horn, reminds us of the ram which replaced Yitzchak and of the dedication of Avrohom and Yitzchak. This, he explains, is why Rosh Hashana should be on the first of Tishrei – because the power of the Shofar is to arouse the merit of the Binding of Isaac which took place at this time. When G-d hears our Shofar blowing and remembers the dedication and love that Avrohom and Yitzchok displayed for Him, He is filled with mercy towards us. Through the Shofar, G-d turns our judgements into mercy.

This explanation of the Medrash is very puzzling. If G-d swore to Avrohom that his descendants would be great and mighty, then why does G-d initially plan to sit on the Throne of Justice? Why are we not already protected by G-d's oath to our ancestor Avrohom? It seems from the Medrash, that despite G-d's oath, we may not be worthy of mercy. Perhaps the time has not yet come for Avrohom's descendants to thrive. Perhaps it will have to be another generation. G-d is coming to judge us and to assess our worthiness.

Yet, if that is the case, and despite G-d's oath to Avrohom we are subject to G-d's strict justice, then how does the simple act of blowing the Shofar make us worthy of G-d's mercy?

There is a phrase in the Medrash which can give us an insight. The Medrash says, *“At the time when the Jewish people take their Shofars and blow before G-d”* that is when G-d moves the Throne of Mercy. The Medrash is highlighting that it is not simply the act of Shofar blowing that earns G-d's mercy. It is specifically when we actively reach out to take hold of our Shofars and blow them before G-d. That is when we earn G-d's mercy. When we take action to connect with Avrohom's sacrifice by taking a ram's horn -- reminiscent of the ram that our forefather offered in lieu of his son, and when we blow that ram's horn *“before G-d,”* that is when we are declaring that we are the bearers of Avrohom's legacy.

This is the unique merit of the Shofar. When G-d first comes to sit in judgement, He knows and *“remembers”* well why He chose our ancestors and the oath He made to them. He is judging us to see where we stand. Are we living up the ideals and the commitments of our ancestors? Do we have the strength and commitment to Torah and to mitzvos that our great-grandparents before us did? Are we going to carry that legacy forward and live a life which shows the world G-dliness and nobility? G-d is ready to judge us on our own merits. We will have to prove ourselves as worthy.

When we blow the Shofar, and remember the dedication of Avrohom and Yitzchok, then G-d sees that we are not only coming on our own strength and merit. We also remember our ancestors' dedication and devotion to G-d. We take that ram's horn and blow the Shofar *“before G-d”* to declare that we still have that memory within our souls and within our psyche. It is still part of our identity today. When G-d sees that the memory is alive within us, then G-d knows that we have the potential to be all that He wants of us. We no longer need to prove ourselves. As the bearers of that great legacy, we are immediately deserving of G-d's mercy. Not only that, but once G-d sees that potential alive within us, even justice itself is turned into mercy.

With this understanding of the mitzvah of Shofar, we can understand where we need to focus our efforts on Rosh Hashana. Our efforts at this time must be focused on recognizing our potential and committing ourselves to a path that will enable us to actualize that potential. We must find ways to show G-d that we truly wish to grow and that we wish to be more than we are today. We each must ask ourselves, *“How can I set myself on a course to actualize my potential? How can I show G-d that I recognize my potential and that Avrohom's legacy is alive within me?”* This is what is meaningful before G-d.

There are many answers to these questions, and each person must answer for themselves. I would like to offer one suggestion, though, which can be adapted to many different areas of growth and repentance.

In Parshas Netzavim, Moshe states that when we repent Hashem will circumcise our hearts. (Devarim 30:6) The Rambam (ibid.) explains that this means Hashem will remove the passions and desires which confound us and lead us astray. When the passions are removed, we will naturally see straight and understand intuitively what it is that G-d wants of us in any given situation.

The Gemara in Kiddushin 30b teaches us that when we feel the evil inclination pulling us astray, “*drag him to the Study Hall.*” The Gemara tells us that Hashem says, “I created the evil inclination. I created the Torah as a medicine for him.” Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, in Ohr Yisroel Letter 7, explains this on two levels. Any Torah study strengthens our connection to G-d and weakens the evil inclination’s grip over us. However, studying the Torah laws of the area where I seek to grow is a direct medicine for that passion and desire. He adds that studying the ethical works and the laws of repentance and growth can directly strengthen our ability to grow and to move beyond our current habits and limitations.

Committing ourselves to regular Torah study weakens the evil inclination and strengthens our connection to G-d. This will certainly show G-d that our potential is alive and well.

May we all merit a year of health, growth, actualization and all good things.

* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer’s recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

Yonah - Jonah, Wake Up! By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * (2014)

Faithful to Sephardic tradition, we have started Selichot this week (Ki Tetze), not because we are more sinful than other contingencies, but because we love the atmosphere of Selichot at early dawn, permeated with soulfulness and longing. The Selichot appropriately open with the poem:

Son of man, how dare you sleep, wake up and pray with supplication.

This line makes direct reference to the famous biblical narrative of Jonah which we will read at Mincha of Yom Kippur, thus completing a full circle from the beginning to the end of the High Holidays period.

The story of Jonah is the story of the decline and fall of the human being, which occurs when we refuse to face our fears, our anger and our problems. Jonah runs away from God and in the process keeps descending lower and lower: he goes down to Jaffa and boards a ship (lit. goes down on the ship), goes down to the stern, and sinks in deep sleep. He is sound asleep amidst a terrible storm which could claim his life along with all the others on board when the captain approaches him and shakes him: “*how dare you sleep? Rise and call out to your God!*”

Many of the tragedies and hardships which befall us are a result of a Jonahesque behavior. When we allow ourselves to give up, to cease trying, to become indifferent and apathetic because we think that nothing is going to change, we seal our fate together with that of many others.

Globally, this proclivity to inaction is well demonstrated by the oblivious and carefree approach to the destruction the human race is wreaking on the planet. Decades of spilling pollutants into our waterways, sinking chemicals into the ground and releasing poisonous and harmful gasses to the air have placed us at the eye of a terrible ecological storm, but most governments and individuals are still sleeping, cuddling in their little patch of heaven.

Nationally, we see now a replay of the horrific events which led to 9/11, when the U.S. chose to ignore a series of attacks, signaling the terrorists that it is tired of monitoring its facilities or enforcing security measures. The lack of proper response to the attempt at the Twin Towers in 1993, the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the USS Cole in 2000, emboldened Al Qaida and encouraged it to carry out attacks on a much larger scale, which left the U.S. devastated and embroiled in a decade long military quagmire.

The same chilling scenario is playing out now as the U.S. and European powers choose to ignore the true danger of extremists and nationalists around the world, focusing instead on Israel in the hope that if the great nations will kneel before the altar of terrorism and will sacrifice on it this tiny state, the aircraft carrier of the Middle East, the blood thirsty leaders will be appeased and those nations will be able to go back to their ignorantly blissful slumber. The shortsighted leaders of those nations refuse to acknowledge that millions of refugees in Africa, hundreds of kidnapped girls in Nigeria, hundreds of thousands murdered and displaced in Syria and who knows how many tortured by ISIS, are all, in one way or another, a result of the indifference and apathy of world powers.

Inaction and submissiveness to difficult reality lead to exacerbation of the situation as we can see in the Parasha of this week, Ki Tetze. Ignoring a child's emotional needs might turn him into a criminal (Det. 21:15-23); A strong warning against ignoring a neighbor's potential loss (22:1-4); Negligence to take safety measures results in tragedy (22:8); The apathy of the Ammonites and Moabites toward the plight of the Israelites caused their alienation from them, and as we know now, their disappearance from the stage of world history (23:1-7).

But let us return to the Selichot and to the state of the individual. The Torah goads the human being towards Tikkun Olam, the improvement and perfection of life on earth, and that lofty goal can only be achieved by the combined power of determined, dedicated and most importantly, alert, individuals.

The Selichot are a pressing call for inspection and evaluation. The opening verse, drawing on the story of Jonah, asks us directly: Are you awake? Do you know what is going on around you? And as we sail through the Selichot, we can add many more questions:

Who are my kids' friends? How am I treated by or treating my spouse? When will this day be over? When will the prayers be over? If I had a chance to do things over, would I change anything? What have I learned last year, week, or day? How did I apply this knowledge to my life? What am I doing to make this world a better place? Do the people I interact with on a daily basis love, respect, revere, or detest me? Am I sleeping, and if so, when I am going to wake up? Did I set up the alarm clock? Is this a nightmare?

Let us all rise and shine, take to mind, take to heart and take action.

Shabbat Shalom.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Note: Rabbi Ovadia posted this Dvar Torah for Ki Tetze in 2014, but its message relates to Rosh Hashanah as much as the parsha a month before the start of the new year.

* Senior Rabbi, Congregation Ramath Orah (New York, NY); Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Previously, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

Shanah Tova, everyone.

We are about to enter the journey of the High Holidays once again, and I very much look forward to seeing everyone here over Rosh Hashanah.

I will be speaking plenty over Rosh Hashanah, so I won't write too much this week. But there is one idea that I think is important for us to take with us as we enter these days.

Rosh Hashanah is a day when we put everything aside. We don't focus only on ourselves as individuals. We come together as a community, as a nation, and we announce to the world: *Hashem Hu HaMelech*. Hashem is the King.

There is a subtle but very important difference in the way we speak about Hashem during these days. Throughout most of the year, we refer to Him as *HaEl HaKadosh*, God. But from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur, we change the language and say *HaMelech HaKadosh* - the Holy King.

God is God regardless of whether we acknowledge Him or not. He is the Creator. He created the universe, He created us, and He does not need us to confirm His ability to create. **But a king is different. A king is only a king when there are subjects who recognise his kingship. That is what we do on Rosh Hashanah. We acknowledge Hashem's kingship over the world, and at the same time, we acknowledge our relationship with Him.** [emphasis added]

Over the past three weeks, we have spoken about Teshuvah, Tefillah and Tzedakah. We looked at all three not simply as actions that we do, but as ways of changing our mindset and strengthening our relationship with Hashem.

On Rosh Hashanah, we take that relationship one step further. We come together and publicly declare who we are and who Hashem is to us.

We show that this is a relationship we are invested in, year after year, generation after generation, going all the way back to the beginning of our nation.

On Rosh Hashanah, we don't just believe in Hashem, we stand up and declare that He is our King. . . . The more we understand what we are doing and why we are doing it, the more meaningful our tefillot can be.

I would like to wish everyone a Shanah Tovah U'Metukah, a happy, healthy and sweet new year. May it be a year of blessing for each of us, for our families, for our community, and for all of Am Yisrael.

Be'Ahavat Yisrael,
Shabbat Shalom and Shanah Tovah,
Rabbi Netanel Kaszovitz

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

Rav Kook Torah

Rosh Hashanah: The Dual Call of the Shofar

The central mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah is to hear the blasts of the shofar. The ram's horn is blown twice during the holiday service: first, immediately before the Musaf prayer, and a second time during the Musaf prayer.

Why do we need two sets of shofar blasts?

Teshuvah of the Mind and Heart

The prophet Isaiah taught those who wish to return to God:

*Seek out God when He is found.
Call out to Him when He is near. (Isaiah 55:6)*

What is the difference between these two aspects of teshuvah: “seeking out God” and “calling out to Him”?

First, it is necessary to “seek out God.” We need to restore the soul’s inner light, dimmed by character faults and misdeeds. Before losing our way, we felt a joy in serving God. We recognized God’s greatness and were delighted with the opportunity to study His Torah and fulfill His mitzvot. Sin, however, darkens the mind and numbs the heart, causing us to lose the wonderful revelations from God’s immanence. Therefore, the first stage of teshuvah is to “seek out God” — an intellectual striving to recover our former enlightenment and restore our joy in knowing God and His ways.

The second area that must be repaired is in the realm of the emotions, to restore the lost feeling of God’s closeness and protection, the perception of Divine favor in material and spiritual matters. To recover this loss, we must “call out to God” and reach out to Him in prayer. We need to overcome our emotional estrangement and restore our sense of God’s intimacy.

Focus the Mind, Open the Heart

The shofar is the tool that helps us accomplish both of these goals, seeking out God with the mind and calling to Him with the heart.

The first set of blasts is blown before praying the Rosh Hashanah Musaf prayer. They are called בשוימד תועיקת, “blasts while sitting,” as they correspond to the teshuvah of the mind: a composed and thoughtful introspection on our insignificance and God’s infinite greatness. Demeyushav comes from the Hebrew word for “sitting” — yeshivah — also means an academy of Torah study. These blasts inspire us to contemplate God and His ways, to “seek out God where He is found.”

The second set of shofar blasts takes place during the Musaf prayer. These blasts are called דמעומד תועיקת, “blasts while standing.” They are an integral part of the prayer service. Deme'umad comes from the Hebrew word for “standing” — amidah — which is also the name of the central prayer, recited while standing. These shofar blasts are like prayer; they are an emotional service of God that fills us with awe and humility. They remind us to reconnect to God with our hearts, to feel His closeness and protection, to “call out to Him when He is near.”

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 56-58.)

<https://ravkooktorah.org/rosh63>

Why the Rebbe’s Shofar Had a Different Sound **Chabad Lubavitch UK Annual Dinner, Marriott Grosvenor Square, London (2014)** By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

[Rabbi Sacks’ Rosh Hashanah message 12 years ago reminds us how The Rebbe changes the world, taught him to change the world, and gave Rabbi Sacks the message that we can all change the world – a beautiful message for Rosh Hashanah. Boldface sections are my emphasis at certain points in this important essay.]

It’s an enormous privilege for Elaine and myself to join you in this great celebration of a great movement and a great force for good in Jewish life and the world.

And we’re doing so at a very powerful moment in the Jewish year. We’ve just celebrated Rosh Hashanah, and we’re on our way to Yom Kippur, which I’m going to need after this evening’s meal!

Let me share with you a story I shared with some friends at Marble Arch the other day, about a memory that came back to me this year about one very special Rosh Hashanah in my life.

A long time ago, 46 years ago, when I was a young student, I had the great privilege of meeting the Lubavitcher Rebbe – an extraordinary meeting that changed my life. I’ve told the story elsewhere, so I don’t want to tell it here.

But I was just about to go back to England. We'd come on a charter flight organised by the Union of Jewish Students, and it was leaving on Sunday. So, on the Shabbat the day before, I was in 770, and the Chassidim said, *"If you're going back to England, you have to take with you the Rebbe's vodka."*

What was the Rebbe's vodka? You went up at a farbrengen, where the Rebbe spoke. There were five or ten thousand people there, and in breaks between the speeches (I think we should have commercial breaks in the middle of my speeches!), when all the Chassidim were singing, people would go up to the Rebbe. They'd pour a glass of vodka, the Rebbe would say "L'chaim," and you would take that back with you wherever you were going. That was the Rebbe's vodka. So, the day before I was due to leave, I went up to the Rebbe. The Rebbe looked at me and said, "You're leaving?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Why?"

I said, "I'm going back to university. The university term is about to begin."

And he said to me, "But the Cambridge term doesn't start until October."

Now... we were having this little exchange in front of however many thousands there were, and this was not normal. You normally just said, "L'chaim."

So, when I got back to my place on the benches, or bleachers, or whatever you call them, all the Chassidim wanted to know: *"What did the Rebbe say? What did the Rebbe say?"*

I said to them exactly what he'd said. I should never have done that. I really had no idea that when the Rebbe says, "I think you should stay," you stay.

So, the next day, Chabad stopped me from getting a taxi to the airport. They forced me to miss my flight.

I said, "How am I going to get back? This was a charter flight."

They said, "Don't worry. We've told them you're ill."

I said, "In what way am I ill?"

They said, "Don't worry. Tomorrow you'll go to the Rebbe's doctor. He'll tell you."

The next day, I went to the Rebbe's doctor. He came out with a long, long list of possible illnesses: "Have you had this? Have you had that?"

I was saying, "No, no, no, no."

Finally, after about 50 items, he came to jaundice.

"Have you ever had jaundice?"

I said, "Yes, ten years ago."

He said, "Recurrence of jaundice..."

So that is how I got to spend Rosh Hashanah with the Lubavitcher Rebbe and hear the Rebbe blow shofar.

Now, that was an experience that stays with me from that day until this. I can still hear it. It was different in kind from any other shofar sound that I'd heard, and it puzzled me.

According to the Torah, there are two different explanations of the shofar. Teruah is the sound of tears, of weeping, of sobs and sighs. Or, according to the other explanation, it is a recollection of the ram that Abraham. It is the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac, and hence a recollection of the many sacrifices Jews made over the centuries.

So, either way, it's the sound of tears or it's the sound of sacrifice. It's a sad sound.

The Rebbe's shofar was not a sad sound. And it bothered me. How was he blowing? What was he... Obviously, the Rebbe had mystical intentions that I would never understand. But many years later, I discovered what I think was the explanation.

Although everyone else explains the shofar as a sad sound, there's one exception: the greatest rabbi of the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides, who says that the shofar is God's wake-up call.

You who *shloof* (slumber) during the year, wake up and realise that you only have one life to make a difference.

And the Rambam goes on to say something absolutely extraordinary, one of the most extraordinary remarks in the whole of Judaism.

He says that we know, according to the Sages, that our lives are judged by the majority of our deeds. If most of our deeds are good, we are written for good. And if most of them are bad, bad things happen to us. And so with a community, with a city, with a country, with the world.

The Rambam says that when you hear the shofar, you should think this: that your life is evenly balanced between good and bad, and the world is evenly balanced between good and bad. And your next act will tilt the balance of the world.

What a thing to say! It is the most unexpected thing anyone could say. We know there's only one of us. There are seven billion people out there in the world. How do we make a difference? We are no more than a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore, dust on the surface of infinity.

But the Rambam says, "No, you are not insignificant. Your next act could change the world."

And that's what I heard in the Rebbe's [shofar]. And that is what he taught the whole Jewish world.

Friends, tonight we celebrate the achievements of two remarkable individuals who really did, and have, and continue to change the world.

First of all, our special guest, Gennady Bogolyubov, who has revolutionised Jewish life in Ukraine and who has done so much throughout the Jewish world.

In Ukraine, which we read about every day in the press, while others are fighting political and military battles, Gennady is making possible the most extraordinary spiritual victory for Jewish life in Ukraine.

Gennady's building a centre, it's absolutely vast, it's 32,000 square metres, I can't even work out... And I thought, "How can you need such a big place for so few Jews in Ukraine?" Now I realise they're all fleeing from [inaudible - Eastern Ukraine conflict areas], and they're all coming to Ukraine, all coming to Dnipropetrovsk. You say it, Gennady, I can't even pronounce it!

But, one way or another, you've done incredible things. You have facilitated this wonderful project exposing the tunnels that run along the Kotel in Jerusalem. You've built a Jewish community centre in Vienna. You have done extraordinary things for Chabad around the world.

And why? Because, Gennady, as you told the shluchim when you addressed them before me - and I had a hard act to follow - I felt so moved at your speech because you said, "*Chabad believed in me.*" And so you believe in your power, which is the Chabad power, to change the Jewish world. Gennady, we salute you.

And, of course, tonight we honour Rebbetzin Fradel Sudak, who, together with her late husband, Reb Nachman, has led and guided the destinies of Chabad in Britain for a very long time. When Rebbetzin Fradel and, *l'havdil bein chaim l'chaim*, Rabbi Nachman zt"l, of blessed memory, arrived here, there was Chabad.

Can you imagine Chabad trying to cheer up Anglo-Jewry? We were kind of boring on principle, you know. It was the toughest challenge anyone could possibly imagine.

And somehow, from nothing, under the guidance of the Sudaks, and now the next generation, you have turned Chabad in Britain into a vast organisation, with 11 campus centres, 25 Chabad houses and 14 schools. It is an incredible, incredible achievement.

Before Chabad appeared on the scene, could you imagine that one day Jews would light a menorah in Trafalgar Square? Could you imagine that they would serve Hashem with such joy? Could you imagine Jews sitting down and drinking vodka before the speeches, which turned out to be a very good idea?

Chabad has made us serve Hashem with joy and share that joy with others. And, Rebbetzin Fradel, you and your late husband changed our Jewish world.

Friends, I want you just to think about this. Rabbi Nachman Sudak was taken from us so sadly prematurely, at the early age of 78.

But I want you just to work it out. He and Rebbetzin Fradel began their shlichut here in 1959. He was head of Chabad in Britain for 55 years. The Rebbe sent the two of them to this vast challenge at the age of 23.

Everyone else spoke about young leadership. The Rebbe actually believed it and did it. And he could see that Rabbi Nachman, and *l'havdil bein chaim l'chaim*, Rebbetzin Fradel could change our Jewish world. And they did. And we salute the entire Sudak family.

Friends, right now, we need the Rebbe's message.

We look at the news every single day, and we see a world filled with hatred and violence and death. That can lead us to very dark thoughts and dark places.

The Rebbe taught us that we can change the world if we bring the same passion, intensity and energy to love, to peace and to life. And that is what we are there to bring into this world.

The Rebbe believed, and heard in the shofar, this call from God for each of us to change the world. And the Rebbe did change the world.

Think of another rabbi in a thousand years who changed every single Jewish community in the world, and places where nobody ever dreamt there would be a Jewish community.

You want to escape from Jewish life? Go to Kathmandu. Do you know what you find in Kathmandu? The biggest Chabad Seder you'll find anywhere in the world, 3,000 people for Seder night. You don't escape yiddishkeit that easily, because

there's always Chabad ahead of you.

Friends, he really did change the world. How did he change the world? By blowing the shofar and teaching each of us that we, too, can change the world.

One life is an entire universe. All we have to do is change one life, and we have begun to change the world.

Friends, we no longer have the Rebbe, and sadly, deeply sadly, we no longer have Rabbi Nachman Sudak with us.

I just want to tell you, and with this I end, about a little encounter I had almost 30 years ago now that had a huge impact.

I went to a Jewish primary school, and the teacher was trying to explain to young children the difference between material possessions and spiritual possessions.

Now, that's a difficult concept, and these were young kids. So the teacher did something very interesting. He took a day and got the class to build a model of Jerusalem. He took a tape and a tape recorder, and he played them a song. They learned the song about Jerusalem.

At the end of the day, he broke the model into pieces. And he took the tape, pulled it out and shredded it.

Then he turned to the children and said, "Do we still have the model?"

They said, "No."

And then he said, "Do we still have the song?"

They said, "Yes."

We may no longer have the Rebbe. We may no longer have Rabbi Nachman Sudak zt"l. But we still have the song they taught us to sing.

The song of pride in our Jewish identity. The song of joy in the fulfilment of mitzvot and in Jewish life. The song of love for our people, and love and celebration and sanctification of life.

All we need to do, every one of us, is teach that song to one other Jew: the Jews who aren't here, who aren't in shul, and we, together, will change the world.

Friends, let us, in a dark age, each be a little candle that shines through and transforms the darkness into light.

May Hashem bless all of you, l'shana tova, with health and blessing and peace.

Amen.

<https://rabbisacks.org/archive/why-the-rebbes-shofar-had-a-different-sound/>

On the Haftarah: The Power of Chana's Prayer

By Yitzi Hurwitz *

[A message from the teachings of the Rebbe.]

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the haftarah about Chana, a barren woman who was blessed with a son, our prophet Samuel.

There are several reasons why this haftarah is read on Rosh Hashanah.

The first is because of its similarity to the Torah reading, where our matriarch, Sarah, also a barren woman, was blessed with a son, our patriarch Isaac. But a question remains: Why read about barren women whose fates were changed on this day?

Another reason this is read is because Chana's prayer to have a child was said (according to many) on Rosh Hashanah, and Eli the High Priest who blessed Chana had been appointed leader on that very day, Rosh Hashanah.

What message are we meant to take from the story?

Looking at the haftarah, it is clear that a central theme of Rosh Hashanah is prayer and requesting our needs for the year. However, thinking of the holiness of the day, we must ask: "Why would we be asking for our selfish needs and wants on such a holy day? Shouldn't we be focusing on G d, and what He wants?"

The question becomes even stronger when you think about the essential motif of Rosh Hashanah, asking G d to be our king for the next year. When crowning a king, a key aspect is the nation's humility and subservience to the king. It hardly seems like a time to request things. To be thinking about yourself is the opposite of self-nullification and subservience to the king. If so, why do we ask for our needs on Rosh Hashanah?

We must conclude that the requests we make on Rosh Hashanah are not selfish at all, but part of our service to our King. When we coronate G d as our King, we are accepting His mission as well. Asking for what we need to accomplish His mission is not selfish at all; it is only for His sake that we ask for them.

On a deeper level, the Baal Shem Tov explains that each of us has a part of the world that we are meant to refine — to make it ready for G d's presence. Our souls are attracted to those objects and the places it has been charged with refining. This is why our bodies crave those things and those places.

Asking for the things you want is asking for what your soul wants, and your soul is part of G d. In actuality, you are asking for what the King wants.

We see this in the haftarah. Chana was pleading for her deepest desire — to have a child. Seeing how she was praying, Eli asked her "How long will you be drunk?" (meaning how long will you be drunk in prayer)? Is it appropriate to stand here, before G d, on this holy day, asking for your personal desires?

To this, she responded: "I am pouring out my soul before G d." Meaning, this is not my selfish desire, this is my soul's desire.

Eli accepted this answer and replied: "Go in peace, and G d of Israel will give you the request you asked for." In other words, he agreed with Chana's mode of prayer, asking for the soul's desires.

The Talmud tells us that "Rav Hamnuna said: 'Several major laws can be derived from these verses of Chana.' "

What is unique about Chana's prayer that we chose to learn these "major laws" specifically from her?

In general, our prayers are divided into two categories. There are daily prayers, where we pray for our regular needs. Then there are prayers in a time of crisis, when praying to end a drought, for a sick person or to have a baby.

The difference between the two could be understood by looking at the difference between brachah (blessing) and tefilah (prayer).

A brachah draws down already existing blessings that for one reason or another had been held back. The brachah removes the blockage, allowing your blessing to flow freely to you.

Sometimes, however, what we are asking for is not in our cards, and we entreat G d to create a new will and grant us something that was not meant to be. This is tefilah, in which we use the words, "May it be Your will . . ."

Daily prayers, like a brachah, are to draw down the blessing that is already coming to us. Crisis prayers, like tefilah, are trying to create, so to speak, a new will in G d.

Within crisis prayers, there are two categories. First, there is asking for a bad decree to be annulled. For example, when it is decreed from above that there be no rain, asking to annul the decree is asking for a new will, but not for a change in the nature that G d imbued in creation. Asking for a sick person to be healed is the same.

But the most powerful from of prayer is when what is being asked for, goes completely against nature — like a barren woman asking to have a child, when it is naturally not possible.

What Chana was asking for was a change in G d's creation. Even more, she asked that G d give her "seed of men," which Rashi explains to mean that the child be holy and righteous. That not only goes against nature, but possibly against the Torah's rule that "everything is in the hands of Heaven, aside for fear of Heaven." Yet so powerful was her prayer that G d changed nature and bent the rules, so to speak, and gave her the child she asked for — our holy and righteous prophet Shmuel.

Now we can understand why major laws of prayer are learned specifically from Chana and why we read about barren women, whose fates were changed, to be blessed with children on Rosh Hashanah.

The prayer of Chana represents the most powerful type of prayer — one that creates a new will in Hashem.

Rosh Hashanah is a time for creating new will. It is when we coronate our King. How do we do this? Through prayer, we generate a new will in Hashem, to be our King for another year. And that as our King, He grant us all, even if it is not in our cards, a happy and sweet year.

Major laws of prayer that are learned from Chana:

- 1. Focus your heart on the words you are saying.*
- 2. Form the words of the prayers with your lips.*
- 3. Do not raise your voice during (Amidah) prayer.*
- 4. Do not pray when drunk.*

* Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz — father of seven, husband of Dina, and spiritual leader at Chabad Jewish Center in Temecula, Calif. — has been rendered immobile by ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). Unable to speak or type, he uses his eyes to write heartfelt thoughts on the weekly Torah portion.

Rosh Hashanah: Renewal

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Annual renewal is necessary if life is to retain its freshness and novelty. If we merely continue cultivating the same type of Divine consciousness, we will remain locked in its limitations, ultimately making our religious lives seem repetitious and dull.

Rosh HaShanah is an opportunity for us to make a quantum leap to a new plateau of Divine consciousness that will inspire our lives for the coming year.

To accomplish this, however, we cannot rely on the words of our prayers, because words carry specific meanings for us that are limited by the knowledge and experiences we have accrued in our lives. In order to break out of our limited modes of expression, we use the blasts and wails of the shofar, which transcend the confines of verbal language.

In this way, we recapture the innocence and inspiration of a newly born soul and of the Jewish people when they received the Torah at Mount Sinai. This renewed inspiration invigorates our relationship with G d for the coming year.

With wishes for a sweet and blessed new year.

– From *Daily Wisdom* *

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

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Ketiva V'Chatima Tova

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Rosh Hashanah Issue

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Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

A Loving Relationship with God

The Musaf (Additional) service on Rosh Hashana sets forth our most fundamental Jewish beliefs and aspirations. The Malkhuyot (Sovereignities) section of this prayer speaks of God's kingship, of an entire world under God. What this means, in effect, is that the only laws that can be promulgated for all of humanity are those that are in consonance with God's laws: the laws of the Ten Commandments, and the seven Noahide ethical laws that are biblical universal laws of morality, which the Bible calls "compassionate righteousness and moral justice."

There may be lesser rulers, whether they are called kings, emperors, prime ministers, or presidents, but they must likewise be subject to the moral laws that God has taught. He, after all, is the King of kings, the one Master God over the entire world. This also means that there is no room whatsoever in the world for a totalitarian or despotic leader who rules by force or terror and literally enslaves at least some significant number of the populace under his control. The absolute prohibition of slavery – that no human being is permitted to subjugate another – was taught by the Bible to the world when God Himself took the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, and that prohibition clearly wells up from the words of the Bible informing us that God created every human being in His image.

On Rosh Hashana, Malkhuyot is introduced by the Aleinu prayer. Aleinu concludes with the verse, "On that day [of the acceptance of God by the entire world] the God of Love will truly be One and His name One" (Zechariah 14:9). The God of Love will rule the world, against all totalitarianism and despotism. In the meantime, says the Aleinu prayer, we Jews came into the world accepting this concept of a universal God demanding compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Therefore, our

role is to teach this idea to the world because we are mandated by God to be a "kingdom of teachers and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6).

First and foremost, we must teach that God loves everyone, and so we must love everyone, too. That fundamental understanding is what will bring peace on earth – a world of wholeness, a world of love. This is the romance between God, the Jews, and the world. God, in His love, appointed us to deliver His message to the world: the loving parenthood of God must lead to the loving siblinghood of human beings. From this perspective one begins to understand that democracy is built into the very fabric of the Torah. A government imposed autocratically by means of power and submission is antithetical to the kingship of God that we declare in Malkhuyot.

While Malkhuyot speaks of God and humanity, the next section of Musaf, Zikhronot (Remembrances), places before us God's special covenantal relationship with Israel, the mutual faithfulness and commitment that eternally unites us. The Jewish people promise that we will always keep the commandments, and God promises that we will always live as a nation and a separate peoplehood, return to Israel, and ultimately redeem the world (Genesis 15; Isaiah 2).

God's specific love for the Jewish people is part of Zikhronot's theme, quoting several verses that describe the great passion with which God initially embraced the Jewish people when He took them out of Egypt, and the ardor with which the Jewish people gave God their love. However, Zikhronot goes much further, describing God's loving relationship with all of creation, and emphasizing the notion that not only is the Jewish nation called upon to come close to God, but the nations of the world are also called upon to cast their lot with the one God. Zikhronot proclaims that God is mindful of all individuals and nations, each of whom will have a unique mission to fulfill on the road to redemption. Zikhronot proclaims that all individuals and nations are remembered by God on this day, and judged according to their actions.

The third and final segment of the Musaf service is Shofarot (Sounds of the Ram's Horn). This portion makes the connection between the two moments in history when the sound of the heavenly shofar was and will be heard: one event at Sinai when God revealed to us His Torah, which we accepted for all generations freely and joyously; and the second sound of the shofar – which will yet be heard and accepted not only by Israel, but also by the entire world – that will announce the ingathering of the exiles to the Land of Israel, and the final Redemption.

The God of Malkhuyot (Sovereignities) is first and foremost the God of creation of all of humanity and the world. The God of Zikhronot (Remembrances) is primarily the God of revelation and especially in His unique love relationship with Israel, expressed in a Torah that was originally meant for the entire world. The God of Shofarot is ultimately the God of redemption, when everyone will be joined in a loving relationship with our universal God of Love in a perfected and liberated world.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Finding God's Embrace Amid Crisis

Harav Mosheh Lichtenstein

Dear friends and alumni, This missive is quite different, in tone, in length and in content, from the letters that we usually send before Rosh HaShana. This is not because we have had a change of heart, but because we have been confronted in recent years by unprecedented circumstances.

As we approach the incoming year and reflect upon the past few years, it is clear that they presented difficult and unanticipated challenges. We immediately recollect the intensity that we experienced throughout this period as we confronted Covid, deep internal divisions, a devastating war and its accompanying tragedies. For the vast majority of us, it is fair to say that the trials and tribulations that we experienced in this period were unprecedented in our lifetime. From the pandemic to the war and the rise of antisemitism throughout the Western world,

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Dedicated to the memory of two friends
of Likutei Divrei Torah
who greatly assisted in past years:
Tsvi Lieber, z"l
Scott Leitner, z"l

we are encountering a reality that was often familiar to our forefathers but largely foreign to our experience.

As 5786 concludes and 5787 is about to arrive, aside from the need to pray for better times and wish each other *תחל שנה, תכלה שנה וקללותיה* and *וברכותיה*, that we may merit to ring out a troubling and difficult year and ring in a fresh new year of hope and blessing, there is a need to reflect and meditate on the events we have encountered and to process them on multiple levels. This includes the necessity to digest the situation, understand its practical and moral implications, and formulate a coherent communal and national response to the constantly evolving challenges that we face. Additionally, there must also be a spiritual reckoning that attempts to understand the historical and religious significance of the events, and to mobilize our inner strength and spiritual resources in response to the changed circumstances.

The most basic and vital resource we must utilize in charting these unnavigated waters is our reliance upon the KBH. My intention in this statement, though, refers not merely to the reliance upon His guidance to cope with the challenges and difficulties of the situation as such or the assistance of divine providence to vanquish our enemies, but mainly to the support we receive from the inner feeling that HaShem accompanies us throughout our ordeals, and dwells among us in times of distress. While the assistance is important, the crucial element is the sense that the KBH is at our side and near to us. Just as the support of parents who embrace their child during illness or danger is vital to the child, even if the father or mother lack the ability to ward off the danger, since their very presence is comforting and critical for the child's spirits and emotional strength, so too is our awareness of the KBH's watching over us in troubled times. The certainty that God is with us and that we are close to Him is the basic religious emotion that supports us in turbulent times and confusing circumstances. Suffering and danger confront us on a dual level: they inflict not only pain and loss, but also instill the sense that we are adrift in the world, facing a sea of troubles, exposed and alone. The latter emotion is, in many respects, more difficult than the former. Therefore, it is not the assistance per se or the practical support that matter most in these circumstances, but the escort and embrace of the KBH throughout the turmoil.

This is the concept of *עמו אנכי בצרה*, which Chazal interpreted as "He accompanies us and dwells with us in our suffering" (rather than "He supports or delivers us from the distress"), since they viewed the support of the divine embrace and the emotion that He is with us as the crucial element for coping with tragedy

and suffering. Accordingly, they proclaimed (Megillah 29a) that the KBH went to exile together with us – although He did not prevent the exile or the accompanying suffering in his role as King of the Universe, He accompanied us as a supportive parent who props up His suffering child. The knowledge that the parent is in the room with the child, regardless of his or her ability to assist is comforting to the child and a pillar of emotional support. The idea of divine accompaniment and common journey in challenging circumstances, expressed by Chazal through the metaphor of a child atop his father's shoulders, figures prominently in the Torah's recounting of the journey through the wilderness, as an expression of HaShem's love and concern for His people. In a well-known and strategically placed passage of the Rosh HaShana prayers, we beseech the KBH to care for us, either as His child or His subject. From either side of the Avinu-Malkeinu dialectic, our essential need is for His support, not only to acquit us and to provide for us, but to be present and accompany us.

Our need to experience God's presence is not only in times of distress, but also in success and celebration. When divine providence smites our enemies or blesses us with prosperity, the primary religious emotion should be the understanding that the KBH cares for us and treats us as His people, and that His assistance expresses His closeness. Thanksgiving for the redemption is vital, but secondary to the basic religious experience of the relationship itself.

The above distinction between the KBH's practical assistance and His embrace is a crucial framework for evaluating and experiencing the past few years, and for approaching the incoming one. It allows us to reflect on the past years and our relationship with the KBH, while also addressing an additional religious dilemma that the situation has thrust upon us: an attempt to interpret and evaluate these momentous events through the lens of belief. Throughout these challenging years, we have tried to make sense of the events that have transpired, which we recognize as historic and extraordinary. We have sought to interpret them as human beings for whom curiosity is a basic trait and from a religious perspective in an attempt to understand God's message and expectations of us, and to appreciate His involvement in history. The Torah famously emphasizes the interpretation of our history and recognition of God's involvement in it as a cardinal value: *בינו שנות דור ודור, זכר ימות עולם*.

Nonetheless, we are likely bound to fail in our attempt to interpret the events of the past few years from the appropriate historical perspective, since history by its very definition

Likutei Divrei Torah

can only be viewed retrospectively. We lack the proper perspective to analyze contemporary events in the moment, and moreover, face a nearly insurmountable hurdle: the recognition that the significance of what has already transpired will only be determined, more often than not, by subsequent events. The shifting dynamics of the coming years will influence and determine the meaning of events that have already occurred. If to point to a relevant example, the meaning of the Six-Day War is constantly evolving since the dynamics of the conflict and its impact upon Israeli society continue to unfold even today.

The same is undoubtedly true of the historic events of the past few years. Only time and subsequent events will allow us to grasp the full meaning of the times we are living through. This does not exempt us from striving to understand and comprehend current circumstances to the best of our ability; however, these attempts will not provide us with a proper understanding of God's historical plan or an appreciation of divine wisdom per se, rather it is an attempt to comprehend what the KBH is signaling to us in the present, and to decipher His message to His people as part of our relationship with Him as Avinu-Malkeinu. The Torah issues an explicit appeal to express our awe, love, and devotion to HaShem (e.g. *אלקיך שואל מעמך ועתה ישראל מה ה'*) as a response to a divine prompt in the context of the relationship between the KBH and Am Yisrael. Likewise, the historical drama summons us to relate and respond to the KBH and His Providence in the context of our relationship with Him. This is not an attempt to fathom the depths of history, but to respond to the KBH's call, to seek to understand His message, and to feel His presence as He accompanies us in our contemporary situation. Just as we distinguish between divine assistance in vanquishing our enemies and the KBH's accompaniment as part of our relationship with Him, so too we distinguish between interpreting historical events and responding to them in real time as part of our relationship with the God of Israel.

In this context, I would like to share my remarks in Yeshiva in the concluding hours of zman choref in mid-March. You may remember, especially if you were in Israel at the time, that this was the height of the euphoria about the strikes on Iran, when many claimed to discern God's plans and the historical significance of the military success. At that time, I described the tension I felt between the recognition that we cannot comprehend historical events in real-time, as described above, and the feeling of immense *siyaata deshmaya*, that we had experienced throughout the previous month. As a resolution to these conflicting emotions, I suggested that

we refrain from the pretension of understanding to have viewed God's ledger and to speak in His name while celebrating the deep religious experience of His accompaniment and embrace in the historical moment. As we all know, the geopolitical balance has since been altered, and the achievements of that campaign are now viewed in a dimmer light, which will likely change time and again. Yet the sentiment of גם שבתך, כי אתה עמדי, לא אירע רע, כי אלך בגיא צלמות ומשענתך המה נחמני, that we experienced remains valid and meaningful regardless of the shifting geopolitical sands. David HaMelekh's description of God's supportive accompaniment and concern, even when he is in dire straits, perfectly expresses this sentiment. God's closeness and embrace are independent of His plans or succor. Our experience of the divine embrace and accompaniment is an existential reality, unrelated to the historical analysis and significance.

As we approach Rosh HaShana at the conclusion of a historic and turbulent year, it is the sentiment and experience of HaShem's support and embrace that we should seek as our primary religious emotion. The transition that occurs in Musaf of Rosh HaShana from God as the transcendental Master of the Universe to God as the guardian King of Israel, and from the Judge who demands strict accountability to an engaged party who has entered into a covenant with us and advocates on our behalf and the duality that is implied within it should be our lodestar on Rosh HaShana 5787. We must recognize the KBH's transcendental glory and inscrutable wisdom, abstain from hubristic attempts to articulate His plan, while feeling and experiencing our reliance upon His protection more intensely, remembering the comfort we received from His accompaniment and embrace in these chaotic years, and remind ourselves of His support as He accompanied us, like a caring parent, throughout the year.

In this regard, I will conclude with a remark about the shofar. Three years ago, the letter sent before Rosh HaShana 5784 included the following passage: "the shofar allows us to cry out to our Master in an unarticulated manner, without making a specific request. We do not know what scenario is best for us or understand what dynamic is optimal for Am Yisrael. Therefore, we express our anguish via the shofar's primeval call and pray to HaShem that He not only answer our prayers but also formulate them for us. Let Him take the incoherent sounds of the ram's horn, decipher them and determine the best course. The shofar's inchoate plea is especially significant this year. Communal needs are at the forefront of our concerns, yet we cannot pray for a particular outcome, since the future is

shrouded in unknowns and it is unclear what the optimal solution might be [...] the cry of the shofar is especially appropriate this year to express our pain and distress as we cry out to Hashem that He hear our prayers and remedy our current situation, even if we cannot articulate a specific remedy that we desire."

All of the above remains extremely relevant this year. Our current historical circumstance continues to be covered by a thick fog – which is why there are such starkly differing opinions regarding the proper course of action – and we certainly need the KBH's help to articulate our needs. However, in light of the above, the blast of the shofar, especially in years of pain and turmoil, is not only as a prayer to fulfil undefined requests, but also as an instinctive cry for help and a call to our Father and Master to hear our distress and accompany us as we face ongoing challenges. The essence of the shofar is the call itself; the very act of crying or uttering a shriek that is directed to the KBH and the need to alert Him to our pain is an expression of our reliance upon Him, and an essential element of our relationship with Him. We are, to borrow a phrase from Tennyson, "an infant crying in the night: an infant crying for the light: with no language but a cry" for whom the sense of the presence of a caring parent is more vital than the actual milk that will be provided. The milk is important, of course, as is divine assistance in solving crises; but knowing the KBH listens to our cry and is present to provide solidarity in our distress is crucial.

In due time, the great shofar of redemption will be blasted by the KBH to announce the ge'ula. This blast will express the duality of message and relationship that we experience in history, and its primary purpose will be our return to the embrace of the KBH. Until that time, we are privileged to be accompanied by HaShem as we journey through the avenues of history and navigate the hurdles of Jewish existence.

We have experienced the past year, with all of its twists and turns, as individuals and as a community. The sense of the Har Etzion community's togetherness and mutual support was evident and deeply felt throughout the year. Parents, alumni, supporters and all other members of the Yeshiva family took great interest in the Yeshiva and all of the members of our community, as we offered strength and mutual support to each another, while striving to advance our goals of Talmud Torah and Avodat HaShem. Our appreciation and gratitude for the support, concern and bond is heartfelt and wholehearted.

May the KBH grant us and all of Am Yisrael a כתיבה וחתימה טובה לשנת חיים ושלום, and may He bestow upon His people and all of mankind

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peace and prosperity as we welcome the new year.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Kol Dodi Dofek: Seventy Years Later... Are We Still Sleeping?

By Rabbanit Shani Taragin

דודי דופק! קול! "אני ישנה ולבי ער I am asleep, but my heart is awake. Hark! My beloved is knocking" (Shir HaShirim 5:2).

The ra'aya, representing Knesset Yisrael, lies in bed. She hears the Dod, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, knocking at her door, His head drenched with dew. He pleads: "Open for Me, My sister, My beloved." But she hesitates: "I have taken off my robe; how shall I put it on? I washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" (5:3). By the time she rises, He is gone. The watchmen strike her, wound her (5:7). The Daughters of Jerusalem, representing the nations, taunt her as she searches for her lover.

This is the scene Rav Soloveitchik seized upon seventy years ago. The Rav identified six divine knocks, i.e. six ways Hashem was "banging" on the door of the Jewish people after two thousand years of waiting. Would we open the door in 1956, eight years after the State's founding? Seventy years later, each knock resounds louder. Do we hear them? Will we finally rise, or miss another opportunity to answer the loving knocks of Hashem?

The six knocks, requalified - The political knock: In 1956, both the western powers and the Soviet Union somehow agreed to vote for the partition plan – a Cold War miracle. Today, the Abraham Accords providing for the Gulf states aligning with Israel, have amplified that knock. And yet, the miracles are reported as geopolitics, stripped of providential character. The Rav heard the Divine hammer in the UN gavel. We hear only headlines.

The military knock: In 1948, Israel miraculously defeated six Arab armies. Today, Israel's achievements against Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran – its intelligence reach, its precision, its resilience – have amplified that knock beyond imagination. And yet, we marvel at the technology, credit the soldiers, and forget to ask Who made them possible. The ra'aya hears the sound but ignores the Dod's hand on the door.

The theological knock: In 1956, Christians could no longer point to Jewish exile as proof of G-d's rejection. Today, Jewish sovereignty and the ingathering of exiles refute every denial of Jewish rootedness. And yet, we have grown accustomed to shivat Tzion. Sovereignty is a headline instead of what the Rav saw: Hashem proving that His covenant endures.

The psychological knock: In 1956, the State injected pride into the Jewish psyche. Today, since October 7th, tens of thousands have made Aliyah, not fleeing but running toward home. And yet, the surge of solidarity fades. The ra'aya's heart stirs, but her body remains in bed. The excitement of October 8th gives way to the routine of August.

The ethical knock: In 1956, the Rav declared that Jewish blood was no longer free. Today, the knock resounds in every soldier who risks his life to minimize civilian casualties, in a military code no other army matches. And yet, the ICJ entertains genocide charges against the people who were nearly annihilated. The knock demands that we not internalize their verdict.

The practical knock: In 1956, every Jew had a place to flee. Today, when war broke out, Israel opened its gates wider – not refugees but fighters came home. And yet, the door is open and we remain in the corridor. The ra'aya hears the Dod say, "Get up," and answers, "I have washed my feet."

The knocks of "brit goral" and "brit ye'ud": what we must become - The Rav's framework rested on two covenants: brit goral, the covenant of fate – involuntary, shared, inescapable – and brit ye'ud, the covenant of destiny accepted at Sinai – the voluntary commitment to a sacred mission. The six knocks were phenomena of goral. But goral is what happens to us; ye'ud is what we choose to become. Fate can catalyze energy but cannot provide direction.

Translating the Rav's categories into our moment, we hear additional knocks meant to transform us from goral to ye'ud – from machane to edah, from a people united by threat to a people united by mission. These are knocks not of Providence acting upon us, but of Hashem demanding what we choose to make of ourselves.

The knock of achdut: October 7th briefly created a united camp (machane) – Charedi and secular, left and right, Diaspora and Israeli. But a machane dissolves when the threat recedes, and the fractures have returned. The knock calls us to become an edah, i.e. a congregation united not by shared danger but by shared covenant. How do we fail to hear it? We let the unity of October 8th curdle back into the partisan camps of October 6th.

The knock of moral clarity: The Rav believed Judaism's unique contribution was the connection between religious experience and ethical action – tzedek u-mishpat, not moral relativism. After October 7th, the world inverted its compass: Israel accused of genocide while defending itself against

genocidal enemies. The knock demands that we not internalize their verdict – self-defense with ethical restraint, yes, but without moral apology for protecting Jewish life. How do we fail to hear it? We become defensive rather than declarative.

The knock of kevod ha-adam: The Rav insisted that denying human dignity calls into question the *raison d'être* of the human race. The hostages. The bereaved. The wounded. The displaced. Each demands that the Jewish people become a society refusing to let suffering become abstract or partisan. "Jewish blood is no longer hefker" must extend beyond the battlefield to the living: the healing of hostages, the widows and orphans, the soldiers learning to walk again. How do we fail to hear it? The hostages become a political football. The bereaved become a ceremony. We move on, but the knock asks whether we can sustain the seriousness of kevod ha-adam.

The knock of kedusha: The State of Israel has achieved remarkable successes in the realm of goral – military dominance, technological prowess, diplomatic breakthroughs. But the knock implores: what kind of society are we building? One of power alone, or one of Torah, humility, chesed, and holiness? The Rav's Adam I – majestic, creative – has been realized. But the knock demands Adam II – the covenantal man of humility and inwardness. The State cannot remain merely a refuge, an army, an economy measured by GDP and military victories; it must strive for kedusha manifest in kindness, justice and Torah values.

The laziness the Rav feared - The Rav feared the laziness of his own community. He confessed that during the Holocaust, American Jewry failed to feel their brethren's suffering with sufficient intensity. "We all sinned in our silence." Orthodox Jews, he charged, suffered from miserliness not only of wealth but of spirit – experts at criticism, amateurs at construction. Seventy years later, the Negev he warned was dangerously underpopulated remains a frontier. Have we opened the door, or merely changed into cleaner pajamas?

Opening the door means Aliyah when possible, serious Israel education when not, material support for soldiers, evacuees, and bereaved families, investment in the Negev and Galil, and a Diaspora Jewish life organized around responsibility rather than sentiment – hearing the goral knocks as calls to national destiny (ye'ud).

The knock that answers the oaths - The Three Oaths (Ketubot 111a), derived from Shir HaShirim (chapters 2, 3, 8), adjured Am Yisrael not to "ascend as a wall" to reclaim the Land and not to rebel against the nations, while adjuring the nations not to oppress Israel

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excessively. For centuries, these oaths deterred return. Rav Zvi Hirsch Kalischer and other nineteenth-century proto-Zionist rabbanim concluded that the oaths prohibited only forcing the End, not the gradual, faithful return that Hashem's providence had made possible.

Rav Soloveitchik's Kol Dodi Dofek, also based on Shir HaShirim, reminds us that even for those who felt the oaths of the ra'aya as constraining Jewish initiative toward the Land, the Dod is not constrained. He comes to her. He knocks on her door. When Hashem knocks through history – through the birth of a state, through military miracles, through the ingathering of exiles, through the very suffering that tests our resolve, refusing to open is not caution. It is spiritual negligence.

The ra'aya's tragedy: she delayed, and He departed. The watchmen found her. The Daughters mocked her. She then searched for Him, wounded and alone. October 7th was the watchmen's blow. Global antisemitism is the Daughters' taunt. How much suffering might have been averted had we opened the door when He first knocked?

Tishrei: the time to rise - And so we arrive at Tishrei – a month of individual and national introspection. The shofar blasts are echoes of the Dod's knocks: Kol dodi dofek! The shofar is the sound of a hand reaching through the hole in the door (5:4), stirring our innards, calling us to rise as stated in Devarim: "And you shall return to Hashem... and He will return your captivity and gather you from all the nations" (30:2–5). Return to Hashem leads to return to the Land. Individual teshuva becomes national return. But only after we get out of bed.

The Rav implored Diaspora Jewry not to remain in slumber. Seventy years later, the knocks are louder – the knocks of goral and ye'ud, the knocks of what happened to us and what we must become. The Dod stands at the door, His head drenched with the dew of mornings in Eretz Yisrael. He is knocking. He has been knocking. Will we rise from passivity, remove our pajamas of complacency, and open the door before He turns and leaves, and we are left to search for Him through the dangerous streets of a world never kind to a wandering ra'aya?

פתחי לי אחתי רציתי – Open for me, my sister, my beloved, cries Hashem now more than ever. The door is yours to open.

Holiday of Honey- By Mrs. Shira Smiles
"Dip the apple in the honey, make a berachah loud and clear..." Apples and honey is one of the most well-known and cherished minhagim that Jews throughout the world observe on Rosh Hashanah. Let's try to move beyond the

surface to obtain a deeper mindset as we practice this custom. What is the power of these sweet treats that it accompanies our Yom Tov and Shabbos tables throughout the High Holiday season?

“Have a happy, sweet new year.” The classic answer is that honey is sweet and we daven for the coming year to be one filled with sweetness. Rav Wolbe in Alei Shur explains that the honey reminds us to keep our behavior on Yom Tov in line with such sweetness, to be agreeable and delightful. Every moment on Rosh Hashanah lays the seeds for what will happen in the upcoming year. It is important to spend these forty-eight hours in pleasant interactions, to avoid getting angry or upset so we encode kindness, courtesy and graciousness into the new year. If we experience minor (or major) annoyances in our homes or shul, instead of responding with anger or frustration, honey reminds us to smile and forgive. Doing so will set a year of goodness, compassion and tolerance.

Rabbi Brazil in Bishvili Nivra Haolam focuses on the halachic property of honey. If a forbidden substance falls into honey, and is absorbed by the honey, it becomes permitted to eat. Honey can transform that which it incorporates to become part of the honey itself. The Chafetz Chayim explains that Torah has this quality. Torah transforms the negative into something good. By eating honey, we symbolically display our yearning to be transformed, to become full of positivity and goodness; our hope throughout the chag is to take on a new, more favorable persona.

In Machshava L'maaseh, Rabbi Noach Weinberg focuses on the qualities of bees. Usually, something that comes from an impure animal is also considered impure. How, then, are we permitted to eat honey that comes from bees? We can answer that the honey is not actually part of the bee, rather, it is something that the bee expels. Similarly, at this time of year, we emphasize that although we have sinned and behaved improperly at times, none of it is intrinsically part of us. Any negativity we have engaged in is merely an outer layer, an external aspect. As we eat apples dipped in honey, we ask that Hashem not identify our inner selves with our sins.

Another idea that Rabbi Weinberg offers is based on the pesukim that describe how Yechezkel HaNavi is told to eat a scroll, “veochla vatehi befi kedevash lematok – so I ate and, in my mouth, it was as sweet as honey” (Yechezkel 3:1–3). One fascinating feature of honey is that we don't see it at all throughout its production, from its beginning stages as pollen collected by the bees, to the hive, one only sees the honey when it is finally extracted. Likewise, so much that happens in

our lives is elusive and hidden from us. So often we only see the results. Yechezkel HaNavi ingested the entire scroll, absorbing everything, the good and bad. In doing so, he tastes its sweetness, affirming that the whole picture is Hashem's design. At times we too can look back and see all the steps in whatever process we have gone through all the way until the outcome. On Rosh Hashanah, when we coronate Hashem as King, we recognize the limitations of our understanding and perceptions of the workings of this world, acknowledging that all that Hashem does is just, fitting and perfectly constructed. May we merit to experience the lessons of honey and the blessing of sweetness this year and always.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

Our Pledge of Allegiance

On Rosh HaShana “HaMelech” is the operative word. Rav Hirsch ztl. pointed out that the word “Melech” – “King” is made up of three letters each of which is a prefix. Together they give a portrait of The King's importance. The letter MEM means “from” because everything comes from HASHEM.

The letter LAMED means “to” or “for” because everything is ultimately for and goes back to HASHEM. The letter CHOF means “like” because everything reflects and bears a likeness to the Creator. The Zohar states, “Koach HaPoel B'Nifal” – “The power of the actor is in his actions. The signature of the artist can be found in his art. So, we too need to properly represent THE KING.

Then we can tag the letter HEY at the beginning,” the HEY HaYedia” – “The HEY of Knowledge” because we are meant to know, the Rambam explains, not just vaguely believe, that HASHEM is not just a king but “The King”, The Only King!

It's a big wonder! The Talmud tells us that “the entire livelihood of a person is decided between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur” (Beitza 16A) and in the liturgy of those days, the Machzor and Slichos, there is barely a whisper of a request. It's a serious matter! Money means a lot to most of us and here a great determination is being made and it's not a serious part of the discussion. How then is it decided during these days of awesome judgments?

A young and very successful surgeon once told me of a job interview he had with someone who was looking to join his thriving practice. The dialogue went something like this: The doctor asked him, “What kind are you looking for?” (A nice open-ended question) The job candidate, the young doctor, answered as follows; “I would like to be making over \$200,000 and year, and be able to take off one

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weekday and one weekend day each week, so I can play some golf. Of course, I would need to have health insurance coverage and compensation for travel expenses too!”

Do you think he got the job? My Dr. friend was appalled. “He made no mention of what he felt he could contribute to the practice or learn, how dedicated and diligent he was, nothing! There was no talk about healing or helping people either.” This was a job interview from the black lagoon. You come in requesting only what you want to get!? The boss wants to know how much grit you are ready to invest.

Rosh HaShana is not about us! It's not about what we hope to earn! It's about what we aim to do and accomplish in G-d's world for heaven's sake. There's always something to do for those who are willing to be helpful. Givers will find a place to give and they will be granted the resource to make good things happen. It's “the vacuum cleaner effect”. You get more according to how much you give out!

Rosh HaShana is not about any one of us! It's about all of us, including us! Rosh HaShana is about HASHEM's KINGSHIP! John Kennedy famously declared at his inaugural address, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” On Rosh HaShana the same call to service is evoked, “Ask not what HASHEM can do for you, but what you can do for HASHEM!”

If we want to crown HASHEM over the entire world, we have to begin some place, as the bumper sticker reads, “Think Global and Act Local!” Lucy from the Peanuts cartoon declared, “I love humanity. It's people I can't stand!” We are ready to begin with whatever HASHEM gives us to do, with the intention that we want to be a part of HIS KINGDOM.

There is always a place in HASHEM's Kingdom for people who are willing to do any job, and do it well! It's the biggest privilege to be a member of HASHEM's team, the Jewish People! We have a noble and historic mission that begins with crowning HASHEM on our own hearts. It does not get more local than that. Then, for sure we will find an important role to play. So, THE KING is waiting for our pledge of allegiance.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Hope to G-d

This is a year of hope. Internationally, the clouds that have darkened our world horizons have cautiously begun to part. The cold atmosphere of the past ten years has slowly but perceptibly begun to warm up. Medically, we are thrilled to the news of the great strides in preventive medicine which promise to eliminate one of man's most dreaded childhood

diseases and ensure hope for thousands of as yet unborn human beings. Religiously, the growing return to tradition, whatever its motivation, the increased growth of schools teaching maximal Judaism is a good, welcome, and hopeful omen for the future.

Yet so frequent have been our disappointments in the past, and so painful our disillusionments, that we moderns have found ourselves almost incapable of hope, almost afraid to hope. Our fondest and most cherished hopes have been dashed to splinters of frustration so often, that we no longer dare to hope. Perhaps Geneva is just another diplomatic maneuver. Perhaps the vaccine will not ultimately work out, or other and more terrible diseases will appear. Perhaps the return to Religion is only a passing fad.

Well, is hope justifiable? Do we, who have flocked to this holy place on this holy day, have the right to hope? Dare we hope?

The answer of Judaism is expressed in one verse, the crowning conclusion of the Penitential Psalm, composed by King David and recited twice daily by Jews the world over during this High Holiday season: kavei el Ha'shem, chazak ve'ya'ameitz libecha va'kavei el Ha'shem, Hope to G-d, be strong and have courage of heart – and hope to G-d.

This is a Declaration of Hope first uttered by the Shepherd King of Israel while hiding out in a cave, hunted like a wild animal by the sick King Saul, not knowing if he would ever again see the light of day. It is an Affirmation of Hope prayerfully chanted by David as his own son Absalom came at him with sword in hand and hatred in heart. It is an Ode to Hope sung by the penitent King as the Prophet Nathan chastised him for his sin and warned of the wrath of G-d at his dealings with Uriah and Bathsheba. It is a glorification of Hope which beat in his weakening heart even as he lay in his death-bed, informed that there was no peace amongst his children, and that already they were dividing his estate, anxiously waiting for his last breath and contesting the division with bitterness, forgetting they ever had a father. Even at such times, when it is so tempting to despair and give up, David would say, kavei...Hope to G-d, be strong and have courage of heart and hope to G-d.

So you see that the answer of Judaism is clear and unequivocal. Kavei – there is hope. That is the most comforting and glorious message Judaism offers us on this Holy Day.

I dare say there is no man or woman here today who has no need of hope. Behind your healthy and happy faces, there is some kind of desperate, anxious yearning. As human beings, we are caught in the complexities that are the web of life. We each have his problems, and to

us, they are big, even overwhelming, no matter how they appear to others. We approach our G-d humble and lowly in spirit. Someone here may be undergoing an acute financial crisis, wondering whether he will ever be able to face his creditors and meet his household obligations. Another may be deeply worried about how to guide a good-natured but stumbling, wayward child who doesn't know what he wants from life. Perhaps there is in this synagogue now a couple burdened with domestic, marital problems. What a tragedy when one begins to notice his marriage crumbling, or even feel the first draughts of coldness and distance chill the warmth of a happy home. There are here today elderly people who feel they have so little to look forward to, dreading a future in which they must turn to their children for help. Some here are laden with grief and miserable in their loneliness as they miss a dear husband or wife or parent or child. There is sickness that threatens, which perhaps no one else knows about yet. There is the plain boredom with the drudgery of everyday existence. There is doubt and worry and perplexity of every kind and shade. To you – nay, to us – Judaism says, first of all, kavei, O hope! There is indeed something to hope for, for help comes from the most unexpected sources. Kavei – hope!

He who has seen a sick man recover from near death knows there is hope. He who has seen a shambles of a people build a state about a hymn called hatikvah – the Hope – knows that it is real and everpresent. He who has seen people of broken spirit and sick mind recover and regain happiness and stability believes the truth of kava'i. He who has seen whole areas rally from the ravages of flood and disease knows Hope is not a lie. He who has seen a helpless, introverted infant grow in the short space of 2½ months into a smiling, responsive, and learning child knows that kavei – one can hope for more, for Hope is the Vitamin H of life. I tell you, each and every one of you, that in your particular predicament, whatever it might be, there is still hope. And not because I say so, but because the Torah says so – kavei, hope.

The second great fact about hope: kavei el Ha'shem, Hope to G-d. That is, the only true source of hope, the only justifiable, redeemable, and meaningful hope, is that which comes from trust in G-d.

Chassidim tell of the Chassid who was terribly ill with a dangerous disease and who came to R. Mordecai of Nishchiz for advice and blessing. The Rabbi instructed the poor Chassid to take off immediately for the town of Anipoli and there see the Professor. When the Chassid arrived – tired, sick, and broke – he found a tiny hamlet with no professor and no doctor, not even a nurse. Upon his return,

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he complained sobbingly to the Rabbi, who said, "If so, what does one do if, Heaven forbid, he gets very sick in Anipoli?" Answered the Chassid, "What can he do, nebech? I suppose he has no choice but to rely on G-d and hope for the best." "Ah," replied the great Rabbi, "That is the great Professor of Anipoli I spoke to you of. He who heals the sick and miserable and poor of Anipoli and a thousand other such hamlets will heal you if you have faith, and hope to Him."

Certainly, that is a prime requisite in the Jewish teaching of hope: kavei el Ha'shem, hope to G-d. The greatest Prof. of Medicine is G-d – ani Ha'shem rofecha. The greatest Diplomat and Maker of peace is G-d – oseh shalom bimromav. The greatest Supplier of Food is G-d – zan umfarneiss lakol. The greatest Psychiatrist and Consoler of the Grievous is G-d – Anochi Anochi hu menachemchem. Hope without Faith is just a wild guess. Hope without Religion is just foolish optimism. Hope without Torah is a dangerously misplaced confidence. Hope without G-d is just a false, pagan superstition.

We Jews have always prayed me'olam kivinu lecha – me'olam means not only "forever," thus "forever we hope to Thee," but it also means, literally, "of all the world." It means that to place our hope in G-d we must not place it in anything else or anyone else in the world. And has not the violation of that principle been the sin of the modern world? We Americans placed our hopes in the invulnerability provided us by two great oceans and in a mighty-sounding legal document – and we had World War I. We trusted the word of a mad, demonic dictator in Munich – and we had World War II. We placed our hopes thereafter in the goodness of the Russian bear – and we have a Cold War. We hoped a Bevin would keep his word – and almost lost the State of Israel. We place our complete, absolute, and undivided hopes in science, in psychiatry, in an economic theory, in a political system, in an individual, in all the idols of our day. No wonder we are an apprehensive, frustrated, disappointed people who are afraid to hope! We have naively entrusted our most sacred hopes to every idea, movement, and agency – everyone, but G-d!

The same holds true, only more so, for our hopes for Judaism. There is no man or woman here who does not want to see Judaism live on and thrive, his children live by it and marry in it. But let us remember: kavei el Ha'shem. Hope, especially for Jews, lies only in G-d. Not in Jewish country clubs, not in Jewish camps, not in Jewish charities, not in Jewish steam rooms, not in Jewish foods – important as all these are – but only el Ha'shem – in G-d. Hope in G-d means belonging to and supporting a synagogue. It means praying in it

regularly with warmth and fervor. It means lending a hand to every project which seeks to advance the cause of Torah. It means working for Jewish education and acquiring one yourself. That is where hope lies – in G-d.

And yet, friends, I feel that there might be somebody here this morning who might want to challenge me and ask; Rabbi, is there not something disturbing about this affirmation of hope by Judaism? Is it not a confession of impotence to have to resort to hope? Is it not the escape of weaklings? Is not hope in G-d, as the Nietzches of all ages have maintained, a false mirage conjured up by and for the weak, the desperate and the lazy? The strong and the capable resign themselves to fate; the weak, the lazy – they just hope.

It is in response to this piece of cynicism that David's third point comes to us like a light out of the darkness. Kavei el Ha'shem – chazak ve'ya'ameitz libecha. In order to hope to G-d you must have strength and courage of heart. Hope in G-d, David wants to tell us, is not a confession of weakness and the practice of the inadequate. It requires moral strength and real courage. To place yourself completely in the hands of G-d means, in the language of diplomatic negotiators, to lead from strength. In the Torah view, G-d should not be the LAST resort for hope, but the FIRST. In the Jewish view, it is not sufficient to say Shma Yisrael after the doctors have given up hope and the patient is in a coma. It means coming to the synagogue before there is a patient, coming despite the sneers of those who may label such practice as "old-fashioned" and "outmoded," coming and thanking G-d for good health and expressing a hope that He will grant many more years of the same. It means not crying and complaining when a man has lost his fortune, but having the fortitude of character to recognize G-d as the One Who gave it – G-d and not luck, G-d and not shrewdness, G-d and not salesmanship – and expressing that hope by sharing the bounty He has given you so far. Hoping to G-d is indeed a first resort, not a last resort; leading from strength and not following from weakness. Strength and courage of heart are the prerequisites of kavei el Ha'shem, of religious hope.

Remember how Abraham and Sarah, of whom we read this morning, wanted a child? It was the all-consuming desire of their lives. They had both dedicated their lives to the teaching of G-dliness, they had succeeded greatly in these endeavors, they had thrived and prospered financially, and they had all a couple could ask for as they settled back into their old age. All, that is, except a child – and that was everything. Their unhappiness was intolerable. Who would don the mantle of Abraham and keep the Sabbath candles burning in the tent of

Sarah after they breathed their last? What emptiness, what hollowness, what a complete vacuum their home was – the house too neat, the books untouched, the stillness unbroken by youthful voice. Instead, there was bitterness.

Was it easy for such people to hope to G-d for a child? Put yourself in their predicament and you will find the answer. Remember that Abraham was an old man who had reached his 100th birthday and that Sarah was past her prime – she was 90. To hope for a child at that age was sheer folly. As a matter of fact, when G-d informed them that such hope was possible of fulfillment, Sarah laughed to herself. Bear a child when you should be rocking away on the porch of an old age home! Kol ha'shomeia yetzachak li, Sarah said, whoever hears of this will laugh at me! And our Rabbis tell us that when Sarah was with child, the leitzanei ha'dor, the cynics of that age, began to spread evil rumors about the child and said it was not Abraham's. To hope for a child under such conditions means braving the stares of strangers, the quizzical looks and raised eyebrows of so-called friends, the ugly rumors that could ruin reputations built over a lifetime. No, a weaker person, a "softie," one without strength and courage of heart, would have preferred continuing childlessness for the few years left in life to the punishment and cruelty of the knowing smiles and anxious whispers and wise remarks.

That would be a "normal" reaction – scrap the hope and spare the criticism. It took spine and spirit and toughness to hope and plan and prepare nonetheless. Yet that is what they did: they hoped, they planned, they prepared. The world laughed – but G-d redeemed their hopes. And they did have a child, and they called him Yitzchak – Isaac – which derives from the word meaning "laughter" – the laughter and ridicule this elderly couple had to brave. So that the very name of one of our great Patriarchs is a testimony to that great fact we have been discussing – the fact that kavei el Ha'shem, hope to G-d, requires CHAZAK ve'ya'ameitz libecha, strength and courage of heart. It means G-d as a First Resort, not Last; leading not from weakness but from strength.

To those of us, then, who have come here on this Rosh Hashanah day burdened by anxieties, miserable in their solitude, deeply disturbed by some knowledge that no outsider shares, thirsty for hope and longing for a sign of help, our Torah tells us in eternal syllables of encouragement: kavei el Ha'shem – hope to G-d! It is a hope which will not be misplaced. It is a hope which will be redeemed by the Eternal Source of all Life in whose hands are the secrets of healing, the seeds of security, the comfort of companionship, the solutions to all the agonizing problems of men.

Likutei Divrei Torah

And to those who have been blessed by G-d with life, with ease and tranquility, with security and health and peace of mind, our Torah presents the great challenge: chazak ve'ya'ameitz libecha ve'kavei el Ha'shem, you more than others need hope. For you to hope requires moral courage, the strength of the heart and the insight of the soul. Let others regard your prayer as superfluous. Let them discourage you from attending an Orthodox synagogue. Let them laugh at your discovery of Torah, gratitude, and thanksgiving, at this beginning of a new year, place that strong and courageous hope in G-d. G-d as your hope, may G-d help.

Shir hamaalos mimaamakim krasicha Ha'shem, Out of the depths I called unto Thee, O Lord: My G-d, listen to my voice... if Thou, G-d, should count our sins, who could survive? For with Thee is forgiveness, so that Thou art revered. Kivisi Ha'shem kivsah nafshi, I hope to Thee, O G-d, my soul hopes and I await Thy answer; my soul hopes for the Lord more than anxious watchmen hope for the dawn. Yacheil Yisrael el Ha'shem, O Israel, hope to G-d, for with the Lord is mercy, with Him redemption abounds. V'hu yifdeh es Yisrael mikol avonosav, and He will redeem Israel from all its sins, justify our cherished hopes that we offer up to Him, and inscribe us and all Israel in the Book of Life, Peace, Health, and Happiness. Amen.



BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON ROSH HASHANA - 5787

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Wishing everyone a **Ksiva vChasima Tova**.

Chaim Shulman cshulman@gmail.com

P.S. This is separate from the regular annual tzedakah appeals (see tinyurl.com/yk83-tzedaka and tinyurl.com/yk85-tzedaka).

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Adapted by CS from

מסר by Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (1902–1979)

שחיתות מוסר by Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (1902–1979)
הרדמת ההרגל *The Slumber of Habit: The Power of a Single Awakening*
The Slumber of Habit. The Torah describes *teshuvah* as something very close to us. כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו - *the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it* (Devarim 30:14). The Ramban and Sforno explain that this entire passage refers to the mitzvah of *teshuvah*. It is not in heaven, nor is it beyond the sea.

Anyone who sees this will be astounded. If the mitzvah of *teshuvah* is so easy, why does not everyone turn away from their evil ways? Why are true *baalei teshuvah* so rare? A person may know perfectly well that his conduct is wrong. Why, then, does he fail to choose the path of *teshuvah* that is so close to him? A person only needs to confess with his mouth and reflect in his heart, and he is like a newborn child.

The Danger of Getting Used to Sin. The answer is that a person's tragedy is getting used to his situation. He makes peace with his condition, no matter how low it is. This is the power of habit. Because of this, he does not feel the need to do *teshuvah*. If he were to suddenly see his situation, he would definitely awaken to repent and become a different person. Imagine a person who never knew that everyone eventually dies. If he suddenly witnessed someone's death, would not he be completely shaken? His heart would turn over, and he would become a complete *baal teshuvah*.

We can say this is what Chazal meant in the Gemara. The Gemara asks, דאמר רבה מאי דכתיב זה דרכם כלל לומר - *Rabba said, what is the meaning of the verse, this is their way, their folly* (Tehillim 49:14). The Gemara explains, יודעים רשעים שדרכם למיתה ויש להם חלב על כסלם - *the wicked know their path leads to death, but they have fat on their flanks* (Shabbos 31b). This means they are so accustomed to it that death makes absolutely no impression on them. The Gemara continues, שמא תאמר שכוחה היא מהן - *perhaps you will say they forget about it, the verse therefore says, and after them, they speak of it with their mouths, selah*. If they simply forgot, they could be fixed. If they saw a friend die or were reminded of the day of death, they would become *baalei teshuvah*. Instead, their bitter end is constantly spoken of in their mouths, and because constant familiarity has dulled even this knowledge, it no longer awakens them.

The Story of Yaakov's Burial. The Gemara discusses how Eisav tried to stop Yaakov's burial. Eisav claimed the plot was his. The brothers told him they bought it. Eisav demanded the deed. They told him the deed was in Egypt, and they sent Naftali to get it. The Gemara then says, חוששים - *Chushim the son of Dan was there, and his ears were heavy; he said to them, what is this* (Sotah 13a). They told him Eisav was delaying the burial until Naftali returned

from Egypt. Chushim responded, *and until Naftali comes from the land of Egypt, will my grandfather lie in disgrace? He took a club and struck him on the head.*

This seems puzzling. Why did not any of the other brothers ask Chushim's question? How could the sons of Yaakov tolerate such a situation?

The answer is exactly this. They argued and debated with Eisav. With every claim and argument, they thought they were defeating him. From one statement to the next, Yaakov remained lying in disgrace. Through this gradual process, they got used to the situation. It is human nature to get used to even the worst situations. This was not the case for Chushim ben Dan. Since he was hard of hearing, he did not know about the argument at all. The terrible situation suddenly appeared before his eyes. Because he was not used to the situation, he couldn't tolerate it, and he ended the matter without delay.

The Power of a Sudden Awakening. In several places, *Chazal* explain that saving a person depends on an awakening. He must suddenly see the situation he has fallen into.

The Midrash relates the story of Yakum ish Tzeroros, the nephew of R Yosi ben Yoezer. Yakum was riding a horse on Shabbos while they were leading R Yosi to be executed. Yakum mocked him, *ראה הסוס שהרכיב אותי - see the horse my master let me ride, and see the horse your master let you ride* (Bereishis Rabbah 65:22). R Yosi replied, *אם כן למכעיסיו קל וחומר לעושי רצונו - if it is so for those who anger Him, how much more so for those who do His will.* Yakum asked, *עשה, has any man done His will more than you?* R Yosi answered, *אם כן לעושי רצונו קל וחומר למכעיסיו - if it is so for those who do His will, how much more so for those who anger Him.* The Midrash says, *the matter entered him like the venom of a snake.* Yakum immediately went and subjected himself to the four death penalties of the Beis Din. R Yosi dozed off and saw Yakum's bed flying in the air, and he said, *לשעה קלה קדמני זה לגן עדן - this one beat me to Gan Eden by a short hour.*

Here was a man who had been completely wicked his entire life. His uncle certainly tried constantly to bring him back to the right path, but to no avail. Yet, through a single awakening that struck him suddenly, he transformed in an instant. He became a different person.

A similar thing happened to R Elazar ben Dordaya. He was deeply immersed in sin. A single statement of rebuke about his terrible situation moved and awakened him. He put his head between his knees and cried bitterly until his soul departed. A heavenly voice declared, *רבי אלעזר בן דורדיא מזומן להי העולם הבא - R Elazar ben Dordaya is destined for the life of the World to Come* (Avodah Zarah 17a).

This is the power of a sudden awakening. Habit kills all the holy feelings of renewal that come to change a crooked path. A single awakening can break the grip of routine.

How to Awaken Oneself. The way to reach this awakening is to awaken oneself deliberately. A person must reflect on his situation and ask himself the question that Chushim ben Dan asked, *what is this?* Where do I stand? Through this, the matters will enter his heart, as it says, *the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.*

The Midrash states, *רבנן אמרי שבעה דברים אמר שלמה על העצל ומה שאמר משה - the Rabbis say, Shlomo said seven things about the lazy person, and what Moshe said was greater than all of them* (Devarim Rabbah 8:6). Shlomo showed seven levels of laziness. But the lowest of all is the level Moshe spoke about when he said, *in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.* You just have to take the word out of your mouth. *Chazal* teach us that someone who does not do *teshuvah* is suffering from laziness. There is no greater laziness than this, since he only needs to speak a word from his mouth.

It is an established halacha that if a man betroths a woman on the condition that he is righteous, she is betrothed even if he is completely wicked. The Gemara explains, *perhaps he had thoughts of teshuvah in his mind* (Kiddushin 49b). The Rambam rules similarly, *she is doubtfully betrothed, perhaps he had thoughts of teshuvah in his heart* (Hilchos Ishus 8:5). The Lechem Mishneh asks why this does not apply when someone betroths a woman in front of invalid witnesses. Why do not we suspect they had thoughts of *teshuvah* and became valid witnesses? He answers that in our case, the man explicitly says in front of us that he is righteous. Since he said it in front of us, we suspect he might have had thoughts of *teshuvah*.

Since he speaks in front of us, we see at least the beginning of an awakening in him. Because of this, we suspect he might have become righteous. This is not the case with invalid witnesses. Since we see no sign of awakening in them, they definitely remain in their habit and laziness.

The Method of Asking Questions. We learn the way to awaken a sinner from his slumber from the story of Yakum ish Tzeroros. R Yosi did not give his second answer right away. At first, Yakum's ears weren't listening, and he would not have been awakened to return. R Yosi acted wisely and gave his first answer. This caused Yakum to awaken and ask a question. Once he was asking rather than mocking, his ears were open. He was then able to absorb the second answer. This was the right moment to give an answer that would enter him like snake venom. We learn from this that the way to create emotion is to bring a person to a state of wonder and questioning. Then, the rebuke of *teshuvah* is heard and absorbed well.

Making the Old Feel New. This is why we fulfill the mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt through questions and answers. It is difficult to fulfill this mitzvah properly because everything has been known for many years, and everyone is used to it. What will it add if a person just repeats the story by rote? The story needs to make him feel as if he just left Egypt. It is impossible to reach this feeling without great emotion. Therefore, *Chazal* established that the mitzvah is fulfilled through a question and answer. Through the question, the answer sounds new, and everyone will come to the proper awakening.

The Gemara says, *אם אין לו בן אשתו שואלתו ואם לאו הוא שואל לעצמו - if he has no son, his wife asks him, and if not, he asks himself* (Pesachim 116a). This shows that the awakening does not only happen when someone else asks. A person can ask himself, and this will help him hear the answer and be awakened by it.

Internalizing the Doubt. During his famous judgment, Shlomo HaMelech listened to the claims of the two women. Then he repeated them, *ויאמר המלך זאת אומרת זה בני החי ובכך זאת אומרת לא כי בנך המת ובני - and the king said, this one says, this is my living son and your son is dead, and this one says, no, your son is dead and my living son* (I Melachim 3:23). The Shulchan Aruch rules this as halacha, *a judge must hear the words of the litigants and repeat them* (Choshen Mishpat 17:7). Here too, the judge must make the doubt in the case feel like his own doubt. Through this, he will strive with all his might to find a true judgment. The way to reach this is by repeating the litigants' words with his own mouth.

The Gemara says, *אמר רב הונא כיון שעבר אדם עבירה ושנה בה הותרה לו הותרה - Rav Huna said, once a person commits a sin and repeats it, it becomes permitted to him. Could you think it becomes permitted? Rather, it becomes like something permitted to him* (Yoma 86b). Why did not Rav Huna say from the start that it becomes like something permitted? This is also a technique to help the listener truly hear the words of *Chazal*. When he hears Rav Huna say it becomes permitted, he will ask in astonishment, could it actually become permitted? Then he will listen carefully, and the words will enter his heart.

Breaking the Habit. The Gemara says, מכריז רבי אלכסנדר מאן בעי חיי כנוף, ואתו כולי עלמא לגביה אמרי ליה הב לן חיי אמר להו מי האישי החפץ חיים וגו נצור ואתו כולי עלמא לגביה אמרי ליה הב לן חיי אמר להו מי האישי החפץ חיים וגו נצור - *R Alexandri announced, who wants life? Everyone gathered and came to him, saying to him, give us life. He said to them, who is the person who desires life, guard your tongue from evil* (Tehillim 34:13-14, Avodah Zarah 19b). R Alexandri wanted to explain that the verse means actual life. If he had just shown them the verse, they would not have seen anything new. They had already read it many times. But when he asked, *who wants life?* and everyone jumped up to hear the announcement, it was the perfect moment to explain the true meaning of the verse. It means actual, literal life.

The difficulty of *teshuvah*, then, is not that it is distant from us. The Torah tells us that it is exceedingly close. The difficulty is that habit makes even the most important truths seem old. The *avodah* is to ask ourselves מאי האי - *what is this?* - and to look again at what we have ceased to notice, until what we already know becomes new enough to enter the heart. A single moment of genuine awakening can then accomplish what years of familiarity could not.

Rav Schachter on the Moadim - Insights and Commentary Based on the Shiurim of Rav Hershel Schachter Adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman available at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0FL5876LH>

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MUSSAF AMIDAH OF ROSH HASHANAH

1. Teki'os al Seder HaBerachos

The *Mishnah* in *Rosh Hashanah* (4:5) records the *halachah* that we are supposed to blow the *shofar* על סדר הברכות - within the order of the *berachos* of the *Mussaf Amidah*, after *Malchuyos*, after *Zichronos*, and after *Shofaros*. *Rashi*, both in his commentary on the *Mishnah* and on the Torah (*Vayikra* 23:24), seems to imply that this is a *d'oraisa* requirement. In fact, the Torah requires three sets of *shofar*-blowing, each consisting of a *teki'ah*, *teru'ah*, and *teki'ah*, and the three sets correspond to these three themes of the *Mussaf Amidah* – *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros*.

The *Ramban* disagrees, questioning *Rashi's* view based on a *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (34b) that discusses the case of one presented with the choice of traveling to a city in which he will be able to hear the blowing of the *shofar* but not the recitation of *Mussaf*, or traveling to a different city in which he will be able to listen to the recitation of *Mussaf* but not the blowing of the *shofar*. The *Gemara* considers it obvious that traveling to the city with the *shofar* takes precedence because hearing the *shofar* is a *mitzvah d'oraisa*, whereas the *mitzvah* of reciting *Mussaf* is only *miderabbanan*. Obviously, if *Mussaf* itself is only *miderabbanan*, the *din* of *teki'os al seder haberachos* can only be a *takanah derabbanan*.

Rav Soloveitchik was fond of relating the following explanation in defense of *Rashi* (see *sefer Yom Teru'ah*). *Rashi* only meant that the recitation of *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* is a *mitzvah d'oraisa* when it comes in conjunction with the blowing of the *shofar*. Then, the *mitzvah* of *teki'os al seder haberachos* has been fulfilled. In the situation described above, in which the city with a *shali'ach tzibbur* to recite *Mussaf* will not have *teki'as shofar*, the recitation of *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* is only *miderabbanan*. However, when one combines *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* with *teki'as shofar*, he has fulfilled a *d'oraisa* obligation according to *Rashi*.

In fact, the Rav would often caution his *minyán* on Rosh Hashanah to wait to hear the final syllable of the last word of each *berachah* of *chazaras hashatz* from the *chazan*, and only then to answer *amen*. A correct response of *amen* to the *berachos* of *chazaras hashatz* is necessary for the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *teki'os al seder haberachos*. This is especially relevant on the *Yomim Nora'im*, when the tune is such that the pronunciation of the final word of each *berachah* is elongated. [See *MiPineit HaRav*, 2001 ed., pp. 127, 128-129; *Eretz HaTzvi*, p. 49.]

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the idea that there is a unique *mitzvah* when *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* are recited in conjunction with *teki'as shofar* is based on a *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (29b), which discusses the reason for the absence of *shofar*-blowing when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos.

At first, the *Gemara* understood that the Torah alludes to this *halachah* in the two *passukim* that describe Rosh Hashanah: שבתון זכרון - "a rest day, a remembrance of *teru'ah* blasts" (*Vayikra* 23:24), and, יום תרועה יהיה לכם - "It shall be a day of *teru'ah* blasts for you" (*Bamidbar* 29:1). The first description of Rosh Hashanah implies that the *shofar* must merely be spoken of. This refers to a year in which Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos, on which the *shofar*-blast is only mentioned, but the *shofar* is not actually sounded. The second *passuk* refers to a year in which Rosh Hashanah falls on a weekday, when we are commanded to actually sound the *shofar*.

The *Gemara* proceeds to reject this interpretation of the *passukim* and concludes that the absence of *shofar*-blowing on Shabbos is merely a rabbinic decree, the *gezeirah d'Rabbah*, instituted lest one carry the *shofar* through a public domain and desecrate Shabbos. The *Gemara* never returns to explain the meaning behind the description of the day of Rosh Hashanah as a זכרון תרועה.

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that once we reach the conclusion of the *Gemara*, that זכרון תרועה is not an allusion to the absence of *shofar*-blowing when Rosh Hashanah falls on the Shabbos, the phrase may have a totally different connotation – *teki'as shofar in conjunction with davening*.

Indeed, we find the usage of the word זכרון in connection with *davening* in a different context. The *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (26a) teaches that a cow's horn may not be used as a *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah. The *Gemara* explains that using such a *shofar* would be equivalent to the *Kohen Gadol* wearing his golden vestments inside the *Kodesh HaKodashim* on Yom Kippur. Both recall the sin of the *eigel hazahav*, and so, both are prohibited based on the principle of קטיגור נעשה סניגור – an "accuser" cannot become a "defender." It is only in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* that we apply this principle, according to which a *mitzvah*-object is disqualified even if it merely belongs to the same category as an object used for an *aveirah*.

In explaining the comparison between the *mitzvah* of *shofar* and the *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol* inside the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, the *Gemara* advances the reasoning: כיון דלזכרון הוא ככפנים דמי - "Since [blowing the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah] is for the purpose of remembrance, it is equivalent to [an *avodah* performed] inside [the *Kodesh HaKodashim*]." The connotation of the *Gemara* seems to be that *teki'as shofar* is for the purpose of זכרון – combining with the *davening*, during which one is considered

to be standing in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*. That is why *teki'as shofar* is equivalent to an *avodah* performed inside the *Kodesh HaKodashim*.

The *Gemara's* use of the term זכרון as a reference to *davening* seems to be based on its understanding of the Torah's description of Rosh Hashanah as a זכרון תרועה. The Torah insists that on Rosh Hashanah we are to engage in *tefillah* along with the *teru'ah* of the *shofar*. This *passuk*, then, is *Rashi's* source. It teaches us that if the *shofar* is sounded, then there is also a *d'oraisa* obligation to recite *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros*, to blend the *tefillah* together with the *teru'os*. If the *teru'os* are absent, *Mussaf* is only *miderabbanan*.

In what way can we understand the connection between *shofar*-blowing and *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros*? Indeed, we may ask why the fulfillment of the seemingly extraneous *mitzvah* of *teki'as shofar* is not considered a *hefsek* (interruption) in the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

[Rav Soloveitchik pointed out a similar situation, the *na'anu'im* (waving) of the *lulav* in the middle of the recitation of *Hallel*. The reason this does not constitute a *hefsek* is that these two *mitzvos* are integrally connected. The waving of the *lulav* during *Shemoneh Esrei* would be

considered a *hefsek*; only in *Hallel* is it not an interruption.

Tosfos in *Sukkah* (37b, s.v. *beodu*) teaches that the *na'anu'im* that are performed during the *Hallel* are a fulfillment of the *passuk*, אז ירננו עצי היער – "Then, the trees of the forest will sing joyously" (*Divrei HaYamim I* 16:33). We shake the *lulav* to convey the notion that the trees are dancing in front of *Hashem*, and we wave the *lulav* to symbolize that the trees are bowing before *Hashem* (*Orach Chaim* 651:9). We demonstrate that all of nature is engaged in the praise of *Hashem*, together with mankind. Thus, the *na'anu'im* of the *lulav* are not extraneous; quite the contrary, this *mitzvah* blends together with the recitation of *Hallel*.

2. Rav Schachter on Birchas Kohanim in Chazaras HaShatz

Another *mitzvah* performed in the middle of *chazaras hashatz* is that of *Birchas Kohanim*, colloquially referred to as "*duchening*." The *Gemara* in *Sotah* (38a) derives from the following *passuk* that this *mitzvah* takes place at the conclusion of the offering of the *korbanos tzibbur*:

וישא אהרן את ידיו אל העם ויברכם וירד מעשות החטאת והעולה והשלמים
Aharon raised his hands toward the people and blessed them; then he descended from having performed the chattas-offering, the olah-offering, and the shelamim-offering. (Vayikra 9:22)

For this reason, Rav Yaakov Emden (*Mor U'Ketzi'ah*) writes that nowadays, the *mitzvah* of *duchening* must be only rabbinic in nature, given the lack of a *Beis HaMikdash* in which to offer *korbanos*.

The *Mishnah Berurah* (in a footnote to *Orach Chaim* 128:44) brings this opinion, but explains based on multiple sources in the *Gemara* and *Midrash* that *duchening* remains a *mitzvah d'oraisa* even nowadays. Similarly, the *Keren Orah* (*Sotah* 38a), quotes his older brother, the *Mishkenos Ya'akov* (*Orach Chaim*, *Teshuvah* 90), who explains that *duchening* remains a *mitzvah d'oraisa*, despite our inability to offer actual *korbanos tzibbur*.

Rav Soloveitchik expanded upon this theme in light of the *berachah* of *Retzei* in the *Shemoneh Esrei*. *Retzei* immediately follows *Shema Koleinu*, in which we ask that *Hashem* accept our prayers: וקבל ברחמים – "and accept, with compassion and favor, our prayer." What, then, is added by the beginning of the very next *berachah*, רצה ד' – "Be favorable, *Hashem*, our G-d, toward Your people Israel and their prayer," which seems to be a restatement of our previous request?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that the *berachah* of *Retzei* was recited by the *Kohanim* in the *Beis HaMikdash* after the sprinkling of the blood of the *Korban Tamid*, in order to ensure that the *korban* would be accepted with favor (*Mishnah Tamid* 5:1). Indeed, the term "*ritzui*" is a technical term that appears in connection with *korbanos* (in the vast majority of its usage in *Tanach*). Examples of this usage are, ונרצה לו לכפר עליו – "and it shall become acceptable for him, to atone for him" (*Vayikra* 1:4), and, פגול הוא לא ירצה – "[If it shall be eaten on the third day] it is rejected; it shall not be accepted" (19:7).

The *Ba'al HaTanya* (*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, perek 2) explains that – הכזה יהיה צום אבחרהו ... הלזה תקרא צום ויום רצון לדי, *"Can such be the fast I choose ... Do you call this a fast and a day of favor to Hashem?"* (*Yeshayah* 58:5), uses the term "*ritzui*" in relation to a *ta'anis* because a fast day shares this element with the offering of *korbanos*. This is in line with the *tefillah* that Rav Sheshes added at the conclusion of his *Shemoneh Esrei* when he observed a *ta'anis*: "May it be Your will to consider my fat and blood that have been decreased as if I had offered them before You on the *mizbe'ach*, and favor me" (*Berachos* 17a). [See *B'Ikvei HaTzon*, p. 82.]

Thus, the innovation of *Retzei* is that in this *berachah* we request that *Hashem* consider our *tefillas* as if we had brought a *korban*. It is not only that our *tefillas* correspond to the *korbanos*, but that the *tefillas* themselves are considered to be as *korba-nos*. The element that serves to convert the *tefillah* into a *korban* is the *berachah* of *Retzei*.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that when one recites *Retzei* in his

private *Shemoneh Esrei*, his *tefillah* is accepted by *Hashem* as if he had brought a *korban yachid* (of an individual). When a *shli-ach tzibbur* recites *Retzei*, the *chazaras hashatz* is then converted into a *korban tzibbur* (of the community). This is because of the concept of תפילת הציבור, which is distinct from תפילה בציבור. A תפילה בציבור is accomplished when each individual recites his own silent *Shemoneh Esrei* at the same time as the other members of a *minyan*. However, תפילת הציבור is the *chazaras hashatz*, in which the *chazan* serves as the representative of the *tzibbur* to offer one *tefillah* on behalf of the entire *tzibbur* as a whole. In this way, the *chazan* is comparable to a *Kohen* offering a *korban tzibbur* in the *Beis HaMikdash* – one *korban* on behalf of the entire *tzibbur*.

Rav Shlomo HaKohen (*Binyan Shlomo*, siman 1), *Av Beis Din* of Vilna in the late 1800's and *magi'ah* of the *Vilna Shas*, adds that this is the intent of the *tefillah*, ותערב לפניך עתירתנו כעולה וכקרבן, "May our entreaty become pleasing before You as an *olah*-offer- ing and as a sacrifice," which we recite just prior to *Birchas Kohanim* on *Yomim Tovim*. Absent *korbanos tzibbur*, we are unable to engage in *Birchas Kohanim*. This is really the theme of the beginning of the *berachah* of *Retzei* as well; we re-emphasize it in ותערב because the transformation of our *tefillas* into *korbanos* is indispensable to *Birchas Kohanim*.

We can also understand the requirement for the *Kohen* to ascend to the *duchan* (platform) during the recitation of *Retzei* in particular (*Sotah* 38b), since it is this *berachah* that establishes the *chazaras hashatz* as a *korban tzibbur*, which in turn makes it possible for the *Kohen* to *duchen*.

Thus, when the *shliach tzibbur* recites *Retzei* in the *chazaras hashatz*, the communal תפילת הציבור is transformed into a *korban tzibbur*. This occurs on the level of *d'oraisa*, allowing for the *Birchas Kohanim* to be *d'oraisa* as well, even nowadays. The *Birchas Kohanim* does, in fact, take place at the conclusion of *korbanos tzibbur*. [The *Mishkenos Ya'akov* adds that although *tefillah* on a daily basis may be only rabbinic in nature (according to the *Ramban*), if it is a *tefillah* with *chazaras hashatz* and *duchening*, that *tefillah* would attain the status of a *d'oraisa*.] Accordingly, we can well understand the necessity of the placement of *Birchas Kohanim* in the midst of the *chazaras hashatz*. Not only is the *duchening* not a *hefsek*, but it is integrally related to the *chazaras hashatz*. [See *Nefesh Harav*, 1994 ed., pp. 121-122; Rav Schachter on the *Parsha*, *Parshas Shemini*.]

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Teshuvah Before Creation

Rav and ABD of Iyve, Volkovysk, and Johannesburg

Seven Things Before Creation

Rosh Hashanah marks the creation of man and opens the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*. In the *Machzor* we say, זכרון ליום ראשון – "This is the day that marks the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day. On the day when Creation is renewed in judgment, man is summoned to renew himself through *Teshuvah*. The joining of these themes raises a fundamental question: why was *Teshuvah* necessary from the very beginning?

What power does *Teshuvah* possess that allows it to overturn a decree and straighten what sin has made crooked? *Chazal* taught, שבעה דברים, נבראו קודם שנברא העולם אלו הן תורה ותשובה גן עדן וגיהנם כסא הכבוד ובית המקדש – "Seven things were created before the world: Torah, *Teshuvah*, *Gan Eden*, *Gehinnom*, the Throne of Glory, the *Beis Hamikdash*, and the name of *Mashiach* (*Pesachim* 54a; *Nedarim* 39b). *Bereishis Rabbah* gives a related list. It names the *Torah* and the Throne of Glory as having been created before the world, and the *Avos*, Israel, the *Beis Hamikdash*, and the name of *Mashiach* as having arisen in the Divine thought. It then adds *Teshuvah* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4). Another Midrashic version adds *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom*. The lists differ in form, but each presents realities that had to precede the world because the world could not fulfill its purpose without them.

Torah is readily understood. *Chazal* say, *Chazal* say, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* looked into the *Torah* and created the world (Zohar, Terumah 161a; see Bereishis Rabbah 1:1). *Torah* is the plan of Creation. Why, however, must the other things precede the world? More particularly, why is *Teshuvah*, itself a *mitzvah* of the *Torah*, counted separately?

These things were not merely earlier in time. They express the Divine purpose that preceded Creation. *Chazal* distinguish between what was actually created and what first arose in the Divine thought, *יש מהם שנברא* - *Some were created, and some arose in thought to be created* (Bereishis Rabbah 1:4). That which appears last in action is first in intention. The realities that preceded the world reveal the end for which the world was brought into being.

Kayin, the First Penitent and the First Murderer

Kayin was the first sinner to discover the power of *Teshuvah*, and Adam learned it from him. When Adam later met Kayin, he asked what had become of his judgment. Kayin answered, *עשיתי תשובה ונתפשרתי* - *I performed Teshuvah, and my judgment was mitigated*. Adam struck his face and exclaimed, *כך היא כחה של תשובה ואני לא הייתי יודע* - *Such is the power of Teshuvah, and I did not know* (Bereishis Rabbah 22:13). Adam then entered the waters of the Gichon up to his neck and fasted for seven weeks, until his body became like a sieve. He prayed, *רבונו כל העולמים העבר נא חטאתי מעלי וקבל את תשובתי וילמדו כל הדורות שיש תשובה ואתה מקבל תשובת שבים* - *Master of all worlds, remove my sin from me and accept my Teshuvah, so that every generation will learn that Teshuvah exists and that You accept those who return. Hakadosh Baruch Hu* extended His right hand, removed Adam's sin, and accepted his *Teshuvah* (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 20). Kayin thus became a sign for all *baalei Teshuvah*.

Kayin was also the first murderer. The *Torah* states, *ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם* - *When they were in the field, Kayin rose against Hevel his brother and killed him* (Bereishis 4:8). *Chazal* identify three matters over which the brothers quarreled: possession of the world, the future site of the *Beis Hamikdash*, and the extra twin sister born with Hevel. In each account, Kayin coveted what had fallen to his brother. The first murder thus contained the three recurring causes of war: greed for land and wealth, religious rivalry, and uncontrolled desire. Kayin became a sign not only for penitents, but also for murderers. His descendant Tuval-Kayin refined Kayin's craft by fashioning weapons for killers, *He refined and perfected Kayin's craft by making weapons for murderers* (Rashi to Bereishis 4:22, based on the Midrash). From Kayin's first weapon would develop the increasingly terrible instruments of war.

The appetite for wealth and territory has no natural limit. One who has one hundred desires two hundred, and one who has two hundred desires four hundred (Koheles Rabbah 1:13). This hunger has repeatedly driven rulers and nations to seize the lands and possessions of others. Religious jealousy has likewise kindled war. The cross and the crescent became emblems beneath which nations fought and shed blood. Each claimed that its road alone led to Heaven, and each sought to force that road upon others.

The holy faith of Israel did not spread by the sword. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave the *Torah* to Israel so that the nations might merit through it, but that merit could never be imposed by force. Truth bears witness to itself. *Converts were not accepted in the days of David or Shlomo*, when conversion might have been sought for wealth, grandeur, or political advantage (Yevamos 24b). A sincere convert is welcomed only after his motives have been tested and he freely accepts the *Torah* even while Israel is afflicted and persecuted. The *Torah* can command, *Do not despise an Edomite, for he is your brother* (Devarim 23:8), because its path is not conquest by the sword.

The third cause is desire. The episodes of Dinah and the *pilegesh*

b'Givah, along with wars recorded among the nations, show how unrestrained passion can set entire peoples against one another. The ancient Midrashic account of two brothers thus contains the recurring sources of human bloodshed.

Regret and the Certainty That Teshuvah Is Possible

Yet the same Kayin who opened the path of murder also revealed the path of *Teshuvah*. Rabbeinu Yonah and the *Chovos HaLevavos* identify *regret and abandonment of sin* as foundations of *Teshuvah*. A person first recognizes the evil of his deed, then regrets it, and finally leaves it behind. Before any of these steps, however, he must believe that return is possible.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* explains that a person must know with certainty that *Teshuvah* is the remedy for rebellion and the path to healing from corrupt deeds. Through it, he can repair his error and recover what he has lost. Without this conviction, he may despair of *Hashem's* forgiveness and never seek pardon. That despair is expressed in the words, *כי פשענו* - *Our transgressions and sins are upon us, and through them we waste away; how then can we live* (Yechezkel 33:10).

Kayin's cry, *גדול עוני מנשוא* - *Is my sin too great to bear* (Bereishis 4:13), can be read both as confession and as a question. *Chazal* hear him pleading: You bear the upper worlds and the lower worlds; can You not bear my transgression? Adam had violated a single command and was expelled from *Gan Eden*. Kayin initially thought that the far graver sin of murder must place him beyond return. Yet he turned to *Hashem*, Who is *forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression*, and discovered that even his judgment could be mitigated.

Adam, by contrast, initially despaired. After his sin, *וידעו כי עירמם הם* - *they knew that they were naked* (Bereishis 3:7), which *Chazal* understand to mean that they had been stripped even of their one *mitzvah*. When confronted, Adam's words suggested that he had eaten and would eat again. Only after Kayin emerged from judgment with a measure of hope did Adam grasp the strength of *Teshuvah*.

From where does regret itself come? When *Hashem* said, *Let us make man* (Bereishis 1:26), *Chazal* explain that He consulted Heaven and earth, or all the works of the preceding days. Man therefore contains traits found throughout the created order. He resembles the angels in some ways and the animals in others (Chagigah 16a). Regret, however, has no model elsewhere in Creation. It is a unique faculty implanted in man from the wisdom that preceded the world.

David said, *אברך את ה' אשר יעצני אף לילות יסרוני כליותי* - *I bless Hashem Who counsels me; even at night my conscience instructs me* (Tehillim 16:7). The sinner's unrest is itself counsel from *Hashem*. Yeshayahu says, *אין שלום אמר ה' לרשעים* - *There is no peace, says Hashem, for the wicked* (Yeshayahu 48:22). The Divine Name used in this verse teaches a striking lesson: the fact that *Hashem* does not allow the wicked to feel at peace with evil is itself an expression of mercy. Their unease can become the beginning of return.

Hashem does not desire the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his way and live (Yechezkel 33:11). The end of *Teshuvah* is therefore peace. *Chazal* say, *גדול השלום שניתן לעושי תשובה* - *Great is peace, for it was granted to those who perform Teshuvah* (Sifrei Bamidbar 42:2). If a person repeats a sin, however, his conscience can grow dull, *כיון שעבר* - *Once a person commits a sin and repeats it, it becomes as though permitted to him* (Yoma 86b).

The Inner War and Three Levels of Teshuvah

The *Masorah* joins three verses through the word *מנערי* - *from his youth*: *For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth* (Bereishis 8:21); *a man of war from his youth*; and *Moav has been tranquil from his youth* (Yirmiyahu 48:11; Baal HaTurim to Bereishis 8:21). The *yetzer hara* begins its attack in youth, and man must therefore become a warrior in youth. If the *yetzer hara* defeats him, the struggle gives way to the false

tranquility of Moav, a life no longer disturbed by conscience. Of the wicked it is said, *For there are no pangs at their death, and their strength is sound* (Tehillim 73:4). Chazal explain that the wicked feel no fear or anguish over death; their heart is as broad and untroubled as a great hall (Shabbos 31b). Such calm is not spiritual health. A living conscience should ache when a person has betrayed it.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* describes three levels of *Teshuvah*. The highest is spontaneous return, when conscience awakens before punishment. This is *If you return, Israel, return to Me* (Yirmiyahu 4:1). The second comes when a person sees punishment befall others and takes warning. The lowest begins only after suffering reaches the sinner himself.

The *Torah* sets out these three levels in the passage of return (Devarim 30:1-10), proceeding from the lowest to the highest. First, after the blessings and curses have come upon Israel, *Hashem your G-d will restore your captivity and have mercy upon you* (Devarim 30:3). Next, *Hashem* places the curses upon Israel's enemies, *Hashem your G-d will place all these curses upon your enemies and pursuers, and you will return and listen to the voice of Hashem* (Devarim 30:7-8).

Finally comes return prompted neither by personal suffering nor by the downfall of others, *Hashem will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, when you listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d and observe His mitzvos and statutes written in this Torah, when you return to Hashem your G-d with all your heart and all your soul* (Devarim 30:9-10). The Masoretic paragraph break within verse 9 marks this highest form of return as a distinct stage.

Why Teshuvah Preceded the World

We can now understand why *Teshuvah* preceded Creation. The capacity for regret did not arise from anything within the created order. It came from the higher wisdom through which *Hashem* gave man a way back. Without that possibility, the world could not attain its purpose. The things that preceded the world are therefore the conditions of its continued existence and ultimate fulfillment. *Chazal* say that a person's evil inclination overpowers him each day and seeks to kill him; without the help of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, he could not prevail (Sukkah 52b). The voice of conscience is one form of that Divine help. It prevents a person from finding rest in evil and summons him to return.

Tehillim places the creation of the world beside the call to return: *Before the mountains were born and You brought forth earth and inhabited world; then, You reduce man to contrition and say, Return, children of man* (Tehillim 90:2-3). *Chazal* read *until the soul is crushed*. Before man ever sinned, the Divine call of *Teshuvah* already stood before the world.

The Sword of War and the Sword of Torah

Kayin is the sign both of murderers and of penitents. We, the children of this dreadful generation, living through the Second World War, have seen the craft of Kayin reach a horror no earlier age imagined. Millions have been killed, lands destroyed, and the surviving remnant driven from place to place. We ask with the verse, *Must the sword devour forever* (II Shmuel 2:26).

Even before Kayin killed Hevel, Adam had seen the symbol of the sword, *He stationed east of Gan Eden the cherubim and the flame of the ever-turning sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life* (Bereishis 3:24). *Chazal* describe a sword that turns upon man and burns him from head to foot and from foot to head. Adam asked who would rescue his children

from that flame. The sword before *Gan Eden* foreshadowed the warfare that would accompany human history.

Peace societies and international agreements have repeatedly promised to sheath the sword, only to fail. Are mankind's hopes for peace no more than a dream? Must the earth remain one vast battleground?

Israel heard at Sinai, *You shall not murder* (Shemos 20:13).

The *Neviim* foresaw a future in which *the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped* (Yeshayahu 35:5). Then, *They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift sword against nation, nor will they learn war any more* (Yeshayahu 2:4). That peace will come when *the earth is filled with knowledge of Hashem as water covers the sea* (Yeshayahu 11:9). The *Torah's* ways are *ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace* (Mishlei 3:17). The answer to Adam's fear is therefore *the sword of Torah*. Unlike the sword of Kayin, the sword of *Torah* conquers violence itself and prepares the world for peace.

The Cherubim and the Purity of Man

The *cherubim* appear again above the *Aron*. *Chazal* explain the name *keruv* as *like a child*, because in Bavel a child was called *ravya* (Sukkah 5b). One face was mature and one childlike, *a great face and a small face*. The *Torah* says, *The cherubim shall spread their wings upward, with their faces toward one another* (Shemos 25:20). From between them the Divine voice emerged.

When Israel came for the *regel*, the curtain was rolled back and the people were shown the cherubim embracing. They were told, *See how beloved you are before Hashem* (Yoma 54a). The child's face signifies man's original purity, *G-d made man upright, but they sought many calculations* (Koheles 7:29).

The blessing states, *Blessed are you when you enter and blessed are you when you depart* (Devarim 28:6). *Chazal* interpret this as a blessing that a person's departure from the world should resemble his arrival: just as he entered without sin, so should he leave without sin (Bava Metzia 107a). The two cherubim thus portray the innocent child and the mature person who has preserved, or recovered, that original purity.

One verse says that the cherubim faced one another, while another says that they faced the Temple. *Chazal* resolve the contradiction: when Israel does *Hashem's* will, the cherubim face one another; when Israel does not, they turn away (Bava Basra 99a). The mature face remains joined to the childlike face only when a person remains faithful to the purity of his beginning.

Man alone walks upright and possesses understanding. His stature urges him to lift his eyes, *Lift your eyes heavenward and see Who created these* (Yeshayahu 40:26). The upward-spread wings symbolize aspiration. Yet the cherubim stand over the *Aron*, because only *Torah* can preserve man's uprightness and purity. The voice that directs him comes from between the cherubim and above the *Torah*.

The cherubim at *Gan Eden* therefore do more than bar the road. Together with the turning sword, they reveal the two paths before humanity: the path of *Torah* and the path of violence. Adam was shown the generations that would follow him. *Torah* is the remedy prepared before the wound, the force capable of transforming a world of war into a world of life.

The *Torah* begins, *In the beginning G-d created* (Bereishis 1:1), and *Chazal* teach that *reishis refers to Torah*. The world was created for *Torah*. Kayin, too, received a sign. The *Tikkunei Zohar* states, *Hashem placed a sign for Kayin; He gave him the letter vav* (Tikkunei Zohar 118b). The

letter vav, whose numerical value is six, points to the *Torah* given on the sixth of Sivan.

Chazal say that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* made a condition with Creation, *If Israel accepts the Torah, you will endure; if not, I will return you to emptiness and void* (Shabbos 88a). Creation remained suspended until the sixth day of Sivan. The sign given to Kayin therefore pointed toward the *Torah* that can bring sin to an end, as Daniel says, *לכלא הפשע ולהחם - to restrain transgression, end sin, and bring everlasting righteousness* (Daniel 9:24).

The *Avos* and Israel likewise preceded the world in the Divine thought. *Because of Hashem's love for you and because He kept the oath He swore to your fathers* (Devarim 7:8). Rashi explains that the world was created for the *Torah*, which is called *reishis*, and for Israel, who are called *reishis* (Rashi to Bereishis 1:1).

Gan Eden, Gehinnom, and the Wall Between Them

G-d - גם את זה לעמת זה עשה האלקים - *Kohleles Rabbah* applies the verse (Kohleles 7:14) to *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom*. How far apart are they? One view says a handbreadth; Rabbi Yochanan says a wall; and the Sages say they are equal and look into one another, *They are equal, so that each may look into the other* (Kohleles Rabbah 7:14).

Usually *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* refer to reward and punishment after death. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai wept before his death because two roads lay before him, one leading to *Gan Eden* and the other to *Gehinnom*, and he did not know on which he would be led (Berachos 28b). *Chazal* likewise say, *Gan Eden is for the righteous and Gehinnom for the wicked* (Eruvin 19a).

Yet *Chazal* also use these names for conditions within this world. Rava warned scholars who learned *Torah* without proper inward commitment not to inherit two *Gehinnoms*, suffering in this world without acquiring life in the next (Yoma 72b). By contrast, the *Avos* tasted a measure of the World to Come during their lives (Bava Basra 16b). Yaakov entered with the fragrance of *Gan Eden*, while Esav entered with *Gehinnom*. Yaakov's way was peace. Even when angered by Lavan, *ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן - Yaakov became angry and contended with Lavan* (Bereishis 31:36), the Midrash observes that his contention consisted of conciliatory words, not blows (Bereishis Rabbah 74:10). Esav, by contrast, lived by the sword. The Midrash therefore also speaks of the *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* that human beings create on earth. The path of *Torah* and peace can make the world a garden; the path of Kayin and the sword can turn it into hell. *Hashem* placed both before man and commanded, *Choose life* (Devarim 30:19). Rashi compares this to a father who points out the best portion to his son and tells him to choose it.

Only one *tefach*, the width of a human hand, separates the two. The choice is expressed through human action. Another opinion says that a single wall stands between them. Walls separate brother from brother, nation from nation, rich from poor, ruler from subject, and oppressor from oppressed. The desire to rule erects these barriers, *עת אשר שלט האדם - the time when one man rules another to his harm* (Kohleles 8:9).

The *Navi* cries, *הלוא אב אחד לכלנו הלוא איל אחד בראנו מדוע נבגד איש באחיו - Have we not all one Father; did not one G-d create us; why then do we betray one another* (Malachi 2:10). If humanity heard that voice, its walls could fall and brotherhood could replace rivalry.

Sedom was overturned in anger, *אשר הפך ה' באפו ובחמתו - which Hashem overturned in His anger and wrath* (Devarim 29:22), because *ואנשי סדם - the people of Sedom were exceedingly wicked and sinful toward Hashem* (Bereishis 13:13). *Hashem* said, *זעקת סדם ועמרה כי - The outcry of Sedom and Amorah is great, and their sin is exceedingly heavy* (Bereishis 18:20).

Yechezkel identifies the social root of that evil, *נאון שבעת לחם ושלוח השקט*

Pride, fullness of bread, and tranquil ease were hers and her daughters', yet she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy (Yechezkel 16:49). *Sedom* was wealthy, but its people wanted no travelers and resolved, *נשכח את הרגל מבינותינו - Let us cause travelers to disappear from among us*. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* answered that He would cause them to be forgotten.

In our own days, nations have closed their gates to Jews fleeing destruction. Walls have risen between rich and poor, the sated and hungry, rulers and ruled. One nation's attempt to create a paradise for itself by excluding and subjugating others has helped create *Gehinnom* for the world.

The opinion that *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* are equal and gaze into one another describes peoples who live side by side while jealousy burns between them. Proximity without fellowship becomes rivalry. Envy destroys the peace of life until the garden itself becomes hell.

These are the *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* that had to precede the world, because man had to be shown both roads from the beginning. The *Torah* places before him *life and good, death and evil* (Devarim 30:15). The cherubim point toward life; the turning sword points toward death.

The variant lists of what preceded Creation can now be read as different arrangements of the same underlying ideas. One version names *Torah*, with the *Avos* and Israel, who receive and embody it, included within its purpose. Another names the *Avos* and Israel, while *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* are contained within the *Torah's* choice between life and death. In each version, the Midrash identifies the foundations established before the world so that it could reach its intended end.

The Choice That Preceded Creation

The world thus stands between two images: the cherubim and the turning sword. The sword is the inheritance of Kayin, the path of jealousy, conquest, and destruction. The cherubim stand above the *Aron*, their wings raised heavenward and their faces turned toward one another. They represent the world as it was meant to be, with man preserving the purity of his beginning and *Torah* directing his strength toward peace. Only a *tefach*, the measure of a human hand, separates *Gan Eden* from *Gehinnom*. The same hand can grasp a sword or perform a *mitzvah*; it can build a wall between one person and another or help bring that wall down. Yet man is not left to struggle alone. Before the world was created, *Hashem* prepared both the *Torah* that reveals the path of life and *Teshuvah* that allows one who has strayed to return to it.

זה היום תחלת מעשיך - *Rosh Hashanah* brings us back to that first purpose. *This is the day that marks the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day*. The day recalls not only the beginning of the world, but also the Divine purpose and mercy that preceded it. Before man could sin, *Hashem* prepared *Teshuvah*. Before the sword could dominate history, He gave the *Torah* that points toward life.

Kayin's sign is therefore a sign for every generation. The first murderer became the first to teach that even deliberate sin need not place a person beyond return. On *Rosh Hashanah*, as we stand before judgment, that lesson brings both hope and obligation. *Teshuvah* is possible, and therefore man must not surrender to despair or make peace with evil. The road back was prepared before the world itself, and *Hashem* still calls to every person, *Choose life*.

TESHUVA: A MITZVAH OR A GIFT?

Chaim Ozer Shulman

A threshold issue regarding *Teshuva* is whether the *Torah* imposes an obligatory *mitzvah* to do *Teshuva*, or whether *Teshuva* is primarily a gift from *Hashem* for a person who sinned and wants to be absolved of the sin and obtain atonement. The Ramban clearly takes the first approach. The Rambam, however, appears to take a different approach, though his language in different places requires careful analysis.

The Ramban: A Mitzvah of Teshuvah – וישבת עד ה' אלקיך מצוה שיצוה אותנו לעשות כן

The most direct source for Teshuva as an obligatory mitzvah is the Ramban (1194–1270) on Parshas Nitzavim. The Torah says 'ושבת עד ה' אלקיך ושמעת בקולו כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום – *for this mitzvah that I command you today is not hidden from you and is not distant* (Nitzavim 30:11). The Ramban explains that the phrase "this mitzvah" refers specifically to Teshuva. He writes *this commandment refers to the Teshuva mentioned above* and then adds *ושבת עד ה' אלקיך – מצוה שיצוה אותנו לעשות כן and you shall return to Hashem your G-d is a mitzvah by which He commands us to do so* (Ramban Al Hatorah Nitzavim 30:11). On this reading, Teshuva itself is an obligatory mitzvah to return to Hashem.

The Ramban also explains לעשותו בפיו ובלבבך *in your mouth and in your heart to do it* (Nitzavim 30:14), as referring to both verbal confession and inner return. He writes *אבותם בפייהם – וישבו בלבם אל ה' – that they will confess their sin and the sin of their fathers with their mouth and return in their heart to Hashem* (Ramban Nitzavim 30:11). Thus, for the Ramban, Vidui is included within the mitzvah of Teshuva itself.

Rabbeinu Yonah. Rabbeinu Yonah (c. 1200–1263) in Shaarei Teshuvah also speaks of Teshuva as an obligation. He writes *הזהרנו על התשובה בכמה מקומות בתורה – we were commanded on Teshuva in several places in the Torah* (Shaarei Teshuvah 1:1). This is essentially the same approach as the Ramban.

The Rambam: A Mitzvah of Vidui – כשיעשה תשובה וישב מחטאו חייב להתודות

The formulation of the Rambam (1138–1204) is more complex. In Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1, he writes *כל מצות שבתורה בין עשה בין לא תעשה אם עבר אדם על אחת מהן בין בזדון בין בשגגה כשיעשה תשובה וישב מחטאו חייב להתודות – all the mitzvos of the Torah whether positive or negative, if a person violated one of them whether intentionally or inadvertently, when one does Teshuva and returns from his sin, one is obligated to confess before the blessed G-d* (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1). He then concludes *עשה – this Vidui is a positive mitzvah* (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1). The crucial phrase is *כשיעשה תשובה*. The Rambam does not write that there is a mitzvah aseh to do Teshuva. He writes that when one does Teshuva, one must confess. This sounds as if the mitzvah counted by the Rambam is Vidui.

In Sefer HaMitzvos, Aseh 73, the Rambam writes *היא שצונו להתודות על – we are commanded to confess the transgressions and sins that we sinned before G-d and to say them together with Teshuva*. The commanded act is *להתודות – to confess*, but the confession is not detached from Teshuva. It must be *עם התשובה – together with Teshuva* (Rambam Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh 73). The Rambam also writes that *כל מיני העונות הגדולים והקטנים ואפילו מצות עשה – all kinds of sins, great and small, and even failures of positive commandments, require confession* (Rambam Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh 73). The Chinuch also states in Mitzvah 364 that *מצות דודי על החטא שנצטוונו להתודות לפני השם על כל החטאים שחטאנו בעת שנתנחם עליהן – We are commanded to confess before G-d our sins that we have sinned, at such time that we feel remorse for them*.

A Major Approach to the Rambam: Teshuvah Is Not the Counted Mitzvah

The Minchas Chinuch (R' Yosef Babad (1801–1874)) takes the Rambam's conditional language literally. He writes *מבואר בדבריו דאין התשובה מצוה עשה דלא כתב מצות עשה שיעשה תשובה רק אם בא לעשות מצות עשה – it is clear from his words that Teshuva is not a positive mitzvah, for he did not write that there is a positive mitzvah to do Teshuva, but only that if one comes to do the mitzvah one should confess*

with his mouth. He then states *עונש כלל על מה שלא עשה תשובה רק על העבירה שעבר – if one did not do Teshuva, one has no punishment at all for not doing Teshuva, but only for the aveirah one committed* (Minchas Chinuch Mitzvah 364 sec. 1). The punishment remains for the original sin; what is absent is an additional punishment for violating a separate mitzvah aseh of Teshuva.

On this approach, Vidui is the Torah-defined form of Teshuva and kapparah. The Torah says in Parshas Naso *והתודו את חטאתם אשר עשו – and they shall confess the sin that they committed* (Bamidbar 5:7). According to the Minchas Chinuch, this does not mean that the sinner is automatically obligated to enter the process of Teshuva as a new mitzvah. It means that once one wants or needs to do Teshuva and obtain kapparah, the Torah commands that Teshuva be done through Vidui. The Meshech Chochmah (Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843–1926)) gives the conceptual reason why the Rambam may not learn like the Ramban. He asks *איך נחשבת למצוה שישוב מכסלו ולא יחטא עוד הלא בלא המצוה – how can it be considered a mitzvah that one return from his folly and no longer sin, since even without this mitzvah he is already commanded not to violate the mitzvos of Hashem* (Meshech Chochmah Vayeilech 31:17). After one sinned, the original command not to sin remains. Therefore, the Torah does not need a new command simply to tell him not to continue violating the old command. The separate post-sin mitzvah is Vidui. As the Meshech Chochmah writes, *if one sinned and leaves his sin, there is a mitzvah to confess* (Meshech Chochmah Vayeilech 31:17). The Yismach Moshe (Rav Moshe Teitelbaum of Ujhel (1759–1841)) makes a similar point. Since the essence of Teshuva is regret, it is difficult to command regret itself. If the person already regrets the sin, the command is unnecessary; if he does not regret it, he remains in rebellion. Nor is a separate command needed merely to stop sinning, since he is already commanded not to sin. The special command is that once the person regrets and is no longer rebelling, *he should confess verbally* (Yismach Moshe, Parshas Naso, s.v. והתודו את חטאתם).

Why Teshuvah Is Still Crucial

This does not mean that, according to this reading of the Rambam, a person can safely ignore Teshuva. A sin creates guilt, distance, and liability. If the person does not do Teshuva, the sin remains unresolved. The Rambam himself writes *ישתדל האדם לעשות תשובה ולנער כפיו מחטאיו כדי – a person should strive to do Teshuva and shake his hands free of his sins so that he dies as a baal Teshuva and merits the life of the World to Come* (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 7:1), and *לפיכך ישב מחטאיו מיד – therefore one should return from his sins immediately* (Hilchos Teshuvah 7:2). Thus, even if Teshuva is not separately counted, the Rambam treats it as an urgent spiritual necessity: the means of repairing the sin and beginning the process of kapparah.

Rav Yitzchak Blazer, Reb Itzele Peterburger (1837–1907) in Kochvei Ohr, goes one step further. Rabbeinu Yonah writes *כאשר יתאחר לשוב – when he delays returning from his sin, his punishment becomes very heavy upon him each day*, because *המנוס – the escape is Teshuva* (Shaarei Teshuvah 1:2). Rav Yitzchak Blazer in Kochvei Ohr applies this to the Rambam's beinoni in Hilchos Teshuvah 3:3. Even if failure to do Teshuva is not a separate sin according to the Rambam as understood by the Minchas Chinuch, once Teshuva is available and the sinner refuses to use it, the failure to repair increases the severity of the sin. On Yom Kippur, he writes, *failure to do Teshuva is a very great and awesome sin added to all his sins* (Kochvei Ohr siman 5).

The Rambam's כותרת and the Kiryas Sefer

The strongest textual challenge to the Minchas Chinuch is the Rambam's הלכות תשובה מצוה, heading, to Hilchos Teshuvah. The heading reads *Hilchos Teshuvah contains one positive mitzvah, namely that the sinner return from his sin before*

Hashem and confess (Rambam heading to Hilchos Teshuvah). This sounds much like the Ramban, because the mitzvah is not described as Vidui alone.

The Kiryas Sefer, written by the Rav Moshe Trani, the Mabib (c. 1500-1580), reads the heading at face value. He writes *התשובה והידידי מצוה אחד* – *Teshuva and Vidui are one mitzvah* (Kiryas Sefer Hilchos Teshuvah perek 1 mitzvah 16). He explains שאין ידידי בלי תשובה כי מי – *there is no Vidui without Teshuva, because one who confesses but does not resolve in his heart to return from his sin is like one who immerses while holding a sheretz* (Kiryas Sefer Hilchos Teshuvah perek 1 mitzvah 16). At the same time, *Vidui is the completion of Teshuva* (Kiryas Sefer Hilchos Teshuvah perek 1 mitzvah 16).

Those who learn in the Rambam that Vidui is the mitzvah and not Teshuva might explain the heading as the מסגרת – *overall framework* of the mitzvah: the mitzvah concerns a sinner returning from his sin before Hashem, and the Torah-required form of that return is Vidui. But the operative halachic definition appears in Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1 כשיעשה: *ידיו זה מצוה עשה* and especially *התשובה ושוב מחטאו חייב להתודות*.

A second possible answer is suggested by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903–1993) in *Al HaTeshuvah*, in his discussion of ידידי. Rav Soloveitchik explains that according to the Rambam, the מעשה המצוה is Vidui, while the קיום המצוה is Teshuva. Thus, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1 identifies the mitzvah act, *כשיעשה תשובה ושוב מחטאו חייב להתודות*. The שיישוב החוטא מחטאו: *לפני ה' ויתודה*. On this approach, Vidui is the act through which Teshuva is fulfilled before Hashem. On a different reading, both the מעשה המצוה and the קיום המצוה are Vidui, while Teshuva is the necessary setting or condition for that Vidui.

Is Vidui Optional Once One Does Teshuvah?

The Minchas Chinuch appears to go a step further and suggest that even when one is attempting Teshuva, Vidui remains optional in the sense that the person has not violated a separate chiyuv by failing to confess, though the Teshuva will presumably fail. He writes *אם יעשה תשובה הי' על* – *if one does Teshuva it must be in this form, namely to confess*, and *אינה מצוה מחויבת רק דהתורה כתבה דתשובה אם ירצה לעשות יעשה על* – *it is not an obligatory mitzvah; rather, the Torah wrote that Teshuva, if one wants to do it, must be done in this form* (Minchas Chinuch Mitzvah 364 sec. 1).

Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin (1888–1978), in *HaMoadim BaHalachah*, strongly objects to this further chidush. He cites the Rambam's language in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, *חובה לחוטא על כל חטא שחטא* – *an obligation upon the sinner for every sin that one sinned*, and describes the Minchas Chinuch's position as *בלתי מתקבל על הדעת* – *difficult to accept* (HaMoadim BaHalachah, Yom Kippur ch. 1). This does not necessarily mean that Rav Zevin holds Teshuva itself is a separate mitzvah chiyuv like the Ramban. His point is narrower: once one has sinned, Vidui itself is a real obligation, not merely an optional procedure.

Yom Kippur as a Separate Obligation

Yom Kippur may be different even according to the Minchas Chinuch's reading of the Rambam. In Hilchos Teshuvah 2:7, the Rambam writes *יום הכיפורים הוא זמן תשובה לכל יחידי ולרבים והוא קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל לפיכך* – *Yom Kippur is the time of Teshuva for all, for the individual and the community, and it is the culmination of pardon and forgiveness for Israel; therefore everyone is obligated to do Teshuva and confess on Yom Kippur* (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 2:7). Here the Rambam does not use the conditional language of *כשיעשה תשובה*. He writes *חייבים הכל* – *everyone is obligated*. That sounds like a day-specific obligation of Yom Kippur.

The source and character of this Yom Kippur obligation require some care. Rabbeinu Yonah explicitly derives a special Biblical mitzvah of Teshuva on Yom Kippur from the Torah's description of the day: *היום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו* – *for on this day He*

shall atone for you to purify you from all your sins; before Hashem you shall become pure (Vayikra 16:30). He writes *אדם את רוחו לחזור בתשובה ביום הכיפורים שנאמר מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו* – *there is a Biblical positive mitzvah for a person to awaken his spirit and return in Teshuva on Yom Kippur, as the verse says, from all your sins, before Hashem, you shall become pure* (Shaarei Teshuvah 2:14). The Rambam does not cite *לפני ה' תטהרו* as the source of Hilchos Teshuvah 2:7. His formulation nevertheless fits the same structure: because Yom Kippur is *זמן תשובה לכל* – *the time of Teshuva for all* and *קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל* – *the culmination of pardon and forgiveness for Israel*, the day itself requires Teshuva and Vidui as part of its avodah of kapparah and tahrarah.

Mitzvah and Gift Are Not Opposites

There is, however, a deeper sense in which Teshuva remains a gift even according to the Ramban. My great-grandfather, Rav Yitzchok Kossowsky (1877–1951) in *Shabbos uMoed*, explains that if an aveirah itself creates spiritual damage, regret after the act should no more erase that damage than regret can undo the effects of poison already consumed. The very possibility of Teshuva is therefore an expression of Hashem's extraordinary mercy, a power of repair beyond the ordinary order. In the language of Chazal, Hakadosh Baruch Hu answers the sinner *let him do Teshuva and gain atonement*. Thus, the alternatives in the title are not really opposites: according to the Ramban, Teshuva is indeed a mitzvah, but the fact that Hashem allows it to erase the imprint of the past is itself one of His greatest gifts.

Conclusion

The disagreement is not whether Teshuva is necessary. All agree that without Teshuva the sin remains unrectified and the future has not yet been changed. The question is whether the Torah counts entering the Teshuva process as a separate mitzvah, as the Ramban and Rabbeinu Yonah hold, or whether, according to the Rambam as understood by the Minchas Chinuch, Meshech Chochmah, and Yismach Moshe, the counted post-sin mitzvah is Vidui, the Torah-required expression of Teshuva when the sinner seeks repair and kapparah. The Kiryas Sefer reads the Rambam more broadly, as one integrated mitzvah of Teshuva and Vidui.

With Rosh Hashanah upon us, the practical lesson is therefore sharper. Whether Teshuva is itself the counted mitzvah or the indispensable setting for Vidui, Hashem has given us a path to repair what was done and redirect what comes next. The obligation and the gift point in the same direction: back toward Hashem.

Adapted by CS from

Michtav MeEliyahu v2 by Rav Eliyahu Dessler (1892–1953)

Malchuyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros

The three central brachos of Rosh Hashanah Mussaf – *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* – form a single unit. Indeed, the halachah treats them as an integrated unit: the brachos are mutually indispensable, and their order is significant (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 593:1; Mishnah Berurah 593:5). Chazal give the inner structure of that unit: *אמר הקב"ה אמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכויות ושופרות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם וזכרונות* – *Hakadosh Baruch Hu said: Recite before Me on Rosh Hashanah Malchuyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros. Malchuyos, so that you make Me King over you; Zichronos, so that your remembrance rise before Me for good; and through what, through the shofar* (Rosh Hashanah 16a; see also the Mussaf structure in Rosh Hashanah 32a-32b).

These are not three disconnected themes. They describe one movement of the soul. *Malchuyos* asks what it means truly to accept Hashem as King. *Zichronos* asks what it means for the *Akeidah* and the deeds of earlier generations to stand before Hashem together with us. *Shofaros* is the power that awakens that remembrance and carries the avodah to its

deepest point: our own *mesirus nefesh* and our acceptance of Hashem's *din* out of love.

Malchuyos - From Submission to Unity

The Gemara records a dispute over which *pesukim* may be counted among the verses of *Malchuyos*. Regarding שמע ישראל - *Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One* (Devarim 6:4), R' Yosi says that it is a *pasuk* of *Malchus*, while R' Yehudah says that it is not. They disagree similarly regarding ידעת היום והשבת אל לבבך כי ה' הוא - *You shall know today and take it to heart that Hashem is G-d in the heavens above and on the earth below, there is no other* (Devarim 4:39), and אתה הראת לדעת כי ה' הוא - *You were shown in order to know that Hashem is G-d, there is none besides Him* (Devarim 4:35) (Rosh Hashanah 32b). [CS: Rav Yitzchok Hutner notes that the dispute between R' Yosi and R' Yehudah regarding שמע ישראל is particularly striking because Shema is itself the classic expression of *kabbalas ol Malchus Shamayim*. How, then, can R' Yehudah maintain that it is not a *pasuk* of *Malchuyos*? Rav Hutner points to this difficulty in Pachad Yitzchak and distinguishes between two concepts that can easily be confused: *kabbalas hamalchus*, accepting the authority of the King, and *hamlachah v'hachtarah*, actively crowning Him as King. Shema unquestionably accomplishes the first. R' Yehudah can nevertheless maintain that the special *Malchuyos* of Rosh Hashanah requires the second. Rav Hutner accordingly reads אמרו לפני - *Recite Malchuyos before Me so that you will crown Me King over you* - quite literally: the recitation is to become an act of coronation, not merely an acknowledgment of authority (Pachad Yitzchak, Rosh Hashanah, Maamar 24). Rav Dessler approaches the same dispute from a different direction, focusing on what this coronation must accomplish within the human heart.]

The disagreement reveals two very subtle forms of *Malchus*, and with them two paths in the *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah.

There is first *mora shel Malchus*, awe of the King. Even this can operate on more than one level. A person may fear the King enough to push aside the fulfillment of his desires, while the desires themselves remain hidden and alive within his heart. He still wants what he wants, but he restrains himself because he accepts the authority of the King. The desire has been suppressed, not uprooted.

There is a deeper form of that same awe. The awareness of the King's authority can become so absolute that the heart no longer experiences fulfillment of the forbidden desire as a real possibility. Once the heart feels that the desired act is simply unavailable, the desire itself can fade and disappear. Rav Dessler compares this to the Ibn Ezra's explanation of You shall not covet (Shemos 20:14). A commoner does not ordinarily covet the king's daughter, because in his inner world marrying her is not a possibility. In the same way, sufficiently powerful awareness of Hashem's Kingship can remove a forbidden desire from the realm of possibility until the desire itself is extinguished.

Yet this remains an *avodah* whose defining qualities are *kefiyah atzmis* and *kabbalas ol*: self-compulsion and acceptance of the yoke. The starting point is still that I possess a will of my own, and I bring it under the rule of the King.

There is, however, a still higher form of crowning Hashem: *hamlachas hamelech b'avahah*, accepting His Kingship through love. Here the heart does not experience Hashem's will as an external force compelling it to surrender. Rather, its deepest desire is itself to fulfill the will of the King. Other desires lose their significance because they are overwhelmed by a greater desire, the desire to do Hashem's will. This is the level of *achdus v'avahah*, unity and love.

This is the depth of שמע ישראל - *Malchuyos, so that you make Me King over you*. Complete *Malchus* means that no independent desire remains in the heart apart from the longing to fulfill Hashem's will with love.

This also explains why the climax of the *pesukim* of *Malchuyos* is שמע ישראל - *Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One*. The Shema is not merely another declaration that Hashem possesses sovereign power. It expresses *achdus gemurah*, complete unity. Any separation, even the finest trace of an independent desire existing only in thought, is already a blemish in that unity. If a private will remains standing apart from Hashem's will, then His Kingship has not yet penetrated the whole heart.

Rav Dessler understands R' Yehudah's position as emphasizing the subjugation of our will through a vivid awareness of the awe of Hashem's Kingship. He understands R' Yosi's position, which is accepted in *halachah*, as pointing toward a still higher *Malchus* toward which we should aspire is *hisbatlus* before Hashem's unity through love. The goal is not merely to conquer a competing will, but ultimately to cease experiencing ourselves as possessing a will independent of His.

The Shofar of Malchuyos

Chazal continue: מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרוכם לפני - *Malchuyos, so that you make Me King over you; Zichronos, so that your remembrance rise before Me for good; and through what, through the shofar*. The shofar therefore serves each part of the day's *avodah*. What is the shofar of *Malchuyos*?

Its task is to awaken an overwhelming perception of Hashem's Kingship. Through the sound of the shofar, a person is to picture the majesty of the King until no point remains within the heart to which the *yetzer hara* can attach itself and turn him aside. This is the inner meaning of *irbuv hasatan*, the confounding of the Satan, of which the Gemara says that his words become stopped (Rosh Hashanah 16b). The Satan's prosecution is not merely an accusation made somewhere outside us. Its inner counterpart is the very seduction of the *yetzer hara* within the heart. If that foothold disappears, the prosecution loses its basis.

Here Rav Dessler insists that the standard is extraordinarily fine, *k'chut hasa'arah*, literally as thin as a hair. The Gemara teaches that a cow's horn may not be used for shofar because it evokes the sin of the Golden Calf, and אין קטיגור נעשה סניגור - *a prosecutor cannot become a defender* (Rosh Hashanah 26a).

At first this seems difficult. Would a person who hears a cow's horn actually begin thinking about the *Chet HaEgel* and then be drawn toward sin? Rav Dessler answers that the danger does not need to reach conscious thought. Because the cow is the mother of the calf, the faintest association can be registered deep within the heart. Through that almost imperceptible suggestion, the *yetzer hara* can gain an opening.

Chazal do not describe this merely as a remote possibility. They state categorically אין קטיגור נעשה סניגור - *a prosecutor cannot become a defender*. Beneath the threshold of conscious awareness, every subtle hint can be absorbed. Even *mashehu min hamashehu*, the slightest trace of an association, can implant a corresponding trace of temptation. That is why the cow's horn is disqualified. The problem is not simply that the ceremony should avoid an embarrassing reminder of an ancient sin. Complete *Malchus* requires *yichud*, an inner unity in which no point of resistance to Hashem's will remains. If even the finest subconscious suggestion can provide the *yetzer hara* with a foothold, then even that infinitesimal division compromises the completeness of Hashem's Kingship.

We generally measure *avodah* by conscious choice: Did I obey Hashem? Did I overcome the temptation? Rav Dessler is describing something deeper. The aspiration of *Malchuyos* reaches beneath behavior and even beneath conscious thought, into the hidden movements of the heart. The shofar must proclaim Hashem's Kingship so completely that even there no rival attachment remains.

Zichronos - When the Past Becomes Present

There are several levels of memory. A person may simply remember something. Something may be deeply engraved in his memory. But there

is a still higher form of remembering: the event may be so vivid that it is as though it were alive and taking place before him now.

Hashem's *zechirah* must be understood in this highest sense. Rav Dessler is not describing Divine memory as the retrieval of something that might have been forgotten. Rather, he describes the person and his deeds as standing before Hashem without the temporal distance that characterizes human memory. *Zikaron* means that the person and his deeds stand before Hashem as a living present reality.

This idea is reflected in the Rosh Hashanah davening: זכר כל היצור לפניך - *The remembrance of every created being comes before You.*

Everything comes *lifanecha*, before You, now. The same idea appears when we invoke the *Akeidah*: וְתִרְאֶה לִפְנֵי עֲקִידָה - *And may the Akeidah appear before You.* It is as though Avraham Avinu stands before Hashem at this moment and binds his son.

Rav Dessler takes the idea further: all generations and all their deeds stand before Hashem in one encompassing view. כולם נסקרים בסקירה אחת - *all are surveyed in a single glance.* In this sense, the deeds performed from the six days of Creation onward stand together before Him as one present reality.

That means that I, too, stand there. I stand before Hashem with my sins at the very same time, as it were, that the holy Avos stand before Him sanctifying His Name through *mesirus nefesh*. Their *Kiddush Hashem* and my conduct are present in the same spiritual scene.

This makes the invocation of *zechus avos* and *zechus haAkeidah* far more demanding than we usually imagine. We naturally assume that the presence of Avraham and Yitzchak can only help us. But is their presence necessarily a merit for me? If, in the very same *maamad*, the Avos sanctify Hashem's Name through complete *mesirus nefesh* while I, chas v'shalom, do the opposite, then their greatness may make my failure more conspicuous rather than less.

Rav Dessler illustrates this with Lot. Lot was afraid of remaining in Avraham's vicinity because he knew that next to Avraham his own deficiencies would become much more visible. Greatness creates a standard of comparison. A flaw that may not appear so glaring elsewhere becomes painfully evident when placed beside Avraham Avinu. ומה נענה - *and what can we answer after him?*

The *Akeidah* therefore does not automatically become our merit merely because we descend from Avraham Avinu. For *zechus haAkeidah* to join with us, the *Akeidah* must first be remembered by us in Rav Dessler's fullest sense: רק אם העקידה זכורה לנו והיא מציאות בלבנו - *only if the Akeidah is remembered by us and is a reality within our hearts.*

We must look toward Avraham Avinu and learn to include ourselves within his *Akeidah* through our own measure of *mesirus nefesh*. We are not asked to reproduce Avraham's test literally. Each person must surrender something of himself, according to his level, על תורתו ועל עבודתו - *for His Torah and for His service.* We make the *Akeidah* present by demonstrating in our own lives that Hashem's will matters more than our private will.

Only then can we truly become part of the *Akeidah*, and only then can its merit be joined to ours when Hashem sees the chain of all the generations as one. The favorable *zikaron* of Rosh Hashanah is therefore not simply a request that Hashem look backward at the greatness of our ancestors. We must look backward ourselves until their past becomes our present.

This gives deeper meaning to the conclusion of the bracha of *Zichronos*: וְעִקְדֵת יִצְחָק לִזְרֹנּוֹ הַיּוֹם בְּרַחֲמִים תִּזְכּוֹר - *And may You remember today with mercy the Akeidah of Yitzchak for his descendants.* The prayer is that the *Akeidah* stand before Hashem as our merit, but Rav Dessler teaches what it means for us to be capable of standing within that merit.

Shofaros - The Secret of the Teruah

And through what does *Zichronos* become alive? ובמה בשופר - *And through what? Through the shofar.* This is the defining power of the shofar: it awakens *Zichronos*.

Rav Saadia Gaon lists ten meanings of the mitzvah of shofar. Among them is להזכירנו עקידת יצחק שמסר נפשו לשמים וכן אנחנו נקבל על עצמנו למסור - *To remind us of the Akeidah of Yitzchak, who surrendered his life to Heaven, so that we too accept upon ourselves to give ourselves over for the sanctification of His Name, and our remembrance will rise before Him for good.*

The wording is exact. The shofar does not merely remind Hashem of the *Akeidah*. It reminds us. We are to accept upon ourselves our own *mesirus nefesh*, and then we can be remembered for good through the remembrance of the *Akeidah*. The shofar turns the ancestral memory into a present commitment.

But Rav Dessler then moves to an even higher dimension. The Zohar comments on אשרי העם יודעי תרועה - *Fortunate is the people who know the teruah* (Tehillim 89:16). The pasuk does not say those who hear the *teruah* or those who sound it, but those who *know* it. The Zohar explains that these are those who know *raza d'teruah*, the secret of the *teruah*.

For Rav Dessler, this knowing is not intellectual knowledge alone. *Sod* belongs to the heart. To know the secret of *teruah* means that the heart itself rises to the spiritual level expressed by it. Such people can come to *they walk in the light of Your countenance* (Tehillim 89:16). The Zohar identifies this with the primordial light, the *or haganuz*, which Hakadosh Baruch Hu concealed for the *tzaddikim*. A shofar in its full spiritual meaning is therefore connected to the light of the World to Come.

What is this hidden secret that the heart must know? The Zohar points to *You shall break them with a rod of iron* (Tehillim 2:9).

Rav Dessler explains that the secret of *teruah* is *kabbalas yissurim b'ahavah*, accepting suffering with love.

This is an extraordinarily demanding level. It is not merely passive resignation to what cannot be changed. A person accepts Hashem's judgment so completely that he can receive *yissurim* with love, even with joy, because he recognizes that Hashem's *din* is true. If he has sinned and distorted his relationship with Hashem, then his concern is no longer simply to escape pain. He wants truth restored. At the highest level, he can even desire that Hashem correct and punish him according to the truth of His judgment.

This is a secret hidden from the ordinary human heart. It can be grasped only by one who reaches a very high spiritual level. Chazal describe such people as שמחים ביסורים - *rejoicing in suffering* and apply to them ואוהביו - *Those who love Him are like the sun emerging in its strength* (Shoftim 5:31; Yoma 23a).

Such joy can come only from *ahavas Hashem*. Rav Dessler calls it *yeti'ah min hahester*, emerging from concealment, comparable to the sun emerging from its covering. While a person remains within *hester*, suffering is experienced only as darkness and loss. When love of Hashem becomes sufficiently deep, he can perceive even *din* as an expression of Hashem's truth and therefore as a path back toward closeness.

When Din Itself Becomes Rachamim

The Midrash gives this idea its central Rosh Hashanah formulation. On אשרי העם יודעי תרועה - *Fortunate is the people who know the teruah*, R' Yoshiyah asks: do the nations of the world not know how to sound a horn? Rather, Klal Yisrael knows how to appease its Creator through the *teruah*, so that He rises from the Throne of Judgment to the Throne of Mercy והופך להם מדת הדין למדת רחמים - *and transforms for them the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy* (Vayikra Rabbah 29:3-4).

The precision is important. It is not merely that mercy replaces judgment. *Middas hadin itself* is transformed into *middas harachamim*. Rav Dessler finds this idea made explicit in an explanation cited in the Siddur of R' Yaakov Maltzan in the name of the Ya'aros Devash (Derush 6).

The Ya'aros Devash explains that the shofar is itself the sounding of *din*. The prosecuting forces are not permitted to enter before the heavenly court until the shofar is heard. Once its sound is heard, judgment begins and the forces of prosecution are permitted to present their claims. The shofar therefore announces, in effect, הנה יום הדין - Behold, the Day of Judgment has arrived.

And precisely this is what confounds the Satan. The defendant himself is demanding that judgment begin. He says, as it were, דונו לי דינא - Judge my case. Why would a person summon the judgment against himself? Because he is no longer fleeing from Hashem's truth. He accepts upon himself the *din* that his sins deserve.

This same principle is expressed in *Nefilas Apayim*, where a person symbolically gives over body and soul to receive the judgment of Heaven as it should truly be received. When he accepts *din* below, Hashem's anger is quieted and, as it were, His mercy is aroused. Chazal express the principle as במקום שיש דין למטה אין דין למעלה - Where there is judgment below, there is no judgment above.

This is not a technical escape from judgment. It is a transformation of the person's relationship to judgment. So long as the self stands against Hashem's *din* and demands to be protected from it, judgment remains something opposed to him. When he accepts Hashem's judgment out of love, the resistance itself is removed. The *din* that seemed to distance him from Hashem becomes a means of returning to Him. In that sense, *middas hadin* itself becomes *middas harachamim*.

One Avodah: Malchuyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros

We can now see why the three brachos form one unit, and why their order matters. *Malchuyos* is the foundation. We begin by accepting Hashem's Kingship and work toward the nullification of every independent desire before *hadar ge'ono*, the majesty of His greatness. At its highest level this is not merely obedience through fear, but *hisbatlusi b'avavah*, the unification of our will with His.

Then comes *Zichronos*. We understand that the *Akeidah* and the *mesirus nefesh* of all the generations stand before Hashem as present realities. But their merit can truly join us only when we place ourselves within the same chain by bringing some measure of their *mesirus nefesh* into our own Torah and avodah.

Finally comes *Shofaros*. The shofar awakens that *zikaron* and calls us to make it our own. At its deepest level, the *teruah* asks us to accept not only Hashem's will but His *din* itself, and to accept it out of love and out of the longing to sanctify His Name.

This is the meaning of וגילי ברעדה - Rejoice with trembling (Tehillim 2:11). The trembling is real, because Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment. But the joy is also real, because the deepest acceptance of Hashem's Kingship removes the distance between the servant and the King. When Klal Yisrael accepts His *din* מתוך אהבת השם - out of love of Hashem - and מתוך השאיפה לקדש שמו - out of the longing to sanctify His Name - it becomes possible for judgment itself to open into mercy.

Thus, the progression of Rosh Hashanah is complete. *Malchuyos* removes the independent will. *Zichronos* joins us to the self-surrender of the Avos and of all the generations. *Shofaros* carries that surrender to its highest form, where even Hashem's judgment is received as the will of the King whom we love. Then *middas hadin* is not merely set aside in favor of mercy. It is itself transformed into *middas harachamim*.

from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>

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The Night I Choose Trust Over Despair

Coronation Night: On the Essence of Rosh Hashanah

Rabbi YY Jacobson

"Coronation Night" – that is how one of the great spiritual masters would define the night of Rosh Hashanah.

In a 1974 sermon, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soleveitchik (1903-1993), one of the great Jewish thinkers of the last century, related that when he was a

young child learning in cheder (Jewish day school), in the Russian village of Chaslavitch, in the days preceding Rosh Hashanah, he could recognize in his teacher an extraordinary sense of trepidation.

"Our teacher, who was a Chabad Chassid (disciple), said to us: 'Do you know what Rosh Hashanah is? The Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek would call the night of Rosh Hashanah – 'Karanatzia Nacht' ('Coronation Night').

"Do you know whom we will be coronating?" the teacher asked the children.

The young Soleveitchik prodigy responded in jest: "Nicholas." (This was several years before the 1917 Russian Revolution, when Nicholas still served as the Russian czar).

And the poor teacher of Chaslavitch responded: "Nicholas? He was coronated years ago. Why do we need to coronate him again? Besides, he?! He is not a real king..."

(This was the authentic Jewish internal pride a poor Jew had in the shtetl, something sorely lacking in so many successful and affluent Jews).

"Tonight, my dear children, we coronate G-d; we place a crown on G-d..."

"And do you know who places the crown?" The teacher continued.

"Yankel the Tailor, Berel the Shoemaker, Zalman the water-carrier, Yossel the painter, Dovid the butcher..."

Rabbi Soloveitchik concluded: Over the years, I have given many sermons and written many discourses on the concept of Rosh Hashanah, but nothing ever made me feel the true depth and power of the day as the words of my childhood teacher. Every year, when I recite in the Rosh Hashanah prayers the words, 'Rule over the whole world in Your glory,' I remember my teacher in Chaslavitch.

The Essence

How much of Judaism is compressed in this brief conversation between the teacher and students? In a few words, a poverty-stricken Jewish teacher in a small shtetl in Russia gave his seven-year-old students the core, the essence, the very marrow of Jewish existence, of Jewish thought and experience.

Now he needed not explain to them why they should marry Jewish girls, continue living as Jews, be proud of their Jewishness, as so many teachers and educators today. It was more than obvious: Who would want to miss out on the opportunity of coronating G-d...

Why Bother?

But why does G-d need us to coronate Him? If G-d created us, does He really need us to declare Him king? He is the boss regardless.

And what does it mean that G-d is our king? Imagine you assemble 15,000,000 ants and declare yourself king over them. When 50,000 of them then turn left instead of right, you kill them in a single instance. Does that make you king over them? G-d gave us our entire existence; our entire being and life force are from Him. Relative to Him, we are far smaller and far less significant than an ant in the presence of a human.

Can He then be our king? Is that not an insult to Him?

Yet here lay one of the great and daring ideas of Judaism. G-d, the perfect endless one, desired to be king not through power or by the dictates of nature. He desired to be chosen as king; He wanted a relationship with someone distinct from Him who would freely choose to construct a bond with G-d. It is our opportunity to choose trust, love, and oneness.

So an infinite, omnipotent G-d suspends His infinity, suppresses His endlessness, and conceals His omnipotence, to allow space for an intelligent, independent, and self-oriented human being who is then capable of choosing G-d as his or her king.

And where do I coronate Hashem? In those very spaces where I do not feel His presence, where I feel so detached, alone, and afraid, in the intimate spaces of my brain and heart that do not trust and do not feel infinite oneness with infinite bliss. That is where G-d "can't" do the coronation. He, so to speak, "needs" me to choose trust and connection.

It is in that space where I feel so separate and anxious, that I, and only I, can coronate Him.

The Night

This, the spiritual masters explained, is the meaning of Rosh Hashanah, the day when the first human was created. It is the day when small, frail, vulnerable, and lowly human beings invite G-d to serve as their King. G-d could place His own crown on His head, but then He would be a dictator, not a king; the relationship would be coerced, not chosen. So G-d waits all year for this great moment for which the entire universe was created – the moment when you and I coronate Him as our king.

Rosh Hashanah is the most moving day in the Jewish calendar. More than any other day, it embodies the meaning of the human existence and the vulnerability of a G-d who linked His fate to man's.

Happy Coronation Night. May we feel the presence and love of the Divine in every space of our heart and life. And as we say in the Rosh Hashanah prayers, may the entire world experience their true oneness with the Divine, and the world will be ONE.

Dedicated anonymously with heartfelt gratitude to TheYeshiva.net for its ongoing inspiration and as a zechus for my family, for abundant blessings, health, happiness, and hatzlacha in the New Year. In honor of the New Year, please increase in your charity. Please help us continue our work at <https://donate.theyeshiva.net/>

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

Rav Ahron Lopiansky

Between Malchus and Adnus

We enter Rosh Hashanah with the sense that teshuva and bettering our actions are the broad theme of these days. Indeed, Rosh Hashanah is the first of the asseres yemei teshuva. Yet, as we keep davening, we rarely find any mention of sin, nor any type of repentance per se. As a matter of fact, it is prohibited to mention sin or sinning in the davening of Rosh Hashanah. This really leaves us bewildered as to the connection of this day to the process of teshuva.

We speak a lot about Hashem as “king”, and Rosh Hashana as the day of coronating the king. It is something that leaves us a bit puzzled. Does this mean just “to believe in Hashem”? Does this mean just obeying His orders? How does this differ from Hashem as master [Adon] of the world, and thereby having the right to tell us what to do?

To fully understand the meaning of Rosh Hashanah, we need to take a second look at the concept of Hashem as “monarch”, as opposed to a “master”. A master is someone who owns a slave, or in a more benign version an employer and employee. The subordination of the employee or servant is simply there to bring benefit to the master. By either having acquired the servant by force or the employee by money, he now can dictate to the servant/employee what it is that he is to do, and it is all there for the benefit of the master.

But that is not the concept of a monarch. The Rambam states that “the monarch’s heart is the very heart of the nation” (Hilchos Melachim 3:6). What this means is that just as an individual person is considered such by having many parts working in excruciating tandem to create one whole person, so too a nation has many parts and pieces that must come together as one. An individual person has a mind and heart that have the vision and understanding, and they then instruct the hands and feet to accomplish the common goal. All of that together is a whole person.

This is similarly true of a society. A society where each person has their own goals and visions and desires yet comes together for things of common benefit is a very nice society. But it is not a people and not a nation. It is only when there is a commonality of being and vision that they can begin to become a nation. A nation needs to have a leader who provides the vision and guidance for all the other parts to realize their common dream.

Israel is the nation of Hashem, meaning it is the nation that understands that its essence is to bring out and reflect Hashem's greatness in this

world. This nation is formed by people who understand this and want to contribute their very being for this aspiration. It also needs someone to be the heart and mind, whose understanding and vision brings this into focus, and then the rest of the nation falls in line, each contributing their own share to this common vision. That is what monarchy is all about, and that is why we pray to restore the monarchy of Dovid Hamelech.

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of man. Way before we deal with the bits and pieces of our performance, we need to put down the goal of ourselves as humans. If a person's goal is some sort of pleasure or personal achievement, then he could technically be a Torah abiding person, but he's not part of that big picture. He may be doing the mitzvos, and staying away from aveiros, but it has nothing to do with malchus Shomayim. Rosh Hashanah we start by putting down the framework of our actions and aspirations as part of malchus Shomayim. The world is meant to be a “kingdom”, meaning a place where all the pieces come together to realize this malchus Shomayim. Without crowning Hashem as our king, we really are missing the single most important part of changing ourselves. We are meant to make a statement that we recognize all of this world as being parts of a monarchy. It is a place that has one vision and focus, implemented by the contribution of each person giving what they possess for this mMalchus. This comes before Yom Kippur.

This is also the reason why the gemara (Rosh Hashana 32b) rules that the verse of “Shema Yisroel” may count towards malchiyos. Even though Hashem as king is not mentioned explicitly, but the idea of “echad”- oneness- is really an expression of what malchus is all about. Malchus is the mechanism that creates a unity of everything, the “echad”. Without malchus we have many bits and pieces but no cohesive whole.

Rosh Hashanah coming first in the days of teshuva gives us a very different picture of what teshuva is all about. Yes, we have done wrong, and yes, there are consequences, But those are particular items. The big question, however, is what is the framework under which all my activities are subsumed. Even believing in reward and punishment still does not ensure that my purpose in keeping Torah isn't for personal gain or loss. My keeping of Torah needs to be seen as part of the big world, bringing malchus Shomayim back together.

If we understand the point of malchus on Rosh Hashanah, we will be able to structure our life appropriately and allocate our resources and deeds to one purpose: malchus.

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**THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag**

for ROSH HASHANA shiur

To our surprise, the holiday that we call **Rosh Hashana** is never referred to as such in Chumash! In fact, Chumash tells us very little about this holiday that we are told to celebrate on the 'first day of the **seventh** month' (see Vayikra 23:23).

So how do we know that this day is indeed a 'day of judgment'?

And why should this day mark the beginning of a 'new year'? In the following shiur, we attempt to answer these fundamental questions from within Chumash itself.

INTRODUCTION

The laws of **Rosh Hashana** are discussed only twice in Chumash, once in Parshat Emor (Vayikra 23:23-25), and once in Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar 29:1-6). Therefore, we must begin our shiur by taking a quick look at these two sources, noting how scant the Torah's detail of this holiday appears to be:

1) In Parshat Emor -

"On the **seventh** month, on the first day of that month, you shall have a shabbaton [a day of rest], **zichron tru'a**, mikra kodesh [a day set aside for gathering], do not work, and you shall bring an offering to God" (Vayikra 23:23-5).

2) In Parshat Pinchas -

"On the **seventh** month, on the first day of that month, observe a 'mikra kodesh', do no work, it shall be for you a **yom tru'a**..." (Bamidbar 29:1-6).

Note that Chumash never refers to this holiday as Rosh Hashana! Instead, we are told to make a holiday on the first day of the **seventh** month [that's closer to 'mid-year' than 'new-year'].

Furthermore, the Torah never tells us **why** this day is chosen. Instead, we are instructed to sound a **tru'a** [yom tru'a], or to remember a **tru'a** [zichron tru'a], but it is not clear at all precisely what these phrases - yom tru'a and zichron tru'a - imply.

[Note that the Torah provides reasons for all of the other holidays, either explicitly: chag ha-matzot is to remember Yetziat Mitzrayim, shavuot for the grain harvest ('chag ha-katzir') and Sukkot for the fruit harvest ('chag ha-asif'); or implicitly - Yom Kippur for it marks the day on which Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai with the second Luchot & God's **midot ha-rachamim**" (based on the three groups of 40 days in the account of those events in Sefer Devarim chapter 9).]

Finally, nowhere in these psukim in Parshat Emor or in Parshat Pinchas do we find even a hint that this day should be considered a 'day of judgment'.

So what's going on? How does this enigmatic biblical holiday become the **Rosh Hashana** that we are all so familiar with?

To answer this question, we must explore other sources in the Bible where these very same topics are mentioned, namely:

- A) the cycle of the agricultural year in Chumash, and
- B) the biblical meaning of the phrases:

"yom tru'a" & "zicharon"

TISHREI - NOT THE 'JEWISH' NEW YEAR

To understand what is special about the seventh month, we must return to the two parshiot of the chagim in Chumash, i.e. Parshat Emor (Vayikra chapter 23) and Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar chapters 28->29).

First, quickly review the internal progression of each of these two units, noting how they both list the entire set of holidays - in

an order that begins in the spring. Most likely, this 'spring start' is based on God's earlier command in Parshat Ha'Chodesh to count the months from the first month of **spring** - corresponding to our redemption from Egypt. [See Shmot 12:1-2; 13:2-3 & 23:15.]

Hence, there seems to be every reason in Chumash to consider **Nissan** as the **Jewish** New Year, and not Tishrei! What then is special about the **seventh** month, and why do we refer to it as Rosh Hashana?

[Even though it is commonly assumed that the first of Tishrei marks the anniversary of the creation of the world, this specific point is a controversy in the Talmud between R. Eliezer (created in Tishrei) and R. Yehoshua (created in Nissan). [See Mesechet Rosh Hashana 11a]

According to R. Yehoshua who claims that the world was created in Nissan and not in Tishrei, could it be that there is nothing special about this day? Furthermore, even according to R. Eliezer, why should the anniversary of the Creation provoke a yearly 'Day of Judgment'? In any case, Chumash never states explicitly that the Creation began in Tishrei.]

To answer this question, we must take into consideration the basic cycle of the agricultural year in the Land of Israel.

THE END OF THE AGRICULTURAL YEAR

In addition to the biblical year that begins in Nissan (see Shmot 12:1-2), we find another 'calendar' in Chumash, which relates to the agricultural cycle of the year. Take for example the Torah's first mention of the holiday of Sukkot, noting how it explicitly states that **Sukkot** falls out at the **end** of the year:

"Three times a year celebrate for Me... and the 'gathering holiday' [**chag ha-asif**], when the year goes out [**be-tzeit ha-shana**], when you gather your produce from the Land..." (see Shmot 23:14-17).

From this pasuk we can infer that Chumash takes for granted that we are aware of a 'year' that 'goes out' when we gather our fruits. If this 'agricultural' year 'goes out' when the produce is harvested, then it must begin when the fields are first sown (in the autumn).

When Sukkot is described in greater detail (in Parshat Emor), we find the precise 'lunar' date for this 'gathering' holiday:

"On the 15th day of the **seventh** month, when you **gather the produce** of your Land, you shall observe a holiday for seven days..." (see Vayikra 23:39).

From these two sources it becomes clear that Chumash assumes that there is an 'agricultural year' that ends in Tishrei.

This assumption is confirmed when we examine yet another agricultural mitzva that requires a defined yearly cycle - the laws of **shmitta** [the sabbatical year].

In Parshat Behar the Torah describes a cycle of six years when we work the land, and the seventh year of rest (see 25:1-7). Clearly, this implies that there must be a certain date when the year of this **shmitta** cycle begins. And sure enough, the Torah informs us of this date when it describes immediately afterward the laws of the **yovel** [Jubilee] year, celebrated after each seven **shmitta** cycles:

"And you shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, and then you shall sound a **shofar** tru'a on the **seventh** month, on the tenth of the month..." (see Vayikra 25:8-9)

Here we are told explicitly that the years of the **shmitta** cycle begin in the **seventh** month.

[One could assume that the year actually begins on the first of Tishrei, but on the yovel year we wait until Yom Kippur to make the 'official declaration'. This may be for a thematic reason as well, for on yovel land returns to its original owners & we annul all debts, etc. [like starting over with a clean slate]. Therefore, we pronounce yovel on Yom Kippur, at the same time when we ask God to annul our sins.]

Finally, the mitzva of **hakhel** (see Devarim 31:10-12) provides conclusive proof that the year of the **shmitta** cycle begins in Tishrei. We are commanded to conduct the **hakhel** ceremony 'be-mo'ed shnat ha-shmitta be-chag ha-Sukkot' - at the appointed [or gathering] time of **shmitta** (i.e. the time of year when cycle increments) on Sukkot. This clearly implies that the **shmitta** cycle increments in Tishrei.

THE BEGINNING OF THE AGRICULTURAL YEAR

In addition to the above sources that assume the existence of an 'agricultural year' that ends in Tishrei, another source in Chumash informs us more precisely when this agricultural year begins. In fact, this source is the **only** time in Chumash where we find an explicit mention of the word '**rosh**' in relation to the beginning of a year!

In Parshat Ekev, the Torah explains how farming in the 'land of Israel' differs from farming in the 'land of Egypt' (see Devarim 11:10-12). Unlike Egypt, which enjoys a constant supply of water from the Nile River, the Land of Israel is dependent on 'matar' (rain) for its water supply. Hence, the farmer in the land of Israel must depend on the rainfall for his prosperity. But that rainfall itself, Chumash explains, is a direct function of God's 'hashgacha' [providence]. In this context (i.e. in relation to the rainfall in the land of Israel), we learn that:

"It is a Land which your Lord looks after, God's 'eyes' constantly look after it - **mi-reishit shana** - from the **beginning** of the year - until the end of the year" (11:12).

[Recall that in the land of Israel it only rains between Sukkot and Pesach, hence the cycle begins in Tishrei.]

Here, God assures Am Yisrael that He will look after the 'agricultural' needs of our Land by making sure that it will receive the necessary rainfall. To prove this interpretation we simply need to read the following parsha (which just so happens to be the second parsha of daily 'kriyat shma'):

"[Hence,] should you keep the mitzvot... then I will give the **rain** to your land at the proper time... [but] be careful, should you transgress... then I hold back the heavens, and there will be no **rain**... (see Devarim 11:13-16!).

In this context, the phrase 'reishit shana' in 11:12 implies the beginning of the rainy season. Hence, the biblical agricultural year begins with the rainy season in the fall - **reishit ha-shana** - i.e. the **new** (agricultural) **year**.

A CRITICAL TIME

But specifically in the land of Israel this time of year is quite significant, for in Israel it only rains during the autumn and winter months. Therefore, farmers must plow and sow their fields during those months in order to catch the winter rain. In fact, the rainfall during the months of Cheshvan & Kislev is most critical, for the newly sown fields require large amounts of water. If it doesn't rain in the late autumn / early winter, there will be nothing to harvest in the spring or summer.

[Note that in Masechet Ta'anit (see chapters 1 and 2) we learn that if the rain is not sufficient by mid-Kislev, a series of 'fast-days' are proclaimed when special prayers for rain are added, including a set of tefillot almost identical to those of Rosh Hashana (see II.2-3). This may explain why Seder Moed places Masechet Rosh Hashana before Masechet Ta'anit, rather than placing it before Yoma (where it would seem to belong)!]

From this perspective, the fate of the produce of the forthcoming agricultural year is primarily dependent on the rainfall during the early winter months. Should the rainfall be insufficient, not only will there not be enough water to drink, the crops will not grow! [See Masechet Rosh Hashana 16a!] A shortage of rain can lead not only to drought, but also to famine, and disease throughout the months of the spring and summer. Furthermore, a

food shortage is likely to lead to an outbreak of war between nations fighting over the meager available resources.

Consequently, it may appear to man as though nature itself, i.e. via the early rainy season, determines 'who will live' and 'who will die', who by thirst and who by famine, who by war and who by disease...'. [from the 'netaneh tokef' tefilla on Rosh Hashana]

NATURE OR GOD?

Even though it may appear to man that nature, or more specifically - the rain - will determine the fate of the forthcoming agricultural year, Chumash obviously cannot accept this conclusion. As we discussed (or will discuss) in our shiur on Parshat Breishit, a primary theme in Chumash is that the creation of nature was a willful act of God, and He continues to oversee it. Although it may appear to man as though nature works independently, it is incumbent upon him to recognize that it is God, and **not** nature, who determines his fate.

Therefore, in anticipation of the rainy season (which begins in the autumn) and its effect on the fate of the entire year, the Torah commands Bnei Yisrael to set aside a 'mikra kodesh' - a special gathering - in the **seventh month** in order that we gather to declare God's kingdom over all Creation. In doing so, we remind ourselves that it is He who determines our fate, based on our deeds, as explained in Parshat Ekev (see Devarim 11:10-19).

Now that we have established why the **seventh** month should be considered the beginning of a **new year**, i.e. the new agricultural year, we must now explain why the Torah chooses specifically the **first** day of this month to mark this occasion.

THE OVERLAP

Based on the Torah's definition of **Sukkot** as 'be-tzeit ha-shana' (the end of the year / see Shmot 23:16), it would seem more logical to consider **Shmini Atzeret** - which falls out immediately after Sukkot - as the first day of the New Year. After all, it is not by chance that Chazal instituted 'tefillat geshem' - the special prayer for rain - on this day. Why does the Torah command us to gather specifically on the **first** day of this **seventh** month, before the previous year is over?

One could suggest very simply that an overlap exists, as the new agricultural year begins (on the first day of the seventh month) before the previous year ends. However, if we examine **all** of the holidays of the **seventh** month, a more complex picture emerges.

A SPECIAL MONTH

Note that in Parshat Emor and Parshat Pinchas, we find four different holidays that are to be observed in the seventh month:

On the first day - a **Yom tru'a**

On the 10th day - **Yom Ha-kippurim**

On the 15th day - '**Chag Sukkot** for seven days

On the 22nd day - an '**Atzeret**'

[Note how all these holidays are connected by the Torah's conspicuous use of the word '**ach**' in 23:27 & 23:39.]

Why are there so many holidays in the **seventh** month? For Sukkot, the Torah provides an explicit reason: it marks the end of the summer fruit harvest [**chag ha-asif**]. However, no explicit reason is given for the celebration of any of the others holidays on these specific dates. Nonetheless, based on our above explanation concerning the biblical importance of the forthcoming rainy season, one could suggest that **all** of the Tishrei holidays relate in one manner or other to the yearly agricultural cycle that begins in the **seventh** month.

More conclusive proof of an intrinsic connection between these three holidays of the **seventh month** - Yom Tru'a, Yom Kippurim, and Shmini Atzeret - can be deduced from their identical and unique korban mussaf, as detailed in Parshat Pinchas. Unlike any other holiday, on each of these holidays we offer an additional **ola** of 'one bull, one ram, and seven sheep' for the mussaf offering.

[See Bamidbar chapter 29, note that no other korban has this same korban mussaf. See TSC shiur on Pinchas. See also further iyun section in regard to the double nature of the mussaf of Sukkot, which may actually include this offering as well.]

But why are three holidays necessary to inaugurate the New Year?

One could suggest that each holiday relates to a different aspect of the anticipation of the forthcoming agricultural year. In this week's shiur, we discuss the meaning of **yom tru'a**, which we are commanded to observe on the **first** day of this month. In the shiurim to follow, we will discuss Yom Kippur and Shmini Atzeret.

YOM TRU'A

As we explained in our introduction, according to Chumash the only unique mitzva of this holiday is that we are commanded to make a **yom tru'a** according to Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar 29:2), or a **zichron tru'a** according to Parshat Emor (Vayikra 23:24).

Each of these two phrases requires explanation. Why would 'sounding a **tru'a**' have any connection to the beginning of the rainy season? Likewise, what does "zichron tru'a" imply?

YOM TRU'A IN THE BIBLE

To understand these phrases, we must consider how a **shofar** was used in biblical times.

Today, a **shofar** is considered a religious artifact. If you are shopping for a shofar, you would inquire at your local "seforim" store or possibly a Judaica shop [or search the internet].

However, in Biblical times, its use was quite different. Back then, if you were shopping for a shofar, you would have most probably gone to your local 'arms dealer' - for the shofar was used primarily in war, as a shofar was used by military commanders and officers to communicate with their troops.

[See for example the story of Gideon and his 300 men, each one sounding a shofar to make the enemy think that there are 300 commanders, and hence thousands of soldiers / see Shoftim 7:16-20.]

Similarly, civil defense personnel used the shofar to warn civilians of enemy attack and to mobilize the army. [See Amos 3:6 & Tzefania 1:16.]

Now, there are two basic types of 'notes' that the **shofar** blower uses:

- 1) a **teki'a** - a long steady note (like DC current);
- 2) a **tru'a** - a oscillating short note (like AC current).

Usually, a **teki'a** long steady sound was used to signal an 'all clear' situation, while the oscillating **tru'a** signal warned of imminent danger (like a siren sound today). This distinction between a **teki'a** & **tru'a** is easily deduced from the mitzva of the 'chatzotzrot' (trumpets) explained in Parshat Beha'alotcha (see 10:1-10 / highly suggested that you read these psukim inside). According to that parsha, the teki'a was the signal for gathering the camp for happy occasions (see 10:3-4,7,10), while the tru'a was used as a signal to prepare for travel in military formation and war (see 10:5-6,9).

[Note, both a 'shvarim' and 'tru'a' are examples of **tru'a** (AC). The difference between them is simply an issue of frequency / 3 per second, or 9 per second.]

Hence, in biblical times, if someone heard a **shofar** sounding a **tru'a**, his instinctive reaction would have been fear, preparation for war, and/or impending danger. [Sort of like hearing sirens today.]

Elsewhere in Tanach, we find many examples. The prophet Tzefania, for example, uses the phrase 'yom **shofar u-tru'a**' to describe a day of terrible war and destruction. Tzefania's opening prophecy speaks of the forthcoming 'yom Hashem', a day in which God will punish all those who had left Him. Note how the following psukim relate **shofar & tru'a** to God's providence

['hashgacha']:

"At that time ('yom Hashem') I will search Yerushalayim with candles and I will punish ('u-pakadeti') the men... who say to themselves 'God does not reward nor does He punish...'"

The great day of the Lord is approaching...

it is bitter, there a warrior shrieks.

That day shall be a day of wrath,

a day of trouble and distress ('tzara u-metzuka'),

a day of calamity and desolation....,

"**yom shofar u-tru'a** ..."

a day of blowing a shofar and tru'a..."

(see Tzefania 1:12-16).

Here, 'yom **shofar u-tru'a**' clearly implies a day of imminent danger and war - a day in when God enacts judgment on those who have sinned. [See also Yoel 2:1-3,11-14 & 2:15-17!]

The strongest proof that the sound of a shofar would cause intuitive fear is from Amos:

"Should a shofar be sounded in the city, would the people not become fearful?!" (see Amos 3:6).

With this background, we can return to Parshat Pinchas. The Torah instructs us to make a **yom tru'a** on the first day of the seventh month (29:1-2). Obviously, the Torah does not expect us to go to war on this day; however, we are commanded on this day to create an atmosphere that simulates the tension and fear of war. By creating this atmosphere in anticipation of the new agricultural year that is about to begin, we show God our belief that its fate - and hence our fate, is in His hands (and not nature's).

Therefore, to create this atmosphere of a 'day of judgment', to help us feel that our lives are truly 'on the line' - in God's Hands, the Torah commands us to sound a tru'a with the shofar.

ZICHRON TRU'A

Now we must explain the phrase **zichron tru'a**, which is used to describe this holiday in Parshat Emor. The key to understanding this phrase lies in the same psukim mentioned above concerning the chatzotzrot. There, we find the link between tru'a, war, and zika'ron:

"Ve-ki tavo'u milchama be-artzechem... va-harei'otem be-chatzotzrot, ve-nizkartem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem..." -

When war takes place in your land... you should sound a **tru'a** with your trumpets that you will be **remembered** by (and/or that you will **remember**...) Hashem, and He will save you from your enemies" (see Bamidbar 10:8-9).

Here we find a special mitzva to sound a **tru'a** prior to, and in **anticipation** of, impending battle. To show our belief that the outcome of that battle is in God's Hands, and not in hands of our enemy, we are commanded to sound a **tru'a**. Obviously, it was not the tru'a itself that saves Bnei Yisrael, rather our recognition that the ultimate fate of the battle is in God's Hands.

We can apply this same analogy from war to agriculture. Just as the Torah commands us to sound a **tru'a** in anticipation of war - to remember that its outcome is in God's Hand; so too we are commanded to sound a **tru'a** on the first of Tishrei in anticipation of the forthcoming agricultural year - to remind ourselves that its outcome is in God's Hand as well.

Therefore, Rosh Hashana is not only a yom tru'a - a day of awe on which our lives are judged, but Chumash defines it as a day of zichron tru'a - a day on which we must sound the tru'a so that we will remember our God, in order that He will remember us. On this day, we must proclaim His kingdom over all mankind in recognition of His mastery over nature and our destiny.

In summary, we have shown how the most basic aspects of Rosh Hashana, which at first appeared to be totally missing from Chumash, can be uncovered by undertaking a comprehensive study of the biblical importance of the seventh month. Obviously,

our observance of Rosh Hashana is only complete when we include all of its laws that have been passed down through **Torah she-ba'al peh** (the Oral Law). However, we can enhance our appreciation of this holiday by studying its sources in **Torah she-bichtav** (the Written Law) as well.

In today's modern society, it is difficult to appreciate the importance of an agricultural year. Rarely do we need to worry about our water supply and other most basic needs. Nevertheless, especially in the Land of Israel, we are faced with other serious national dangers such as war and terror. Even though we must take every precaution necessary against these dangers, the basic principle of the above shiur still applies, that we must recognize that the ultimate fate of the forthcoming year is in God's Hands, and that He will judge us based on our deeds.

Even though all the nations are judged on this awesome day, Am Yisrael's custom is to sound the **tru'a** specifically with the shofar of an **ayil** (a ram), a symbol of 'akeidat Yitzchak' - a reminder to the Almighty of our devotion and readiness to serve Him.

With this shofar, together with our tefillot, our heritage, and our resolve to conduct our lives as an 'am kadosh' should, we pray that God should not judge us like any other nation, rather as His special Nation.

shana tova,
ve-ketiva ve-chatima tova,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In Chodesh Tishrei, the 'seventh' month, we find many chagim that relate to nature, especially the 'seven' days of Sukkot marking the culmination of the harvest season of the previous year. We also find three days of 'Judgement', Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Shmini Atzeret.

1. Compare the korban mussaf of each of these three chagim. (one par, one ayil, seven kvasim and one se'ir le-chatat).
2. In what way are these chagim connected?
3. According to Chazal, when are we judged for water? How does this relate to the above shiur?
4. Relate this to the tefilla of the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur! (it's in your machzor at the end of seder avoda)

B. Why does Hashem need Am Yisrael to proclaim him king? The one thing Hashem, ki-vyachol, can **not** do, is make Himself king. A kingdom is meaningless if there are no subjects. A king becomes king when and because he is accepted by his subjects. Similarly, only when God is accepted and recognized by man does He become Melech.

1. Relate this to our davening on Rosh Hashana.
2. Explain changing 'E-I HaKadosh' to 'Melech Hakadosh' according to this concept.

C. The Jewish New Year, the New Year special and unique to Am Yisrael is actually Nissan - Ha-chodesh ha-zeh lachem rosh chodashim rishon hu lachem le-chodshei ha-shana (Shmot perek 12/v1-2). Yetziat Mitzrayim which took place in Nissan marks the birth of the Jewish Nation.

1. What aspects of Pesach and Chag HaMatzot emphasize that we are a special nation, different from other nations.
2. What aspect of the chagim in Tishrei relate to all mankind. (Note 70 parim on Sukkot etc. - see also Zecharya chap 14)

D. In the shiur of the '13 midot' you may recall our explanation that Hashem's hashgacha over Am Yisrael after brit Sinai was broken due to chet ha-egel and defaulted to 'u-veyom pokdi u-pukadti' (Shmot 32:34). As opposed to immediate punishment, God will punish them from time to time, allowing for good deeds to balance out the bad deeds. In the manner, Bnei Yisrael would

be judged no different from other nations. Note the Ibn Ezra on that pasuk - there he explains - 'from Rosh Hashana to Rosh Hashana'!

1. Relate this peirush by the Ibn Ezra to the above shiur!

E. Note that from the story of the flood in Parshat Noach, we could also deduce the year begins in Tishrei, i.e. according to the agricultural year. The heavy rains of the flood began to fall on the 17th day of the **second** month, which would correspond to Cheshvan. (See Breishit 7:11.) However, this specific point is a controversy among the commentators.

Avraham and the Day of Judgement: An Analysis of the Torah Readings for Rosh HaShanah

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. THE TANNAIM: TWO OPINIONS

The Mishnah (3rd or 4th chapter of Megillah – depending on which version you are looking at) lists the special Torah readings for each of the holidays and unique days during the year. Regarding Rosh haShanah, the Mishnah states:

“On Rosh haShanah, we read “And on the seventh month, on the first of the month...” (Vayyikra 23:24 ff.)”

The Bavli (Babylonian Talmud) cites a second Tannaitic opinion as to what should be read on that day (at this time, there was still only one day of Rosh haShanah):

On Rosh haShanah, we read “In the seventh month” (Vayyikra 23)...”others” say [we read] “and God remember Sarah” (B’resheet 21)... (BT Megillah 31a)

The second alternative – to read about the story of Sarah’s miraculous birth at the age of 90 – is a bit disarming of a choice. All of the other “special” readings focus around either the laws pertaining to that day (e.g. the Sukkot readings focus on the offerings of each day, as well as the full treatment of the calendar) or of an explicit historical reference (e.g. Pesach and the Exodus story).

What connection is there between the story of Sarah’s birthing Yitzchak at an advanced age and the “Day of Remembrance” (Rosh haShanah)?

The conventional understanding is that the Sarah association is based on the Gemara in Rosh haShanah (11a), which states that both Sarah and Hannah were “remembered” on Rosh haShanah. (see, e.g., commentary of Ran to Megillah ad loc.)

There are, however, several problems with this explanation – as will become clear when we look into the Gemara to discover the roots of our practice vis-a-vis the Torah reading on the two days of Rosh haShanah.

II. THE GEMARA: THE “TWO DAYS” SOLUTION

The Gemara, in assessing how to “resolve” these two opinions, makes a startling statement. We would normally expect the Gemara to “compromise” and assign each of the readings to one of the days – let “the seventh month” reading take place on the first day and “God remembered Sarah” take place on the second day (or vice-versa). This is, by the way, exactly how the Gemara (ibid) resolved a dispute regarding the reading on Shavuot – now that there are two days (outside of Israel), we “fulfill” one opinion on the first day, and the other on the second day.

Regarding Rosh haShanah, however, the Gemara does not take this “path of compromise”:

Now that there are two days, on the first day we follow the “others”, on the next day, “And God tested Avraham...” (B’resheet 22)

Where did the “Akedah” (binding of Yitzchak) story come from? Why is it suddenly introduced into the range of possible readings here?

Keep in mind that the first two opinions were rendered by Tannaim – and it is highly unlikely and somewhat enigmatic for the Gemara to “overrule” a Tanna, especially when both opinions could have been maintained!

Besides the difficulty with this Gemara, there is an additional problem with the “God remembered Sarah” reading, based on the way that we practice.

The text of the Sarah-Yitzchak-Hagar-Yishma’el story is 21 verses long – which is enough for a complete reading, even if Rosh haShanah falls on Shabbat. Why then do we read the rest of Chapter 21 (vv. 22-34), detailing the covenant between Avraham and Avimelekh? What relevance does that story carry for Rosh haShanah?

To sum up:

We have two questions about the reading on Rosh haShanah:

- a) Why is the Tanna’s opinion ignored in favor of the “Akedah” story?
- b) Why is the Avraham-Avimelekh story also read?

To this, we could add a third question:

- c) What is the significance of the Akedah story to Rosh haShanah? (keep in mind that according to the Midrash, that terrifying event took place on the date that would eventually be Pesach – in the spring – and not in the fall).

Regarding this final question, there is no question that the ram, brought in place of Yitzchak, is associated with Rosh haShanah (the Shofar) – but, again, is that enough to justify “overruling” the first Tanna (and the only opinion cited in our Mishnah) as regards the reading?

III. REEVALUATING THE “OTHER’S” OPINION

We generally assume, as mentioned above, that the association between the story which begins with Sarah’s miraculous conception and birth and Rosh haShanah lies at the beginning – in that she was “remembered” on Rosh haShanah. There is another way to understand the association – one that is not subject to the challenges raised above.

If we understand the second Tannaitic opinion (“others”) as relating ONLY to the birth of Yitzchak – then, indeed, our questions stand. If, however, we understand the second opinion as relating to the entire narrative of the birth of Yitzchak, the covenant with Avimelekh and the culmination of Abraham’s life – the Akedah, then we understand the “solution” of the Gemara:

The first opinion is that we read from Vayyikra – a Halakhic section which details the laws of special times in our calendar – including (among others) the day of Rosh haShanah. In other words, the focus of the reading should be similar to that on other holidays – the “practice” of the day.

The second opinion, contradistinctively, is concerned that we read a piece of narrative – (Chapters 21 and 22 of B’resheet – later on we will address the significance of these two chapters). In other words, this opinion maintains that the focus of the reading should be on the “experience” of the day (i.e. narrative), rather than the “practice” of the day (i.e. legislative).

The Gemara’s solution was that, now that we have two days, we accept the second opinion and divide that reading into two parts – one for each day – so as to preserve the thematic continuity throughout the two-day holiday.

This already answers the first question – why the first Tanna’s opinion was ignored. There was no solution of “one day this, the other that” such as the Gemara effects for Shavuot. On Rosh haShanah, there is a basic dispute as to whether the reading should be legastically-oriented (Vayyikra) or narrative-oriented (B’resheet). Once the Halakhah decided in favor of the second opinion – that reading was simply split into two parts.

Now, we have to address the other two questions, which can be combined into one mega-question: What is the relevance of these two chapters (and now, we have to include the story of Sarah’s miraculous conception and birth) of B’resheet to Rosh haShanah?

IV. ROSH HASHANAH – THE INDIVIDUAL STANDS BEFORE GOD

Unlike the tenor of the rest of the holidays of Tishri – Yom haKippurim, Sukkot and Sh’mini Atzeret – Rosh haShanah seems to place the individual and his/her relationship with God at the core of the experience of the day. Even though we are crowning God, declaring Him to be King over “all that draw breath into their nostrils” (from the liturgy) – and this declaration is made as a community as well as by each individual – the sense of “judgment” which drives the day is focused on each person as he or she stands alone before the Creator. Note the Mishnah’s statement about the day:

On Rosh haShanah, they all pass before Him like “B’nei Maron” (Rosh haShanah 1:2; see the Gemara – Rosh haShanah 18a for the various interpretations of that phrase).

The Gemara explains that this means (regardless of what the phrase specifically depicts) that each person passes before God – to be judged – as an individual.

This is not the experience of Yom haKippurim, where, although each person confesses his sins before God in a private manner and does Teshuvah to the best of his ability, much of the focus of the day is on community (note the oft-repeated “Ki Anu Amekhah” which depicts the relationship between God and the Jewish people via various real-world analogues).

It is certainly not the same experience as Sukkot – where the focus is almost totally on the community (and the agricultural seasons). Rosh haShanah literally “stands alone” as a time for individual reflection, introspection and solitude – where the individual stands before God in judgment.

When we look through our history, we find that there was only one individual whose entire life calling approximated that which we experience on Rosh haShanah. Unlike Yitzchak, who was trained in the “way of God” by his father; unlike Ya’akov, who had two generations of righteousness and loyalty to God as a model, Abraham was the true trail-blazer of our national (pre-)history. In order for him to succeed at his mission, he not only had to “ignore” his father’s lessons (and those of his kinfolk), he had to actively get up and leave the entire environs of his youth (and middle age) and follow God’s directive to a “Land that I will show you”. If there is anyone whose life is a model for the Rosh haShanah experience, it is Abraham Avinu.

This would help to explain an enigmatic phrase in the chapter of T’hillim which is recited 7 times before the blasting of the Shofar (Ps. 47):

“The great of the peoples are gathered together , the nation of the God of Avraham, for the guardians of the earth belong to God, He is greatly exalted.”

Why is God referred to as “the God of Avraham” in this chapter – which is otherwise devoted to God being crowned via the blast of the Shofar (see *infra*)?

Again – it is Avraham’s path of solitude and isolation which is the one we must attempt to walk through the Rosh haShanah experience – as will be explained below.

V. “ECHAD HAYAH AVRAHAM”

Although we will look at this in much greater detail in the upcoming shiurim on Sefer B’resheet (especially Parashat Lekh-L’kha and Parashat Vayera), a thumbnail sketch of Avraham’s life is in order.

Not only did Avraham have to leave his comfortable and familiar environs in order to receive God’s blessing – but the demand for repeated isolation and separation from loved ones was the hallmark of his life.

A brief chart will clarify this:

Chapter – Separation from...

12- Father’s house, birthplace, land

12- Sarai (see Ramban here – it’s fascinating!)

13- Lot

16- (temporarily) Hagar (carrying his seed)

20- Sarah (again!)

21- Hagar & Yishma’el

22- (almost) Yitzchak

As you can see, every step of his life was marked by separation from family – from parents, from his wife (four times, counting Hagar twice), from children (twice – and nearly a third time) and from his beloved nephew.

Note also that every one of these separations is accompanied by an increased blessing:

(see 12:2-3; 13:2; 13:14-18; 16:10; 17:5-8; 20:14-16; 21:20; 22:17-18).

In other words, it is when Avraham demonstrates this tragic heroism – the ability to leave everything near and dear for the sake of God and for His promise – that he succeeds.

We can now understand why a segment of the life of Avraham is appropriate to read on Rosh haShanah (the 11 chapters which make up the bulk of the “Avraham narrative” comprises too much text for the purpose). Why then this part – why Chapter 21 (the birth of Yitzchak, the exile of Hagar and Yishma’el and the covenant with Avimelekh) and Chapter 22 (the Akedah)?

VI. RASHBAM AND THE AKEDAH

In order to understand the particular relevance of this section of the narrative to Rosh haShanah., we turn to an ancillary question posed by the Rishonim on the first verse of Chapter 22:

It came to pass after these matters...

This introduction seems to indicate not only a juxtaposition in time between the (upcoming) Akedah and the events just mentioned (the covenant with Avimelekh) – but also a causal relationship. To wit, it seems that the covenant had something to do with the Akedah.

Rashbam (R. Sh’mu’el b. Me’ir, 12th century France) suggests that the Akedah was, indeed, a Divine (punitive) reaction to Avraham’s signing of the covenant. His reasoning is that since the land of P’lesheth (present day Ashdod south to Azzah) is part of the Land which God promised to give him, God was angry at Avraham for signing a pact of mutual non-aggression (which is either unnecessary or makes it impossible to properly take the Land.) Rashbam suggests, based on the Midrash, that the reason that we were later unsuccessful in wresting that part of the Land from the P’lishtim was due to this earlier covenant.

I would like to suggest a slight variation on Rashbam’s approach – which will also support the rationale for reading specifically these three sub-narratives on Rosh haShanah.

Avraham’s entire path was to be tread on alone; since he was truly “The Lonely Man of Faith”. Every time that he tried to become attached to a family member, that loved one was (almost?) taken away – if not permanently, at least for a time.

Now that Avraham and Sarah had their own child (and God approved of sending Hagar and Yishma'el away), it seems that Avraham started "banking on" his future. Note the wording of the covenant with Avimelekh:

"Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my grandchild..." (21:23 – these are Avimelekh's words). Since Avraham agreed to the oath, it seems clear that he (now) felt in a position to be able to make promises about the future and about future generations.

This led to the Divine response of the Akedah – "You think that Yitzchak is yours, is so surely going to be here that you can make covenants and oaths regarding his loyalties???" asks God,;

"Take your son, your only son, the one that you love....Yitzchak!" (22:2).

The inspiration to be found in these lessons is a microcosm – and the apex – of Avraham's spiritual adventure. When he finally gained the beloved son of his old age with Sarah, he immediately was called to exile his other, beloved son (see Rashi on 22:2); when he felt confident that he could pinpoint the one through whom God's promises would be realized, he made an agreement and projected that son's future. At that point, God called him to reject that future and to place all of his faith in God – not in allies, not in this son or the other – but only in God.

That lonely path, the one blazed for us by Avraham, is the one we must each walk when we face God on Yom haDin – the day of Judgment.

We are doubly blessed:

We have the reserves of Avraham's strength on which to draw to enable us to stand alone, if atremble, before the Throne on Remembrance Day.

Our second blessing is that we are not confined to that path; as we leave the path less taken and join the communal "celebration" of Yom haKippurim, approximating Yitzchak's offering – and then join the entire House of Ya'akov in the Sukkah (hint: B'resheet 33:17).

K'tivah VaHatimah Tovah to all of our Haverim

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