

ישיבת הר עזיון

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Selected and Adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll

Quote from the Rosh Yeshiva

The blessing of Malkhuyot accepts as a given that everything that God gives us is really a gift from Him; we do not deserve anything at all. Even the most basic elements of our lives – health, for instance – are not to be taken for granted. Everything we have is a result of God's kindness....

What is meaning of the blessing of Zikhronot?... Memory in Tanakh is judgment, and the blessing of remembrance is the blessing of judgment. In this blessing, we approach Rosh Ha-shana as the day that begins the yearly Divine Providence. We are gathering in the crops and beginning again, and we discuss God's knowledge and judgment of all of man's deeds – “the books of life and the books of death are open before Him.”...

The blessing of Shofarot discusses the relationship between God and the nation of Israel. This relationship is epitomized by two points in history: the giving of the Torah and the future redemption....

-Harav Yaakov Medan

(Excerpted from: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/themes-malkhuyot-zikhronot-and-shofarot>)

“Your Love is Better than Wine:” The Meaning of the Decree against Blowing Shofar on Shabbat

Based on a Sicha by Harav Yehuda Amital zt”l



Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/your-love-better-wine-meaning-decree-against-blowing-shofar-shabbat>

In Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (23:3), we read:

Yehuda bar Nachman opened in the name of Resh Lakish: “God has gone up with a shout; [the Lord with the sound of a shofar]” (Tehillim 47:6): When the Holy One, blessed be He, goes up to sit on the seat of justice, he goes up with justice, as it is written: “God [Elokim] has gone up with a shout.” And when Israel take the shofar and blast, the Holy One, blessed be He, gets up from the seat of justice and sits on the seat of mercy, as it is written: “The Lord [the Tetragrammaton] with the sound of a shofar.” And He becomes filled with mercy for them and He shows them mercy and He turns the quality of justice into the quality of mercy for them. When? “In the seventh month” (Vayikra 23:24).

We don't fully understand what is stated here. What precisely are the qualities of justice and mercy, and how does the sounding of the shofar turn the quality of justice into the quality of mercy? In any event, we clearly have here an exceptional situation: Amoraim explicitly discussing the impact of the mitzvot upon the heavenly order, the Divine attributes. The talmudic authorities generally avoid such discussions, leaving contemplations of this sort to the masters of Kabbala.

On Rosh Ha-shana that falls on Shabbat, we content ourselves with the Malkhuyot, Zikhronot and Shofarot blessings, and abstain from sounding the shofar. This is the way that Rava explained this law (Rosh Ha-shana 29b):

[When] the festival of Rosh Ha-shana fell on Shabbat – in the Temple they would sound [the shofar], but not in the provinces... From where do we derive this?... Rava said: By Torah law it is permitted [to blow the shofar on Shabbat], and it was the Rabbis who issued a decree, in accordance with Rabba. For Rabba said: All are obligated in sounding the shofar, but not all are proficient in sounding the shofar. [Therefore the Rabbis issued] a decree, lest a person take [a shofar] in his hand, and go to a person who is proficient in order to learn [how to blow it], in the course of which he will carry it 4 cubits in the public domain. And this is also the reason for [the rabbinic prohibition of taking] a lulav [on Shabbat], and this is the reason for [the rabbinic prohibition of reading the] Megilla [on Shabbat].

We see, then, that by Torah law blowing a shofar on Rosh Ha-shana that falls on Shabbat is permitted. But the Sages forbade this because they were concerned that a person who does not know how to blow a shofar may go to a person who does know in order to learn how to blow it, and he will end up carrying the shofar in the public domain, which is forbidden on Shabbat.

What Sages had the courage to prohibit the sounding of the shofar on Shabbat owing to such a far-fetched concern? Is it realistic to think that a person will not prepare himself in advance, but rather will try to learn how to blow the shofar on the very day of Rosh Ha-shana, and thus come to carry the shofar in the public domain?

Midrash Sekhel Tov (Bereishit 22:18) cites Rabbi Zera, explaining that it was the Anshei Keneset ha-Gedola (the Men of the Great Assembly) who decreed that the shofar, lulav and megilla not be observed on Shabbat.

This was not the only decree that the Anshei Keneset ha-Gedola issued in order to avoid the violation of the prohibition of carrying on Shabbat. The Anshei Keneset ha-Gedola demonstrated great sensitivity regarding this issue, and because of this concern they forbade the handling of objects that are muktzeh, as we find in a baraita on Shabbat (123b), which first describes the initial, strict decree of muktzeh. The baraita, however, continues by informing us that this decree underwent changes, leniencies being added 3 times. Why did the Sages do this? Because they saw that the people needed to use these utensils.

Thus the question arises: Why did the Sages permit only the handling of objects that were required for the satisfaction of material needs but not also the handling of a shofar? Is the turning of the attribute of justice into mercy not a sufficiently important need?

The answer is that the Sages were confident that just as the observance of the Torah's mitzvot impacts upon heaven, so too their own decree that we should suffice with the Malkhuyot, Zikhronot and Shofarot blessings and not sound the shofar on Shabbat, can turn the attribute of justice into mercy. They were confident in this despite the fact that the Talmud predicts negative consequences for a year where the shofar is not sounded at its beginning (see Rosh ha-Shana 16b). The Tosafot there cite the Halakhot Gedolot who explains that this stricture does not apply when Rosh Ha-shana falls on Shabbat.

In other words, while there may be metaphysical consequences to a failure to sound the shofar, even if it due to circumstances beyond control, nevertheless, when it is the rabbinic decree that prevents the sounding of the shofar – the decree overcomes it!

From where did they derive this confidence? The answer to this question is found in the Yerushalmi (Avoda Zara 2:7):

“For your love is better than wine” (Shir ha-Shirim 1:2) – Rabbi Ba bar Kohen said in the name of Bar Pazi: Know that the words of the Scribes are dearer than the words of the Torah....

Rabbi Yishmael taught: The words of the Torah include prohibitions and allowances, some are light, while some are serious. But the words of the Scribes – all of them are serious....

A prophet and a sage – to what may they be likened? To a king who sent 2 of his seals to the provinces. On one he wrote: “If he does not show you my signature and my seal, do not believe him,” and on the other he wrote: “Even though he does not show you my signature and my seal, believe him.” So, too, regarding a prophet, it is written: “And he give you a sign or a wonder” (Devarim 13:2). But here [regarding a sage]: “According to the sentence of the Torah which they shall teach you” (Devarim 17:11).

The words of the Sages work even without seals! When the people of Israel express their love of God through their observance of the decrees enacted by the Sages, this itself turns the attribute of justice into mercy. And indeed, the decree not to sound the shofar on Shabbat was accepted, and the prohibition spread throughout all of Israel.

How did the Sages know that their words are so dear? In order to answer this question, we must return to the Yerushalmi passage cited above. The Yerushalmi there cites a discussion of a certain decree between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Yehoshua, from which they “diverted” to a more aggadic matter, but one that relates to our topic:

Yishmael, my brother, how do you read the verse – “For your [masculine] love [‘dodekha’] is better than wine” (Shir ha-Shirim 1:2), or “For your [feminine] love [‘dodayikh’] is better than wine”? He replied: “Your [feminine] love is better.” He said to him: This is not so, as it is proved by its fellow [verse]: “Your [masculine] ointments have a goodly fragrance [wherefore the maidens love you].”

The Yerushalmi asks why Rabbi Yehoshua did not reveal the reason for the prohibition under discussion, and it answers: “Rabbi Yochanan said: Because they had recently forbidden it, and Rabbi Yishmael was young.” The Bavli (Avoda Zara 35a) formulates the answer in a more understandable way:

Ulla said: When an ordinance is made in the west [=Eretz Israel], its reason is not revealed before a full year passes, lest there be some who might not agree with the reason and would treat the ordinance lightly.

Rabbi Yishmael, who according to the Yerushalmi was still young at the time, did not participate in the process of establishing the decree, and therefore it was forbidden to reveal its rationale to him.

As such, it seems that the diversion was raised because it was still impossible to reveal to Rabbi Yishmael the rationale underlying the decree. But, as the Yerushalmi itself asks, this does not explain why this particular verse was cited, as there are verses from the Torah that could have been cited instead. While the Yerushalmi suggests an answer to this question, we have an alternate suggestion.

It seems, rather, that the “diversion” pertains to the decree. In the dialogue between the man and the woman in Shir ha-Shirim, the Sages understood the man as representing God and the woman as representing the Jewish people. Rabbi Yishmael read the verse as recording God’s words to the people of Israel: “Your (feminine) love is better than wine.” According to him, we are forced to say that the speaker is God, because he thinks that the people of Israel are themselves incapable of issuing decrees, as their words have no force. To this Rabbi Yehoshua replied that the speaker in the verse is in fact the people of Israel – it is they who say: “For your (masculine) love is greater than wine”: this is the power that God gave to the Sages – that their words should have independent validity.

Last Shabbat we read in the Torah:

I call heaven and earth to witness this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse... that you may love the Lord your God, and that you may obey His voice, and that you may cleave to Him (Devarim 30:19-20)

The mitzvot are the means through which the people of Israel express their love for God and their cleaving to Him. The observance of the mitzvot is inseparably connected to the love of God; the observance of the mitzvot integrates the love of God with the fear of His majesty. If you remove the element of love from the mitzvot – the desire to connect with God, to cleave to Him and to walk in His ways – you turn it into something dry and lifeless. On the words, “O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord” (Yechezkel 37:4), Rabbi Yirmiya bar Abba says: “These were people who lacked the vitalizing sap of good deeds” (Sanhedrin 92b).

This principle, which underlies all of the mitzvot, is what guided Chazal in their decrees. All of Chazal’s decrees reflect a desire to draw closer to God, based on genuine concern regarding the commission of the slightest transgressions that erect a barrier between God and us. This is the source of their confidence that this is indeed the will of God. With these decrees, the people of Israel, as it were, say to God: “The main thing is our love for You.”

What is the meaning of the words: “For your love is better than wine”? When Rav Dimi came [from Eretz Israel] he explained it thus: The people of Israel said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe! Your love is more pleasant to me than the wine of the Torah. (Bavli, Avoda Zara, ibid.)

The essence of the mitzva of repentance – the main mitzva associated with this period of the year – also lies in renewed closeness to God, as the Rambam explains in Hilkhos Teshuva (7:7):

How exalted is the degree of repentance? Only yesterday [the sinner] was separated from the Lord, God of Israel.... He cries aloud and is not answered.... He fulfills mitzvot and they are flung back in his face....

Today, the same individual [having repented] is closely attached to the Divine Presence.... He cries and is immediately answered.... He fulfills mitzvot and they are accepted with pleasure and with joy.... Yet more, they are eagerly desired....

We say in our prayers: “Purify our hearts to serve you in truth.” “In truth” means that our every word and every action should be sincere: that we should serve God out of deep faith, out of love for Him, and out of a genuine desire to draw close and cleave to Him, as did the Sages. May we and all Israel merit this during the coming days of repentance.

Translated by David Strauss

Tefillot Rosh Hashana: Holiness and Kingship

By Harav Baruch Gigi

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/holiness-and-kingship>



A. Where does one recite Malkhuyot?

We mention God’s kingship in 2 of the blessings in the Amida on Rosh Ha-shana. The third blessing, “Ata kadosh” (You are holy), is expanded greatly on Rosh Ha-shana and includes a plea that all nations will recognize God’s sovereignty, anticipating the revelation of His reign on earth. Additionally, the fourth blessing, “Mekadesh Yisrael Ve-yom Ha-zikaron” (Who sanctifies Israel and

the Day of Remembrance), is integrated in the musaf prayer with the blessing of Malkhuyot (Majesty).

The Mishna in Rosh Ha-shana (32b) records a dispute concerning the placement of the blessing of Malkhuyot in the Amida. Rabbi Akiva argues that we should do what we do today, integrating the blessing of Malkhuyot into the fourth blessing (on the sanctity of the day). Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri disagrees, arguing that the blessing of Malkhuyot needs to be integrated into the third blessing (on the sanctity of God).

While we follow Rabbi Akiva and include Malkhuyot in the fourth blessing, the expanded version of the third blessing that we recite on Rosh Ha-shana and Yom Kippur may be a remnant of Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri's position. Although Malkhuyot is primarily in the fourth blessing, we also include extensive Malkhuyot material in the third blessing.

B. Ha-Melekh ha-kadosh

As mentioned, on Rosh Ha-shana and Yom Kippur, all Jewish communities, include prayers in the third blessing of the Amida for the revelation of the God's kingdom in the world. The conclusion of the blessing is also modified to match its expanded content: "Ha-Melekh ha-kadosh," the holy King.

In fact, during all Ten Days of Repentance the custom is to include expressions of kingship in the third blessing of the Amida. During these days, many congregations conclude the third blessing with the phrase "ha-Melekh ha-kadosh." Yemenite communities even use the extended version of the blessing that all recite on Rosh Ha-shana and Yom Kippur throughout the Ten Days of Repentance.

The basis for the change to the conclusion of the third blessing during this time is the Gemara (Berakhot 12b). The Gemara cites one view that states that one should recite ha-Melekh ha-kadosh during the Ten Days of Repentance, and another view – of Rabbi Elazar, that one can fulfill the obligation "even if he said ha-Kel ha-kadosh," based on a verse that indicated that "the holy God" is exalted through justice.

Rabbi Elazar's statement implies that while one fulfills one's obligation if one recited ha-Kel ha-kadosh, ideally, one should still conclude the third blessing with ha-Melekh ha-kadosh during the Ten Days of Repentance. However, since Rabbi Elazar cites a biblical source for his opinion, it may be argued that his position actually reflects an ideal, and that one may intentionally conclude the blessing with the phrase Ha-Kel ha-kadosh. In fact, this is the position of the students of Rabbeinu Yonah, who state that one can recite either version according to Rabbi Elazar (see Berakhot, pages of Rif 7a).

The words of Rabbi Elazar, who was an amora in Eretz Yisrael, are also cited in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Ha-shana 4:6), with 2 differences. One change is in the language at the conclusion of the blessing. Instead of the recommended ha-Melekh ha-kadosh, as in the Talmud Bavli, the Yerushalmi discusses the phrase "adir ha-melukha" (exalted in kingship). The second change relates to the essence of Rabbi Elazar's opinion:

Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: "In any place, if one incorrectly says adir ha-melukha, he does not fulfill his obligation, except in the case of Ha-Kel ha-kadosh of Rosh Ha-shana, and even then, only in musaf." This follows the position of Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri.

According to Rabbi Elazar, as recorded in the Yerushalmi, one should conclude the third blessing with Ha-Kel ha-kadosh even during the Ten Days of Repentance. He rules that one who concluded with adir ha-melukha during these days does not fulfill his obligation, except during musaf of Rosh Ha-shana. Ideally, however, one should conclude the third blessing with Ha-Kel ha-kadosh, even on Rosh Ha-shana and Yom Kippur.

The Yerushalmi then notes that this view of Rabbi Elazar is consistent with the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri, who says that the blessing of Malkhuyot should be integrated into the third blessing. Therefore, it seems that according to Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri, the conclusion should also change to mention the kingship of God. Thus, according to Rabbi Elazar (as recorded in the Yerushalmi), if one concludes this blessing with a phrase that mentions kingship (i.e. adir be-melukha), he has fulfilled his obligation. Ideally, he should still conclude the third blessing with Ha-Kel ha-kadosh, since the Yerushalmi essentially follows Rabbi Akiva that malkhuyot does not belong in the third blessing. However, if he closed the blessing with adir ha-melukha, he has fulfilled his obligation, based on Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri's opinion, provided that he mentions malkhuyot in the blessing.

C. The uniqueness of the first three blessings

Why doesn't the Yerushalmi explicitly require the mention of God's kingship in the third blessing? The answer may lie in the difference between the blessings of the Amida. The Gemara (Berakhot 34a) states:

Rav Yehuda said: "One should never petition for his needs either in the first 3 blessings or in the last 3, but rather in the middle ones. For Rabbi Chanina said: 'In the first ones he resembles a servant who praises his master; in the middle ones he resembles a servant who requests a gift from his master; in the last ones he resembles a servant who has received a gift from his master and takes his leave.'"

However, in the Yerushalmi, (Berakhot 3:4) that same unit appears as follows:

Rabbi Acha said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: "Even the one who established this prayer did so in an order. The first 3 and last 3 are praise, and the middle [are requests] for the needs of living creatures."

At first glance, the passages seem similar, making similar distinctions between the 3 sets of blessings. However, after further study, one can distinguish between the two versions. According to the Yerushalmi, the purpose of the first 3 blessings is to praise God, and therefore one may not add any requests to them at all. The Bavli, on the other hand, only says that one may not ask for his own needs in the first 3 blessings. However, one may be able to ask for the needs of the community.

Indeed, this distinction is discussed explicitly in the responsa of the Geonim, who question why we are permitted to add requests to the first and last blessings during the Ten Days of Repentance such as "zokhreinu le-chayyim" (remember us for life) and "u-khtov le-chayyim tovim" (inscribe all the members of Your covenant for a good life). The answer given is that while personal requests are not made in those blessings, "a communal request such as zokhreinu le-chayyim, where all of Israel needs it," and one is petitioning for the needs of all, is permissible (Sha'arei Teshuva 151).

According to the Geonim, who follow the understanding of the Bavli, the Men of the Great Assembly established the first 3 blessings of praise because it is not proper to focus on one's personal needs before praising God. On the other hand, requests on behalf of the Jewish people – and perhaps even for the whole world, which is judged during these days – are appropriate and can be integrated into the first 3 blessings.

Thus, the additions that we make to the first 3 blessings have a universal focus. We make requests on behalf of the entire world, without mentioning the Jewish people, and we do not make any personal requests. Even the additions that we add to the last 3 blessings are not personal requests, but rather deal with the Jewish people as a whole.

We request that God should "inscribe all the members of Your covenant for a good life" and pray that "we and Your entire nation, the House of Israel" should be remembered and inscribed in a book of life, blessing and peace. These requests are not personal, and there is therefore no reason, according to the Geonim, to refrain from adding them at the beginning and end of the Amida. However, even in the time of the Geonim, some challenged this custom, such as Rav Hai Gaon, who claimed that "these blessings are not appropriate places to petition for one's needs." (Shibbolei Ha-leket, Seder Rosh Ha-shana 286)

The Ramban asked the same question in his sermon for Rosh Ha-shana (Derasha Le-Rosh Ha-shana 247), citing a beraita (Soferim 19:6) that seems to frown on the custom of adding zokhreinu le-chayyim. How can the Geonim dispute this beraita? To answer this question, the Ramban suggests there was a dispute between those who lived in Eretz Yisrael and those who lived in Babylonia, as the latter did not accept the beraita's objection to this custom. The early manuscripts reflective of the early prayer customs of Eretz Yisrael support the Ramban's claim. These manuscripts do not have either the insertions for the Ten Days of Repentance, nor any change in the closing of the third blessing. Apparently these were not practiced in Eretz Yisrael in the early period.

D. Between kingship and holiness

It seems that the dispute between the Bavli and the Yerushalmi about adding personal requests to the first 3 blessings of the Amida is related to their dispute regarding the conclusion of the third blessing on Rosh Ha-shana and Yom Kippur.

According to the Bavli, the first 3 blessings were designed to ask permission from God before asking for one's own needs. As such, it is not proper to make personal requests during these blessings. However, there is no fundamental distinction between the first and middle blessings. Thus, it is legitimate to make requests that pertain to the needs of the community in the first blessings, and certainly also to mention the sovereignty of God.

According to the Yerushalmi, the purpose of the first blessings is to praise God, whereas the middle blessings are requests for the needs of living creatures. It follows, therefore, that it is not appropriate to add any requests to the first 3 blessings. It is as if the first 3 blessings belong to God, so one may not discuss the needs of living creatures in this context. Even though the first 2 blessings mention God's creations, the purpose of these blessings is to praise God for protecting and taking care of His creations, not to make requests on their behalf. The purpose of the third blessing is to emphasize that the sanctity of God is not dependent on His creations. He stands above all.

Therefore, it emphasizes the sanctity of God, the supremacy that He has over His world and His fundamental metaphysical reality. Therefore, God, and not mankind and its needs, is the center of the first 3 blessings of the Amida.

For the same reason, the position of the Yerushalmi is that the third blessing is not the place to mention the kingship of God. The focus of the third blessing is the holiness of God's name as it relates to His essence. God is holy on His own, distinct from the world, outside it and above it. It is irrelevant how this sublime holiness is manifest in physical reality. This blessing is not the place to mention God's kingship over the world, which is just one manifestation of His holiness and one way in which God's presence is revealed. Accordingly, the Yerushalmi states that one should not conclude the third blessing with a phrase that mentions the kingdom of God, as that blurs the line between God's intrinsic sanctity and how His presence is revealed in the world.

E. Malkhuyot in the third blessing?

As we saw above, there is one time of year when even the Yerushalmi concedes that we include the contents of Malkhuyot in the third blessing. During musaf on Rosh Ha-shana, according to Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri, who rules that we include the blessing of Malkhuyot in the third blessing, one who concludes the blessing with a version that mentions kingship has fulfilled his obligation.

It is clear that according to this understanding, the nature of the third blessing in the musaf prayer of Rosh Ha-shana is different from the nature of that blessing throughout the year. The essence of the musaf prayer is the addition of Malkhuyot, Zikhronot and Shofarot. The blessing of Malkhuyot is the infrastructure and foundation of the blessings of Zikhronot and Shofarot, because only the King of the world can remember its inhabitants, judge them, reveal Himself to them and redeem them. Therefore, Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri maintains that during the musaf prayer of Rosh Ha-shana one may add an additional focus to the third blessing – addressing not the transcendent holiness of God, but His kingship as it is revealed on earth.

According to Rabbi Akiva, even in musaf of Rosh Ha-shana we must maintain the distinction between God's sanctity and His kingship, between His inherent sanctity and the way He rules the world. According to his opinion, there is no room to include in the first 3 blessings praises that deal with the earthly manifestation of God's kingship. Only in the fourth blessing (kedushat ha-yom), which already discusses the relationship between God and the Jewish people and how God reveals Himself to His creations, may we add the verses of malkhuyot. This is because these verses discuss God's relationship with His world, since there cannot be a king without a nation.

As mentioned, we rule in accordance with Rabbi Akiva's position, but we also follow the fundamental understanding of the Bavli that we are permitted to mention God's kingship in the third blessing. We also reject the understanding of the Yerushalmi that the sanctity of God, according to Rabbi Akiva, will always remain a distinct type of holiness and that all expressions of God's revelation and His holiness must appear in the fourth blessing, next to the blessing of Malkhuyot. Because we follow the Bavli in this regard, we include elements of kingship in the third blessing as well. However, we still incorporate the main blessing of Malkhuyot into the fourth blessing, which deals with the sanctity of the day.

Translated by Ora Ziring

Rosh HaShana: From a Day of Joy to a Day of Judgment By Rav Amnon Bazak

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/day-joy-day-judgment>



Rosh Hashana appears twice in the Torah: first in Vayikra 23:24 – “...In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, shall you have a sabbath, a remembrance of blowing of horns (zikhron teru’ah), a holy gathering...,” and later in Bemidbar 29:1 – “...It is a day of blowing the horn (yom teru’ah) to you.” What is the significance of this “yom teru’ah”? On what basis do the Sages identify this day as the Day of Judgment (Yom HaDin)? Why do the Sages call this day ‘Rosh Hashana’ while the Torah makes no mention of this term?

Apparently we have one source to guide us in understanding the biblical significance of the “Yom teru’ah” – the “Parshat HaChatzotzrot,” the portion dealing with the trumpets. For our purposes, the last 2 verses of this parsha are of particular note: “And if you go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresses you, then you shall blow an alarm with the trumpets (vaharei’otem

ba'chatzotzrot); and you shall be remembered (ve'nizkartem) before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, you shall blow with the trumpets (ut'ka'tem ba'chatzotzrot) over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a remembrance (le'zikaron) before your God – I am the Lord your God" [Bemidbar 10:9-10].

Here, too, the concepts of remembrance (zikaron) and blowing (teru'ah) are juxtaposed, and the connection between them begs explanation.

Firstly, we see that blowing horns is not particular to Rosh Hashana, but rather is characteristic of every Rosh Chodesh (new month) – in the form of the blowing of the trumpets. (Note that in the Beit HaMikdash the trumpets were blown on Rosh Hashana as well – see Mishna Rosh Hashana 3:3.) Rosh Chodesh in biblical times was celebrated in a far more festive fashion than it is today (see Shmuel I 20; Melakhim II 4:24; Yeshayahu 1:13; Amos 8:5; Hoshea 2:13) and the blowing on Rosh Chodesh is defined as "a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Yaakov" (Tehillim 81:5 – according to 'peshat' the reference is not specific to Rosh Hashana). What, then, is the meaning of "zikaron" on Rosh Chodesh? What is the significance of 'zikaron' specifically on festivals and days of rejoicing?

It seems that there is more to remembrance than simply the opposite of forgetting. Zikaron implies that there is special attention paid to the object of remembrance. The Torah says of God that He "remembered Noah" [Bereishit 8:1], Avraham [19:28] and Rachel [30:22]. Surely this cannot mean that until that moment God had forgotten them, as it were. Rather, the Torah is teaching us that from that moment onwards, special providence and close guidance (hashgacha) was provided for those individuals. The meaning of remembrance is special attention. Following the period of Bnei Yisrael's servitude in Egypt, the time comes for their salvation – "And God remembered his covenant... and God knew" [Shemot 2:24-25]. From that moment, Bnei Yisrael were under Hashem's special "hashgacha."

The opposite of this "zikaron" is forgottenness – not the abyss of oblivion, but rather that of God "hiding His face" (hastarat panim) and obliterating us, as it were, from His heart. "God has forsaken me, and God has forgotten me" – so laments Bat Tzion [Yeshayahu 49:14]; and an even clearer example is provided by the psalmist [Tehillim 10:11] – "...God has forgotten, He hides His face..." The forgottenness means the hiding of God's face, the removal of "hashgacha," with its terrible consequences: "I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them..." [Devarim 31:17].

Now we can understand why at times of trouble and war we pray to God in the hope that "you shall be remembered before the Lord your God and you shall be saved from your enemies." The Torah is teaching us that remembrance is achieved through the blowing of horns, as a symbol of the nation's cry to God. The purpose of the blowing is to renew God's special guidance over the nation of Israel, thereby bringing about their salvation.

Additionally, on the occasion of each festival and joyous occasion the Torah promises God's special guidance: "And in the day of your gladness... you shall blow on the trumpets... that they may be to you for a remembrance before your God." The blowing of the trumpets is part of the festivity, part of the expression of the special hashgacha of God over the nation of Israel.

The above applies to every Rosh Chodesh. What, then, is the specific renewal of Rosh Chodesh of the seventh month, which is designated as an entire day of blowing horns: "Yom Teru'ah"?

It seems that the special nature of the day is derived from the special nature of the month. There are 2 cycles of festivals in the Torah – the Shalosh Regalim (3 pilgrimage festivals), and the festivals of the seventh month. The seventh month is endowed with special holiness, in the same way that the seventh day and the seventh year have special kedusha. "Kol hashevi'in chavivin" ("All [events which are] seventh [in the cycle] are beloved"), says the Midrash [Midrash Tehillim 9:11]. During this month Yom Kippur occurs – the day upon which God forgives Israel for all their sins – as well as Sukkot, which has significance beyond being one of the 3 Regalim. (See Rav Breuer's article entitled "Hag HaSukkot" in his book Pirkei Mo'adot) During this month God's hashgacha over Am Yisrael is particularly evident. Therefore, Rosh Chodesh of this month has the same characteristic, and is referred to as "zikhron teru'ah" – an expression which reflects the essence of the day.

Ramban comments on the connection between "teru'ah" and "zikaron" in his commentary on Vayikra 23:24: "But 'zikhron teru'ah,' like 'yom teru'ah yihyeh lakhem,' means that we should blow [the shofar] on that day, and it will be a remembrance for us before God, as it says further: 'And you shall blow on the trumpets and they shall be to you for a remembrance before your God...'"

Hence it seems that on this day, the rejoicing should be greatly increased. And so indeed it appears from the description in Sefer Nechemia of the Rosh Hashana that was celebrated after the Sefer Torah was found: "Nechemia said... 'Go your way, eat well and drink sweet drinks, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord, do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength...' And all the people sent their way to eat and to drink and to send portions and to make great celebration..." [Nech. 8:9-12].

It is also possible that blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashana has special significance beyond that of every Rosh Chodesh. The Sages learned that the 'blowing' referred to in the Torah means blowing of the shofar, from a 'gezeira shava' regarding Yovel: "Then you shall have the shofar blown on the seventh month... and you shall sanctify the fiftieth year..." [Vayikra 25:9-10]. The blowing of the shofar serves as the symbolic commencement of the Yovel year (which occurs after a cycle of 7 x 7 years), and on an annual basis, it seemingly also serves as the symbolic commencement of the seventh month.

From all of the above, the question arises – how did this day become Yom HaDin in the eyes of the Sages, the day on which "angels are in trepidation – and all quaking with fear" – a day on which Hallel is not recited for fear of judgment?

The root of the answer can be understood from Rav Kook's idea in his article "Le-Mahalakh Ha'Ide'ot BeYisrael". Rav Kook holds that with the withdrawal of the Shekhina (Divine Presence) after the destruction of the First Temple and the consequent exile, the glory of Israel was dashed to the ground. As a result, "all the practical individuality – of keeping Torah and mitzvot in their individual detail and conceptual individuality the beliefs concerning the individual's personal connection with eternal life and the individual striving towards it – which had formerly revealed itself and existed as the manifestation of the Divine Idea... now, with the disappearance of the great light of the nation during the time of the Second Temple, was confined and manifest in its special individual character." Israel lost its nationhood, leaving each individual to stand on his own merit.

From then on, God did not "remember" Am Yisrael as a whole, but rather "remembered" each individual separately. And when each person is judged individually, the Day of Remembrance obviously takes on a much more profound aspect of judgement, with fear replacing joy. The individual is no longer able to hide himself among the many – he stands alone before the King of Judgment.

Now we can understand why the Sages refer to the day as Rosh Hashana, even though the Torah emphasizes the beginning of the seventh month rather than the beginning of the year. There is no doubt that the month of Tishrei served as the New Year for certain purposes – parallel to the month of Nisan (see Mishna Rosh Hashana 11:1). Proof of this can be brought from the very necessity of defining the month of Nisan as "Rosh Chodashim" – this seems to indicate that until then a different month had served this purpose. According to Josephus Flavius and other historians, Tishrei indeed served as the beginning of the year, based on the tradition that the world was created in that month. This also emerges from the designation of Sukkot as "tekufat Hashana" (the year's end) [Shemot 34:22], the blowing of the shofar on Yom Kippur of the Yovel year which sanctifies the Yovel [Vayikra 25:9-10], and, critically, from Yechezkel who says, "on Rosh Hashana on the tenth of the month" [40:1] – referring by 'Rosh Hashana' not to a specific day, but rather to the beginning of the year.

But the Torah determined that "This month [i.e. Nisan] is for you the beginning of the months, it shall be the first month of the year to you." All counting is based on the Exodus from Egypt, since by counting thus, Israel is distinguished from the other nations; counting from Nisan marks the date on which God's majesty was revealed to Am Yisrael. And specifically on "yom teru'ah," the day on which Israel's special character is manifest, we understand the idea of counting the year starting from the month of Nisan, making Tishrei seventh in that cycle.

But as mentioned above, with the destruction of the First Temple, the national dimension of Israel was diminished, and the day became one of judgement, when "kol ba'ei olam ov'rim lefanekha kiv'nei maron." There is no longer an outstanding special quality pertaining to the nation of Israel, and the universal Rosh Hashana – the day on which the world was created – takes on a more practical character: now we may emphasize that the same day on which the world was created, is also the day on which the world is judged.

But ideally this day is special for Am Yisrael, and therefore we do not emphasize that it falls on the same day as the creation of the world, since the latter has a more universal significance.

We can understand why the Sages emphasize the Kingdom of God over the whole world – since at this time God's majesty is manifest over the whole world – as opposed to Rosh Hashana as presented in the Bible, when this aspect pales next to the majesty of God over Israel specifically. Hence the Sages laid down the formula for the blessing in the Rosh Hashana prayer: "Rule over THE WHOLE WORLD in Your honor... and EVERY CREATURE will understand that You created him, and EVERY LIVING BEING will say, 'The Lord God of Israel is King, and His majesty reigns over all.'"

Rosh HaShana Customs

Tashlikh - The Complement of Shofar

By Rav Asher Meir

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/tashlikh-complement-shofar>



THE CUSTOM OF TASHLIKH

One of the most familiar and beloved customs of Rosh Ha-shana is going to a body of water in the afternoon and symbolically “casting away” our sins, in the ceremony known as “tashlikh.” Yet this custom is also one of the most mysterious. Unlike the shofar, which is a mitzva of the Torah (Vayikra 23:24, Bemidbar 29:1), and the special symbolic foods or “simanim” which are mentioned in the Talmud (Horayot 12a, Keritot 6a), tashlikh is not mentioned in the halakhic literature until the period of the later Rishonim (Maharil, Rosh Ha-shana 9).

This custom originated in medieval Ashkenaz, and is recorded in the Darkhei Moshe and the Rema (OC 583). After the Ari (Rav Yitzchak Luria) expressed his approval of this custom and gave a Kabbalistic explanation for it (Sha’ar Ha-kavvanot 90), the custom rapidly spread to Sefaradi communities as well, and today is practiced throughout the Jewish world.

Tashlikh involves going to a body of water – preferably a river or a lake, and when this is impossible to a well or the like – and reciting verses from the end of Micha (7:18-20) which refer to God “casting into the depths of the sea” all of our sins. Many people also have a custom of shaking out their pockets, or of shaking their tzitzit. Some people recite special prayers, such as that composed by Rav Chaim Yosef David Azulai, the “Chida” (eighteenth-century Eretz Yisrael).

COMMEMORATION OF THE AKEIDA

The Maharil, Rav Ya’akov HaLevi Segal Moelin, compiled a detailed, authoritative compendium of the customs of his native Ashkenaz (the Rhine valley in what is now Germany). In Chapter 9 of the section on Rosh Ha-shana, he explains:

On Rosh Ha-shana, after the meal, we have the custom of going to the lakes and rivers to cast into the depths of the sea all of our sins.

This commemorates the Akeida, in accordance with the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Vayera 99) which says that [on the way to the intended sacrifice of Yitzchak] Avraham Avinu passed through a river until the water reached up to his neck, and said, “Rescue me, Hashem, for the waters have reached until the soul” (Tehillim 69:2). And it was actually Satan, who made himself into a river in order to prevent Avraham from performing the Akeida.

The Maharil emphasizes that tashlikh is a commemoration of the Akeida. By going to the river, we demonstrate to God that we recall Avraham’s determination to fulfill His command. Not only was Avraham willing to sacrifice his only son, but he was willing to endure great hardship in order to do so. We imply that we too are willing to overcome obstacles to carry out God’s will.

By emphasizing our continuing connection to Avraham Avinu, showing that we are his spiritual as well as his genetic heirs, we show that we are fully worthy of sharing in the blessing which God swore to Avraham’s descendants as a result of the Akeida (Bereshit 22:16-18).

“CORONATION” OF GOD

Many works mention an additional reason for the custom of going to a river on Rosh Ha-shana: because it is customary to anoint a king next to a body of water. The gemara (Horayot 12a) explains that a king is anointed near a river as a sign that his kingdom should have continuity, just as a river continually flows. On Rosh Ha-shana, we proclaim God as our King, and by going to a river we give a tangible sign of our desire to accept His sovereignty. (See, for example, the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 129:21.)

The connection of this source to Rosh Ha-shana is not only thematic, but also textual. A few lines later, the same gemara infers from the custom of anointing kings on the river that “a sign has meaning,” and this then serves as the basis for the custom of eating symbolic foods on Rosh Ha-shana night.

TASHLIKH AND THE ROSH HA-SHANA PRAYERS

These 2 themes, commemoration of the Akeida and the coronation of God, have a familiar ring. They are in fact 2 of the 3 central themes of the Rosh Ha-shana prayers!

The regular Musaf prayers – recited on Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh – have only a single blessing relating to the day, one which recalls the Musaf (“additional”) sacrifice of that day. But on Rosh Ha-shana there are THREE blessings: Malkhuyot (“sovereignty,” proclaiming God as our King); Zikhronot (“commemoration,” most prominently recalling the Akeida); and Shofarot (“horn blasts”).

The requirement to mention malkuyot and zikhronot is derived from 2 biblical verses. The shofar of Rosh Ha-shana is referred to in the Torah as a “ZIKHRON teru’a” – the COMMEMORATION of the horn (Vayikra 23:23). This shows that Rosh Ha-shana requires a “remembrance.” And from the verse which refers to the trumpet call as “a commemoration before your God” (Bemidbar 10:9), we learn that commemoration is always paired with coronation of God, our King (Rosh Ha-shana 32a).

Usually, the focus of the Musaf prayer is our inability to carry out the sacrificial rite we are describing. "Because of our sins we were exiled from our country, and we were distanced from our land. And we are unable to carry out our obligations in Your chosen House." We then pray that soon we will indeed be able to offer the Musaf sacrifice, among others.

However, there is nothing anachronistic in the subjects of the Rosh Ha-shana prayers. Although the Musaf prayer generally refers to the distant past and the (hopefully near) future, the themes of the Rosh Ha-shana Musaf prayer – God's sovereignty, His recollection, and the shofar – belong to the present! If the Musaf prayer represents our desire to translate longing into action, then each of these themes should be given a concrete expression in our Rosh Ha-shana conduct.

TASHLIKH AS THE COMPLEMENT OF SHOFAR

The theme of shofarot, mentioned in the prayers, is translated into action by the practical mitzva of shofar – the principle mitzva of the day. Of course, the shofar also gives expression to the other 2 themes: the ram's horn reminds us of the ram sacrificed in place of Yitzchak, and the shofar blast reminds us of a coronation fanfare. (See, for example, I Melakhim 1:34, 1:39.) That is why the shofar is blown during these benedictions as well as during the benediction of "shofarot."

But unlike the "shofarot," these motifs of sovereignty and memory have no practical mitzva which is unique to them. To that extent, we can view the custom of tashlikh as the complement of the mitzva of shofar. Balancing the shofar, which is the practical expression of the "shofarot" blessing, tashlikh gives a practical expression to the malkuyot/zikhronot pair.

MINHAG VERSUS MITZVA

It is also appropriate that precisely these 2 themes find their practical expression in "minhag" (custom), rather than in a mitzva.

First of all, unlike shofar which is explicitly mentioned in the Torah, these "sovereignty" and "remembrance" aspects of Rosh Ha-shana are inferred from subtle textual hints. It is only natural that their practical expression should also be in the more subtle area of minhag.

Second of all, there is an important difference between the theme of shofar and those of malkuyot and zikhronot. This difference is illustrated by a well-known Midrash which explains the relationship between the 3 foci of the Rosh Ha-shana Musaf:

Why did the Sages ordain to say malkuyot first, then zikhronot and shofarot? First of all make Him King over you, and then ask for mercy so that He will remember you. And with what [will He remember]? With the shofar of liberation! But I still don't know who blows this shofar, so the Scripture teaches, "And the Lord God will sound the shofar" (Zekharia 9:14). (Sifri, Bamidbar 77)

This Midrash teaches that WE are responsible for expressing the aspects of malkuyot and zikhronot. We make God into our King, and we ask for His mercy to be favorably remembered. So it is appropriate that the observance corresponding to malkuyot and zikhronot should come from us – from the domain of minhag.

In response, we hope and pray that God will react by blowing the shofar of liberation, i.e. by bringing the Redemption. So it is appropriate that the observance corresponding to shofarot comes from God, as a mitzva of the Torah.

It is also fitting that the mitzva of shofar is primarily a passive one – most people hear the shofar from the "ba'al toke'a," and the blessing recited is "to hear the sound of the shofar." This recalls the shofar of redemption which God will sound for us.

But the custom of tashlikh is performed by each person individually – corresponding to the responsibility of each individual to accept God's sovereignty and ask for His mercy.

So the beloved, but little-studied, custom of "tashlikh" provides a beautiful example of how the customs which were initiated by the Jewish people constitute a harmonious complement to the mitzvot of the Torah.

(This article is an expanded version of the section on tashlikh in Rav Meir's book, Meaning in Mitzvot, which is serialized on the VBM as the "YHE-Kitzur" shiur.)



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