



TORAH LISHMA

Yamim Nora'im 5777



Introduction

Rav Shlomo Brown
Menahel

Contributions

Rav Shlomo Riskin
Founder and Chancellor, Ohr Torah Stone
and
Rav David Stav
Co-Chancellor, Ohr Torah Stone

Shiurim and Essays (authors listed in alphabetical order)

**Rav Yitzhak Blau, Rav David Brofsky, Rav Rafi Eis,
Ms. Dena Freundlich, Rav Menachem Leibtag,
Mrs. Sally Mayer, Rav Jonathan Mishkin, Rav Yoni Rosensweig**

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***P.S. Your feedback is very important to us.
Please contact our alumnae coordinator, Batsheva Ephraim,
with questions and /or comments: batsheva@ots.org.il***

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INTRODUCTION



Rav Shlomo Brown Menahel

We are proud to present this edition of “Torah Lishma”, a choveret featuring shiurim and essays on the Yamim Noraim from the rabbinic leadership of Ohr Torah Stone and from our faculty at the Maria and Joel Finkle Overseas Program at Midreshet Lindenbaum.

The following idea about the shofar explains what we see as our overall mission at Midreshet Lindenbaum:

Why, immediately before Tekiat Shofar, do we recite the pasuk, “**מִן הַמַּצַּר קָרָאתִי יְיָ עֲנֵי בְמַרְחֵב יְיָ**”, “From the straits have I called out to Hashem. Answer me in the breadth of Hashem” (Tehillim 118:4)?

Rav Kook (Mo’adei Hare’iya) explains that the mouth of the shofar is narrow, then grows wider. This is similar to the path of teshuva. As the Rambam explains, first, there is individual teshuva, and then a general teshuva. The first is an introduction to the latter. That is to say, the teshuva of the month of Elul is an introduction to the teshuva of Rosh Hashana. In Elul, we are engaged in personal teshuva. And on Rosh Hashana, we rise to the level of the desire of teshuva for the entire nation—“recite the malchiyot before Me in order to coronate me over you” (Rosh Hashana 16a)—and also for all of humanity: “Rule over the entire world in Your glory.”

When we recite the pasuk of “Min Hameitzar” before hearing the Shofar on Rosh Hashana, we are to focus on directing our teshuva in a similar direction: improving ourselves in the context of improving the Jewish People and the entire world.

Likewise, our primary mission at Midreshet Lindenbaum is that the Torah we learn not only improves us as people and as ovdei Hashem, but also inspires us to go out and improve the world around us. May we attain this goal in the coming year.

Ketiva v’Chatima Tova to you and your families,

Rav Shlomo Brown

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Rav Shlomo Riskin

Founder and Chancellor, Ohr Torah Stone

“The Sound of the Shofar”

What is the essence of our faith, the purpose for which the Jewish people have been placed in the world? Fascinatingly enough, the answer is to be found within the central prayer of our Rosh Hashana liturgy: the three blessings, uniquely found within the Additional (Musaf) prayer of Rosh Hashana, of “Malchuyot” (kingship), “Zichronot” (remembrances) and “Shofarot.” These blessings are each punctuated by the sounds of the shofar, and according to the 14th-century theologian Rabbi Yosef Albo as well as the 19th-century Franz Rosenzweig, contain the essence of our faith.

The first of these blessings, Malchuyot, begins with the more familiar “Alenu” prayer. This prayer teaches that the God whom we now accept as the one Lord of the Universe, the God of love, morality and peace, will eventually be accepted by the entire world. This axiom of our religion, this prophecy of the ultimate endgame, is especially comforting in the face of the dangerous global village in which we live, a global village in which the specter of nuclear proliferation looms.

This blessing affirms that it is the God of compassionate righteousness and moral justice who will eventually emerge supreme over the totalitarian trinity of Nazi fascism, Stalinist Communism and Islamic fundamentalism. Our broken world will eventually be perfected under the Kingship of the God of righteousness; through the teachings of Abraham “all the families of the Earth will be blessed” with a world of peace (Genesis 12:3).

The second blessing, Zichronot, which is a Hebrew term for history, opens with: “You remember the activities from the beginning of the world, and you are mindful of the deeds [or the potential functions, from the Hebrew tafkid] of every creature from earliest times.”

Here is a ringing declaration of faith in the process of history; the clear sense that historical time is on the side of humanity, and that individuals and nations have a unique role to play in the cumulative march of history toward redemption. Israel alone of the nations of the world enjoys a special relationship with God, a covenant which ensures its eternity and defines its mission as the messenger of ethical monotheism to all of humanity.

This blessing guarantees that there is an overarching purpose to history, which is not a cyclical, repetitive cycle leading nowhere but rather a linear pathway leading to peace. Redemption will come about in the fullness of historic time as a result of the cumulative merits of all preceding generations.

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How will we carry out our covenantal task of imparting our message to the world? This is told to us by the third blessing, Shofarot, which reminds us of the revelation at Sinai, the 613 commandments which God presented to Israel and the seven commandments of morality, centering around “thou shalt not murder,” which God presented to the world.

Maimonides, the great codifier of Jewish law, insists that just as God commanded Moses to bequeath 613 commandments to Israel, “similarly did He command Moses to coerce the nations of the world to accept the seven laws of morality” (Laws of Kings 8:10).

This is an immensely significant message, especially in our postmodern, relativistic, “everything goes” society, which denies any absolute concept of morality.

“Situation ethics” dominates our conventional wisdom, and the most heinous crime can become transformed into a sacred act “when seen from the perpetrator’s point of view.” (Hence a suicide bomber who murders innocent children is called a “freedom fighter.”) Shofarot tells us that the seven laws of morality which must be accepted by the nations are not options, but absolutes, since – especially in our global village – the lives of all humanity hang in the balance of their acceptance.

Hence the Rosh Hashana Musaf Amida teaches that the nation of Israel must and will teach fundamental morality, or ethical monotheism, to all the nations of the world. Only when this message is accepted, when “this Torah comes forth from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem,” only then will “nation not lift up sword against nation and humanity not learn war anymore,” and “everyone will sit under his vineyard and fig tree and no one will have reason to fear” (Micah 4:4).

Each of these blessings is punctuated by the shofar sounding. After God’s kingship we sound the shofar, the means by which the king in the ancient world was crowned. Take note: It is us, the Jewish people, who must bring God down into this world and crown Him.

After Zichronot we sound the shofar as a reminder of the aborted sacrifice of Isaac in favor of the ram whose horns were caught in the thicket. Isaac, the future of the Jewish people, was slated for slaughter, but was set free. The shofar sound after Zichronot reminds us that the Jews will continue to live despite exile and persecution. We must live so that we may remain God’s witnesses and a light unto the nations of the world (Isaiah 42:6).

Finally, we sound the shofar after Shofarot since the method by which we must reach out to the world is by teaching the world our Torah – a teaching revealed at Sinai amid the sounds of the shofar.

And it will ultimately be that when the Almighty Himself will sound the shofar that all of the dispersed will return to Israel, the Temple will be rebuilt and the nations will come to learn from us to beat their swords into plowshares and to live together in peace.



Rav David Stav

Co-Chancellor, Ohr Torah Stone

אמירת "כל נדרי"

זה שנהגו לומר "כל נדרי" עם כניסת יוה"כ, לפי שיום הכיפורים הוא יום סליחה ומחילה ותשובה, וצריך האדם להיטהר מעוונותיו ביום זה. ואם נדר אדם בתוך השנה איזה נדר, הוא חייב לקיימו, ואין יום הכיפורים מכפר עליו ופוטרו מלקיים נדרו. ואם נדר ושכח מלקיימו, מה יעשה ויתכפר לו ויהא נקי ביום הכיפורים מעוון נדרים? אין לו כפרה אלא התרת הנדר. לפיכך, תיקנו לעשות התרה זו בציבור, כדי לבטל למפרע את הנדרים שעתיד שלא לקיימם, ונמצא עומד עכשיו בלי עוון נדרים גם מיום כיפורים שעבר עד יום כיפורים זה.

וחששו ביותר לעוון נדרים, לפי שהוא חמור מאוד ועונשו מרובה. שהחמירה תורה על החטאים הבאים על ידי דיבור, יותר מהחטאים הבאים על ידי מעשה, וכמו שאמרו רבותינו: "האומר בפיו חמור מהעושה מעשה" (ערכין ט"ז). וטעם דבר זה הוא לפי שיתרונו של האדם על בעלי החיים הוא בכוח הדיבור, כמו שכתוב "וייפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה", ותירגם אונקלוס: "לרוח ממללא" (לרוח מדברת. ויתרון זה ניתן לו, שיהא משתמש בו לטובה. ואם הוא משתמש בו לרעה, הרי הוא מוריד עצמו למדרגה נמוכה משל בעלי החיים. הבהמה אינה מקלקלת בפיה, והוא מקלקל בכוח דיבורו. לפיכך, ראוי הוא לעונש חמור על כך, והתרת הנדרים היא אחד מתיקוני חטאות הלשון והפה.

ונוסח זה שאומרים קודם "כל נדרי": "על דעת המקום" וכו', "אנו מתירים להתפלל עם העבריינים", בשעת הגזרה תקנו בימי אנוסי ספרד. רשעי הגויים כפו על ישראל בכל מיני ייסורים ועינויים קשים, לעבור על דת ולקבל עליהם את דתם. והיו בישראל רבים שלא יכלו לעמוד בעינויים קשים אלה, וקיבלו עליהם את דתם למראית עין בלבד, ושמרו בסתר על דת ישראל, איש איש במחבואיו, ולא היו מתוודעים איש לרעהו. כיון שבא ליל יום כיפורים, שמו נפשם בכפם, ונתאספו יחדיו למרתפי סתר, כדי לקבל עליהם ברוב עם קדושת יום טוב, ולבקש על עצמם רחמים מלפני המקום, על היותם נראים כעבריינים כל השנה, שאין הקב"ה מואס בתפילת הרבים לעולם, אפילו עבריינים הם. ועל אותו הזמן, ועל אותם העבריינים מפני אונסם, תקנו לומר: "אנו מתירין להתפלל עם העבריינים".

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נוסח זה נשתמר גם בימינו, מפני שגם עתה באים לבית הכנסת בליל יום הכיפורים, עבריינים מכל השנה, ולולא שהתירו את התפילה בצוותא אתם על דעת המקום ועל דעת הקהל וכו', הייתה צוותא זו פוגמת חלילה בתפילותיהם של הצדיקים שאינם עבריינים. ועכשיו שמתירים – תפילותיהם של אלה מתעלות עם תפילות כל ישראל, שכולם זרע אברהם יצחק ויעקב, ורצון כולם לעשות רצונו של מקום, ומי מעכב? הגלות מעכבת ופיתוי היצר. עכשיו, בשעה שבאים לבית הכנסת להתפלל, ומקבלים עליהם מצוות היום, ומבקשים מחילה על עוונותיהם מכל השנה, שוב נעשים הכל קדושים וטהורים, וראויים שתהא תפילתם מתקבלת לפני שומע תפילה.

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Rav Yitzhak Blau

“The Logic of Repentance: Justice or Mercy?”

תלמוד ירושלמי מכות פרק ב דף לא טור ד /ה"ו

שאלו לחכמה חוטא מהו עונשו אמרה להם חטאים תרדף רעה שאלו לנבואה חוטא מהו עונשו אמרה להן הנפש החוטאת היא תמות שאלו לקודש' בריך הוא חוטא מהו עונשו אמ' להן יעשה תשובה ויתכפ' לו היינו דכתיב על כן יורה חטאים בדרך יורה לחטאי' דרך לעשות תשובה

ספר העיקרים מאמר ד פרק כה

ובאור הענין הזה הוא שהתשובה אין לה מקום לפ' שורת הדין כמו שבארנו בתחלת הפרק, אבל היא דרך חסד ונדבה הנמשך מהשם יתברך

ספר מסילת ישרים פרק ד

ודאי, מדת הרחמים היא קיומו של עולם, שלא היה עומד זולתו כלל וכלל. ואף על - פי - כן אין מדת הדין לוקה, וזה, כי לפי שורת הדין ממש, היה ראוי שהחוטא יענש מיד תיכף לחטאו בלי המתנה כלל, וגם שהעונש עצמו יהיה בחרון אף, כראוי למי שממרה פי הבורא יתברך שמו, ושלא יהיה תיקון לחטא כלל, כי הנה באמת, איך יתקן האדם את אשר עיות והחטא כבר נעשה? הרי שרצח האדם את חברו, הרי שנאף, איך יוכל לתקן הדבר הזה? היוכל להסיר המעשה העשוי מן המציאות? אמנם, מדת הרחמים היא הנותנת הפך השלשה דברים שזכרנו: דהינו, שיתן זמן לחוטא ולא יחד מן הארץ מיד כשחטא, ושהעונש עצמו לא יהיה עד לכלה, ושהתשובה תנתן לחוטאים בחסד גמור, שתחשב עקירת הרצון כעקירת המעשה... וזה חסד ודאי שאינה משורת הדין, אך על - כל - פנים הנה הוא חסד שאינו מכחיש הדין לגמרי, שהרי יש צד לתלות בו, שתחת הרצון שנתרצה בחטא וההנאה שנהנה ממנו בא עתה הנחמה והצער. וכן אריכות הזמן איננו ויתרון על החטא, אלא

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מדרשת או"ת לינדנבאום
MIDRESHET LINDENBAUM

סבלנות קצת לפתוח לו פתח תקון... אך שיתרו עבירות בלא כלום או שלא ישגיח עליהם, זה היה נגד הדין לגמרי, כי כבר לא היה משפט ודין אמיתי בדברים, על כן זה אי אפשר להמצא כלל.

תלמוד בבלי קידושין דף מ עמוד ב

ר"ש בן יוחי אומר: אפילו צדיק גמור כל ימיו ומרד באחרונה - איבד את הראשונות, שנאמר: צדקת הצדיק לא תצילנו ביום פשעו; ואפילו רשע גמור כל ימיו ועשה תשובה באחרונה - אין מזכירים לו שוב רשעו, שנאמר: ורשעת הרשע לא יכשל בה ביום שובו מרשעו. וניהוי כמחצה עונות ומחצה זכויות! אמר ריש לקיש: בתוהא על הראשונות.

תלמוד בבלי יומא דף פו עמוד ב

אמר ריש לקיש: גדולה תשובה, שזדונות נעשות לו כשגגות, שנאמר שובה ישראל עד ה' אלהיך כי כשלת בעונך. הא עון מזיד הוא, וקא קרי ליה מכשול. איני? והאמר ריש לקיש: גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכויות, שנאמר ובשוב רשע מרשעתו ועשה משפט וצדקה עליהם הוא יחיה! - לא קשיא; כאן - מאהבה, כאן - מיראה.

רש"י יומא דף פו עמוד ב

עליהם הוא יחיה - על כל מה שעשה, ואף על העבירות.

מהרש"א חידושי אגדות יומא דף פו עמוד ב

אבל בסמוך דקאמר שזדונות נעשו לו כזכויות כו'. הוא לכאורה דבר תמוה דנמצא חוטא נשכר וי"ל דעושה תשובה מאהבה כדמסיק דבהכי איירי ודאי דעושה תשובה גמורה ומוסיף במעשיו הטובים יתר מכדי הצורך לגבי אותו עון והרי אותן מעשים טובים שמוסיף הם נעשים לו כזכויות וקרא דמייתי מוכיח כן שנאמר ובשוב רשע מרשעתו ועשה משפט וצדקה עליהם חיה וגו' דמשמע משפט וצדקה שהוסיף לעשות על תשובתו עליהם חיה יחיה

תוספת יום הכיפורים יומא דף פו עמוד ב

איני והאר"ל כו' נעשות לו כזכויות שנאמר ביחזקאל סימן ל"ג ובשוב רשע מרשעתו כו'. ודייק לה מתיבת עליהם דהיא יתירה אלא בא לרמוז עליהם הוא יחיה כלומר על מה שעשה ואף על העבירות כדפרש"י והא דלא דייק לה מדכתיב שם סי' ח"י ובשוב רשע מרשעתו ויעש משפט וצדקה הוא את נפשו יחיה כו' משום דהתם איכא למדחי דמאי דכתיב הוא את נפשו יחיה קאי בעבור המשפט וצדקה שעשה... ויש להתבונן היאך אפשר שגוף העבירה יעשה זכות. י"ל דכיון דתשובה מעולה היא באותו פרק וכו' כדלקמן וכיון שלעבר טעם טעם החטא והכיר במים גנובים ימתקו ואפ"ה פירש מהעבירה מאהבת ה' נמצא דאותה עבירה שעשה כבר גרמה הפרישה זו שעשה שהוא זכות גדול משא"כ בצדיק במעולם לא חטא ופגע באשה זונה ופירש ממנה אין לו זכות גדול ודוק:

ר' צדוק הכהן מלובלין - צדקת הצדיק אות מ

עיקר התשובה הוא עד שיאיר ה' עיניו שיהיו זדונות כזכויות, רצה לומר שיכיר ויבין שכל מה שחטא

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היה גם כן ברצון השם יתברך, כמו שאמרו ז"ל (ברכות ל"א סוף ע"ב) שלושה פסוקים וכו' ואתה הסבות את לבם (מלכים - א י"ח ל"ז) ואשר הרעותי וגו' (מיכה ד' ו'), וכטעם ידיעה ובחירה שביאר האריז"ל בסוף ספר ארבע מאות שקל כסף, ששניהם אמת כל אחד במקום בפני עצמו במקום הבחירה שם אין מקום לידיעה, ובמקום הידיעה שם באמת אין מקום לבחירה, וכשמשיג לאור זה העצום אז שבו כל זדונותיו בלתי יוצאים מעומק ידיעת השם יתברך והוא ודעתו ורצונו הכל אחד: ומאחר שהשם יתברך רצה כן הרי הכל זכויות וזוכה לכפרה גמורה שביום הכפורים שזה סוד השעיר לעזאזל שאילו עשוהו האדם עצמו היה עובד עבודה זרה גמור והוא לא יהיה, שהוא יסוד כל המצוות לא תעשה, וכל העבירות וההסרות מרצון השם יתברך. רק שהשעיר הוא על ידי רצון השם יתברך שהוא מצווה לשלחו לו נעשה עוד מצוה ולא עבירה.

ספר העיקרים מאמר ד פרק כז

והפעולות המעורבות מן האונס והרצון שהן האמצעיות בין שני אלו המינים שזכרנו הוא דבר קשה לידע אם ראוי שייחוסו אל האונס או אל הרצון... ועל כן נראה שהגבלת הפעולות הרצוניות הוא על זה הדרך, שהדבר שיעשהו האדם ובעת שיעשהו יבחרו על זולתו ורוצה בו ואחר שנעשה הוא רוצה בקיומו, כלומר שהוא חפץ ורוצה שיהיה עשוי, הנה זה ראוי שייחוס אל הרצון, אף על פי שיש בתחלתו קצת אונס... ונתבאר לפי זה שהעבירה שמתחרט עליה כראוי ואינו רוצה בקיומה הנה זה יורה שלא נעשה הפעל ההוא ברצון גמור..ומזה הצד הוא שתועיל התשובה לבעל העבירה, שהיא תשים העבירה כאלו לא נעשית בפעל וכאלו הוא דבר שנעשה בטעות ובבלי דעת, ובזה ישיג מרוק העונות, ועל צד החסד תחשב לו לצדקה ויאבהו השם יתברך נדבה כמו שכתבנו למעלה:

על התשובה "ביעור הרע או העלאתו"

השאלה אם התשובה היא המשך או הפסק, אם היא מקיימת את העבר או מבטלת אותו לגמרי תלויה בטיבה של התשובה... שנות החטא נהפכות לכוח דחף עצום הדוחף את החוטא אל בורא עולם... על ידי החטא גילה בקרבו כוחות נפש חדשים, רזרבואר של אנרגיה של עקשנות וחמדנות שלא ידע על קיומם לפני שחטא. עכשיו יש בידו לקדש את כל הכוחות האלה ולכוונם כלפי מעלה.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Halakhic Man", pp. 114-115

Both past and future are alive; both act and create in the heart of the present and shape the very image of reality...The past by itself is indeterminate, a closed book. It is only the present and the future that can pry it open and read its meaning.

* * * * *



Rav David Brofsky

“Mitzvat Teki’at Shofar”

Reasons for the Mitzva

The fourteenth-century Spanish scholar Rabbi David ben Yosef Abudraham records that Rabbi Saadia Gaon (tenth century) enumerates ten reasons for the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShana. Many Mahzorim (High-Holy-Day prayer books) include these reasons before the blowing of the shofar. We will focus on three of them.

1) Coronation

According to Rabbi Saadia Gaon, one function of blowing the shofar, as it appears in the Bible, is to praise God and to crown Him as our King. When a king is crowned at the beginning of his rule, trumpets and horns are blown to announce his coronation. Similarly, we coronate God through the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShana. Indeed, the Book of Psalms states, “With trumpets and the sound of the shofar, shout before the King, God” (Ps. 98:6) and, “Praise Him with the blowing of the shofar; praise Him with the psaltery and harp” (150:3) Furthermore, Bilaam tells Balak, “Nor has He seen perverseness in Israel; God, his God, is with him, and the king’s shout [teruat melekh] is in him (Num. 23:21).

The Gemara, discussing the three central blessings of the Musaf prayer, also implies that this is a function of the shofar blowing:

And you should recite before Me Malkhuyot, Zikhronot, and Shofarot. Malkhuyot, in order that you should coronate Me for you; Zikhronot, in order that your remembrance should rise to Me with favor. And how? Through the shofar. (Rosh HaShana 16a)

Elsewhere, the Gemara relates a debate between R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua regarding whether the world was created in Tishrei or Nisan (Rosh HaShana 10b). The Gemara records that our prayers follow the opinion of R. Eliezer, as we say in the Musaf prayer, “This is the day, the beginning of Your work, a remembrance for the first day” (27a).

This reason for blowing the shofar on Rosh HaShana may be indicated by a comparison to another command to blow the shofar. Interestingly, the Torah never states explicitly that we blow the shofar on Rosh HaShana; rather, it simply describes the day with the term “terua” (Lev. 23:23–25; Num. 29:1). The Torah only explicitly commands us to blow a shofar on Yom Kippur of the Yovel (jubilee) year:

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And you shall number seven sabbaths of years for you, seven times seven years; and there shall be for you the days of seven sabbaths of years – forty-nine years. Then shall you make proclamation with the shofar of terua on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement shall you make proclamation with the shofar throughout all your land. (Lev. 25:8–9)

The Gemara derives that all of the laws of the shofar in “the seventh month” (i.e., those written regarding Yom Kippur of a Yovel year) apply equally to Rosh HaShana (Rosh HaShana 33b).

Is the relationship between Yovel and Rosh HaShana merely coincidental, or do they share a common theme? Rambam writes:

And it is known that this blowing on the Yovel is to publicize the freedom [of the slaves]...as it says, “And you shall proclaim liberty” (Lev. 25:10) – and it is not similar to the sounding of the shofar on Rosh HaShana, which is a remembrance before God; whereas this [Yovel] is to release the slaves, as we have explained. (*Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandment 137*)

According to Rambam, we should not search for the meaning of the shofar in the laws of the Yovel.

The Sefer HaHinukh, however, a work that systematically discusses the laws, and some reasons for the 613 mitzvot, offers a different perspective. The Hinukh offers the following reason for blowing the shofar on the Yovel:

The reason for this mitzva, according to the simplest understanding, is that God wishes to declare to His nation that everything is His, and that everything which He wishes to bestow will ultimately be returned, because the land is His.... The message of Yovel is similar to that which earthly kingdoms practice, that the lord of the land periodically takes control of the fortified cities he has given to his vassals, in order to instill in them fear of their lord. (*Sefer HaHinukh, Mitzva 130*)

The Hinukh does not believe that this is the reason for the shofar on Rosh HaShana, but based upon this reason, we might suggest that just as the shofar on Yovel is meant to declare the kingship of God, the shofar of Rosh HaShana similarly crowns Him.

2) Repentance

Rabbi Saadia Gaon offers a second reason for the shofar:

The second reason is that the day of Rosh HaShana is the first day of the Aseret Yemei Teshuva [the Ten Days of Repentance], and we blow the shofar...as if to warn: whoever wishes to repent should do so; and if not, he will suffer the consequences.

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The prophet Amos's description of the blowing of the shofar, "Shall a shofar be blown in the city, and the people not tremble?" (Amos 3:6), illustrates the potential impact of the shofar upon those who hear it. Similarly, Rambam writes:

Even though the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShana is a decree of the Torah, there is a hint in it, as if to say: Awake, sleepers, from your sleep, and slumberers from your slumber! Search your actions and repent, and remember your Creator! ...Because of this, the entire house of Israel maintains the custom of increasing their charity, good deeds, and involvement in mitzvot from Rosh HaShana until Yom Kippur, above the level of the rest of the year. (*Rambam, Hilkhos Teshuva 3:4*)

The *Hinukh* elaborates on this, describing the impact of the shofar sound:

Because a physical being will only awaken to certain things upon being called...on Rosh HaShana, which is a day designated from antiquity for judging all creatures...the sound of the shofar wakes the heart of all who hear it, and certainly the sound of the *terua*, that is, the broken sound. And not only should a person be aroused, a person should remember to break his evil inclination to desire the pleasures of the world and to sin when he hears the broken sounds. (*Sefer HaHinukh, Commandment 405*)

3) Prayer

Shofar blowing fulfills a third function: it serves as a vessel or instrument of prayer. The Torah relates the numerous functions of the trumpets in the desert (Num. 10:1-10). For example, they were sounded in order to signal the camps to move, or even merely to assemble the people. It is in this context that we first encounter the scriptural term "to blow" – "litko'a" – from which the talmudic word for a straight note, *teki'a*, is derived. It appears only as a verb in Tanakh; in fact, the Torah even uses the verb form of *teki'a* to command us to blow a *terua*!

When the Torah describes the preparations before going out to war, it relates that the trumpets are also blown:

And when you go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound a *terua* with the trumpets; and you shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies.

Apparently, the sounding of the trumpets in this context is meant either to arouse the nation to repent or possibly to serve as the vehicle of prayer itself. In fact, as we have previously noted, Ramban derives from this verse that prayer in times of crisis is a biblical obligation. (*Ramban, Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandment 5*)

Rambam similarly writes:

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There is a positive commandment to cry and call out with the trumpets upon every crisis which confronts the community....This is the way of repentance, that during a crisis they should cry and call out; they should know that their condition is a function of their bad behavior....This is what will allow them to avert the crisis. This is the way of repentance, that when a crisis comes, [the nation] should cry and call out, and all should realize that because of their deeds, their situation has worsened. (*Rambam, Hilkhos Ta'anuyot 1:1-3*)

As we saw above, this may be the intention of the Gemara that describes the shofar as the tool for bringing our remembrance before God (Rosh HaShana 16a).

The Nature of the Mitzva

Understanding the halakhic nature of the blowing of the shofar may shed light on the reason for the mitzva. There are actually two components of the mitzva of shofar: teki'a and shemi'a, blowing and hearing the shofar. The posekim have struggled for generations to understand the relationship between these two elements, attempting to determine whether the teki'a or the shemi'a defines the mitzva. To do this, we must examine cases in which either the blowing or hearing is problematic.

On the one hand, the Mishna teaches that one who blows a shofar into a hole or pit has only fulfilled his obligation if he heard the sound of the shofar itself, not its echo (Rosh HaShana 3:7). This Mishna seems to strongly indicate that even if one properly blows the shofar, one must still hear its pure sound. On the other hand, other sources indicate that this may not be so simple. For example, another Mishna teaches:

A deaf person, a mental incompetent, and a minor cannot fulfill the public's obligation. This is the rule: [only] one who is obligated in a matter can fulfill the public's obligation (*Rosh HaShana 3:8*). [The Gemara also extends this principle to women, who are exempt from shofar because it is a mitzvat aseh shehazeman gerama, a time-bound positive commandment.]

Who is the deaf person (heresh) mentioned in the Mishna who cannot blow the shofar for another? Is he a deaf-mute, who is generally exempt from all mitzvot, or even a deaf person who can speak, who may be obligated in mitzvot that are not affected by his condition?

Me'iri cites two divergent opinions regarding this question (*Me'iri 29*), which may be dependent upon our discussion. Rabbi Yonatan of Lunel rules that the Mishna is speaking of a deaf-mute; a deaf person, however, who can speak may fulfill another's obligation (*Rabbi Yonatan of Lunel, Rosh HaShana, 29a*). This implies that the main point of the mitzva is blowing, not hearing, the blasts. The Shulhan Arukh, however, strongly implies that a deaf person may not exempt others (*Shulhan Arukh 589:2*), implying that shemi'a is the crucial aspect of the mitzva. The latter position is faced with a perplexing difficulty: if shemi'a is the focal point of the mitzva, why does it matter if the person blowing the shofar is technically obligated or not? As long as one hears the

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shofar blasts, he should fulfill the mitzva. The dispute among the Rishonim regarding this issue extends to other aspects of teki'at shofar as well.

Birkat HaShofar

Rambam rules that the listener should recite the blessing “lishmo’a kol shofar,” “to hear the sound of the shofar.” (*Rambam, Hilkhhot Shofar 3:10*) This alone may not irrefutably indicate how the Rambam understands the mitzva of shofar, but a number of other sources do. For example, Rambam introduces Hilkhhot Shofar by noting the mitzva “to hear the sound of the shofar on the first of Tishrei.” In a responsum, he states this explicitly:

The mitzva that is commanded is not the teki’a, but rather hearing the teki’a.... If the mitzva would have been the teki’a [alone], each and every male would be obligated to sound [the shofar], just as each and every male is obligated in the mitzvot of sukka and lulav; and one who listens but does not blow would not have fulfilled his obligation... Similarly, one who blows but does not hear – for example, one who covers his ears – would fulfill his obligation! ...[Rather,] we only blow in order to hear...and therefore we recite the blessing “to hear the sound of the shofar,” and not, “on the blowing of the shofar.” (*Teshuvot HaRambam 142*)

Rambam clearly maintains that the mitzva is to hear the shofar, not to blow the shofar. He also raises another fascinating point: since the mitzva is to hear, the congregation does not fulfill their obligation through the principle of shomei’a ke’oneh, which equates listening to a sound with actually producing it, as the Gemara implies (Rosh HaShana 27b), but rather by simply hearing the sound of the shofar. Seemingly, the principle of shomei’a ke’oneh cannot apply to the mitzva of shofar, as it is performed with one’s body, and not one’s speech.

The Shulhan Arukh rules in accordance with Rambam (as well as Behag, Raavya, and Rosh); one should recite the blessings of “l-shmo’a kol shofar” and “Shehehiyanu,” the blessing over new or seasonal experiences, before blowing the shofar. (*Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Hayim 585:2*)

Rabbeinu Tam (cited by Rosh 4:10) disagrees. He maintains that one should recite the blessing “al teki’at shofar” – “on the blowing of the shofar” – because “asiyata hi gemar mitzvata” – “its performance is the conclusion of the mitzva.” Rabbi Aḥai Gaon (*She’iltot 171*) and Semag (*Semag, Positive Commandment 42*) also rule that one should recite “al teki’at shofar” before blowing the shofar. It seems at first glance that Rabbeinu Tam believes that the teki’a is the primary component of the mitzva. This understanding is questionable, however, given his explanation that “asiyata hi gemar mitzvata.” We might suggest that Rabbeinu Tam maintains that one recites blessings over the performance of a mitzva’s act (maase), rather than over the fulfillment of its aim (kiyum). Thus, even though the goal of the mitzva is hearing the blasts, the blessing is recited over the act of blowing them. (*Rambam, Hilkhhot Shofar 1:1, 3*)

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The Stolen Shofar

The Yerushalmi questions why one may not fulfill his obligation with a stolen lulav, but one may do so with a stolen shofar:

R. Yosa said: Regarding a lulav, it says, “And you shall take for yourself” (Lev. 23:40) – that which belongs to you, and not that from which it is prohibited to derive benefit. But here [regarding shofar, it says,] “It shall be a day of terua for you” [Num. 29:1] – in any way.

R. Lazar said: There, he fulfills the mitzva with [the object] itself; here, he fulfills the mitzva with its sound, and no prohibition exists to benefit from a sound. (Y. Sukka 3:1)

Rambam rules in accordance with R. Lazar: “There is a positive commandment to hear the sound of the shofar of Rosh HaShana...one who blows a stolen shofar has fulfilled his obligation, as the mitzva is fulfilled through the sound...and the sound cannot be stolen.” (*Rambam, Hilkhos Shofar 1:1, 3*)

Once again, it is clear that Rambam maintains that shemi’a is the dominant component of the mitzva. Raavad, commenting on Rambam (*Ibid.*, 1:3), adopts R. Yosa’s opinion: “Even if a sound could be stolen, the verse says, ‘It shall be a day of terua for you’ – in any way.” Raavad may be alluding to a fundamentally different approach to the entire mitzva of shofar, as we shall see shortly. Hagahot Asheri (4:14) cites the Ohr Zaru’a, who rules that a stolen shofar may not be used for the mitzva. Seemingly, he believes that the mitzva of shofar is no different than the mitzva of lulav; both mitzvot are fulfilled through an action performed with the object – in the case of the shofar, the teki’a.

Each approach, in truth, seems to fall short. Rambam, for example, does not explain why one must hear the sound of the shofar from a person who is obligated in the mitzva, the problem we noted above (*Rosh HaShana 29a*). Furthermore, the Gemara quotes R. Zeira as telling his friend, “Have in mind; sound the shofar for me” (28b). Some maintain that this Gemara must be understood according to those who maintain that commandments must be fulfilled with intent (mitzvot tzerikhot kavana); thus, the blower must also have intent to fulfill his obligation. (*Rosh 3:11*)

Others maintain, however, that the Gemara implies that one needs intent in order to fulfill another person’s obligation of shofar. (*See Ran’s discussion, 7b*) In fact, Rambam rules (*Hilkhos Shofar 2:4*) that both the person blowing the shofar and the person listening must have in mind to fulfill the mitzva, and the one blowing must have in mind to fulfill the obligation of the listener.

Why is this necessary if the mitzva is fulfilled merely by listening? Some suggest that R. Zeira merely reminded his friend to blow the shofar for the public properly, not merely “to play around.” He is not referring specifically to the intention to fulfill his own or another’s obligation.

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Some interpret Rambam's statements in this manner. In any case, Rambam's position remains difficult.

Still, those who focus upon the teki'a, such as Rabbi Aḥai, Semag, and Rabbeinu Tam, must explain why a deaf person (who is not also mute) is unable to fulfill the mitzva; after all, he is capable of blowing the shofar, even if he cannot hear it. Furthermore, they must also explain the Mishna's assertion that one who blows the shofar into a pit and hears the echo has not fulfilled his obligation. If the mitzva is fulfilled through the teki'a alone, then one should fulfill his obligation in that case as well. Finally, those who maintain this approach assume that the listener's fulfill their obligation through the principle of shomei'a ke'oneh. They must thus confront Rambam's question: How can the principle of shomei'a ke'oneh apply to a mitzva performed with one's body?

The Aḥaronim grapple with these questions and offer numerous solutions. Some attempt to adhere to the extreme positions, suggesting, for example, that although the mitzva may be the shemi'a, the hearing of the shofar, one must still hear a halakhically recognized kol shofar, which can only be produced by a person obligated in the mitzva of blowing a kosher shofar. The shemi'a is only valid if the blasts were blown properly. Alternatively, some suggest that although the mitzva is fulfilled through the teki'a, the blowing of the shofar, one must still produce a sound that may be heard. The teki'a is only valid if the blasts were heard properly. Maharam Alashkar (1466–1542), for example, explains that:

For those who state that there is a mitzva to blow...nevertheless, one must blow in a way that the sound reaches his ears, as we find by the recitation of the Shema and similar mitzvot, that although the mitzva is reading, it must be a reading that is audible. (*Responsa 10*)

Others suggest a more moderate approach, explaining that all must agree that both the teki'a and shemi'a are integral components of the mitzva of shofar. Rabbi Yosef ben Moshe Babad (1801–1874), author of the *Minḥat Hīnukh*, writes:

See what the later commentators have written regarding this mitzva, that both the hearing and the blowing are part of the mitzva, and one without the other is insufficient. For one who hears from someone who is not obligated, e.g., from women and the like, does not fulfill his obligation. Thus, the mitzva is not only hearing; one must also blow, and thus he can fulfill his obligation only via someone who is obligated. Similarly, blowing without hearing is not sufficient, as is explicit in Tractate Rosh HaShana: "One who blows into a pit..." (*Mitzvah 405*)

Accordingly, the Rishonim cited above disagree as to the primary aspect of the mitzva, not as to which is the only component of the mitzva.

Rabbi Yonatan of Lunel (*29b*) offers one of the most intriguing and innovative suggestions:

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It does not say, “And you shall blow the shofar,” as it says regarding lulav, “And you shall take...” [Lev. 23:40]; rather, [it says] “zikhron terua” [ibid., v. 24] and “yom terua” [Num. 29:1]. Therefore, if one hears the sound from his friend, it is a “yom terua” and it is a “zikhron terua.”

Apparently, Rabbi Yonatan of Lunel believes that the mitzva is neither to blow nor to hear the shofar. Rather, the mitzva is to create “a day of terua,” which is accomplished by a person obligated in the mitzva blowing a kosher shofar. This may also be the view of Raavad, cited above, who disqualifies a stolen shofar due to the verse, “It shall be a day of terua for you” (Num. 29:1).

Conclusion

Perhaps we can correlate the reasons offered for the mitzva of shofar with the differing perspectives regarding the nature of the mitzva. Those who maintain that the primary reason for the mitzva is the shofar’s role in the coronation of God or as an instrument of prayer may be inclined to focus more upon the blowing of the shofar and less upon hearing the shofar. It is the act of blowing that accomplishes the coronation or the prayer. Alternatively, those who view the sounding of the shofar as a call to repent may be more inclined to focus upon the “hearing” of the shofar. Rambam, for example, who explains that the shofar is a “wake-up call” to repent (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 3:4), also strongly asserts that the mitzva lies in the shemi’a, not the teki’a.

This may be supported by Rabbeinu Tam’s position regarding the berakha recited over eating in the sukka, as well as his position regarding women reciting a blessing over a mitzvat aseh shehazeman gerama, but this lies beyond the scope of our present discussion.

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מדרשת או"ת לינדנבאום
MIDRESHET LINDENBAUM



Rav Rafi Eis

“מצוות צריכות כוונה”

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ראש השנה דף כח עמוד א

שלחו ליה לאבוה דשמואל כפאו ואכל מצה (כח עמוד ב) דקא מנבח נבוחי

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ראש השנה דף כח עמוד ב

אמר ליה רבי זירא לשמעיה... (כט עמוד א) עד שיתכוין שומע ומשמיע (משנה)

פסקן How do you think we

שיטת הרמב"ם

רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה פרק ו

הלכה ג: אכל מצה בלא כונה כגון שאנסוהו גוים או לסטים לאכול יצא ידי חובתו, אכל כזית מצה והוא נכפה בעת שטותו ואחר כך נתרפא חייב לאכול אחר שנתרפא, לפי שאותה אכילה היתה בשעה שהיה פטור מכל המצוות.

רמב"ם הלכות שופר וסוכה ולולב פרק ב

הלכה ד: המתעסק בתקיעת שופר להתלמד לא יצא ידי חובתו וכן השומע מן המתעסק לא יצא, נתכוון שומע לצאת ידי חובתו ולא נתכוון התוקע להוציא או שנתכוון התוקע להוציא ולא נתכוון השומע לצאת לא יצא ידי חובתו, עד שיתכוין שומע ומשמיע.

הלכה ה: מי שתקע ונתכוון להוציא כל השומע תקיעתו ושומע השומע ונתכוון לצאת ידי חובתו אף על פי שאין התוקע מתכוין לזה פלוני ששמע תקיעתו ואינו יודעו יצא, שהרי נתכוון לכל מי שישמענו, לפיכך מי שהיה מהלך בדרך או יושב בתוך ביתו ושומע התקיעות משליח ציבור יצא אם נתכוון לצאת, שהרי שליח צבור מתכוין להוציא את הרבים ידי חובתו.



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רמב"ם הלכות קריאת שמע פרק ב

הלכה א: הקורא את שמע ולא כיון לבו בפסוק ראשון שהוא שמע ישראל לא יצא ידי חובתו והשאר אם לא כיון לבו יצא, אפי' היה קורא בתורה כדרכו או מגיה את הפרשיות האלו בעונת קריאה יצא והוא שכיון לבו בפסוק ראשון.

What is the problem in the רמב"ם?

כסף משנה הלכות שופר וסוכה ולולב פרק ב הלכה ד

והר"ן ז"ל כתב וז"ל... ולא פליגא דידיה אדידיה דס"ל דבתקיעת שופר כיון דחזינן דרבי זירא אמר לשמעיה איכוין ותקע לי נקטינן דצריך כוונה אבל בכפאוהו ואכל מצה כיון דלא חזינן בגמ' מאן דפליג עליה בהדיא לא דחינן לה דאע"ג דבתקיעת שופר לא יצא הכא יצא שכן נהנה כדאמרינן בעלמא המתעסק בחלבים ובעריות חייב שכן נהנה

קובץ שיעורים חלק ב סימן כג

(ו) והנה מצינו שני סוגי מצוות (א) שעשית המעשה ע"י האדם היא גוף המצוה כגון שופר לולב וכו' (ב) שעיקר המצוה היא תוצאות המעשה כגון פדיון שבויים פריעת בע"ח פריה ורביה וכו', והחילוק הזה נפ"מ לכמה דברים כגון למ"ד מצוות צריכות כונה והתקוע לשיר צריך לחזור ולתקוע ובפריעת בע"ח מצוה אם פרע שלא בכונת מצוה לא נאמר שצריך לחזור ולפרוע... וכה"ג גם באיסורין נמצא החילוק הזה היכא שהאיסור הוא שלא יעשה האדם המעשה אבל אם תיעשה המעשה מאליה אין בזה קפיידא כלל כגון במלאכת שבת וכדומה, ובזה דבר שאין מתכוין מותר דמעשה שנעשית בלא כונה אינה נחשבת על האדם אלא כאילו נעשית מאליה היא חשובה

How do the ר"ן and the (ר' אלחנן ווסרמן) fundamentally differ on מצות אינו צריכות כונה?

Putting the Topic Into Perspective

רבינו יונה על הרי"ף מסכת ברכות דף א עמוד א

....ומצות צריכות כוונה דאפי' מי שאמר שאינן צריכות כוונה מודה דלכתחלה צריכות ועוד שאפילו בלא זאת הכוונה צריך כוונת הלב לקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים במורא...

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Ms. Dena Freundlich

“Teshuva, Revelation, and Yom Kippur”

What is the essence of Yom Kippur? At first glance, the answer seems obvious. In terms of themes, goals, and purposes of the day, Yom Kippur seems to be the most transparent of all the holidays. After all, the entire day is spent in shul in prayer, “klapping al chet”, not eating or drinking or doing any of the other festive things that usually characterize Jewish holidays.

However, the answer is actually not that clear. There are several anomalies: in the halakhot, the practices, and the pesukim regarding Yom Kippur that seem to indicate that there are other critical elements and themes to the day as well, in addition to teshuva.

Jewish holidays generally have one or two mitzvot that are unique to that particular day and serve to characterize them. For example, Rosh Hashana has the mitzvah of shofar; Sukkot has the mitzvot of sitting in a sukka and of taking a lulav and etrog; Pesach has matza and the seder; Chanukah has lighting the menorah. And so on so forth.

What is the mitzva that most characterizes and is unique to Yom Kippur? Inui.

In fact, the phrase “ve’initem / te’anu et nafshoteichem” repeats FIVE times in the psukim which describe Yom Kippur – eating, wearing leather shoes, washing, anointing, and marital relations. Thus understanding inui should give us insight into what the essence of the day is all about.

This would seem to be entirely in consonance with saying that the singular theme of Yom Kippur is teshuva – the goal is to remove ourselves from physicality (be angel-like) and focus exclusively on our spiritual well-being and to create a serious, somber, introspective atmosphere.

However I, for one, generally find it more difficult to focus on my tefillot when my stomach is grumbling and begging for attention. I understand why perhaps a large festive meal would take away from the serious introspection of the day, so it makes sense that that is prohibited. But it almost seems that it would have been more conducive to focus intently on one’s spiritual well-being if one’s physical needs were taken care of at least minimally (i.e. if we could eat enough to be satisfied so that our physical selves wouldn’t be crying out to us all day).

Moreover, one might have thought that if the reason behind the five inuyim is to remove our focus from physicality, then we should not wear our nicest clothing on Yom Kippur. Yet according to Gemara Shabbat קיט, one is supposed to make sure to wear nice, clean clothing on Yom Kippur, and in fact the general requirement to wear our nicest clothing on Yom Tov is extrapolated from

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this requirement learned initially by the Gemara about Yom Kippur specifically! The fact that we are supposed to dress nicely, even though clothing is a very physical, material thing seems to indicate that perhaps there is something else behind the fasting of Yom Kippur.

In addition, many of the inuim overlap with mourning practices, such as not wearing leather shoes, refraining from marital relations, and not bathing. This seems to fit with a very serious and somber approach to Yom Kippur.

However, one would have thought that although Yamim tovim generally cancel aveilut, if someone chas v'shalom loses a loved one during the week prior to Yom Kippur it would seem that not only should aveilut be able to coincide with Yom Kippur, but it would even seem to be remarkably appropriate and to aid in the serious appraisal of one's own life and deeds. Yet, the Shulchan Arukh paskens in Yoreh De'ah שצט"ו (and this is the halakha we follow) (based on a machloket in Mishna in Moed Kattan 3:6 and the Gemara's ensuing discussion in Moed Kattan 19) that

ר"ה ויום כפורים חשובים כרגלים לבטל האבילות

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, just like all other Regalim, cancel aveilut!

Thus, Yom Kippur is characterized by the observance of the inuim, the sole mitzvah of the day, and it is repeated five times. This always seemed apropos to me – it is supposed to be a serious, somber day, devoid of physical aspects, focused exclusively on spirituality.

However, the fact that:

- a) being hungry makes many of us think more about physicality;
- b) we are supposed to wear nice clothing; and
- c) though externally, many of the inuim overlap with aveilut practices, aveilut is antithetical to Yom Kippur and is even cancelled by it seem to indicate that there must be something behind the inuim other than creating a serious, anti-physical, introspective atmosphere.

The other indication that there is more to Yom Kippur that “klapping al chet” is that examination of the sources reveals that not only is Yom Kippur not in consonance with mourning, but surprisingly, there actually seems to be an element of simcha present on Yom Kippur!

Firstly, the Mishna in Ta'anit 4:8 says:

”אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל: לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב וכיום כפורים”

This seems to indicate that not only is there an element of simcha on Yom Kippur, but that it is supposed to be one of the two happiest days of the year! This seems quite incongruous with the serious and austere day of repentance we usually think of.

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If someone needs to eat on Yom Kippur, such as a choleh, though there is a machloket about the issue, the Shulchan Arukh paskens in תריח: that he should say ya'aleh ve'yavo in bentching, and the Mishna Berura explains that the reason is

כיון דבהתרא אכל הוי ליה יום כפורים כמו לדין שאר יום טוב

In fact, there are even some poskim who maintain that the choleh should make kiddush and have lechem mishne, indicating that Yom Kippur is a yom tov with a mitzva of simcha like all other yamim tovim. According to this view, it is simply the requirement to fast that prevents the expression of the simcha in the ways with which we are familiar.

Furthermore, Yom Kippur can coincide with Shabbat! If the ninth of Av ever falls out on a Shabbat, our commemoration of Tisha B'Av is "nidche" – pushed off until Sunday, the tenth of Av. Yom Kippur in many ways seems similar to Tisha B'Av – they're the only two fast days that begin at night, and on which we cannot wear leather shoes, bathe, or anoint, etc. – yet Yom Kippur can be celebrated / commemorated on Shabbat and is not pushed off until Sunday, indicating that there is nothing contradictory between Yom Kippur and Shabbat, the day of oneg.

Simcha certainly does not seem in line with the serious, non-physical, somber mood with which we have always associated with Yom Kippur.

When we take into account all of the above factors – namely, that the primary mitzva of the day (fasting and the rest of the inuim), in some ways seems to make focusing on purely spiritual matters more difficult; that we are supposed to wear kesut nekiah (our nicest clothing), showing the goal of the day is not simply to remove us from all physicality; that though we fast, etc, Yom Kippur cancels mourning; that there are halakhic elements of simcha, evidenced by the Mishna in Ta'anit that says it is one of the two greatest yamim tovim of the year, that a choleh who must eat says "ya'ale ve'yavo" and maybe even kiddush and lechem mishne; and that it can coincide with Shabbat – make us think that perhaps there is more going on with Yom Kippur than just teshuva.

I certainly do not intend to minimize the centrality of teshuva to the day. It is unequivocally clear that that is a central focus. But the above factors beg us to look to see if there are others as well.

In order to investigate this issue, another pressing question begs to be asked:

Does Yom Kippur re-enact an historical event, and if so, which one? Virtually all Jewish holidays re-enact some historical moment of great consequence in Jewish history. The goal of re-creating that event is not simply to remember that it occurred once, but to re-experience it ourselves each year.

For example, on Pesach we re-live the Exodus – it is not enough to simply retell the story, but we actually re-live it by eating matza and maror and dipping and leaning and all the other physical manifestations that we do throughout the seder.

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On Sukkot, we re-live the desert experience by actually leaving our homes and dwelling in sukkot for the week.

On Yom Kippur, however, we do not seem to be re-creating any specific historical event. We spend the day in shul, fasting and praying. And as we mentioned, the primary mitzva of the day is inui – afflicting ourselves – not eating, drinking, washing, etc. which doesn't seem to re-enact anything.

Now one might say, if we were meant to re-create an event, the Torah would have spelled that out. However, Shavuot disproves that theory: nowhere does the Torah ever mention the fact that Shavuot has anything to do with Matan Torah, nor is there a single mitzva that dictates that on Shavuot we re-create the receiving of the Torah. (The Torah simply tells of Bikkurim and the Korban shtei halechem.)

However, Chazal noticed the far-too-coincidental fact that the date on which the Torah commands us to celebrate the holiday of Shavuot happens to be the date on which we received the Torah. And therefore it became a fundamental part of Shavuot that on it we re-experience the receiving of the Torah (for example, by practicing the custom of staying up all night learning, and decorating our homes and shuls with flowers like Har Sinai).

I believe the same thinking applies to Yom Kippur, though even more hidden and overlooked than Shavuot. Though the Torah never indicates that we are supposed to re-enact an event on Yom Kippur, the date on which the Torah commands us to observe Yom Kippur is far-too-coincidental for it to be merely a coincidence.

Though the Torah never explicitly states the date, if one calculates the chronology, as Rashi does, it emerges that Yud Tishrei, the date of Yom Kippur, was the very day on which Moshe came down with the second set of luchot.

To many, this notion is already familiar. However, we generally assume that the confluence of Yom Kippur and the second set of luchot is that God giving Moshe this second set signified that He had forgiven the Jewish people for Chet HaEgel. This is a very appropriate moment to remember on Yom Kippur as we beg God to forgive us for our sins. This is certainly true, but I posit that there is even more to it than that.

To fully understand, we have to first analyze what the giving of the second luchot was all about. Let's remember the events surrounding it: God comes down in a magnificent thunder and lightning display, and gives the luchot with the Aseret Hadibrot. A mere 40 days later, the people commit one of the most egregious sins of all time – Chet Ha'Egel, leading Moshe to smash the luchot.

God, understandably, is furious, and Moshe must plead for forgiveness on behalf of the people. Finally, God acquiesces and agrees to forgive the people and give them a second set of luchot. We often think of the giving of those second set of luchot simply as an addendum, or coda, to the first set. But an examination of the pesukim reveals that the second luchot were given amongst a

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revelation of their own, a revelation that rivaled that of the initial Matan Torah, and may even have surpassed it as being the most intense Divine revelation in the history of the world.

Look at the pesukim that describe the writing and giving of the second set of luchot. It is not related as one unified, uninterrupted narrative, but is instead completely interwoven and intertwined with another narrative/event – the revelation of the 13 Middot HaRachamim! And God divulging/disclosing to Moshe these 13 Attributes of Mercy was an unparalleled experience of Divine revelation.

At the original Matan Torah, God only revealed Himself amid thunder and lightning, and smoke and clouds. But during the revelation of the 13 Middot, God actually showed Himself to the greatest degree that a human being could possibly withstand. (See Shemot 33:19-23, 33:6 – ויעבר ה' על פני ויקרא... And God did not simply pass before Moshe, but as he passed He called out / shared and expressed the text of the 13 Middot.

At the original Matan Torah, God revealed Himself by sharing His laws, but during the revelation of the 13 Middot, He revealed His personality, so to speak! He was telling Moshe what His qualities are, what His personality is! What greater revelation could there possibly be?

In fact, it was not after the original Matan Torah or Moshe's initial 40 day-and-night stay in Shamayim that his face glowed, but only after this revelation of God's 13 Middot! It seems to have surpassed even the original Matan Torah! Why, then, is Matan Torah always touted as the greatest moment of revelation in history? Why do we always look to Matan Torah as the primary moment of revelation?

Because Matan Torah was the revelation to the entire nation; every man, woman, and child experienced God themselves, and that had never happened before or since. But it is precisely because that initial Matan Torah was to the entire nation, while the revelation of the 13 Middot was exclusively to Moshe, that the latter could be the more intense, because Moshe could handle more than the average person.

Thus, although Matan Torah is unmatched because it took place in front of the entire nation, the 13 Middot are unrivaled in terms of the quality – how much of Himself, so to speak, God allowed to be “seen”, and the depth of what God actually revealed about Himself.

We can now go back and answer the question, what event are we supposed to be re-enacting, and what is its significance? The answer is, the giving of the second luchot, because it was probably the greatest moment of revelation in history, when God showed Himself (as it were) and described His personality to Moshe. Thus, it would seem that the central theme of Yom Kippur is not teshuva, but revelation!

Once we are sensitized to the fact that revelation, imminence, closeness with God is the essence of Yom Kippur, we see it everywhere.

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מדרשת או"ת לינדנבאום
MIDRESHET LINDENBAUM

What was the highlight, the climax of Yom Kippur during the time of the Beit Hamikdash? That this was the one and only day of the year that the Kohen Gadol could enter the Kodesh Kodashim. The Kohen Gadol entering there is a re-enactment of Moshe, as representative of the nation, going up for the most intense encounter with God that is humanly possible! (This fits in very well with the opinion of Ramban that the Mishkan is a parallel to Har Sinai. The Kodesh Kodashim is where the aron and luchot were located, and the place from which God spoke to Moshe equals the top of Har Sinai.

Furthermore, a look at the pesukim that describe the Kohen Gadol's avodah on Yom Kippur reveal that they are introduced with "בזאת יבא אהרון אל הקדש" – the entire avodah ceremony is presented as the way to enable the Kohen Gadol to enter the Holy of Holies. Certainly striving for kaparah plays a central role in the avodah, but it is so clear from the pesukim that it is all within the framework of what the nation and the individual Kohen Gadol needs in order to be worthy of entering – that is the end goal, that is what the day is all about.

And now the other anomalous features discussed at the beginning of this shiur make sense, as well.

Certainly part of the five inu'im, which characterize the essence of the day, is to make us like angels focused only spiritual matters, as we have all been taught many times. But there is another idea embedded within them, as well.

Some of what of the mitzvot of Yom Kippur are aimed at is the idea that each of us as an individual is to supposed to play the role of the Kohen Gadol, and to feel each Yom Kippur as if we are preparing to enter the Kodesh Kodashim, to encounter God as Moshe did when he received the second set of luchot.

What is the most prominent of the five inu'im? The prohibition on eating and drinking. What was one of the miraculous aspects of Moshe's time in shamayim? "Lechem lo achal umayim lo shatah". Fasting is not just to show we are not focusing on our physical needs, it is our way of stepping into Moshe's shoes and re-enacting his encounter with the Divine.

What else do we do? No leather shoes – like Moshe at the burning bush – "shal na'alecha me'al raglecha". And the Gemara (Berachot 62b) derives from that pasuk a general prohibition against ever wearing shoes on the Temple Mount – shoes are inappropriate when in the presence of the Divine!

Additionally, marital relations are forbidden, just as in the case of Moshe, who separated from his wife in anticipation of Divine revelation at any moment. This has a parallel to before Matan Torah, when all Jews had to refrain from relations with their wives, demonstrating that we are re-creating a moment of revelation!

This is why we observe these practices even if perhaps they sometimes take away from our kavana, and why even though they seem so similar to minhagei aveilut, which are otherwise cancelled by

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Yom Kippur. In reality, these practices have nothing to do with aveilut, and are about something else entirely.

And this notion of re-creating the revelation is reflected in minhagim as well.

One of the unique aspects of the responsibilities of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur was to frequently change his clothing, since he could not enter the Kodesh Kodashim in his usual golden vestments, but rather, only in bigdei lavan. Nowadays, we have a minhag to wear white and remove all gold jewelry, because we are supposed to be re-enacting being the Kohen Gadol who is preparing to enter the Kodesh Kodashim to meet with God. And now, of course, it makes sense that certainly we should wear at the very least kesut nekiah: we are preparing to meet the Almighty!

And then there is simcha on Yom Kippur. Rav Soloveitchik develops through a complex halakhic analysis that true simcha is being “lifnei Hashem”. And what is amazing is that to test this theory, I checked a concordance, and almost every time the word “שמחה” appears, the phrase “lifnei HaShem” is right beside it! Since on Yom Kippur, one is especially “lifnei HaShem”, of course there is simcha. The expression of the simcha may not be as overt as on other holidays because encountering the Divine can be a terrifying prospect. Surely the Kohen Gadol must have been terrified – he had to stay up all night and spend a week preparing, etc. But ultimately, Yom Kippur is, as the mishna in Ta’anit (4:8) purports, one of the two greatest yamim tovim of the entire year.

And I believe that this is also one of the reasons why the 13 Middot play such a pivotal role in our tefillot of this season and of Yom Kippur in particular. We recite them at least 15 times throughout the Yom Kippur davening, and especially if you look through Ne’ilah, which is the last tefillah of the day, the climax, they’re on practically every page! This is because we are re-enacting that moment when God Himself came and revealed Himself and His Divine characteristics to Moshe.

Moreover, how do we conclude Yom Kippur? With our rousing seven-fold declaration, “HaShem Hu HaElokim!” followed by a shofar blast. What is one of the primary symbolisms of the shofar? Matan Torah and the revelation! Note how the entire section of Shofarot in Rosh Hashana Musaf begins – “אתה נגלית בען כבודך”, and speaks all about Matan Torah, and the pesukim from the Torah in that section are all about Matan Torah.

All of this raises two powerful questions:

(1) How can we say that Yom Kippur is really all about revelation rather than teshuva? Teshuva is so clearly the central theme and focus of Elul and Yom Kippur – we say Selichot, blow shofar to awaken us to repent, and we spend much of the Yom Kippur davening “klapping al chet”. How can we claim that teshuva is not really the focus?

(2) We don’t have a Beit HaMikdash or Kohen Gadol or Kodesh Kodashim anymore. We don’t even prophecy. So what does it mean to say that the essence of Yom Kippur is Divine revelation – it is no longer possible to achieve Divine revelation. So are we re-enacting it by fasting, and not wearing

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shoes, etc. simply as a way to remember that it once happened in the past? In other words, what is Yom Kippur supposed to mean for us?

The answer is that, of course, teshuva is the focus. But it is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. The true aspiration of the day is to connect with God in a personal moment of revelation, achieving the feeling of closeness, intimacy, and imminence embodied by revelation. Teshuva is the way to achieve that. In Judaism, we don't believe that revelation just comes miraculously without any prior preparation.

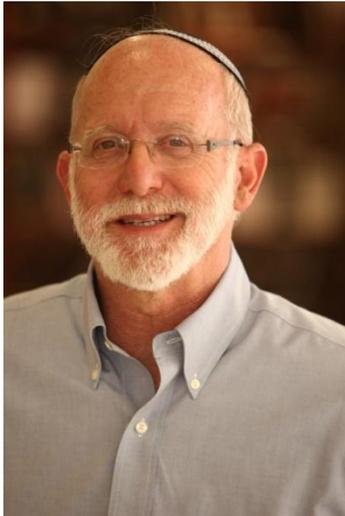
Rambam in Moreh Nevukhim (II:32) famously explains that prophecy is not a sudden miraculous moment of illumination that simply comes upon a person out of nowhere, nor is it arbitrarily bestowed upon a random individual by God like a gift. Rather, one has to perfect himself and work on himself, be introspective, think seriously and at length about God and one's relationship with Him, so that ultimately the natural result of all this thinking and introspecting and learning, is that one discovers that his or her entire relationship with God is on a deeper, more profound level.

We tend to mistakenly think of revelation as a moment when God comes and speaks to us. But it's any feeling of closeness, of sensing His presence, of even a split second of clarity or understanding. And that is something of which we are all capable. But it requires preparation, and that is why teshuva is the focus – because we cannot simply sit around on Yom Kippur and expect a bolt of lightning to hit. Certainly not in today's times of hester panim, but not even in the time of the Beit Hamikdash.

Rather, we must spend at least a month, Elul, and build up through reciting Selichot, and then Rosh Hashana, and then the Aseret Yemei Teshuva, thinking, introspecting, analyzing our relationship with friends and with God, and making ourselves ready for real change, even something small – one small element of one mitzva or interaction with others, or prayer to God – so that when we arrive at Yom Kippur and we re-enact that moment of intense revelation to Moshe by fasting and wearing white and reciting the 13 Middot Harachamim, we truly experience a more profound relationship with God, which is the essence of what revelation and Yom Kippur are all about.

* * * * *

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Rav Menachem Leibtag "Yom Tru'a"

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

So how do we know that this day is indeed a 'day of judgment'? And why should this day mark the beginning of a 'new year'? In the following shiur, we attempt to answer these fundamental questions from within Chumash itself.

INTRODUCTION

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

1) In Parshat Emor -

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

2) In Parshat Pinchas -

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

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

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

[Note that the Torah provides reasons for all of the other holidays, either explicitly: chag ha-matzot is to remember Yetziat Mitzrayim, shavuot for the grain harvest ('chag ha-katzir') and

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Sukkot for the fruit harvest ('chag ha-asif'); or implicitly - Yom Kippur for it marks the day on which Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai with the second Luchot & God's midot ha-rachamim" (based on the three groups of 40 days in the account of those events in Sefer Devarim chapter 9).]

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

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

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

A) the cycle of the agricultural year in Chumash, and

B) the biblical meaning of the phrases:

"yom tru'a" & "zicharon"

TISHREI - NOT THE 'JEWISH' NEW YEAR

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

First, quickly review the internal progression of each of these two units, noting how they both list the entire set of holidays - in an order that begins in the spring. Most likely, this 'spring start' is based on God's earlier command in Parshat Ha'Chodesh to count the months from the first month of spring - corresponding to our redemption from Egypt. [See Shmot 12:1-2; 13:2-3 & 23:15.]

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

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

According to R. Yehoshua who claims that the world was created in Nissan and not in Tishrei, could it be that there is nothing special about this day? Furthermore, even according to R.

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Eliezer, why should the anniversary of the Creation provoke a yearly 'Day of Judgment'? In any case, Chumash never states explicitly that the Creation began in Tishrei.]

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

THE END OF THE AGRICULTURAL YEAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE BEGINNING OF THE AGRICULTURAL YEAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A CRITICAL TIME

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

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

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

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

NATURE OR GOD?

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

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

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

THE OVERLAP

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

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

A SPECIAL MONTH

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

On the first day - a Yom tru'a

On the 10th day - Yom Ha-kippurim

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

On the 22nd day - an 'Atzeret'

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

Why are there so many holidays in the seventh month? For Sukkot, the Torah provides an explicit reason: it marks the end of the summer fruit harvest [chag ha-asif].

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However, no explicit reason is given for the celebration of any of the others holidays on these specific dates. Nonetheless, based on our above explanation concerning the biblical importance of the forthcoming rainy season, one could suggest that all of the Tishrei holidays relate in one manner or other to the yearly agricultural cycle that begins in the seventh month.

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

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

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

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

YOM TRU'A

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

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

YOM TRU'A IN THE BIBLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The great day of the Lord is approaching...

it is bitter, there a warrior shrieks.

That day shall be a day of wrath,

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

a day of calamity and desolation.....

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

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

(see Tzfanian 1:12-16).

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

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

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

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

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

ZICHRON TRU'A

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

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

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

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

We can apply this same analogy from war to agriculture. Just as the Torah commands us to sound a tru'a in anticipation of war - to remember that its outcome is in God's Hand; so too we

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are commanded to sound a tru'a on the first of Tishrei in anticipation of the forthcoming agricultural year - to remind ourselves that its outcome is in God's Hand as well.

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

SUMMARY

We have shown how the most basic aspects of Rosh Hashana, which at first appeared to be totally missing from Chumash, can be uncovered by undertaking a comprehensive study of the biblical importance of the seventh month. Obviously, our observance of Rosh Hashana is only complete when we include all of its laws that have been passed down through Torah she-ba'al peh (the Oral Law). However, we can enhance our appreciation of this holiday by studying its sources in Torah she-bichtav (the Written Law) as well.

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

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

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

* * * * *

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Mrs. Sally Mayer

“The Inspiration to Change”

The Torah states that the mitzvah of teshuva is “לא בשמים היא” – it is not in heaven or across the sea, far away and unreachable, but rather it is within our grasp and our ability to accomplish. The Torah makes it sound so easy! Let’s look together at three cases of teshuva in Tanakh to think practically about what inspires teshuva. What precipitates this return? And under what circumstances does Hashem embrace our teshuva, and welcome us back into His presence?

With the first sin in history comes the first opportunity for teshuva – though it turns out not to be a case of teshuva at all, but rather a missed opportunity. Adam and Chava eat from the *etz hada’at*, and when they hear Hashem walking in the garden, they hide from Him. Interestingly, Hashem does not confront them openly with their sin at the outset. Hashem asks Adam, “Ayeka” – “Where are you?” Hashem, of course, knew where they were: He was giving Adam the opportunity to admit his sin and take responsibility. Unfortunately, they do not – Adam answers the question as though Hashem had really been wondering: I heard You walking, and hid because I was embarrassed that I had no clothing. Hashem responds, “How do you know that? Did you eat from the forbidden tree?” The answer, we intuitively expect, should have been an ashamed and contrite: “Yes, I did.” However, Adam shifts responsibility to his wife, who shifts it to the snake. The result: they are all cursed, and the concept of death enters into the world.

In Bereshit Perek 4, we read about Kayin, Adam and Chava’s son, who experiences anger, frustration and jealousy over the fact that his offering was not accepted while his brother Hevel’s was. God tries to encourage Kayin: “Why are you dejected? You have the capacity to rule over your inclination” - your desire, in this case, to kill your brother. The Ramban writes here, “הורהו על ההתשובה”: Hashem taught Kayin about the possibility of redeeming himself, of ruling over his inclination. One could formulate the goal not as removing the evil inclination, but rather channeling that inclination – which can lead one to pursue so many divergent paths – towards a positive, moral purpose. Kayin, however, like his parents before him, not only did not heed G-d’s warning to mend his ways; even when confronted with the sin of killing his brother, he denies rather than accepts responsibility for his actions.

Many generations later, we find Yehuda, the brother who proposed selling Yosef into slavery. In Perek 38 of Bereshit, we read how Yehuda’s daughter-in-law Tamar, realizing that Yehuda will never fulfill his promise of allowing Shei’la to marry her, disguises herself as a prostitute to tempt

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Yehuda, who does not recognize her. Several months later, when Tamar's pregnancy from that encounter comes to light, Yehuda condemns Tamar to death for her adultery, as she was still legally tied to Shei'la. As she walks to her death, she sends Yehuda his ring, staff, and cord that she had taken as collateral from him, and says "haker na" – please recognize these items – whose are they? Yehuda hears the echo of the cruel "haker na" message he sent to his father – "Do you recognize this coat dripping with blood as your son Yosef's?" At this moment, Yehuda faced a terrible choice: publicly humiliate himself by admitting to this intimate encounter with his daughter-in-law, or allow Tamar – and his own unborn children - to die by fire. After being confronted with his personal effects, and recognizing his accountability for Tamar's desperation, Yehuda summons up the courage, and in two words redeems himself and ascends to the leadership of the family: "צדקה ממני" – she is more right than I. His recognition of his responsibility for the situation, combined with his strength of character and willingness to be humbled, inspired his successful teshuva.

Later in Bereshit, when Yosef's brothers encounter the Egyptian viceroy's hostility and false accusation, they whisper to each other, "אבל אשמים אנהנו" – we are guilty, for we did not listen to the cries of our brother. What inspired their feelings of teshuva? It seems that they did not feel remorse after the sale, nor after they see their father's suffering when he concludes that Yosef has been killed. They feel remorse when they experience *yisurin*: difficulties and suffering. While they did not know for sure that this was a punishment from God, as they experienced this persecution, they began to question, why is this happening? Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, זצ"ל, speaks of this reaction to suffering in his beautiful and inspiring article, קול דודי דופק: He speaks of how one can never understand why bad things happen to good people, and that we ought not to try. However, if one does unfortunately suffer, he or she must take the opportunity to return to Hashem, to do *teshuva*.

Our final example of teshuva is David HaMelekh, descendant of Yehuda and Tamar. In Shmuel Bet 11-12, we read of David's seeing, desiring, and taking Batsheva while her husband is away at battle. Upon discovering that she is pregnant, David invites her husband Uria home from the battlefield, in the hopes that he will go home to his wife and thus assume that the baby is his own. Uria's refusal to go home to be with his wife while *Am Yisrael* is in danger on the battlefield is an ironic condemnation of David's sin. David then orchestrates Uria's death in battle and takes Batsheva as his wife after she mourns her husband.

It is striking how similar this situation is to Yehuda's – a woman who was connected to another man (Batsheva to Uria and Tamar to Shei'la), a pregnancy, and a death sentence for an innocent person – only Yehuda stops before carrying out the execution, and David unfortunately does not. Natan Hanavi goes to David and tells him a story about a rich man who takes a poor man's sheep to feed to his guest instead of taking one from his own sizable flock. David pronounces that this man should be killed. Natan Hanavi responds to David – You are that man, and therefore you will suffer punishment: the sword will never leave your family, and another man will take your wives openly: while you were able to sin secretly using the power of the king, your punishment will be public humiliation.

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After hearing this, David acknowledges his guilt: “chatati laHashem.” This is the formulation we were hoping for – no excuses, but simply: “I take responsibility.” Natan responds that Hashem accepts the teshuva, at least partially, for he will not die. But the other punishments stand. One wonders – did Natan hope that David would have figured out the story before he explained it? And had he done so, would his teshuva have been even more effective?

We have now three models: the teshuva of Yehuda, which is the ideal, since he is lucky enough to be offered the opportunity to admit his sin without suffering or punishment, and who has the courage and character to seize the chance; the model of the brothers, who, as a result of their suffering, look at themselves and how they can mend their ways; and finally, David, who admits his sin only after hearing his punishment, but yet that teshuva is meaningful and accepted as well.

Rav Soloveitchik writes in Halakhic Man that “Repentance, according to the halakhic view, is an act of creation – self-creation. The severing of one’s psychic identity with one’s previous “I,” and the creation of a new “I,” possessor of a new consciousness, a new heart and spirit, different desires, longings, goals – this is the meaning of that repentance compounded of regret over the past and resolve for the future.” May we all find within ourselves the creative power to transform ourselves this year with sincere teshuva and lasting change.

* * * * *



Rav Jonathan Mishkin

“The Themes of Rosh Hashana”

It should be stated right off the bat that nearly every idea associated with the holiday of Rosh Hashana is based on tradition and the writings of the sages. The Torah itself, while using creation as the introduction of God to the world, does not give a date for the events described in the first two chapters of Genesis.

Other major historical periods such as the Exodus from Egyptian slavery and the revelation at Sinai - episodes which were destined to become milestones in the history of the nation of Israel, are indeed commemorated on days when the Torah says they took place. Interestingly, on our holiday, there is almost no emphasis placed on the fact that the world has aged another year since last Rosh Hashana. That doesn’t seem to be all that important - calculating the number of years since creation is an activity of neither the Bible nor the Talmud. What is far more significant is the relationship between God and the world he created.

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Rosh Hashana is referred to as יום הדין Judgment Day, by the Talmud. The Mishna, when describing this day, claims that "On Rosh Hashana all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him (God) like flocks of sheep, as it is said (Psalms 33:15) "He who fashions the hearts of them all, Who understands all their doings" (Mishna Rosh Hashana 1:2). Judaism views Rosh Hashana as a universal holiday rather than a national one. It does not commemorate an event in the history of Israel, but in the history of the world.

It makes sense that this Judgment Day, relating as it does to all of humanity, should take place on the anniversary of the creation of the world. Commemoration of creation represents a fresh start for all, a turning point between last year and next year. This is when God determines what the world will look like next year and who will be its inhabitants, just as He did at the beginning of the first year.

It is unclear why the Rabbis settled on the first of the month of תשרי as the date of creation, and hence as the day of renewal for the entire planet. As mentioned, the Torah does not refer to this holiday as Rosh Hashana - New Year's, as the anniversary of creation, or even as Judgment Day. The Torah merely calls this day a Day of Remembrance. We might offer a theory based on Rosh Hashana's association with Yom Kippur, which falls on the 10th of Tishrei. The Torah *does* explain the nature of Yom Kippur, calling it a Day of Atonement.

It would seem that Rosh Hashana is considered as a form of introduction to Yom Kippur: since Yom Kippur represents an opportunity for repentance for sins committed during the previous year, Rosh Hashana is observed as a time to examine the behaviour of that year and to judge whether in fact atonement is in order.

One interesting point of symbolism contrasts the state of the moon on Rosh Hashana and other Jewish holidays. Rosh Hashana is the only holiday celebrated on the first of the month. Because Jewish months follow the lunar cycle, the moon is a new one when Rosh Hashana is observed. Pesach and Sukkot both start on the 15th of their respective months, when the moon is full, and Shavuot on the 6th with a half moon.

The nation of Israel has often been compared to the moon, experiencing periods of growth and decline during its history. The happiest times of nationhood are celebrated when the moon is full - the Jewish people are content and grateful to God. On Rosh Hashana, when the moon can barely be seen, its symbolic absence highlights the universal nature of the day (Rosh Hashana is in fact nicknamed כִּסָּה - covered, because the moon is hidden; see Kiddush for Rosh Hashana day). On this day, God identifies with the whole world, and not only the nation of Israel.

The Amida prayer on Mussaf of Rosh Hashana includes three blessings unique to this service. Each of the sections focuses on a separate theme, and is built around ten verses from the Bible supporting that theme: 3 from the Torah, 3 from Psalms, 3 from the Prophets and a final one from the Torah. I will now offer a few ideas about this most dramatic of the Rosh HaShanah services.

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מדרשת או"ת לינדנבאום
MIDRESHET LINDENBAUM

The *עלינו* prayer is the most prominent feature of the *מוסף* service of Rosh Hashana, its first paragraph claiming that the sole distinction between Jews and non-Jews is that the Jews have accepted God as Master of the universe, while other nations have not. We are different because we bow to God and acknowledge that "it is He who stretched forth the heavens and founded the earth."

What is critical for the role this text plays in the Rosh Hashana service is the second paragraph. Here, *Aleinu* shifts gears and tenses: whereas the first paragraph noted that the nations of the world do not now recognize the Jewish God as King of the world, paragraph two expresses the hope that in the future, the entire world will "bend the knee and prostrate themselves before you."

Again, note that this prayer does not present a desire for mass conversion to Judaism, which would involve a lifestyle based on law and tradition. Recognition of God and removal of false gods from the world is all it asks.

It should be easy to see why *Aleinu* plays a central role in the *Mussaf* service of Rosh Hashana. A prerequisite to accepting Rosh Hashana as a day of judgment is recognizing the existence and power of the Judge. *מלכות* is hence the first theme in the *Amida*: the coronation of God. All of the Biblical verses included in this section use the term King in one form or another, all emphasize the fact that God is not just King of the Jews, but King of the world. After all, since Rosh HaShanah is hailed as Judgment Day for all people, then the need to accept God as King should be, according to Judaism, incumbent on all people. The first paragraph of *Aleinu* proclaims God as creator of the world; on the anniversary of creation it is hoped that all creatures join in that proclamation.

Rosh Hashana is a Jewish holiday. We do not expect non-Jews to join services in the synagogue or participate in the familiar Jewish New Year customs. But the hope on Rosh Hashana seems to be for the message of the holiday at some point to become universally accepted. Reading *Aleinu* actually provides a chance to compare the nature of Rosh Hashana to January 1st, a holiday which has succeeded in winning world-wide stature.

In contrast to Rosh Hashana, January 1st does not celebrate God as the King of the universe, but rather places man at its center. Popular culture winds down the old year by listing man's accomplishments and achievements; a "man of the year" is crowned; the best books, movies and human quotes are reviewed. It almost seems that the discomfort in the passing of time is eased by thoughts that man is forever moving upwards.

On the other hand, the Jewish New Year talks about the smallness of man in God's world and how much work we have yet to do to become better people. In fairness, New Year's resolutions are made by people hoping for a brighter year; but the focus often remains the improvement of the individual in his own little world rather than as part of the world of God.

While one of the themes of Rosh Hashana is the coronation of God, it is never really assumed that prior to Rosh Hashana, God is *not* King of the universe. Rosh Hashana does not alter the state of God, it merely affirms it. Man on the other hand, quite obviously does change, he succeeds and fails.

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Judgment Day would be a waste of time if man's behaviour were uniform and unchanging. The evaluation on New Year's therefore is more accurately an examination of how the God-man relationship has developed based on man's performance over the past year.

Statements in the זכרונות section of מוסף express the Jew's willingness to face that evaluation of himself by admitting from the start that nothing he has done can be hidden from God. "There is no forgetting before thy throne of glory" is an admission that the Jew is ready to confess his sins, admit his guilt - to be judged.

In a sense, the theme of remembrance is more reflective of Rosh Hashana as the start of the year than the theme of coronation. As the first of the Kingship verses states, "The Lord shall be King forever and ever" - past, present and future. But as a turning point between last year and the coming year, Rosh HaShanah is the time for reflecting on the deeds that were done. By stating that God knows and remembers every detail of the past year, we try not to cheat ourselves into forgetting or ignoring actions which require repentance and improvement.

The verses of remembrance actually seem to contain two contrasting ideas. Verses like "God heard their moaning; God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exodus 2:24) indicate a shift from the earlier theme that recognized that God takes note of all our actions. Now we call on God to remember something else - promises He made to the Patriarchs specifically and to the nation in general. These vows promise abundance and salvation.

Why are we invoking these ideas at this point in the service? It's almost as if we're saying: despite the fact that you, God, are judging each individual on his or her merits, recognize also that You have promised to take care of us in your assurances to the nation. On the one hand, we know we must be judged for our deeds and say we are prepared to meet our sentence; but on the other hand we are saying that we want God to overlook our individual actions and save us, spare us because of promises made to the nation of Israel generations ago.

What we see here is an example of appealing to God's sense of compassion, generally called מדת הרחמים The Attribute of Mercy. Jewish tradition has quite often juxtaposed appeals for mercy with recognition of human failure; it is never assumed that humanity could withstand the sentencing it deserves for its behaviour. The contents of the Remembrance section of the Musaf service thus shift from recognizing that God remembers every deed of man, to an appeal to God to suppress or even forget that knowledge, and allow us another year of life. The sort of remembering that saves us is naturally the one that is emphasized in the section and which forms the conclusion of the blessing: ברוך אתה ה' זוכר הברית.

Many reasons have been offered for the purpose of blowing the Shofar on this holiday - I will mention two. The verses comprising the Biblical quotations in the שופרות section of the Musaf service evoke a powerful idea: trumpet music is played to accompany the coronation of God as King. This theme is intentionally fitted to match the philosophy of the day: the birthday of the world is the appropriate time for reaffirming the reign of God in the world.

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The Shofarot verses also contain the idea that in the future, when the whole world recognizes the existence of God, the Shofar will be sounded to announce His crowning. On Rosh Hashana we sound the Shofar as a sign of our belief and as a hope that the future will see all of humanity believing.

Besides the Shofar, the strongest impression that most people have of the rituals of Rosh Hashana is that of sitting for hours in the synagogue. More time is spent praying on Rosh Hashana than on any other holiday, besides Yom Kippur.

We have seen some of the ideas associated with this holiday and it should be obvious by now that traditional Judaism sees these days as Days of Awe. Many Jews believe that God is to decide their future during this season - the intent Jew may tremble with emotion at the meaning of Rosh Hashana. Numbers 10:1-10 commands the construction of silver trumpets and lists several occasions when the Shofar might be sounded. What concerns is is this statement:

"When you are at war in your land against an aggressor who attacks you, you shall sound short blasts on the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the Lord your God and be delivered from your enemies."

The Shofar is used as a cry of emergency. Much like prayer itself, the Shofar serves to alert God to our needs. Of course, we have already said that God knows all, and certainly he knows that we all want life and a pleasant year ahead. Human prayers do not necessarily serve to relate information to God of which He was previously ignorant. Rather, the process of prayer serves as a declaration of the individual that he recognizes God and God's ability to help.

Blowing the Shofar thus incorporates many of the themes mentioned above: blowing the Shofar serves to announce the coronation of God; this in turn alerts us to the power God has over the universe, encouraging us to pray for salvation. Accompanying the prayers is the sense that deliverance may be effected by repentance. In fact, the passage in Numbers 10 contains a brief summary of these ideas. Blow the Shofar, it says and "you will be remembered before the Lord".

The final phrase, "I am the Lord your God", is a necessary pre-requisite for being answered by God - the individual must recognize that God is King before crying to Him for life. All three sections of the Musaf service - Coronation, Remembrance, Shofarot are represented.

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Rav Yoni Rosensweig *“Significant Selichot”*

Every year the High Holy Days come around, and every year we find that our access to the content of those days is surrounded by a high wall, namely: Selichot. For some, Selichot remains an insurmountable obstacle. They are different from Kinot. On Tisha B'av the Kinot in many shuls are explained by the Rabbi, because there is so much free time during the day anyway, and no one is rushing anywhere. Selichot, on the other hand, cannot be paused and played every few minutes, with intervening explanations between each Selicha, for several reasons, amongst them the fact that most Selichot Minyanim are on a schedule – they have to "move things along".

If Selichot were simply the lead-up to Rosh Hashana that would be bearable. However, Selichot are also said during the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and above all that they are an integral part of the Yom Kippur davening, appearing in Maariv and taking up a significant part of Neila. Can we really afford to not connect to Selichot? Can we really afford to let that part of the davening pass us by? If the answer is that there's no choice, and we are doomed to such a fate, then that is a very sad conclusion indeed. However, I believe there are ways to overcome this sizeable obstacle.

First of all, if you have the time and the patience, get a Selichot book with explanations. The best thing would be to spend half an hour going through the Selichot of that day before you say them with the minyan. That way, you'll come to the minyan with the ability to understand the words and the concepts, and even if you don't understand every word as you're reading it, you'll have the gist of it fresh in your mind. It's a good idea to write some notes on the side, reminding you of what's going on.

Secondly, it is important to take your time. Don't rush it. If reading the text slower and with more intent so that you can understand will result in your inability to finish the entire Selicha – so be it. When the chazzan reaches the end of it and everyone says "El Male Rachamim" you simply stop wherever you got to and join in with the community to say the 13 Attributes of mercy with everyone. It is more important to say less with meaning, then to say more without meaning.

Thirdly, remember that you are davening with a community. You are not alone, and that – in and of itself – holds significance. True, you don't understand every word you're saying, but besides the words there are other things going on. There's a context. There's an atmosphere. There's a backdrop to this recitation, and it's important to recognize it for what it is. Selichot is not only

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about saying the Selichot, but also about coming together as a community, which is why there's a Kaddish at the beginning and the end of the Selichot. You can't really say Selichot alone. And so, if you're not understanding the words, do your best, and meanwhile allow yourself to be swept up by the moment, to feel the community raise you up.

Lastly, this Selichot are about you and Hashem. And seriously, He can see into your heart, regardless of anything else. And I personally feel that there's something about medieval-era Hebrew that gives the Selichot a special twist, and touches the heart in a unique way. And perhaps just reciting will move something inside of you, and bring you closer to Hashem. That, after all, is the point of it all: of the Shofar, of the confession, of the Teshuva, of the davenings, of the Selichot – it all leads to one main objective: reconnecting with our Maker.

At the end of the day, that's all we really want. And that's all He really wants. So pick up your Selichot, learn them, find a minyan you like, concentrate, engage – and let it happen.

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כתיבה וחתימה טובה

