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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) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

NOTE: Because of certain obligations, I shall not be able to post next week for Shabbat Shuva and Yom Kippur. I am posting this issue for two weeks.

The Torah never states that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, and the Torah does not emphasize that Yom Kippur is the day of cleansing our sins. Are judgment and wiping away our sins the real essences of the High Holy Days? As usual, Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org clarify the connections better than any other source I have found.

The Torah calls Rosh Hashanah "Yom Zichron Teruah," the day of remembering the sound of the Torah. 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? The sounds that accompanied us at Har Sinai during the Revelation. We did not see Hashem – our contact was entirely through the shofar blasts and God's voice reciting the beginning words of Aseret Dibrot. An excellent explanation comes from *Raiders of the Lost Ark.* The hero of the movie told his companion to keep her eyes closed and face down when the bad guys summoned God. By refraining from looking, they survived while everyone who looked melted away.

Humans cannot survive in God's world. The only way that a human can encounter Hashem and survive is by listening to God's voice – at the Revelation but also by listening to His voice in shofar blasts. Zichron Teruah means that we observe Rosh Hashanah by remembering the shofar blasts at the Revelation. The second connection comes from the Torah reading on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. 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 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 taught us to come closer 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. The lessons from the Three Weeks appear here and in many other places in the Torah.

What is the essence of Yom Kippur? I have discussed the issue on other occasions, especially with respect to Acharei Mot, the central portion in the Torah, the chapters that discuss the ceremony of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur

afternoon. The climax of Yom Kippur comes during the afternoon, when the Kohen Gadol would go to the mikvah five times, change clothes five times, and then enter the Holy of Holies. On that day, he would bring a korban with the spices, burn the korban on the alter, and the smoke of his offering would rise above the Aron to mix with Hashem's cloud covering the Aron. This event was the only time when a human could enter Hashem's world and survive. (The exception was Moshe, who could enter Hashem's presence when God called to him.) A side effect of God accepting the Kohen Gadol's service was that Hashem would wipe away the sins of the community. While we focus today on cleansing sins on Yom Kippur, the focus in the Torah is the one opportunity of a human entering Hashem's world and surviving – something otherwise not available to any human (other than Moshe) after Hashem expelled Adam and Chava from Gan Eden.

To me, the essence of the High Holy Days is coming close to Hashem, working on our relationships with God, and working to become better humans, Jews, and neighbors. Ideally, any religion should teach (even command) all of us to become better people, to work toward peace, and to help less fortunate individuals to share in the blessings of our world. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, reinforced this lesson on many occasions.

In a world with much hatred and evil leaders bringing war (and harming citizens), we cannot avoid attacking violence with strong measures. May the time come when countries that desire and work toward peace push back the descendants of Amalek. May the future for our children and grandchildren look brighter so they can focus more on coming closer to Hashem and helping make our world a better place.

Shabbat Shalom. Kativa v'chatima tovah.

Hannah and Alan

Alan and Hannah

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 Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Hodesh Tov,

Hannah & Alan

Finding God and Ourselves Anew

by Matthew Berkowitz
Director of Israel Programs, JTS, © 2013

During the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we devote ourselves to the process of repentance, attempting to tip the balance in our favor as we approach the Day of Atonement. The Sabbath in between the two holidays

is known as Shabbat Shuvah, the Sabbath of Return; and Shabbat Shuvah is considered an auspicious time to reflect on this sacred endeavor. It would seem that the Torah reading this week reinforces this notion, reminding us of earlier, harmonious days in our relationship with God (Deut. 32:7), and of days marred by our collective wayward behavior (32:15–16). We, indeed, seek a closer, more intimate relationship with God and our fellow humans, and so hope that "our days will be renewed as of old."

About halfway through Moses's poem of Parashat Ha'azinu, he describes God's response to Israelite disloyalty:

> *The Lord saw and was vexed and spurned His sons and daughters. God said, "I will hide My countenance from them, and see how they fare in the end. For they are a treacherous breed, children with no loyalty in them."* (Deut. 32:19–20)

How are we to understand the expression about hiding the Divine Face?

Nahmanides (Ramban) clarifies two very important and seemingly contradictory points. First, when God makes this threat, Ramban explains that God says it either to Himself or to the ministering angels — not to the People. That is to say, God knows well that the divine anger and threat should not preclude the process of teshuvah (repentance) and repair of relationships. Verbalizing such a destructive message directly to the People will lead to a sense of futility. Second, Nahmanides goes on to explain that the meaning of this notion of *"hiding*" is that the People will go out to seek God, but ultimately fail in their search. In this instance, God's quality of justice and desire for vengeance seems to overwhelm God's desire for mercy.

Every year, we are given the gift of finding God anew. And while our previous track record may discourage God from opening the door, it should not deflate us and our attempts to open the door to repentance. Even when it seems we have drifted quite a distance from our divine source, the possibility of returning is within reach. God may continue to hide the divine presence, but we need to be firm in *"knocking harder."* Our persistence will awaken God's quality of mercy. May our teshuvah, tzedakah (charity), and tefillah (prayer) all diminish the severity of the decree and lead to a revealing of the Divine Countenance.

Yom Kippur: Expelling Our Own Scapegoats

by Matthew Berkowitz
Director of Israel Programs, JTS, © 2014

[Yom Kippur] culminates the period of 'aseret yemei teshuvah, the 10 days of repentance, as we commemorate Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is the *"Sabbath of Sabbaths,"* in which we seek to successfully complete our journey toward making amends and recall the ritual of purification that unfolded in biblical times. This particular ritual is detailed during the Musaf service of Yom Kippur. We read that the High Priest would set aside his elegant garments and don the garb of a regular priest as he entered the Holy of Holies. There he would atone for his own sins, the transgressions of his family, and the sins of all of Israel. Subsequently, two goats were selected — one for God and the other designated for a place called 'Azazel. While the former goat would be offered as a sacrifice, that latter animal would be led into the desert wilderness. What was this mysterious place, and how can we better understand this intriguing ritual of the scapegoat?

The 13th-century Spanish commentator, Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban) sheds light on the significance of the goat and of 'Azazel. Regarding the latter, Ramban surveys the beliefs of other commentators:

> This was a high mountain — a flinty precipitous peak, as it is said, *"a land which is cut off"* (Lev. 16:22). This is the language of Rashi. Other say this means the *"hardest"* place in the mountains . . . Accordingly, the meaning of the word la'azazel is to a hard place [the root of the word azazel being az — strong], with the letter zayin doubled just like izuz (strong) and mighty (Psalms 24:8). (Commentary to Lev. 16:18, trans. Chavel)

Nahmanides, however, remains unconvinced, rejecting these interpretations. He argues rather that the goat and ‘Azazel must be understood within a context of idolatrous Near Eastern cultures. The se’ir (goat) sent to ‘Azazel is meant to recall a goat-like spirit that represented desolation and destruction. The Israelite nation, then, seeks to reframe this previously idolatrous practice — symbolizing both a break from pagan practice and a break with its wayward past. By expelling sins to a place of desolation, it diminishes and removes the power of transgression from its presence.

While we may lament the fate of the innocent scapegoat, the power and significance of this ritual resonates with us today. All too often, sin, as represented by habitual, harmful behavior (idolatry of another sort) takes hold of us. A downward spiral ensues as we find ourselves embroiled in chaos and desolation. The challenge for each of us is to reclaim a path of discipline in our individual and communal lives. To do so, such destructive habits need to be exiled. The very controlled and complex ritual of confessional and expulsion as represented by the scapegoat becomes a powerful model for atonement. Discipline expels disorder and chaos. We journey a step farther from the chaos of the wilderness as we endeavor to bring the Promised Land within reach. Ken yehi ratzon! So it may it be for all of us in this High Holiday season.

Rosh Hashanah, Haazinu: The Blessings We All Hope For

By Rabbi Label Lam * © 5773

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 it’s not a serious part of the discussion. How then it is 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 of work are you looking for?” (A nice open ended question) The job candidate took the opportunity to answer affirmatively,”I would like to be making over $200,000 and year, and be able to take off one weekday and one weekend day each week. I would need to have full health insurance coverage and it would certainly be a plus if my travel expenses were covered too!”

Do you think he got the job? The doctor told me he was appalled by the attitude. “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 demanding and requesting and expecting this is what you want? The boss wants to know how much grit and intellect will you bring to the workplace?! Are you worth investing time to train etc.? How serious are you!

What do learn from the sagely statement above that the entire livelihood of a person is decided between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur? We are going on a job interview and a salary review. The Machzor guides us cleverly through the process. In Musaf we mention “Malchios” – Kingship -- which helps us present our understanding of the seriousness of the task at hand. Then we speak of Zichronos – Remembrances – which focuses on our identification with the success of those who preceded us! It’s an expression of optimism and our confidence our ability to accomplish the task. Then comes Shofaros – the Shofar which betrays our deepest desire and willingness to get it done! That covers everything.

Steven Covey writes in 7 Habits of Highly Effective People that a habit (a good habit too) consists of 1) Knowledge, 2) Skill, and 3) Will! There you have it!

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 what I call “the vacuum cleaner effect.” The cleverly designed machine is able to pull in forcefully because it pushing air outward. That creates the vacuum into which

goodness flows. Maybe that's what the Shofar is expressing by blowing out and thereby attracting **the blessing we all hope for!**

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5773-roshhashanah/

Yom Kippur: The Weight of Sin

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2014

Sin and atonement are very abstract, colorless concepts. When we discuss such things, we tend to do so in relation to other abstract concepts: "Sin is an act of transgressing God's will or commandment; atonement is the act of divine forgiveness, or of becoming reconciled and at one with God." All of this is true, but spoken about this way, these concepts remain without shape and form. As such, they often do not resonate viscerally, and we find ourselves at a loss in attempting to think about them in concrete and helpful ways.

Not so for earlier generations. In our liturgy, in the Talmud, and in the Torah, sin is constantly discussed through metaphors. The power of this cannot be underestimated. Metaphors allow us to experience abstract realities on an emotional plane, away from the intellectual, and help us create an inner religious life that is dynamic and alive. Let us consider two metaphors for sin: that of stain and that of a weight.

Perhaps the most prevalent metaphor for sin in our liturgy is sin as a stain. The act of divine atonement, in parallel, becomes an act of cleansing this stain: "If your sins be as red as scarlet, they shall be whitened as snow" (Isaiah, 1:18); "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you" (Ezekiel, 36: 25).

A stain is something dirty and disgusting found on a person or his garments. Sin, then, becomes something that we should find repulsive, that we would naturally recoil from. But it is not just a piece of dirt or excrement; it is a stain. A stain adheres to something – one's garments or one's own self. Sin as a stain clings to us, sullying our very person and sullying our clothing, the image that we project of ourselves to others and to ourselves. And when one or one's clothing is stained, one is embarrassed to go out in public and unable to appear before people of importance or prestige. When sin soils us, we likewise will feel a sense of embarrassment to be in the company of others who are not similarly soiled, and we will certainly feel such embarrassment to appear before God.

It is hard emotionally to think in this way, but it can also be helpful because it gives us a handle on these realities. It encourages us to think about the ways we have hurt ourselves – our soul, our spirit, our inner religious life – as a result of sin. It makes us see the way that sin and bad past decisions can sometimes make us feel that we are not worthy, not worthy to have certain relationships, engage in certain activities, or make certain life choices: "Those are for people who haven't made the same mistakes that I have, for people who are unsullied."

But we are not stuck in this state. Most stains are not permanent. We can launder our garments; we can bathe ourselves; and we can become clean. This is the promise that teshuva holds out – we can transform who we are. And if we do this, God will cleanse us; God will forgive – or more to the point – wash away our sin, restoring us, and help us restore ourselves, to our original state of purity and cleanliness.

Sin as stain occurs frequently in the liturgy and in Nakh. In the Torah, however, the metaphor that dominates is that of sin as a weight or a burden. In a brilliant article in Tarbiz, Dr. Baruch Schwartz of Hebrew University looks at the phrase nosei avon, literally translated as "carrying sin," which has troubled Bible commentators and academics for centuries. This phrase can be used to describe both forgiveness for sin and punishment for sin. We are told in the Thirteen Attributes of God that we recite during the asseret yimei teshuva, that God is nosei avon, forgiving of sin. At the same time, we read that when a person curses God, vi'nasa cheto, "he will carry his sin" (Vayikra, 24:15).

So what is going on here? How can the same phrase mean one thing and its opposite? The answer, writes Dr. Schwartz, is in realizing how sin was understood. It is not just a deed done in the past. It creates a metaphysical reality. It is a real thing, a thing on the back of the sinner, a thing that will weigh him down, a thing that can crush him, that can bring about suffering and even death.

Hence the two meanings of the phrase nosei avon. This phrase means just one thing: to carry the sin. The question is who is doing the carrying. Initially, the sinner is carrying his sin. But if God chooses to forgive the sin, then God will remove it from the sinner's back; God will carry the sin away.

How does sin as weight differ from sin as stain? We may first note that a weight is something external to a person. As such, sin as weight is more about the sin than it is about the sinner. It is about how what we have done has become a real thing that is now outside of us – a thing that doesn't go away just because we have changed and done teshuva. We thus find that in verses that refer to sin as weight, the sin is never eradicated. It can be lifted off of our back, it can be put on the back of the scapegoat and sent far away, but it will always exist. When we do teshuva the stains on our selves, on our person, can be completely washed away, but that which was done in the past was still done; it can never be fully undone.

Although this is true, teshuva is still effective. Such a teshuva must be focused on the sin as well as the sinner and must be directed to minimize the lasting impact of one's past deeds. If we have shouldered our responsibility for what we have done, then it will no longer have to continue to burden us – the weight will be taken off our shoulders.

Talking in these terms is also difficult. It is hard to face up to how our actions have affected others, not just ourselves. But this can also help us fix it, to correct, to the best degree possible, those hurtful things that we have done. Too frequently we hear of people – often abusers, but also people such as Bernie Madoff and the like – who declare that they have done teshuva and want to be welcomed back into the community. Thinking of sin as a weight that exists in the world reminds us that teshuvais not just about the person; teshuva requires fixing the damage done by one's actions.

This also points to a productive path for teshuva. In the Torah, sin is a weight that can only be removed by the offended party – be it another person or be it God. This should be enough. But sometimes even after we have made amends, we continue to beat ourselves up for what we have done in the past. We are burdened by guilt and self-criticism. We let the sin crush us and hold us back, hold us back in our relationships, our career, our religious and emotional growth. If we have already done the work that we need to do, then it is time for us to remove that weight from our own back.

The Dubner Magid tells a parable about a pauper who was carrying the heavy load of all his earthly possessions on his back and making the long, slow trek from one town to the next. A wagon driver rides up next to him and offers to give him a ride to the next town. After a few miles, the wagon driver looks back into the wagon and sees the man sitting there, still carrying the load on his back. "Why are you still carrying your load? Put it down in the wagon!" he says to him. The pauper replies, "Dear sir, you have been so kind to offer me a ride. I cannot possibly impose upon you to ask you to carry my heavy load as well."

God carries the whole world, says the Dubner Magid, and still we think that we have to carry our own load. "Cast your burden unto the Lord and He will sustain you" (Tehillim, 55:23). We can let God carry our burdens. Whether our burdens are due to worry or whether our burdens are due to sin, God can manage it. We don't have to carry them alone.

As Yom Kippur approaches, the difficult task of thinking about the concrete realities of sin can help us think about the concrete ways to do teshuva and to move forward. Let us do the work that we need to cleanse ourselves and to remove the impact of our past harmful actions from the world. And once we have done that, let us learn to remove the weight from our shoulders, to turn to God who is nosei avon, to trust in God's promise that we will be forgiven so finally we can learn to forgive ourselves.

Gmar Chatimah Tovah!

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.

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.

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.

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

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The Binding of Isaac: Extremely Religious without Religious Extremism

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

The Akedah, or binding of Isaac (Genesis 22:1–19), [1] is a formative passage in Jewish tradition. It plays a central role on Rosh haShanah, and many communities include this passage in their early morning daily liturgy. Beyond its liturgical role, the Akedah is a religiously and morally challenging story. What should we learn from this jarring narrative with regard to faith and religious life?

It appears that the Akedah, perhaps more than any other narrative in the Torah, teaches how one can and should be extremely religious, but also teaches how to avoid religious extremism. In this essay, we will consider the ideas of several modern thinkers who explore the religious and moral implications of this narrative. Why Did Abraham Not Protest? Although the very idea of child sacrifice is abhorrent to us, it made more sense in Abraham's historical context. Many of Israel's neighbors practiced child sacrifice. It stands to reason that when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, Abraham concluded that perhaps God required this of him. Of course, God stopped Abraham and went on to outlaw such practices as a capital offense in the Torah (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2–5). We find child sacrifice abhorrent precisely because the Torah and the prophets broke rank with the pagan world and transformed human values for the better. [2] In its original context, then, the Akedah highlights Abraham's exemplary faithfulness. He followed God's command even when the very basis of the divine promise for progeny through Isaac was threatened.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was deeply troubled by the morality of the Akedah. He maintained that nobody is certain that he or she is receiving prophecy, whereas everyone knows with certainty that murder is immoral and against God's will. Therefore, Abraham failed God's test by acquiescing to sacrifice Isaac. He should have refused, or at least protested. [3] However, the biblical narrative runs flatly against Kant's reading. After the angel stops Abraham from slaughtering Isaac, the angel proclaims to Abraham, *"For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld*

your son, your favored one, from Me" (Genesis 22:12). God thereby praises Abraham's exceptional faith and commitment. [4]

Adopting a reading consistent with the thrust of the biblical narrative, Rambam (Spain, Egypt 1138–1204) draws the opposite conclusion from that of Kant. The fact that Abraham obeyed God demonstrates his absolute certainty that he had received true prophecy. Otherwise, he never would have proceeded: [Abraham] hastened to slaughter, as he had been commanded, his son, his only son, whom he loved…. For if a dream of prophecy had been obscure for the prophets, or if they had doubts or incertitude concerning what they apprehended in a vision of prophecy, they would not have hastened to do that which is repugnant to nature, and [Abraham's] soul would not have consented to accomplish an act of so great an importance if there had been a doubt about it *(Guide of the Perplexed* III:24). [5] Although Rambam correctly assesses the biblical narrative, there still is room for a different moral question. After God informs Abraham about the impending destruction of Sodom, Abraham pleads courageously on behalf of the wicked city, appealing to God's need to act justly (Genesis 18:23–33).[6] How could Abraham stand idly by and not challenge God when God commanded him to sacrifice his beloved son?

By considering the Abraham narratives as a whole, we may resolve this dilemma. Abraham's actions in Genesis chapters 12–25 may be divided into three general categories: (1) responses to direct commands from God; (2) responses to promises or other information from God; and (3) responses to situations during which God does not communicate directly with Abraham. Whenever God commands an action, Abraham obeys without as much as a word of protest or questioning. When Abraham receives promises or other information from God, Abraham praises God when gratitude is in order, and he questions or challenges God when he deems it appropriate. Therefore, Abraham's silence when following God's commandment to sacrifice Isaac is to be expected. And so are Abraham's concerns about God's promises of progeny or information about the destruction of Sodom. The Torah thereby teaches that it is appropriate to question God, while simultaneously demanding faithfulness to God's commandments as an essential aspect of the mutual covenant between God and Israel. [7]

The Pinnacle of Religious Faith

Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994) suggests that Abraham and Job confronted the same religious test. Do they serve God because God provides all of their needs, or do they serve God under all conditions? Both were God-fearing individuals before their respective trials, but they demonstrated their unwavering commitment to God through their trials. [8]

Professor Moshe Halbertal (Hebrew University) derives a different lesson of commitment from the Akedah. God wishes to be loved by us, but this is almost impossible since we are utterly dependent on God for all of our needs. We generally express love through absolute giving. When sacrificing to God, however, we always can hold out hope that God will give us more. Cain and Abel could offer produce or sheep to God, but they likely were at least partially motivated to appeal to God for better crops and flocks next year. What can we possibly offer God that demonstrates our true love? The Akedah is God's giving Abraham the opportunity to offer a gift outside of the realm of exchange. Nothing can replace Isaac, since his value to Abraham is absolute. As soon as Abraham demonstrates willingness to offer his own son to God, he has proven his total love and commitment. As the angel tells Abraham, *"For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me"* (Genesis 22:12). Halbertal explains that Abraham's offering a ram in place of Isaac becomes the paradigm for later Israelite sacrifice. Inherent in all sacrifice in the Torah is the idea is that we love God to the point where we are prepared to sacrifice ourselves or our children to God. The animal serves as a substitute. The Akedah thereby represents the supreme act of giving to God. [9] The ideas explored by Professors Leibowitz and Halbertal lie at the heart of being extremely religious. Abraham is a model of pure, dedicated service and love of God. Such religious commitment is ideal, but it also comes with the lurking danger of religious extremism. We turn now to this critical issue.

Extremely Religious without Religious Extremism

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) composed a classic work on the Akedah, entitled *Fear and*

Trembling. He argued that if one believes in religion because it appears reasonable, that is a secular distortion. True religion, maintains Kierkegaard, means being able to suspend reason and moral conscience when God demands it. Kierkegaard calls Abraham a knight of faith for his willingness to obey God and sacrifice his son. Although Kierkegaard's philosophy did not lead others to violence in the name of religion, it certainly is vulnerable to that horrific outcome. In his philosophy, serving God must trump all moral or rational concerns.

A fatal problem arises when the representatives of any religion claim that God demands violence or other forms of immorality. In a powerful article written in the wake of the terror attack on New York City on September 11, 2001, Professor David Shatz (Yeshiva University) addresses this urgent question.[10] He observes that in general, the answer for any form of extremism is to create a system with competing ideals for balance. For example, one may place law against liberty, self-respect against respect for others, and discipline against love. In religion, however, there is a fundamental problem: placing any value against religion — especially if that competing value can trump religion — defeats religious commitment. Professor Shatz suggests a solution. There is a way to have passion for God tempered by morality and rationality without requiring any religious compromise. One must embrace morality and rationality as part of the religion. The religion itself must balance and integrate competing values and see them all as part of the religion. This debate harks back to Rabbi Saadyah Gaon (Babylonia, 882–942), who insisted that God chooses moral things to command. In contrast, the medieval Islamic philosophical school of Ash'ariyya maintained that whatever God commands is by definition good. [11] Kierkegaard's reading of the Akedah fails Professor Shatz's solution to religious extremism and is therefore vulnerable to the dangers of immorality in the name of God. In truth, Kierkegaard's reading of the Akedah fails the narrative itself: God repudiates child sacrifice at the end of the story. Whereas Kierkegaard focuses on Abraham's willingness to suspend morality to serve God, the narrative teaches that God rejects immorality as part of the Torah's religion.

The expression of religious commitment in the Torah is the fear of God, which by definition includes the highest form of morality. [12] There must never be any disconnect between religious commitment and moral behavior, and Israel's prophets constantly remind the people of this critical message. [13] Thus, the Torah incorporates morality and rationality as essential components of its religious system. It also is important to stress that people who act violently in the name of religion generally are not crazy. Rather, they are following their religious system as they understand it and as their clerics teach it. Such manifestations of religion themselves are evil and immoral.

Post-modernism thinks it can relativize all religion and thereby protect against the violence generated by religious extremism. In reality, however, post-modernism achieves the opposite effect, as its adherents no longer have the resolve to refer to evil as evil and to battle against it. Instead, they try to rationalize evil away. This position very meaningfully empowers the religious extremists. [14] Professor Shatz acknowledges that lamentably, there are negative extremist elements among some Jews who identify themselves as religious, as well. However, their attempts to justify their immorality with Torah sources in fact do violence to our sacred texts.[15] Such Jews are not extremely religious, as they pervert the Torah and desecrate God's Name. Similarly, every religion must build morality and rationality into their systems so that they can pursue a relationship with God while avoiding the catastrophic consequences of religious extremism. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has observed, *"the cure of bad religion is good religion, not no religion."* [16]

Conclusion

The Akedah teaches several vital religious lessons. Ideal religion is all about serving God, and is not self-serving. Because we expect God to be moral, the Torah's protest tradition also emerges with Abraham's holding God accountable. We may and should ask questions. Simultaneously, we must obey God's laws in our mutual covenantal relationship. We aspire to be extremely religious, and Abraham serves as a paragon of the ideal connection to God, an active relationship, and faithfulness. The Akedah also teaches the key to avoid what is rightly condemned as religious extremism, using religion as a vehicle for murder, persecution, discrimination, racism, and other expressions of immorality. Morality and rationality must be built into every religious system, or else its adherents risk lapsing into immorality in the name of their religion.

One of the best means of promoting our vision is to understand and teach the underlying messages of the Akedah. We

pray that all faith communities will join in affirming morality and rationality as being within their respective faiths. It is imperative for us to serve as emissaries of a different vision to what the world too often experiences in the name of religion, to model the ideal fear of Heaven that the Torah demands, and ultimately to sanctify God's Name.

Notes

[1] The Hebrew root for Akedah appears in Genesis 22:9, and refers to binding one's hands to one's feet. This is the only time that this root appears in the entire Bible.

[2] Rabbi Samuel David Luzzatto (Italy, 1800–1865) suggests that this legislation was in part an anti-pagan polemic, demonstrating that the Torah's idea of love of God does not involve the immoral sacrifice of one's child.

[3] Kant was not the first person troubled by the moral implications of the Akedah. In the second century BCE, the author of the non-canonical Book of Jubilees (17:16) ascribed the command to sacrifice Isaac to a "satanic" angel named Mastemah, rather than God Himself as presented in the Torah. Evidently, the author of Jubilees was uncomfortable attributing such a command directly to God. Adopting a different tactic, a fourteenth-century rabbi named Eleazar Ashkenazi ben Nathan Habavli maintained that the Akedah must have occurred in a prophetic vision. Had the Akedah occurred in waking state, he argued, Abraham surely would have protested as he did regarding Sodom (in Marc Shapiro, Changing the Immutable: How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History [Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015, p. 70]).

[4] See sources and discussion in Yonatan Grossman, Avraham: Sipuro shel Massa (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2014), pp. 300–301.

[5] Translation from The Guide of the Perplexed, Shlomo Pines, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 501–502.

[6] See especially R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "Does Jewish Tradition Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakha?" in Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice, ed. Marvin Fox (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1975), pp. 62–88.

[7] See further discussion in Hayyim Angel, "Learning Faith from the Text, or Text from Faith: The Challenges of Teaching (and Learning) the Abraham Narratives and Commentary," in Wisdom From All My Teachers: Challenges and Initiatives in Contemporary Torah Education, ed. Jeffrey Saks & Susan Handelman (Jerusalem: Urim, 2003), pp. 192–212; reprinted in Angel, Through an Opaque Lens (New York: Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006), pp. 127–154; revised second edition (New York: Kodesh Press, 2013), pp. 99–122.

[8] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State, ed. Eliezer Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 48–49, 259. Cf. Michael V. Fox, "Job the Pious," Zeitschrift fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 117 (2005), pp. 351–366.

[9] Moshe Halbertal, On Sacrifice (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 22–25.

[10] David Shatz, "'From the Depths I Have Called to You': Jewish Reflections on September 11th and Contemporary Terrorism," in Contending with Catastrophe: Jewish Perspectives on September 11th, ed. Michael J. Broyde (New York: Beth Din of America and K'Hal Publishing, 2011), pp. 197–233. See also Marvin Fox, "Kierkegaard and Rabbinic Judaism," in Collected Essays on Philosophy and on Judaism, vol. 2, ed. Jacob Neusner (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), pp. 29–43.

[11] See Howard Kreisel, Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), p. 38.

[12] See, for example, Genesis 20:11; 42:18; Exodus 1:17, 21; Deuteronomy 25:18.

[13] See, for example, Isaiah 1:10–17; Jeremiah 7:9–11; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21–25; Micah 6:4–8.

[14] For a chilling study of the virtual elimination of the very concept of sin and evil from much of Western literature, see Andrew Delbanco, The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995).

[15] See especially R. Yitzchak Blau, "Ploughshares into Swords: Contemporary Religious Zionists and Moral Constraints," Tradition 34:4 (Winter 2000), pp. 39–60.

[16] R. Jonathan Sacks, The Great Partnership: God, Science, and the Search for Meaning (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011), p. 11.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/binding-isaac-extremely-religious-without-religious-extremism-rabbi-hayyim-angel

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Shofar -- Living in the Present

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The Shofar is beloved to the Jewish people. It represents a call of coronation as we recognize Hashem as the creator and as our king. In a very personal way, it announces the day of judgment and calls upon us to assess ourselves. At this momentous time, we take stock of that of us which is good and that which needs to be improved.

Jewish tradition speaks of a link between our Shofar and the ram that took Yitzchak's place at the Akeida. That ram had two horns, each of which plays a great role in history. One horn was used as a Shofar at Har Sinai when the Torah was given, and we received our mission statement. The other horn will be used as a Shofar when Moshiach arrives.

The Shofar is connected to the call at Sinai when we received the Torah; it is also connected to the call which will come at the time of Moshiach when Hashem will usher in a most special time. In between — the energy which links Sinai with the times of Moshiach — is the energy of Yitzchak, his children, and his legacy. It was at the Akeida that Yitzchak dedicated himself with every fiber of his being to Hashem. Although typically Hashem doesn't ask us to die for him, it is that energy of dedication which inspires us to rise to the occasions of life and dedicate ourselves to the nobility of Torah living.

A friend of mine asked a class the thought-provoking question: What would you be willing to die for? Responses varied. Some said that they would risk their lives to save family members that were in danger. Others said they would be willing to die for their religion. My friend then proceeded with a smile to explain, *"You will not typically be asked to die for your family or religion. But if it is that important to you, then live for them! Spend the time to connect and develop genuine relationships."*

I am told that after a teenage pianist performed magnificently, someone in the audience exclaimed, *"I would give my life to play like that."* Another person responded, *"He did."* He did give his life to play like that. In terms of dedication, he used every ounce of himself to excel and become a master in his chosen field. Similarly, all of us can choose a life direction. We can choose a style of living that is wholesome and dedicated to Hashem.

The legacy of Yitzchak is to bridge the two Shofaros — that of Sinai and that of Moshiach — by living in the most dedicated way we can. In fact, each day as we complete the Amidah we pray that the Beis Hamikdash should be rebuilt. There are various reasons that this is the final touch to our Amidah prayer. One explanation is that as we conclude the

Amidah we recognize that all we strive for and all we pray for is aimed at reaching that great goal, bridging the gap between the call of Sinai and the call of Moshiach. We sincerely yearn for the time when Hashem will renew His relationship with us in a grand way and bring the world to the beautiful utopia that He promised of world peace. Our task is to hold on tightly as we live the gap between those two momentous events.

A Rebbe of mine once shared an anecdote from the life of his grandfather, a man who grew up in Europe in the early 1900s. He described how their school was situated about a mile away from the residential part of town. To get to school the children had to climb up and down a very large hill. Most of the time they were good natured about the hike. But when it was snowy and icy it could get quite messy.

Whenever there was a snowy day, the children would climb the mountain and slip so much that they came to school bruised. Until my Rebbe's grandfather came up with a solution. Clever youth that he was, he got a very long rope and affixed it to trees all along the mountain route. From then on, the children held tightly to the rope that was anchored at the two bottoms of the mountain, and they did not fall, even on the most slippery of days.

Rebbe explained that if we — as Jews — recognize that we are anchored firmly in our rich past and in the prophetic vision of our future, then we will not slip. Like his grandfather as a young boy, we just need to hold on tightly to the rope of Torah that helps us stay safe and secure.

The Shofar of Rosh Hashana is the call of the Torah which anchors us to the past at Sinai, and to the future, Messianic times. We try to live our lives in the best way that we can to bridge the gap between the mission statement of Sinai and its ultimate fruition in Messianic times. The lives we live are a gift to us because Hashem has faith in us that we will do our best. As the saying goes, *"Life is a gift. That is why it is called, 'The Present.'"*

May we merit Hashem's bountiful blessing this year, a year of good health, peace, Parnassa Tova, and renewed relationships.

May we recognize the gifts in our lives and merit to utilize them in a most blessed way.

With heartfelt blessings for Kesiva V'Chasima Tova to you and yours.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 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, 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 Ramba"n (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.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year. I have slightly adapted his Dvar Torah from 2020 to reflect his absence by distance now rather than distance because of the pandemic in 2020.

Rosh Hashanah: Judges and Halacha for Each Generation

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

]Rabbi Ovadia did not submit a Dvar Torah on Rosh Hashanah. Watch this space for more of his insights in 5784.[

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Shavuon Rosh Hashanah

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

At long last the moon has finally made its 12)or 13(monthly cycles and it is time for the New Year.
The Jews, a people compared to the moon since Abraham, have gone through its cycles of joy and despair, highs and lows, and hills and valleys. And I bet there's not one person reading this who hasn't had a cycle themselves. No one always flies high and no one always stays low. If I may paraphrase the band Journey, the wheel in the sky keep on turning.

Even if you're standing in the sleet and rain and don't know if you'll make it home again, there's always the morning sun. It's rising to kiss the day. There's always the full moon. Guiding our journey through the night. So after all the adventures over the past year, I can't wait to celebrate the start of a new one and see what the year in front of us will bring.

Hopefully we'll have a few experiences that are as sweet as honey, simple as the shofar's cry, savoury as a steak sandwich, complex as the Unetaneh Tokef, and spicy as a curry.

Shanah Tovah to All!

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Special note: The Auckland Holocaust Memorial Trust, chaired by Bob Narev, is initiating work on a Holocaust Memorial Garden near the Auckland Hebrew Congregation to create a beautiful Memorial and place for reflection. The design will incorporate more than 200 cobblestones from the Warsaw Ghetto that Auckland War Memorial Museum obtained as a gift to the Jewish community from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. The Trust will also move and reinstall the Holocaust Memorial sculpture completed in 1993 for the Greys Avenue site)former location of the Orthodox congregation(. After Yom Tov, the Trust will reach out to families who have a close connection to the Holocaust to discuss a legacy project that will memorialise those who lost their lives for generations to come.

Rav Kook Torah
Rosh Hashanah: The Call of the Great Shofar

> **Note:** Rav Kook delivered the following sermon in Jerusalem's Old City on Rosh Hashanah 1933. It was a time of mixed tidings. On the one hand, ominous news of Hitler's reign in Germany became more troubling with each passing day. On the other hand, the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael was flourishing. Immigration from central Europe was on the rise, bringing educated immigrants with needed skills and financial means. It seemed that the footsteps of redemption could be heard.

We say in our daily prayers, *"Sound the great shofar for our freedom, and raise the banner to bring our exiles together."*

What is the significance of this "great shofar"?

Three Shofars

There are three types of shofars that may be blown on Rosh Hashanah. The optimal shofar is the horn of a ram. If a ram's horn is not available, then the horn of any kosher animal other than a cow may be used. And if a kosher

shofar is not available, then one may blow on the horn of any animal, even one which is not kosher. When using a horn from a non-kosher animal, however, no blessing is recited.

These three shofars of Rosh Hashanah correspond to three *"Shofars of Redemption,"* three Divine calls summoning the Jewish people to be redeemed and to redeem their land.

The preferred Shofar of Redemption is the Divine call that awakens and inspires the people with holy motivations, through faith in God and the unique mission of the people of Israel. This elevated awakening corresponds to the ram's horn, a horn that recalls Abraham's supreme love of God and dedication in Akeidat Yitzchak, the Binding of Isaac. It was the call of this shofar, with its holy vision of heavenly Jerusalem united with earthly Jerusalem, that inspired Nachmanides, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevy, Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura, the students of the Vilna Gaon, and the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov to ascend to Eretz Yisrael. It is for this *'great shofar,'* an awakening of spiritual greatness and idealism, that we fervently pray.

There exists a second Shofar of Redemption, a less optimal form of awakening. This shofar calls out to the Jewish people to return to their homeland, to the land where our ancestors, our prophets and our kings, once lived. It beckons us to live as a free people, to raise our families in a Jewish country and a Jewish culture. This is a kosher shofar, albeit not a great shofar like the first type of awakening. We may still recite a brachah over this shofar.

There is, however, a third type of shofar.)**At this point in the sermon, Rav Kook burst out in tears.(** The least desirable shofar comes from the horn of an unclean animal. This shofar corresponds to the wake-up call that comes from the persecutions of anti-Semitic nations, warning the Jews to escape while they still can and flee to their own land. Enemies force the Jewish people to be redeemed, blasting the trumpets of war, bombarding them with deafening threats of harassment and torment, giving them no respite. The shofar of unclean beasts is thus transformed into a Shofar of Redemption.

Whoever failed to hear the calls of the first two shofars will be forced to listen to the call of this last shofar. Over this shofar, however, no blessing is recited. *"One does not recite a blessing over a cup of affliction"*)Berachot 51b(.

The Great Shofar

We pray that we will be redeemed by the *"great shofar."* We do not wish to be awakened by the calamitous call of the shofar of persecution, nor by the mediocre shofar of ordinary national aspirations. We yearn for the shofar that befits a holy nation, the shofar of spiritual greatness and true freedom. We await the shofar blasts of complete redemption, the sacred call that inspires the Jewish people with the holy ideals of Jerusalem and Mount Moriah:

> *"On that day a great shofar will be blown, and the lost from the land of Assyria and the dispersed from the land of Egypt will come and bow down to God on the holy mountain in Jerusalem."*)Isaiah 27:13(

)Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, pp. 67-70.( ]emphasis added[

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/ROSH_65.htm

Haazinu: The Spirituality of Song **(5776, 5783)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

With Ha'azinu we climb to one of the peaks of Jewish spirituality. For a month Moses had taught the people. He

had told them their history and destiny, and the laws that would make theirs a unique society of people bound in covenant with one another and with God. He renewed the covenant and then handed the leadership on to his successor and disciple Joshua. His final act would be blessing the people, tribe by tribe. But before that, there was one more thing he had to do. He had to sum up his prophetic message in a way the people would always remember and be inspired by. He knew that the best way of doing so is by music. So the last thing Moses did before giving the people his deathbed blessing was to teach them a song.

There is something profoundly spiritual about music. When language aspires to the transcendent, and the soul longs to break free of the gravitational pull of the earth, it modulates into song. Jewish history is not so much read as sung. The rabbis enumerated ten songs at key moments in the life of the nation. There was the song of the Israelites in Egypt)see Is. 30:29(, the song at the Red Sea)Ex. 15(, the song at the well)Num. 21(, and Ha'azinu, Moses' song at the end of his life. Joshua sang a song)Josh. 10:12-13(. So did Deborah)Jud. 5(, Hannah)1 Sam. 2(and David)2 Sam. 22(. There was the Song of Solomon, Shir ha-Shirim, about which Rabbi Akiva said, *"All songs are holy but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies."*]1[The tenth song has not yet been sung. It is the song of the Messiah.]2[

Many biblical texts speak of the power of music to restore the soul. When Saul was depressed, David would play for him and his spirit would be restored)1 Sam. 16(. David himself was known as the *"sweet singer of Israel"*)2 Sam. 23:1(. Elisha called for a harpist to play so that the prophetic spirit could rest upon him)2 Kings 3:15(. The Levites sang in the Temple. Every day, in Judaism, we preface our morning prayers with Pesukei deZimra, the *'Verses of Song'* with their magnificent crescendo, Psalm 150, in which instruments and the human voice combine to sing God's praises.

Mystics go further and speak of the song of the universe, what Pythagoras called *"the music of the spheres."* This is what Psalm 19 means when it says, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands . . . There is no speech, there are no words, where their voice is not heard. Their music]3[carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world."* Beneath the silence, audible only to the inner ear, creation sings to its Creator.

So, when we pray, we do not read: we sing. When we engage with sacred texts, we do not recite: we chant. Every text and every time has, in Judaism, its own specific melody. There are different tunes for Shacharit, Minchah and Ma'ariv, the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, Shabbat, the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Succot)which have much musically in common but also tunes distinctive to each(, and for the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are different tunes for different texts. There is one kind of cantillation for Torah, another for the haftorah from the prophetic books, and yet another for Ketuvim, the Writings, especially the five Megillot. There is a particular chant for studying the texts of the written Torah: Mishnah and Gemara. So by music alone we can tell what kind of day it is and what kind of text is being used. Jewish texts and times are not colour-coded but music-coded. The map of holy words is written in melodies and songs.

Music has extraordinary power to evoke emotion. The Kol Nidrei prayer with which Yom Kippur begins is not really a prayer at all. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. There can be little doubt that it is its ancient, haunting melody that has given it its hold over the Jewish imagination. It is hard to hear those notes and not feel that you are in the presence of God on the Day of Judgment, standing in the company of Jews of all places and times as they plead with heaven for forgiveness. It is the holy of holies of the Jewish soul.]4[

Nor can you sit on Tisha b'Av reading Eichah, the book of Lamentations, with its own unique cantillation, and not feel the tears of Jews through the ages as they suffered for their faith and wept as they remembered what they had lost, the pain as fresh as it was the day the Temple was destroyed. Words without music are like a body without a soul.

Beethoven wrote over the manuscript of the third movement of his A Minor Quartet the words Neue Kraft fühlend, *"Feeling new strength."* That is what music expresses and evokes. It is the language of emotion unsicklied by the pale cast of thought. That is what King David meant when he sang to God the words: *"You turned my grief into dance; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent."* You feel the strength of the human spirit no terror can destroy.

In his book, *Musicophilia,* the late Oliver Sacks)no relative, alas(told the poignant story of Clive Wearing, an eminent musicologist who was struck by a devastating brain infection. The result was acute amnesia. He was unable to remember anything for more than a few seconds. As his wife Deborah put it, *"It was as if every waking moment was the first waking moment."*

Unable to thread experiences together, he was caught in an endless present that had no connection with anything that had gone before. One day his wife found him holding a chocolate in one hand and repeatedly covering and uncovering it with the other hand, saying each time, "Look, it's new." "It's the same chocolate," she said. "No," he replied, "Look. It's changed." He had no past at all.

Two things broke through his isolation. One was his love for his wife. The other was music. He could still sing, play the organ and conduct a choir with all his old skill and verve. What was it about music, Sacks asked, that enabled him, while playing or conducting, to overcome his amnesia? He suggests that when we *"remember"* a melody, we recall one note at a time, yet each note relates to the whole. He quotes the philosopher of music, Victor Zuckerkandl, who wrote, *"Hearing a melody is hearing, having heard, and being about to hear, all at once. Every melody declares to us that the past can be there without being remembered, the future without being foreknown."* Music is a form of sensed continuity that can sometimes break through the most overpowering disconnections in our experience of time.

Faith is more like music than science.]5[Science analyses, music integrates. And as music connects note to note, so faith connects episode to episode, life to life, age to age in a timeless melody that breaks into time. God is the composer and librettist. We are each called on to be voices in the choir, singers of God's song. Faith is the ability to hear the music beneath the noise.

So music is a signal of transcendence. The philosopher and musician Roger Scruton writes that it is *"an encounter with the pure subject, released from the world of objects, and moving in obedience to the laws of freedom alone."]*6[He quotes Rilke: *"Words still go softly out towards the unsayable / And music, always new, from palpitating stones / builds in useless space its godly home."*]7[The history of the Jewish spirit is written in its songs.

I once watched a teacher explaining to young children the difference between a physical possession and a spiritual one. He had them build a paper model of Jerusalem. Then he played a song about Jerusalem on a cassette tape, and taught the song to the class. At the end of the session he did something very dramatic. He tore up the model and shredded the tape. He asked the children, *"Do we still have the model?"* They replied, *No. "Do we still have the song?"* They replied, *Yes.*

We lose physical possessions, but not spiritual ones. We lost the physical Moses. But we still have the song.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[*Mishnah,* Yadayim 3:5.

]2[*Tanhuma,* Beshallach, 10; Midrash Zuta, Shir ha-Shirim, 1:1.

]3[*Kavam,* literally "their line," possibly meaning the reverberating string of a musical instrument.

]4[Beethoven came close to it in the opening notes of the sixth movement of the C Sharp Minor Quartet op. 131, his most sublime and spiritual work.

]5[I once said to the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins, in the course of a radio conversation, *"Richard, religion is music, and you are tone deaf."* He replied, *"Yes, it's true, I am tone deaf, but there is no music."*

]6[Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Philosophy,* Duckworth, 1996, p. 151.

]7[Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus,* II, 10.

Around the Shabbat Table

]1[Why do you think music plays such an important role in Judaism?

]2[Are there tunes and songs in our rituals and prayers that particularly speak to you?

]3[How can we ensure that we do not lose this Song?

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/haazinu/the-spirituality-of-song/

On the Haftarah: The Power of Chana's Prayer

By Yitzi Hurwitz * © Chabad 2023

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

There are several reasons why this haftorah 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 haftorah, 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 haftorah. 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.

Dedicated to Jewish women praying for G d to grant their deepest desire — to have a child of their own. May He grant you what you are asking for.

* Spiritual leader at Chabad Jewish Center in Temecula, California, Rav Hurwitz is a victim of ALS. He composes his spiritual insights using his eyes, because he can no longer speak or type.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3449362/jewish/On-the-Haftarah-The-Power-of-Chanas-Prayer.htm

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Rosh Hashanah: The Day of Renewal

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

The Day of Renewal

For this thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, so you can fulfill it.
)Deut. 30:14(

It is on the day of Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the Jewish year, that G-d renews his covenant with us. Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, the first human beings, and on it we also celebrate the creation of the world in general. Inasmuch as both humanity and the world at large are being re-created on this day, it is an opportunity both to remake ourselves as human beings and to improve our influence on the world.

Rosh Hashanah is therefore our annual opportunity to make a new covenant with G-d, to rededicate ourselves to our Divine mission to transform the the world into his Home.

We begin this process with ourselves, resolving to live our lives in a more G-dly, spiritually refined manner, bringing Divine consciousness into the minutest details of our daily conduct.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

With the first day of Rosh Hashanah coinciding with Shabbos, may the new year be a restful, restorative and

invigorating year.

Shana Tova Umetuka!

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Volume 29 **Rosh Hashanah Issue** **5784 B"H**

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Teshuva Is for Everyone
Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

We cannot be content with our level of spirituality. There is always room for improvement. Life is like climbing up a downward escalator. If we are not constantly climbing, we will descend!

We just read Parshat Nitzavim which deals with the mitzvah of Teshuva. The Ramban interprets the following passuk as the source for the mitzvah of Teshuva: For this commandment which I command you this day, is not concealed from you, nor is it far away. (Devarim 30:11).

This passuk is referring to a mitzvah that is not out of reach. We are able to do Teshuva and return to the correct path. This is consistent with the previous passuk, which uses the term "ki tashuv"– when you return!

Often we think of Teshuva as being performed by a person who committed a serious transgression. In fact, this is something that is to be contemplated by each and every individual. Introspection is necessary in order to constantly improve upon ourselves and to become better human beings.

A story is told of Rav Saadia Gaon who informed his student of the following experience. Rav Saadia Gaon was traveling and stayed at an inn overnight. In those days, there was no internet or Rebbe cards and although Rav Saadia's reputation preceded him, not everyone was familiar with how he looked.

When Rav Saadia arrived at the inn, he was treated well by the owner of the inn, given a comfortable room and a tasty meal. When he was checking out, another guest recognized Rav Saadia and greeted him with the utmost respect. Upon witnessing this, the owner of the inn was mortified and apologized. He told Rav Saadia 'If I had known who you were, I would have treated you better.' Rav Saadia was puzzled. He informed the innkeeper that the service he received was impeccable and that nothing was lacking. The innkeeper replied: 'Yes, but had I known that you are Rav Saadia Gaon, I would have given you super treatment!'

Rav Saadia explained that he learned an important lesson from the innkeeper. Rav Saadia told his student: "Every single day I have a deeper appreciation of HaKadosh Baruch Hu; therefore, every single day of my life I should spend doing Teshuva because yesterday I didn't truly appreciate G-d's greatness." In other words, some- thing was lacking in my avodat Hashem yesterday, given what I know today. We cannot be content with our level of spirituality. There is always room for improvement. Life is like climbing up a downward escalator. If we are not constantly climbing, we will descend! If Rav Saadia Gaon felt he could get closer to Hashem each day, then we have plenty of room to improve our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu as well.

As we reflect upon our challenges and accomplishments over the past year, we should also carefully consider concrete new goals so that we can further enhance our limud torah, our tefilla and our acts of chesed. Determine what new shiur we plan to attend, or new sefer we intend to learn. How we will make an effort to catch minyan more often, or undertake to better understand the tefilla. Consider ways of assisting those less fortunate than us by both by volunteering our time and allocating our ma'aser money effectively. As we are told in the parsha – it is up to us to engage in the act of Teshuva. "B'ficha ubilvavcha laasoto" – it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it (Devarim 30:14).

May we be successful in identifying the areas in which we can improve, so that we can achieve Teshuva Shlema!

The Sound of Silence – Seeking Hashem's Unspoken Will
Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Avraham's willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Yitzchak was the climax of the 10 divine tests he passed and the seminal expression of religious commitment. Sur- prisingly, we only have one mitzvah that commemorates this Akeida- the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Chazal explain that the blowing of the shofar aims to remind G-d of Avraham's com- mitment and our identification with it.

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16a) explains that we therefore customarily use the horn of a ram - the animal Avraham sac- rificed after he was told to spare Yitzchak.

Although the Akeida may not have taken place on Rosh Hashanah itself, it is the day we commemorate it because it is the day G-d and (therefore) we reflect on our religious identity and commitment. The essence and goal of Rosh Hashanah are Zikaron (the word the Torah uses - Vay- ikra 23:24), but the focus is Malchuyot.

The way we merit G-d remembering' (viewing) us positively is by reaffirming and sharpening our commitment to Him - a resolute kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim (acceptance of the yoke of Heaven). Our identification with Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak expresses this clearly and firmly.

Interestingly, the symbol used to com- memorate the Akeida is the ram's horn. As opposed to an object that would have reflected Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak, we choose the horn that commemorates his sacrifice of the ram.

Why focus on the less challenging sacri- fice of the ram initiated by Avraham's own volition as opposed to his heart-wrenching willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak commanded by G-d Himself? Isn't the latter a better expression of Avraham's acceptance of G-d's Authority and his commitment to His Will?

The significance of the sacrifice of the ram can be seen in the parsha of the Akeida as well. Two important postscripts of the Akeida narrative - Avraham's naming of the place, ('Hashem Yir'eh (has shown/been shown)') and his receiving of the divine blessings as a reward for his commitment - happen only after he sacrifices the ram.

Why wasn't Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak enough to merit him G-d's blessings?

I believe the answer lies in the difference in how Avraham arrives at the decision to sacrifice the ram versus how he comes to the decision to sacrifice Yitzchak. The latter is, of course, a result of G-d's express request that he do so. For the former, though, there is no command or request. After showing appreciation for Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak and telling him to stand down, G-d is silent. There is no mention of another sacrifice, no mention of the ram.

The Torah tells us that it was Avraham who searched for ('Vayisa Avraham et einav'), found, and decided to sacrifice the ram. G-d had relieved him of his duties, but Avraham continued looking for opportunities to serve.

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Like in the beginning of the parsha, where, despite the intense heat, Avraham searched (note the similar phrase - 'Vayisa Avraham et einav') for guests to offer chesed to.

Interestingly, the Torah tells us that the ram was caught in the thicket. Why are we told this detail? Chazal understood this as an indication that the ram was placed there by G-d for Avraham to find. In fact, Chazal include the ram as one of the objects created during the six days of creation for this purpose. Though unspoken, it was G-d's Will that Avraham follows up his willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak with the actual sacrifice of the ram in Yitzchak's place. In fact, it seems that Avraham saw the ram as something G-d had shown him by naming the place 'Hashem Yir'eh' to commemorate G-d's having shown him the ram.

G-d directs us not only through his spoken word (the Torah and Halacha) but also through events and circumstances His Providence arranges. Man is expected to serve G-d not only by heeding His stated word, but by searching for the additional opportunities/ expectations He sends our way.

It is this latter aspect of the Akeida that the mitzvah of shofar commemorates and focuses our attention on each Rosh Hashanah. Complete kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim means seeing ourselves as G-d's creations charged with the mission of fulfilling His will. If we see ourselves this way, we would strive not only to fulfill

G-d's stated commandments but to deter- mine and realize His unspoken directives as well.

May we learn from how we commemorate the Akeida to 'remember' how to live our lives as complete ovdei Hashem (servants of G-d) and merit through this G-d's 'remembering' us and granting us life, welfare, and success in the coming year.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

The Greatest Trial

In the story of the akedah, we read that, after the angel of the Lord had stayed the hand of Abraham, and Isaac was released from his bonds on the altar, the angel declared: attah yadati ki yerei Elokim attah, "Now I know that you are a God-fearing man."

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, one of the most profound and mysterious of the Polish Hasidic leaders, asks: why the emphasis on attah, "now?" If the binding of Isaac on the akedah was the act of sacrifice that marked Abrahm as a yerei Elokim, then the statement attah yadati should have come earlier in the narrative, when Abraham bound his son. Is it not out of place "now" that Isaac was saved?

The answer of the Kotzker is nothing short of amazing, even shocking. He says that for Abraham to take Isaac off the altar was many times harder than for him to offer him up in the first place! It was more painful for Abraham to release Isaac than it was to bind him--and that is why the angel said attah yadati, first now do I know that you are really a yerei Elokim.

What can the Kotzker Rebbe mean by this? Certainly not that Abraham had any special pleasure in sacrificing Isaac! To cast Abraham in the role of an idealistic sadist or masochist is to misread and undo the entire meaning of the akedah. Rather, the Kotzker here presents us with a new interpretation of the akedah, one which teaches an awesome psycho-spiritual insight. It is the nature of man, once he has taken a clear position in life, especially if he has suffered for it, not to retreat from it, but to mold the future along the doctrines of the past in order to vindicate his past. It is part of our normal psychology: what we have invested in time and energy, loyalty and commitment, prestige and reputation in a certain approach, we do not want to change, we cannot change, lest we thereby declare that our entire past has been invalid and inauthentic. Self-justification of our past dictates our future.

Consider what Abraham had to invest in his initial decision to offer up his son. He had to overcome such enormous inhibitions in order to bring Isaac up on the altar. The Rabbis describe the inhuman anguish that Father Abraham had to undergo between the divine commandment and the actual binding on the altar. In these three days he lived through 300 years. This was his entire posterity, his beloved Isaac--and the Lord who had promised him that his seed would occupy his Land, now ordered him to destroy this child with his very hands! What greatness, what enormous and even inhuman devotion was required of Abraham. He had to cut out a whole part of his heart, he had to subdue the tenderest, gentlest, most powerful love--in order to obey what seemed to be such a cruel demand of his Lord. In his mind's eye, Abraham saw his son dead over and over again. As he made his way up the mountain, he rehearsed the bloody scene a thousand times. His mind ached and his heart burst and his nerves threatened to snap from the death screams of his own child which he anticipated in such unspeakable agony. This was his beloved Isaac, and he was a warm and compassionate father, and now--he had to subdue his most powerful natural instincts. Yet Abraham followed the dictates of God and sacrificed the love of a father's heart. The love of God demands that every other love be subservient to it. And so Abraham invested in his momentous decision every fibre of his humanity and his very being. And one he had decided on his path, that was that. Having made his decision, Abraham was no longer the same man. He aged, and was now--in his own image of himself--and old and bereft father, whose light of his life had been extinguished. He cut a tragic figure in the halls of history who had to choose between family and faith, between God and son, and, having chosen, would never sleep soundly again.

This, then, was what was involved in Abraham's submission to the divine command to sacrifice Isaac. At this time, after having made that historic, heart-rending, and soul-wrenching psychological decision; at this point when Abraham held up his hand holding the knife above Isaac, he had, in the reality of his heart and mind, already sacrificed his son on the akedah. The pain, the suffering, the renunciation, the conflict, all of it was over--only the anti-climax of the actual physical act remained to be done. And now, after all this, to be told to cease, because it was only a trial, a show, would have meant invalidating all that he had done, his anguish and his fear, his commitment and his pain--and especially his renunciation of his love for his child. When now the angel suddenly told him to stay his hand, he in effect told him: Abraham, you gave up that boy's life too quickly; morally you already split the child's blood--and it was not really necessary: you marked yourself as a murderer in the name of a higher cause, and, after all that, you are not even going to receive the reward of knowing that your sacrifice was a real one. Who would have blamed Abraham for turning to God and saying: "God, are You playing games with me? Once I had decided to raise my hand over the akedah, to stretch out my hand against my son, the entire story was over for me. Couldn't You tell me before it was only a game? Why, in heaven's name, did You force me into a sacrifice of heroism, and then pull back and reduce a sacred drama to a pretentious gesture?" To be told to release Isaac at the last moment could very well have meant that Abraham, in his own eyes, would henceforth be the eternal fool: the man who hallucinated about God, the man who was ready to do something which he thought noble but which now seemed terrible, the man who was haunted and pursued by heaven itself, telling him that his great sacrifice was unwanted by God, unnecessary, and therefore pointless. The angel's command not to sacrifice Isaac meant that Abraham must be prepared to embrace the role in history of a confused old man rather as Kierkegaard called him, "the Knight of God." So it was inhumanly difficult for Abraham to invalidate his past, to risk making his whole life illegitimate--how much easier and more natural to convince himself that the angel's voice was the temptation of his fatherly love, or Satan, or his inner resistance to the divine command. But Abraham was a yerei Elokim, a God-fearing man. And a God-fearing man-- does not look to his own investment, to his own reputation, to his own sacrifice; he cares only about the will of God. He is willing to surrender the justification of his past conduct and start all over again. No matter how much pain and pride he had invested in the past, he is willing to declare it bankrupt and change. Abraham's greatness is thus more evident in obeying the angel's command to stay his hand than in God's command to sacrifice Isaac. His not

sacrificing Isaac marks him truly as the "Knight of God."

The Kotzker was right: binding Isaac on the altar was the act of akedat Yitzhak, the sacrifice of Isaac; taking him off was the act of akedat Avraham, the sacrifice of Abraham. Perhaps this is why this portion is read on Rosh Hashana--not only because tradition ascribes the event of the akedah to Rosh Hashanah, but because Rosh Hashanah is the time of teshuvah, and repentance implies the invalidation of one's ego, the confession that my past cannot and will not be justified, the admission that all that I have done and been until now is null and void. For this, indeed, is what Abraham had to do when he obeyed the voice of the angel to release Isaac: he had to say that my enormous sacrifice of offering him up in the first place--was null and void. My self-image as a heroic, tragic figure--is an error. I submit--to the crushing of my ego.

Shofar, symbol of the akedah, has ever since been the chilling summons to us to forego self-justification, to renounce the vindication of a life in which we have built powerful super structures on shifting sands and uncertain foundations. To say "I was wrong, I'm willing to start all over again, to abandon my self-image, to declare myself in error, even bankrupt"--that is the greatest trial, even greater than the sacrifice of one's greatest love. But it is a challenge we cannot escape, either individually or collectively.

This affliction of self-justification hampers us at almost every juncture of life. As a Rabbi who does counselling as part of his professional duties, I can say that, objectively speaking, most of the personal problems brought to my attention can be solved fairly simply. Logically, many are open-and-shut cases. What causes most of the difficulty is - self- justification. A wayward husband or wrong-headed or wrong-headed parent or child or contentious brother has followed one policy or way so long that to change would call into question his past wisdom and judgment, and invalidate his character and conduct and "image" and reputation. So he decides to spend his energy perpetuating the same mistake, elevating an error to philosophy and stubbornness to policy, and getting deeper into the sme mess, because he hasn't the courage to change. But that is precisely the message of Shofar and the Akedah it symbolizes: atta yadati ki yerei Elokim atta--true character requires the courage to admit that, despite your best intentions, you were wrong, and now must redirect your course of life.

Our failure to do just that is probably the major cause of our great national agony, the most humiliating episode in American history--the Vietnam war. No diabolical industrial-military complex gathered in some Pentagon basement to involve us in a bloody Asian land war. We stumbled into it, bit by bit. And then, when we realized what we had gotten into, when the public became aroused--there was a point at which we could have gotten out, but we found we did not have the courage of Abraham. We began to justify our past decisions, we threw in good money after bad money; new young lives were sacrificed on the Asian akedah because we would not respond to the angel's call to stay our hand, retract, and cease forthwith. So more than one father and mother is bereaved as a result.

And now, as citizens of this country, we must not shrink from another moral obligation. We must insist to our leaders that any further enormous investments in manned-landing programs in space to be thoroughly debated before we stumble into it simply because the apparatus and capability exists and because not to do it would call into question the completed Moon landing. It is too late now to argue whether the Man on the Moon program was worth it--ten years in which we spent $24 million, 10% of our national budget, on a project of questionable scientific value (the "manned" aspect), and a decade during which we have suffered through a long Far Eastern war, a quick Middle Eastern war, several major political assassinations, student uprisigns, urban crisis, racial unrest, youth rebeliousness, a sex revolution, and a run-away economy. Perhaps some will agree with the President that the landing on the moon was "the greatest day since the creation." But no one ought to agree with the Vice President mindlessly and without further deliberation that now we must immediately embark upon a Man on Mars program. Man's salvation lies not in the exploration of distant planets but in alleviating pain and hunger and want on this planet.

I תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום חגינו. Shofar is sounded on Rosh Hashanah בכסה, when the moon is concealed, as it always is on the first day of the lunar month. Rosh Hashanah bids us redirect our attention from Moon and Mars and all that which distracts us from the real, fateful issues that trouble men and women in their daily lives. We must not permit Moon to eclipse Man.

Abraham said hineni, "I'm ready," when he was told to stay his hand; without hesitation, he was willing to stay his hand; without hesitation, he was willing to risk invalidation of his past. We must do no less. The fact that we have the technical capability and administrative apparatus necessary for such a venture further into space, should not push us into it. Just because we did so these past 8-10 years would not make us justify the Moon program by investing in a Mars program. Too many human lives may be sacrificed on the altar of that distant and barren planet. Now is the time to say, "enough!" The Moon landing salvaged our national prestige; let us now tend to our national honor-education and health and social justice and the quality of life--instead of squandering our resources on sophisticated gimmickry.

As Jews--especially as Jews --we must listen to that challenge of the akedah. Judaism is in trouble in America--and even in Israel. And unless we have the courage to indulge in self-criticism and openly say we were wrong in our lukewarm, tepid loyalties--our children will. Unless we abandon self-justification and invalidate our past--the next generation will abandon us. For example: there is hardly a more doctrinaire anti-Torah group than the Marxist Hashomer Hatzair in Israel. Yet a year after the Six-Day War, the same group issued, for private distribution only, conversation of its youth in which the tone was set by a young man who expressed resentment against his elders who had denied him any real contact with the Jewish tradition, and thus left him both rootless and without a common language with other Jews in the Diaspora. He said, in reference to the lack of a Shabbat in his life: אני יכול להגיד בצורה קצונית שהחיים שלנו שדופים. החיים שלנו הם חול אחד ארוך... אנחנו חיים חיים אפורים 365 ימים בשנה
"Our lives are parched, empty. We live one long Week-day--we live gray, dull lives 365 days a year."

What a condemnation of parents who didn't have the guts to question their own anti-religious dogma and to undo decades of commitment to the wrong ideals! They are saying the opposite of what God said to Abraham: atta yadati--"now I know that you have no fear of God, that you are a moral coward and a spiritual weakling, that you failed me!" For in attempting to justify a bankrupt ideology when events screamed out against it, you bestowed on us a life that is a burden--for a life without Shabbat, without Yom Tov, without kashrut, without a touch of transcendence--is "one long week-day!"

This lesson of treasure, to live by the highest standards and ideals of our tradition--ethically, morally, halakhically. Having chosen that way, we invest in it our logic and time and energy and pride, we are caught up in the grip of inertia...We feel we must justify our past and thus we threaten to destroy our future. Rosh Hashanah attempts to dislodge us and to encourage us on to a new way.
No one says it is an easy task. On the contrary, it is the greatest trial of all. It is harder than sacrificing our greatest love, for it means sacrificing our very egos, our reputations, even our identities.

But we can do it. And we must do it. And having done it, we shall be liberated from the tyrannical rule of self-justification.

We enter now a New Year, a new shanah. That Hebrew word for "year" is related to two other meanings. Shana also means "he repeated" and "he changed." Two opposites: to repeat and to change. If this is to be a shanah tovah, a good year, we must know what to repeat and what to change: to continue that which deserves perpetuation and to abandon that which does not, even at the risk of self-invalidation.

May we do that, with our inherited Abrahamitic courage. And then the good Lord will pass His judgment: atta yadati ki yerei Elokim attah, now you are truly God-fearing and deserving of a shanah tovah, a year of health and happiness, of blessing and peace, a year of fulfillment and reconciliation, for us individually, for the State of Israel, for Jews throughout the world, and for all mankind.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Do we celebrate Rosh Hashanah on the right day?
In our davening on the New Year we proclaim,
"HaYom harat olam!" – "This is the day on which Hashem created the world!"

Similarly in our davening we say,
"Zeh hayom techilat maasecha." – "This is the day on which You commenced Your creativity Hashem,"
"Zikaron leyom rishon." – "The anniversary of day one."

But is that correct? Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the creation of the first human being which was day six of Creation. It all actually started on the 25th of Elul!

One of the privileges that I have as Chief Rabbi is to officiate at significant anniversary events. There have been so many occasions on which I've celebrated the anniversary of a shul building with communities. I've never so far officiated at the anniversary of the laying of a foundation or the completion or even the furnishing of an edifice. It's always been the anniversary of the first occasion on which the building was used for a purpose.

Surely this is exactly what we celebrate on Rosh Hashanah! It is the anniversary of the first occasion on which human beings used what Hashem had created in this world in a constructive and productive way.

Rosh Hashanah is therefore most certainly celebrated on the right date, recognising what humankind has achieved from the moment we were given the opportunity to do so.

In similar fashion, over these high Holy Days, let us reflect on the past year. To what degree have we utilised the opportunities that Hashem has given us? In what respects have we allowed missed opportunities to occur? This should inspire us to guarantee that during the forthcoming year 5783, we will take advantage of everything that Hashem has created in this world, so that we as individuals, families, communities and a nation will ensure that we make the very best of this year for all of humankind.

I wish you all a shana tova – a happy and wonderful new year.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Some Underlying Concepts of the Jewish New Year

Sometimes, by analyzing three words of a greeting, we can dissect the expression, and discover vast differences from one culture to another. On January 1st, millions, or billions, of people around the world wish each other "Happy New Year". On Rosh Hashana, Jews the world over use three Hebrew words of greeting: "שנה טובה ומתוקה". It sounds very similar to the English greeting, but if we analyze these Hebrew words, we see a vast difference from the English.

I am not going to define here the concept of "happy" in "Happy New Year," especially since it is an entire Shiur in unto itself, and we analyzed this concept two weeks ago in the Parsha. Perhaps the word "*Metuka*-sweet" indeed approximates happy, since a person who feels that he or she has a sweet life is undoubtedly happy. Both expressions use the word *year* in English and Hebrew. But what is missing from the Jewish words expressed tonight? In *every* other culture, on the first day of the year, there is always an expression about the "New" year. But in saying Shana Tova, Jews wish each other a "good" year. Nothing new about it. Jews never say *Shana Chadasha*-a new year. Why not?

When non-Jews greet each other on January 1st or whenever they celebrate the beginning of their year, they proudly accentuate Happy NEW year. Out with the old, in with the new. In Denmark, they intentionally throw out old glasses and plates. In Panama, they hang an effigy as a symbol of the old year. Let's get rid of it. Burn it. Start over. New year's resolutions. Sounds pretty good. But it isn't Jewish.

The word *Shana*-year - can be derived from the word "*Leshanot*" – to change, which certainly fits the theme and days of Teshuva-repentance. But this word is also derived from the world Yashan-old, the opposite of new. The Year is old. It comes from the unchanging sun. The moon, however, *is* Chadash- new. It is *always* changing. Of course, there is a place for newness in Judaism. We wish each other תתחדש when we *buy* something new. Chodosh is the new Halachik grain permitted after the Omer offering in Nisan. Jews indeed celebrate newness each month on Rosh Chodesh. But not on Rosh HashanaIn fact, tonight is indeed new, but we go out of our way NOT to mention it. It is Rosh Chodesh. But we do NOT say Chodesh Tov tonight. We *hide* the fact that it is Rosh Chodesh by *not* announcing it last Shabbat. And we say tonight "תִּקְעוּ בַחֹדֶשׁ שׁוֹפָר בַּכֶּסֶה לְיוֹם חַגֵּנוּ:" (Psalms 91:4) We blow shofar on the day *we cover up the New Moon*. Today is not about new. The old year, the past IS important. We do NOT throw out the past and automatically begin anew. We carefully examine that past on Rosh Hashana and make changes where needed. THAT is the Jewish way. We get a second chance NOW – to do it over and get it right. That is *another* meaning of Shana – *Leshanot* does not only signify change but also "to do it over again" Lishanot in Hebrew. Mishne. Vishinantom. Jews build on the past and THEN they add to it. A New year implies throwing out the past

This concept is how God exemplified the Jewish people as a whole. The Mishne in Sanhedrin (Mishne Sanhedrin 10:1) says that all Jews begin with a share in Olam Haba-The Next World. What is the proof verse? God in Isaiah (Isaiah 60:21) calls all Jews righteous and נצר מטעי the branch of God's planting. What is the difference between *Netia*- a plant, and a Zera-also a plant? לנטוע or לזרוע? A *Zera* is a seed for planting a vegetable. To grow vegetables, last year's crop must be totally extricated, eroded and plowed over, to begin again with a new seed on an empty field. A *Netia* is a sapling, a tree, with roots that last from year to year, with branches and ultimately, new fruit. While each fruit is completely new each year, the trunk, branches, and roots remain. They are "old." The Jewish people, says God, are compared to that tree נֵצֶר מַטָּעַי. But non-Jews are compared to vegetables. In the non-Jewish world, each generation, each year, like vegetables, thinks they have to start over again, and be better than the previous generation. Each year, they begin again. Happy NEW year. Jews build from year to year, and continually improve on the past. Remove the bad, leave the good, and make it better. That is the Jewish people and that is Rosh Hashana.

Lest one think that this is merely a play on words, i.e., that the word Shana is both "old" (*Yashan*) and change (*Leshanot*) simultaneously, there is another word in Hebrew which demonstrates the identical concept. When a commander in the Israeli army wants a soldier to go forward, he shouts "*Kadima*". *Lehitakdem* signifies growth, moving forward. But that very same Hebrew word- *Kadima*- also signifies the past- *Kedem. Yimai Kedem* are olden times. A Jew, to go forward, *Kadima*, must always be cognizant of his or her past. *Kedem*. King David wrote that we are built to look to the past and forward simultaneously. "אָחוֹר וָקֶדֶם צַרְתָּנִי" (Psalms 91:4). Only by looking back can Jew peoperly move forward. Or, as Rabbi Wein is fond of saying: "When a person is parked in his or her car, before he or she can move forward out of the parking spot, the driver MUST look at his or her rearview mirror". That is Rosh Hashana.

To demonstrate that this is a uniquely Jewish concept and feeling, the Talmud compares each religion/nation to a specific animal. Jacob or the Jewish people are compared to a lamb (Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 4:6), Eisav-Western Civilization is compared to a pig (Rashi commentary on Genesis 26:34), while Yishmael, the Islamic world, is compared to a camel (Midrash Aseret Melachim, Midrash Pitaron Torah, Parshat Shmini.). Rabbi

Jonathan Sacks *Zichrono Livracha*, makes the argument that these three animals symbolize each culture related to their outlooks in life. Lambs and all kosher animals have both attributes of chewing their cud and a split hoof. Pigs have split hooves but do not chew their cud, while camels chew their cuds but do not have slit hooves. The hooves of an animal symbolize its forward movement, its future. Chewing its cud symbolizes bringing back the action that already has taken place or returning to the past. Today's Western Culture is constantly looking to move forward, like the pig with only split hooves. New technology makes many of the advances of the past (even by a few years) obsolete. Western culture seeks change and rarely has respect for the past. Happy *New* Year. Out with the old. This is the symbol of the split hoof without chewing its cud.

Chewing the cud is a regurgitation of the past. The Middle Eastern and Muslim world generally glorifies its past and looks back on the success of its history as the pinnacle of its accomplishments. The Arab world seeks to return the world to the days of the past when Arab culture led the way and dominated. This is the symbol of chewing the cud but not having split hooves.

But the sheep and other kosher animals, the Jewish people, both chew their cud and have split hooves. The Jewish culture is manifested by both aspects of life and aspirations. Deep respect and reverence for the past. And yet, Judaism is always looking forward and moving forward at the same time. It wishes to use the rich culture of the past to change the present and bring the future. Thus, it is the kosher animals, with both the past and future, that are the symbols of the Jewish people. And this is the essence of Rosh Hashana as well.

This crucial message for us was most properly articulated by Jeremiah the prophet "הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ ד' אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם:" (Eicha 5:1) If we wish to achieve Teshuva (הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ ד' אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה), HOW? (חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם) We must transform, the old, the *Kedem*, into *Chadash*, the new. We must build on the old, last year, and make it new, make it different, make it better for today and the entire year to come. That is Teshuva. That is Rosh Hashana. Kadima! Shana Tova Umetuka!

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Opportunity for Renewal
Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum

One of the most beautiful things about Judaism is that we are given a fresh start every year. New beginnings give us hope and the energy to go on.

However, new beginnings also require significant efforts on our part. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur respond to the following: How does one begin anew? How can we revitalize our lives? Every interpersonal, intimate or family relationship, as well as any business relationship, requires rejuvenation. A person who never reinvents himself and is always static cannot live his life to the fullest.

Unlike other festivals and fast days, Yom Kippur is not linked to any specific historical event; nor is it like the Sabbath, which is associated with Creation. Yom Kippur is a time unto itself and is therefore the ideal time for contemplation, affording time and opportunity for reflection and renewal both for the individual and the congregation. True, on Yom Kippur, one stands before the Creator as an individual; however, one does not stand alone, nor is one's repentance achieved through self-contemplation and seclusion.

Rather, the individual repents as a member of a congregation, and for this very reason the prayer of the Viduy (confession recited on Yom Kippur) uses the plural form rather than the singular form — "we have sinned." Reciting our confession in the plural helps us understand what 'public repentance' (teshuvat harabim) is all about.

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are regarded by many Diaspora Jews to be not only the holiest days in the Jewish calendar, but also a time of year which is formative, shaping Jewish life and Jewish identity. Millions of Jews come to listen to the shofar blowing on Rosh Hashana, attend the Kol Nidrei prayer at the start of Yom Kippur and take part in the Ne'ila prayer and the final shofar blowing, which marks the end of the fast of Yom Kippur.

Many of the Jews who attend the synagogue service on Yom Kippur are not religious or observant Jews. Unlike any other day, on Yom Kippur all Jews go to the synagogue and sit side by side: religious, secular, and even assimilated Jews. Many don't come to engage in prayer per se, but to be a part of the congregation. Some come to reinforce their Jewish identity once a year, while others act on feelings of nostalgia and come because their fathers and forefathers did the same. Some are in search of a sense of belonging, while others seek meaning. What brings non-practicing Jews, or those that are not connected to the Jewish tradition in any way, to the synagogue on these days?

Why is it that the prayer of Kol Nidrei, with its impersonal and somewhat complex content, in addition to the somber melody to which it is sung, serves as such an attractive force, more than the joyful dancing of Simchat Torah?

Contemporary Jewish existence is often characterized by a sense of loneliness. When a Jew feels lonely, this has a direct impact on his personal Jewish identity. On Yom Kippur, the individual yearns to be a part of something bigger; to feel a sense of belonging and to strengthen his personal identity through the Jewish collective; to stand together with an entire congregation even if he himself is not actually praying. Indeed, the 25 hours constituting Yom Kippur are not only the holiest hours of the year, so aptly called Shabbat Shabbaton, but also play a pivotal role in preserving Jewish identity.

Another reason why people attend the synagogue services on Yom Kippur is their quest for spirituality. In our modern world, there is a constant search for the spiritual because people need meaning which transcends religious practices and laws.

There is a difference between religion and spirituality. Spirituality seems to be more personal and intimate than religion, which is perceived to have a significant public dimension and to be more practical. Spirituality is born inside the individual and develops within; whereas religion is a collection of rules and commandments by which an individual must abide. Religion instructs one on how to distinguish between right and wrong, and in what to believe. Spirituality enables one to find this out independently and discover the meaning of these ideas on one's own. Spirituality is what gives the individual meaning and purpose; it is the means through which one's soul and inner-most chambers are touched. Yom Kippur is a day on which the individual Jew seeks spirituality, be he a religious Jew or one who is far removed from the Jewish tradition.

It seems to me that if we adopt the language of "Jewish spirituality" by developing a contemporary spiritual jargon which interfaces with Judaism and gives one a sense of belonging, we stand the chance of bringing many Jews closer to Jewish tradition. This is our way in all Ohr Torah Stone institutions and at the Beren-Amiel and Straus-Amiel educational and rabbinical emissary programs in particular. We are attentive to the voices of the Jewish People all year round, as well as on the High Holy Days so that we can speak the language of Jewish, intellectual spirituality.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein
Holy Anxiety

Jews are often stereotyped as a hopelessly unsatisfied people who can be difficult to please. If there is sociological evidence to warrant and support this portrayal it is rooted not in a sophisticated palate or sensitive disposition but rather in an underlying and intractable spiritual restlessness. According to the Gemara (Sanhedrin 76b) the parchedness mentioned in the pasuk, "that the quenched shall be added to the thirsty" (Devarim 29:18), refers to the Jewish people, who Rashi tells us "are eternally eager and hungry to fear their

Creator and fulfill His mitzvos". Rav Shimshon Pincus (Tiferes Shimshon) concludes from this identification that a Jew should be driven by a relentless thirst and craving to come closer to Hashem such that it prevents him from ever being satiated or truly at peace with the status quo. For this reason, in certain circles, pious Jews are approvingly referred to as "chareidim" - "those who are anxious," because their religious observance is defined by a controlled and reasoned but at the same time eager and anxious ambition for greater and more intense degrees of spirituality.

In this sense, an appropriate dose of religious uneasiness is a healthy sign and a reason to be optimistic about the overall spiritual trajectory and possibility for future growth. This message surfaces from the reconciliation of the different themes of Rosh Hashanah which at first glance seem to be inconsistent. On the one hand, the sense of trepidation inherent in being judged precludes the recitation of hallel, as the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 32b) asks rhetorically, "is it possible that while the King is sitting on the throne of judgment and the books of life and the books of death are open before Him, the Jewish people should sing joyous songs?" At the same time, the Tur (Sec. 581) rules that it is appropriate to eat, drink, and rejoice on the day of Rosh Hashanah for the Jewish people are confident that Hashem will vindicate them in judgment. How can one be apprehensive while simultaneously unwaveringly secure? Perhaps one emotion yields the other. If the fear of judgement is internalized, and worry over the verdict generates an earnest pursuit of improvement, then there is ample reason to feel assured about the prospects for the coming year.

An animated religious approach demands that there be some disruption to the serenity of complacency. The Beis Yaakov of Izhbitza (Parshas Noach) writes that a drunk is prohibited from praying (Brochos 31a) not only because of his lost inhibitions and slurred speech, but rather because he is numb to the tensions of life and devoid of inner conflict, as the Gemara (Yoma 75a) observes, "whoever casts his eye on his cup the whole world seems to him like level ground." Prayer, and indeed all religious growth, is a response to some measure of personal turmoil. Alcohol can induce an oblivious state of ignorant bliss which is empty of any sense of striving or yearning to discover transcendence and therefore incompatible with prayer. Similarly, Chazal (Chagigah 13a) comment that the design of the Chariot may only be transmitted to one whose "heart inside him is concerned." Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (Pri Tzaddik, Beshalach) explains that only when there is a sense of confusion can a deeper understanding be found. It is precisely the troubled quest for answers that serves as the impetus for greater knowledge and intimacy.

This outlook is the basis for the statement which the Mitteler Rebbe attributes to the Maggid of Mezritch (Kuntres HaHispaalus, 5) that "a man cannot possibly receive the true secrets of the Torah and the deepest comprehension of the light of the Ein Sof unless he possesses a natural essential melancholy." Certainly, the Maggid is not endorsing or encouraging a depressed state, for Rav Chaim Vital (Shaarei Kedushah 2, 4) and later the Baal Shem Tov (Tzavaas Harivash) emphasize that sadness and dejection are the primary tools of the yetzer hara and have no place whatsoever in authentic and productive avodas Hashem. Elaborating on their words, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Moharan 282) made famous the notion that "a person must find some good point within himself and take care to be happy always and keep away from depression." It is more likely that the Maggid was referring to an inner discomfort, prompted by a voracious appetite to ascend, that creates a brokenness through which the light of the Ein Sof can enter. As opposed to the tranquil soul, who is not searching or seeking, and therefore happy, content, and closed.

Perhaps, this awkward and unsettled spiritual state, which is the trigger for further exploration and enrichment, began at Har Sinai. From the dawn of the Jewish people, they have been distinguished by three hallmark traits, as the Gemara (Yevamos 79a) states, "There are three qualities of the Jewish people. They are merciful, they are shamefaced, and they perform acts of kindness." The Baal Shem Tov (Mekor Mayim Chaim, Parshas Shemos) claims that these three attributes can be traced back to the period of the avos; kindness to Avraham, shamefacedness to Yitzchak, and mercifulness to Yaakov. However, elsewhere we are told that the characteristic of being shamefaced developed as a result of the revelation at Har Sinai, about which the pasuk states "that His fear may be upon your faces" (Shemos 20:17). The Gemara (Nedarim 20a) comments, "this is referring to shame, one who does not have the capacity to be shamefaced, it is known that his forefathers did not stand at Har Sinai." Did the tradition of shamefacedness begin with the avos or was it only acquired later after Har Sinai?

The Beis Yaakov of Izhbitza (Parshas Yisro) resolves that there are two distinct sources and modes of shamefacedness. The earliest form, and the one that is innate to the Jewish people, comes as a response to sin. Since the time of Yitzchak, Jews have embodied the strength of character to acknowledge failure and embrace an honest moment of embarrassment, instead of retreating behind the embankment of indifferent disregard or brazen obstinance. However, in the wake of Har Sinai, when the pinnacle of spirituality became visible and the potential for Divine attachment was unleashed, a second kind of shamefacedness emerged. This genre of embarrassment is not a reaction to a specific incident but a pesty nagging sense of shame that arises from the frustrated reality of unrealized potential. Har Sinai changed the Jewish people's expectations for themselves and cast a shadow of disappointment over their regular existence. Attempts to recreate and recapture that experience invariably produces a holy anxiety which is a function of the confident conviction that greater spiritual engagement is always possible.

There are some mechanchim today who are uncomfortable using the word "potential" in their yeshivos. If their hesitation is solely intended to underscore that each talmid is valued and cherished for who they are presently, and not only for who they have the potential to become, their initiative is valid and laudable. But the nature and formulation of their opposition suggests another element as well. It seems that they consider even mentioning the word "potential" in connection with a talmid to be a disheartening insult because it implicitly connotes an incomplete work in progress. While in years past, talmidim were inspired by the bold belief that they have the "potential" for gadlus, today, talmidim are coddled and reassured that they are already big tzaddikim, from their head to their toe. However, this philosophy which obfuscates the need and nobility to maximize potential, while perhaps warranted in limited circumstances, should not be adopted broadly, because it extinguishes any motivation to develop and achieve. Instead, we should stress that spiritual growth is spurred specifically by recognizing the delta between who we are and who we want to become and that genuine greatness resides in the ambitious struggle to bridge the gap between them.

BS"D

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> date: Sep 14, 2023, 9:11 AM subject: Rav Frand - The Connection Between Peah and Malchiyos

Rabbi Yissocher Frand **The Connection Between Peah and Malchiyos**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: ## 1349 – The Baal Tokeah Who Was Doubtful If He Could Blow. Good Shabbos & Kesiva V’Chasima Tova! The next shiur is planned for Parshas Bereishis. I would like to share two insights I saw from the Tolner Rebbe. They both speak to the same point. Parshas Emor is one of several parshios that discuss the Moados (Jewish Holidays). The Torah begins there with the Yom Tov of Pesach and then continues with Shavuos, etc., etc. However, in the middle of the Moados (between Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah), the pasuk says “When you reap the harvest of the land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the convert you shall leave them, I am Hashem your G-d.” (Vayikra 23:22) In what appears to be an unrelated interruption to the listing of the Jewish Holidays in the calendar cycle, the Torah discusses the mitzvah of Peah. Then the Torah resumes its discussion of the Moados: “…In the seventh month on the first of the month, there shall be a rest day for you, a remembrance with shofar blasts…” (Vayikra 23:24). Immediately after the parsha of Peah, the Torah continues with the Yom Tov of Rosh Hashanah. The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 32a) asks “How do we know to recite Malchiyos (the section in the Rosh Hashanah Musaf prayer describing G-d’s Attribute of Monarchy)? In a Braisa it was taught: Rebbi says “Ani Hashem Elokeichem” (‘I am Hashem your G-d’ — the last 3 words of Vayikra 23:22 dealing with Peah) are juxtaposed with “And on the seventh month…” (the first two words of Vayikra 23:24 dealing with Rosh Hashanah).” This teaches the obligation to say Malchiyos. This quite obscure allusion seems to be a very roundabout way to teach the obligation to say Malchiyos in the Rosh Hashanah Musaf prayer. It certainly seems like a stretch to use this as THE source for invoking the overriding theme of the day when Hashem sits in Judgment as King over the entire world. Another observation: The Toras Kohanim (cited by Rashi on Vayikra 23:22) asks the question we raised above: “Why did the Torah place this mitzvah (Peah) in the middle of the holidays, with Pesach and Shavuos on one side, and Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos on the other side?” The Toras Kohanim answers that whoever gives Peah properly is considered as if he built the Beis HaMikdash and brought his offerings inside it. There are many significant mitzvos among the 613 mitzvos. Chazal do not teach “whoever puts on Tefillin – it is as if he built the Beis HaMikdash.” Such a statement is not made about eating matza on Pesach, or about reciting Krias Shma. Somehow, suddenly, leaving a corner of the field for the poor is equated with offering sacrifices in the Beis HaMikdash! What is so special about Peah? The answer to both of these questions is that Peah is fundamentally different from any other type of Tzedakah. When I give charity, I have the sense and feeling “I am giving this man money. I am taking my hard-earned money and I am giving it to him.” There are many psychological and emotional ramifications attached to that. First of all, it is a bit of an ego trip. I have a certain satisfaction from fulfilling a mitzvah. There is a certain feeling of superiority gained by dispensing charity. I feel somehow higher than this poor individual, this unfortunate schlepper. “I can take care of him.” That gives me a good feeling. There are many wonderful forms of dispensing charity, but all of them come with this sense of ego gratification. Even when

a person gives matanos b'seser (literally 'gifts in secret' where the donor is unaware of the recipient and the recipient is unaware of the donor), nevertheless there is this inner satisfaction that comes with such donations. This is all well and good, but the element of inner pride is present. Peah is a different type of mitzvah. Peah is not "given," but rather, it is abandoned, so to speak. The Ribono shel Olam tells the farmer: "Guess what? Of your 150 acres, you only own 149 of them. That little corner at the end of your field is not yours! That belongs to the poor." In this case, there is no satisfaction of "I gave him" because "No. You didn't!" The mitzvah is not formulated as a gift from the farmer to the poor man, but rather as the poor owning this portion of the field. Someone who neglects to give other types of gifts to the poor is guilty of "stealing the gifts of the poor." However, one who fails to leave the corner of the field is not "stealing from the poor;" he is just plain "stealing" period! The corner of your field belongs to the poor because the Ribono shel Olam said "This is My world and you can own your 149 acres, but this part you don't own." In truth, the Ribono shel Olam owns the entire field, but in order to bring that point home, He commands: "You cannot touch that corner!" This message is conveyed by the last three words of this pasuk dealing with Peah – namely "Ani Hashem Elokeichem." Hashem is saying "I am the property owner." Malchiyos is a difficult concept for us to imagine in our day and age. We don't know what a king is. Even in England, where they still have a monarchy, the king is not a real king. In basic terminology to which we can relate today, malchus very simply means: Hashem runs the world. It is His world. This is the appropriate thought process for the Yomim Noraim. I recently heard a speech from Rav Avrom Ausband, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva of Telshe Almuni in Riverdale New York. He told the following story: When he first started the Yeshiva, – like any other yeshiva – he struggled financially. Making payroll was always a challenge. He used to pay his Rebbeim twice a month – on the first and fifteenth. Many times, he did not know how he would make payroll! He said he was blessed with a group of chaverim, people of means, and when payroll time arrived and he did not have enough money, he would call up one of these friends and say "Listen, can you lend me $25,000?" They would do it. Rabbi Ausband was good for the money. Rav Ausband said there was one time that he had to make payroll and every one of his friends in this group of chaverim had a legitimate excuse why they could not help him at that time. He said he was at his wits end, unable to see a way to meet payroll! He could not concentrate on anything. "Tomorrow is the 15th of the month, and I just can't make it!" He said he was walking to the yeshiva at night for Maariv. He was standing there on the street in Riverdale, NY and he raised up his hands to shamayim and pleaded "Ribono shel Olam, it is not my yeshiva. It is Your yeshiva. I have done everything I can. I am out of eitzas (plans, solutions). Ribono shel Olam, either You are going to help me or I am just going to need to tell all the Rebbeim 'Sorry, I just can't pay you this month.'" Then he proceeded to the yeshiva and for the first time in days, he had peace of mind: "Listen, I did what I can do; there is nothing more I can do. I want to sit down and learn after Maariv." (He said that at that point he had not learned well for several days.) As it turned out, a Jew came to Maariv, came over to Rav Ausband immediately after davening and said "Can I speak to you for a minute?" Rav Ausband said, "Okay. But it has to be right here in the Beis HaMedrash because I need to learn." Rav Ausband did not know who the fellow was. The fellow took out an envelope and said, "Here is a check for $20,000." Rav Ausband said that right then he gained a new level of recognition of the fact that 'It is Hashem's world!' A person might think "It is because of my connections. I know this person. I know that guy. No. At the end of the day, it is all the Ribono shel Olam." This, my friends, is the lesson of Peah. That is why Peah is the source of "How do we know to say Malchiyos on Rosh Hashanah?" The mitzvah of Peah concludes with its message: 'Ani Hashem Elokeichem.'" Peah demonstrates that it is the Ribono shel Olam's world. This is why it is Peah – and not matzah, and not Shofar, and not Tefillin – that the Gemara equates with building the Beis HaMikdash and bringing Korbanos. Out of all the 248 positive mitzvos, Peah is a prototype for being mekabel ol malchus shamayim (accepting the yoke of heaven). Peah demonstrates an emunah in the Ribono shel Olam. When a person leaves the Peah in the field, he is putting his money where his mouth is, more than with any other form of Tzedakah. In our day and age of democracy and egalitarianism and all the other philosophies that we encounter in our world, it is difficult to imagine and take to heart what a monarchy is all about. We should try to concentrate on the fact that the Ribono shel Olam runs the world including every little aspect of our lives. Every success in life that we experience comes from Him and every setback that we experience comes from Him. That is our kabbalas ol malchus shamayim (acceptance of the yoke of heaven). That is how we should enter Rosh Hashanah. It is Your world, Ribono shel Olam. Please take care of me. Please take care of my family. Please take care of Klal Yisrael. Kesiva V'Chasima Tova! May you be Inscribed and Sealed in the Book of Life!

Tidbits Rosh Hashanah 5784 Inbox

Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> Wed, Sep 13, 7:02 PM (2 days ago) to me

Rosh Hashanah 5784

Although Rosh Hashanah is referred to as the "Day of Judgment," the primary focus of the davening on this day is the proclamation of Hashem's Kingship instead of advocating for ourselves. Our reliance on governments and their leaders for peace, protection and prosperity is constantly exposed as folly. This realization only makes it easier to recognize Hashem's ultimate reign, and reinforce our belief that He, and only He, is the Source of everything. This acknowledgement enables us to sincerely beseech Him for a good year. On this day, we pray for all our needs, big and small, material and spiritual, while remembering to include our family, friends, and Torah leaders in our prayers.

Selichos is significantly lengthier; Tachanun is said at the end of Selichos, while it is omitted later during Shacharis • The Shofar is not sounded after Shacharis • Hataras Nedarim is conducted following davening. One must understand what he is saying in order for the nullification to be effective. If one is aware of a specific kabbalah/neder he made, he should not rely on the general text of Hataras Nedarim; rather, he should mention it separately to the 'beis din' participants • Some have the custom to fast on Erev Rosh Hashanah until chatzos • There is an accepted minhag for men to immerse in a mikvah on Erev Rosh Hashanah, preferably not before an hour prior to chatzos • One should get a haircut and wear nice clothing in honor of the impending Yom Tov, as well as to display our confidence in Hashem's mercy. It is improper, however, to wear exceedingly ornate and expensive clothes • A two-day candle is commonly lit for Yom Tov use • Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Kiddushin 33 • Yerushalmi: Kilayim 62 • Mishnah Yomis: Megillah 1:3-4 • Oraysa - Next week: Yoma 8b-11a

This year, the first day of Rosh Hashanah is Shabbos and all Shabbos prohibitions regarding cooking and carrying [outside an eruv] are in effect. An abridged Kabbalas Shabbos is said. The additions for Shabbos are added in the davening. Avinu Malkeinu is omitted on Shabbos as well as the Yud Gimmel Middos before Kerias Hatorah and the prayers during Bircas Kohanim. On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, we greet a man/woman by saying, "Leshana Tovah Tikaseiv/ee Veseichaseim/ee". After this point we no longer use this greeting • Many are stringent and discourage marital relations on Rosh Hashanah eve, unless it is a Leil Tevillah • One who removes his tallis while taking a break during davening need not make a new berachah when he puts his tallis back on • Many are lenient regarding eating before hearing Tekias Shofar. However, one should preferably not eat more than a k'beitza of foods considered pas habaah b'kisnin (e.g. cake, cookies, etc.) • One must be exceedingly careful about his behavior on this day, and strive to utilize the entire day in a meaningful way. Poskim write that one should preferably avoid sleeping on Rosh Hashanah day (at least until chatzos) • Tashlich is not said on Shabbos and is pushed off to the second day of Rosh Hashanah. It may also be said on other days, through Hoshanah Rabbah • One may not prepare on the first day of Rosh Hashanah for the second night of Yom Tov. As such, preparations for the meal etc. may not

begin until after nightfall at first day's end • Vatodieinu is added in maariv on the second night of Rosh Hashanah • Shehecheyanu is recited on both nights of Rosh Hashanah [at candle lighting and during Kiddush]. Due to a halachic uncertainty regarding reciting shehecheyanu on the second night, there is a widespread minhag to have a new fruit present at the second night candle lighting and again later at Kiddush when the shehecheyanu is recited (the fruit is not eaten until the meal) • Kiddush on the second night includes Havdalah (Yakneha"z). As a flame may not be extinguished on Yom Tov, using the regular Havdalah candle is impractical. Therefore, many use a special two-wicked "Yaknehaz" candle. (Holding two candles together to join their flames and then separating them may be problematic halachically. Others maintain that there is no absolute need to have a double candle for this berachah.) The Rosh Hashanah Meals: A new fruit is present on the second night during Kiddush when the shehecheyanu is recited (see above) • There is a minhag to use round challos for all seudos (up to and including Shemini Atzeres). The challah is dipped in honey. Many also dip into salt as usual. Regardless, salt should be present the table • Various foods are eaten as a siman tov (a good omen) for the new year. Many do so after washing and eating bread, while some do so immediately after kiddush. Many begin with the berachah of ha'eitz and tasting a bit of an apple. The yehi ratzon is then recited (...Shanah Tova uMesukah) and the apple is eaten with honey. One should have in mind that the berachah of ha'eitz will apply to the dates and pomegranate from the simanim as well. (Some maintain that it is better not to have the dates and pomegranate fruits present at the table when making the bircas ha'eitz on the apple, as halachically the ha'eitz blessing should be made on them if they are present.) Alternatively, some partake in the dates first. Many include Hashem's Name when saying the yehi ratzons; others omit His Name. The yehi ratzon may be recited on any food item present even if one isn't actually eating the food • Some partake of the simanim on both nights of Rosh Hashanah; others do so only on the first night • One should be cognizant of any kashrus advisories regarding insect infestation in certain fruits • Many Poskim rule that a man who forgets to add Yaaleh V'Yavo in Bircas Hamazon on Rosh Hashanah needs to repeat Bircas Hamazon only at the evening meals. A woman does not need to repeat.

Through familiarizing oneself with the davening and understanding the meaning of the prayers, one can elevate his/her prayers and entire davening experience. MUSSAF: The themes of the Mussaf prayer are: Malchuyos, Zichronos and Shofaros • The pesukim of Malchuyos - Kingship - highlight Hashem's existence and His complete and absolute control over all • The pesukim of Zichronos - Remembrance - highlight Hashem's attribute of justice, as He remembers every deed performed by all of mankind • The pesukim of Shofaros highlight Hashem's revelation at Har Sinai and in the upcoming days of Mashiach • During the Kedushah of Mussaf, when the chazan chants "Ayei", it an auspicious time for special prayers • When bowing down for Kor'im, a separation is placed between one's head and the floor. No separation is needed for one's knees • Especially on these exalted days, one should concentrate during Birchas Kohanim. SHOFAR: The Shofar is not blown on Shabbos. There is a Mitzvas Asei Midoraysa to hear the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Although women are not obligated to hear the Shofar, the prevalent minhag is for women to fulfill this mitzvah by hearing at least 30 Shofar blasts. There is a mitzvah of chinuch for a minor son who understands the significance of hearing the Shofar to hear it. However, a child who will disturb others should not be brought to Shul • One should not talk from the first Shofar blast until the final blasts at the end of Mussaf. Tehillim may be recited, as prayers are not considered an interruption. One should preferably wait to recite Asher Yatzar until after the shofar blasts following Shofaros (just before Modim). However, if one gauges that he will likely need to use the restroom again before those later blasts, he should make the berachah immediately, so as not to negate the earlier berachah obligation.

Beginning on Rosh Hashanah and throughout the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, the berachah ending "HaKeil HaKadosh" (in all Shemoneh Esreis) is replaced with "HaMelech HaKadosh", and the berachah ending "Melech oheiv tzedakah u'mishpat" (in weekday Shemoneh Esreis) is replaced with to "HaMelech HaMishpat." If one forgets "Hamelech Hakadosh," he may correct his error if he remembers immediately. Once a few seconds have passed, or if he just began the next berachah ("Atah Chonen"), he must restart Shemoneh Esrei. (According to Sefardim this applies to "HaMelech HaMishpat" as well, and one must return to the berachah of Hashivah Shofeteinu). If one is unsure what he said, we assume he said HaKeil Hakodosh/Melech Oheiv, as is his habit all year. However, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur itself, when the berachah of Atah Kadosh includes the lengthy addition of U'vechein Tein, if one knows he said U'vechein we may then assume that he ended the berachah correctly. Zachreinu L'chaim, Mi Chamocha, Uch'sov Lechaim, and B'sefer Chaim are added into Shemoneh Esrei in their places. Additionally, many say Oseh HaShalom in place of Hamevarech es amo Yisrael Bashalom. If one forgot these additions but immediately remembered before saying Hashem's name at the end of the berachah, he may go back and fix his error. Otherwise, one does not need to go back or repeat Shemoneh Esrei. In Kaddish, Le'eila (u')Le'eila Mikol is said, and Oseh Shalom is read Oseh HaShalom. Many Shuls, particularly nusach sefard, have the custom to recite Shir Hamaalos (Tehillim 130) during Shacharis, after Yishtabach. Avinu Malkeinu is said both during Shacharis and Minchah throughout the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah.

During the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, one should increase his involvement in charity, mitzvos and Torah learning. There is a minhag to refrain from eating pas akum (bread type items baked by a non-Jew) as an added stringency. Many are stringent regarding cookies, pretzels and perhaps even cheerios. Many avoid eating egozim (nuts) as their gematria is chet (sin). Many avoid eating sour or bitter foods. Some say that spicy foods aren't included in this stringency.

The day following Rosh Hashanah is Tzom Gedaliah. The fast day of Tzom Gedaliah commemorates the tragic assasination of Gedaliah ben Achikam, whose death marked the final step in the destruction of the remnants of the Jerusalem community that remained following the churban. During the Shemoneh Esrei of Shacharis, the Sheliach Tzibbur adds Aneinu as a separate berachah. Chazaras Hashatz is followed by Avinu Malkeinu, Tachanun, and Kerias Hatorah (Vayechal Moshe). Minchah includes Kerias Hatorah followed by the Haftarah (Dirshu Hashem). One who is fasting adds Aneinu in his quiet Shemoneh Esrei (as part of Shema Koleinu). Nusach Ashkenaz says Sim Shalom in place of Shalom Rav. In Chazaras Hashatz, the Sheliach Tzibbur adds Aneinu (as a separate berachah) and Bircas Kohanim; Avinu Malkeinu follows.

First Day of Rosh Hashanah: The laining is divided into seven aliyos due to Shabbos. The laining and haftarah contain similar narratives of barren women whose prayers were answered and were blessed with children. The laining (Bereishis 21:1-34) tells of Sarah Imeinu who was 'remembered' and conceived on Rosh Hashanah, and bore her only son, Yitzchok. The haftarah (I Shmuel 1:1-2:10) relates the story of Chana, who prayed fervently and was blessed with a son, Shmuel (Hanavi). Some say this too occurred on Rosh Hashanah. These episodes teach us the power of sincere prayer (especially on the momentous Rosh Hashanah day). The maftir (Bamidbar 29:1-6) is the same for both days of Rosh Hashanah, and reviews the korbanos Mussaf to be sacrificed on Rosh Hashanah. Second Day of Rosh Hashanah: Zichronos, remembrance, is one of the themes of the day. We lein the episode of Akeidas Yitzchak (Bereishis 22:1-24) to invoke our ancestor's merits into today's judgment. The haftarah (Yirmiyah 31:1-19) speaks of Hashem's promise to Yirmiyah to attend to Klal Yisrael in better times and redeem them. The pasuk of "Haben yakir li" is also one of the ten pesukim of Zichronos recited in the Rosh Hashanah Mussaf. The emotional pleas of Rachel Imeinu are recounted as well, in which she begs for mercy for her children, in merit of her mercy and selflessness towards her sister Leah. Shanah tovah u'mesukah What is the explanation of a "good and sweet" year? Rabbi Zlotowitz zt"l would explain that while we may be intellectually aware that all Hashem does for us is for the good, practically

speaking, the sweetness of any given situation may not be obvious. Thus, we wish each other a year of goodness that we can easily understand and experience as sweet.
Wishing you and your family a Shanah Tovah Umesukah!

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https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/jewish-columns/the-three-stages-of-the-rosh-hashana-tefillah/2023/09/14/
JudaismColumns

The Three Stages Of The Rosh Hashana Tefillah By Rabbi Shmuel Reichman - 29 Elul 5783 – September 14, 2023 0

Genuine teshuva is not just about self-transformation; it's about self-expression, returning to your true and higher self. As we have previously explained, there are three stages of genuine teshuva:
The first is individual teshuva, where we return to our higher selves, our fetal selves, our true selves. The second stage of teshuva goes beyond the limited self, turning the focus from individual to community. The third stage of teshuva is returning to our absolute root and source, to the Source of all sources, to Hashem Himself. We will now display how these three stages parallel the three themes of the Rosh Hashana tefillah.

The Rosh Hashana Tefillah
The three main themes of the Rosh Hashana davening are Shofaros, Zichronos, and Malchuyos. Shofaros relates to the blowing of the shofar; Zichronos relates to remembering seminal events from Jewish history and Hashem's covenant with the Jewish People, and Malchuyos is the process by which we crown Hashem King. Judaism is a holistic religion, in which everything is interconnected, expressing an underlying oneness. What then is the underlying connection between these three themes?
Shofaros
The shofar represents one's individual spiritual yearning. It is a haunting, wordless cry that brings us back to our higher self – our fetal self.
The beracha we recite on the shofar refers to the "kol shofar" (voice of the shofar). This is because blowing the shofar is meant to draw our attention to the unique depth of the shofar's role in our tefillah. We blow the shofar as a part of the Rosh Hashana prayers, but it is unique amongst the tefillos. While all the other prayers utilize words, the shofar is a wordless cry. What is the meaning behind this?
Speech is always a limited expression of one's inner thoughts. Formulating ideas and feelings into words requires taking that which is abstract, beyond finite form, and giving it concrete form and expression. By doing so, one limits that infinite potential into just the words that are spoken. This is why words often fail to describe and convey that which is most important. Words are a limited form of expression; they cannot convey the full force of "self" contained within them. Kol, however, is the root form of verbal expression, a speech that has not yet been formed into words. The wordless cry of the voice is not limited to specific words; it is beyond words and beyond finite expression.
On Rosh Hashana, we cry out with the resounding "kol of the shofar," expressing our deep yearning to return to our root selves – a yearning that cannot be expressed in words. As the blast of the shofar jars us from our stupor, we join in its cry as our souls beg to return to their root.
This is also why the concept of kol is connected to crying. When does one cry? When the clear path ahead loses its clarity and expression. When one hears the doctor's report and finds out that instead of fifty years they have only weeks left to live, they cry. Or, on the flip side, when one receives the news that instead of having a couple of days left in this world, they have been completely cured, they cry. When the clear and expressed path breaks down, we cry. This is why the Hebrew word for tears, "dim'ah," is also the Hebrew word for "mixture," something that is unclear and confusing. The spiritual concept of crying is the breakdown in expression. This is also why the root of the Hebrew word for "crying" (bocheh) is the root of the Hebrew word for "confusion" (mevucha) as well.
(When the Meraglim delivered their negative report about Eretz Yisrael, Klal Yisrael cried. Chazal (Taanis 29a) note that this was an inappropriate form of crying (bechiya shel chinam – a baseless cry). In Klal Yisrael's eyes, the road to Eretz Yisrael was broken, and the path toward their destiny was shattered. But in reality, this was not true. As punishment for inappropriately crying – for incorrectly viewing the clear path as broken, Hashem made that day, i.e., Tisha B'Av, a day of genuine crying (middah k'neged middah – measure for measure). Tisha B'Av became the day of all breakdown and crying, and it became the day where we actually lost our place in Eretz Yisrael; not by choice, but by exile [both in the midbar and later on in Jewish history].)
On Rosh Hashana, we cry out with a resounding kol, expressing how deeply we yearn to return to our source, to Hashem. The concepts of both kol and crying focus on the root and source instead of the expression. Kol is the root of speech, and crying brings us back to a formless, root state where no outward expression is clear. On Rosh Hashana, we take a step back from the expressed physical world and return back to our transcendent source.
Zichronos
Zichronos refers to the concept of memory, building upon this same theme. Memory represents tracing something from the present back into the past, of sourcing something back to its root. On Rosh Hashana, as we discuss the Akeidah and other seminal moments in Jewish history, we connect back to our collective self, the root soul of all of Klal Yisrael.
The Akeidah holds infinite layers of depth and meaning, and it has striking implications for us as we trace ourselves back to our collective self. At the Akeidah, Yitzchak was willing to give up his life. The willingness to give up one's life for Hashem reflects the belief that one is not merely a physical being, but a spiritual consciousness that transcends their physical body. This is why Chazal note that the letters of Yitzchak's name spell "keitz chai" – he who lives (chai) while paradoxically also existing beyond life (keitz). At the Akeidah, Yitzchak rooted himself beyond space and time while still living within it. On Rosh Hashana, we remember this; we tap into our unique nature as Klal Yisrael, a nation that transcends this world while paradoxically living fully within it. The root of our ability to do so stems from Yitzchak and the Akeidah. Malchuyos
On Rosh Hashana, we crown Hashem as our Melech. We declare Hashem to be the source of everything, our ultimate root. This is our mission in this world – to become a walking kiddush Hashem, fully connecting ourselves back to Hashem, our Creator. It is for this reason that we don't mention vidui (prayer of confession) or any of our sins on Rosh Hashana. Our singular goal on this day is to source ourselves back to Hashem, crown Him as our King, and root ourselves within reality, connected to Hashem. [On Yom Kippur, we focus on the details of our past year and the quality of our upcoming year. On Rosh Hashana, however, our goal is simply to root ourselves within reality, connecting ourselves to Hashem, our Melech. Before we discuss the quality and nature of our existence (Yom Kippur), we need to ensure that we exist in the first place (Rosh Hashana).] Our Three-Stage Ascension
While all three of these themes are connected to all three forms of teshuva, Shofaros most deeply reflects our individual teshuva; Zichronos most deeply reflects our collective teshuva; and Malchuyos most deeply reflects our ultimate teshuva, sourcing ourselves back to Hashem Himself. May we be inspired to fully actualize all three forms of teshuva this Rosh Hashana and seal ourselves in the book of life, the book of true existence.
Why My Year In Israel Was One Of The Best Investments I Have Ever Made Next article Guide for the Perplexed: Rosh Hashanah 2023 Rabbi Shmuel Reichman Rabbi Shmuel Reichman is the author of the bestselling book, "The Journey to Your Ultimate Self," which serves as an inspiring gateway into deeper Jewish thought.

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JudaismTorah

Days Of Fear And Trembling: A Yamim Noraim Reflection On The Yom Kippur War

By Rabbi Reuven Taragin - 28 Elul 5783 – September 14, 2023

Fifty years ago, Yom Kippur and the Yamim Noraim took on new meaning. The term "Yamim Noraim" connotes the awesomeness of the High Holiday period and the fear that our lives hang in the balance. This feeling was especially palpable on Yom Kippur fifty years ago – both individually and nationally.

In just its third decade of existence, Israel and its citizens faced an existential threat. The surprise Yom Kippur morning attack caught Israel off guard. The Egyptian and Syrian armies made significant headway in both the north and south. People feared the worst. Though Israel rebounded, almost three thousand soldiers lost their lives, and nearly 10,000 were wounded. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan feared what he called "Churban Bayit Shlishi."

The miraculous Six-Day War had given Israelis a false sense of security. They felt that the victory would deter future attacks and that expanding their borders created a safe buffer zone. The Yom Kippur War shattered these illusions. The Fear and Vulnerability of War

During a time of war, people feel incredibly vulnerable. No one knows which side will win and who may be killed, wounded, or captured in the process.

The wars of the State of Israel are even more terrifying. Israel's enemies threaten to obliterate the State and kill or drive out its populace. In addition, the state's army is a "citizen's army." Everyone has a son, brother, parent, or cousin at the front, making the war and the accompanying fear deeply personal.

The wail of sirens in Israeli cities expresses and reinforces the terror. In the words of Amos (3:6), "Does the shofar sound in the city without the people trembling?"

The Torah teaches us to direct these feelings of fear toward prayer. We should realize that war and other suffering emanate from Hashem, who orchestrates them behind the scenes, and we should respond by blowing chatzotzrot (horns) to "remind" us of Hashem and ask Him to "remember" (and save) us. The Rosh Hashana Connection

The shofar we blow on Rosh Hashana is also connected to the emotions of war. Because the shofar was blown at times of war, hearing it conjures up the associated feelings of fear and vulnerability (Pesikta Rabati 40).

The sounds we blow also connect to the emotions of war. The teru'ot resemble the cries of Sisrah's mother, who waited by the window for her son to return from war (Rosh Hashana 33b). Expressing and identifying with these feelings of fear and distress should remind us that on Rosh Hashana, our lives hang in the balance (Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, He'arot L'Masechet Rosh Hashana (33b)).

Like the chatzotzrot blown at a time of war, Rosh Hashana's shofar calls upon us to respond to distressing circumstances by remembering Hashem and doing teshuva (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 3:4). If we respond to the shofar by remembering, returning, and committing ourselves to Him, we merit His "remembering" us and judging us favorably. A Year-Round Reflection

Though the Yamim Noraim should also be a time when we draw close to and strengthen our love of Hashem, they begin with recognizing that He is judging us and determining our fate for the upcoming year.

May the memory of the trauma of the Yom Kippur War help us feel the vulnerability we are meant to feel during this period and throughout the year.

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https://jewishlink.news/the-state-of-god-in-our-world/

The State of God in Our World By Rabbi Moshe Taragin | September 12, 2023

"All of humanity pass before You as sheep …" On Rosh Hashanah, God reviews all human behavior, scrutinizes our inner hearts and determines our fate for the coming year. On this solemn day of judgment, we also celebrate divine sovereignty. The shofar blast recalls historical milestones: creation, the binding of Isaac, Jewish selection, Sinai and, of course, the Messianic endpoint of history. Rosh Hashanah is both a somber day of judgment, but also a celebration of divine majesty and religious glory.

God is infinite and omnipresent, but His "status" on our planet, is dependent upon human decisions and the fluctuations of history. By vesting humans with free will, God abdicated control of His presence in this world—delivering to humans the opportunity to bolster or undermine that presence. Our historical Jewish mission is to draw God into our world, speak in His name and hoist humanity to higher ground. Rosh Hashanah is the grand day of divine authority, human free will and Jewish destiny.

On this day of gravitas—with both trepidation and anticipation—we look toward the future and pray for prosperity and success. We dream of augmenting God, and moral spirit in this world. But we also look back upon the previous year: Which events—over the past year—have enhanced the presence of God in our world, and which events have diminished His presence? As the new year commences, what is the "state of God" in our world?

War and Peace

The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine has taken hundreds of thousands of lives, while also reviving dormant Cold War-era tensions. Worried about potential future wars, many European countries have undergone rapid weaponization, while other superpowers such as China are forging dangerous new alliances in pursuit of regional influence. Often, the world doesn't realize that it is on a path to war and doesn't hear the drumbeats of war until it is too late. We are closer to large-scale hostilities than at any point in the past 30 years. There is nothing romantic about war and it doesn't represent the will of God, who desires peace and accord between His creatures. We pray that the world shifts back toward amity and away from armed confrontation.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

We thought that the information revolution of the past 30 years—including the emergence of the internet and social media—were the transformative revolutions of our generation. Little did we know that these events were merely the warm-up show to the main event—the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The power to create machines that can mimic human intelligence, learn from data and make decisions will radically alter our workplace, our culture and our fundamental definition of human identity.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been evolving for years, but this past year's debut of chatbots brought this revolution to the forefront.

We know that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will influence religious thinking, we just don't know how. The past track record of the religious impact of scientific revolutions isn't great. Galileo's 17th century announcement that the Earth didn't stand at the center of the universe shook the foundations of religious belief. Darwin's 19th century discovery of the evolution of species has turned the world away from belief in a God who created the world.

Though many religious people instinctively assume that technology erodes religious belief, it is inaccurate and dangerous to villainize technology as an enemy of religion. This pessimistic view can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Is it possible that AI will enhance religious practice? Is it possible that it will make religious texts more accessible, allowing us to explore faith more deeply? Is it possible that AI will liberate us from tedious labor affording us greater time and resources for religious pursuits? Of course, it is also entirely possible that AI will challenge traditional ideas of soul and human immortality, throwing into question fundamentals of belief.

It is impossible to know how this technology will evolve, but religious people better pay close attention. We are taking a blind leap into the great unknown. We trust that religion is durable enough and eternal enough to outlast any human innovations. We just need to find the answers.

A Polarized and Angry World

Our world is sharply polarized. Society has become radically split along politics, cultural, ethic, economic and gender lines. Echo chambers amplify pre-existing biases reaffirming our own narrow beliefs. Growing anxiety, as well as dissolving trust in public institutions encourage us to adopt "safe positions," rather than consider opposing viewpoints. Our world has become angrier, overconfident and full of rage. This world of rage doesn't reflect a compassionate and caring God. Let us pray that the world becomes more calm and more caring. That would be a more God-like world.

Social Discord in Israel

Israeli society has been fractured by public strife surrounding the proposed judicial reforms. This controversial issue has evoked darker divisions which, in the past, were suppressed by the larger issue of national security. The year of social discontent has highlighted the numerous fault lines of Israeli society. To survive, Israel must learn to better bridge between religious and secular, between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, between the wealthy elite and the common average-income citizenry, between universalists and nationalists and between those who adopt progressive politics and those who adhere to conservative models. We lazily refer to all these numerous divisions as "left" and "right," but these schisms do not always overlap and they are far more nuanced than simple stereotypical labels suggest. We could all gain by erasing the terms "left" and "right" from our vocabulary.

A horrific and roundly condemned statement by a pro-reform activist demonstrated how far we have fallen and how much of our common narrative we are losing. Frustrated by what he perceived as Ashkenazi-led anti-reform protests, he expressed his wish that the Nazis had murdered more European Jews. Though, it was later retracted, I can't get that horror out of my imagination. For the past 75 years, the Holocaust and our security struggle each provided a common narrative to unify our country. Evidently, those narratives are fraying and in the absence of any common narrative, we are becoming fractured by our differences.

We are the people of God, meant to teach the world that He is a One God—responsible for everything. When we behave as "one" people, we better reflect His Oneness. When we are badly splintered, we less reflect His Oneness. Social strife in the land of Israel isn't merely a social problem, it is a theological defect.

Unfortunately, the social discord has alienated many secular Israelis from religion. Perhaps, religious identification has increased in some sectors, but many secular Israelis have become more alienated. Regardless of who is to blame, this is painful development and religious people must take accountability for any decline of religion and faith.

My revered rebbe, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, often cited a Talmudic passage cautioning a father against physically hitting his adolescent son—given the likelihood that the son would retaliate, strike the father and violate a sin. Though a father is instructed to discipline his child, he must also factor in the consequences of his son's reactions. Whether religious people are right or wrong is inconsequential. We have a lot of ground to make up.

Finally, the social strife has altered international perception of our state. It has emboldened our enemies, who view this instability as a moment of weakness and an opportunity to attack us, God forbid. The social strife has also diminished the allure of the state of Israel in the international arena. Over the past 30 years, Israel has experienced phenomenal success in almost every sector of national interest. This led to a surge of respect for our country and its people. This surge culminated in the "Isaac Accords," which were not adopted primarily as a gesture of peace, but out of surging interest among our neighbors to align with our country and its successes.

As we are God's people, when our allure rises, God's presence similarly rises. Let us pray to find a way to construct bridges and to restore our national unity. Let us hope that we continue to draw admiration from the international community, as they realize that it pays to align with the people of God.

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https://www.ynetnews.com/article/hkrb75lyp

A guide to the laws and customs of Rosh Hashanah Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the Jewish New Year – From blowing shofar (except when it falls on Shabbat) to eating symbolic foods, this is how Jews observe the holiday R**abbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon**

What is Rosh Hashanah? Rosh Hashanah is the birthday of the universe (Rosh Hashanah 27a, according to Rabbi Eliezer) and it is celebrated as the beginning of the Jewish year.

More stories: Nearly 10 million living in Israel on eve of Rosh Hashanah For your Rosh Hashanah table: Easy recipe for chicken with pomegranates For a sweet New Year: Honey-glazed sweet challah

The Torah refers to this day as "Zikaron" (Remembrance) – "Zikaron Teruah" (Vayikra 23: 25). Therefore, in our prayers we often call it "Yom Hazikaron" (Day of Remembrance). This name expresses G-d's hashgacha (providence) over the world. This day is also called "Yom Hadin" (the Day of Judgment) (see Mishnah Rosh Hashanah, 1:2; 15; Vayikra Raba 29:1), and this is the term we use in the special prayer of "Unetaneh Tokef."

5 View gallery Apples and honey are traditional foods for Rosh Hashanah Apples and honey are traditional foods for Rosh Hashanah(Photo:Shutterstock) Judgment Day provokes anxiety. However, Jewish sages (following Nehemiah 8) taught us that Rosh Hashanah is a 'Yom Tov' during which we eat special foods - for example meat - and drink wine (Shulchan Aruch 597). How could that be? This is judgment day we're talking about. Our sages taught us (Yerushalmi, Tur 581:4) that this is indeed a day of judgment, but G-d wants the best for us. If we make good decisions and try to be good, we know that G-d will sign our judgement for the good.

Shofar blowing Rosh Hashanah is also called "Yom Teruah" (Day of Shofar Blowing) in the Torah (Bamidbar 29:1). Thus, there is a mitzvah from the Torah to blow the shofar at Rosh Hashana.

What is the significance of the shofar blowing? The shofar blowing is made up of a simple blast (tekiah), and of a moaning and sob-like blasts (shevarim and teruah). Apparently, the blasts are supposed to shock us and shake us up (Maimonides, Teshuva 3:3). But this explanation should be scrutinized. While shevarim may symbolize crying and create shock, the teruah in the Torah actually is a sound of joy that is particularly associated with the king's coronation: "With trumpets and sound of the horn shout ye before the King, the Lord. (Psalms 98:6)." So, it is not clear: Does the sound of the shofar symbolize weeping and breaking, or the crowning of a king and joy?

Blowing the shofar

The shofar blowing is supposed to remind us of our role in the world, our mission. On the one hand, there is a concern: Maybe we've marred the mission, maybe there are things we haven't done properly, and we are required to fix. On the other hand, our very right to coronate G-d shows how much G-d loves us, and believes in us. G-d's love for us gives us the strength to mend. It gives us strength even after the fracture ('shevarim') to reach a clean and pure place. ("tekiah"). How many times the shofar is blown? According to Jewish law, it is enough to sound 30 shofar blasts. Meaning, three times a tsr"t (tekiyah, shevarim, teruah, tekiyah), three times ts"t (tekiyah, shevarim, tekiyah), and three times tr"t (tekiyah, teruah, tekiyah). These blasts are blown in synagogue before the Mussaf, or additional, prayer. In addition, 30 more blasts are blown according to the order of the blessings in the Amidah prayer (10 blasts in in the Malchuyot section, 10 in the Zichronot section, and 10 in the Shofarot section). Some do the same for the silent Amidah prayer and the Chazarat HaShatz (repetition of the Amidah) prayer, and others only in the Chazarat HaShatz (and complete another 30 blasts after Mussaf). It is customary to complete 100 blasts (Rosh Hashanah Tosfos 33b), and therefore, at the end of the prayer, 10 more blasts are added - tsr"t, ts"t, tr"t.

It is therefore good to hear all the blasts, but according to the law 30 blasts are enough. Thus, when the shofar is blown for women or other people who were not able to get to a prayer service, a total of 30 blasts are blown. Why is Rosh Hashanah two days? Rosh Hashanah is the only holiday in which the

Yom Tov is observed as a two-day holiday in Israel. The Hebrew calendar is determined according to the moon. Every month, witnesses would come and testify that they had seen the beginning of the new moon, and so the court would sanctify the day as the first day of the month (today we do so according to the calendar based on calculation and not according to witnesses). Rosh Hashanah is the only holiday that falls on Rosh Chodesh. In the past, it was difficult to inform everyone when the holiday was sanctified, and therefore Rosh Hashanah was established as a two-day holiday, to leave no doubt. Today, Rosh Hashanah is celebrated two days according to rabbinic decree and custom of the Jewish people. The first day of Rosh Hashanah is a Torah obligation (and this is why people are more stringent in their shofar blowing on this day) and the second day is a rabbinic decree.
חלות לשבת The holiday lasts two days; pictured, Challah bread(Photo: Shutterstock) There was a controversy over whether the two-day celebration of Rosh Hashanah should be considered as a yoma arichta – a long, extended day – or as the two days of festivals celebrated in the Diaspora. Therefore, there is doubt about saying the shehecheyanu blessing (which expresses gratitude to God for new and unusual experiences) recited on the second day. In fact, it is customary to say shehecheyanu both in the kiddush of the second day, and we try to have a new fruit (or new outfit) so that the shehecheyanu will apply to it too (Shulchan Aruch 500:2). Simanim (symbolic foods) of Rosh Hashanah There is a custom to eat specific foods at the beginning of the meal (of the first night, although some also eat them on the second night), to symbolize our prayers for the new year. What is the source of this common practice? Nehemiah (8:9-10) tells the nation of Israel to eat fat and sweet food on Rosh Hashanah. In the Talmud (Horiyot 12a) the rabbi Abaye writes that since symbols have significance, it is good for a person to engage in eating foods for good omens at the beginning of the year, and this has also been cited in the Shulchan Aruch (583).
What are the simanim? In the Talmud, the gourd, Rubia (a type of long beans and, according to the great scholars, fava beans), Karti (leeks), beets and dates, and you recite over each one of them a "Yehi Ratzon" (may it be G-d's will) prayer; on the dates, for example, that "the people who hate us be abolished." It is common practice to eat an apple dipped in honey and say (Machzon Vitri 323): "May it be your will, our G-d and G-d of our ancestors that we should have a good and sweet new year." עוף עם רימונים Chicken prepared with pomegranates(Photo: Anatoly Michal) It is common practice to eat a pomegranate and say: "May it be your will, our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, that our merits increase, as the seeds of the pomegranate." A fish is also eaten, symbolizing that we will multiply like fish, and some eat the head of a fish, to symbolize that we should always be the head and not the tail. You can add more signs and even say a "Yehi Ratzon" prayer of this kind. There is a controversy as to when the simanim should be eaten. Some eat them before the meal, but most Ashkenazim and Sephardim eat them after hamotzi (and some eat the dates first, while others eat the apple dipped in honey first). The traditional custom is to bless the fruit: "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree" (for example, on the apple dipped in honey), to taste a little, and only afterward to say "yehi ratzon" (There are other customs). Additional customs on Rosh Hashanah It is customary to wish "Leshana habaah tikatev v'tichatem" (may you be inscribed and sealed for a good year), or "ktiva v'chatima tova (Rama 582:8). Some do not sleep during the day of Rosh Hashanah, in order to receive strength during the rest of the year (Rama 583:2). This is only significant if one is studying or praying at this time, but if one does nothing of significance during that time, it is better to sleep (according to the Ari after midnight it is possible to sleep – Shulchan Aruch Harav 583: 8). This is how you make Shofer (Shofarot Yerushalayim)
It is customary to go to perform Tashlich on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, in which we ceremonially cast our sins into the river or sea (Shulchan Aruch 583:2). Of course, this is a symbolic act that tries to bring us to the realization that we are starting a new page, and that we have the power to add good to the world. What are the special practices for Rosh Hashanah when it coincides with Shabbat? This year, the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, therefore we will be able to fulfill the mitzvah of sounding the Shofar on the second day only. Let's briefly discuss some of the special laws for this year: Lighting of candles: On the second night of Yom Tov, candles should be lit after night has fallen, after the woman has blessed "Baruch hamavdil bein kodesh l'kodesh" (the blessing that draws a distinction between Shabbat and other days) or has performed the evening prayer service at the end of Shabbat which includes a similar distinction. Remember to light a 24-hour candle before Shabbat, so that it is possible to use an existing flame on Yom Tov for lighting the candles and for cooking, as is required. Upon reciting the blessing Shechiyanu when lighting the candles, the woman should think about the new holiday day that is renewed and also about a new fruit she will be eating. חרדים תפילה תשליך Performing the Tashlich prayer(Photo: EPA) Preparations from Shabbat to Yom Tov: Nothing can be prepared on Shabbat for the purpose of Yom Tov. Therefore, the table should not be set for Yom Tov before the end of Shabbat. It is possible to clean and tidy things that are for the benefit of Shabbat too. Food should be heated only after the end of Shabbat. It is recommended to prepare dishes that heat easily after Shabbat. Shabbat: Those who usually bring in the holiday earlier, should not do so in this year's case, because it is not right to bring in the Yom Tov within the Shabbat (for old or sick people we may be lenient). (Shmirat Shabbat K'Hilchita 2:7:111)
הרב יוסף צבי רימון Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon Photo: Yehoshua Halevi At the end of Shabbat (Yom Tov eve), we add to the Maariv prayer "Vetodienu" which separates between Shabbat and other days (Brachot 33b Shulchan Aruch 491:2), and we do not recite the prayers "Vayehi Noam" and "Ata Kadosh." The second night of Rosh Hashanah Kiddush: We follow the acronym YAKNEHAZ: First we bless over the wine (Gefen-yayin), then Kiddush ("Who has chosen us"), Candle (Ner), Havdalah ("Hamavdil bein Kodesh l'chol… Baruch… hamavdil bein kodesh l'kodesh), and shehecheyanu (Zman). No shofar blowing on the first day of Rosh Hashanah that coincides with Shabbat Avinu Malkenu: Ashkenazim do not say the prayer Avinu Malkenu on Shabbat, because it is a plea that is said during fasts, although according to the Ari it is said on Shabbat too, and many Sephardim have this custom. Seuda Shlishit: It is commendable to eat Seuda Shlishit, the third meal of shabbat, early and not to eat much, so that one is not too full for the holiday meal (and some divide the second meal into two. They bless, take a break – to study, for example, and then do the ritual handwashing of netilat yadayim for the Seuda Shlishit). Tashlich: The usual custom is to postpone the Tashlich to the second day (Rama 583:2 and Mishna Berura there). May G-d write and seal us all for a long, good life and peace! Shanah Tova to All! Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon is the rabbinic head of the Jerusalem College of Technology and the head of its Batei Midrash and serves as the rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council

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Rabbi Yakov Haber Simanim of Food, Simanim of Action

One of the more prominent culinary aspects of Rosh Hashana, the subject of a popular song, is eating an apple dipped in honey accompanied by a prayer for a good and sweet year. A full gamut of simanim, or symbolic foods, is outlined in the Talmud (Kerisus 6a, Horayos 12a) by the amora Abaye[1] spanning a range of agricultural edibles customarily eaten after reciting a specific yehi ratzon mentioning the particular good decree to which that item alludes. Different communities have added other meal customs and prayers - including the apple dipped in honey, not mentioned by the Talmud[2] - or modified the Talmudic foods in light of the availability of particular produce in that place and season.[3]

What is the meaning behind these customs? Do we somehow think we can "eat our way into the Book of Life?" The Maharal (Chiddushei Agaddos Horayos 12a, Be'er Hagolah 2) commenting on the aforementioned Gemara provides a deeper insight as to what we are trying to accomplish based on a

theme developed by Ramban (Bereishis 12:6). Explaining Chazal's teaching of "מעשה אבות סימן לבנים", Ramban develops the concept of a po'eil dimyon or a demonstrative act of prophecy. Throughout Tanach, various prophets were commanded to act out their prophecies ranging from demonstrating a pretend siege of a model Beis Hamikdash to throwing stones into a river to eating various symbolic foods to getting hit by others. The purpose of these actions, explains Ramban, was to "seal in the prophecy" into the future historical record such that they would not be subject to change or repeal. This was also the purpose of the Divinely-orchestrated actions of the Avos. They were not just demonstrating future Jewish and world history, they were generating it.[4] Based on this, Maharal explains that we are trying to "seal in" a decree for a good, sweet year filled with avodas Hashem (e.g. "sheyirbu zechuyoseinu k'rimon - may our merits increase like the seeds of a pomegranate" recited over the consumption of that fruit) and physical bounty and peace (e.g. "sheyitamu son'einu - may our enemies cease" and "shenifreh v'nirbeh k'dagim - may we multiply like fish" recited on the tamar (date) and fish respectively).

At first glance, this comparison of Maharal is difficult to understand. The prophets acted out a prophecy already given to them or about to be delivered to them by Hashem. In the case of Rosh Hashana, certainly on the first night,[5] the decree has not yet been decided nor is one guaranteed that the decree will be a good one. How then can we seal in a good decree by consuming the simanim?

Various approaches ranging from the practical to the mystical have been offered in answer to this question. Perhaps we can suggest an approach based on a teaching of Rav Tzadok Hakohein of Lublin. He taught that in addition to believing in Hashem, a person has to, l'havdil, believe in himself, in his own formidable abilities. Without a confidence in his ability to change, lasting teshuva would be impossible, and vidui and future commitments to better himself would be futile and meaningless. But a person can change, having been endowed by his Creator with supernatural abilities rooted in his soul, created b'tzelem Elokim, and being accompanied by Hashem's constant assistance throughout his life. By eating the simanim and reciting the prayers, we inspire confidence within ourselves to make the year into a year of blessing by acting upon our commitments to teshuva. These symbolic acts serve as catalysts to awaken within us the desire and confidence that we can transform ourselves. It is the thoughts of teshuva caused by these actions that causes a Heavenly decree of life and happiness to be issued. As such, these symbolic acts have the power not only to inspire the repentance, but also to "seal in" the good decree generated by this teshuva commitment similar to the effect of a po'eil dimyon.

Similarly, Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt"l once explained - in answer to the commonly asked question as to why actual teshuva does not appear to be a part of the Rosh Hashana prayer service in direct contrast to Yom Kippur where vidui is such a prominent feature of the liturgy - that if someone is to properly repent, they have to have confidence that they have good qualities also. The power of these good qualities can then be marshalled to overcome one's less than stellar qualities in the quest for a more perfect service of G-d. He explained that therefore the day of Rosh Hashana is designated not for direct repentance from past misdeeds but rather to demonstrate the most perfect avodas Hashem we can muster. The days of Rosh Hashana are to be ones in which our prayers are recited with intense concentration, our meals are eaten with less frivolity and more divrei Torah at which the blessings are recited properly and with concentration, a day on which we lessen idle chatter, and, according to common custom, eliminate or lessen daily naps utilizing the extra time for the recital of Tehilim or the study of Torah. On these days we demonstrate to Hashem and ultimately to ourselves what we can be even though we are not necessarily there yet. Rav Wolbe found an allusion to this in the basic unit of blowing the shofar. The straight sound, the initial teki'a indicates man's perfect state before sin tainted him. The broken sound of the teru'a indicates his sinful state necessitating teshuva. The final straight sound triumphantly indicates the possibility of returning to his original perfect state. Similarly, Rosh Hashana parallels the initial teki'a, our more perfect actions on those days indicating our initial and potential perfection. The intense process of teshuva of the intermediate days following Rosh Hashana parallel the teru'a where we sense our broken state and act to correct it. And finally, the climax of Yom Kippur follows - symbolized by the final teki'a - by the end of which hopefully we have at least come one step closer to returning to the initial perfection we possessed and initially demonstrated on Rosh Hashana.

Many have noted Rosh Hashana's significance as the head or beginning and hence, foundation, of the rest the year. On the infrastructure of these days, similar to the foundation of a tall edifice, we literally build the rest of our year. Perhaps we can suggest that the more perfect behavior of Rosh Hashana serves as the most potent po'eil dimyon, much more powerful than the eating of the simanim, to ensure a good year. Just as the Avos, representing the root and foundation of the Jewish people, through their actions, created Jewish history, in a smaller way, we, through our more perfect avoda on the foundational day of Rosh Hashana create our history for that year.

May the more elevated forms of Avodas Hashem we aspire to and enact at the beginning of the New Year both serve as inspiration to us as to what kind of people we can really be and serve as a po'eil dimyon to seal in גזירות טובות לנו ולכל בית ישראל!

[1] Curiously, the Rambam omits this entire custom from his Mishne Torah.

[2] See Tur and Beis Yosef (O.C. 583). As some additional examples, the Rema records the custom not to eat nuts since the Hebrew word for nut, egoz, has the same numerical value as cheit, or sin. GR"A records the custom not to eat grapes. Some base this on the opinion that the Eitz Hadaas, the object of the very first sin, was a grape vine.

[3] For example, the Talmud lists ruvya as an allusion to an increase of merit (l'harbos). In Europe, carrots were typically used instead since in Yiddish the word for carrots is mehren which also means more.

[4] Fascinatingly, Ramban (introduction to Shemos) notes that for this reason the entire first book of the Torah and not just the first section is called Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Creation) by Chazal since it contains the narratives of the creation of the world and the creation of Jewish history generated by the actions of the Avos and Shevatim.

[5] Customs vary whether the simanim are eaten on the second night.

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The Judgment of Rosh Hashana

By: Rav Yosef Kritz

Based on a Sicha

Print this Shiur Rosh Hashana is commonly known as Yom Hadin (Judgment Day), a term which generates a natural sense of "yirah" (awe). What exactly is the nature of this judgment on Rosh Hashana? What are its ramifications, and how do we prepare for it?

The Rambam writes (Hil. Teshuva 3:1-3):

Each and every person has merits and sins. Someone whose merits are more than his sins is a "tzaddik." Someone whose sins are more than his merits is a "rasha." Half and half is a "beinoni" (mediocre) ...

A person whose sins outnumber his merits dies immediately in his wickedness ... This calculation is not according to the number of merits and sins, but according to their greatness. There is a merit which balances a number of sins, ... and there is a sin which balances a number of merits ... This calculation is only in the Mind of G-d, and He knows how to weigh the merits against the sins ...

Just as a person's merits and sins are weighed at the time of his death, so too, each and every year, the sins of each and every person are weighed with his merits on the holiday of Rosh Hashana. One who is found to be a tzaddik is sealed for life; one who is found wicked is sealed for death; the beinoni is suspended until Yom Hakippurim. If he repents, he is sealed for life; if not, he is sealed for death.

This passage of the Rambam raises two fundamental questions. First, the Rambam's assertion that the wicked are sealed for death and the righteous

are sealed for life does not seem to reflect reality. For example, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933. He had no merits and all possible sins, and yet, many Rosh Hashanas passed until he died in 1945. Conversely, there are many righteous people who suffer or die in their youth. Clearly, we cannot understand the Rambam's statement simply. What, then, does it mean?

Second, why does this judgment follow the majority of a person's actions? Why is each merit and sin not rewarded or punished for individually?

The basis of the answer to these questions can be found in Tosfot (Rosh Hashana 16b). The gemara there quotes the statement of Rav Kruspedai in the name of R. Yochanan that three books are opened on Rosh Hashana, one of the completely righteous, one of the completely wicked, and one of the beinonim. The righteous are written and sealed immediately for life, etc. Tosfot (s.v. v'nechtamin) comments that sometimes the righteous are sealed for death and the wicked for life, so that this gemara must be referring to "chayei Olam Haba," the life of the world to come. This requires explanation, however. How can a person be judged for his chayei Olam Haba every Rosh Hashana? That judgment should be made at the conclusion of one's life! What does Tosfot mean?

Tosfot's statement can be explained based on a principle of Rav Eliyahu Dessler, zt"l, that "Ratzon ha'adam zehu mahuto -- A person's real desire is his essence." Every person has a "tzura ruchanit," a spiritual form, which is the product of his ambitions and his goals, of the things that fascinate him and that grab him. These true desires form his essence, his true self.

We generally consider the creation of the world as "yeish mei'ayin" (ex nihilo), something from nothing. The Ba'al Hatanya writes, however, that spiritually the world is "ayin miyeish," nothing from something. Originally, G-d's presence filled the world completely. At the time of creation, his presence constricted so that it would no longer be perceived everywhere. Our goal in avodat Hashem is to restore the "yeish," to bring about once again that the Divine Presence should be felt throughout the world.

Therefore, if a person's goals are spiritual, "yeish," this is called in the language of Chazal and the rishonim "chayim" -- true life, whereas if a person's goals are purely physical, "ayin," this is called "mavet" -- death. Thus, it says, "The righteous, even after their death, are called alive; the wicked, even in their lifetime, are called dead." (Berachot 18a) This essence of a person is what Tosfot means by "chayei Olam Haba," because this "mahut" or form, which is not always noticeable in this world, is what remains with a person even after his death, and becomes evident in Olam Haba.

In this manner we can explain the dispute in the gemara (ibid.) whether the dead know what is happening in this world. The gemara relates the story of a certain "chasid" who slept in a cemetery on Rosh Hashana and overheard two spirits talking to one another about matters of this world. This story indicates that the dead are aware of, and interested in, worldly events, as well as in the activities and talk of people. Similarly, the gemara states that worms are as painful to the dead as a needle is to a living person. Other passages quoted in that gemara, however, indicate otherwise, that the dead are not aware of worldly occurrences.

R. Yonatan Eibschutz, in Ya'arot Dvash, explains that there is merit to both sides of the issue. (This is true also in Halacha, but is particularly true in aggada, that often there is no real disagreement. Each side of the dispute is just expressing a different aspect of the issue.) When a person dies, his essence does not change from this world to the next. People who are concerned only with spiritual issues in their lifetime, and view their bodies merely as tools for the service of Hashem, have no further concern with this world when they die. They do not identify themselves, their essence, with their body and material possessions, and no longer have a need for these tools to experience closeness with G-d. In contrast, people who seek physical goals in their lifetime remain concerned about worldly affairs even after their death.

When Avigail came to meet David and appease him, she said to him, "May my lord's soul be bound up in the bond of [eternal] life, with Hashem, your G-d, and may He hurl away the soul of your enemies [as one shoots a stone] from a slingshot." (Shmuel I 25:29) While we understand Avigail's blessing that David's soul be bound eternally to G-d, what did she mean that the soul of his enemies should be slung from a "slingshot?"

The Kabbalistic works state that the wicked after their death, even prior to Gehenom, are slung with a "slingshot" from one end of the earth to the other. Rav Dessler explains that when a person chases worldly pursuits -- "ayin" -- in his lifetime, he continues to chase these luring imaginations after his death as well. Since in the next world he is unable to find them, as they do not exist there, his craving for them increases, and he has an awesome hunger for them which only subsides over time. Similarly, R. Chaim Volozhoner writes in Nefesh Hachayim on the verse, "that soul shall be cut off, its sin is in it" (Bamidbar 15:31), that sin itself is its own punishment, because it becomes a part of the soul's essence.

We can now explain the meaning of Tosfot, and, based on this, the nature of the judgment of Rosh Hashana. As explained, each person has a "mahut" -- an essence or form of what he really is -- which is called "chayei Olam Haba," since this is all that remains in the world to come. Tosfot means that this "mahut" is determined and sealed on Rosh Hashana. Rav Yisrael Salanter, zt"l, thus explains that the judgment of Rosh Hashana involves evaluating a person's spiritual goals, and decreeing the degree of "siyata dishmaya" (Divine assistance) that he will receive in attaining them, along with the corresponding resources in Olam Hazeh.

A "tzaddik" is one who enters Rosh Hashana prepared with teshuva and spiritual goals. He is written and sealed immediately for life, i.e., the necessary help to continue his learning, chesed and spiritual life. A "rasha" is someone who has no connection whatsoever with spiritual goals, but is oriented in the opposite direction. He is sealed for death, i.e., he is not given any help in religious pursuits. Essentially, this is the ultimate expression of "mitzvah goreret mitzvah." Depending on a person's "mahut," he will be granted siyata dishmaya to continue that same path of "life" or "death.

With this understanding, we can proceed to answer our second question, why is it necessary to judge based on the majority? The mitzvot that a person performs build up his "mahut," and, unfortunately, the sins destroy it. The Rambam writes (Iggeret Teiman) that mitzvot are not merely symbolic actions, but have intrinsic power to bring a person to what the mitzvah is all about. For example, wearing tzitzit, whose purpose is "so that you may remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them," (Bamidbar 15:40), arouses a person to want to fulfill all of the mitzvot. Taking the lulav and etrog, which is a way to "rejoice before Hashem" (Vayikra 23:40), inspires each person to feel simcha in his personal manner of avodat Hashem. Just as the body needs healthy food to nourish it and allow it to grow (even though the effects of the food cannot be seen daily), so too the mitzvot and proper midot build a person's "yeish." The opposite is true of sin.

The sum total of one's actions create a complete product, and together make a person into either a tzaddik or a rasha, giving a certain direction to his life. This is why the judgment and evaluation of one's "mahut" follows the majority. This evaluation can only be done by G-d, though, since it is not dependent just on the number of mitzvot, but on their greatness to the person involved. Only G-d knows what impact each mitzvah or sin has on the person, and the degree of exertion or toil he expended on it.

We can ask, though, why does this calculation have to be done every year? The answer is, the knowledge that we are being judged NOW awakens us, and gives us the opportunity to correct our path and refocus our goals continuously throughout our lifetime.

The ramifications of this judgment of Rosh Hashana are monumental. While every choice that we make in life has ramifications that are eternal, some choices have only local ramifications. Others choices involve "bechira clalit" (general choice), with major ramifications on a person's whole life, such as whether to study in Yeshiva or to attend a secular college or go straight to work. The judgment of Rosh Hashana is such a "bechira clalit," because it determines what "siyata dishmaya" and resources will be available

throughout the year. This is especially relevant for talmidim who are undergoing a critical year of growth and development.

What can a person do if he find himself always in a contradiction, if there are things pulling him in both directions? On the one hand, he seeks spiritual growth; on the other, he is also attracted to worldly issues. This is the state of all of us, beinonim. A mere decision to focus on the spiritual is insufficient, since a person's "mahut" is not determined in his mind, but in his heart and actions!

There is a seemingly simple answer, but that answer has a basic problem. The simple answer is to do teshuva. Let him have remorse, confess, correct the wrong he has done, and accept not to do so anymore. Let him increase his mitzvot and good deeds. The Kabbalists teach that each date in the month of Elul is a microcosm of that date in all the other months, and can serve as a rectification for them. The Arizal writes, as well, that each day in the last week of the year serves to rectify all the corresponding days throughout the year. [The same is true regarding the seven days of Aseret Yemai Teshuva between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. That is why the Rambam writes (Hil. Teshuva 3:4), "It is the practice of Israel to increase tzedaka and good deeds, and to do mitzvot from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur more than the rest of the year."] The Mishna Berurah adds that the last day of Elul can serve to rectify the entire year. A person who does teshuva, learns and davens well, and performs chesed on that day can achieve a tikkun for the whole year!

The problem with this solution, though, is that sometimes even this is not enough to change one's "mahut." It can take years to learn how to daven properly, and so too it can take years to develop an appreciation for the importance of Torah and a love of it. What can be done in the interim?

R. Yonah writes very clearly and bluntly in Shaarei Teshuva about the gravity of sin and the extent needed to completely eradicate the effect of sin. He writes, however, that when a person hears mussar from "chachamim and mochichim" (wise men and rebukers), and accepts upon himself to do and follow whatever they instruct him, "This person, in a single moment goes out from darkness to a great light," and his teshuva is valid. (2:10) This is because by doing so, the person plants in himself the seeds to be a tzaddik, and G-d considers it as if he is already righteous with a direction in life towards the spiritual.

Who are our "chachamim and mochichim?" The sifrei mussar. They teach us what the correct actions and traits are. They show us and implant in our hearts the proper path in Avodat Hashem. The commitment to learn these sefarim daily, seriously and consistently, is our acceptance to listen to the "chachamim and mochichim." This is how we can prepare ourselves for Rosh Hashana, and with this "fortunate is he, for he has vindicated himself in a single moment," and we will certainly be written and sealed "lechayim tovim ul'shalom," for a good life and for peace!

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Rosh Hashanah: The Call of the Great Shofar

Rav Kook delivered the following sermon in Jerusalem's Old City on Rosh Hashanah 1933. It was a time of mixed tidings. On the one hand, ominous news of Hitler's reign in Germany became more troubling with each passing day. On the other hand, the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael was flourishing. Immigration from central Europe was on the rise, bringing educated immigrants with needed skills and financial means. It seemed that the footsteps of redemption could be heard.

We say in our daily prayers, "Sound the great shofar for our freedom, and raise the banner to bring our exiles together." What is the significance of this "great shofar"?

Three Shofars There are three types of shofars that may be blown on Rosh Hashanah. The optimal shofar is the horn of a ram. If a ram's horn is not available, then the horn of any kosher animal other than a cow may be used. And if a kosher shofar is not available, then one may blow on the horn of any animal, even one which is not kosher. When using a horn from a non-kosher animal, however, no blessing is recited.

These three shofars of Rosh Hashanah correspond to three "Shofars of Redemption," three Divine calls summoning the Jewish people to be redeemed and to redeem their land.

The preferred Shofar of Redemption is the Divine call that awakens and inspires the people with holy motivations, through faith in God and the unique mission of the people of Israel. This elevated awakening corresponds to the ram's horn, a horn that recalls Abraham's supreme love of God and dedication in Akeidat Yitzchak, the Binding of Isaac. It was the call of this shofar, with its holy vision of heavenly Jerusalem united with earthly Jerusalem, that inspired Nachmanides, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevy, Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura, the students of the Vilna Gaon, and the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov to ascend to Eretz Yisrael. It is for this 'great shofar,' an awakening of spiritual greatness and idealism, that we fervently pray.

There exists a second Shofar of Redemption, a less optimal form of awakening. This shofar calls out to the Jewish people to return to their homeland, to the land where our ancestors, our prophets and our kings, once lived. It beckons us to live as a free people, to raise our families in a Jewish country and a Jewish culture. This is a kosher shofar, albeit not a great shofar like the first type of awakening. We may still recite a brachah over this shofar.

There is, however, a third type of shofar. (At this point in the sermon, Rav Kook burst out in tears.) The least desirable shofar comes from the horn of an unclean animal. This shofar corresponds to the wake-up call that comes from the persecutions of anti-Semitic nations, warning the Jews to escape while they still can and flee to their own land. Enemies force the Jewish people to be redeemed, blasting the trumpets of war, bombarding them with deafening threats of harassment and torment, giving them no respite. The shofar of unclean beasts is thus transformed into a Shofar of Redemption. Whoever failed to hear the calls of the first two shofars will be forced to listen to the call of this last shofar. Over this shofar, however, no blessing is recited. "One does not recite a blessing over a cup of affliction" (Berachot 51b).

The Great Shofar We pray that we will be redeemed by the "great shofar." We do not wish to be awakened by the calamitous call of the shofar of persecution, nor by the mediocre shofar of ordinary national aspirations. We yearn for the shofar that befits a holy nation, the shofar of spiritual greatness and true freedom. We await the shofar blasts of complete redemption, the sacred call that inspires the Jewish people with the holy ideals of Jerusalem and Mount Moriah:

"On that day a great shofar will be blown, and the lost from the land of Assyria and the dispersed from the land of Egypt will come and bow down to God on the holy mountain in Jerusalem." (Isaiah 27:13)

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, pp. 67-70)

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A Small Step for Man; A Giant Step for G-d

It's Never All or Nothing

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Relativity

An Odessa Jew meets another one. "Have you heard, Einstein won the Noble Prize?"

"Oh, what for?"

"He developed this Relativity theory."

"Yeah, what's that?"

"Well, you know, five hairs on your head is relatively few. Five hairs in your soup is relatively many."

"And for that, he wins the Noble Prize?!"

Today we will discuss this "theory of relativity" in Jewish spirituality. What may seem small on one plane is seen quite differently on another.

What's the Novelty?

Teshuvah, or repentance, one of the greatest gifts that Judaism and the Torah have given humanity, is the idea that G-d gives second chances. This is a fundamental part of the Jewish experience and is written in innumerable places in Torah -- and it is the focus during this time of the year, as we welcome Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Which is why it comes as a surprise that Rabbi Akiva, the famed Jewish leader and Talmudic scholar living in the second century CE, some 1500 years after Sinai and the writing of the Torah, seems to have been surprised, inspired, and even astounded by the idea that G-d gives a second chance to the sinner who repents.

I refer to a statement Rabbi Akiva made which has since gained fame in Jewish songs, chants, and liturgy, and it is recorded in the Mishna.1

אמר רבי עקיבא, אשריכם ישראל! לפני מי אתם מטהרין ומי מטהר אתכם? אביכם שבשמים! שנאמר (יחזקאל לו) וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם, ואומר (ירמיהו יז) מקוה ישראל ה'. מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים, אף הקב"ה מטהר את ישראל.

Rabbi Akiva said: How lucky are you, O Israel! Before whom are you purifying yourself, and who purifies you? Our father in Heaven! As it is written (Ezekiel 36), "I will sprinkle upon you purifying waters, and you will become purified," and it is said (Jeremiah 17), "Hashem is the mikva of Israel," just as the Mikvah purifies the impure, so too does G-d purify Israel.2

What innovation, what revolutionary idea is Rabbi Akiva teaching that has not been taught for over a thousand years? That G-d purifies the impure, forgives the penitents, and absolves the sinner? This is an axiom of Jewish thought dating back to Abraham! This idea is fundamental to Judaism itself. It is as old as Moses and the Jews of the Golden Calf, as Joseph forgiving his brothers, as G-d giving Adam a second chance after eating from the tree of knowledge. The entire concept and institution of Yom Kippur—discussed at length in the Book of Leviticus—is that G-d cleanses the people of Israel! Comes Rabbi Akiva 1500 years after Yom Kippur was created, and declares a novelty! How fortunate are you Israel. Why? Because your father in heaven cleanses you from your blemishes. It seems that Rabbi Akiva has suddenly "discovered America," when in essence he is repeating an ancient axiom of all of Tanach!

The question is stronger: To support this thought, Rabbi Akiva quotes verses that were transcribed some 500 years earlier which clearly state this very truth! Yet even the verses he quotes are from Ezekiel and Jeremiah, rather than from the Five Books of Moses, which clearly state the same truth.3

Even if you can find some reason why Rabbi Akiva repeated this ancient idea, why did the Mishna have to record it? The Mishna is a collection of original Jewish Law, and not the place to record inspirational sentiments that do not teach us anything new and innovative.

Two Extra Words

Many times, when studying Torah we will find, that if there are two questions on the same text, one question will be answered by resolving the other. Here too, there is another problem on the concluding words of Rabbi Akiva:

מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים אף הקב"ה מטהר את ישראל.

"Just as the Mikvah purifies the impure, so too does G-d purify Israel."

Every word in Mishna is precise. There is not an extra word used, not even for esthetical beauty. Every word of the Mishna was carefully edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince and is exact and necessary. Rabbi Judah chose from thousands of collected records of teachings and manuscripts and redacted in the Mishna only the best and most exact wordings.

In this statement of Rabbi Akiva, it seems, we have two superfluous words. It should have written simply, "Just as a Mikvah purifies, so too does G-d purify Israel."

Why add the extra words, "purify the impure"? We all know that a mikvah is designated to purify someone who is impure! Who else would be going to the Mikvah but someone who is impure? Why state the obvious?

Yet, in these seemingly superfluous two words lies a wondrous secret. But first, we have to understand a little about the functioning of a Mikvah.

Two Types of Impurity

There are different degrees of impurity, and there are different methods of purification from these various states of impurity.

[These were mostly relevant in biblical times and during the days of the Temple, when people had to be very careful to maintain their ritual purity in order to enter the Temple, or eat the sacred food of sacrifices. Today, we don't pay much attention to these ritual patterns; which is why most Jews would not tour the Temple Mount, since you may not enter the space of the Temple if ritually impure.]

For example, if one touches a dead rodent, he becomes impure for a day and can become pure simply by immersing in a mikva and waiting for nightfall. On the other hand, if he touches a human corpse he becomes impure for a week and needs a lengthy process of immersing in a mikvah, as well as being sprinkled with a mixture of water and ashes of the red heifer.

Now imagine if someone has become impure, on both accounts, he both touched a rodent, and a human corpse. He is inevitably impure due to the corpse for a week regardless of whether he goes to the mikva or not for the rodent-tumah. The mikvah, usually potent for purification from rodent-impurity, seems now meaningless and impotent due to the stricter corpse–impurity that remains inevitably for a week. Is there any benefit of him going to the mikvah? It would seem not. He will anyway remain impure because he has also touched a corpse.

However, that is not the case. And here we discover something fascinating. The law is that a mikvah will purify and remove the lesser impurity even if the stricter degree of impurity remains!4

This then is the profound innovation of Rabbi Akiva. "Just as a Mikvah will purify the impure person" who is destined to remain impure, even after going to the mikvah, so too does G-d purify the penitent who still remains, in some ways, distant and separate from G-d!

A person who is not prepared to repent and to return to G-d fully, he is not ready to take the plunge and surrender away all of his sins and pet peeves, this person might think that G-d accepts all or nothing. He might think: Either I truly repent for everything, or I do nothing. Either I entirely change my life, or not bother at all. Since I know that I cannot make so many changes in my life, let me not even begin.

Imagine if someone—a borrower, an investor, a partner—owes you $50,000, but really has neither the desire nor intention to pay you now. It's not that he denies that he borrowed the money, it's just that he cannot be bothered, and maybe does not have the money.

Then one fine morning, perhaps the day before Yom Kippur, your dear ungrateful and audacious borrower or partner shows up at your door announcing proudly: "I want to pay you $5,000!"

"$5,000?? What's that for? You owe me 50,000!!"

"I know, but seriously, I only feel like paying you back 5,000. For now, let's forget about the rest. We will deal with that another time. Ok? Deal, or no deal?"

How would you react? Chances are you would throw this man out head first, with his measly $5,000. And rightfully so. The sheer chutzpah! What is he thinking?

How Lucky!

This is what Rabbi Akiva is talking about. As Jews we turn to G-d each year, and all of us, to some degree or another, feel some sense of remorse or regret for one or two or three things in our life that need to be mended. Not that we are ready to turn over a new leaf, not that we are ready to make the serious changes in our life, not that we are ready for a complete transformation, but there is that one little aveira, that one little sin, that one little lie or cheat, that is nagging me. And I really want to get it off my chest.

I may have hurt someone in a dramatic way and it sits on me; I may have done something wrong that is really perturbing me; I may have insulted someone in a nasty way and I am upset at myself; I may have been involved in something that is eating up on my conscience.

So I repent for just that one thing. I ask G-d, or whoever it was that I wronged, to forgive me for that one act. What is going to be with the rest of my issues I cannot be bothered, and I neither know nor care too much at the moment. I don't have time or energy to deal with all my sins. But this one thing I am ready to deal with.

Is this worth anything? Does G-d care for this type of repentance?

Comes Rabbi Akiva and says:

מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים.

Just as a Mikvah purifies the impure, the one who will remain impure even after the mikvah, the one who either way has contracted a much more severe and serious impurity which he is not dealing with right now, yet, the mikva works and will purify him at that moment for the lesser impurity, exactly so does G-d purify Israel!

Why? Why doesn't G-d act as any normal person would, and throw our measly attempt at reconciliation back in our faces?

To this Rabbi Akiva tells us:

מי מטהר אתכם? אביכם שבשמים!

Because G-d is our "Father in heaven," father who is anxiously waiting for the merest sign of positive movement from, us, his child. A good father will embrace and appreciate the tiniest effort his son makes to connect with him, regardless and oblivious to the fact that the son has done wrong in so many more areas.

Today, all psychologists and educators agree that the way to educate is by focusing and drawing attention to even the smallest positive successes of our children and building on them. Education through criticism has been debunked and proven to be futile at best, and destructive at worst.

But Rabbi Akiva said this almost 2000 years ago. G-d is the ultimate loving parent. When he sees that a Jew makes even the slightest movement of Teshuva, regardless of how much he has left to go, G-d immediately embraces this movement with the deepest love, and purifies him just as the mikvah does.5

Fix One Thing

How many of us have not attempted something because we are afraid of failure? How many of us give up on our dreams because we know we will never fulfill them perfectly? How many of us remain paralyzed by perfectionism? How many of us look at things as all or nothing, and therefore do not begin jobs that we know we can never fully complete? How many of us deprive ourselves of this gift of a mitzvah that is so dear to us, just because we are scared to become "completely religious?" We feel that if we do not get it all right, we will get nothing right, and it is not worth the effort?

Rabbi Akiva is telling us that a Jew must know, that G-d values and cherishes every single mitzvah a Jew does. G-d embraced and cherished every act of change. Even if I regret one mistake in my life and change that, G-d accepts it fully and purifies me. Whatever you manage to accomplish, any step you manage to take forward, towards a better more inspired, G-dly life, is infinitely treasured by G-d who can purify even the one who still remains impure. It may be one small step for man; but a giant step for G-d.6

1. Mishna end of Yuma.

2. In the original verse, mikva means hope. G-d is the hope of Israel. Rabbi Akiva interprets it as a "mikvah," a gathering of natural water.

3. He could have quoted for example the verse in Leviticus quoted earlier in this very Mishnah: For on this day He will forgive you, to cleanse you from all your sins…" You can't get much clearer than this.

4.See for example end of Ch. 3 of Mishna Berachos. משנה זב שראה קרי ונדה שפלטה שכבת זרע והמשמשת שראתה נדה צריכין טבילה

5. This is an innovation revealed and espoused quite fittingly by Rabbi Akiva, the great lover of Jews, and a man who himself made a long and arduous journey from being an illiterate shepherd who actually hated Torah and Scholars, to becoming the pre-eminent Sage and leader of the Jewish people through one of the most difficult moments in their history.

6. This novel interpretation in the Mishna was shared by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during a public address ("farbrengen"), as he concluded the study of Tractate Yuma on his mother's yartziet, 6 Tishrei 5730, 1969. Part of it was published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 17 Parshas Acharei.

When Rosh Hashana's First Day is Shabbat Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

RSR Head Shot Gershon Ellinson creditThis year the majority of the first day of Rosh Hashana is turned into a mystical mystery with the silence of shofar, the absence of the expected blasts of the ram's horn – a phenomenon which is difficult to understand. Despite the fact that the Bible describes Rosh Hashana as "a day of a truah (broken, staccato shofar sounds) shall it be for you" (Numbers 29) – indeed, the only Biblically ordained positive commandment of the New Year's festival is the sounding of the shofar – when Rosh Hashana falls out on the Sabbath day, the shofar falls silent. In the words of the Mishnah: "When the Festival of Rosh Hashana falls out on the Sabbath, the Shofar is to be blown in the Holy Temple, but not anywhere else in the country." (Mishnah, Rosh Hashana 4,1). How can we understand such a strange mandate – especially since there is one Talmudic opinion that this silence is even a Biblical decree, stemming from the verse, "A Sabbath of remembering the truah sound" (Leviticus 23); when Rosh Hashana falls out on the Sabbath, you may only remember what the shofar blasts sound like but the ram's horn itself must remain silent. (B.T. Rosh Hashana 29b).

Perhaps we can understand this idea if we delve more deeply into the significance of the shofar sounds in general. There are fundamentally two different blasts which are blown from the ram's horn: the firm, exulting and exalting t'kiah sound (taka means, straight strong and firm while the staccato, searing, sighing, sobbing t'ruah sound expresses brokenness and despair).

The sages of the Talmud even debate as to whether the truah is three sharp sighing sounds and since shvarim actually means broken peaces. And should be followed by nine gasping, sobbing sounds. Our charge is to sound all of the possible permutations, with the broken sound of despair always preceded and succeeded by a triumphant straight sound (t'kiyah) of faith and hope (B.T. Rosh Hashana 33b).

What do these blasts have to do with the fundamental significance of Rosh Hashana? Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of the creation of the world – and our declaration of faith that the Almighty guarantees an eventual world of perfection and peace, a haven of harmony. This is clearly expressed in the Additional Prayer (Mussaf Amidah) liturgy of malkhiyot – "we have faith in You that we shall soon see the glory of Your power…when all the wicked will be turned to You and the world will be perfected in the Kingship of God." And the exalted t'kiyah sound expresses this optimistic faith.

But Rosh Hashana is Biblically referred to as "Yom Truah", the day of the staccato, sighing-sobbing sound! I believe that the reason is tragically clear: unfortunately, the world in which we live is a far cry from the perfected world of nations vowing fealty to a God of justice, compassion and peace. Our world is a place of corruption, wars and terrorism , a veritable vale of tears! Hence we cry out to God in pain on Rosh Hashana, entreating our Parent-in-Heaven to take note of our suffering and effectuate our redemption. This is the truah, the sigh-sob cry of God's suffering servants in a world of untimely deaths and innocent victims of drive-by shootings.

When Rosh Hashana comes out on the Sabbath, another motif enters the equation. The Sabbath is a fore-taste of the world-to-come, a day of peace and harmony which allows us a glimpse in the here-and-now of what will eventually occur in the days of redemption. Rosh Hashana is redemption promised – whereas Sabbath is redemption realized.

But redemption is not being realized at all; our history is blood-soaked and tear-stained with Jewish sacrifices – and the intensity of the pain is only exacerbated during this last period of our war against the terrorism of Islamic fundamentalism. For a nation which has willingly risked privation and poverty in order to celebrate the Sabbath, the confluence of Perfection Promised and Perfection Realized which takes place when Rosh Hashana falls out on the Sabbath can seem like a delusion and a mockery in the backdrop of a reality in which parents bury children, in which an Efrat

resident, Rabbi Leo Dee buries his young wife Lucy and two teenage daughters Maya and Rina, brutally murdered by terrorists.
And when the disparity is too great, when the ideal and the actual are so far apart -perhaps the only way to maintain our faith is to remain silent! In the Elah Ezkerah.
martyr ology which we recite on Yom Kippur, the liturgical elegist pictures Moses watching the great Rabbi Akiba being tortured to death by his Roman captors, and crying out to God: "This is Torah, and such is its reward?" The Almighty responds: "Be silent- or I'll turn the world back into primordial waters." When the disparity between the world as it is and the world as it ought to become too great, the only possible response – if you want to keep the faith – is silence!
This is the higher meaning between Aaron's silence when his two righteous sons were struck by Divine fire on the day of the consecration of the Sanctuary (Vayidom Aharon). I had the privilege of being present at the first Sabbath circumcision celebrated by the Klausenberger Hassidim in the Beth Moses hospital – a building that the surviving remnants took over after the Holocaust, when they settled in Brooklyn. The Rebbe himself lost his wife and eleven children – and refused to leave the inferno before trying to save as many of his adherents as possible.
The Rebbe explained:
"At every circumcision, we recite the verse from Ezekiel, usually translated: 'I see that you are rooted in your blood (dam), by your blood shall you live, by your blood shall you live (beamayich hayii). "But 'dam' also means silence, as in Vayidom Aharon. At this time in our history, on this Sabbath, if we are to continue to plant in the vineyard of Torah despite the unspeakable horror of the holocaust that we have experienced, I would translate the verse, 'I see that you are rooted in your silence (dom); By your silence do you live, by your silence do you live.'''
And so, on Rosh Hashana which falls on the Sabbath, the shofar is silent; the people of Israel swallow their cries of despair in order to keep on working for and believing in the perfection of the world in the Kingship of God.

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from: Michal Horowitz <contact@michalhorowitz.com> date: Sep 14, 2023, 11:04 AM subject: [New post] Rosh Hashana 5784: The Call of the Shofar

Rosh Hashana 5784: The Call of the Shofar By Michal Horowitz on Sep 14, 2023 08:01 am

Rosh Hashana 5784. Another year – 5783 – has come and gone, and here we stand on the precipice of a new year. We reflect on the year that has passed, on our achievements, our shared mission, our communities, families, friends, and our Land. We beseech HKB"H that this new year should be one of abundant and overflowing simcha, joy, bracha, blessing, good health and shalom, peace, for all.
It is the call of the shofar, the chefetz mitzvah (mitzvah object) of Rosh Hashana (R"H) that cries out to us to repent, to come closer to G-d, to leave our sins behind, and to reach ever higher spiritual heights in the new year.
The Torah identifies R"H as a day of shofar blast in two different places.
"And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: דַּבֵּר אֶל–בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לֵאמֹר: בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ, יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן—זִכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה, מִקְרָא–קֹדֶשׁ – Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first of the month, it shall be a cessation for you, a remembrance of the shofar blast, a calling of holiness" (Vayikra 23:23-34).
" וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם – And in the seventh month, on the first day, a calling of holiness it shall be for you; you shall not perform any mundane work. It shall be a day of shofar sounding for you" (Bamidbar 29:1).
The Rambam famously teaches that the shofar calls out to us to wake up from our spiritual slumber and arouse ourselves from our lackadaisical attitudes in avodas Hashem.
אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁתְּקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה גְּזֵרַת הַכָּתוּב הֲרֵי הִיא כְּלוֹמַר עוּרוּ יְשֵׁנִים מִשְּׁנָתְכֶם וְנִרְדָּמִים הָקִיצוּ מִתַּרְדֵּמַתְכֶם וְחַפְּשׂוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂיכֶם וְחִזְרוּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה וְזִכְרוּ בּוֹרְאֲכֶם

Even though the sounding of the shofar on R"H is a decree, it contains an allusion. It is as if [the shofar's call] is saying: Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator (Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuva, 3:4).
Particularly powerful and poignant are the words and reflections of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z'l. "What does R"H say to us? Of what is it a reminder? How can it transform our lives?… R"H tells us is that life is short. Untaneh Tokef tells the poetry of morality with haunting pathos: Man is founded in dust and ends in dust. He lays down his soul to bring home bread. He is like a broken shard, like a passing cloud, like a breath of wind, like whirling dust, like a dream that slips away…
"Furthermore, R"H tells us that life itself, each day, every breath we take, is the gift of G-d: Remember us for life, O King Who delights in life, and write us in the book of life – for Your sake, O G-d of life. Life is not something we may take for granted. If we do, we will fail to celebrate it. G-d gives us one gift above all others, said Maimonides: life itself, besides which everything else is secondary… Judaism, as opposed to other religions, sought G-d in the here-and-now of life on earth. Yes, we believe in life after death, but it is in life before death that we truly find human greatness.
"R"H reminds us that life may be hard, but it can still be sweet, the way the challah and the apple are on R"H when we dip them in honey. Jews have never needed wealth to be rich, or power to be strong. To be a Jew is to live for simple things: the love between husband and wife, the sacred bond between parents and children, the gift of community where we help others and others help us and where we learn that joy is doubled and grief halved by being shared. To be a Jew is to give. It is to learn and never stop seeking, to pray and never stop thanking, to do teshuva and never stop growing. In this lies the secret of joy… Life is sweet when touched by the Divine…
"So on R"H we remember and ask G-d to remember those who came before us: Avraham and Isaac, Sarah, Hannah, and Rachel, the Israelites of Moses' day and the Jews of every generation, each of whom left some living legacy in the prayers we say or the melodies in which we sing them. And in one of the most moving verses of the middle section of Mussaf we recall the great words said by G-d through the prophet Jeremiah (2:2): זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ, אַהֲבַת כְּלוּלֹתָיִךְ—לֶכְתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר, בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה – I remember of you the kindness of your youth, your love when you were a bride; how you walked after Me in the desert, through a land not sown. Our ancestors… never stopped following G-d though the way was hard and the destination distant… We have inherited wealth, not material but spiritual. We are heirs to our ancestors' greatness… R"H and Y"K allow us to begin anew, forgiven, cleansed, undaunted, ready for the next challenge, the next year…
"And whether the shofar is our cry to G-d or G-d's cry to us, somehow in that tekia, shevarim, terua – the call, the sob, the wail – is all the pathos of the Divine-human encounter as G-d asks us to take His gift, life itself, and make of it something holy by so acting as to honor G-d and His image on earth, humankind. For we defeat death, not by living forever but by living by values that live forever; by doing deeds and creating blessings that will live on after us; and by attaching ourselves in the midst of time to G-d Who lives beyond time, 'the King – the living, everlasting G-d'… Those who fully enter the spirit of R"H emerge into the new year charged, energized, focused, renewed, knowing that to be a Jew is to live life in the presence of G-d, to sanctify life for the sake of G-d, and to enhance the lives of others – for where we bring blessings into other lives, there G-d lives" (Ceremony & Celebration, p.20-25).
בברכת שנה טובה ומתוקה,
Michal

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 Avraham'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, Avraham 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 Avraham 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’leshet (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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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 one 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 parshia (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 Tzfania, for example, uses the phrase 'yom **shofar** u-**tru'a'** to describe a day of terrible war and destruction. Tzfania'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 Tzfania 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 chatzrotrot. 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

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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-l 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.