



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

Rosh Hashana תשפ"ה

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

When the Torah commands us to observe the festival of Pesach, it tells us clearly that it celebrates our freedom from slavery in Egypt. When the Torah commands us to observe the festival of Sukkot, it clearly tells us that it celebrates the protection that Hashem provided us throughout the forty years in the wilderness. Yet when it comes to the very important holiday of Rosh Hashana, the Torah is very cryptic. Here is what it says (Numbers 29:1):

(א) וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם

*1) In the seventh month (Tishrei) on the first day of the month, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no laborious work, **it shall be a day of “Teruah” for you.***

The first day of the month of Tishrei is Rosh Hashana, but all the Torah relates about it is that it is “a day of *teruah*”. The exact meaning of the word “*teruah*” is a mystery, and a bit of detective work was necessary to define it. The first step was to look at Onkelos’s Aramaic translation for a hint. There it says, “יום יבבא” a day of *yebbava*. But exactly what is a *yebbava*? A verse from Judges (5:28) gives us the answer.

(כח) בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן נִשְׁקָפָה וַתִּיבֵב אִם סִיסְרָא בְּעַד הָאֶשְׁנָב מִדוּעַ בִּשְׁשׁ רַכְבּוֹ לְבוֹא מִדוּעַ אַחֲרוֹ פְּעָמֵי מְרַכְבוֹתָיו

*28) Through the window she gazed, Sisra’s mother **sobbed** by the window. “Why is his chariot delayed in coming? Why are the hoofbeats of his carriages so late?”*

This verse is part of the song that Devorah the Judge sang after the death of Sisra, the Canaanite army commander who cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years and whom Yael killed in her tent by hammering a tent peg into his head. The word ***yebbava*** describes Sisra’s

mother's sobbing at the window as she waited in vain for his return from the battlefield. We deduce from this that the sound of a **teruah** is something like a sobbing sound. A sob is an expression of deep anguish and despair created when one sees no way forward and feels himself against a brick wall. This profound frustration triggers sobbing that emanates from deep within. Sobbing is done in short cries one after the other. Hence, we learn that a "teruah" is the short, broken blasts of the shofar. (The long, unbroken sound of the shofar is called the תקיעה – "tekiah.")

We learn from elsewhere in the Torah where it says שופר תרועה – Shofar teruah - that the sobbing sound should come through a shofar. Hence, we have learned that Rosh Hashana is a day of shofar blowing.

Got it! On Rosh Hashana, one must *hear* the shofar blown. We fulfill this during the Rosh Hashana Musaf, when, in the course of the service, we hear 100 shofar blasts. (The minimum requirement is to hear 30 blasts during Rosh Hashana day.)

But if that is all that the Torah wrote about Rosh Hashana, why is it one of the *High* Holidays? Why don't we just go to shul, hear the blasts, and then go home? Why all the fanfare?

The answer is found in the Oral Torah - the Mishna. The Mishna in Tractate Rosh Hashana (1:2) teaches us:

(ב) בְּאַרְבָּעָה פְּרָקִים הָעוֹלָם נִדוֹן ... בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תהלים לג) הַיּוֹצֵר יַחַד לֵבָם, הַמְבִּין אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂהָם...

2) There are four times the world is judged... the third time is on Rosh Hashanah when all people who entered the world pass before Him (Hashem) like sheep. As it says in the verse (Psalms 33:15) He who fashions their hearts together, and Who comprehends all their deeds. (The day that Hashem fashioned their hearts - Rosh Hashanah the day

Hashem created man - is the day that Hashem looks into all of man's deeds)

In his commentary to the Mishna, Maimonides explains:

ועניינו שמחשבין על בני אדם ודנין עליהם בבריאות ובחלאים והמות והחיים
וזולתם מענייני האדם

What this means is that Hashem considers every person and judges if he will be healthy or sickly, if he will live or die, and a myriad of other matters pertaining to him.

Every aspect of a person's life is judged and determined on Rosh Hashanah. This is very serious indeed, and worthy of all the fanfare; but what does this have to do with the shofar's sobs?

A third elemental theme of Rosh Hashana is that Hashem is His **Kingly** mode. Hashem wears different "hats" so to speak- He assumes different roles. He is our Father. He is our Shepherd. He is our Judge. During Rosh Hashana and through Yom Kippur, Hashem is in His mode as King of the Universe. So important is this concept, that during these days the Sages have incorporated it into the fabric of our daily prayers for that period.

For the ten days that begin with Rosh Hashana and end with Yom Kippur, the עשרת ימי תשובה - *the ten days of Teshuvah*, the Sages have made two small but significant changes to two of the standard blessings that are in the daily *Amida*. I will only discuss the first one here.

The first change occurs in the third blessing, which is the same in every *Amida*.

אַתָּה קָדוֹשׁ וְשִׁמְךָ קָדוֹשׁ וְקְדוּשֵׁיךָ בְּכָל יוֹם יִהְיֶיךָ סְלָה :
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַקַּל (בְּעֵשֶׂיית הַמְלִיךְ) הַקָּדוֹשׁ :

You are holy, and Your Name is holy, and holy ones praise You every day, forever.

*Blessed are You Hashem, **the holy G-d.***

Starting with Rosh Hashana and ending with Yom Kippur, to emphasize to us and to help us maintain awareness that during these ten days Hashem presides over the world in the mode of King and is judging us, the word מלך , *king*, being substituted for the name G-d. Thus, the blessing concludes,

*Blessed are You Hashem **the Holy King.*** (המלך הקדוש)

So important is this change that if a person inadvertently concluded the blessing the way he normally does and only realized it just after starting the next blessing, he would have to restart the *Amida* from the beginning. Without this insertion, “The Holy King” the *amida* is incomplete, so it must be redone.

We now have the complete picture. Harav Saadia Goan (d. 942) lists 10 ideas behind blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashana. Here is the first one.

הראשון, כי בעצם היום הזה תחלת היצירה מהאדם, שהיתה בו כונת בריאת זה העולם השפל ובו ביום מלך הקדוש ברוך הוא על בריות העולם הזה, שיצא מן הכח אל הפעל. ומנהג ידוע, כי ביום שימלך מלך בשר ודם יתקבצו עבדיו ויתקעו בשופרות לפניו לפרסם הדבר ויאמרו: יחי אדוננו המלך. וכדאי הוא מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא, אשר מלכותו קדמה לעמו והיה ה' למלך על כל הארץ לעולם, שיעשו כן בתחלת מלכותו שמלך על כל העולם וכן ביום הזה בכל שנה, כיון שמלכותו תהיה תמיד בלי הפסק

For on this very day, man, the purpose for creation, was created. Therefore, it was this day that Hashem’s Kingdom over mankind began, for, with this, creation had gone from a state of potential to a state of actual. It is a well-known custom that when a new king comes to power, his subjects all gather and blow (trumpets) shofars before him to publicly proclaim, “Long live the King!!!”

It is therefore appropriate that for the King of all Kings, Hashem, whose kingdom preceded the kingdom of all other kings, and Whose kingdom extends over the entire universe, that we should do the same on this day every year, since Hashem's kingdom will always be present.

This is the day that Hashem became the King of the Universe, and we are coronating Him through blowing the shofar. Very well, but now, where does the judgment on this day come in?

The Ran in his commentary to the Talmud provides the answer.

חדושי הר"ן על ראש השנה דף טז/א

נמצאת אומר בר"ה נברא אדם הראשון ראשונה עלה במחשבה בשניה נתייעץ עם מלאכי השרת בשלישית כנס עפרו ברביעית גבלו בחמישית רקמו בששית עשאו גולם בשביעית זרק בו נשמה בשמינית הכניסו לגן עדן בתשיעית נצטוה בעשירית סרח באחת עשרה נדון בשתים עשרה יצא בדימוס א"ל הקב"ה לאדה"ר זה סימן לבניך כשם שעמדת לפני בדין ביום זה ויצאת בדימוס כך עתידין בניך להיות עומדין לפני ביום הזה ויוצאין בדימוס וכ"ז אימתי בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש ומכאן סמך למה אדם נידון בר"ה יותר מבשאר ימים,

On Rosh Hashana (the sixth day of creation) Adam was created. The first hour of the day, Hashem had the idea (so to speak) to create him; in the second hour, Hashem advised with the angels; in the third, Hashem gathered the dust to make him; in the fourth, Hashem mixed the earth with water; in the fifth, Hashem "knitted him together;" in the sixth, Hashem gave him form; in the seventh, Hashem blew his soul into him; in the eighth, Hashem placed him into the Garden of Eden; in the ninth, Hashem commanded him not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge good and bad; in the tenth, Adam sinned; in the eleventh he was judged; and in the twelfth he went out with his good judgment. Hashem then said to Adam, "This is a sign for your children. Just as you stood before me for judgment today and you received a good judgment, so, too, your children are destined to stand before me on this day, and they, too, shall go out with a good judgment." When did this all happen? On the first day of the

seventh month. This is why man is judged on this day more than any other.

In the course of the past year, we too have sinned. On the day that Hashem became King over His world, He has decided to judge each of His creations to evaluate if they are worthy of another year of life in His kingdom. As Maimonides indicated above, every aspect of one's life will come under scrutiny and be determined on Rosh Hashana.

What will be the basis of Hashem's judgment? By what standard will He measure us? The Mishna quoted above gives us a clue.

*On Rosh Hashana, all people who entered the world pass before Him (for judgment) כבני מרון **kivnei maron**.*

The meaning of these words, *kivnei maron*, has three interpretations.

The first option is, "Like sheep."

The second option is, "Like a steep mountain pass, where people can only walk in single file."

The third option is, "Like the soldiers in King David's army who were sent to the front one at a time."

It is clear from all the options that on Rosh Hashana, a person is judged as an individual. Each viewpoint, however, represents a different aspect of one's life: one's relationship with his Creator, one's relationship with his fellow man, and one's relationship with his community.

Like sheep – Sheep are notorious for following the leader. The lead sheep of a flock once decided to walk off the edge of a cliff, and, to the horror of their owner, so did every single sheep in the flock.

If Hashem is our Shepherd, how are we doing in terms of our relationship with Him? Are we following His instructions? Are we loyal

and obedient? Or have we strayed far from the flock, out on our own somewhere? This is the first matter on which we will be judged.

Like a steep mountain pass – On this mountain pass there is room for only one person to walk at a time. If someone tries to pass the person in front of him, he may push him off the edge into the valley below. One must be careful not to go too fast and push the person in front of him. One should also not take a siesta, blocking the path for the others. One must be aware and considerate of his friends, as they, together, traverse the narrow path. This is the second matter for which we will be judged. Are we helpful and considerate to our fellow Jew? How are our relationships with others? Are there some that need repair?

Like the soldiers in King David's army – In an army, every soldier in the group is essential to the group. Each soldier has a unique role and must focus his attention on what is best for the group, even if it means that he must make a personal sacrifice. The Jewish community is one army serving Hashem. All must direct their resources towards strengthening the community and making it a better servant to serve Hashem. This is the third area in which we will be judged. How am I doing in my communal involvement? Am I a team player and helping the community?

If a person is meritorious in any one of the above areas, he may receive a pass for another year of service to Hashem in the area that he excels.

As we approach Rosh Hashana, knowing that we are about to be judged, it would be appropriate to inspect our deeds and try to better ourselves in each of these areas.

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The words of the Ran mentioned earlier generate an obvious question. There it says:

*Hashem then said to Adam, “This is a sign for your children. Just as you stood before me for judgment today **and you received a good judgment**, so too your children are destined to stand before me on this day, and they too shall go out with a good judgment.”*

Adam received a “good judgment?” He got clobbered! Here is what Hashem told him (Genesis 3:17-19).

(יז) וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ וַתֹּאכַל מִן הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר:
לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אֲרוּרָה הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוּרָךָ בְּעֶצְבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ
(יח) וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר תַּצְמִיחַ לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה
(יט) בְּזַעַת אַפֶּיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוֹבָבְךָ אֶל הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי עָפָר
:אַתָּה וְאֶל עָפָר תָּשׁוּב

17) To Adam He said, “Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate of the tree about which I commanded you saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ accursed is the ground because of you; through suffering shall you eat of it all the days of your life. 18) Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. 19) By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the ground from which you were taken: for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

How could the sages call this a good judgment? The thorns and thistles are still poking us and making it difficult to earn a living. We still suffer from the curse of having to toil to bring food to the table. What could be the meaning of this?

Here lies a deep and profound lesson about Hashem’s “punishments.” Hashem does not get hurt or insulted when we disobey His orders, so He has no need to “punish” us – to get back at us - for what we have done to Him. Hashem is untouchable. The idea behind Hashem “punishing” us is to provide *us* a way to learn from our mistake and correct it. The “punishment” is the antidote to the crime; it fixes the damage created by the sin. Seeing things this way gives us to understand

that Hashem's punishments are good for us because they afford us the opportunity to correct and remedy the damage that we have done by our misdeed. This is why Adam's judgment was good for him.

Our Sages go to great lengths to explain Adam's sin. Before eating from the "Tree of Knowledge good and 'bad'," Adam had no bad within him. Evil was manifest only in the snake, which was external to Adam. It was only upon eating from the fruit of the "Tree of knowledge good and bad" that evil entered Adam's body. Unlike us, he had no evil inclination within him to cause him to sin. So how could he have done so?

Our Sages explain that although Adam had no evil inside of him, he nevertheless, was aware of its possibility. After all, Hashem told him of the "Tree of Knowledge good and bad." In his original state, there was only "true and false" but not "good and evil."

What's the difference? An illustration will be helpful. Let's say that I need to take a trip by car. I am considering which car I should use for the trip. Should I use my Mercedes? Or should I use my Ford? Well, I don't own a Mercedes, so it is not really an option. This is the case of true and false. Since the Mercedes doesn't exist, it isn't an option. But if I have two cars, a good car and a broken car, I could consider taking the broken one, since indeed, it exists. I may never reach my destination, because it will break down before I arrive, but if I choose that option, it is a possibility. This is the case of good or bad. Things that are "bad" are really "false" because through them you will never reach your destination. They nevertheless present themselves as an option that one can choose if he wishes.

A simple example. If one eats things that are "bad" for his health, he will not reach his destination of a long healthy life. The foods that are bad for your health look delicious and present themselves as "good" options, but in reality, they are really "false" and should not be an option at all.

Adam had the following thought.

In my present state, the lines of right and wrong are very clear and obvious. Right is real, wrong is false. False is not an option. It is not that difficult to make the right choices. If I bring the evil into me, and, when it presents itself to me as an option, I recognize its falseness and choose not to do it, how much greater will the display of loyalty to Hashem be! Even though it looks like a reality and an option that I can choose, I will not choose it! That will be a real feat! Hence, by eating from the tree, I will show Hashem how super loyal I am to Him!

Unfortunately, Adam could have no perception of how the evil would manifest itself within him and how it would become so much part of him, that he will actually mistake it for himself. This is the reality of life. When we really want something, even if it is bad, still “I want it!” When it comes to refraining from doing something wrong, we have to answer to the question of, “Why aren’t *you* doing it?” The good inclination is *you*, and the evil inclination is *me*.

This is why we must always listen to Hashem, because only He has the whole picture. We think with our limited vision that it is good for us, but we do not see behind the scenes or what is directly down the road. Only Hashem knows everything, and He has given us the path to success.

This is how the punishment to Adam corrects his sin. His current state in life will undo his sin. How so? His sin was that although he was able to see Hashem clearly, he opted to operate in a world where Hashem’s reality would be unclear, a world of good and bad. The antidote to that is that from a world that obscures Hashem’s presence to such a strong degree, we must seek out and identify Hashem in every facet of our lives. Especially in the area of our livelihoods, where it seem so clear and undisputable that I am the source of my sustenance: I planted, I watered, I harvested, etc. It is possible to live an entire lifetime

without even thinking that Hashem is a reality, and there are very many who do. This is our lifelong mission in life.

This is the basis of Hashem's judgement. All of His "punishments" constitute the medicine that we need to heal the sins that we have committed.

If, on Rosh Hashana, we say to Hashem, "Hashem, You are my King, and I want to serve You! Please forgive me for my past transgressions and grant me another year of life so I may continue my mission to seek You out and serve you!" Hashem would surely be impressed by and cherish such a sincere plea; and what King would not want a servant like that?