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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.



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The Shofar Blasts 5784

A Clarion Call for Unity



Rabbi Doron Perez
Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

At the dawn of the new year of 5784, the Jewish people in general and the State of Israel, in particular, are in the midst of one of the greatest internal challenges since its founding.

After five years of inconclusive elections, the state of Israel finally had a decisive result – a right-wing government of 64 mandates. For the first time in Israel's history, the entire government is made up of right-wing and religious parties. With many in Israel still reeling from the results, on January 3rd, 2023, Minister of Justice, Yair Levin, launched his systematic plan for judicial reform. Israel has not been the same since.

On the one hand, there is general consensus, almost across the board in Israel, for a need for significant change to the far-reaching and perhaps unparalleled powers of Israel's judiciary. Balance needs to be restored between the Supreme Court and the government – between the judicial and legislative/executive branches of the Israeli political system. On the other hand, Levin's plan has become one of the most divisive political initiatives in Israel's history. Introduced as an overarching plan with long-term systematic structural changes initiated by a partisan government, these changes seem to many, revolutionary, rather than evolutionary. Highly controversial, as opposed to consensual.

Many see this as a threat to democracy and fear a potential dictatorial power grab by the Right. Months of major demonstrations continue to take place consistently across the country.

Others believe that the current powers of Israel's Supreme Court and the plethora of government legal advisers with expansive powers is no less extreme and an imbalanced power play. With such an activist Judiciary, many feel that the court oversteps its jurisdiction in undermining the decisions of a majority of elected officials and the will of the majority at the ballot booths.

The fissures in Israeli society between left and right, between democratic and Jewish, between universal and progressive versus religious and conservative have emerged to roil Israeli and Jewish society to the core.

I recently attended an event in Modiin where a minister and deputy minister of the government were scheduled to attend. There was a loud demonstration outside the building during the course of the entire event. As I walked out at the conclusion of the event, someone in the crowd started shouting "Busha, busha" (shame on you, shame on you) and then one person spat at me. Such is the level of the deeply concerning hatred at this current time.

After such a divisive year we have a critical need for a paradigm shift – for a new Jewish covenant and conviction of unity.

In my opinion, the *shofar* blasts on Rosh Hashana are the exact antidote to the challenge and the very cure to the curse of divisiveness.

A Mitzvah to Listen

The *shofar* is the only Torah-mandated commandment of the day. In fact, it is the very definition of the day which is called in the Torah, 'Yom Teruah' (Bamidbar 29:1) a day of the blowing of the *shofar*. The translation of the word *teruah*, as rendered by the ancient commentary of the Targum Onkelos, is *yevavah*, meaning a cry. The *shofar* is a heartfelt crying call that must be heard. Critically, the commandment of the *shofar* is fulfilled not by the blowing but by **listening** to the crying sounds. As the blessing on the *shofar* clearly states: "לשמוע קול שופר" – to **hear** the sound of the *shofar*.¹

I always found it quite incredible that the first *mitzvah* that we are called upon to do as Jews at the beginning of the year is to listen. To pay attention to exactly what it is that Jewish destiny is about. The *shofar* beckons us first and foremost to hear and listen carefully to that which Hashem expects of us.

The truth is that truly listening and empathizing is not only the key to our relationship with Hashem, it is the key to all successful relationships. We cannot have meaningful and lasting relationships if we are unable to hear what others are saying and feeling – their cries and concerns; needs and expectations. On both sides of the current internal conflict, there are genuine cries and concerns. Cries of many about the endemic injustices and more equitable representation on Israel's judicial bodies and decades of judicial activism making many in Israel feel disempowered, disparaged and unrepresented. Cries and fears from others of the potential Judicial overhaul and revolution which instead of restoring balance may create unbridled and unchecked governmental power – simply putting the shoe



No healing can happen until both cries are empathetically heard – where the frustrations and fears of both sides are genuinely heard by the other

on the other foot. What de Tocqueville called the 'tyranny of the majority'.

No healing can happen until both cries are empathetically heard – where the frustrations and fears of both sides are genuinely heard by the other. Only then can camaraderie and the covenant at the heart of Jewish peoplehood begin to be healed and restored.

A Call for Unity

Secondly, what is fascinating about the *shofar* blasts on Rosh Hashana is how all communities across the Jewish world have uniformly accepted exactly the same custom. This is not self-evident at all as there could be at least three different interpretations of what the Torah means by the word 'teruah' and hence three different acceptable customs.

The Sages (Rosh Hashana 33b) establish that the *teruah* is a broken crying sound, while the *tekia* is a smooth unbroken sound and that before and after each *teruah* there needs to be a *tekia*. Since the term *teruah* appears three times in the context of Rosh Hashana (and the Yovel/Jubilee year on Yom Kippur) and each one must be preceded and followed by a *tekia* – one must blow three sets of *tekia*, *teruah*, *tekia* (nine sounds) to fulfill the biblical obligation of hearing the *shofar* or 9 sounds. (Rambam, Hilchot Shofar 3:1, Shulchan Aruch OC 590:1).

While the sound of the *tekia* is relatively self-evident – smooth and flat – the broken sound of the *teruah* is unclear. The Sages mention three different interpretations – either a medium, tremolo blast, what we call *shevarim* (breaks); a short staccato

blast, what we call *teruah* or perhaps a combination of both (*shevarim teruah*). All three variations are acceptable according to Jewish law and any could be done to fulfill the *mitzvah* (Rav Hai Gaon, Otzar HaGeonim, Rosh Hashana, Siman 117).

The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 34a) records that Rabbi Abahu of Caesarea ruled that one should blow all three different possible variations. Remarkably, Rabbi Abahu's opinion has been accepted by **all** of Israel. Incredibly, all communities blow the *shofar* in the same way ensuring that all three variations² are given expression. All interpretations are included as all may be true. We start the year with a spiritual act of unity – giving expression to all potential ways of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *shofar*.

Just as we start the year with the twin transformative values of empathic listening and unity in diversity, so too may 5784 be a year where we listen carefully to each other's heartfelt concerns and find a unified way to charter our future forward together.

-
1. Shulchan Aruch, O.C 585:2. This is in accordance with the opinion of the Rambam and Behag. Rabbeinu Tam and the Semag disagree and believe that the *beracha* should be "על תקיעת שופר" – on the blowing of the *shofar*. The Rosh rules according to the Rambam which is in accordance with the majority of opinions. Hence the Tur and Shulchan Aruch rule in this way and that the essence of the *mitzvah* is on hearing the *shofar* blasts.
 2. *Terua-shevarim-teruah* x 3 = 9 blasts. *Tekiah-teruah-tekiah* x 3 = 9. *Tekiah-shevarim-teruah-tekiah* x 3 = 12. All together, 30 blasts.

Days of Fear and Trembling: A Yamim Noraim Reflection on the Yom Kippur War

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Rabbi Reuven Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi
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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.¹ Though Israel rebounded, almost three thousand soldiers lost their lives, and nearly 10,000 were wounded.

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.²

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, “Does the *shofar* sound in the city without the people trembling?”³

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.⁴

The Rosh Hashanah Connection

The *shofar* we blow on Rosh Hashanah is also connected to the emotions of war. Because the *shofar* was blown at times of war,⁵ hearing it conjures up the associated feelings of fear and vulnerability.⁶

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.⁷ Expressing and identifying with these feelings of fear and distress should remind us that on Rosh Hashanah, our lives hang in the balance.⁸

Like the *chatzotzrot* blown at a time of war, Rosh Hashanah's *shofar* calls upon us to respond to distressing circumstances by remembering Hashem and doing *teshuvah*.⁹

If we respond to the *shofar* by remembering, returning, and committing ourselves to Him, we merit His “remembering” us and judging us favorably.¹⁰

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.

1. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan feared what he called “*Churban Bayit Shlishi*.”
2. See Sefer Kohelet (8:8), which points to war as reflective of man's lack of control over his own life.
3. 3:6.
4. See Bamidbar 10:9, which mandates the blowing of *chatzotzrot* at a time of war. See also Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ta'aniyot 1:1–2) who categorizes blowing the horns as a form of prayer meant to inspire *teshuvah*, an outgrowth of remembering Hashem (see Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4). This merits Hashem's “remembering” and saving us. See also Ibn Ezra (Bamidbar 10:9), who mentions the two forms of memory (our's and Hashem's).
5. Yehoshua (6:4–5), Shoftim (3:27, 7:16) and Shmuel I (13:3) mention that the *shofar* was blown during wars. See also Talmud Bavli, Masechet Sotah (43a) which interprets (even) a *pasuk* that mentions *chatzotzrot* at a time of war as actually

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HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Tefillat Chana: From Personal Prayer to National Anthem



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

Tefillat Chana assumes a central role in our Rosh Hashanah liturgy. It is not only read as a *haftara* on the first day, but is also the basis for the centrality of the Rosh Hashanah service – the *Mussaf* brachot of the *Amida*. According to Rabbi Yitzchak (Brachot 29a) the nine brachot of *Shemoneh Esreh* on Rosh Hashanah are based on the nine references to “Hashem” by Chana in her *tefillah*. The gemara provides an explanation for this connection: “*De’amar Mar – B’Rosh HaShana Nifkada Sarah, Rachelle, ve’Chana*”; as one of the three barren women, according to *Chazal*, who were remembered on Rosh Hashanah and thereby conceived, Chana assumes a central role in the day’s *tefillot*. Some *Rishonim*, however, (e.g. *Ritva*) reject this explanation offered by the *Bavli* and quote other opinions, including the explanation of the *Yerushalmi*: Since Chana mentions Hashem as the judge over the world at the conclusion of her prayer, it is most appropriate that her *tefillah* serve as the basis for the *tefillot* on the Day of Judgement (*Tosafot Rav Yehuda haChassid*). Both opinions cited above seem rather difficult; After all, according to the *Bavli*’s explanation, Chana is one of three barren women remembered on Rosh Hashanah – so why not choose references to G-d’s name in the parshia of “*VeHashem Pakad et Sarah*”? The latter opinion as well is somewhat disturbing – if the basis for Chana’s *tefillah* on Rosh Hashanah is because of the marginal reference to judgment, should we not search for a more apparent section in Tanach that deals with the subject directly (*Avraham, Moshe, Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel, Iyov*, to mention a few characters who cite

Hashem as judge more frequently and apparently!)?

A closer look at Chana’s *tefillah* in context will perhaps reveal a deeper connection between her prayer and those recited on Rosh Hashanah. Chana offers her *tefillah* after the birth of Shmuel, and yet, her words are not considered those of praise, thanksgiving, *shira* or *hallel*, but rather, “*tefillah*” – containing a *bakasha* as well (evident in the last *pasuk* “*Hashem yechato merivo...va’yarem keren Meshicho*”).

Chana is thereby addressing two issues in her prayer: Firstly, her personal salvation through the birth of her son, and secondly, a request for the salvation of *Am Yisrael*. Chana understands that through becoming a mother after being barren for so long, she has been a beneficiary of Hashem’s salvation. Instead of focusing solely on her own joy, she remembers the plight of her people and enjoins Hashem to catalyze salvation for all of *Am Yisrael*. Living during a period of anarchy with tribal leaders (*Shoftim*), Chana understands that the nation is in desperate need of spiritual and physical revival and assumes the pain and responsibility for praying on their behalf. She places the needs of her nation above her own as if to say – “as you saved me, Hashem, please save your nation”.

Chazal saw the fulfillment of the *tefillot* of Chana through Shmuel who spiritually revived the people and anointed two *meshichei Hashem* (anointed kings) – *Shaul* and *David*. They therefore compiled a *tefillah* based on the structure of *tefillat Chana* through the nine brachot containing themes of *malchiyot, zichronot, and shofarot*. *Malchiyot* describes the majesty

of G-d in the world, *Zichronot – Hashgachat Hashem* in the world, and *Shofarot* refers to the blasting of the horn of divine revelation and redemption at the time of *matan Torah* and the final *geulah*. These brachot clearly express and are founded on the same ideas mentioned by Chana in her *tefillah* on behalf of *Am Yisrael*. (*Malchiyot – Shmuel Aleph, perek 2, pasuk 2, Zichronot – hashgachat Hashem – pasuk 8, and Shofarot – prayer for salvation – pasuk 10*).

Although Sarah and Rachelle were also answered on Rosh Hashanah, Chana’s *tefillah* serves as a basis for our *kavanot* particularly on The Day of Judgement. As we daven for personal requests of *teshuva*, Chana’s prayer reminds us of the nature of the day of Rosh Hashanah as a day of universal majesty of G-d over the world, particular guidance for *Am Yisrael*, and our hopes for nationalistic redemption. We learn from Chana that beyond our concern with individual requests, we must not forget to beseech G-d for the needs of our community, our nation. The *tefillot* of Rosh Hashanah must be infused with a spirit of nationalistic identity and communal concern. Our hope is, as *Chazal* intended, that through identifying ourselves with the *tzibbur of Klal Yisrael*, Hashem answer our *teruot* and *tefillot* and redeem us, as He did through Chana, “*ירימנו ויקרן משיחו*”.

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: Why do we blow shofar on Rosh Hashanah?

Answer: It is a biblical command to blow the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, as the *pasuk* says “*yom teruah yehiyeh lachem – a day of teruah it shall be for you*” (Bamidbar 29:1). The Rambam writes that these blasts allude to blasts which are meant to wake up and shake a person:

Even though the sounding of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah 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. Those who forget the truth in the vanities of time and throughout the entire year, devote their energies to vanity and emptiness which will not benefit or save: Look to your souls. Improve your ways and your deeds and let every one of you abandon his evil path and thoughts.¹ (Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 3:4)

However, this reason needs to be given a closer look. While the *shevarim* blast is intended to represent crying and to infuse a feeling of trembling, the *teruah* sound throughout Tanach generally is associated with happiness and the coronation of a king. “*Bachatsots'rot v'kol shofar hariu lifnei hamelech Adonai – With trumpets and the sound of a shofar, raise your voices before the King, the Lord*” (Tehilim 98:6).² If so, it is not so clear: Are the sounds of the *shofar* supposed to represent crying and brokenness or actually the coronation of our King through joy?

Sounds of the *shofar* which result in

shattering remind us of the *tekiot* blown surrounding the cities of Yericho. There the process is: *tekiya*, breaking, and the wall falling. In a similar vein, it may be that the *tekiot* on Rosh Hashanah are not meant to scare us or knock us down, but rather knock down the walls separating us from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

There are real walls created through sin. Each sin creates a separation, a wall, between us and holiness. Additionally, there are virtual, imaginary walls that we create. During the *shevarim* blasts, we try to break these walls down. Not only do we break down the virtual walls which fake us into believing we are far from Hashem, but we even break the real walls of sin. We do this through recognizing that our sins are not truly us, but rather, something external to us to which we aim not to return. We recognize that we have a pure soul which is unfitting for sin. When this perspective is reached, we can break down the walls of sin.

After the *shevarim*, after we break down the walls, we can arrive at the *teruah*. What is the *teruah*? The *pasuk* says “*Hashem elokav imo uteru'at melech bo*” (Bamidbar 23:21). Unkelos translates the latter part of the *pasuk* as the *shechina* resting between them. In other words, the *shechina* holds together *Am Yisrael* and brings *Am Yisrael* close with Hashem. According to this *peirush*, *teruah* is from the word “*re'ut*” – friendship/affection (See Seforno there). After breaking the walls with *shevarim*, we arrive at closeness, friendship, to a deep connection and great love between us and Hashem. Now, we can connect to the king. Now, we are privileged to call out to the king.

Before the *shevarim*, there are walls, there is distance. After the *shevarim*, after the understanding that we do not want to return to our sin and that they are not part of us, there is great closeness and complete *deveikut* to Hashem.

Question: If I speak in between the tekiot, do I need to go back and re-start?

Answer: The *brachot* said before the *tekiot* are meant to cover all of the *tekiot*, and therefore, one should not speak (unless it is a matter pertaining to the *brachot/tekiot*) from the time of the *brachot* until the end of the *tekiot* after *musaf* (at the very least, one should not speak until after the blasts during *chazarat hashatz – SA OC 392:2*). One certainly must not speak during the *tekiot* or between the *tekiot* (Mishna Berurah 392:10-11).

One who speaks does not need to go back and make another *bracha* (ibid, 392:13).

● Compiled by Yaakov Panitch.

1. Translation from chabad.org

2. See 98:4, 47:2-3 for more examples

The Deep Significance of the Shofar



Rabbanit Sharon Rimon
Tanach teacher and author

What is the deeper significance of the *shofar*? The *shofar* has a number of uses in Tanach, the

most basic of which is as a musical instrument, expressing joy. For example, when bringing the Aron up to Jerusalem, David and the people blow the *shofar* as part of the great celebration (Shmuel Bet 6:15). Similarly, in Tehillim 150:3: "Praise Him with the blast of the *shofar*, praise Him with lyre and harp."

The blowing of the *shofar* at the beginning of the Jubilee year can also be interpreted as a sound of joy, but its purpose could simply be to proclaim the start of the momentous year. *Shofar* as announcement appears numerous times, particularly in connection to war – for example, when Gidon calls upon the local residents to gather for war (Shoftim 7:8), or when Shaul blows the *shofar* after Yonatan kills the Philistine commissioner as a sign for the war to begin (Shmuel Aleph 13:3), and many others.

It appears the function of the *shofar* was to declare war, to warn, and to cause the people to gather in preparation for war. Indeed, the *shofar* became so identified with war that it is sometimes mentioned as a synonym for war or the fear that accompanies it: "Is the *shofar* ever sounded in a city and people do not fear?" (Amos 3:6).

In addition to joy and announcing war, blowing the *shofar* is also used to mark the coronation of kings (see *Melachim Aleph* 1 as an example).

At *Har Sinai*, G-d's Revelation is prefaced by the blowing of the *shofar*, and we can deduce that the sound of the *shofar* here is expressing G-d's Kingship (Shemot 19:16).

At the time of the conquest of Jericho, the *shofar* combines both aspects – it's a war, but it's a miraculous war, hence the blowing is performed by the *Kohanim* before the Ark of G-d: "And the seven *Kohanim* carrying the seven *shofars* before the Ark of G-d walked on and blew the *shofars*." (Yehoshua 6:13)

On Rosh Hashanah, we have the opportunity to stop and listen to the sound of the *shofar*, which arouses our hearts and awakens our internal voice. Indeed, the blasts of the *shofar* can make us tremble and fearful, like the *shofar* sounded at the start of a war. It hits us with a powerful sense of what the Day of Judgement is, as we recall our mistakes and failures, feel trepidation for the year ahead, and spur ourselves to do *teshuva* out of *Yirat Hashem* (the fear of G-d).

On the other hand, at the same time, the sound of the *shofar* can stir feelings of celebration and joy, like an instrument accompanying festive occasions.

In addition, the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah can also express the coronation of G-d as King over the World, and perhaps, in that sense, it really does integrate the two aspects above: Coronating G-d is a festive and joyous event, yet it also carries an element of duty and responsibility, and may be destructive when human beings are not worthy of it. That's why many prophets describe the day of G-d as *גדול ונורא* – great and full of awe, i.e.,

our contrasting emotions accompanying the *shofar* blowing are an expression of the day's essence – joy and celebration at being so close to G-d, together with the awe, fear and trepidation of standing before Him in judgement.

I think that Ezra and Nechemia taught the people the right balance between these two feelings on this day: "So Ezra the *Kohen* brought the Torah before the congregation... on the first day of the seventh month [Rosh Hashanah]... and Ezra blessed Hashem, the great G-d... they bowed and prostrated themselves in front of G-d... and they read clearly from G-d's Torah, applying wisdom... and Nechemia said... 'Today is holy to the L-rd your G-d. Don't mourn and don't cry,' for all the people were crying as they heard the words of the Torah. And he said to them, 'Go eat from the best foods and drink sweet beverages... because the day is holy to our Master, and don't be sad, because rejoicing in G-d is your fortress'" (Nechemia 8:2-10)

Ezra and Nechemia taught the people that Rosh Hashanah is a day of holiness, and it is fitting to contemplate one's *Avodat Hashem* and *mitzvah* observance and give an accounting of oneself. On the other hand, one must be wary of slipping into sadness and tears. It is a day of joy, of celebration, "because rejoicing in G-d is your fortress." That is what gives us the feeling of security and serenity. That is what gives us true joy.

Who will we be a year from now?



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

Excuse me, but have you already imagined what you will be like next Rosh HaShanah? It so happens that this is exactly what someone claimed to be our task this Rosh HaShanah. Not only to look backward on the past year, but mainly to look forward to the next year. To think about exactly what we want from ourselves, in every area of life.

This practical and intriguing challenge was presented by Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, zt”l, the Admor (Hasidic rebbe) from Piaseczno. He was murdered during the Holocaust and left behind a wonderful educational legacy. He suggests that on Rosh HaShanah we consider where we want to be next Tishrei, evaluate the distance to get there, and do the following:

“If you desire to serve HaShem and to elevate yourself, and not to be in the same place at the age of seventy as you were on your Bar Mitzvah, do this: Every year, set a goal for yourself. If your name is Reuven, for example, imagine which Reuven you will be a year from now – his achievements, his service of G-d, his character traits and everything else about him a year from now. Measure yourself against this imaginary Reuven throughout the year, what you lack in comparison to him. Strive so that your service of G-d and personal refinement on a daily basis will be sufficient to meet the goals – one year from now – of the Reuven you wish to be.” Everyone is invited to imagine who they want to be a year from now.



Many nations celebrate their new year by counting backward and loudly gathering at a public place such as at Times Square with a party. But then there is another nation that gathers together in silence,

and turns inward, quietly listening to the simple sounds of the *shofar*.

We are full of seriousness at the starting point of the new year. We don’t shout “*mazel tov*” and open a bottle of champagne, we don’t go out and celebrate, but instead we gather together inside a shul for a moment to listen to that “still, small voice.”

What should we be thinking about when we hear the blast of the *shofar*? What is its meaning? First of all, before we get into some of the commentaries, this is a positive *mitzvah* from the Torah. Let’s remember, above all, that we are keeping the commandment designated for this day. This is the simple meaning of *shofar*. And so too is it stated in our Torah:

“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day for you when the horn is sounded.” (Numbers 29:1)

“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts”. (Leviticus 23:24)

And the Rambam opens his *halachot* pertaining to *shofar* with the following declaration: “It’s a positive *mitzvah* of the Torah to hear the loud blasts of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashana, as it is stated: “a day for you when the horn is sounded.”

So, first of all, we are doing what needs to be done on this day, in these *shofar*-blowing moments. This is important even if we do not understand the full meaning of *shofar*, and, after all, how is it really possible to understand the full meaning?

Here, for example, is what Rabbenu Bachya writes about this *mitzvah*: “This (*shofar*) paragraph is more enigmatic than any other paragraph regarding the festivals, and the reason is well known: the more something is hidden and the deeper

its inner meaning – the more enigmatic it is and so it is conveyed in abbreviated language and with few words.”

So here we have a secret. I thought to myself that perhaps the secret, first of all, is the silence itself, the stillness, the retreat within ourselves in the absence of noise.

The “restart” moment on Rosh Hashana is so important, and each year is more important than the last. We reset the entire system. We quiet things down. We, ourselves, become silent. This is actually found in the blessing that we recite over the *shofar* blowing. Pay attention to the wording:

“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our G-d, who has sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to hear the sound of the *shofar*.”

Typically, blessings are recited over a physical action: lighting a candle, putting on *tefillin*, eating bread, drinking wine, sitting in a *Sukkah*, reading the *Megillah*. Here, however, we are blessing the experience of hearing the *shofar*, “he commanded us to hear”. To hear and not to be heard. To hear and not to speak.

But this is not only for the sake of experiencing some quiet time. If it were, we would just take “a moment of silence”. We do shout something, but without words, something higher than words, in these special seconds.

Sometimes, however, shouting, represented by the *shofar* blast, is needed, too. This is our cry, sounded by the *shofar*: I am here. I have come home. It doesn’t matter how far away I went, many years ago or just last year. Now I am here, and that’s what matters. The king hears our shouts, that we believe he is our father our king, that this connection is important to us, and that we accept his kingship over us.

For the Rosh Hashanah Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi

Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“One thing I requested from Hashem, that I will seek: May I dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the pleasantness of Hashem and to visit His Sanctuary” (Psalms 27:4).

Since the beginning of the month of Elul, Psalm 27 (“*LeDavid Hashem Ori...*”) has been added to our daily prayers and we shall continue to recite it twice a day until the end of the Sukkot.

Towards the beginning of the psalm, David HaMelech expresses his desire to be close to Hashem. Interestingly, whereas he longs to dwell in the house of Hashem, he only requests to visit the Sanctuary. If David could only ask Hashem for one thing, why would it not be to dwell permanently in the Sanctuary? Why does he only request an occasional visit?

In truth, David understood that occasionally visiting the Sanctuary is the most he could ask for, for it is the most that man



Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are opportunities to visit Hashem's Sanctuary and reach true spiritual heights.

can achieve. Whilst we can strive towards dwelling in the house of Hashem with daily study and service, the elevated spiritual experience represented in the verse as visiting his Sanctuary is not always within our grasp, for no person can naturally sustain a constant spiritual high.

We live in a world of increasingly instant gratification. Accustomed to receiving immediate satisfaction in the fields of communication, information, entertainment, food and travel, we can find ourselves searching for instant spirituality

as well. The failure to maintain constant meaning or connection can easily dissuade us from the path of faith, for we are impatient and unaccustomed to waiting.

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are opportunities to visit Hashem's Sanctuary and reach true spiritual heights. However, it is important for us to realize that spirituality does not come instantly and we cannot expect to feel a constantly intimate, emotional and spiritually charged connection to Hashem. In order to “visit His Sanctuary” and experience elevated moments of spirituality, we must first seek to “dwell in the house of Hashem” all the days of our lives.

By committing ourselves to dwelling in the house of Hashem, may we merit to visit His Sanctuary as well.

Shana Tova!

Continued from page 4

referring to a *shofar*.

See also Talmud Bavli, Masechet Ta'anit (16b) which mentions that they would recite *pesukim* of *Shofarot* at a time of war.

The Yerushalmi (Masechet Rosh Hashanah 20b) records that the Jews were once attacked when they blew the *shofar* Rosh Hashanah morning because our enemies thought that the sound meant that the Jews were about to attack them.

6. Pesikta Rabati 40. See also Ran (Masechet Rosh Hashanah [3a in Rif]) who associates the Rosh Hashanah *shofar* with the *pasuk* in Amos that describes the blowing of the *shofar* at a time of war.

7. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Rosh Hashanah 33b.

8. Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, *He'arot L'Masechet Rosh Hashanah* (33b).

9. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4. The Rambam seems to understand the “memory” the Torah mentions in reference to the Rosh Hashanah *shofar* (Vayikra 23:24) as referring to our memory.

He explains the goal of blowing *chatzotzrot* at a time of war the same way (Hilchot Ta'anivot 1:1-2).

The Rosh Hashanah *shofar*'s goal of getting us to remember Hashem explains why the *mishnah* about the “hands of Moshe” (which had a similar goal during the war against

Amalek) is included in the chapter dealing with the laws of *shofar*.

Understandably, Yechezkel HaNavi (Sefer Yechezkel 33:1-9) compares his call to *teshuvah* to a *shofar* blown to warn a city of an approaching army. Like the watchman who warns the people by blowing the *shofar*, so Yechezkel warns the people of their need to do *teshuvah*.

10. See Sefer HaChinuch (331) based on the Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot 137. For this reason, Rosh Hashanah is referred to as *Yom Hazikaron*, “the Day of Memory.”

The Challenge of Jewish Repentance



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The Ten Days of Repentance are the holy of holies of Jewish time. They begin with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and culminate 10 days later with Yom Kippur, our Day of Atonement. At no other time do I feel so close to G-d, and I suspect the same is true for most Jews.

These days constitute a courtroom drama like no other. The judge is G-d Himself, and we are on trial for our lives. It begins on Rosh Hashanah, with the sounding of the *shofar*, the ram's horn, announcing that the court is in session. The Book of Life, in which our fate will be inscribed, now lies open. As we say in prayer, "On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur, it is sealed, who will live and who will die." At home, we eat an apple dipped in honey as a symbol of our hope for a sweet new year.

On Yom Kippur, the atmosphere reaches a peak of intensity on a day of fasting and prayer. Repeatedly we confess our sins, whole alphabetical litanies of them, including ones we probably had neither the time nor the imagination to commit. We throw ourselves on the mercy of the court, which is to say on G-d Himself. Write us, we say, in the Book of Life.

And at the end of a long and wrenching day, we finish as we began 10 days earlier, with the sound of the ram's horn – this time not with tears and fears but with cautious yet confident hope. We have admitted the worst about ourselves and survived.

Beneath the surface of this long religious ritual lies one of the more transformative stories of the human spirit. The sociologist Philip Rieff pointed out that the movement from paganism to monotheism was a transition from fate to faith. By this, he meant that in the world of myth, people were pitted against powerful, capricious forces personified as gods who were at best indifferent, at worst hostile, to humankind. All you could do was try to propitiate, battle or outwit them. This was a culture of character and fate, and its noblest expression was the literature of Greek tragedy.

Jews came to see the world in a completely different way. The book of Bereishit opens with G-d making humans "in His image and likeness." This phrase has become so familiar to us that we forget how paradoxical it is for the Hebrew Bible since G-d has no image and likeness. As the narrative quickly makes clear, what humans have in common with G-d is freedom and moral responsibility.

The Jewish drama is less about character and fate than about will and choice. To the monotheistic mind, the real battles are not "out there," against external forces of darkness, but "in here," between the bad and better angels of our nature. As the religion writer Jack Miles once pointed out, you can see the difference in the contrast between Sophocles and Shakespeare. For Sophocles, Oedipus must battle against blind, inexorable fate. For Shakespeare, writing in a monotheistic

age, the drama of "Hamlet" lies within, between "the native hue of resolution" and "the pale cast of thought."

The trouble is, of course, that faced with a choice, we often make the wrong one. Given a second chance, Adam and Eve would probably pass on the fruit. Cain might work a little harder on his anger management. And there is a straight line from these biblical episodes to the destruction left by Homosapiens: war, murder, human devastation and environmental destruction.

That is still our world today. The key fact about us, according to the Bible, is that uniquely in an otherwise law-governed universe, we are able to break the law – a power that we too often exercise with relish.

This raises an acute theological dilemma. How are we to reconcile G-d's high hopes for humanity with our shabby and threadbare moral record? The short answer is forgiveness.

G-d wrote forgiveness into the script. He always gives us a second chance, and more. All we have to do is to acknowledge our wrongs, apologize, make amends and resolve to behave better. And G-d forgives. It allows us to hold simultaneously to the highest moral aspirations while admitting honestly our deepest moral failings. That is the drama of the Jewish High Holy Days.

At the heart of this vision is what the post-Holocaust writer Viktor Frankl

called our “search for meaning.” The great institutions of modernity were not constructed to provide meaning. Science tells us how the world came to be but not why. Technology gives us power but cannot tell us how to use it. The market gives us choices but no guidance as to which choices to make. Modern democracies give us a maximum of personal freedom but a minimum of shared morality. You can acknowledge the beauty of all these institutions, yet most of us seek something more.

Meaning comes not from systems of thought but from stories, and the Jewish story is among the most unusual of all. It tells us that G-d sought to make us His partners in the work of creation, but we repeatedly disappointed Him. Yet He never gives up. He forgives us time and again. The real religious mystery of Judaism is not our faith in G-d, but G-d's faith in us.

This is not, as atheists and skeptics sometimes claim, a comforting fiction but quite the opposite. Judaism is G-d's call to human responsibility, to create a world that is a worthy home for His presence. That is why Jews are so often to be found as doctors fighting disease, economists fighting poverty, lawyers fighting injustice, teachers fighting ignorance and therapists fighting depression and despair.

Judaism is a supremely activist faith for which the greatest religious challenge is to heal some of the wounds of our deeply fractured world. As Frankl put it: the real question is not what do we want from life but what does life want from us.

That is the question we are asked on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. As we ask G-d to write us in the Book of Life, He asks us, what have you done with your life thus far? Have you thought about

others or only about yourself? Have you brought healing to a place of human pain or hope where you found despair? You may have been a success, but have you also been a blessing? Have you written other people in the Book of Life?

To ask these questions once a year in the company of others publicly willing to confess their faults, lifted by the words and music of ancient prayers, knowing that G-d forgives every failure we acknowledge as a failure and that He has faith in us even when we lose faith in ourselves, can be a life-changing experience. That is when we discover that, even in a secular age, G-d is still there, open to us whenever we are willing to open ourselves to Him.



The banner features a background of light rays emanating from the center. At the top center is the Mizrahi logo, a Star of David with a menorah inside, above the word "MIZRACHI". To the right is a portrait of Rav Kook. The main title "OROT MIMIZRACH" is written in large, bold letters, with "OROT" in red and "MIMIZRACH" in yellow. Below it, the Hebrew text "אורות מִמִּזְרַח" is written in red, followed by "PRESENTED BY WORLD MIZRACHI" in blue. A blue banner at the bottom contains the text: "Visit mizrachi.org/OrotMiMizrach to listen or find it on your favorite podcast streaming platform".

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Hakarat HaCheit



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

The first step in the *teshuvah* process is *hakarat haCheit* (recognition of the sin). The natural state of the Jewish *neshama* is that it seeks to be close to G-d. It is considered an aberration for a person to desire to sin. Thus, *hakarat haCheit* stems from the sinner's feeling that he is distant from G-d. He wants to return because of the sense of loneliness he experiences.

The *passuk* says, או הודע אליו חטאתו אשר חטא – “If his sin that he committed becomes known to him” (Vayikra 4:23, 28), to teach that *yediat haCheit* (definite knowledge of the sin) is a necessary prerequisite to bringing a *Korban Chattat*. Tosafot¹ questions why the Torah had to specify that *yediat haCheit* is necessary prior to offering a *Korban Chattat*. This should have been understood from the fact that a *Korban Chattat* may not be offered voluntarily. This *korban* may only be offered for a cheit one knows he has committed, and so it should be obvious the sinner must know he sinned before bringing the *korban*.

Tosafot explains the *passuk* comes to exclude a case in which the individual merely suspects he may have sinned accidentally and therefore is *mafrish* (sets aside) an animal to be used as a potential *korban* once he ascertains he did, in fact, commit an *aveirah*. The *passuk* teaches that even if he subsequently comes to the realization he did sin, he would not be able to use that animal, because it was sanctified as a *korban* prior to definite knowledge that he sinned. The obligation to offer a *Korban Chattat* does not exist prior to *yediat haCheit*, just as there is no *chiyuv teshuvah* without *hakarat haCheit* and *yedi'at haCheit*.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes² that there is a special *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur, beyond the constant obligation to repent every day. He bases himself on the *passuk*, לפני ד' תטהרו – “before Hashem shall you be cleansed” (Vayikra 16:30), which he understands as a directive to cleanse ourselves on this day. The Rav pointed out a similar statement of the Rambam (Hilchot Teshuvah 2:7):

יום הכיפורים הוא ... קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל לפיכך חייבים הכל לעשות תשובה ולהתוודות ביום הכיפורים.

Yom Kippur is... a specific time of pardoning and forgiveness; therefore, all people are obligated to do *teshuvah* and to confess their *aveirot* on Yom Kippur.

Rav Soloveitchik suggested the nature of the obligation may be different on Yom Kippur than during the rest of the year, specifically in regard to the requirement of *yediat haCheit*. In general, if a person becomes aware of an *aveirah* he committed and thus has *yediat haCheit*, he has an obligation to do *teshuvah*. The unique obligation on Yom Kippur is for one to search through all of his actions. In reviewing all his actions, including those he believed to be permissible in the past, he may well come to the realization he had been committing an *aveirah* all along that he did not recognize. He may find a *yediat haCheit* he was unaware of until this point, for which he is now able to do *teshuvah*.

The Rav suggested a parallel *halacha* that illustrates this additional requirement. In discussing the destruction of *avodah zarah* specifically in Eretz Yisrael, the Torah commands:

אבד תאבדון את כל המקומות אשר עבדו שם הגויים ... את אלהיהם ... ואבדתם את שמם מן המקום ההוא.

You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations worshipped... their gods ... and you shall obliterate their names from that place (Devarim 12:2-3).

Based on this, the Rambam (Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 7:1) rules, בארץ ישראל מצווה – “In Eretz Yisrael, there is a *mitzvah* to chase after [*avodah zarah*] until we destroy it from our entire Land.” In *chutz laAretz*, no such requirement exists; the *chiyuv* only applies to *avodah zarah* we know about in an area we occupy. The additional *teshuvah* obligation on Yom Kippur is thus similar to the increased obligation to destroy *avodah zarah* in Eretz Yisrael.³

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Moadim.

1. Shavuot 4b, s.v. vene'elam; see Kovetz He'arot, Yevamot, 63:4.

2. Sha'arei Teshuvah 4:17.

3. See MiPninei HaRav, 2001 ed., p. 320.

Setting Ourselves Up For Success



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

There are two different understandings for the idea of *Teshuva Gemura* that we find. The first is in Maseches Yoma (86B) where Rebbe Yehuda explains that it is when a person finds himself in the same situation in which he previously sinned and the next two times around prevents himself from doing this same action is considered to have done complete *Teshuva*. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 2:1) explains that just one time to hold oneself back to be called one who has done *Teshuva Gemura*.¹

To achieve the level of *Teshuva Gemura* today is much harder than it has ever been before. There are so many distractions around constantly that take us away from what is important. It used to be that when one had free time it would be with a *Sefer* for a few moments until he had to go back to work or his bus arrived. The challenge today with the constant buzzing of our phones and news alerts has brought us into a reality where those potential couple minutes that could elevate us are now something that falls secondary to these other interruptions. The Rambam teaches us that we can reach *Teshuva Gemura* when we get back to a place where we no longer find ourselves needing to decide which is the proper choice and can be firm in our decisions.

Rav Tzadok HaKohen (Takkanas HaShavim Page #39 in the name of the Baal Shem Tov)² suggests that it is only called “*Teshuva*” once a person has successfully put himself in the same position in which he failed and now comes out the other side “sin free”. Despite this, Rav Tzadok asks how could it be that we can allow a person to put himself in a spot where he will test himself and the *koach* he has to overcome such an obstacle? Based on this, we can ask on Rav Tzadok: How then do we become *Baalei Teshuva*? How does one ever learn from their mistakes and grow from them if they cannot experience it again and try to come out stronger?

Rav Tzadok teaches us that there is a compromise we need to make with ourselves. In order to properly and healthily interact with that which is around us, we need to be able to set up borders for ourselves. Borders in the sense of being able to recognize our limits and what is the correct level we can be involved with certain things versus what is crossing a line. We need to create a safety net for ourselves to prevent such a sin from ever occurring again rather than just self assuring that we would never come to do so again. Why take the risk?

Rav Schwab ZT”L makes the observation about the constant use of the word *shomer* that appears throughout *Sefer*

Devarim. In *Parshas Re'eh* alone, I myself counted twelve times in which *shmira* or *shamor* were used without a specific reference to any *mitzvah*. He explains that this is the meaning of being *Shomer Shabbos* – setting up boundaries that keep us from doing actions that are prohibited for us to do. Not simply refraining from doing so but taking the extra measures needed that will help to keep us from ever coming close. This is something to consider in all aspects of our lives as we enter the season of the *Yamim Noraim* and the new year. It is not enough for us to just consider what we did poorly and tell ourselves things will be different. We need to go the extra mile in finding the ways that will ensure our *Tefillos* to Hashem that things will be better will really be true. May the coming year be full of more things that we know are meaningful and put that which is secondary on the side.

A Gut Gebentched Yar to one and all!

● Edited by Zac Winkler.

1. The Lechem Mishna ibd. explains that the Rambam (as well as the Rif) had a different version of the Gemara that did not include “the second time”

2. Also found in the Kli Yakar at the beginning of *Parshas Chukas*

The Difference Between Hearing and Listening



Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

Music is unique in that it can go where other external stimuli can't – it can access our innermost thoughts, where logic and speech are no longer able to reach. Alzheimer's sufferers, stroke victims, even coma patients often respond to music in ways they can't even respond to their loved ones.

This is especially true when it comes to the *shofar*. The notes of the *shofar* affect several parts of the brain in a profound manner. It startles us into alertness and increases activity throughout the brain, propelling us into a heightened state of consciousness that allows us to see things clearly and act resolutely.

The *mitzvah* of *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah requires active intentionality. It requires not just hearing the sound, but listening to it. Based on the Talmud, the Rambam rules that both the one who is blowing the *shofar* and the one who is listening to the *shofar* must have in mind that they are fulfilling a specific Torah obligation. But the Rambam goes a step further, emphasising the importance of attuning ourselves to its potent moral and spiritual message: The *shofar* is a call to return to our best selves. It goes beyond the physical process of converting air vibrations into nerve impulses and then ordering them in our brain. It's an enriching, potentially life-changing intellectual, emotional and spiritual experience.

The *shofar* is our Divine wake-up call. It can arrest our moral and spiritual slumber, jolt us into being present, jumpstart our lives. It can reawaken us to our

priorities and purpose, and return us to a path of personal and spiritual growth. The moments of hearing the *shofar* being sounded in shul on Rosh Hashanah can become a truly deep spiritual experience for us, as we are literally hearing G-d calling out to us through the sounds of the *shofar* to become better people, to fulfil our potential.

The notes of the *shofar* are particularly specific. Essentially, the pattern is a straight sustained note (a *tekiah*), followed by a broken note (either a *shevarim* or a *teruah*), followed by another straight note. What is the significance of these notes? What does this pattern mean?

In the context of the *shofar*, Rabbi Hirsch explains that the first unbroken note, the *tekiah*, is G-d calling us to attention - to accept His authority in our lives and prepare to receive His message. The broken notes, the *shevarim-teruah*, represent breaking camp with our past selves, our entrenched bad habits. This requires doing a deep, honest reassessment of our lives, in terms of the Torah's values and principles, to determine what needs to be reinforced and taken with us on our new journey, and what we need to leave behind. The final straight note, the *tekiah*, is a call to move forward into the future with our new resolutions and a renewed sense of direction, aligned with G-d's will and our true, elevated purpose.

Like our ancestors, we are on a journey in life. And that journey requires a map, a compass. Our Creator has put us on this earth for a particular purpose, and in order to ensure we fulfil it, we need

His direction. In the same way the Jewish people in the desert needed to be alerted when to break camp and go forward, we too need that wake-up call to break from the harmful things we are doing, to find new, positive, productive things to do, and to journey forward in a new direction. The map and the compass of our lives is the Torah, but sometimes we forget that, and we need a reminder. The *shofar* is that reminder. It calls us to take note, to step away from the turbulence of day-to-day life and to hear the crystal clear call of G-d, the blast of the *shofar* that pierces our souls. It stops us in our tracks, and calls on us to disengage from all the things that we become attached to, all the extraneous things that are not part of the map of our lives. And it calls us to move forward, into the future, with determination and with conviction.

These three steps of the *shofar* – stopping, assessing, and moving forward – mirror the process of repentance itself, which the Rambam defines as regret for the wrongdoing of the past, disengagement with this wrongdoing in the present, and a resolve not to engage in this wrongdoing in the future.

It's interesting that in the blessing recited before the sounding of the *shofar*, we refer to *lishmoa kol shofar* – “hearing the voice of the *shofar*”. The *shofar* isn't just a sound, it's a voice. It's a voice with an explicit message, something directly intelligible. We are called on to hear that message, not just in the sense of hearing the notes, but to listen intently and receive it. Listening is foundational in Judaism. The mission statement of the Jewish people is *Shema*

Continued on next page

Step by Step



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

Rav Sa'adia Gaon says there are 10 thoughts, 10 messages we're supposed to be thinking about as we hear the *shofar*. For example, *malchuyot* – how we're coronating G-d with our *shofar* blows, with our *tefilot*, the *shofar* of Har Sinai and the *shofar* of Akei-dat Yitzchak, לעורר תשובה – to arouse us to *teshuvah* (as the Rambam says in *Hilchot Teshuva*). Even though ultimately we blow the *shofar* because G-d commanded us, there is a *remez*, a hint: wake up you who are sleepwalking through life. Review your actions, do *teshuvah* and recognize G-d. Another motif Rav Sa'adia Gaon mentions is focusing on the *geula haAtidit* – the future redemption.

What exactly is *geula*? What should we be focusing on as we hear the *shofar*? How would we define *geula*, past, present and future?

The first national *geula* was *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. To start that process, G-d came to Moshe at the burning bush, and they have a back and forth in which G-d implores Moshe to go to *Mitzrayim* and lead *Am Yisrael* to freedom and Moshe continually refuses, until G-d finally becomes angry. Doesn't Moshe want to take *Bnei Yisrael* out of *Mitzrayim*? Why all the excuses?

Moshe finally says, "send with whom you shall send." What does that mean? Rashi says this is referring to Aharon HaKohen

– send the person You would normally send, my older brother Aharon. Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer (39) explains it differently. It's not referring to Aharon HaKohen but someone else later on in history. Not he whom You have been accustomed to sending, but he whom You will send. Who is that? "Eliyahu HaNavi," says Moshe, and G-d answers that this is not His plan. "You go to Pharaoh. That man you're referring to, he'll have his time."

The commentaries explain that redemption is not smooth. You cannot simply climb up the ladder step by step. There are ups and downs, *aliyot* and *yeridot*. Forwards and backwards.

Take Yosef for example. He was sold when he was 17, thrown into jail in Egypt and as a result, *Bnei Yisrael* were forced to slave away in back-breaking labor for hundreds of years. Was this all part of the *geula*?

Yes, because *geula* is not a smooth process.

Moshe saw all of history open in front of him. He didn't only see the *galut* in *Mitzrayim*, but the entire process. He saw there would be crusades, pogroms, massacres, a Holocaust. He saw everything and he said, "G-d, I don't want to be part of it. Let somebody else do this. Let Eliyahu HaNavi do it, skip straight to the final stage." Moshe argued with G-d and repeatedly refused Him because he loved *Am Yisrael*. Not because he was insensitive to their plight.

Geula has ups and downs. That's life – both personal and national. Even the symbol of *geula* – *Mashiach* – is a poor man riding on a donkey. Why a donkey? Shouldn't it be something more glamorous and majestic?

A donkey doesn't walk on a straight path. It moves forward, stops and sits down. Then it goes backwards. Sideways. That's us too, *Am Yisrael*. As we hear the *shofar*, we recognize it hasn't been a smooth process. We've come and gone and come and gone. And even now, when we have been *zocheh* to return to *Eretz Yisrael* as a nation, the process continues to be rough. There are difficulties and challenges but they are an essential part of the *geula* process.

Thus, through our *shofar*, we pray that G-d takes us to the end of this process – where there are only *aliyot*, and *yeridot* are a thing of the past.

Yehi ratzon that this Rosh Hashanah, as we blow the *shofar*, let us remind ourselves that we're almost there. G-d should take away all the *yeridot* so we reach the end of the *geula*, the final stage, when we will be able to enjoy the blessings and abundance of *Mashiach Tzidkanu*, במהרה בימינו.

Continued from previous page

Yisrael – "Listen O' Israel." We recite the *Shema* every day before we go to bed and when we wake up. We begin and end each day with listening.

This Rosh Hashanah, we will hear the sound of the *shofar* 100 times on the second day. It is the sound that can awaken us. It is the sound that stirs us to look deep inside ourselves and make

changes. It is the sound that opens the door and beckons us to a new, glorious future – to who we were meant to be. And all we need to do is listen.

The Great Shofar



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, speak to the Children of Israel saying: in the seventh month, on the first of the month, it shall be a Sabbath for you, a remembrance of the shofar blast, a calling of holiness (Vayikra 23:23-24).

The main motif, the Biblically ordained mitzvas ha'yom (commandment of the day) is the blasts of the shofar. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 3:4) teaches: *Even though the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashana is a scriptural decree, it contains an allusion. It is as if [the shofar's call] is saying: Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep! (Wake up) you who slumber, arise! Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator.*

The shofar blasts are meant to arouse us from our spiritual slumber. *Tekiah - shevarim - teruah* it calls out to us. The blasts stir our souls and remind us that there is an Eye that sees, an Ear that hears, and that all of our deeds are recorded in the Book (Avos 2:1).

R' Soloveitchik *zt'l* powerfully teaches, "מן-הַמִּצְרָה, קָרָאתִי יְיָ - ה", from the straits I call upon G-d (Ps.118:5). The dominant theme of Rosh Hashana is the declaration of G-d's sovereignty. The corresponding realization is that we are utterly dependent on Him alone. Prayer is significant only when it dawns upon man that his situation is hopeless, that he is utterly defeated, that there is no one to help him but G-d. Prayer and crisis are inseparably linked. Meaningful prayer issues from existential distress, from 'out of the straits,' when man feels trapped and defeated.

"The Shofar prompts crisis-awareness. On Rosh Hashana we are in crisis be-

cause on this day, the fate of the individual, as well as that of the world, hangs in a precarious balance. Although this awareness is most acute on Rosh Hashana, it is a permanent feature throughout the year. The crisis exists as long as the human is aware of himself. It is the crisis that expresses itself in man's fear of death, his anxiety about his future, his feelings of guilt regarding the past, and his yearning to recover lost time and wasted opportunities, to undo things that he did and to do what he did not do" (Machzor Masores haRav l'Rosh Hashana, p. 444-445).

This Rosh Hashanah, let us not forget the power of the day's holiness.

R' Yisroel Stone, the Chabad rabbi of the Chabad Lower East Side (NY), shared the following story:

At or around midnight the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah, Ashkenazic Jewish communities around the world begin reciting Selichot — the penitential prayers in preparation for the High Holidays.

A story is told about Rabbi Shmuel Munkes, a disciple of the Alter Rebbe (R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi, 1745-1812, founder of Chabad), a very devout and spiritual man with a strong sense of humor.

One year, as he traveled to be with his Rebbe for Rosh Hashanah, he spent Shabbat at a roadside inn owned by an elderly Jewish couple. At midnight, the owners dutifully roused their guests to join them at the local synagogue for Selichot. When they came to Rabbi Shmuel's room, he seemed confused.

"Why are you waking me up in the middle of the night?" he asked. "To recite Selichot," they replied. "I've never heard of this prayer be-

fore," he said. "What is it all about?"

The owners seemed bewildered at the site of a bearded and respectable looking rabbi, who apparently had never heard of this ancient Jewish custom. So they began to explain: "We pray to G-d that the cow gives milk in the coming year and that we make enough money to support our family."

Rabbi Shmuel then turned serious and said to them: "You're waking up in the middle of the night the week before the holiest day of the year to pray for your cow?! That's not what the High Holidays are all about!"

Indeed, let us not forget that while we surely should be praying for materialistic good, our focus during the High Holidays should be on our relationship with G-d, and our commitment to being the best Jews that we can be.

As we pass before G-d this Rosh Hashana, as a shepherd counts his flocks, let us recommit ourselves to living meaningful, connected and purposeful lives. While we daven that 'the cow should give milk', let us not forget that Rosh Hashana is *Coronation Day*. Let us daven that G-d's Presence be revealed in our world, that truth shall prevail over falsehood this coming year, that light shall dispel the darkness that envelops us, and that peace shall finally be bestowed upon our people, our Land, our city of peace, and this world.

May we merit to hear the call of the great shofar this coming new year, which will signal our final redemption and ultimate return.

ותקע בשופר גדול לחרותינו ושא נס לקבץ גליותינו – and blast the great shofar of our freedom, and raise the banner of the ingathering of the exiles (weekday amidah).

Yom Tru'a



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

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?

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.

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.

Similarly, civil defense personnel used the *shofar* to warn civilians of enemy attacks and to mobilize the army.

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* – an 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* and *tru'a* is easily deduced from the *mitzva* of the '*chatzotzrot*' (trumpets) explained in Parshat Beha'alotcha. According to that parsha, the *teki'a* was the signal for gathering the camp for happy occasions, while

the *tru'a* was used as a signal to prepare for travel in military formation and war.

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.

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 G-d 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 G-d's Hands, the Torah commands us to sound a *tru'a* with the *shofar*.

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 *psukim* mentioned concerning the *chatzotzrot*. There, we find the link between *tru'a*, war, and *zika'ron*: "*Ve-ki tavo'u milchama be-artzechem... va-harei'otem be-chatzotzrot, ve-nizkartem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem...*" – When war takes place in your land... you should sound a *tru'a* with your trumpets that you will be remembered by (and/or that you will remember...) Hashem, and He will save you from your enemies" (see Bamidbar 10:8-9). Here we find a special *mitzva* to sound a *tru'a* prior to, and in anticipation of, impending battle. To show our belief that the outcome of that battle is in G-d's Hands, and not in the hands of our enemy, we are commanded to sound a *tru'a*.

Obviously, it was not the *tru'a* itself that saves Bnei Yisrael, but rather our

recognition that the ultimate fate of the battle is in G-d'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 G-d's Hands; 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 G-d's Hands 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 G-d, 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 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 G-d'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 G-d should not judge us like any other nation, rather as His special Nation.

“The Yom Tov of Emuna”



Rabbi Eli Mansour

Edmond J Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

“**T**here is a tradition that the Ten Days of Repentance – the period from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur – correspond to the Ten Commandments. Each day of this ten-day period is somehow associated with the corresponding commandments.

According to this system, Rosh Hashanah – the first two days of the Aseret Yemeh Teshuva – corresponds to the commands, ‘I am Hashem your G-d’ and ‘You shall not have any gods besides Me.’ In other words, Rosh Hashanah is associated with the fundamental belief in Hashem as the only being who controls the world.

This concept dispels a common misconception about the holiday of Rosh Hashanah. Many people, unfortunately, view Rosh Hashanah as a kind of ‘shopping spree.’ They bring to the synagogue a mental list of what they need for the coming year, and they present this list to G-d. Perhaps, they also think a bit about how they can improve themselves, but their primary focus is what they are asking from G-d for the coming year.

It is easy to prove that this is not what Rosh Hashanah is about. We need to look no further than the text of the prayer service. If Rosh Hashanah is a time to ask for our needs, then we should recite the standard weekday *Amida* prayer, in which we ask for intelligence, forgiveness, health, livelihood, and so on. But none of this appears in the *Amida* of Rosh Hashanah. Instead, our Rosh Hashanah prayers focus on the theme of *Malchut* – divine kingship. This is the day when we reaffirm our subservience to G-d and our recognition of His rule. Monarchs would hold a coronation ceremony every year to reaffirm their rule. This is what we do on Rosh Hashanah: we once again proclaim



Rosh Hashanah is about G-d, not about us.

our allegiance to G-d, and we recognize that as we are His subjects, He will judge us on the basis of our faithfulness. Rosh Hashanah is about G-d, not about us. It is a time to renew our acceptance of His unlimited rule. Of course, we are entitled to also plead for what we need. But this is not the essence of Rosh Hashanah.

This renewal of our acceptance of G-d’s kingship includes reinforcing our belief in Providence, that He exerts absolute control over our lives and the world at large. Nothing at all happens unless G-d wanted it to happen. The Baal Shem Tob, the founder of the Hassidic movement, taught that there is a purpose for every leaf that falls from a tree, and for why it fell at that precise time and at that precise spot. On Rosh Hashanah, the Yom Tob of Emuna, we reinforce our faith that G-d controls everything that happens, and even events that appear harmful are actually for our benefit.

Thus, Rosh Hashanah is not a time for making requests; it is a time to reaffirm our belief that even when our requests are not granted, everything is for the best, because Hashem knows far better than we do what we need.

This perhaps answers a question that one might have asked concerning the Torah reading on Rosh Hashanah. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the section of *Akedat Yitzchak*, the story of how Avraham Avinu was prepared to offer his beloved son as a sacrifice in fulfillment of

G-d’s command. However, we conclude the reading with a series of verses that tell of the birth of children and grandchildren to Nahor, Avraham’s brother. We might, at first glance, wonder how these *pesukim* are relevant to Rosh Hashanah. Why is it important for us read of Nahor’s children and grandchildren on this day?

The answer, perhaps, is that this section essentially completes the test of the *Akeda*. Avraham and Sara finally had a child after decades of praying and waiting, and then Avraham nearly had to kill him with his own hands. Meanwhile, his brother begot numerous children and grandchildren without any delay or trouble. Avraham devoted his life to kindness and to the [service] of G-d, whereas his brother was an idolater. What more difficult test could there possibly be for Abraham than seeing his brother succeed and prosper while he struggles? The *Akeda* was certainly a very difficult test, but no less difficult was the test that came afterward, when, immediately after demonstrating his unbridled devotion to G-d, Abraham heard about his idolatrous brother’s success.

And so this section, too, is vitally important to our observance of Rosh Hashanah. It reminds us of the need to remain faithfully devoted to G-d even if we do not see how it brings us blessing and success. Regardless of what kind of hardship we are enduring, we must continue observing the Torah, trusting that Hashem is kind and gracious, and fulfilling His will is always beneficial.

Of course, we hope to be blessed with a good, sweet year. But on Rosh Hashanah we proclaim that even when our lives are not ‘sweet,’ and we face difficult challenges, we will nevertheless remain steadfastly committed to G-d, knowing that everything He does is for the best.”

Iyov's Memories



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

We see from the Gemara that the order of the *shofar* blowing is a strong clear *tekiyah* at the beginning, broken, mournful *teruah* sounds in the middle, and a strong clear *tekiyah* at the end. In truth, this is the pattern of our individual lives as well as the life of our nation. As a child, each person begins with a clear, simple, optimistic note. Then, when a person grows up a bit, life becomes complicated. We hit obstacles and suffer setbacks, disappointments, and pain. But then, eventually, one reaches a stage in life when he or she is able to look back on his early years, everything in between, and all of his accomplishments and feel that simple, clear sense of satisfaction and *nachas*.

People often ask me how I would characterize the difference between teaching and meeting with the *bochurim* in *yeshiva* and teaching and speaking with the members of my *shul*. I love the *yeshiva*. And I love the *shul*. But it is a completely different experience. Speaking with the *bochurim* in *yeshiva* can be compared to the initial, clear, simple *tekiyah* blast. They are filled with optimism, hope, and idealism for the future. Even if they regret certain mistakes, they look forward to how they will go in a new direction. This is completely different from speaking with people who are older, middle-aged, or already grandparents. They have already experienced so many of the ups and downs, the complications of life. They have had their share of *teruos*, broken *shofar* blasts.

Our great-grandfather *Avraham Avinu* experienced this pattern as well in the *parshah* of the *Akeida*, the binding of Yitzchak, which we read on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. When the time came, the *pasuk* (Bereishis 22:3) says, "And Avraham got up early in the morning." The day started

with a crystal clear and simple *tekiyah* blast. Avraham was ready to do Hashem's will, whatever that meant. But he was not immediately able to fulfill Hashem's command. Rather, he had to walk with Yitzchak for three days before he arrived at the place where he would bind and slaughter his beloved son, his only heir to the spiritual legacy he brought into the world. What thoughts were going through Avraham's mind during those three days? How many memories of his time with Yitzchak flashed before his eyes? How many tears did he shed for what he and the world were about to lose as the minutes turned into hours and the hours turned into days as they slowly journeyed toward their destination? Those three days must have been the most mournful *teruah* in Avraham's life. But when they arrived and the time came to carry out Hashem's will, Avraham's simple, clear desire to do Hashem's will returned: "I am here!" (ibid. 11).

And much later, there was another *tzadik* who experienced his own *tekiyah - teruah - tekiyah*: Iyov. There was something that bothered me as I learned through *sefer Iyov* on Tisha B'Av. Iyov's life began with a grand, clear *tekiyah* blast. He was a wealthy *tzadik* with a beautiful wife and children. What could have been better? But in one long staccato *teruah*, he lost everything and everyone precious to him in quick succession. In the end, however, Iyov experienced another *tekiyah*, a clear *shofar* blast. The *psukim* say (Iyov 42:12-17) that Hashem restored Iyov's wealth. He remarried and had many more children. He was even more blessed than before.

I cannot help but not be satisfied with that ending. While there is no doubt that Iyov loved his new wife and children, how often did he think about his first wife and first children with sadness? My parents,

may they live and be well, lost everyone that they loved in the Holocaust. While they loved my sister and I, I have no doubt that they have always and will always mourn all of the loved ones they lost.

During the final *tekiyah* of Iyov's life, what was he thinking when his children or grandchildren sat on his lap? They certainly gave him *nachas*, but I have no doubt that the memories of his children who left the world never stopped haunting him. His previous wife and children were Iyov's *zichronos*, *shofar* blasts of remembrance.

The same Gemara we quoted above also says that if one doubles the length of the final *tekiyah* of one set of *shofar* blasts, the second half of that blast cannot count as the first *tekiyah* of the next set of blasts. Why not? Because one simply cannot compare the simple, upbeat, fresh optimism of a new beginning with the *nachas* later on in a full life saturated with the memories of all of the ups, downs, and disappointments of the previous years. They are not in any way interchangeable.

We therefore ask that Hashem look at our people now. We ask that he listen to our *tekiyah gedolah*, our final great and clear *shofar* blast filled with thousands of years of disappointments, losses, and pain. May He finally "sound the great *shofar* of our redemption." And as we say in the Rosh Hashanah *Shemonah Esreh*, may Hashem grant "happiness to Your land, joy to Your city, a blossoming of the horn of Dovid Your servant, and the establishment of the candle of the son of Yishai, Your anointed one, may it be soon in our days." It has been too long already. All we want on our birthday is that Hashem finally sound the great *shofar*. Call and end to this long process and bring us back to our land with the coming of *Moshiach* this year!

Show More



Rabbi YY Jacobson
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The Hebrew month of Elul precedes the high holidays. This month is described in Chassidic teachings as a time when “The King goes out to the field to meet with His people, greeting them with kindness and tenderness, displaying a joyous face to all.”

In our present-day slang, we would call this a date.

Just as the conventional dating process allows the two people involved to become acquainted with each other, with joy and serenity, so too the month of Elul provides us with an opportunity to get to know G-d in a genuine and profound way. G-d comes out to the field, as it were, longing to meet you where you are, to connect with you in your natural and authentic state.

G-d, apparently, is not a fan of drawn-out dating, neither is He fearful of commitment. Four weeks later, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, He makes His proposal. “I’m crazy over you. Will you marry me?” is the question communicated to the heart of each of us as the sun sets over the horizon of the year gone by.

This is not an easy decision to make. To be married to G-d is a formidable task. It means to live with transcendence, discipline, and endless mystery. It means to challenge myself daily to go beyond my ego and insecurities, and align my posture with Divine infinity. It is the constant readiness to challenge my moral failures and to stand by the highest levels of integrity and truth. And yet, a whispering voice within persists that if we will avoid this relationship we will deny ourselves the fulfillment and happiness we are capable of achieving in our lives. We were designed to be G-dly human beings, conduits for the cosmic heart.

“Let me sleep on it,” we tell G-d.

What a night this is! The world goes haywire, says Master Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria. “During the night of Rosh Hashanah,” he writes, “the consciousness animating the universe becomes weak.” The great Jewish mystics would, in fact, feel physically weak during the night of Rosh Hashanah.

All of existence was brought into being for the sake of this marriage. If we refuse Him, the entire creation was in vain. The entire cosmos—every galaxy, every blade of grass, every grazing animal, every electron, genome, plant, and speck of dust—awaits our decision with trepidation.

On the morning of Rosh Hashanah, a piercing sound rises from the earth: The cry of the *shofar*. It is a simple, unsophisticated cry, expressing a person’s quintessential yearning to touch heaven.

We have decided. Our answer is, yes.

The wedding day arrives. Yom Kippur is a day described as “the time of oneness” in which the cosmic bride and groom forge a bond for eternity.

In the Jewish tradition, the bride and groom fast on their wedding day. On the day we unite with G-d, we abstain from food or drink as well. The Talmud teaches that upon marriage, all the sins of the groom and bride are forgiven. That’s why this day is called Yom Kippur, “the day of atonement.”

The marriage ceremony begins with the stirring melody of “Kol Nidrei,” in which we annul our vows for the coming year. What is this all about? It is the courage we cultivate to remove the power from all those promises, vows, and addictions that tie us down, opening our neural pathways to new possibilities. During these

profound moments, we attempt to free ourselves from compulsive behavior and toxic habits and let go of the traumas, pains, resentments, animosity, anger, fear, and envy, that hold us hostage to dysfunction.

The traditional Jewish marriage ceremony culminates with the bride and groom entering a secluded room (“*cheder yichud*” in Hebrew) to spend time alone with each other. Yom Kippur as well culminates with the *Neilah*, or closure prayer. As the sun of Yom Kippur sets, the gates of heaven close—with you inside.

During *Neilah*, every soul is alone with G-d.

When the bride and groom exit their private room, the party begins. From Yom Kippur, we leap into the seven-day festival of Sukkot, described in the Torah as “the time of our joy.”

These days are filled with feasting and ecstatic happiness. Every Jewish family builds a hut, a *sukkah*, outdoors, where they celebrate for seven days the marriage between G-d and His people.

We eat, drink, sing, dance, and just enjoy being one with Oneness.

The wedding feast is over. The guests and relatives have returned home. In the consummation of the relationship, bride and groom experience intimacy, their lives melded together as husband and wife.

So too, following the seven days of Sukkot, we reach the zenith of the High Holiday season: Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, described in the writings of the Arizal, the Tanya, and the Vilna Gaon as the “time of intimacy with the Divine.” During these two charged days the joy reaches its peak, as G-d and His people merge into a seamless whole. A Divine seed is planted in each of our hearts.

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Rosh Hashanah: Signed & Sealed...With Love



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

For more than sixty years, Rabbi Dr. Nissan Mindel, z'l, was a trusted secretary and a member of the inner-circle of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. A kind *talmid chacham* and master educator, he was an author of dozens of fundamental articles and books on Chabad philosophy, as well as the first translation of *Sefer haTanya* into English.

He also oversaw the publication of Chabad's children's magazines for decades, and was a respected emissary of the Rebbes, representing them at national public events.

As is well known, the Lubavitcher Rebbe corresponded with tens of thousands of people from all walks of life on nearly every topic, dispensing blessings, advice and guidance on every subject imaginable, and responding to questions and needs with endless positivity and insight. As many as 1,800 letters would arrive at the Rebbe's office in a given week, and he would personally open and read each one himself. However, in order to respond thoughtfully to these letters, it was necessary to rely on his secretaries to help write his responses. Rabbi Mindel was responsible for overseeing this immense operation of writing replies in numerous languages and addressing them to their eagerly waiting recipients.

In Rabbi Mindel's introduction to *The Letter and the Spirit*, a multi-volume sampling of letters that he translated, edited and curated, he shares a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the Rebbe's greatness and sensitivity in correspondence.

The Rebbe would personally sign each outgoing letter. In an effort to help manage the overwhelming flow of mail and save the Rebbe's precious time, Rabbi

Mindel once suggested they adopt the universally accepted practice of 'signing' letters with a rubber stamp, and allow the production line to rapidly stamp the Rebbe's signature before the letter was placed in an envelope.

While appreciating the thoughtfulness of the suggestion, the Rebbe firmly declined. "How can I send prayerful wishes to a person in such an artificial manner? How would someone feel if they received their Rebbe's good wishes in a letter that was signed with a rubber stamp?"

Another time, someone recommended that the Rebbe use an electric letter-opener to automate the process and save much time and effort. Again, the Rebbe affirmed the good intentions of the recommendation, but then sighed deeply: "Can an electronic machine possibly sense the pain and tears that went into the writing and signing of these heartfelt letters?"



Much of the imagery unfolded in the liturgy of the *Yamim Noraim* is of the Master of the World judging His creatures and writing our names and our deeds in *Sefer HaZichronos*, "The Book of Remembrances". The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah*, 16) speaks of three books that are opened in the upper worlds on Rosh HaShanah:

אָהַד שֶׁל רְשָׁעִים גְּמוּרִין, וְאָהַד שֶׁל צְדִיקִים גְּמוּרִין, וְאָהַד שֶׁל בֵּינֹנִיִּים. צְדִיקִים גְּמוּרִין — נִקְתָּבִין וְנִחְתָּמִין לְאֵלֶּתֶר לְחַיִּים...

"One book is of 'complete *resha'im*', one is of 'complete *tzadikim*', and one is of 'average people'. In the book of complete *tzadikim*, they are immediately written and sealed for life...."

Thus, throughout the *Yamim Noraim*, we

pray repeatedly and passionately that we, our loved ones, and all of *Am Yisrael*, will be inscribed in the *Sefer haChayim*, "The Book of Life".

One of the deeply stirring and emotional selections in the Ashkenazic High Holiday tradition is the *piyut* of *U-Nesaneh Tokef*. This reveals a shocking truth about the *Sefer haZichronos*: "*V'chosem yad kol adam bo* — the signature of each person's hand is in it." The Supernal accounting of our deeds is actually sealed in our own handwriting! This brings up a couple questions. What is this 'book' which records all our intentions, choices and actions, and where can it be found? And with what writing implement are we 'signing off' on our verdict and destiny?

Reb Tzadok haKohen of Lublin tells us:

דידוע שהספר של צדיקים ושל רשעים ושל בינונים הוא לב האדם עצמו וכששובר לבו ועשה תשובה ונשבר לבו בקרבו הרי נקרע הספר של גזר דין...כל תיקוני התשובה הכל בלב

"It is known that the 'Book of the *Tzadikim*' and that of the *resha'im*, and that of the *beinonim*, are actually the hearts of the persons themselves. And when a person breaks his heart in doing *teshuvah*, and his heart is broken within him, the 'Book of Harsh Decrees' is ripped up....For all the rectifications created by *teshuvah* occur in the heart."

(*Takanas haShavin*, 8)

May the *Ribbono shel Olam* receive our heartfelt *teshuvah* and may we be written and signed into the Book of True *Tzadikim* for a sweet year of revealed good, life, peace and redemption!

לשנה טובה תכתב ותחתם
אלתר לחיים טובים ולשלום,
בספרם של צדיקים גמורים אמיתיים!

Multi-Dimensional Teshuva

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

One of the highlights of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur prayers is *Unesane Tokef*. At the close we say, “*U’Teshuva, U’Tefila U’Tzedaka maavirin et roa ha-gezera*. Repentance, prayer, and charity, remove the harsh decree.” After harboring that terrible sense of doom, this statement gives us a feeling of renewed hope that it is within our ability to annul any evil hovering above us. We read in *Pirkei Avot*, “The world stands on three things: Torah, prayer, and kind deeds. These correspond to *teshuva*, *tefila*, and *tzedaka*. The Netivot Shalom explains that a person experiences life on three levels: Torah, which relates to his intellectual side; prayer, which corresponds to emotion; and kind acts which parallels physical action. The Arizal says that every soul has a certain purpose to fulfill. Each person is a miniature world. Therefore this verse in *Pirkei Avot* not only applies to the outside macro world but to our own personal micro world. On Rosh Hashana we renew our intellectual, emotional, and physical commitment to Hashem.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains how *teshuva* and Torah are synonymous. Teshuva is not merely repentance but a return to one’s natural state before sin. A Jew is inherently pure. His desires and temptations temporarily deflect him away from Hashem. While repentance involves dismissing the past and starting anew, *teshuva* involves returning to our root and revealing our true essence. Torah compels us to recognize that we are here for a purpose, to develop a relationship with Hashem, to bring Him into this world, and to live by his word. Both Torah and *teshuva* help us recognize what our core is – to serve Hashem. Torah is the means by which we recognize this and *teshuva* is the path by which we come back to this mandate. Living Torah means tapping into the spiritual spark within us. Doing *teshuva* is rediscovering that spiritual link with Hashem. *Tefila* is not prayer or request, but attaching oneself. It comes from the root word, “*tafel*,” to connect. *Tefila* is about binding one’s soul to Hashem. In a sense one says, “I need nothing but your closeness.” *Tefila*, like

teshuva and Torah, involves returning to Hashem and developing a relationship with Him. Appreciation and recognition of his kindness naturally follows.

Tzedaka is not charity, but *chesed*. Charity implies that the recipient has no right to the gift and that the donor is under no obligation to give. On the other hand, *tzedaka* means righteousness or justice. The donor gives because it is his duty. Just as we ask Hashem for blessing, even though he owes us nothing, so too should we give *tzedaka*. By emulating Hashem’s *chesed*, we connect with Him.

Bringing Torah, *Teshuva*, *Tefila*, and *Tzedaka* into our daily lives involves commitment. Choose a *sefer* and learn from it daily. Do one *chesed* each day. Be sure to pray every day, and select one line or *tefila* that you will particularly concentrate on. *Teshuva*, *tefila*, and *tzedaka* are about finding that spiritual linkage and uncovering who we really are in a way that reflects this reality in the purest and deepest sense.

Continued from page 20

That’s why we recite special prayers for rain on the festival of Shmini Atzeret. What is rain? In the midst of intimacy between heaven and earth, procreative drops from heaven are absorbed, fertilized, and nurtured by mother-earth, which in time will give birth to its botanical children. Shmini Atzeret is the day of intimacy when all new souls to be born that year are spiritually conceived.

The honeymoon comes to an end and the excitement begins to fade. Now the marriage becomes about caring for each other

and demonstrating trust and loyalty, as husband and wife work through the daily grind of life.

Out of the twelve months in the Jewish calendar, the only one lacking a single festive day is the one that immediately follows the High Holiday season, the month of Cheshvan. Why? Because this is the time to build a genuine relationship with our marriage Partner in our everyday lives. No fanfare or drama, just learning to find meaning and love in the daily chores of life.

This is the time to discover the joy born out of a continuous relationship with G-d, during the mundane days and nights that define the bulk of our life on planet earth. It is time to discover how ordinary moments and experiences can be extraordinary – as long as the love is flowing in your veins.

In Memory of my Grandfather



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

Last Shabbat, the synagogue in the “Malach” neighborhood of Marrakech, where my grandfather had prayed, was destroyed. The earthquake left fragments of tablets and with them the story of my grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Shoshanah *zt”l*.

My grandfather was a *dayan* in the Beit Din – both in Marrakech and Casablanca – at the time when the king granted the Jewish sages jurisdiction over their internal affairs.

My grandfather was thoughtful and evoked a kind of quiet awe in the eyes of all who saw him.

On his way to the eastern wall in the synagogue, a still, thin voice was heard. Angels were frenzied, a trembling and terror seized them – and they said, “Behold, it is the man of judgment.”

About two months ago, I visited the synagogue (before it was destroyed) and an old man told me a story that moved me greatly: “On Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Chaim came to pray in his gray robe, but contrary to his custom, he did not go east and sit in the crowd. This is the case every year. And when they asked him why, he would stand up and say, “Today we are not sitting at the eastern wall! Today we are judging the *dayan*!” And the whole assembly was moved to tears...”

Today we are judging the judges.

תקעו בחודש שופר, בכסה ליום חגנו, כי חוק לישראל- הוא משפט לאלוהי יעקב

Once a year, the Israelites have a law: the legal system itself takes stock and the judgment is that of the “G-d of Jacob”, so to speak! The “*Dayan*” knows that the state of a community will reflect the nature of his judgment, and he will discuss with the audience, so to speak...

Only in the Jewish legal system do all the people participate in the committee to appoint judges, and the name of the Kingdom calls for this action.

And can we, G-d forbid, say that G-d is not a king without us? No, but “there is no king without a people” and only on the day of Rosh Hashanah, the day man was created, “then was His Name proclaimed King.” And that is perhaps the definition of democracy in its oldest form.

“The Court said, today is New Year’s Day, the Holy One, praise to Him, says to the angels of service, put up the dais, [summon defenders, summon accusers, for My children said that today is New Year’s Day.] If the Court took counsel to transfer it to the next day, the Holy One, praise to Him, says to the angels of service, remove the dais, remove the defenders, remove the accusers, for My children took counsel to transfer to tomorrow. What is the reason? Certainly, it is a rule for Israel, a law of the G-d of Jacob. If it is not a rule for Israel, so to speak it is not a law for the G-d of Jacob.” (Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:3)

On Rosh Hashanah, they will not talk about the concept of “guilt” at all. We have been blaming each other all year. On Rosh Hashanah, the term “guilt” will be replaced by the word “responsibility,” and everyone will bear responsibility. The judge will examine himself, so to speak, and the accused will also examine themselves.

When my grandfather sat in the crowd, he actually said the words that would heal the great rift that our nation is now experiencing: No one can be completely right, because then there will be no community.

“The Almighty said, If I win, I lose, and if I am defeated, I destroy: I have won for the

generation of the Flood, and I have lost that I have lost all these populations, as at the Tower of Babel and Sodom. But at the sin of the calf, Moshe was defeated on my behalf, and I destroyed that population. Finally, I attribute to all my creations on Rosh Hashanah that I will not lose them...” (Psikta Rabati, Parashah M)

We desperately need both justice and justices, justice must not prevail over the entire community. Thus, the judge and the condemned will sit wrapped in each other, knowing that they were in the wrong and knowing that they were in the right now that we have forgiven all people.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin

balashon.com

Author of the book *Kohelet: A Map to Eden* (Maggid)

A common greeting in the New Year season is *גְּמַר חֲתִימָה טוֹבָה*. But what does it mean, and what is its origin?

The literal meaning is “a good final sealing.” For those who notice the proper gender suffixes in Hebrew, it might appear strange. If the first noun is the masculine *גְּמַר*, why does it end with the feminine *טוֹבָה*?

The answer to this seemingly technical question actually explains a lot about the meaning of the phrase. The original term was *חֲתִימָה טוֹבָה*, which is consistent grammatically. The addition of *גְּמַר* came later, as a modifier of the earlier phrase.

This distinction is embodied in the custom by some to say *חֲתִימָה טוֹבָה* up until Yom Kippur, and *גְּמַר חֲתִימָה טוֹבָה* from Yom Kippur until Hoshana Rabba. While that division is not always preserved today, it

reflects the origin of the custom.

Going back to the Talmud, Rabbi Meir assigns different stages of judgment to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur:

הַכֹּל נִידוּנִים בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, וְגִזְרֵי דִּין שְׁלֵהֶם נֶחְתָּם בְּיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים

“All are judged on Rosh HaShana, and their sentence is sealed on Yom Kippur” (Tosefta Rosh Hashana 1:13, BT Rosh Hashanah 16a)

So the wish for a *חֲתִימָה טוֹבָה* by Yom Kippur indicates a desire that the sealing of the judgment be a good one.

In the Talmud, there is no mention of Hoshana Rabba being associated with judgment. Rather, its primary significance was being the last day of circling the altar with the aravot (Mishna Sukkah 4:5).

But in kabbalistic literature, it became known as *ליל החותם* – the “Night of the

Seal” (see for example, Ramban on Bamidbar 14:9). In this tradition, this is when the final seal was applied to the judgment decided on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Zohar, VaYehi 120a; Terumah 142a). According to some explanations, the distinction between the “sealing” of Yom Kippur and that of Hoshana Rabba is like that of a final decision handed from a judge to those executing the decision. Until it is actually carried out, there’s still room for a possible appeal for a change.

And so this is the significance of the addition of *גְּמַר* to the wish for a “good sealing.” While we might understand the imagery of this heavenly judgment in different ways, from the allegorical to the more literal, certainly we can all appreciate the notion of hope embedded in the persistent possibility of additional repentance and change.

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh

Mizrachi Melbourne

Name at least four people from Tanach whose birthdays are on Rosh Hashana.

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

Adam, Chava, Kayin and Hevel (according to RH 11a some say the Avot)



THIS WEEK in
Jewish History

- Tishrei 1, 2085 (1677 BCE):** Avraham’s supreme test of faith, the *Akeidat Yitzchak*, occurred, and is recalled each Rosh Hashanah.
- Sept. 17, 1978:** The Camp David Accords were signed by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and US President Jimmy Carter.
- Tishrei 3, 3179 (582 B.C.E.):** Gedaliah ben Achikam, the last Jewish governor of Judea was assassinated, destroying the last vestiges of autonomy after the Babylonian conquest.
- Sept. 19, 1921:** Isaac ‘Daddy’ Ochberg and 200 orphans escaping pogroms in Ukraine arrived in Cape Town from London to a tumultuous welcome.
- Sept. 20, 1890:** Birthday of Rachel, Hebrew poetess active in pre-State Israel. Her poems are popular to this day, many of them having been set to music.
- Sept. 21, 1922:** President Harding signed the Lodge-Fish Joint Resolution of Congress, “favoring the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People.”
- Tishrei 7, 2312 (1449 BCE):** Traditional birthdays of Zevulun and his twin sister Dinah.

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