

QUESTIONS ON ROSH HASHANA – HA'AZINU

Q-1. (a) Why does *Tishrei* contain the judgment day of *Rosh Hashana* (5 reasons)? (b) What are 5 other names for *Rosh Hashana*?

A-1. (a) (1) *Adam* and *Chava* sinned on *Rosh Hashana* and stood before *Hashem* in judgment (*Rosh Hashana* 10b). (2) Since we do many *mitzvot* in *Tishrei*, it is a good time to be judged (*Avudraham*). (3) *Tishrei's* zodiac sign, a pair of scales, represents judgment; (4) *Tishrei* has the same root as “*shari*”, meaning untie or dissolve – we hope we will be untied from our sins, which will dissolve (*Midrash Raba – Emor* 29:1). (5) *Tishrei's* letters can be reassembled as “*yishraf*”, or straightness – in *Tishrei*, we try to straighten out hearts with *teshuva* (*Birkat Chaim*). (b) (1) *Yom Terua* (*Bamidbar* 29:1); (2) *Zichron Terua* (*Vayikra* 23:24); (3) *Yom haKeseh* (*Tehilim* 81:4); (4) *Yom haDin*; (5) *Yom haZikaron* (*Machzor*).

Q-2. (a) Why does the *Torah* command blowing the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashana* (15 reasons)? (b) Why 100 blasts (3 reasons)?

A-2. (a) *Sa'adia Goan's* 10 reasons – (1) Kings celebrate their coronation's anniversary with instruments – we re-proclaim *Hashem's* Kingship with the *shofar* on Creation's anniversary; (2) the *shofar* warns us to initiate *teshuva*; (3) *Hashem* gave the *Torah* amid *shofar* blasts – we renew accepting the *Torah* with *shofar* blasts; (4) *Yechezkeil* compared the *shofar's* sounding to admonitions to repent; (5) the *shofar* recalls our foes' battle alarms in destroying the *Beit haMikdash* – the *shofar* reminds us to plead with *Hashem* to rebuild it; (6) it reminds us of the *akeida* – we ask *Hashem* to accept our *tefila* in *Avraham's* and *Yitzchak's* merit; (7) the *shofar* awakens us to tremble, so that we will submit to Him; (8) *Tzefania* (1:14-16) calls the final Judgment Day a “*shofar*” day – blowing it instills fear of that day; (9) *Yeshayahu* 27:13 says *Hashem* will blow a *shofar* at the exiles' ingathering to *Eretz Yisrael*; (10) 18:3 declares that the *shofar* will herald *tehiyat ha-meitim* (*Sa'adia Goan*). (11) The word “*shafer*” means “better oneself” – when we better ourselves, He turns stern judgment into mercy (*Midrash Raba – Emor*). (12) *Mashiach*, for whom we pray, will be heralded by the *shofar* (*Zecharya* 9:14) (*Tana de-bei Eliyahu Zuta*). (13) When He hears the *shofar*, He brings *Bnei Yisrael's* merits before Him (*Yalkut Shimoni*). (14) The *shofar* blasts “confound the *Satan*” (*Rosh Hashana* 16a-b). (15) The *shofar* reminds us of *yetziat Mitzrayim* – *Mitzrayim's* enslavement ended on *Rosh Hashana*, 6½ months before *yetziat Mitzrayim* – the *Torah* commands that slaves be freed with the sound of the *shofar* (*Vayikra* 25:9-10) (*Radak*). (b) They recall the 100 cries (1) *Sisera's* mother uttered (*Shoftim* 5:28) when her son died (*Tosafot – Rosh Hashana* 33b). (2) *Sarah* uttered upon hearing that *Yitzchak* had been sacrificed (*Pirkei deRebi Eliezer*). (3) a woman utters in childbirth – 90 in labor and 10 upon giving birth – the cries recall the world's “birth” on *Rosh Hashana* (*Midrash Tanchuma – Tazria*).

Q-3. (a) Since we do not make personal requests in *Shemoneh Esrei's* first 3 blessings (*Shulchan Aruch* 527:70), why do we add *zachreinu le-chaim* (remember us for life) to the 1st blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* beginning on *Rosh Hashana*? (b) Why do we not mention the fact that it is *Rosh Chodesh Tishei* in the *Rosh Hashana tefilot* (3 reasons)? (c) Why do we not blow the *shofar* during *Shacharit* under the rule of *zerizin makidmin le-mitzvot* (perform a *mitzvah* as early as possible) (3 reasons)? (d) Why can we not use the horn of a cow or ox (3 reasons)?

A-3. (a) *Zachreinu le-chaim* is not a personal request but a communal request pleading for *Bnei Yisrael's* continued welfare (*Berachot* 34a – *Tosefot d'h Al Yishal*). (b) (1) Calling *Rosh Hashana* “*zichron terua*” refers not only to the holiday, but also to *Rosh Chodesh* (*Rosh Hashana Yerushalmi* 1:2). (2) To confuse the *Satan* (*Matei Efraim*). (3) Focusing on a minor holiday (*Rosh Chodesh*) would detract from our focus on *Rosh Hashana* (*Leket Yosher*). (c) (1) The Romans interpreted *shofar* blasts as a call to rebellion – *Chazal* instructed to wait until *Musaf*, when the Romans would see *tefila* all morning and understand the *shofar* as part of the *tefilot* (*Rosh Hashana* 32b). (2) The *mitzvah* of *shofar* is next to *Rosh Hashana's musaf korbanot* (*Bamidbar* 29:1-6), indicating *shofar* blowing should be part of *Musaf* (*Rosh Hashana Yerushalmi* 4:8). (3) Reciting the *Shacharit tefilot*, the *Torah* and *haftara* and the Rabbi's *derasha* strengthens our arguments against *Satan* (*Yalkut Shimoni*). (d) (1) Their horns are called “*keren*”, not *shofar*; (2) cows recall the *cheit ha'eigel* – an object used for a sin cannot be used to do a *mitzvah*; (3) a cow's horn has layers, looking like one *shofar* within another – the *Torah* specifies that a single *shofar* must be used (*Rosh Hashana* 26a).

Q-4. (a) Why is it customary to eat *chala* on *Rosh Hashana* in the shape of a: (1) circle? (2) ladder? (3) bird? (b) Why does the *Talmud* (*Kiritut* 6a) recommend eating the following on *Rosh Hashana* – (1) carrots; (2) leeks; (3) beets; (4) gourds?

A-4. (a) (1) The circular *chala* recalls *Hashem's* “crown”, without beginning or end (*Birkat Chaim*). (2) *Hashem* decides who shall ascend the ladder of success, and who shall descend to less success (*Midrash Tanchuma – Matot*). (3) Just as birds fly heavenward, we pray our *tefilot* will reach the *Kisei haKavod* (*Otzar Minhagei Yeshurun*). (b) (1) Carrots are *mehren*, i.e., “more” – we ask *Hashem* to increase our merits; (2) leeks are “*kartay*” – cut – He should cut off our enemies. (3) beets are “*silka*” – remove – He should remove our sins and enemies; (4) gourd is “*keraw*” – call or tear – He should call up our merits and tear evil decrees (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 583/*Magen Avraham*).

Q-5. (a) *Rosh Hashana* begins the New Year and is Creation's anniversary – why do we not begin the *Torah* reading cycle with Creation on this day (2 reasons)? (b) Why are *Yitzchak's* and *Shmuel's* births in the 1st day's *Torah* reading and *haftara*? (c) Why (1) do we say *tashlich* near water (8 reasons)? (d) Why is it better to recite *tashlich* at a body of water with fish (4 reasons)?

A-5. (a) (1) To confuse the *Satan*; (2) since the *Torah* cycle would be interrupted by special readings for *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot* and *Shemini Atzeret*, it is better to begin the cycle uninterrupted after *Yom Tov* (*Matei Efraim*). (b) *Hashem* “remembered” *Sarah* and *Chana*, who were barren, and *Yitzchak* and *Shmuel* were conceived on *Rosh Hashana* – we want *Hashem* to provide positive answers our *tefilot*, just as *Avraham's* and *Chana's* *tefilot* were answered (*Rosh Hashana* 11a; *Megilla* 31a). (c) The ceremony (1) is based on the verse, “and You shall cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (*Micha* 7:18-20); (2) is based on a *Midrash* that *Satan* placed an impassible river as a barrier to prevent *Avraham* and *Yitzchak* from performing the *akeida* – they overcame *Satan*, just as we seek to overcome our *yeitzer hara* (*Sanhedrin* 89b). (3) reminds us of Creation, when the world was covered with water; we seek to do *Hashem's* will which was the purpose of Creation (*Torat haOla*). (4) celebrates *Hashem's* coronation – kings of *Yisrael* were crowned near a body of water (*Horayot* 12a). (5) teaches humility, since water symbolizes humility (*Ta'anit* 7a). (6) reminds us to move forward in serving *Hashem*, like water, which continuously moves and flows (*Sefer haChaim*). (7) represents the purity that we seek – water is a symbol of purity (*Mechilta – Parashat Bo*). (8) reminds us of *Bnei Yisrael's* gathering at a water gate to listen to *Ezra* read the *Torah* on *Rosh Hashana* (*Nechemia* 8:1-3). (d) (1) Fish have no eyelids, and we pray that *Hashem* does not “close His eyes” to our needs (*Eliyahu Raba*). (2) Water symbolizes *Torah*, and we show *Hashem* that we want to be surrounded by *Torah* learning, like a fish surrounded by water (*Midrash Rabbah*). (3) We pray to not get caught like a fish in the net of the *yetzer hara* (*Levush*). (4) Fish multiply rapidly, and we pray that *Bnei Yisrael* increase speedily (*Mishna Berurah* 583:8).

Q-6. (a) Why did *Moshe* begin *Ha'azinu's* song by telling heaven and earth to “listen” (4 views)? (b) Why did he compare “*likchi*” (my teaching – the *Torah*) to rain (4 reasons)? (c) (1) Why is “*ve-chirvivim a-lei eisev*” (and like droplets on the grass) followed by “*Ki sheim Hashem ekra*” (when I call out *Hashem's* name) (2 reasons)? (2) How do we know that (i) we must recite a *beracha* before learning *Torah*? (ii) one should invite others to a *zimun* before *benching*? (iii) it is greater to respond “*amen*” to a *beracha* than to recite it? (iv) when a blessing was recited in the *Beit haMikdash*, *Bnei Yisrael* responded, “*Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto*” (Blessed is the Name of glory of His Kingdom)? (*Devarim* 32:1-3)

A-6. (a) (1) If *Bnei Yisrael* deny that they had agreed to *Hashem's* covenant, the heavens and earth, which last forever, will be witnesses; (2) if *Bnei Yisrael* keep the covenant, *Hashem* will reward them with good weather (from heaven) and good agriculture (from the earth) – He will punish them if they do not (*Rashi*). (3) The heavens testify whether *Bnei Yisrael* have observed *mitzvot* related to it, e.g., *kiddush ha-chodesh* and *yamim tovim* – the earth testifies whether they observed agricultural laws, e.g., *ma'aseir* and *kilayim*; (4) just as heaven and earth “listen” to *Hashem* and constantly obey His commands, so should *Bnei Yisrael* (*Sifrei*). (b) Just like water, the *Torah* (1) comes from heaven; (2) is vital for *Bnei Yisrael's* survival; (3) purifies *Bnei Yisrael*; (4) should be sought constantly by *Bnei Yisrael* (*Sifrei*). (c) (1) To teach that we must recite (i) special prayers when *Hashem* withholds rain; (ii) a unique *beracha* for each type of food (*Ba'al haTurim*). (2) (i) From “*ki sheim Hashem ekra*” (when I call out *Hashem's* name), *ha-vu godel Lei-lokeinu*” (ascribe greatness to the Almighty) (*Berachot* 31a). (ii) From “*ki sheim Hashem ekra*”; (iii) from “*ha-vu godel Lei-lokeinu*” (*Berachot* 53b). (iv) From “*ha-vu godel Lei-lokeinu*” (*Ta'anit* 16b).

Q-7. Why did *Moshe* call (a) *Hashem* “the Rock” (3 views)? (b) *Bnei Yisrael* “a vile and unwise people” (4 views)? (*Devarim* 32:4,6)

A-7. 6. (a) *Moshe* said *Hashem's* judgment is perfect (1) and firm as a rock (*ibn Ezra*). (2) but He does not punish quickly, though He is strong like a rock (*Rashi*). (3) even when refusing to let *Moshe* enter *Eretz Yisrael* for his sin of hitting the rock (*R. Bechaya*). (b) *Moshe* predicted that they (1) will forget all the good that He has done for them and will sin; (2) will not understand the consequences of their sinful behavior (*Rashi*). (3) Will repay the good *Hashem* has done for them with bad (*Ramban*). (4) Will be vile in their deeds and unwise in their hearts (*ibn Ezra*).