

*SHANAH TOVA AND SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is Rosh HaShanah, the first two days of Tishrei 5781. The Shofar is not blown on Shabbat, and Tashlich is recited on the second day.*

#### TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 287 Birnbaum) (p. 402 Artscroll)  
[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED),  
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1. Had the Sages of the Great Assembly asked me for my opinion for the Torah reading for Rosh HaShanah, I would have suggested the first two chapters of the Torah. The first day we would read the Story of Creation, establishing Hashem as the Creator of the World. On the second day we would read a brief summary of the Creation, introducing the relationship that Hashem has with human beings. Alas, they did not ask me. They decided on the final section of Parshat Vayeira, in which there are five subjects covered: 1. The Birth of Yitzchak, 2. The Expulsion of Yishmael and Hagar, 3. The Peace Treaty between Avraham and Avimelech, 4. The Aborted Sacrifice (Akeidah) of Yitzchak, and 5. The Birth of Rivkah. The challenge for us is to realize that these stories touch the themes suitable for Rosh HaShanah.

2. The Birth of Yitzchak. All our Patriarchs had fertility issues. In ancient history, the only way to confront this issue was to pray fervently and frequently. Today medical science offers some serious suggestions to assist a childless couple. But even with their help, prayer still presents a positive avenue to help us. And PRAYER is an important theme and message for today. Historically Codifiers of Halachah suggest that after ten years of childlessness, the couple should divorce and seek a different partner in life. At the same time, our Sages emphasize the help of prayer. At the end of L'Dovid (Psalm 27) the Text reads: Kaveh el Hashem, Chazzak... v'Kaveh el Hashem. Hope (pray) in the Lord. Be strong and of good courage, and hope (pray) in the Lord. Pray, and if your prayer is unanswered, pray again. Be hopeful. The Talmud says that on Rosh HaShanah, Sarah, Rachel, and Channah were remembered positively by Hashem in their quest to have a baby (Megillah 39 and Berachot 29). Some add Rivkah and Leah to the list (Tanchuma Vayeira 17). This is a major theme of this holiday.

3. The Expulsion of Yishmael. Shalom Bayit (Peace in the Family) and the future of our children are paramount in our life's goals. Sarah saw the danger of having Yishmael in the house, and Hashem agreed with her, forcing Avraham to expel both Hagar and Yishmael. Yishmael's life was threatened during their journey in the desert. Hagar prayed for her son, and Hashem responded, but the text said that Hashem responded to the cries of the boy (and not the prayer of the mother). The Midrash says that the prayers of the sick person is preferred over the prayers of others (offered on behalf of the sick) (Bereishit Rabbah 53:14). What was wrong with Hagar's prayer? Why were Avraham's prayers for Avimelech accepted? We must

conclude that the quality of the prayers is the key. What could be wrong with Hagar's prayer when her son, whom she loved, was at risk? But the text said that she prayed but turned away because she did not want to see the death of her son. So how much faith did she really have in her prayer? Again, a major theme is raised by our Sages for our consideration on this holiday: Prayer. Pray and mean it.

4. Finalizing our Torah reading on the first day Rosh HaShanah is the peace treaty that Avraham enters into with Avimelech, king of the Philistines. The Midrash writes that Hashem became angry with Avraham over the treaty. Hashem said: I give you a gift, the major gift of Eretz Yisrael, and you give part of it away? Avraham has given the Gaza Strip to Avimelech in order to gain peace in the region. Sound familiar? Isn't the modern State of Israel repeating Avraham's sin? To gain peace, they gave the Gaza Strip to an enemy! The Midrash adds elsewhere: Why was Samson an important person in our Scripture? Why did the author (the prophet Samuel) consider Samson worthy of having his story recorded in Scripture? The Midrash states that the real purpose in Samson's life was that Samson repealed the peace treaty that Avraham made with Avimelech. Being that the source for this perspective is Midrash, this means that we cannot rule halachically in this case based on Midrash. The Midrash supplies us with themes to ponder upon. The subject of Eretz Yisrael is worthy of our attention on Rosh HaShanah.

5. The Akeidah. The most powerful and meaningful act of absolute faith by Avraham was his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son, Yitzchak. It is one thing to risk his own life in a test to show his ultimate faith in Hashem, when he willingly went into the fiery furnace (at Nimrod's command) and when he fought the four kings in order to rescue his nephew Lot. Now, Hashem commands Avraham to sacrifice his son, who is supposed to inherit the Land of Israel and be a patriarch to Am Yisrael, and Avraham does not bat an eyelash. He takes his son and travels to Yerushalayim. This is a major theme of this holiday. To sacrifice fully is the proclamation of our faith in Hashem. In the Mussaf on Rosh HaShanah, we invoke the Akeidah, beseeching God to recognize Avraham's ultimate faith and Yitzchak's willingness to accept martyrdom. Avraham "suppressed his compassion in order to perform Your will with a whole heart." During the Middle Ages, when martyrdom became a recurring incident for Jews, the Torah portion assumed extreme importance in our liturgy, especially on the High Holidays and Selichot.

6. The Birth of Rivkah. These stories culminate with the Torah telling us that the sparing of Yitzchak and the birth of his future wife means that the future will be positive and redemptive. There is another theme: the ultimate birth of the nation of Israel. Right now the Torah is involved with the story of the first Jewish family. The next step is reaching a stage of having twelve sons. Avraham almost lost his one son, and his brother Nachor already has his twelve! And in the end of the following Parshah, Chayei Sarah, the Torah will record that Yishmael had reached his

next step of twelve sons. By the time Yaakov has twelve sons, these others are well on their way to achieving the next step of growth: from family to a tribe, when they reach 70 souls. When Yaakov gets to Egypt he finally reaches 70. And 200 years later, they will achieve the status of Am Yisrael, the nation of Israel, when they reach 600,000 male souls. 600,000! That is amazing and important. To label a domain to be a Reshut HaRabbim, a Public Domain, in the laws of Shabbat, at least 600,000 people have to traverse the area in one day! [And in 1948, the Land of Israel would become a State of Israel when it reached a population of 600,000 people!] (RED)

7. In summation, I cannot compare my suggestion of Torah reading for today to those chosen by our Sages. They hit upon some phenomenal topics for us to dwell on and concentrate on this holiday of Rosh HaShanah. Rosh HaShanah has personal and universal implications. Not only do each of us stand in judgement in front of the Almighty this day, but the entire nation of Israel stands in judgement. And, in fact, the entire world is being judged today. (Put in a good word for the COVID scourge that permeates the entire world!) But our prayers have the added feature of the Shofar blasts. There are basically two types of Shofar blasts. First is the Tekiah, one long blast which announces the presence of the King of the Universe. We coronate Hashem on this holiday. Following the coronation is the supplication of our heart, symbolized by the Teru'ah sound of the Shofar. The Talmud describes the cry of the Teru'ah, either to be the wail of our Teru'ah, or the Shevarim, the sigh of our souls when we submit our fate to Hashem. The Shofar, as you see, is a form of prayer, establishing a meaningful relationship with the Almighty. (RED)

HAFTORAH

(p. 295 Birnbaum) (p. 416 Artscroll)

The Haftorah of the first day is the story of Channah and how she is remembered by Hashem to have a child. On the second day, the Haftorah will mention Rachel, the other Matriarch who is remembered (on Rosh HaShanah) for having a child. Again it is the Zichronot theme that is chosen by our Sages for these readings. In Channah's case, more is derived as she is the one who teaches us how to pray, quietly and felt deeply in our hearts. "Only her lips moved" indicates the need to articulate the words but without allowing someone else to hear what we say. Furthermore she took a vow to devote her child to the Tabernacle. Before her prayer was answered, Channah received an immediate effect. Praying the way she did gave her a renewed spirit and a new purpose in life. She was no longer downcast; her spirits were lifted. This is the power of prayer, even before reaching Hashem for a response. (RED)

ROSH HASHANAH QUIZ 5781  
by Rabbi Edward Davis

1. Why do we blow Shofar throughout the month of Elul, the month before Rosh HaShanah?
2. What happened historically on Rosh HaShanah?

3. Why is the Challah round on Rosh HaShanah?
4. Why is there a custom not to eat nuts on Rosh HaShanah?
5. What are the three divisions of the Mussaf Amidah on Rosh Hashanah?
6. The words of Rosh HaShanah and Yom HaDin (Day of Judgement) do not appear in the Torah. How does the Torah refer to this holiday?
7. What is Tashlich?
8. What do we do with the Challah and apple before eating them on Rosh HaShanah?
9. What Biblical story are we reminded of when we take the Shofar?
10. Why do we eat a "new fruit" on the second night of Rosh HaShanah?
11. What is the song that Leonard Cohen wrote based on the prayer U'Netanah Tokef?
12. Why do we fast on the day after Rosh HaShanah?
13. According to the Mishnah (Rosh HaShanah 1:1) there are four New Years on the Jewish calendar. Name them.
14. Why do we not blow Shofar when Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbat?
15. Where does the expression appear in TaNaCH?
16. On what days of the week can Rosh HaShanah NEVER fall out?
17. What is the earliest that Rosh HaShanah can fall out?
18. What is the latest date for Rosh HaShanah to fall on?
19. What are the Days of Awe, Yamim Nora'im?
20. What work that is prohibited on Shabbat is permitted on Yom Tov?

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ANSWERS FOR ROSH HASHANAH QUIZ 5781

1. To arouse us to repent to Hashem.
2. Man was created, highlighting the week long activities by Hashem.
3. To symbolize the cycle of life.
4. Because of the close numerical value (Gematria) equating the Hebrew words for nut (egoz) and sin (cheit). [The Kotzker Rebbe has a great quip about this: The Gematria of Cheit is Cheit!]
5. Malchuyot (crowning Hashem as the King of the World), Zichronot (Hashem remembers our past deeds), and Shofrot (the Revelation of Hashem).
6. Yom Teru'ah, the Day of Shofar Blasts.
7. When people go to a body of water and throw crumbs into the water, symbolizing our casting away our sins.
8. Dip them in honey, symbolizing our hopes for a sweet year.
9. The Akeidah, the aborted sacrifice of Yitzchak.
10. To give us reason to say a Shehechyanu in the Kiddush.
11. Who By Fire.
12. The Fast of Gedaliah, commemorating the assassination of Gedaliah, the Jewish governor of Israel, who was appointed to his post by the Babylonians.
13. The first of Nissan (anniversary of the kings), the 15th day of Shevat (the New Year for the trees), the first of Elul (the New Year for the tithing of animals and vegetation), and the first of Tishrei (Rosh HaShanah).
14. The Sages were concerned that we might carry the Shofar on Shabbat.
15. Ezekiel 40:1. But it does not mean the holiday of Rosh HaShanah.
16. Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday. Tractate R.H. 20a.
17. September 5 as happened in 1842, 1861, 1899, and 2013.
18. October 5 as happened in 1815, 1927, and 1967. (And will happen in 2043)
19. The Ten Days from Rosh HaShanah through Yom Kippur.
20. Cooking and Carrying.