

May we fulfill this day as Halacha demands; may we realize and rejoice in truth—that God is our God; and may we remain on the path where Torah is our primary focus and enjoyment



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Houston	7:24	Phoenix	6:34
Jerusalem	6:43	Pittsburgh	7:32
Johannesburg	5:38	Seattle	7:30
Los Angeles	6:59	Sydney	5:21
London	7:26	Tokyo	5:49
Miami	7:21	Toronto	7:33
Montreal	7:11	Washington DC	7:18

Weekly Parsha

Netzavim Vayelech

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Hashem's Covenant is with All Generations

And not with you alone do I enter into this covenant and this curse. Rather with those who are

(continued on next page)

High Holidays

Rosh Hashanna Mindset of the Musaf

RABBI DR. DARREL GINSBERG

"Our God and God of our fathers, reign over the entire world in your glory..."

The essential theme that defines Rosh Hashana is the concept of malchus Hashem, God's kingship over the world. Both – the different tefilos as well as the blowing of the shofar – serve to bring a person to realize and internalize God's role as Melech Elyon, a concept that is fundamental to Rosh Hashana. Therefore, it would naturally seem imperative to review these tefilos (beyond translating them) and enter into the appropriate mindset prior to engaging in this potentially transformative experience. In doing so, a person would find many instances where the idea is highlighted in the Torah She'be'al Peh, the Oral Law. One relevant example is found in an intriguing piece in the Talmud.

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High Holidays



Blessings & Shofar

What is this Holiday all About?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Many factors lead to false conclusions and personal loss. Mitzvos that require – what we feel is extra "effort" – or are associated with "discomfort" are often viewed as offering little benefit and are rushed through, forfeiting all possible gain. Prayers are much longer on Rosh Hashanna, and shofar blasts are bereft of meaning to many: they're just sounds, in themselves offering no ideas. So "What's the purpose of hearing shofar?" many question quietly to themselves. "What is shofar doing for me?" On the other hand, God's universe astonishes all who study it. From the molecular world, zoology and geology, to physics and

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Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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here with us standing today before Hashem our G-d and those who are not here with us today. (Devarim 29:14-15)

Moshe's final address to the people comes to its conclusion. He tells the nation that they are entering into a covenant with Hashem to observe His Torah. Moshe explains that this covenant does not bind merely the current generation. It will establish a relationship that will extend throughout history. Future generation of Bnai Yisrael will be obligated to observe the commandments as a result of this commitment. These future generations will be subject also to the blessings and curses that accompany the covenant. An obvious question emerges. How could the people Moshe addressed obligate generations that did not exist? Why should those not yet born be obligated to be faithful to a bargain into which they had not personally entered?

This covenant was not made between Hashem and individuals. It was an agreement entered into by Hashem and the nation of Bnai Yisrael. The nation is not just those living in a single generation. The nation consists of all Jews – those who lived in the past and those who will live in the future. The present generation is only the current membership of Bnai Yisrael.

When Moshe's generation entered into the covenant they acted on behalf of the nation of Bnai Yisrael. Therefore, their commitment was binding upon all members of the nation in all future generations. This includes those present that day and those not yet born.

We are not Responsible for Hidden Sins

The hidden things are the concern of Hashem your G-d. Regarding the revealed things, it is ours and our children's responsibility forever to observe the words of this Torah. (Devarim 29:28)



The commentaries dispute the meaning of this enigmatic pasuk. Rashi explains that the nation was to accept communal responsibility for observance of the Torah. This weighty obligation is not easily fulfilled. Some sins are performed in the open. These can be addressed by the community. However, many of the obligations of the Torah are performed in the privacy of one's home or in the heart. How can the community bare responsibility for these private areas of observance? Rashi understands the pasuk to respond to this issue. The community is obligated to encourage Torah practice in all of its observable forms. This obligation does not extend to those obser-

vances that are hidden from the community. In these areas, the community is not duty-bound to ensure observance. This is Hashem's domain. He will deal with the private practices and thoughts of the human being.[1]

Nachmanides offers an alternative interpretation of the pasuk. Not all of our sins are revealed to us. Sometimes we commit a sin unknowingly. The pasuk explains that we are not responsible for these errors. Instead, we must apply our full attention to repenting from those iniquities of which we are aware.[2]

Nachmanides comments can perhaps be understood on a deeper level. Repen-

tance assumes that we have the ability to control our actions. This is not always the case. Sometimes we are confronted with a behavior we are truly incapable of controlling or altering. In general, these behaviors stem from motivations we do not fully understand. Because these motivations are hidden, they are impossible to uproot. We find ourselves powerless to correct our behavior. Possibly, Nachmanides is discussing this issue. These sins are referred to as hidden. This is because the observable sinful behavior is only the outward expression of the hidden aspects of our personality. We are not held responsible for these sins that we cannot control.[3]

(continued on next page)

(Netzavim/Vayelech continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

When all of Israel comes to appear before Hashem you G-d, in the place that He will choose, read this Torah before all of Israel, in their ears. (Devarim 31:11)

This pasuk discusses the mitzvah of HaKhel. This mitzvah is observed during the Chag of Succot in the year following the Sabbatical year. On this date, the entire nation assembles in the courtyard of the Temple. The king reads, to the nation, portions of Sefer Devarim.[4]

On which day of Succot is the mitzvah performed? The Talmud explains that the reading takes place on the first day of Chol HaMoed.[5] This is not specifically mentioned in the Torah. Why this day? Rashi explains that the mitzvah should be performed as early as possible during Succot. However, it is impossible to observe the mitzvah on the first day. Therefore, the observance is postponed until Chol HaMoed.

Why can the commandment not be observed on the first day of Succot? Rashi explains that the answer lies in understanding the manner in which the mitzvah is performed. The king ascends onto an elevated platform. He reads to the nation from this elevated place. This platform cannot be assembled before Yom Tov. The platform would occupy needed space during the first day. The nation comes to the Temple to offer sacrifices on the first day. Every inch of the courtyard is required to accommodate the crowd. The laws of Yom Tov prohibit the construction of this platform on the first day of Succot. Therefore, the platform cannot be assembled until Chol HaMoed.[6]

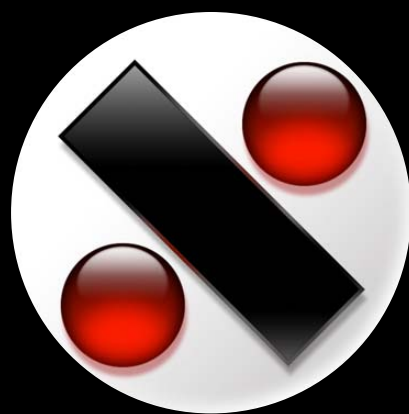
Tosefot object to Rashi's explanation. They agree that the mitzvah is performed on the first day of Chol HaMoed. They also agree that the Torah is ideally read from this elevated platform. However, they argue that the reason for the assignment of the mitzvah to the first day of Chol HaMoed is not related to the requirement of reading from an elevated platform. It is a consequence of other considerations. Their reasoning is that although a platform is appropriate, the mitzvah is still fulfilled without this element. If the best time to perform the commandment were the first day of Succot, then the mitzvah would be observed at that time. The platform would be forgone in order to perform the mitzvah at the proper time![7]

two possible explanations. The first is that this is one of the roles of the king. The king is charged with the duty of leading the nation according to the mitzvot of the Torah. This requires that he teach its laws to Bnai Yisrael and encourage observance. The mitzvah of HaKhel provides the king with the opportunity to discharge this duty.

There is a second possibility. This mitzvah is not one of the duties of the king. Then why is the king chosen to read to the nation? This glorifies the Torah. The king is the highest authority and the most respected individual in the nation. Through his personal involvement in the mitzvah, the importance of Torah observance is communicated.

Rashi apparently maintains that the king's involvement is required to honor the Torah. This implies that the king should appear and participate in his glory. The platform elevates the king above the people. It emphasizes the importance of the king. Through honoring the monarch the Torah is glorified. Rashi may agree with Tosafot that this platform is not absolutely essential for fulfillment of the mitzvah. However, Rashi would argue that the mitzvah cannot possibly be formulated in manner that is antithetical to its objectives. Therefore, because the mitzvah is designed to glorify the Torah, the appropriate time for its observance must correspond with this objective. This time is the first day of Chol HaMoed.

Tosefot apparently argue that this reading is one of the duties of the king. The king can perform this duty without the platform. Therefore, inability to erect the platform should not dictate postponement of the mitzvah. ■



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It is possible that the explanation of this dispute lies in understanding the role of the king in this mitzvah. Why does specifically the king read the Torah to the nation? There are

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 29:28.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban/Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 29:28.

[3] Rav Yisroel Chait, Editor's notes.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Chagigah 3:1-3.

[5] Mesechet Sotah 41a.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Sotah 41b.

[7] Tosefot, Mesechet Sotah 41a.

(Mindset of Musaf continued from page 1)

High Holidays

Prior to debating and discussing the specific verses to be included in the musaf of Rosh Hashana, the Mishna (Rosh Hashana 32a) takes up the following:

“There should be recited not less than ten kingship verses, ten remembrance verses, and ten shofar verses.”

The Talmud proceeds to expand on this, offering the following opinion (due to space limitations, only the first of the subsequent three opinions will be analyzed):

“To what do these ten kingship verses correspond? — R. Levi said, To the ten praises that David uttered in the book of Psalms. But there are a large number of praises there? — It means, those among which occurs, Praise him with the blowing of the shofar.”

The chapter of Tehilim referred to by the Talmud is the final one of the sefer, Chapter 150. The dominant theme of this chapter is the praising of God through musical instruments (3-5):

“...Praise Him with the blast of the horn (shofar); praise Him with the psaltery and harp, Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and the pipe, Praise Him with the loud-sounding cymbals; praise Him with the clanging cymbals.”

Obviously, the Talmud is using the reference to the use of the shofar in this context as the tie-in to the ten verses found in each of the three core Rosh Hashana blessings malchiyos (God's omnipotence), zichronos (God's omniscience) and shofros. Yet, it is but one of the many different instruments listed by Dovid Hamelech in this chapter. Are we to believe the reference to shofar alone is what makes this mention applicable? A more fundamental question can be directed towards the composition of this final chapter. It is interesting that the composer of such incredible and brilliant praises and gratitudes to God chose to end Tehillim with a focus on giving shevach (praise) through musical instruments. One would think the culmination of the sefer would be replete with the greatest of all praises and thankfulness that could be conjured by man. Instead, Dovid Hamelech writes about horns and cymbals and how they are used to praise God. Why choose to end the sefer in such a seemingly anticlimactic manner?

It is also quite interesting that the Talmud devotes such effort to understanding what the overall quantity of verses refers to. After all, the essential concepts of Rosh Hashana would seem to emerge from the recitation and comprehension of the verses themselves. The fact that there happen to be ten should be of little import. In fact, strictly speaking, if

someone merely recited one verse, he would still fulfill his obligation. Why all this attention?

It could be the Talmud is introducing a theme that is part of the character of the malchiyos, zichronos and shofros. Knowledge of this theme serves as a prerequisite of sorts, a necessary component in order to successfully engage in this tefila. Of course, the next question is what exactly is this theme?

As mentioned above, Dovid Hamelech saved the last chapter of Tehillim for praising God through musical instruments, rather than composing ideas and thoughts. What does this teach us? It could be that while Dovid Hamelech expressed so many important ideas throughout Tehillim, the final culmination of the effort had to reflect one crucial yesod — the inherent limitation in mankind's ability to praise God. Man can spend day and night, even his entire life, composing and offering shevach to God; but at the end of the day, his limitation as a created being, and his inability to truly understand God, creates an inherent defect in offering complete and appropriate praise to God. Therefore, at the end of Tehilim, the culmination of all the praise to God is described through musical instruments. This does not mean that playing the instrument is the shevach in and of itself. Rather, Dovid Hamelech is telling us that the human mind can only go so far in formulating praise of God. We can only verbalize so much

and we turn to the instrument to demonstrate this limitation. The use of the instrument, the sound it makes, reflects this very concept. This ties in to the concept of the shofar. It is not that the shofar is some sort of magical horn. Instead, it reflects the limitation in our ability to praise and thank God, the sound that emanates from the shofar encompassing the idea that we require extensions of our natural selves to accomplish the task. This theme, the inability of man to ever adequately praise God, is a necessary part of the process of tefila. And it would therefore seem to be a fundamental prerequisite in the comprehension of malchus Hashem, God's kingship.

This concept takes a pivotal role in the structure of tefila on Rosh Hashana precisely due to the unique nature of the musaf. The musaf on Rosh Hashana for the individual involves a tefila unlike any other throughout the year. Its structure, its content and its overall themes are exclusive to this day. Engaging in such a tefila is a tremendous opportunity for a person. At the same time, it can be dangerous, offering that same person a sense confidence in his ability to completely praise God, and truly understand God's kingship. The Talmud is guiding us to a critical thought process necessary to avoid this potential over-confidence, clearing potential obstacles in our declaration of God as the Melech Elyon — the Supreme King. ■

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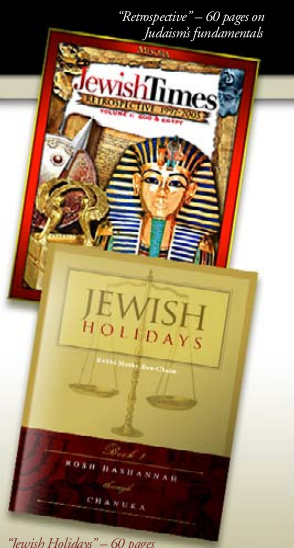
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astronomy...immense wisdom and intelligent systems abound in every corner. So how can this same Creator who created Torah, not have used His same Intellect in forming our mitzvos? The answer, of course, is that the Torah too reflects God's wisdom...but only when studied, just like all sciences. And Torah is even more abstract. Therefore, prior to Rosh Hashanna, it is essential to our appreciation of this day that we become familiar with the primary Talmudic discussions addressing the mitzvos. Rushing through the blessings and hearing shofar without understanding their purposes would be a shameful loss, while we can in fact gain much from this unique and elevated High Holiday.

Let's approach our new study of Rosh Hashanna mitzvos with a clean slate, forgetting all preconceived notions...and both hear and "listen" to what the Talmudic Rabbis discussed.

The Mitzvos & the Questions

The two primary mitzvos are 1) hearing (not blowing) the shofar blasts, and 2) reciting the blessings.

Unlike other holidays, the blessings are unique, requiring numerous supporting verses from Torah, Prophets and Writings. Why is this so? Why is such a recitation of numerous verses absent on other holidays?

Additionally, the blessings are composed of three topics: God's Kingship ("Malchyos"), God's Remembrance of man ("Zichronos") and Shofaros, referring to the shofar blasts on Sinai, among other blasts. We are commanded to recite these blessings that include the supporting verses, and to hear the shofar together with these blessings. (We also hear the shofar independent of the blessings.) But why are these three topics central to Rosh Hashanna?

Furthermore, our Rishonim teach[1] that we must recite all three blessings, or none at all! In what manner are these three

blessings dependent on the others? Rabbah provides a clue[2] for this interdependence:

"God says, 'Recite before me Malachyos so you might accept Me as your King; recite Zichronos so your memory might come before Me for good; and with what shall you recite these? With Shofaros'."

To understand this statement, we must learn the purpose of each blessing independently. And why must the order be in this precise sequence of Malchyos, then Zichronos and then Shofaros?

The Talmud[3] also states that the mitzvah of hearing shofar is preferred over the mitzvah of reciting the blessings. Meaning, if one must choose between two shuls, the first shul he is certain that a minyan is present but has no shofar, and the second shul has a shofar but members might have gone home...he must attend the second shul, regardless of his doubt that he will hear shofar, and the certainty of forfeiting his blessings. What is the shofar's superior nature? To answer this last question, we turn to the blessing of Shofaros.

Shofaros

This blessing describes the event of Revelation at Sinai: a sound of a shofar waxed louder and louder at this event. Why was a shofar blast needed back then? Was not the primary concern that God give the Torah to the Jewish nation? If so, how does shofar play any role?

What is shofar? It is a loud blast that captures one's attention. It is an alert or siren. A "signal". And a signal is that which is a sign to something "other" than itself. Thus, when a fire breaks out, a local firehouse gives a sign of the fire by sounding the fire-horn. When a king enters a room, they sound trumpets to direct our attention to the king, not to the trumpets. And as you read further in this blessing, the

Torah has many instances of how God is introduced or accompanied by shofar and trumpets. So we can define shofar as a means of directing man's attention. But upon hearing shofar, on what are we to now focus?

Rosh Hashanna is different than all other holidays. It is not a mere date on the calendar recalling isolated events, albeit stupendous events with God's miracles. Rosh Hashanna has a greater theme. It recalls the purpose of man's existence, to recognize the Creator; the One who created and governs our lives...and will determine our fate this year, and always. Although Rosh Hashanna is a yearly event, it is not something to be considered yearly, but it must permeate the entire year, and our entire consciousness. Perhaps this is why we do not celebrate the New Month on New Years...it is greater than the calendar. And so great is this day, Torah contains numerous verses throughout each book of Torah, Prophets and Writings as God's existence and relation to us as King dominates all other notions. This repetition is intended to impress us with the vital theme of God's Kingship and Remembrance of man. These verses are recited in our Rosh Hashanna blessings, as no holiday demands such focus, like the High Holidays.

Sinai & Shofar

So vital was God's gift of Torah, that he sounded a shofar at Mount Sinai. This event – over all others – was central to His purpose in creating mankind. For man, without a guidebook of perfection, is not God's plan. He created man so we might all use the intellect that He endowed our species alone. This intellect should be used to marvel at creation and Torah, and ultimately arrive at an awe of, and love for the Creator. The shofar was sounded at Sinai for this very reason; to alert us to the central roles that Sinai and Torah play in our lives. Thus, understanding Sinai is central to understanding shofar.

This explains why Rabbah said we must accept God as King, and seek His remembrance of us, through shofar. For both, our acceptance of God as King and His remembrance of our lives must be summoned by a siren – the shofar – that we realize the gravity of these ideas.

We must first accept God as King, before it makes sense to ask for His remembrance, and a good verdict for the coming year. Shofar must accompany this process of realizing the King and seeking His positive decrees. Malchyos, Zichronos and Shofaros: all three, or none at all. For without accepting God as King, we will not seek Him to grant a verdict. Alternatively, once we do accept Him as King, we must then qualify this acceptance by seeking Him alone to decide our fate. Shofar underlines these two blessings by highlighting their urgency, via a warning blast.

We must also add that true "kingship" is not for a single term. This compromises the nature of a king. If God were not eternal, this rejects His "exclusive" nature as God of the universe. God – by definition – is He who is self-sufficient for the universe, for all time, and controls all. Nothing else exists that is responsible for this universe, but He alone. This explains why our prayers include praises for God from Genesis, through the future gathering of exiles, and eternally. His eternal reign is part of the true definition of God.

Rabbah taught: "God says, 'Recite before me Malachyos so you might accept Me as your King; recite Zichronos so your memory might come before Me for good; and with what shall you recite these? With Shofaros'." We learn that we must return to our senses and retain a focus on the reality that we only exist due to God. He runs all; He is King. Our fate is in His hands alone, so we seek His remembrance of our lives. We call an alert to these truths via shofar, the method God used to call our

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attention to His gift of Torah, so we might use this one life for its true purpose. Shofar echoes the blasts of Sinai. It recalls man's purpose, which is synonymous with God's will. And the shofar will again be heard when God reveals Himself in the messianic era. For then again, and in a greater measure, will God be known by the entire world. Man's purpose will be clear. Sinai's message will once again ring loud and clear.

Why are shofar blasts of greater importance than the blessings? I refer to Rabbi Ginsberg's fine explanation in this issue. Man is incapable of composing praise of God commensurate with His true nature. Thus, as a wise Rabbi taught, King David concludes Tehillim with instrumental praise, as human praise always falls short of what God deserves. To indicate man's inability to grasp God and praise Him accurately, King David uses instruments to conclude his thoughts, as a way to say, "I cannot

begin to accurately describe Your greatness, God, so I will use instruments instead". The shofar is included in that last Tehillim as it too shares this idea. Shofar blasts indicate God's indescribability, a true idea that obscures man's feeble attempts at praising God.

We might also suggest that hearing – not blowing – the shofar is the mitzvah, since it is a signal to something else. Thus, the act of "blowing" is not the signal, but the alert "sound" is the mitzvah. We are alerted to the ideas of the day.

I conclude citing Rabbi Ruben Gober: Endorsing the truths contained in these blessings and through listening to the shofar, may we all become worthy of God's good decrees this coming year. Kasiva vChasima Tova. ■

[1] Rash, Ran

[2] Rosh Hashanna 34b

[3] Rosh Hashanna 34b

thoughts on ROSH HASHANNA



RABBI BERNIE FOX

Differing Customs for the Reciting of Selichot

It is customary to arise in the early morning to recite prayers of supplication from the beginning of the month of Elul until Yom HaKippurim. (Shulch' Aruch, Orech Chayim 581:1)

It is customary to recite Selichot – prayers of supplication – prior to Rosh HaShanah. Generally, these prayers are recited at night before day break. Both Ashkenazic and Sefardic communities recite Selichot. Each of the communities has its own version of the Selichot service. Many of the components of the service are different in the two versions. This can lead to the impression that two communities have developed very different versions of the service. However, this is incorrect. Both versions are constructed around a fixed set of essential components. Only the less essential components are different in the two versions.

Although their two versions of the Selichot service are structurally similar, there is one area in which the two communities' practices regarding Selichot do reflect a fundamental difference in their respective interpretations of the service. According to Rav Yosef Karo, this service is initiated on the first day of Elul. This is the custom generally accepted by Sefardic communities. Rav Moshe Isserles comments that the Ashkenazic custom is to begin reciting the Selichot from the Motzai Shabbat prior to Rosh HaShanah.[1]

The source for these two customs is discussed by Rabbaynu Nissim. He explains that the custom of Barcelona was to begin Selichot on the twenty-fifth day of Elul.[2] The Gaon of Vilna explained that this is the source of the Ashkenazic custom.[3]

In order to appreciate the Gaon's conclusion, we need to better understand the practice of the Barcelona community. Rabbaynu Nissim explains the basis of this custom. This custom reflects the opinion that the sixth day of creation corresponds with Rosh HaShanah. Hashem chose this day for Rosh HaShanah because it is associated with forgiveness. On this day, Adam and Chavah, representing humanity, committed the first sin. They disobeyed Hashem. They ate the fruit that the Creator had forbidden. Hashem forgave this iniquity. On Rosh HaSha-

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nah, we too beseech Hashem for forgiveness. It is appropriate to appeal to Hashem on the anniversary of the date that forgiveness was introduced into the universe. If Rosh HaShanah corresponds with the sixth day of creation, what calendar date corresponds with the first day of creation? This date is the twenty-fifth of Elul (Elul having twenty-nine days).[4]

We can now understand the Gaon's comments. The conventional Ashkenazic practice simplifies the message of the Barcelona custom. The Barcelona custom is designed to remind us of the association between Rosh HaShanah and Adam and Chavah's experience of mercy and forgiveness. It accomplishes this through fixing the date for the initiation of Selichot with the calendar date corresponding with the first day of creation. In this manner, the days of the recitation of Selichot lead up to and climax with Rosh HaShanah. According to the Gaon, the conventional Ashkenazic custom fixes the day for the initiation of Selichot with the day to the week corresponding to the first day of creation. In place of associating the initiation of Selichot with the first day of creation by fixing it to a calendar date, it creates the association through fixing the initiation to a day of the week.

Rabbaynu Nissim explains the custom in Gerona was to begin the recitation of Selichot on the first day of Elul. This date was also chosen because of its association with forgiveness. After the sin of the Egel HaZahav – the Golden Calf, Moshe ascended Mount Sinai. He sought forgiveness for Bnai Yisrael. Moshe ascended the mountain of the first day of Elul. He secured Hashem's forgiveness forty days later. This day – the tenth of Tishrai – became Yom Kippur.

These two customs reflect two different aspects of Divine forgiveness. The forgiveness received by Adam and Chavah was not a result of repentance or prayer. In fact, both Adam and Chavah minimized their role in committing the sin. Why were they forgiven? Hashem created humanity and bestowed within us the unique ability to choose between good and evil. Every human enters life as an imperfect and instinctual creature. It is our responsibility to improve ourselves through the wise exercise of our freewill. It is inevitable that we will sin as we proceed along this path. Hashem forgives us for these failings just as He pardoned Adam and Chavah. In short, the very design of creation allows for an imperfect individual and implies Hashem's forbearance and forgiveness.

The forgiveness at Sinai was achieved

through supplication and prayer. Moshe ascended the mountain and beseeched Hashem to forgive His people. As Moshe elevated Himself and rose to a higher spiritual level, he drew closer to Hashem. Through this process, his prayers were accepted and Bnai Yisrael was forgiven.

Each custom reflects one of these aspects of forgiveness. The Ashkenazic custom reminds us of the forgiveness received by Adam and Chavah. It recalls the forgiveness inherent in the design of creation. The Sefardic custom reminds us of the forgiveness achieved at Sinai. It recalls the forgiveness we can secure through personal spiritual effort and prayer.



The Formula for Confessing One's Sins

How does one confess? He says, "I beseech you Hashem. I have erred. I have willfully acted wrongly. I have acted rebelliously before you. I have (specify wrongdoing). I have regret. I am embarrassed with my actions. I will never return to this behavior. (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 1:1)

The process of repentance must be accompanied by a verbal confession. This confession has a specific format. Maimonides' formulation of the confession is based upon a discussion found in Tractate Yoma. The majority of Sages suggest the formulation adopted by Maimonides. In this version first, errors or unintentional sins are confessed. Then, reference is made to intentional wrong doing. Last, acts of rebellion are included. The reasoning underlying this order is that a person should first seek forgiveness for lesser sins and then the more serious wrong doings.

However, the Talmud explains that Rebbe Meir suggests an alternative form for the

confession. He suggests that first the confession should mention the willful sins. This is followed by mentioning acts of rebellion. The confession ends with reference to unintentional errors. Rebbe Meir derives his order from the prayers of Moshe. In seeking forgiveness for Bnai Yisrael, Moshe describes Hashem's attributes of mercy and kindness. He declares that because of these attributes, Hashem forgives willful sins, acts of rebellion, and unintentional errors. Rebbe Meir adopted this order for his formulation of the confession.[5]

What is the basis of the dispute between the Sages and Rebbe Meir. The Sages order the sins referred to in the confession from the least serious to the most severe. This order is dictated by a clear logic. The confession is a request for forgiveness. It is appropriate to begin with the lesser offenses. Rebbe Meir maintains that the confession includes an additional element. It makes reference Moshe's intercession on behalf of Bnai Yisrael. Moshe began by enumerating the attributes of Hashem responsible for forgiveness. In order to incorporate the reference to Moshe's appeal for forgiveness based upon the attributes of mercy and forbearance, Rebbe Meir's confession adopts the order Moshe used in describing the sins of the nation. In over words, Rebbe Meir maintains that as we ask for forgiveness, we must acknowledge and appeal to the benevolence of Hashem implicit in this forbearance.

Although the opinion of the Sages is accepted, the issue raised by Rebbe Meir finds expression is halachah. The confession contained in the liturgy is often accompanied by a recitation of the Divine attributes of Hashem described by Moshe. This is accord with Rebbe Meir's opinion that confession is associated with recognition of Hashem's kindness as expressed in the attributes. Although this recognition is not incorporated into the confession itself, it is associated to the confession though the liturgy. ■

[1] Rav Moshe Isserles, Comments on Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 581:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Nissim, Notes to Commentary of Rabbaynu Yitzchak Alfasi, Mesechet Rosh HaShanah 3a.

[3] Rabbaynu Eliyahu of Vilna, Biur HaGra, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 581, note 8.

[4] Rabbaynu Nissim, Notes to Commentary of Rabbaynu Yitzchak Alfasi, Mesechet Rosh HaShanah 3a.

[5] Mesechet Yoma 36b.

the Significance of Shofar

Understanding
the
Mitzvos

Taken from a shiur by

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT



What should a person have in mind when listening to the “Kol Shofar”, the sound of the Shofar? In Hilchos Teshuvah (3:4), Maimonides discusses the function of Shofar. Maimonides states that even though the voice of the Shofar is obligatory because of a decree of the Torah, there is also a philosophical concept. The voice of the Shofar is to awaken man from his slumber. It should cause one to investigate his actions, repent and remember his Creator. It is designed for those who forget the truth and waste their time in helpless and vain endeavors. It is to provoke them to analyze their souls, improve their ways and actions, and forsake their evil conduct and corrupt philosophies. This is a very large demand of an individual to be motivated to such a large degree by the simple voice of the Shofar. When one hears the Shofar it should prompt him to do teshuva. A total overhaul of the human personality is summoned by the Kol Shofar. One’s entire approach to life has to be changed. Maimonides is not referring to teshuva – repentance – from a specific sin, but rather, a teshuva, which transforms the entire character of the sinner. How does the sound of the Shofar awaken a person to do teshuva? What is so unique about the Kol Shofar that can cause a person to redirect his life’s energies and change?

It is apparent that the Kol Shofar must be related to a deep idea, which reflects upon human nature and stimulates one to change the focus of his life. The obvious question is what is this idea and how is it so compelling to evoke such a dramatic response. What is the philosophical principle that Maimonides alludes to?

The sanctity of the day of Rosh Hashana is described in the Torah as “Yom Teruah”, a day of blasts. The Torah is very sparse in its description of the Kedushas Hayom, the sanctity of the day, other than saying it is a Yom Teruah. Why is the Torah so concise when describing the character of this day as opposed to Yom Kippur, where the Torah elaborates the sanctity of the day as a day of affliction? It is evident that these two words “Yom Teruah” must encapsulate the entire character of

the day. This also reinforces the concept that the Kol Shofar strikes at the very heart of man, his very nature. The sanctity of the day as a Yom Teruah must embody this concept. How does the mechanical sound of a Shofar express the Kedushas Hayom?

Onkelos translates Teruah as a “yevava”, weeping. The Yom Teruah is a yom yevava, a day of weeping. The Gemara teaches us that the yevava of the Teruah is expressed by the cry of the mother of Sisra. Sisra was a great warrior and waged many successful battles. His mother always anxiously awaited his return and celebrated his triumphs. However, at the time he was eventually defeated, she was looking out the window, anxiously awaiting his arrival as in past battles. As time transpired she started to realize that he was not returning and started to howl. Her crying is described as a yevava. It is that crying that the Kol Shofar replicates. What was so unique about her crying and why does the Gemara cite it as a paradigm for the Kol Shofar?

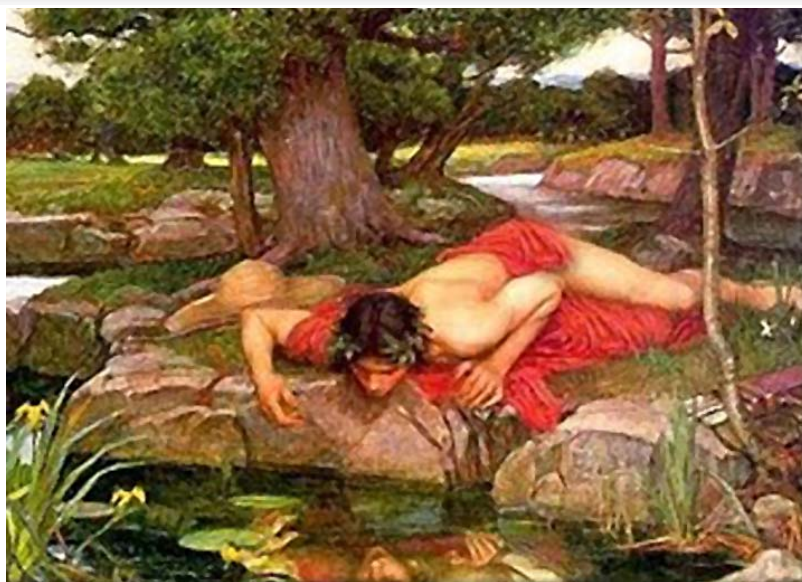
The Torah describes the Kol Teruah as the sound blown by the trumpets when the Bnei Yisrael moved their camp while traveling in the wilderness to the holy land. When God commanded Moshe to inform Klal Yisrael that it was time to embark, the sound of the Teruah summoned their departure. Onkelos again translates Teruah as a yevava, a cry. Rashi in his commentary states there were three factors that were needed before the camp embarked: the word of God, Moshe’s instruction and the Teruah. The traveling of the camp was more than just a practical phenomenon. It symbolized that the entire destiny of Klal Yisrael – the nation of Israel – was in the hands of God. They were in the wilderness and needed the providence and direction from God in order to survive. They were helpless and vulnerable and their destiny was determined by the system the Torah sets out for their embarking. Three essential components dictated their movements. It had to be the word of God as transmitted by Moshe and summoned by the sound of the

(continued on next page)

Teruah. Thus, the Teruah is not just significant on Rosh Hashana, but it also played a role in the destiny of the nation as reflected in the wilderness. It is interesting to note that the destiny of man cannot be determined by the word of God alone. After the giving of the Torah at Sinai, we require the interpretation of the Oral Tradition by Moshe, our teacher. Without the Torah a person will certainly go astray. A person needs God to direct his destiny but he also needs the teachings of the Torah. Because of man's limitations God alone is not enough; he needs the guidance of the Torah. God does not function alone because the gap between God and man is great. Man, on his own, cannot scale the chasm that exists between him and his Creator. He needs the prophet; he requires the teachings of Moshe to assist him. If he endeavors to close this gap on his own he will undoubtedly fall prey to the philosophy of the idolaters. This failure is exemplified by every organized religion that attempts to close the gap between man and the Almighty. They create their own false and corrupt systems, which cater to their emotional needs and desires. The third element required in the camps' movements were the sound of the Teruah. The sound of the Shofar is essential to shape the destiny of Klal Yisrael. Again we see that the Kol Shofar is not merely a mechanical sound but contains a vital message.

The sound of the Shofar is unique. It is a yevava, a cry. What is this cry? It is the inherent cry of every human that is part of his nature. It is the proclivity of man to cry, a cry of his state of depression. Why is man depressed? The Gemara in Nazir 3b tells of the story of a particular Nazirite about whom Rabbi Shimon Hatzadik commented. He said,

"I never ate the guilt offering of a defiled Nazirite except once. There was a handsome lad from the south who had beautiful eyes and wonderful locks shaped into curls. This lad shaved his head prompting me to question his actions. The lad responded that he was a shepherd and would gaze at his appearance in the well as he drew water for his flock. The lad said, 'Then I saw my evil inclination was overwhelming me and driving me from this world. I said to it, 'wretched one why are you arrogant in a world that is not yours...in the end you will be just maggots and worms'. The lad thereby said that he would shear his locks for the glory of God. Rabbi Shimon upon hearing the lads response kissed him upon his head and said there shall be more Nazirites in Israel like you."



The Nazirite was insightful in recognizing that this is a world that is not his. This story personifies man's constant struggle with his yetzer hara, his evil inclination. This led to the recognition that man is not in control. The life of instinctual desires and pleasures as proposed by the yetzer hara, only makes sense if man is in control. Instinctual pleasures cannot bring happiness in a world that is not man's. This world is God's world and is governed by the will of the Creator. The lures of the world of instinctual pleasures, fueled by the powers of one's fantasy, is shattered when man comes to the recognition that this world is not his. Man's existence in this world is tenuous and transitory at best, and reality belies the illusion of the world of the physical. This perceptive lad recognized that this is not man's world. Man is but a resident for a short duration. Man cannot control reality, but rather, he must conform to reality and the will of the Creator. Upon such recognition, man can cling to reality by embracing the Source of reality, and his soul can partake of an eternal existence.

The universal cry of mankind is the recognition that man is really not in control. Loss of control is a powerful psychological blow. Man desires to be powerful. The cry embedded in the human soul is that man is not in control and in reality, he is powerless. This world is not man's. He is totally vulnerable and at any moment he could be gone.

The mother of Sisra cried upon the recognition that he was vulnerable. The fantasy that he was invincible was shattered and she cried repeatedly. She cried the cry that exists within every created being. This world is not man's world. It is an "olam she-aino shelo", a world

that belongs not to him.

The Torah chose the mechanical cry of the Shofar to convey that our destiny is in the hands of our Creator. This world is not our world that we can control. On Rosh Hashana it is a day of Teruah, a day where man cries and acknowledges that this is not his world. This recognition alone is insufficient; it must be accompanied by "Malchus Hashem", God's Kingship. This is the ultimate realization that this world is merely a reflection of God's will and God is the king. His royalty is proclaimed by mankind and is manifest by observing His creations. On Rosh Hashana Klal Yisrael blows the Teruah and proclaims the sovereignty of the Almighty. We are not depressed by the eternal cry of mankind, that this is not his world. We do not create man-made religions to pacify our fears and allow us to deceive ourselves by continuing to live life based upon the false world of the instinctual pleasures. We recognize that this world is not man's. Our response is to proclaim the sovereignty of our Creator and cling to the source of reality. We recognize that our destiny is in God's hands and we live our lives as mandated by the teachings of his Torah. When we complete the initial set of our blowing, we recite a verse from Psalms, "Fortunate are the people that know the Teruah, Hashem in the light of your presence we shall walk." This obviously does not mean that we know 'how' to blow the Shofar. We are fortunate that we understand the 'significance' of the sound of the Shofar.

Our response is that we follow the light of God's presence and are blessed that we can live our lives based upon true reality, as expressed in the Kol Shofar. ■

Rosh Hashannah & the Akeida

Maimonides on the Binding of Isaac

("Guide" book III chap. xxiv)

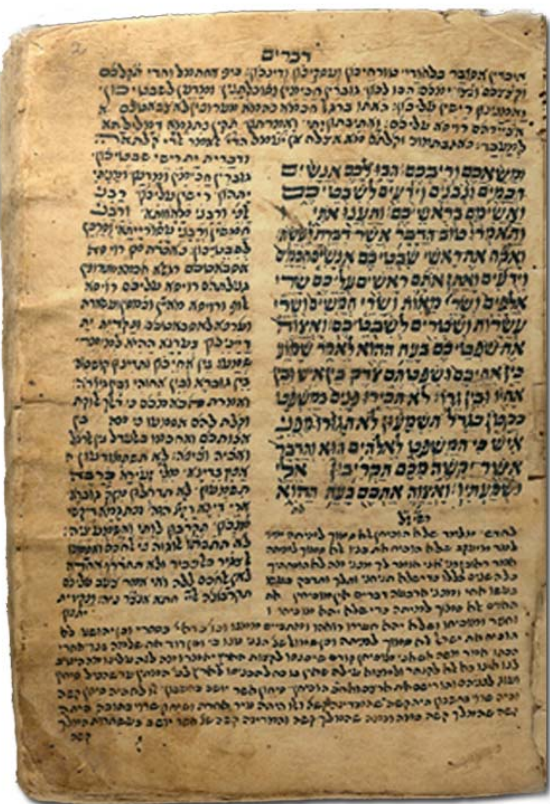
"The account of Abraham our father binding his son, includes two great ideas or principles of our faith. First, it shows us the extent and limit of the fear of God. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions, which are believed to be contrary to human feelings. He had been without child, and had been longing for a child; he had great riches, and was expecting that a nation should spring from his seed. After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great must have been his delight in the child! How intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared God, and loved to do what God commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of three days. If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the commandment proves the presence

of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of God. There is no necessity to look for the presence of any other idea or of anything that might have affected his emotions. For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that God might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man's duty to love and to fear God, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment. We have repeatedly explained this. The angel, therefore, says to him, "For now I know," etc. (ibid. ver. 12), that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a God-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of God. This idea is confirmed in Scripture: it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of God, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples, for it is said, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God," etc. (Deut. xxviii. 58). This is one of the two purposes of the 'akedah' (sacrifice or binding of Isaac)"

Maimonides discusses the significance of Abraham's binding of Isaac is son. Upon passing this test, Abraham found a ram caught by its horns – by its shofar. Maimonides teaches that the binding of Isaac, represented by the ram's horn, displays man's height of perfection, where he sacrifices what he loves most, his only son, for the command of God. Shofar, the ram's horn, thereby conveys the idea of the most devoted relationship to God. We see why Rosh Hashanna focuses

on the shofar as a central command. It is on Rosh Hashanna that we focus not on God's miracles, salvation, or laws. Rather, we focus on God alone. This means, a true recognition of His place in our minds, as King. He is our Creator, Who gave us existence, the greatest gift. Abraham's sacrifice is the ultimate expression of man apprehending the idea of God, and loving God. Not the idea of God Who saves, heals, or performs miracles, but more primary, as Creator.

High Holidays



It's a
great time
to be a
Jew

RABBI REUVEN MANN

The Torah is unique among religious books of the nations. It contains an outline of what will befall the Jewish people in the course of its history. All the writings of the other religions were authored by men who then claimed that they were recipients of revelation. However, they were very careful not to expose themselves to the risk of having their deceptions exposed. Thus they omitted any predictions by which the validity of their claims could be tested. The lone exception is the Torah which goes into extensive details about the future course of Jewish History. Why does our Torah include material which makes it vulnerable to refutation? There is only one answer: the Torah is the only scripture that actually comes from Hashem. Only Hashem who knows the future could provide the details of what would happen to His people on their historical odyssey.

Our history confirms the prognoses of the Torah. All the events we have experienced conform to what is written in the Torah. Unfortunately, many of these confirmed prophecies have been negative, e.g. the destruction of both Temples, exile, dispersion and persecution. Even very convincing allusions to the Holocaust can be found by a careful reading of the text. Indeed, the suffering of the Jews has been very great, and many ask; why, so much and Ad Masai, for how long will this go on? The answer (to a very complex issue) in very simple and basic terms is found throughout the Book of Devarim. It is expressed, succinctly,

in the holiday prayers: "and because of our sins we have been exiled from our land". The positive side of this declaration is that we can alter the situation through a change in our conduct. It is important at this season of the High Holidays to take note of another prediction of the Torah. This week's parsha Nitzavim-Vayelech promises that after experiencing the blessings and curses of our history we will consider the matter very carefully and recognize that the Torah is true. The Jewish people will then engage in a national return to observance of the commandments and service of Hashem with "all our heart and all our soul". This message is relevant to the season we are in and should give us renewed inspiration to engage in Teshuva in a manner which uplifts ourselves and inspires others. We have witnessed the many curses, none more catastrophic than the Holocaust. And yet we have also experienced the greatest miracle in two thousand years: the rebirth of the Jewish state in the land of Israel, and the beginning of the ingathering of the exiles. We can look back at Jewish history from the vantage point of Tanach and proclaim: Moshe emes vektoraso emes (Moshe is true and his Torah is true). This is a great time for a Jew to be alive. We are experiencing the unfolding of Divine prophecy. Our faith should be strengthened and we should yearn to participate in the National Redemption which Hashem has promised will happen.

Shabbat Shalom.

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