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Introduction

The Dual Message of the Shofar

Rabbi Michael Taubes ('76)

Rosh Yeshivah

What thoughts are supposed to go through our minds when we hear the blowing of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*? From one perspective, its piercing sounds in a perfectly silent room can be stirring and frightening. As noted by Maran HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt"l, the root of the word “*teruah*,” the word which describes one of the sounds made by the *shofar* and the word which the *Torah* uses to identify this holiday (see *Vayikra* 23:24 and *Bamidbar* 29:1) suggests punishment and destruction, as is seen in the use of one form of this root in *Yeshayahu* (24:19), where the *Navi* speaks of the world breaking and shattering. Similarly, we find another form of the word used in *Yirmeyahu* (4:19) where that *Navi* discusses the alarms of war and its accompanying disasters.

On this basis, Rav Soloveitchik explained that one message of the *shofar* is the reminder to mankind that this day, *Rosh Hashanah*, is a *Yom Hadin*, a day of judgment, a day on which man cannot escape his fate as a being who has erred and sinned before Hashem and is thus deserving of punishment and perhaps even destruction. The despair and trepidation that one therefore feels on this day helps us understand why on *Rosh Hashanah*, although it is certainly a *Yom Tov*, we do not recite *Hallel*, for, as the *Gemara* states in *Maseches Rosh Hashanah* (32b), among other places, when the

King is sitting on His throne of judgment and the books of the living and of the dead are open before Him, it is completely inappropriate to sing songs of praise. In codifying this ruling, the Rambam (*Hilchos Chanukah* 3:6) states that this is a day of fear and awe, and not of excessive happiness. For this reason as well, some had the practice to actually fast on Rosh Hashanah (see *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 597:2).

At the same time, however, the root of the word “*teruah*” is used elsewhere to connote friendship and closeness, as in *Bamidbar* (23:21), a *passuk*, cited in the “*Malchuyos*” section of the *Mussaf Shemoneh Esrei* on Rosh Hashanah, which describes Bilaam, during his failed attempt to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, referring to Hashem as being with His people and displaying towards them the affection of a king for his nation (see Rashi there, *d”h u’seruas*). In this sense, the sounds made by the *shofar* are exciting and majestic, like trumpets blown to herald the entrance of a royal figure or some other respected dignitary; they represent the arrival of a king who chooses to connect with his people by joining them in their very midst. Indeed, it is for this reason that many of the traditional melodies used as part of the *nusach* on Rosh Hashanah are marching tunes, suitable for a king’s coronation. Far from despair, the feelings which the listener has when hearing the *shofar* and considering this idea are ones of harmony and even intimacy, exhibiting an inner desire and a sense of pride to be in the presence of one’s king. Though man has indeed sinned, he knows that he can reconcile with Hashem and re-establish a damaged friendship; this opportunity creates a spirit of optimism and happiness.

These two seemingly opposing emotions engendered by the blowing of the *shofar*, that of gripping fear and that of great joy, is reflective of the dual nature of the holiday of *Rosh Hashanah* itself. It is at once a day of awe, on which crying out to Hashem out of desperation, brought about by the fear and anxiety associated with impending judgment (a point developed by, among others, the Ramban, in his *Milchamos Hashem to Rosh Hashanah*, p. 11a in Rif) as well as a day of rejoicing, which most people celebrate with festive *Yom Tov* meals and on which no practices of mourning are observed. The *Sefer Hachinuch* (*Mitzvah* 311) hints at this dichotomy by noting that while there is no doubt that one should certainly be frightened at the prospect of being judged by Hashem on *Rosh Hashanah*, this yearly judgment is actually something positive because it paves the way for ultimate forgiveness and atonement. Rav Soloveitchik added that the mere fact that man can indeed be judged by Hashem is something which he can be proud of because it attests to his unique character and his lofty stature among Hashem's creations. An animal is not judged by Hashem because an animal, while he can be trained to behave a certain way, is not held responsible for his actions because he is incapable of comprehending what that responsibility means and entails. It is only man, the anniversary of the creation of whom (on the sixth day of the creation of the universe) is marked on *Rosh Hashanah*, who can be judged because he is an intelligent and hence responsible being and who can thus aspire to improve himself, grow ever-closer to Hashem, and soar to ever-greater heights.

Perhaps we may also add that the need to live with and strike a balance on *Rosh Hashanah*, especially when hearing

the sound of the *shofar*, between feelings of regret, frustration, disappointment, and even fear on the one hand, and pride, excitement, anticipation, and even joy on the other hand is indicative of the challenge of life itself. Life for most people is not characterized by “smooth sailing” all the time. We all have our ups and downs, our good days and our bad days. And throughout our lives we all experience moments of anxiety and fear as well as moments of happiness and joy. The sound of the *shofar* and its dual message reminds us that even when things are tough, and we seem to be experiencing Hashem’s strict judgment, we do not give up in despair, but we rather focus on mending our relationship with Him and indeed rejoice over the fact that we have the remarkable opportunity to do so. It is noteworthy that while the “*teruah*” sound is a wailing one, going up and down, similar to a public siren announcing an emergency, the “*tekiah*” sound is straight and flat, similar to a siren announcing that all is now clear. We of course end the blowing of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* with the “all-clear” sound of the *tekiah*; may we thus all be blessed with a new year during which we will feel that all is indeed clear.

Elul

Understanding Shemiras Halashon During the Yemei Teshuvah

Matan Marmmer ('25)

As we approach the month of Tishrei, we are all focused on *teshuvah* and ways to change ourselves for the better. During this period of *teshuvah* one thing that keeps showing up, either in the *parshiyos* in Elul or in the *tefillos* of *yamim noraim*, is one's speech. In *Parshas Shoftim*, we are told that we should not testify falsely in court. In *parshas Ki Seitzei*, we are warned to keep our word - "מוצא שפתיך חשמר" - "ועשית" (*Devarim* 23:24) - and that we should be careful not to speak *lashon hara*. The beginning of *parshas Ki Savo* shows us a way we should be using our speech, with the declaration that one is supposed to make after bringing *bikkurim* or separating *ma'aser*. Also, in *parshas Mattos* which talks about *nedarim* it says "lo yacheil devaro kechol hayotzei mipiv ya'aseh" (*Bamidbar* 30:3), and the last letter of *lo yacheil devaro kechol* (לא יחל דברו ככל) spells out Elul (אלול). Then, on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* we do *hataras nedarim*, which is declaring all of our vows null, and at the start of *Yom Kippur*, we do *kol nidrei*, which is a *hataras nedarim* that you are doing in front of Hashem instead of in front of a *Beis Din*.

So, what is all this focus on our speech? There are really two parts to protecting your speech. The first part is making sure one doesn't speak *lashon hara*. Well, if you look in *Sefer Chofetz Chaim*, it says that by speaking *lashon hara*, you could be violating 31 *mitzvos*. The Rambam says in the *Mishnah Torah* that speaking *lashon hara* is *kineged avodah zarah*, *gilui arayos*, and *shfichus damim*, the three big *aveiros*. In *Chovos Halevavos* it says that when one speaks *lashon hara* about someone else, all your *mitzvos* get transferred to that person and all of his *aveiros* come to you. The second part of protecting speech is keeping your word. This is especially important in *Elul* like we see in the acronym of *lo yachel*. When one does not keep to something that he says, he is violating a *mitzvas aseh* and a *mitzvah lo sa'aseh*. This is the focus of *hataras nedarim* and *kol nidrei*. We say them to make sure we do not violate these two *mitzvos* that have to do with keeping your word.

We see from all of this just how serious a few utterances that are emitted from one's mouth can be. One could be chatting with his friends, and in just a minute or two of speaking *lashon hara* he could pile up quite a number of *aveiros*. Also, someone could say something as a joke without saying *bli neder* and then lo and behold he has taken a *neder* or a *shvuah* upon himself. We can see now why protecting our speech is so important in doing *teshuvah* and our path to forgiveness.

There is a tradition that *Hoshanah Rabbah* is a culmination of all of the *teshuvah* starting on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*. *Hoshanah Rabah* is the last day of *Succos*, and on *Succos* we wave the *daled minim*. There is a well known *vort* that each of the *daled minim* correspond to a part of the body.

The *lulav* is the spine, the *esrog* is the heart, the *hadassim* are the eyes, and the *aravos* are the mouth. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we take the *aravos*, the *min* that symbolizes the mouth, and we hit it on the ground. This puts together all of the hard work that we have been trying to accomplish over the course of the last two months. We start with just trying to protect our speech, with warnings in the *parshiyos* in *Elul*. Then during *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* we annul our *nedarim* and *shvu'os*. Finally, on *Hoshanah Rabbah* we get rid of the bad speech by banging the “mouth” on the floor, and we start the year on a “new leaf”.

Why Do *Chassidim* Rejoice Upon The Death of *Tzadikim*?

Yosef Pechenik ('25)

This year on *Chaf Hey Tishrei*, tens of thousands of *chassidim* will celebrate the *yahrzeit* of one of the founding fathers of modern *chassidus*, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, may his memory be a blessing to us all. The *Bardichever's* *yahrzeit* will be the occasion for many *tishim*, *fabrengens*, and various gatherings.

A question arises with this approaching festivities: why do *chassidim* dedicate so much joy to the *yahrzeits* of their *rebbe*s and *tzadikim*? Shouldn't a date of passing be a day of mourning and sadness?

To answer this, one must delve into lore, song, and culture. And, though all these will contribute, to find the final

answer, one must go to the beating heart of this majestic and equally mysterious culture of *chassidus*.

In *Makkos* (7b), a fiery debate ensues, eternalized in the pages of the *Gemara*. This debate centers around a key *mishnah*, which states, “whenever [an accidental] death is caused in the course of a downward movement, [for example, lowering a cask, and it falling on someone below and killing them] that person is liable to banishment.” This method of thought by punishment based off of motion becomes particularly difficult to understand when referring to someone who climbs a ladder, and a rung falls from his weight and kills an unsuspecting bystander below.

To what is this death attributed to? A downward motion or an upward motion? This is the question of R. Avahu. R. Yonatan steps in to answer, saying that “this downward motion is the prerequisite motion for an upward motion. His exact words being “*Yeridah Tzorech Aliyah*.” Whenever a speaker of the *Gemara* states any phrase, there is a great hidden meaning behind every word.

The *Vaad L’Hafotzas Sichos*, which is a group of the most knowledgeable *Lubavitcher talmidei chachamim* in charge of the dissemination of the talks of the *Lubavitcher Rebbe*, cite in *Likkutei Torah* that the concept of *Yeridah Tzorech Aliyah*, having originated in the very aforementioned *daf* of *Gemara*, is in one of the *Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l* *Sichos* for *Chof Daled Teves*. In that *Sicha*, the *Rebbe* applies this very concept to the question of why *chassidim* mourn the death of *tzadikim*.

The *Rebbe* states that the reason *chassidim* rejoice on a *tzadik’s* *yahrzeit* is because the purpose of the descent of the soul into a physical body has been accomplished on the day of

passing. *The Rebbe*, owing the listener an explanation, goes further to say that the entire purpose of the soul's descent to the earthly plane reflects the paradigm of *Yeridah Tzorech Aliyah*: 'through the divine service that the soul accomplishes in a body – the study of Torah and the observance of *mitzvos* – the soul can ascend to a higher level than the one on which it existed before its descent.'

Here the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* eloquently states the *chassidic* interpretation of *Yeridah Tzorech Aliyah*, which reads into the words of R. Yonatan in *Makkos*. This *chassidic* concept can be simplified to a poem that was collected on one of the ethnographic missions of the polemicist, writer, and ethnographer Shloyme Zanol Rappoport. While traversing the *shtetlech* of Ukraine, he heard the following melody, and recorded it and its poetic lyrics to be used in the play he was writing, which would become the hit *The Dybbuk*. Its sole musical score, the nigun "Mipnei Mah" is the most acute simplification to *Yerida Tzorech Aliyah*;

Wherefore O Wherefore
Has the Soul
Fallen from exalted heights,
To profoundest depths?
Within itself, the fall
Is the prerequisite for the ascension. (*Yeridah Tzorech Aliyah*)

The poem, with no credited writer, is the earliest known instance within *chassidus* where this concept appears; the poem itself was probably written by a *chasid* setting music to a *ma'amer* from his *Rebbe*.

With all this stated, it seems like a satisfactory answer has already been provided, yet, the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* again tackles this question with another answer, delving into even more mystic thought, “Although in its non corporeal state, “the soul is hewed out from the throne of glory” (*Zohar* Vol 1 P113a) and the soul is pure. These spiritual heights cannot compare to the divine peaks it reaches through its divine service on the material plane.” The Rebbe then follows to say that those peaks are reached when the soul completes its mission on earth, and that is why we rejoice on a *tzadik’s yahrzeit*.

Two obvious questions arise upon hearing this. What does that have to do with *Yeridah Tzorech Aliyah*, and what mission allows the soul to reach this great spiritual peak that *the Rebbe* is talking about?

The second question can be answered by another delve into *chassidus*. The *Baal Shem Tov*, the founder of *chassidus*, may his memory be a blessing to all of us, used to teach that every *yid* was put on this earth for a specific mission. No one knows what their mission is, yet it is the reason for their current corporeality on the earthly plane. This is the mission the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* speaks of. In *chassidus*, it is believed that every *yid* will accomplish their mission before his passing, and in reference to *tzadikim* the Rebbe states that “surely a *tzadik* completed the mission with which he was charged in its entirety [thus the further reason to rejoice upon a *tzadik’s yahrzeit*.]”

With this in mind, the first aforementioned question becomes even more pertinent. What does this mission have to do with *Yeridah Tzorech Aliyah*? Didn’t the Rebbe just state

that it was the completion of this elusive mission that was the reason we rejoice on the *yahrtzeit* of a *tzadik*?

The answer is that the final completion of the divine mission does not just come as an isolated event. The completion of one's divine mission is a culmination of all their service to Hashem that they have achieved in their lifetime. As the English translation of *nigun Mipnei Mah* stated: "Within itself, the descent is the prerequisite for the ascension." As it applies to the soul, within the descent of the soul on earth, one's *Torah* and *mitzvos* already begin the ascension which finishes with the completion of the soul's mission on this earth. Here we see that the concept of the life's mission of the *Baal Shem Tov* works in perfect harmony with the concept of *Yeridah Tzorech Aliyah*.

The *Rebbe* concludes the *Sicha* by referencing *Tikkun Shovrim*, saying, "The same spiritual influences expressed on the first occasion an event took place are repeated every year," surely because a *Tzadik's* *yahrtzeit* is the day where the mission of the *tzadik* is completed and celebrated, it is thus the celebration of the *Yerdiah Tzorech Aliyah* to that mission, the celebration of the journey to the destination. Thus *chassidim* rejoice over all the *mitzvos* the *tzadik* observed so stringently, all the *Torah* the *tzadik* learned, every *masechta*, every *sefer*, every word, every letter! It is a celebration of all this, a celebration of the very fabric of our faith! That truly is a reason to celebrate as a people.

Rosh Hashanah

Newlywed Love

Mr. Murray Sragow

In one of the *pesukim* of *Zichronos* which we recite in *Mussaf* of Rosh Hashanah, we quote the beautiful words of Yirmiyahu (*Yirmiyahu* 2:2):

בַּה אָמַר ה' זָכַרְתִּי לְךָ תְּסֻד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבַת כְּלוּלֵתֶיךָ לְכַתֵּךְ אֶחָרִי בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא יִרְוֵינָהּ.

“I remember, says Hashem (that’s why it appears in *Zichronos*) the devotion of your youth, your newlywed love, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land barren of vegetation.”

Yirmiyahu is telling the people that there is hope for *teshuva*, for restoring the relationship with Hashem, because Hashem fondly remembers the beginnings of His marriage to us. Hashem remembers when we were “newlyweds,” just after *yetzias mitzraim* and *matan Torah*, and how we faithfully followed Him through the Sinai desert. Ah, what good times those were.

Really? Good times? A cursory glance at the *Torah* reveals what seems like an endless list of unpleasantness between Hashem and the Jewish people, beginning almost immediately after *matan Torah* and continuing throughout those 40 years in the desert. We did NOT follow faithfully. Anyone remember *chet ha’egel*? The *misonenim*? The *mis’avim*? The spies? *Ba’al Peor*? Surely Hashem does. So

what's this newlywed love? It seems more like a rocky marriage from the start.

So how can we explain this nostalgia? The *Rishonim* try valiantly to focus our attention on those few moments over those 40 years in which there was indeed a good relationship between us. The Radak argues that Hashem is thinking about *ma'amad har sinai*, where the Jews said "*naaseh v'nishma*" and trusted Hashem enough to accept His *Torah*. Rashi claims that the passage refers to *yetzias mitzrayim*, where we left Egypt even though it was fertile and safe to head out into an unknown and dangerous desert.

But these attempts only underline the question. Yes, there were nice moments here and there, when the Jews were on the same page as Hashem and were doing what we should. But that's certainly overshadowed by the many times we misbehaved. Why is Hashem so willfully forgetful of those times?

Perhaps the answer is that Hashem is calling the people to *teshuva*. The Jews in the time of *Yirmiyahu* were deeply embedded in sin, primarily *avodah zarah*, which is as bad an affront to Hashem as one can imagine. Many people probably said that restoring the relationship with Hashem was impossible. They had "cheated" on Hashem by getting involved with these foreign gods. How could they expect Hashem to forget that? How can an unfaithful spouse ever hope to once again experience the love and total commitment that existed prior to the cheating?

And so Hashem says that while it's true that people have a hard time forgetting the pain that others have put us

through, Hashem is better than that. He can put behind Him all our foolishness, as long as we sincerely want to come back to Him. And the proof is that this is exactly what He does with the *Dor Hamidbar*. Were they perfect tzaddikim? No. Was it all good times? Of course not. But Hashem is assuring us that when He thinks back on that, He has forgiven us for all our mistakes and remembers only the newlywed love. And just as He was able to do that, He was also willing to forgive the *avodah zarah* of Yirmiyahu's time. And we quote this *pasuk* in *Zichronos* in *Mussaf* to give us exactly the same confidence. Yes, we are deeply embedded in our own sins. But those sins do not need to hold us back. If our *teshuva* is sincere, Hashem promises to remember only our good times.

It is important to remember that we need to expect from ourselves the same behavior we ask from Hashem. We cannot turn to Hashem and ask Him to let go of the past and embrace us going forward without being willing to do the same to our neighbors. And therefore, we need to model the very *midos* we pray to Hashem about when people want to restore relationships with us. If my friend hurt me, but now sincerely apologizes, I need to be as fully accepting of that as we ask Hashem to be in our *Tefillas Mussaf*. And that's hard to do, but essential. I don't have to forgive those who continue to hurt me. We don't ask Hashem for that, either. But if my friend sincerely expresses remorse over what he did and wants to set things right, I need to let go of the pain and get to that place as well. And if I can truly do that, then not only can I repair my relationship with my friend, but that then entitles me to ask the same from Hashem as well.

Shofar So Good (for the Teshuvah Process)

Dov Hochman ('23)

Every Shabbos we say the same words in *perek tzadi beis* of *Tehillim*, better known as *Mizmor Shiur Layom Hashabbos: uchasil lo yavin es zos* (and the fool can not understand this). But the psalm does not really explain what “this” is that the fool doesn’t understand. The question is what is “this” and why is it so important (and apparently difficult) to understand?

The word *zos* in *gematriah* is 408. Every year at the end of *unisaneh tokef* we call out as a congregation “*uteshuvah utefillah utzedakkah maavirin es roah hagezeirah.*” In our *machzorim*, there are three smaller words above the former three in the aforementioned phrase, which read: “*tzom, kol, mamon.*” The sum of the *gematriah* of those three words is also 408: each of the words valued at 136. This connection is significant, because the authors of the *machzor* were telling us that only a fool does not understand that he has the ability to tear up the evil decree placed on him by doing these three actions of repentance, prayers, and giving charity. Furthermore, this is a lesson for life: if you take the *gematriah* of one of those words and cut it in half you get 68 which is the same value as *chayim* (life).

Rabbi Yosef Stern, in his *sefer*, *The Days Of Awe*, asks why we don’t say *Hallel* on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, despite otherwise largely treating them like *Yemei Tov*. He explains that the purpose of *teshuvah* is to help us live, a task

so all-encompassing that we need to be focused on *teshuva* to the extent that we don't even think to praise Hashem by singing *Hallel*. As the *Gemara* (*Erachin* 10b) states, that when the angels asked Hashem why *Bnei Yisrael* could not sing *Hallel* on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* Hashem responded that it wouldn't be possible for them to do so because they are faced with life and death and need to pray, not praise. *Bnei Yisrael* themselves wanted to sing *Hallel*. They realized that they could not and the *schar* they earned from their desire to sing created new angels to assist them in their impending judgment. Rabbi Stern continues that this event turned the nation into *Baalei Teshuva*. The *Gemara* (*Berachos* 34b) states that *Baalei Teshuva* are spiritually greater than the righteous. Rabbi Stern further explains that this is why the angels didn't fully understand what Hashem had said and why *Bnei Yisrael* did. Because as *Baalei Teshuva*, *Bnei Yisrael* could understand more than even the angels could.

The way we channel *teshuvah* through action is by blowing the *shofar*. We blow it every day for an entire month before reaching *Rosh Hashanah*. Hashem hears the blasts that come from the *shofar* and he remembers the sacrifice Avrohom Avinu made. Avrohom was willing to give up his son Yitzchok for his love for Hashem. Hashem sees his children holding a horn similar to the one Avrohom found on a ram by the *Akeidah* and hears our cries for help and feels (*kivayachol*) compelled to redeem us, thus we read the *Parsha* of *Akeidas Yitzchok* on *Rosh Hashanah*. When we see the *shofar* it reminds us of one of the ram's horns from the *Akeidah* used during the events of *Har Sinai* and we bring ourselves closer to Hashem because we think about how much we love the *Torah*.

During these times we have to learn the lesson that the *Bnei Yisrael* understands and fools can not. We need to understand that we can redeem ourselves by doing acts of kindness, praying to Hashem, and repenting towards our creator with as much strength as we have. We know from *Pirkei Avos* that the world stands on three pillars - *Torah, avodah, ugemilas chasadim* - which are the same things as we call out three times a year. Without these three things the world can not last and we would just be fools. So this year let us be *zoche* to hear the wake up call of the *shofar* and set our minds towards *teshuvah*, and to hear the sound of the second horn from the ram that Avrohom Avinu found that will be used as a *shofar* to bring *Moshiach*.

Start Your Engines!

Aaron Sisser ('23)

Imagine you are in the audience, about to listen to Beethoven's 5th Symphony. You are highly anticipating the famous dun-dun-dun-dun notes that begin the musical work, and the whole room is quiet. However, there is a sense of anticipation in the air. Some may even say tension. That is because these first four notes are so important. They are at the beginning of the symphony, and so they are the most famous and scrutinized part of it. They are a microcosm of the rest of the piece of music. So, one error here by the musicians, and it will leave a lasting negative impression on the audience. It is imperative that the musicians play the beginning of the piece perfectly, because that is what the

entire audience will use to perceive them for the remainder of the show.

We are now approaching Rosh Hashanah, the all-important beginning of the year 5783. We are like the musicians, and we are taking very special care to ensure that we make our beginning as beautiful as it can be. In fact, we do many things during our *tefillah* on Rosh Hashanah to make it special, in order to start off with a splendid performance for Hashem. For example, the longest *amidah* of the year is said on *musaf* on Rosh Hashanah. We are serenading Hashem to our utmost abilities in order to try and show that we truly have *emunah* in Him. We also say the famous holy prayer of *Unesaneh Tokef*, in which we declare that we realize how all-powerful Hashem is. We are showing that we are completely and totally under His control, and we hope that He listens to our *tefillos* and grants us a good year. Additionally, on Rosh Hashanah, we do many things to try to initiate our doing of *teshuvah*. We blow the *shofar* as a wake up call for *teshuvah*, and we also eat special foods which help to remind us to be good people in order to improve our fortune. We do all of these special things on Rosh Hashanah in order to show Hashem that we have the potential to be good people, and we hope that Hashem listens to our *tefillos*. Here, Hashem is like the audience at the music show. He is awaiting the performance, and it better be amazing. This shows us how much care and effort we must put into our performance during the beginning of the new year.

However, it is not just the beginning of a new year that we must take note of. In all aspects of life, beginnings are very important. The first year after a bride and groom get married is very important as it is considered a view into how the

entire growth of the family will play out. If the first year is good, it can have a lasting positive effect on the family for many years. When you meet someone new, the first thing you say to them or do for them is very important as it lays the foundation for the relationship that you will have with that person. A good first-impression can go a long way. In a race, the initial jump that a runner uses to get ahead will help them for the entire duration of the race, and can be vital in deciding the winner. In fact, the *Sheim Meshmuel* points out that beginnings are so important that the first-born child gets a double portion of inheritance, from among the rest of his siblings, because he was the first child and laid the groundwork for the rest of his family. In all of these cases, it is clear that the beginning of something new has a very significant role to play.

The beginning of the *Torah* is no different. It is also extremely important, and it displays a wonderful lesson. The first *passuk* in the *Torah*, “*Bereishis bara Elokim es Hashamayim ve’es ha’aretz*,” is incredibly important and is used as the cornerstone of our belief that Hashem created the World. This imperative value that we have imbued in us is due to the beginning of the *Torah*, which does a wonderful job of setting the stage for the rest of Hashem’s Word.

Thus, let us all make sure that during *Rosh Hashanah*, we take careful note of how much we are affecting our future. This is the turning over of a new leaf, and it is now when we are able to make that leaf a good one. What we do now can have a lasting positive impact on our year. It is said that *Kol Haschalos Kashos*, all beginnings are hard. However, they are also very important, and we must ensure that we take

aspect of *Elokim*, judges us unfavorably, the side of *Kel rachum v'chanun* will have mercy on us and forgive us of our sins.

There are a few questions, however, that emerge from this seemingly satisfying answer. One, why is this happiness attributed to Rosh Hashanah? Isn't Yom Kippur an even happier day filled with forgiveness and mercy? As the *mishnah* in *Ta'anis* (*Mishnayos Ta'anis* 4:8) tells us, "לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים, לְאִישׁוֹרָאֵל כְּחַמְשָׁה עָשָׂר בָּאָב וּבְיוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים"?! Why not save our celebration for the day when our judgements are sealed in our favor? Moreover, the famous reason for why we don't recite *hallel* on the *Yamim Nora'im* is because (*Rosh Hashanah* 32b) "אֶפְשָׁר מְלֶךְ יֵשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא דִין, וְסִפְרֵי חַיִּים וְסִפְרֵי מֵתִים פְּתוּחִין לְפָנָיו —" אֶפְשָׁר מְלֶךְ יֵשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא דִין, וְסִפְרֵי חַיִּים וְסִפְרֵי מֵתִים פְּתוּחִין לְפָנָיו —"?! If the impending judgement is enough to prevent us from singing *hallel*, should it not be severe enough to impact the day's atmosphere? Clearly, we should not be celebrating and rejoicing on Rosh Hashanah!

To answer the first question, the *Sukkas Dovid* explains that Rosh Hashanah is purely a day of *din*, of judgement. Yom Kippur, however, is inherently a day of *rachamim*, of mercy, with a bit of *din* sprinkled in. On Rosh Hashanah, we are facing *malkeinu*, our King, while on Yom Kippur, we are facing our *av*, our Father. Therefore, it is a greater *neis* on Rosh Hashanah when we are judged favorably than on Yom Kippur; one who has done wrong and is facing trial in front of the King is in much worse shape than someone who has to ask forgiveness from their father. So, even though we are happier on Yom Kippur when we are sealed into the book of life, we are celebrating a much more significant miracle on Rosh Hashanah.

To answer the second question, a more nuanced approach is needed. Imagine walking into a courtroom for a

case you are almost certain will go in your favor. You've spent months collecting evidence, and you have all the tools you need to undoubtedly win the case. You walk up to your table, the judge is preparing to begin the trial, and you spontaneously burst into song. You yell out to everyone present how confident you are, and you throw your folder of evidence at the judge. For some strange reason, you are dragged out of the courtroom and you lose the case. How did this happen? You had everything you needed to win the case handily, yet you still walked out of the courtroom defeated! To anyone familiar with the proper decorum in a courtroom, however, it is quite obvious why the judge ruled against you. There are certain rules in the courtroom and failure to obey these rules will lead to you losing the case, no matter how much evidence you can bring in your favor. You must respect the judge, you must present your case only when called upon, and you must lend the proper dignity to your opponents. Tying the *mashal* back to our case, the *Sukkas Dovid* explains that even though we are supremely confident on Rosh Hashanah that the "court case" will go in our favor, we are still terrified of the possibility of loss. So, even though we are almost certain that we will be judged favorably, we cannot break out into song in front of the judge. We must follow the proper "decorum" to ensure that our *zechuyos* will work productively in ensuring that we are rewarded the share that we earned. But still, even though we must take certain precautions to ensure our success, we are so confident in the *Kel rachum v'chanun* that we dress in our brightest clothing and rejoice with festive *yuntif* meals.

With this in mind, I hope you can begin to appreciate the miraculous wishes hidden in the words “have a *k’siva v’chasima tovah*”.

The Ultimate Cry

Daniel Toth ('24)

During the prayer services of *Rosh Hashanah* we recite a spiritually energizing prayer which begins with “Our Father, our King...”, and continues with a request for the coming year. Each line of the prayer begins with “Our Father, our King...”, and has its respective request following that beginning. Though the prayer is found to be uplifting and life changing, it is important to recognize the significance of the words “Our Father, our King...” and other related ideas.

The Talmud records a devastating drought. This drought absolutely shook the involved people. In response to the event, Rabbi Elazar declared a public fast day and recited twenty four different blessings. Unfortunately, in spite of R’ Elazar’s efforts, the drought ensued. But when Rabbi Akiva cries out for mercy by declaring, “Our Father, our King! We have no one else, but You! Our Father, our King, have mercy upon us, for Your sake!” Instantly, the drought ended, and the rain began to fall. What is the practical difference between the prayers of R’ Elazar and R’ Akiva? Why was one answered, while the other was not?

In *parshas Re’eih* (*Devarim* 14:1), the Torah states “*banim atem laHashem Elokeichem...*”. Within this passuk we derive the idea that we are the sons of G-d. We are G-ds children, so He can dismiss our sins and grant us salvation which in this

case meant granting R' Akiva rain. Though G-d is the King of the entire universe, He is “our Father...” as well.

On a similar note, this prayer, “Our Father, our King...”, captures the relationship we have with G-d: As we call out to Him, calling Him “Our Father..”, we assume our sins are forgiven, and our needs are given careful attention. But if we merely perceive Him as “our King..”, then we cannot expand our intricate relationship with Him. If we do stretch our arms out, asking for nothing other than Him and a relationship with Him, then a seemingly deadly situation turns into a situation of fertility and flourishment. We must understand that when R' Akiva called out “Our Father, our King...”, he also called for a relationship with Him. Specifically, he called for the relationship between a child and a father. Still, why is this relationship particularly meaningful to us as Jews?

When the time for *teshuvah* comes, on days like *Yom Kippur*, one may feel overwhelmed and possibly believe that he cannot atone for all of his accumulated sins. This is not so. The Talmud (*Yoma*) lists some harmful sins and the punishments one can incur for these violations. The *gemara* soothes the sinner by telling them that *teshuvah* out of love for G-d can completely erase these sins. When we do *teshuvah*, when we truly regret our actions, plan on changing our bad habits, actually change these habits, all out of love and care for our relationship with G-d, we can completely erase certain harmful sins. This is due to the Jew’s personal relationship with “Our Father, our King...”, the King of the universe, and Father of the greatest nation. It is never too late to correct wrongdoing, no matter how bad one might think they have acted.

As one mends his ways, not only does he become closer to G-d, but G-d becomes closer to him. *Pirkei Avos* states that when you “treat His will as if it were your own will...He will treat your will as if it were His will.” Moreover the Mishnah states, “Nullify your will before His will, so that He will nullify the will of others before your will.” These two *passukim* are truly mind boggling. Not only can a Jew completely fix his broken past, but he can also ensure his promising future. All due to His cry to G-d.

That is the fundamental difference between R' Akiva and R' Elazar. Though it is proper and nice to pray to Hashem and supply Him with blessings, it is far more powerful to reactivate our relationship with Him. It is essential to remember that each of us has this voice of R' Akiva within us.

This seems very hopeful, but isn't reaching the lowest of the low the worst thing we can do? Especially in these times, when every single act of chesed is like a hidden gem. If I reach rock bottom, is it not too late for me?

A *medrash* states the following: *b'nei Yisroel* asked *HaKodosh Baruch Hu*, “When are You going to redeem us? *HaRibono Shel Olam* responded, “When you hit rock bottom, when you hit the lowest place.” The beauty in this can be seen in a Chassidic quote: “Every descent is for the sake of ascent.” Meaning, when we reach rock bottom, there is only one way to go: Up.

Moreover, Rebbi Nachman says that when one is in the lowest of the low, he should cry to Hashem. But sometimes, the loudest cry is a silent cry. For then, one truly relies on Hashem to save him.

The Torah is often compared to water, and just how R' Akiva brought forth a much needed rain, may we, through

serious introspection and careful behavior during *Tishrei*, bring forth an ultimate shower of Torah and *middos* for the year to come, and beyond!

When Does the Jewish Year Actually Begin?

Natan Horowitz ('23)

Soon we will be celebrating *Rosh Hashanah*, starting off the Jewish Year with the month of *Tishrei*. And yet, when we take a look in the *Torah*, we find that *Nissan* is referred to as *chodesh rishon*, making *Tishrei* the seventh month of the year. So which is it? When does the year actually start?

Rav Kook had an amazing insight into the question. Rav Kook answered that there are two paths one can take in spiritual growth. The first does not require too much effort, rather it relies only on maintaining human decency and natural human integrity. In order to accomplish this, one would need only to abstain from corrupt deeds, which could be done by simply following the *Sheva Mitzvos B'nei Noach*. This is comprised of *mitzvos* that maintain the innate goodness of human beings, and only when someone has corrupted this innate goodness would they be inclined to engage in actions such as murder or theft. However, the second path is reserved for *Am Yisrael*. It requires extra effort by keeping the 613 *mitzvos* and engaging in *talmud Torah*. The reward for following this path is not just keeping one's *nefesh* uncorrupted, but also the ability to instead attain ever higher

levels of spirituality that would be unattainable on the first path.

In correspondence to these two paths of spiritual growth, there are also two ways in which *Hashem* runs the universe. One is through judgment according to each person's *zechus*. The other is via supernatural means. *Hashem* sees how every individual contributes towards the goal of the universe as a whole, and since He takes into perspective how everything works towards the same goal, opposites can be blended, and natural order changed in order to achieve that goal. Such supernatural rule is given to *Bnei Yisrael* as a *zechus* for their intense efforts to perfect themselves.

The two months, *Tishrei* and *Nissan*, both relate to two different *middos* of *Hashem*. *Tishrei* reflects justice as it reflects creation and the natural order of things, and therefore one is judged by what they've accomplished in their purpose in life. *Nissan* reflects the *middah* of mercy as it reflects *Yetzias Mitzraim*, where mercy can even be given to those with little *zechus*. This is because they are tied towards the common goal of the universe through Torah and *mitzvos*.

So, as we approach the month of *Tishrei* and prepare to start a new year, we should keep in mind both our personal purpose in life and the role that we each play in furthering ourselves toward our one common goal. By doing so, may we soon merit true salvation and *Yemei Mashiach*, *Bimheira Biymanu*.

Shanah Tovah!

The Deeper Connection Between Shofar and Tefillah

Moshe Lieberman ('24)

There are quite a few *Gemaras* in *maseches* Rosh Hashanah which seem to allude to the connection between the powerful blasts of the *shofar* and prayer, possibly even leading to the conclusion that the blowing of the *shofar* is a form of prayer.

“*Ein kategur na'aseh sanegur*” (Rosh Hashanah 26a), or, “don't make the accuser into the defender.” This is the famous line of the *Gemara* which explains why a cow's horn may not be used for the blowing of the *shofar*. In other words, it's disgraceful to take the horn of a cow, the animal used in the *chet ha'egel*, and use it for the mitzvah of *shofar*. Based on this principle, the *Gemara* goes on to question the acceptability of the garments of the *kohen gadol*, which included ornaments of gold. Is this not also a material which brings to mind the sin of the golden calf? But, the *Gemara* replies, since the golden garments are not worn “*bifnim*,” inside the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, there is no disqualification. Similarly, since *shofar* is called “*zichron*” (remembrance), it is regarded by the *Gemara* as being akin to the service in the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, and therefore a cow's horn is invalid. We see from this that *shofar* is considered “*bifnim*,” indicating not only that the *Gemara* regarded *shofar* as a form of prayer, but actually considered it to be a prayer as significant as the entry of the *kohen gadol* into the *Kodesh Hakodashim*!

Next, the *Mishnah* (Rosh Hashanah 26b) records two opinions with respect to the *shofar*'s shape. The first opinion

maintains that on *Rosh Hashanah* we sound a straight horn of the *ya'el*, and on *Yom Kippur* of the *Yovel* we use the bent horn of a ram. Rebbe Yehuda disagrees and holds the reverse view. The *Gemara* explains that Rebbe Yehuda's view sees the shape of the *shofar* as being a reflection of the posture that one should have on *Rosh Hashanah*, when we approach Hashem in prayer, a humble, bent posture is more appropriate. In *Yovel*, when we proclaim freedom, an upright, or straight posture is called for. Surprisingly, we see from here that we don't even need the sound of the *shofar* to connect to our davening, but even something as simple as the shape of the *shofar* is directly related to our davening.

Also, Rabbeinu Tam maintains that the *mitzvah* of *shofar* is one of sounding, and that the listeners fulfill their obligation through "*shome'a ke'oneh*." One who hears is considered as if he recited himself. Clearly, this notion applies only in the realm of blessings and prayers, which require a verbal recitation, and not the performance of an action. That Rabbeinu Tam seems to suggest that he views the sounding of *shofar* as a form of speech, or prayer, seeming to be another proof that *shofar* really is related to the davening.

As well as that, the *Mishnah* (*Rosh Hashanah* 32a) records a disagreement between R. Yochanan ben Nuri and R. Akiva concerning the insertion of the *shofar* blasts during the *Musaf* service of *Rosh Hashanah*, in *Malchiyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofros*. Evidently, the blasts of the *shofar* are seemingly intertwined with the *Shemoneh Esreh* of *Musaf*, causing it to become part of the davening. Moreover, Sephardim have a *halachah* to blow the *shofar* within the proper sections of

their private *Amidah*, showing that even their private *davening* is affected by the *shofar*.

Lastly, the *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 33b) discusses the nature of the *teruah* blast, equating it to different forms of crying, whether it be a series of short sighs, or wails. Whatever type of crying it may be, it's clear that these sounds represent a form of deep prayer from the heart.

Overall, there seem to be many sources and indications to the strong connection between *tefillah* and *shofar*. May we all be able to increase our *kavanah* in our *tefillah* through listening to the *shofar*.

Aseres Yemei Teshuvah

Selichah 66: Be'ashmores Haboker – At the Morning's Watch

Yisrael-Dovid Rosenberg ('23)

There is something curious about *selichah* 66. Or rather five curious things. Each of the five stanzas of the *piyut* seems to discuss substantially different matters with little connection to each other. Let's take a look.

בְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת הַבֹּקֶר קְרִיאַתְךָ אֵל מְהֻלָּל. יְעַרְב־לְךָ חִיַּן עֲרַפִּי יוֹם לְבִי לְךָ סוּלָל. וְתַגִּיהַ
אֶת־חֹשֶׁךְי וּבְאֹר בִּקְר יְהֻלָּל. מְלֻכִי וְאַלְהִי כִי אֵלֶיךָ אֶתְפַּלֵּל:

*In the early morning, I call upon You Almighty, Who is praised;
let the order of my prayer be sweet to You on this day when my
heart exalts You; lighten my darkness and may it be bright as
the morning. My King and my God, to You I pray.*

We open the *selichah* with a reference to surrounding darkness. It is clearly speaking about the time at which *selichos* are said - the last watch at the end of the night (see *Berachos* 3a) - and the darkness of the times in which we may find ourselves. Our prayers, elicited by our sorrows, ring into the final hours of the night. The paragraph draws a sharp contrast between this night and the light for which we now beseech Hashem.

צָרִי מִזְעִימִיךָ בָּאֵף חֲרָפוֹ עִמָּךְ. וְנִשְׂאֲתִי אֵימֶךָ בְּרָגֶשׁ שְׂאוֹן קִמְיָךְ. שְׂפוֹךְ עֲלֵיהֶם
וְעִמָּךְ וְחֲרוֹן אַף מִמְרוֹמֶיךָ. וְקִנְיָ אֵל לְשִׁמְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּגוֹיִם מִחֲלָל: מִלְכֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי כִי
אֵלֶיךָ אֶתְפַּלֵּל:

My foes who anger You, humiliate Your people in their rage. I bear the fear of You despite the tumult of Your adversaries. Pour out Your wrath upon them and rage from Your Heavenly Dwelling; and be jealous, Almighty, for Your Name which has been profaned among the nations. My King and my God, to You I pray.

In the second stanza we begin to discuss a new topic. The enemies of Hashem and His people - us - are mentioned. We cry out, reminding Hashem of our awe of Him, in the hopes that He will bring retribution upon those who have desecrated His name, drawing out the idea that our offenders are His offenders.

חַי רוֹכֵב עַל־עַב קֵל. אִם תַּעֲלֵנִי בְּמִשְׁקַל, צְדָקִי כְּחוֹל־יָם יִתְקַל. וְרָשָׁעֵי כְּנוֹצָה
יִקַּל. וְאִם גְּתִיב אַרְחֵי מִעֶקֶל וְדִינֵי כְּשׂוֹר הַגִּסְקַל. שְׂקֵלָה כְּפֶלֶס מְהוּלָל. אֵיִשׁ
מִפְּשָׁעִים מִחוּלָל: מִלְכֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי כִי אֵלֶיךָ אֶתְפַּלֵּל:

O living One, Who rides upon a swift cloud; if You place me on a scale, let my righteousness be as heavy as the sand of the sea,

and my wickedness as light as a feather; and if my path has been crooked, and my sentence is [to be] as that of an ox who is stoned to death, then weigh me on the scale of grace, for I am a man, wounded with transgressions. My King and my God, to You I pray.

Then we speak about the exaltedness of God as He sits high in the heavens and we ask for some form of *rachamim badin*, mercy in judgment. We conjure up images of judgment - a scale to balance our merits against our sins and an ox that has been given a deadly verdict - and request a more favorable outcome than we may strictly deserve.

קוּמִים אַרְוֹן וּבִדְיוֹ וְהִלְבֵּשׂ אֶהְרֹן מְדִינָה. וְרוֹכֵה וְצוֹדֵה בְּצִידוֹ יֵאָכֵל פְּרִי מַעֲבָדָיו.
וְאִישׁ נוֹהֵם עַל־מְרִדָיו לְשׁוֹן־אִישׁ תֹּאכֵל בְּדָיו. וּבָעֵרוּ שְׂנֵינֵהֶם יִחָדוּ כְּאִשׁר׃ בְּעֵר
הַגִּלְגַּל: מִלְכֵי וְאַלְהֵי כִי אֶלְיָךְ אֶתְפָּלֵל:

Restore the Holy Ark and its staves, and clothe Aaron in his [priestly] garments; and they that hunt with snares shall eat the fruit of their labor, and each of those who rebelled, let tongues of flame consume their offspring, and let them both be discarded as dung is thrown out. My King and my God, to You I pray.

We continue with a more cryptic paragraph discussing the Aron Habris and certain antagonists of our people throughout biblical history. The archer and hunter most likely refer to Yishmael and Esav, respectively, since they are described by these terms in *Sefer Bereishis*. We wish that the nation and its Jewish priests, represented by Aharon Hakohen, will once again rise and that our tormentors be cast down.

קדוש על־כָּל־אֲדוֹן עִם כָּל יְצוּרָיו נְדוֹן. תְּזוּה יְרִיבֵי אִישׁ מְדוֹן מְדַבֵּר עָלַי בְּדוֹן.
וְנוֹכְחֵי יַעֲוִיר בִּידוֹן וְתוֹתַח בִּי יְדוֹן. תִּנְהָ אֶת נַפְשִׁי לְשָׁלֵל מוֹלִיד יוֹנְעָצִים שׁוֹלֵל:
מִלְכֵי יְאֱלֹהֵי בִי אֱלִיד אֶתְפַּלֵּל:

Holy One, Who is above all masters, Who judges all His creatures, see how my quarrelsome adversary [Satan], speaks evil of me and lifts his spear against me, and his vengeful darts are cast at me. Let my soul be rescued [from him] O God who annuls and frustrates [evil] counsel. My King and my God, to You I pray.

We finally conclude our *selichah* invoking Hashem's rule over the world and submitting our plea to Hashem to save us from the evil plotting of the *Satan*.

What do darkness, enemies, judgment, the Aron Hakodesh, and the *Satan* all have to do with each other? Well, when put that way, maybe it's not much of a question anymore. These are the perfect images to encapsulate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They all evoke the *Yamim Nora'im*, the Days of Awe, and the religious turmoil we feel at this time as we strive to improve ourselves in the year to come.

The *paytan* really weaves these expressions together, upon closer inspection, and does not just leave them in isolated stanzas. The second stanza makes a subtle mention of Hashem's exaltedness in the word "*mimeromecha*", "from your heights". This is followed by the third stanza with its opening of God on a cloud, so to speak, reigning from far above us in the sky. Also, the enemies in the second stanza might well be related to those of the fourth one. Throughout the *selichah*, of course, we continually ask Hashem for reprieve from our enemies and troubles and for a merciful judgment. With this perspective, the first line really

introduces the entirety of the *selichah*; it indicates how, out of the darkness, we call up to Hashem on high.

The explanation here is a combination of my personal literary analysis of the piyut and the explanations given in the Artscroll and Koren Minhag Lita Selichos. The text and translation here are drawn from Sefaria which attributes it to The Metsudah Selichos: translated and annotated by Rabbi Avrohom Davis, Metsudah Publications, 1986.

Erev Yom Kippur

Why Is There a Mitzvah to Eat on Erev Yom Kippur?

Yaakov Feldman ('24)

In a number of contexts, the *Gemara* makes clear that just as it is a *mitzvah* to fast on the day of *Yom Kippur*, it is also a *mitzvah* to eat the day before. This is most likely based off the *possuk* in (*Vayikra* 23:32) that specifies *btishah lachodesh ba'erev* - “On the ninth day of the month in the evening”, indicating that there is more to *Yom Kippur* than just the fast that only starts on the tenth itself.

There are different opinions as to the source of this obligation, perhaps the most logical being that it is simply to stave off crippling hunger. This approach is taken by *Rashi* and others, with the accompanying detail that fasting on the ninth makes it as if one had fasted on both the ninth and tenth. However, it is important to clarify that the above

possuk still says *vi'anisem es nafshoseichem* - "And you shall afflict your souls," and the goal of the eating is not to eliminate discomfort completely. There still must be a sense of discomfort as to motivate a repentance, albeit slightly less. The very notion that there is a *mitzvah* to eat proves this point, as it is clear that the main point of fasting on Yom Kippur is not for everyone to be in too much pain to make it to shul, rather that they can be rid of distractions as they focus on trying to do *teshuva*.

Conversely, there is an explanation that the fast actually becomes more difficult after eating a larger than usual meal, and that the point of eating is to make the fast more challenging. Another explanation is that since expressing *simchas Yom Tov* cannot be done through eating on Yom Kippur itself, it is done the day before. There is also the explanation of Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 4:9), who considers the eating as an expression of gratitude and happiness for the opportunity to do *teshuva*. Whatever the reason, the *mitzvah* to eat on Erev Yom Kippur is given enough credence that the *Gemara* in (*Brachos* 8b) even instructs us to slightly lessen our learning so that there should be time to eat.

R' Akiva Eiger considers these options when addressing the case of a woman who will not be fasting on Yom Kippur and her relationship to eating on the day before, suggesting that the answer hinges on two of the reasons mentioned above. If the *mitzvah* is a positive commandment of eating to show *simchas Yom Tov* and gratitude for *teshuva*, it would then be in the category of *Mitzvos Asei Shehazman Gramah*, which would make the woman exempt. However, if the *mitzvah* is just to prepare for the fast, anyone not fasting

would seemingly have no reason to eat at all and would also be exempt. While it comes out that the woman in this case would probably be exempt from multiple angles, analyzing her case sheds light on the true reason for this obligation.

May we all have a meaningful fast and merit a *kappara* with our *teshuvah*.

Yom Kippur

The Ideal Teshuvah

Yosef Weiner ('23)

In describing the *teshuvah* process the Rambam seems to contradict himself. However, close examination reveals that the Rambam is conveying a fundamental concept at the very heart of *teshuvah*.

The Rambam (*Teshuvah* 1:1) describes the process of *viduy* as follows:

כיצד מתודין אומר אנא ה' חטאתי עויתי פשעתי לפניך ועשיתי כך וכך והרי נחמתי ובושתי במעשי ולעולם איני חוזר לדבר זה, זהו עיקרו של וידוי, וכל המרבה להתודות ומאריך בענין זה הרי זה משובח.

How does he confess? He says, "Please God, I have sinned, I have erred, I have transgressed, I have done such-and-such, I am regretful, and ashamed for my actions, and I will never again return to my old ways." This is the essence of the confession, and anyone who wants to lengthen, this is praiseworthy.

Here the Rambam describes one first acknowledging their sin and expressing their regret and then making resolutions for the future.

However, the Rambam later in *hilchos teshuvah* writes (2:2):

ומה היא התשובה הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד שנאמר יעזוב רשע דרכו וגו', וכן יתנחם על שעבר שנאמר כי אחרי שובי נחמתי... וצריך להתודות בשפתיו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלבו

What is teshuvah? It is when a person abandons the sin that he sinned and removes it from his thoughts and commits in his heart that he will not do it again, as it says, The wicked should abandon his path etc. And also that he regrets sinning, as it says, After I returned I regretted... He must verbally confess and state these matters which he resolved in his heart.

Here the Rambam swaps the order, first depicting one making resolutions to remove himself from sin and only then does he mention the concept of regret for past actions.

The Rav (*Hararei Kedem* Vol. 1 45) addresses this contradiction based on another Rambam (*Teshuvah* 7:6).

גדולה תשובה שמקרבת את האדם לשכינה... התשובה מקרבת את הרחוקים, אמש היה זה שנאווי לפני המקום משוקץ ומרוחק ותועבה, והיום הוא אהוב ונחמד קרוב וידיד

Teshuvah is great for it draws a man close to the Shechinah... teshuvah brings near those who were far removed. Previously, this person was hated by God, disgusting, far removed, and abominable. Now, he is beloved and desirable, close, and dear.

The Rav explains that this tremendous power of *teshuvah* takes place when one recognizes that previously he was hated by God, far removed, and that his actions were

abominable. Through this type of *teshuvah* one becomes beloved and desirable, close, and dear to Hashem.

Parenthetically, the Rav explains that sin is akin to sickness requiring healing - *teshuvah*. This is why the Torah (*Shemos* 33:4) when describing *Bnei Yisroel's* reaction as they recognized the severe nature of the *cheit ha'eigel* states

וישמע העם את הדבר הרע הזה ויתאבלו...

The nation heard this bad thing and mourned...

They mourned for the loss of many levels of *kedusha* and *tahara* because just as one mourns over death there is mourning for losses to one's *nefesh* and *neshamah*.

Coming back to the contradiction between the two Rambams, the Rambam in *perek aleph* describes acknowledgment of one's sins and regret for their actions first because this is the best form of *teshuvah* (see *Hilchos Teshuvah* 7), one which emerges from regret for past actions.

Furthermore, in *perek aleph* when the Rambam depicts one resolving to never do this act again this is not only a resolution for the future but an expression of the great regret they feel over the behaviors of their past.

However, in *perek beis*, the Rambam is dealing with one who is not undergoing the highest level of *teshuvah* - regret of one's past resulting in resolve not to sin again in the future. Rather, it is about someone who has made up their mind that they would like to refrain from sinning but not necessarily motivated by disgust over his past actions. It is therefore necessary for the Rambam to state that the person should now resolve not to sin again and then eventually the person will come to regret his past actions as well.

Sukkos

Who Needs Sukkos?

Elisha Price ('23)

Sukkos is a tremendously important *Yom Tov*. It is one of the *shalosh regalim* and is one of only two holidays to have a few days of *chol hamoed* in its midst (the other, of course, being *Pesach*). It is the longest *Yom Tov* of the year, and in the *Mishnah* it is considered to be the epitome of a holiday, thus referred to by the name “*chag*” over and over again in *mishnayos* (for example: *Taanit* 1:1-2, *Sukkah* 2:6, 3:13, 4:4, 5:2, *Sotah* 7:8, and *Megillah* 3:5).

However, there are some very critical aspects of *Sukkos* which are either missing or very ambiguous in the *Torah*. For example, the *Torah* never really clarifies why *Sukkos* is where it is on the Jewish calendar. For the purposes of this article, we will discuss a different key element of the *Yom Tov*, which, when addressed in the *Torah*, seems to raise at least as many questions as it answers.

The *passuk* (*Vayikra* 23:43) says as follows:

למען ידעו דרתיכם כי בסכות הושבת י את־בני ישראל בהוציא י אותם מארץ מצרים אני ה' אלקיכם

In order that future generations may know that I made Bnei Yisrael live in huts when I brought them out of the land of Egypt—I, Hashem, your G-d.

Two very striking questions emerge from this *passuk*: (1) Why is that enough to merit one of the three *regalim* along with *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and *Kabalas HaTorah*? And (2) When exactly did Hashem make us live in huts?

Rabbi Eliezer (*Sukkah* 11b; Rashi and Ramban (23:43:1)) defines these *sukkos* not as actual huts or tents that Hashem made us reside in, but as the *ananei hakavod* (the pillars of cloud) that Hashem provided us in the wilderness to protect us from external harm. If so, what the *passuk* appears to be saying is that the *Yom Tov* is to commemorate the miracle Hashem performed for us with the *ananei hakavod*, not the physical residence within them.

On the other hand, Rabbi Akiva (*ibid.*, Ramban and Ibn Ezra (23:43:1)) translates the *passuk* literally: apparently *Bnei Yisrael* made huts in the desert after crossing the *Yam Suf*, and again at *Har Sinai*. Ramban adds (quoting from the *Sifra* (*Emor* 17:11)) that if so, the holiday is not commemorating something unique but is something of a combination of *Pesach* and *Shavuos* in that it encompasses both of their remembrances.

Rabbi Eliezer's opinion is very logical. However, the opinion of Rabbi Akiva is troubling:

According to Rabbi Akiva without Ramban's addition, why do I care that they sat in tents? And with Ramban's explanation, why do I need *Sukkos* at all? I already have *Pesach* and *Shavuos*! In fact, when the *Aruch Hashulchan* (O.C. 625:2) quotes and explains both opinions, he describes the greatness of the miracle of the *ananei hakavod* at great length, but leaves Rabbi Akiva's opinion as a question. In short, we have not managed to answer question (1) according to Rabbi Akiva's understanding, with or without Ramban's elucidation.

Rav Ezra Bick, in his twelfth installment to his set of *shiurim* on *Sukkos*, gives a beautiful answer that helps us not only understand the *lomdus* of the *machlokes* between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva but also to appreciate the holiday

itself. He writes that Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva are really saying the same thing. Really, there are two aspects to *Bnei Yisrael's* life in the *midbar*: (1) they lived in harsh natural conditions, and (2) they were taken care of through amazing supernatural events. Rabbi Eliezer understood the *zechirah* mentioned in the *passuk* to be referring to the latter aspect, the miracles, consistent with the other *regalim*. But Rabbi Akiva believed that the *zechirah* of *Sukkos* is the natural conditions in which we would have lived had Hashem not created the *ananei hakavod* for us.

Commemorating *nissim* can be done in many different ways. It can be done by celebrating the glory of the *neis* (as Rabbi Eliezer explains). But miracles can also be commemorated by acknowledging the need we had for that miracle. Meaning that what we do on *Sukkos*, according to Rabbi Akiva, is sit in a temporary structure and say that this (at best!) is what our ancestors would have lived in in the *midbar* had You, Hashem, not sent them the *ananei hakavod*. They would have been unable to survive in the harsh conditions of the desert. And through this method, we gain an appreciation for the benefit we derived from the miracle, perhaps more so than by praising the glory and splendor of the supernatural event itself.

[At this point, it may be helpful (or possibly even necessary) to rethink how we translate the *passuk*. Instead of “I made *Bnei Yisrael* live in *sukkos*,” Rabbi Akiva reads the *passuk* as “In the *sukkos*, I made *Bnei Yisrael* live.”]

Keeping all this in mind, we can now understand the significance of Ramban's additions (that *Sukkos* is something of a compound *zikaron* of the miracles of *Pesach* and *Shavuot*). The *zikaron* of *sukkos* serves a different function

than that of the other *regalim*. On *Pesach*, what we are *chayav* to discuss at the *seder* table are the *nisim vinifla'os*: the wondrous miracles that Hashem performed for us at the time of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. On *Shavuos*, there is a *mitzvah* to remember the fire and lightning of *Har Sinai* (at least according to *Ramban*; *Rambam* disagrees) and (according to everyone) there is value in immortalizing the revelation of Hashem's glory to all of *Bnei Yisrael* in our minds and in our culture. And according to *Rabbi Eliezer*, *Sukkos* fits this pattern, commemorating the great *neis* that Hashem performed when He provided the *ananei hakavod* for our benefit. But according to *Rabbi Akiva* (as elucidated by *Ramban*), *Sukkos* deviates from the pattern. It commemorates not the glory of the miracle, but the understanding that without these miracles, we could not have survived the *midbar*. And according to *Ramban*, this message is so powerful it needed to be applied to *all three regalim*. It is not enough to just focus on the flashes and bangs, we have to understand their significance in our people's survival. Therefore, it was necessary to add an element of the *zichronos* of both of the other *regalim* into *Sukkos*' so that they too can be viewed in this fashion.

The Connectivity of the Esrog

Noam Sheffey ('25)

One of the many exciting elements of the *Yuntif* of *Succos* is the *Arba Minim*. The *posuk* states

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַרְאִשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הַדֶּרֶךְ כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵגֶר עֵץ־עֵבֶת
וְעֵרְבֵי־עֵמֶל וְשִׂמְחֶתֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים

On the first day you shall take the product of hadar trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy* trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before your God seven days (Vayikra 23:40).

The Midrash explains that the *mitzvah* of the *arba minim* is meant to unify B'nai Yisroel. The *esrog* also symbolizes the heart, one of the utilities we use to serve Hashem. The *esrog* also represents a person who has good deeds. But is there a more fond connection that the *esrog* has? After all we find that the words *pri eitz hadar* are alluding to what is called a Citron. This fruit has a very pleasant aroma which is pretty well known. *Vayikra Rabah* (30:9) states:

דָּבַר אֶחָד, פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר, זֶה הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שְׂכָתוֹב בּוֹ (תהלים קד, א): הוֹד
וְהָדָר לְבָשָׂתָּ. כַּפַּת הַמְּרִים, זֶה הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שְׂכָתוֹב בּוֹ (תהלים צב, יג):
צְדִיק בְּתִמְרֵי יִפְרֹחַ.

Another explanation: "The fruit of a beautiful tree (*ets hadar*)" - this is [referring to] the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written about Him (Psalms 104:1), "You were dressed in splendor and beauty (*hadar*)."

This teaches us that there is a connection of the beauty of the *esrog*, and the beauty of Hashem. After all the *esrog* comes from a beautiful tree. We then see that the *esrog* tree has a connection to Hashem, and Hashem is the one who is referred to by the beauty of this tree. Hashem is the beauty that we see in the *esrog*.

The Talmud *Yerushalmi* (*Sukkah* 3:5:2) states

כתיב פרי עץ הדר. עץ שפריו הדר ועצו הדר. אי זה זה. זה אתרוג. אין תימר רימונא. (עצו) [פריו] הדר ואין (פריו) [עצו] הדר. אין תימר חרובא. עצו הדר ואין פריו הדר. אי זה זה. זה אתרוג. הדר. אמר רבי לוי. שהוא דר באילנו משנה לחבירתה.

It is written, a fruit of the splendor tree, a tree whose fruit is splendor and its wood is splendor. Which one is that? This is the etrog. If you would say, the pomegranate, its (wood) [fruit] is splendor but its (fruit) [wood] is not splendor. If you would say, the carob, its wood is splendor but its fruit is not splendor. Which one is it? The etrog. Hadar; Rabbi Levi said, for it stays on its tree from one year to the next.

It goes on to discuss how the esrog is the fruit of the splendor tree. And other things that grow from a tree such as a pomegranate or carob do not have those special traits that an esrog has. Also we see that the esrog has a special bond between us and Eretz Yisroel.

In *Vayikra Rabbah* it states

דבר אחר, פרי עץ הדר, אלו ישראל, מה אתרוג זה יש בו טעם ויש בו ריח, כך ישראל יש בהם בני אדם שיש בהם תורה ויש בהם מעשים טובים.

Another explanation: "The fruit of a beautiful tree" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this citron (etrog), which has taste and has smell, so too Israel has among them people that have Torah and have good deeds (30:12-14).

This is coming to show how the esrog not only has a special bond with Hashem but with Bnei Yisroel, and Eretz Yisroel too. We are also compared to the esrog, but this time not in beauty, but the traits we possess as a nation. We can now see how we have a special connection with the esrog. The esrog in its beauty connects us to Hashem. We can see just

how many connections the *esrog* can make, and how it can make those connections in so many ways.

Is Going to Great Adventure on Chol Hamoed a Fulfillment of a Mitzvah De'oraisa?

Rabbi Shimon Schenker

In today's times, *Chol Hamoed* trips have become huge events, perhaps none more famous than going to Great Adventure. In the times of the *Batei Mikdashim*, they did not go to Great Adventure, *Klal Yisrael* was privileged to be *Oleh Regel*, to literally go to *Hashem's* house and spend time with Him. There can't possibly be anything greater than spending time with *Hashem* in His house. *Hashem* promises that we will have a blast if we sacrifice some animals and eat some *korbanos*, as it says in the *passuk*, (*Devarim* 16:14) "*Vesamachta bechagecha*". The *Gemara Chagigah* (8a) says that this refers to eating the special *korbanos* brought during *Aliyah Leregel*.

There is a debate between the *Chinuch* (*Mitzvah* 488) and the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Chagigah* (*Perek* 1 and 2) and *Hilchos Yom Tov* (*Perek* 15) versus *Tosafos* (*Moed Kattan* 14b) whether this *mitzvah* of *Simchas Haregel* can be fulfilled only by eating *korbanos* or also in other ways. The *Chinuch* and *Rambam* both agree that ideally when we have a *Beis Hamikdash*, *korbanos* are the ideal way to fulfill this *mitzvah*, like it says in *Pesachim* (109a). However, this *mitzvah* can be fulfilled with eating regular meat, drinking wine, or wearing

nice new clothes for *Yom Tov* (*Chagigah* 8a). *Tosafos*, on the other hand, holds that to fulfill this *mitzvah* on a *de'oraisa* level it must be done through eating *korbanos*, while other avenues can work on a *derabannan* level.

This has tremendous ramifications today, where, because of our sins, we do not have a *Beis Hamikdash*, so according to *Tosafos* we do not have this *mitzvah* today, whereas according to the *Chinuch* and *Rambam* we do. The *Shagas Aryeh* (*siman* 64) *paskens* like the *Rambam*, as does the *Chafetz Chayim* in his *Sefer Hamitzvos Hakatzar* (*Mitzvah* 21). The *Shagas Aryeh* explains that this *mitzvah* is not limited to even the list of things in the *Gemara* or *Rambam*. He explains that we can fulfill this *mitzvah* today by doing anything which spiritually enhances our *Yom Tov*. For example, it is important to have delicious food on *Yom Tov*, but the point of the food is to enhance our overall experience and enable us to come closer to *Hashem*, as opposed to simply eating to excess because the food tastes good. The *Rambam* (*Yom Tov* 6) himself expresses this: a person needs to have *simchah* on *Yom Tov*, and each person can define their own definition of *simchah*. For children it may mean candy, whereas some adults may prefer new clothing, and others savor meat and wine. However, he writes that is only if the *simchah* is not silliness and emptiness.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein *zt"l* said in the name of the Rav: "My father-in-law, Rav Soloveitchik *zt"l*, would often explain - and even in writing - that we must view the *simchah* obligation as a *mitzvah* in which the "*kiyum*" (essential fulfillment) and "*ma'aseh*" (concrete action/s required) stand apart from one another. The *kiyum* is an emotional one, the realization of an emotional experience bearing a specifically

defined quality. The mandated actions - the consumption of meat and drinking of wine or donning colorful clothing - serve merely as the external medium intended to trigger the creation of this experience. It thus turns out that even though we define the specific mediums as Biblical imperatives, and one is obligated - when possible - to use them and carry out these activities, they are not necessarily indispensable to the fulfillment of the basic *mitzvah*."

So, is going to Great Adventure a fulfillment of a *mitzvah de'oraisa*? You decide.

Hashem is Always with us!

Aryeh Manevitz ('23)

We read the *passuk* in Parshas Beha'aloscha:

"עַל-פִּי ה' יָקַמוּ וְעַל-פִּי ה' יִסְעוּ"

"By the mouth of Hashem they camped and by the mouth of Hashem they traveled." (*Bamidbar* 9:23)

This *passuk* is about when the Jews were in the desert and were guided by the Cloud of Glory. When the cloud would stop moving above the *mishkan* the Jews would know to set up camp there until the cloud started moving again, which would be the signal for the Jews to pack up and continue traveling. Through this, *Bnei Yisrael* learned trust and obedience to Hashem; no one knew how long they were going to remain stationary for and for how long we would be mobile.

The *Gemara* in *Maseches Shabbos* talks about the *melacha* of *soser*, destroying or disassembling something. One

is only *chayav* (culpable) if they destroy constructively, as is the case with all 39 prohibitions on *Shabbos*. If one just destroys something on *Shabbos* they are *not chayav*, they are *patur* (exempt) although it is not *mutar* (permissible). Moreover, there is an opinion in the *Gemara* that *soser* is only a biblical prohibition when one disassembles a structure with intent to rebuild it in the same place. The *Gemara* proceeds to ask “We learned the prohibition of *soser* from the *mishkan* that we disassembled while we were traveling and *assembled in a different place*, so how can it be that the prohibition of *soser* is only if one resembles the object in the same place!?” The *Gemara* answers that because the *passuk* says “By the mouth of Hashem they camped and by the mouth of Hashem they traveled,” it is as if they camped in the same spot. The simple explanation of the *Gemara* is that God could have started moving the cloud so that everyone would pack their belongings and then stop the cloud in the same spot to test *Bnei Yisrael*.

Rabbi Daniel Kalish says in the name of Rabbi Rafael Helevi Shmuelevitz who heard the answer from his father Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz as follows: When a family moves houses it is very stressful for everyone, except for the baby. Regardless of where the mother goes, at the end of the day if you ask the baby “Where did you go today?” the baby will say “in my mother’s arms” (assuming that this baby can talk). In the desert we were so close to Hashem, where we physically were did not matter! We were always in the same place: Hashem's arms.

Now, as we have the year ahead of us, and we will inevitably be running around from place to place, never forget

that you will always be in Hashem's arms no matter where you go.

Hoshanah Rabbah

Hoshanah Rabbah: A Redemption for All of Us

Isaac Cohen ('23)

The month of Tishrei is an exciting time for all of Klal Yisrael. From Rosh Hashanah to Simchas Torah and all that's in between there is enough *simcha* to go around for everyone - perhaps even too much. Hoshanah Rabbah, the 7th day of Sukkos, is an important day in the Jewish calendar, but its placement in between all the *chagim* makes it overlooked and perhaps not delved into as deeply as it should be. Thus, I invite you to join me for a minute or two as we uncover the origins of many of the customs of Hoshanah Rabbah and understand how it all fits in in relation to the *chagim* surrounding the day.

One of the most widely known observances on Hoshanah Rabbah is the practice of the *aravah*/willow twigs. The practice was originally instituted in remembrance of the observance from the time of the *Beis Hamikdash*. Let's first analyze how to perform the *mitzvah*.

Although one willow twig is sufficient for fulfilling the *mitzvah*, many follow the way of the *Arizal* - five willow twigs. However, there is a *machloches* as to how to perform the *mitzvah*. Rashi holds that the *aravah* is held and waved. This is

parallel to the *avodah* in the *Beis Hamikdash* which, according to Rashi (*Succah* 43b), involved waving the *aravah*. The Rambam holds that the *aravah* should be beaten on the ground, an object, or a piece of furniture two or three times. This reason is also in conjunction with the *avodah* from the *Beis Hamikdash* which involved the beating of palm fronds on the ground (*Mishnayos Succah* 4:6). But, how does one fulfill the *mitzvah* nowadays? Many people follow the Arizal and beat the *aravah* on the ground five times.

The *Orchos Chaim* (664:1) points out a fascinating idea of the significance of instituting a *mitzvah zecher lemikdash* to be performed on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, but more specifically on the day of which *Hoshanah Rabbah* occurs - the 21st of *Tishrei*. For it was on the 21st of *Tishrei* that the prophet Chaggai (2:9) received prophecy:

"גְּדוֹל יְהוָה כְּבוֹד הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה הַאֲחֵרוֹן מִן־הַרְאִשׁוֹן אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת וּבְמִקוֹם הַזֶּה אֶתֵּן שְׁלוֹם וָנֶאֱמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת"

“The glory of this latter House shall be greater than that of the former one, said the LORD of Hosts; and in this place I will grant prosperity—declares the LORD of Hosts”.

The *passuk* is in reference to the glory of the second *Beis Hamikdash*.

We have discussed the practice of the *aravah*, however one question is still left to answer. What is the reason for the use of an *aravah*-bundle? And what is it supposed to teach us nowadays in conjunction with the practice of beating it on the ground?

R' Zemach Gaon (*Teshuvos HaGeoni, Shaarei Teshuvah*, 340) brings an interpretation of this practice that all of us can relate to and learn from nowadays. Interestingly, the leaves of

the *aravos* are shaped like lips. Thus, when we beat the *aravah* bundle on the ground we are atoning ourselves for speaking ill of others and not thinking before we speak. This is where we understand the true essence of *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

As we enter the *chagim* one may feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities of helping our parents prepare for the *chagim* and learning about the *halachos* that may fly over our heads regarding what the month of *Tishrei* can be expressed as for us. Let us realize that it is a time for us to devote and repent for our sins, but also a time for us to improve upon ourselves. Speaking ill of others is something most of us probably struggle with, and if this isn't a problem for you, then *Kol Hakavod*. However, the month of *Tishrei* gives us the opportunity to think about how we can improve ourselves, but more importantly how we can actually implement our plans. But, as highschoolers at MTA, one may say, "oh, why should I try to improve upon myself now? I am in high school, I have the rest of my life to improve myself." So, to incentivise all who read this, I offer you a challenge: over the course of the coming school break think about/implement a way to overcome one challenge you have in your *avodas Hashem*. It can be as simple as waking up early for *shacharis* or being vigilant of *brachos*, but whatever you do, stick to the program. Oh, and if you thought there was a prize for the completion of this challenge, don't ask me for one, because with each step towards greater *avodas Hashem* we all grow closer towards a prize greater than anything I could offer you - the coming of *Moshiach, amen*.

Thank you to all of the Shema Koleinu Staff for all the hard work put into creating this publication.

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From The Entire Shema Koleinu Team,
Have a Wonderful New Year!

שנה טובה