

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**T**his day the world was conceived...” [Rosh Hashanah liturgy] We are approaching the formidable "festival" period which will last for more than three weeks beginning with Rosh HaShanah, the anniversary of the creation of the world, continuing with Yom Kippur, the Day of Forgiveness and Purity, and concluding with the glorious eight days of Sukkot and joyous Simchat Torah when we dance with the Torah Scrolls.

On each of the festivals, we read a Biblical passage that relates to the meaning of the day, so it's strange that on Rosh HaShanah we read stories from the early experiences of the first Jewish family, Abraham, Sarah, and the two boys; Ishmael and Isaac. Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the Creation of the world which makes it a natural time to read the majestic opening passage of the Torah, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth."

And, given that in any case, we are now concluding the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah, wouldn't it make sense to start the year by recommencing the cycle of Torah readings from the beginning of Genesis?

But that is not the only strange thing about our festive season. In the middle of our holiday period, is the Yom Kippur fast, replete with the exhortation to "afflict our souls". And then, after this day of affliction, we rush to erect a seven-day virtually make-believe home, exquisitely decorated with fragrant vegetation, a green garden roof, and wall hangings of Biblical personalities and Holy Temple scenes. What single idea connects these disparate sacred days?

I believe that the unifying scheme for the festival month of Tishrei will emerge when we contemplate the natural human reaction to New Year's Day. Amidst all the festivities, it's a time when we nostalgically remember those who were with us last year, but are no longer. The older we are, the more conscious we are of our mortality.

There are two contrasting approaches to human mortality. The Greco-Roman way was to cry out, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die". It's a hedonistic approach to the world, living for the moment and disregarding the consequences. Judaism took a different approach. While declaring Rosh Hashanah a

Yom Tov on which we wear our best clothes and enjoy sumptuous meals together with our families, the Rabbis saw that there was also a more somber message. "Repent one day before you die," they said. Since none of us knows exactly when we will pass away, our sages felt that we should always take stock of our actions and repent for our misdeeds.

The Jewish New Year ushers in a period of repentance, introspection and reexamining of priorities. So while we may not know how long we will live, we can choose how best to spend the time we have. Only that which is finite and susceptible to decay and disappearance is truly valued and appreciated. So our mortality reminds us how precious every day of life really is and the importance of making the most out of whatever time we have. The objects that we acquire in life are as vulnerable and temporal as we are, but the fruits of our loins, the next generation, has the potential to carry us along into the future towards eternity.

Perhaps that is why on Rosh Hashanah, the Biblical readings focus on the first family of the people of Israel -Abraham, Sarah and Isaac- recording their tests and their triumphs, their satisfactions and their sacrifices, their rivalries and their victories.

For most of us 'the world' centers on our own family, for Jews this includes our identity as members of the family of Israel with its heroes, mediocrities and villains.

Despite the fast, Yom Kippur; the Day of Atonement and Divine Forgiveness is considered a major festival. Dressed in simple white garb, deprived of food, drink and sexual relations and ensconced for the entire day in the synagogue with prayer book, Bible and G-d, it is almost as if we have moved from the temporal world of the living to the eternal world of the Divine spirit.

Yom Kippur is the day on which we are given the Divine gift of a fresh slate. Our day of atonement fortifies us with a sense of total renewal, together with the empowerment and self confidence which comes at the end of the fast to realize that we can rise above our usual physical needs and instinctive drives. We can change our priorities and in the process even re-create ourselves.

Contemplating our mortality and reexamining our lives can be frightening - but it can also be uplifting and edifying. I know an important Jewish leader and philanthropist who lived a carefree, rich, playboy existence. Out skiing one day, he got caught in a

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terrible storm. Stranded and alone on a mountaintop, he was convinced that death was imminent. Strangely enough, he felt no fear-and made no bargains with G-d. Instead, his thoughts turned to the question as to who would mourn his passing. Reflecting on all his business associates and professional acquaintances, he realized that actually his mother would be the only true mourner and since she would have grieved even if he had been stillborn, it was as though he had never lived at all.

Miraculously, he survived the ordeal, but his harrowing brush with death and the powerful reflections on the mountaintop led him to make enormous changes to his lifestyle. As a rabbi, I have visited many terminally ill patients; none of them regretted time not spent in the office, but almost all regretted time not spent with family or on behalf of community. My friend was fortunate to learn these lessons whilst still young and healthy. From then on, he made sure that he devoted plenty of time to his family and to worthy causes which needed his help.

The climax of our festival season takes place when we leave our generally comfortable houses, taking up residence in small, fragile huts. Perhaps the message of these "halakhic homes" is that the goal of Israel is not to be bigger and better than others, but rather to be wiser and holier.

The real strength and security of a home comes from our time-honored traditions and our eternal values. "One thing do I ask of the Lord, only this do I request: allow me to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to see the sweetness of the Lord and to visit in His tent." © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

On Rosh Hashanah we stand in judgment before our Creator. But we are not mere passive defendants standing in the dock awaiting a verdict in our trial. Instead we take the liberty of submitting requests, suggestions and sometimes even demands to our Heavenly Judge. We pray for life and health, prosperity and wisdom, family and national stability, as well as for redemption, peace, serenity and meaningful success.

That is quite a long and impressive list of requests that we submit to the Almighty. It is part of the ethos of Judaism that such requests are allowed if not

even encouraged by the Lord. It illustrates our dependence upon G-d and our inability to have hope, direction and planning in our lives without Heavenly aid and grace.

The doors of Heaven, the gates of prayer are thrust wide open for us on the High Holy days and the Ten Days of Repentance and we are bidden to take advantage of that situation with our prayers, requests and improved social and religious behavior. It would be foolish in the extreme to ignore and not take advantage of such an opportunity to ask for what we need in our personal and national life.

Though the results of the judgments of Rosh Hashanah are not immediately clear and present, we are nevertheless in an optimistic mood and the day is celebrated in a holiday mode with feasting, family and friends. It is the connection with eternity and Heaven that Rosh Hashanah affords that transforms an otherwise day of tension and awe into one of holy serenity and satisfaction.

But Rosh Hashanah is a two way street. It is not only our turn to ask G-d for what we wish, but it is also a day when G-d, so to speak, also informs us what He wishes and requires from us. Judaism is a faith of mutually binding covenants between G-d and the Jewish people, collectively and individually. The rabbis taught us that first and foremost G-d wants our hearts. He wants sincerity and faith, belief and discipline, strength of character and good will. He abhors falsehood and hypocrisy, mendacity and venality.

The prophet taught us that the Lord desires that we act justly, love kindness, show mercy to others and to walk humbly in G-d's ways. He demands that we live up to our end of the covenant, that we observe His commandments and sanctify His Holy Days and the Sabbath by our behavior and demeanor. He wishes us to have an appreciation and knowledge of our past and a vision for our future. He wishes that we share His view, so to speak, of the Jewish people as being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation - a unique treasure amongst all of the peoples of the world.

He also wishes that each and every one of us realizes that he or she is a special unique individual and not just a faceless number in a world of billions. People who feel special are special. Our self judgment in our hearts influences our Heavenly judgment on Rosh Hashanah as well. To a great extent, G-d invites us, so to speak, to judge ourselves in conjunction with the Heavenly court. Therefore we state in our prayers that every person's signature appears on the verdict of the Heavenly court. We are equal partners in our judgment and in the outcome

The national hopes of the Jewish people also find expression on Rosh Hashanah. No Jew is exempt from the destiny of the Jewish people as a whole. Our past century of sad and tragic experience clearly indicates the futility of attempting to somehow think that the Jewish covenant allows individuals to opt out of it at

will. Solidarity with the Jewish faith and people, with the state of Israel and with the eternal Torah is the guarantee of individual Jewish survival and meaning.

Joshua upon encountering the angel in his tent asked only question: "Are you with us or are you against us and with our enemies?" Unfortunately many Jews, deluded by "humanitarian" sloganeering, wittingly or unwittingly cannot answer Joshua's question correctly. Rosh Hashanah allows us to look within ourselves and to declare to the G-d of Israel that we are truly with Him and with our people.

We wish to be inscribed in the book of eternal life and Jewish glory and not, G-d forbid, on the pages of Jewish perfidy and shame. Rosh Hashanah provides us with a wide range of important choices that have eternal consequences. May we always choose wisely and correctly. © 2009 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

We live in a world where people emphasize history-their past, or the future-their hopes and dreams. Does the present really occur? After anticipating a particular event it passes in an instant and becomes a memory.

Interestingly, in every Shabbat portion read between the Ninth of Av and Yom Kippur, the word Ha-Yom (today) appears. Perhaps the most famous is read on the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashanah-where the Jewish nation is told "You are standing this day (Ha-Yom) all of you before the Lord your G-d." (Deuteronomy 29:9) Indeed, the Rosh Hashanah service reaches its crescendo as we recite the famous Ha-Yom prayer, which states, "May you strengthen us this day (Ha-Yom), may you bless us this day (Ha-Yom)."

The word Ha-Yom may remind us that sometimes one has the chance to change the world today; but if one misses that chance, the opportunity may be lost forever. For me, the narrative, which most powerfully teaches this idea, is the binding of Isaac story, which, not coincidentally, is read on Rosh Hashanah. Consider the image of Avraham (Abraham), Yitzhak's (Isaac's) father who was old enough to be his grandfather, taking his son to Moriah. After a three-day trek Avraham binds Yitzhak, lifts his knife and is prepared to slaughter him.

Now consider the second image. An angel of G-d appears at a distance, intent upon interceding. As I become older, I have started to read this story with a different perspective. Now that I am a father and grandfather, I wonder whether the angel will intervene in time. When mentioning this to one of my students, she

responded, "You've missed the point rebbe-angels always make it on time, people don't."

No doubt, Ha-Yom teaches that when performing an action we should consider how it is influenced by the past and impacts on the future-merging into the present deed. No doubt, also, Ha-Yom teaches us to hold on to the good times. Those moments come and go too quickly. But in this season Ha-Yom reminds us of the importance of proper timing. In the words of the rabbis, "Do no say when I have time I will do, lest that time never come."

What an appropriate message especially on Rosh Hashanah, the day of repentance which emphasizes our being given a second chance. Ha-Yom reminds us that sometimes that is not the case-sometimes and opportunity arises only once - Ha-Yom. © 2009 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev was unique in his ability to see the good side of the nation of Yisrael. In view of the sanctity of the coming holiday we will let his own words speak for him (with slight editing).

"With trumpets and the sound of a shofar, sing the praises of the King, G-d" [Tehillim 98:6]. We can explain this with an allegory about a human king who traveled to a huge forest to hunt. But when he reached the depths of the forest he could not find the King's Road, the proper way to return to his home on a broad and straight path. He met some villagers and asked them how to get out of the forest. But they did not recognize the king and did not know what to answer him, for they never knew about the wide and straight path of the King's Road. Finally the king was able to find a wise man and ask him about the road.

The wise man realized that the person asking for the road was the king himself, and stepped back in shock. He immediately showed the king the road, since in his wisdom he knew where it was. He led the king to his palace and his throne. The king liked the man very much, and he raised him up above all the existing ministers. He gave the man very expensive clothes and commanded that his old clothing should be put away in storage.

And then, sometime later, the wise man sinned against the king, who became very angry and told his ministers to punish the man. And the man begged the king that before the sentence was carried out he should be allowed one request: to dress him in the clothing that he had worn when he showed the king the way out of the forest. And the king granted this request.

Then, when the king saw him in that clothing, he remembered the great kindness that the man had shown him by helping him to return to the palace and to his throne. And he had pity on the man and forgave him for his sins and returned him to his exalted position.

This parable tells the story of G-d's nation, Yisrael. At the time of the giving of the Torah, the Almighty went to all the other nations and asked them to take the Torah but they refused. Then we accepted the Torah with such great joy and happiness that we said "we will observe" before "we will understand" [Shemot 24:7] and made Him our King, and we accepted His mitzvot and His holy Torah.

But now we have sinned against Him, and on Rosh Hashana we are afraid of the day of judgment for all the creatures, where each and every person is judged according to his deeds. We therefore blow the shofar, in order to put on the same "clothing" that we wore when we received the Torah, since we declared G-d to be a King with blasts of a shofar, as is written, "The sound of the shofar grew stronger and stronger" [Shemot 19:19]. This will remind the Almighty of our merits so that He will forgive us for our sins and judge us to be innocent. Let us be written down for long and good lives.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

The shofar has a strange voice, jarring yet enthralling. It cannot rightfully be called music, nor can the shofar itself be considered a musical instrument. And yet, the shofar plays an exceedingly prominent role in Jewish observances. Its voice accompanied the Giving of the Torah, and subsequent momentous occasions, such as declarations of war, are also accompanied by the sound of the shofar. It is considered the perfect sound to awaken the slumberer from his spiritual torpor, the quintessential call to repentance.

Wherein lies the secret power of the shofar? True, the shofar, a ram's horn, is reminiscent of Abraham's preparedness to sacrifice his only son Isaac on the Akeidah, but surely the sound itself must have some visceral force even for those unaware of the connection to Isaac.

Let us consider for a moment. What is the ultimate form of communication? Most of us would be inclined to say it is language, sophisticated combinations of words that express the ideas and concepts we seek to communicate. But what if we want to communicate something much more basic? What if we want to communicate who we are and what we are? Could we weave a tapestry of words that would capture the essence of our very beings? Probably not. Strangely enough, our voices actually offer a much better glimpse into the innermost chambers of our souls than any words we can string together. Why is this so?

When the Creator first formed man from the dust of the earth, the Torah tells us that "He blew the breath of the Lord into his nostrils." This brought the man to life, and this represents his very essence, the breath that flows through his body. The unadorned breath of life, free of the artificial manipulations of speech, is the most expressive form of communication. A gasp, a sigh, a scream are more eloquent than pages of prose, because they don't tell about what is inside us, they actually are what is inside us.

Therefore, the voice itself, the exhalation of the breath, is more expressive than the spoken words it transports. When Hashem wanted Abraham to heed the advice of his wife Sarah, He told him to "listen to her voice." The voice is the key, not the words.

In this light, we gain a new appreciation for the role of the shofar. The shofar dispenses with all the affected trills and warbles of musical instruments. Its sound is the unadorned magnification of the human breath. The barely audible sound of breathing heard on a very high decibel level shocks us, because we are suddenly confronted with our very beings. It is traumatic and disconcerting, but it can also be uplifting. Deep down, on a very primal spiritual level, we are reminded of who and what we are. We are awakened from our slumber, and we are moved to repent.

For this very reason, the shofar has such a ubiquitous role in Jewish observance. We need to approach all momentous occasions as real people, devoid of the airs and layers of affectation in which people ordinarily clothe themselves. We need to remove the barriers of artificiality that stand between us and our Creator. The shofar accomplishes this as nothing else can. It presents us with the primal substance of everyman, the pristine essence of humanity as it was formed by the Creator. When we listen to the sound of the shofar, we are in touch with ourselves.

The Polish government once issued a decree abolishing ritual slaughter of animals. With the greatest difficulty, the Jewish communities arranged for one of the leading sages of the time to meet with a high-ranking Polish minister and plead for the abolition of the decree.

The sage and his delegation were shown into the presence of the minister, and the sage immediately began to speak. There was just one problem. The sage spoke only Yiddish, and the minister understood not a word of it. Another member of the delegation immediately interposed himself as the interpreter, but the minister waved him aside. Instead, he sat and listened intently as the sage spoke for many minutes.

Afterwards, the would-be interpreter tried once again to translate and summarize the sage's remarks. Again, the minister waved him aside.

"I did not know the meaning of a single word he uttered," said the minister, "but I understood him completely. The decree is abolished!"

This year, as we listen to the shofar, let us recognize its message and reflect on it. Let us reach down to the very core of our identity and present ourselves to our Creator stripped of all the vanities we accumulate in our daily lives. Let us stand before Him as He created us, without the barriers of artificiality. If we open our minds and hearts and souls to Him, surely He will gather us in His loving embrace and bless us with a wonderful new year. © 2009 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**ll of a person's income (see Rashi) is set (determined) for him from Rosh Hashana and until Yom Kippur, aside from expenses for Shabbos, expenses for Yom Tov and expenses for teaching his children Torah" (Baitza 16a). This is how the standard "Vilna" edition of the Talmud reads, and the way it is quoted by many commentators. The Bach changes the wording to read "from Rosh Hashana and until Rosh Hashana," a version some of the other commentators have as well. Both versions have basically the same message: the amount of money we will earn in 5770 will be determined during the upcoming holidays. The only issue seems to be whether the Talmud is referring to the time period during which the determination is made ("between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur") or the time period of the income (the entire year, "from Rosh Hashana to Rosh Hashana"). The reason the Bach altered the text would, at first glance, be based on the Talmud saying "from," rather than "between," indicating that it is the time the decree applies to being discussed, not the time frame within which the decree is made and finalized. An almost parallel Talmudic statement in Bava Basra (10a) also says "from," and does not give a second date, indicating that this was the intent. However, a closer look at the Talmud in Bava Basra may show us that much more is going on.

"Just as a person's income [for the entire year] is set on Rosh Hashana, so are a person's losses [for the year] set on Rosh Hashana." The Talmud continues by telling us that even though the amount of the income that will be "lost" is set, precisely where this money will go is not. Therefore, one can give what will be "taken away" to charity, getting the mitzvah without losing any additional money. The Talmud then relates an incident with the nephews of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai to illustrate this point.

"Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai saw in a dream that they (his nephews) would have to lose 700 dinars. He pressured them and took [money] from them (throughout the year, see Rashi) for charity. [Of the 700 they were decreed to lose], 17 still remained with them (i.e. they had given 683 dinars to charity). When the day before Yom Kippur arrived, the house of Caesar sent

someone to take it (the 17 dinars). Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai said to them, 'don't be afraid; the 17 dinars that had remained with you is [all] they will take from you.' They said to him, 'how do you know this?' He responded, 'I had a dream about you.' They said to him, 'and why didn't you tell us, so that we would give them (the additional 17 dinars to charity before the government took it from us)?' He told them, 'I thought that this way you would do the mitzvah (of giving charity) for the right reason (to give charity, not to avoid losing it to the government)."

Much can be learned from this story, but I would like to focus on the timing of the money being taken by the house of Caesar; right before Yom Kippur. Rashi (before the Bach's emendation) tells us that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai's dream had occurred the night after the previous Yom Kippur. This makes sense; since the decrees for the upcoming year aren't finalized until Yom Kippur, RYbZ was informed right away how much money had been decreed that his nephews=20 would lose in the upcoming year. However, the year ends right before Rosh Hashana, and they didn't lose the last 17 dinars until right before Yom Kippur. The very fact that they were summoned on Erev Yom Kippur indicates that Yom Kippur was the deadline to "lose" the amount that had been decreed a year earlier. But doesn't the year start (and end) on Rosh Hashana?

Although I had suggested last week that the Hebrew word for "day" ("yom") can mean any definable period of time (and I have since seen further evidence of this, see Rabbeinu Avraham ben Harambam on Beraishis 2:4), and that the entire 10 Days of Repentance can be included in the term "Yom haDin," I don't think this addresses our issue. This "day" doesn't start until Rosh Hashana, which is already the new year; even if Yom Kippur is part of the first "day" of the new year, it is still the new year, and it had been decreed that RYbZ's nephews would lose 700 dinars in the previous year. The Simchas Yom Tov (on Baitza) does suggest that the same way decrees aren't finalized until Yom Kippur - giving us the ability to change the decree for the upcoming year - so too can we finish up the previous year's commitments until Yom Kippur. Therefore, RYbZ's nephews could have paid the final 17 dinars from last year's tab through Erev Yom Kippur, and when they didn't, it was taken from them. However, the decree was that they would lose the full 700 dinars in the previous calendar year. The deadline should have been Rosh Hashana; if they hadn't "lost" the full 700 dinars by then it should have been taken away on Erev Rosh Hashana, not on Erev Yom Kippur.

The Maharsha says that the fiscal year for a person's income and expenses (and other matters) is really from Yom Kippur to Yom Kippur, which is why RYbZ had his dream right after Yom Kippur and the 17 dinars were taken on Erev Yom Kippur. He recognizes that Rashi's comment that the 17 dinars still remained "on Erev Rosh Hashana" is inconsistent with this

approach, so he changes the text of Rashi to "on Erev Yom Kippur." Nevertheless, there are other issues with this approach, aside from the text in Bava Basra only mentioning the decree being "from Rosh Hashana" (with no mention of Yom Kippur).

First of all, not everyone's decree is finalized on Yom Kippur; what about those whose income is finalized on Rosh Hashana? Is their fiscal year different? Can the length of a person's fiscal year change from year to year, depending on when their decree is finalized? If last year's income was decreed from Rosh Hashana to Rosh Hashana, and this year his decree for this year's income won't be finalized until Yom Kippur, where is the income earned between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur coming from? Additionally, the Talmud (in Baitza) based the concept of a person's income being determined on Rosh Hashana from a verse that alludes to a holiday when the moon is "covered," i.e. the first of the month. Since Yom Kippur is on the 10th, this verse shouldn't work.

The Maharsha himself (in Baitza) asks why only the decree regarding income is hinted to in that verse (in the word "chok"), if the concept of decrees being made on Rosh Hashana applies to everything, not just income. He says that an answer to this question can be given, but doesn't think highly enough of it to share it with us. (Perhaps life and death being decreed every year was obvious, making a source for it unnecessary; that our finances are also decreed year-to-year was not as obvious, so needed a source.)

The Bach changes the timing of RYbZ's dream from the night after Yom Kippur to the night after Rosh Hashana. However, he does not change the date when the money was taken away. The Ahavas Aysan (in Bava Basra), quoting the Metzudas Dovid (which is brought by the Chidushai Geonim, both of whom are printed in the Ein Yaakov) says that while life and death (for those neither "completely righteous" or "completely wicked") isn't finalized until Yom Kippur, the amount of income is decreed and finalized on Yom Kippur. This, he says, is why the Bach changed the text (in both places) from "Yom Kippur" to "Rosh Hashana." It also answers the Maharsha's question as to why only the decree on income is alluded to in the verse. We would still need to explain why the Bach didn't also change the day the last 17 dinars were confiscated to Rosh Hashana. [It should be noted that the "U'Nesaneh Tokef" prayer, said on both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, lists the types of decrees made on Rosh Hashana and sealed on Yom Kippur, a list that includes "who will become poor and who will become rich."]

We now have two possible explanations for the difference between our version of the Talmud in Baitza and the Bach's; whether using "from" rather than "between" necessitates the time frame being when the decree applies instead of when it is made/finalized, or whether the decree is actually finalized on Rosh Hashana or on Yom Kippur. I would like to propose a

totally different way to understand this time frame, one that addresses other issues raised here as well.

Had RYbZ's nephews given an additional 17 dinars to charity, whether before or after Rosh Hashana, it is pretty clear that the house of Caesar would not have come knocking on their door. But what would have happened had they given the 17 dinars before Rosh Hashana and then given even more charity during the 10 Days of Repentance? Would they have to get back that additional money before Yom Kippur? Would it count towards the following year even though they completed their "losses" during that time as well? Things that happen during these 10 days, were they decreed that Rosh Hashana, or the previous Rosh Hashana? How can we earn any money that first week of 5770 if the decree about our income won't be finalized until after Yom Kippur? I would suggest that these days, already special because of how close G-d is to us, are also special from a heavenly bookkeeping standpoint. What happens then can count for the previous year OR for the new year, depending on the circumstances.

Many are familiar with month-end and year-end closes. Often times, there is a preliminary close, before the final numbers are in. This "preliminary close" occurs at the end of the day on Erev Rosh Hashana, and indicated that RYbZ's nephews were 17 dinars short of the amount of losses decreed for them for that year. Therefore, the first 17 dinars lost during the week before Yom Kippur would count for the previous year, after which its final close would occur. Because they didn't "lose" that money on their own, the house of Caesar came and took it from them. Had they lost additional money, such as by donating more than 17 dinars to charity, the "extra" money would have counted towards the losses that were decreed for them for that year (and would be finalized on Yom Kippur). RYbZ had his dream right after Yom Kippur because that's when the decree was finalized, the "preliminary close" on Erev Rosh Hashana showed that they needed to lose 17 more dinars, which were lost before the actual close, on Erev Yom Kippur. The same is true of income, with the money earned between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur possibly completing the decree from the previous year or counting towards the decree that will be finalized on Yom Kippur.

The reason the verse only alludes to income may be precisely because of its uniqueness; if decrees regarding other things apply from Yom Kippur to Yom Kippur, they can't be included in a verse that refers to Rosh Hashana. (This would create an interesting possibility of someone during the week before Yom Kippur being able to not only affect the decrees for the coming year, but to annul a non-monetary decree that was finalized by the previous Yom Kippur for the year about to end on Yom Kippur.)

Let's reread the wording of the Talmud. "All of a person's income is set for him from Rosh Hashana and

until Yom Kippur." In other words, the amount of money a person will earn between Rosh Hashana 5770 and Yom Kippur 5771 will be set for him this coming week. The "from" fits well. The "and" ("and until") fits well. Using both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur as the parameters fits well. And there's no need to repeat the end parameter in Bava Basra, where the point is to equate what was taught in Baitza about income with a person's losses. May 5770 (through Yom Kippur 5771) bring all good things. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

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Aspaqlaria

by Rabbi Micha Berger

Why is it that we established the custom to read the Torah once annually from Shemini Atzeres to Shemini Atzeres, thereby turning the second day of Shemini Atzeres (the only day, in Israel) into Simchas Torah? What's the connection between completing the Torah and Shemini Atzeres in particular?

Second, Rosh haShanah is called "Yom haZikaron", or "Yom Zikhron Teru'ah" (the Day of Remembrance, or the Day of Remembrance of the Broken Shofar Cry). At of the three berakhos that make up the heart of the Rosh haShanah Mussaf, Zikhronos is the longest. But what do we mean when we praise Hashem for remembering? What does He remember? For that matter, what does "memory" mean when speaking of the One Who created time, rather than a person who lives within its flow?

I assume you're now wondering a third question-what do the previous two questions have to do with each other?

When we look at the Jewish Year, we find the holidays mentioned in the Tanakh are grouped around two seasons: fall and spring. In the fall, we have the Yamim Nora'im, Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres. In the spring: Purim, Pesach and Shavu'os. The gemara compares Purim and the holiday the Torah calls "Yom haKippurim". It also compares Pesach and Shavu'os, learning many laws from one to the other on the basis of a gezeira shava (comparison due to similar terminology) because both are placed on the 15th of the month. And Shavu'os is called by our sages "Atzeres", a parallel to Shemini Atzeres.

Purim commemorates the completion of the process that began on Shavu'os. On Shavu'os, we accepted the Torah because "He held over them the mountain like a barrel", Hashem threatening to crush the Jewish people if they would decline. This situation lasted all through the prophetic period, where sin often had supernatural consequences. It's only after G-d "Hides his 'Face'" on Purim, acting while hiding through nature, that "qiyumu vekiblu haYehudim", the loyalty to the Torah took on a higher level. (And the centrality of willing acceptance by the Jewish People is also why

Purim had to be rabbinic, from us, rather than decreed by Hashem.)

And so, given those pieces of the structure of the year, I would expect reflections of Shemini Atzeres to illuminate our understanding of the Yamim Nora'im, as there should be a connection between them similar to that between Shavu'os and Purim.

On each day of Sukkos there is a different number of bulls offered in the mussaf offering. On the first day, 13 bulls; the second day, 12, and so on until on the 7th day 7 were brought. All together, 70 bulls. The gemara (Sukkah 55b) teaches that these 70 bulls are one each for the 70 nations of the world. The medrash (Yalkut Shim'oni, Bamidbar 684) references Tehillim "Instead of My love-they hated Me." (109:4) "R' Yehudah said, 'How foolish are the nations! They lost something, and they don't even know what it is they lost! When the Beis haMiqdash stood, the mizbei'ach would bring them forgiveness.'" -Through these 70 bulls- "Now - who will bring them forgiveness?"

And then on Shemini Atzeres, one bull. An offering for the Jewish People. "This can be compared to a king of flesh and blood who said to his servants: 'prepare for me a great banquet.' On the final day he said to his beloved, 'prepare for me a small meal so I may enjoy your [company].'" (Sukkah 55a)

The connection between Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah is that expressed in the berakhah said before studying Torah. When the gemara asks what that berakhah should be, Rav Hamnunah's answer, "asher bakhar banu mikol ha'amim venasan lanu es Toraso...-Who has chosen us from all the nations and given us His Torah... who gives the Torah" is called the elite of the various suggestions.

Shemini Atzeres, the one day at the end of the fall holiday series dedicated to the special relationship between G-d and the Jewish People is therefore also the day of commemorating that He gave us the Torah." To be "the Chosen People" is to be the "benei beris", people of the covenant.

And, as I wrote, that implies that we should expect the notion of covenant to be central to the Yamim Nora'im as well.

Zikhronos doesn't describe a memory of the past, it describes remembering for the future. "You remember all the actions of the world... And upon the nations, it is sentenced: which to the sword, and which for peace..." The berakhah continues asking Hashem to remember us the way He remembered Noach, "and also Noach you remembered in love, and You appointed him in a statement of salvation and compassion..." And then citing the pasuq, "And G-d remembered Noach and all the living things and all the animals with him in the ark, and Hashem made a wind pass over the earth, and the water subsided."

The other nine verse of Zikhronos are also about Hashem remembering his covenants with us.

More so, His remembering that which He found in us making us worthy of the covenants.

"And G-d heard their cries, and G-d remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchaq, and with Ya'aqov."

"And I will remember My covenant of Yaaqov, and also My covenant of Yitzchaq, and also my covenant of Avraham I will remember, and I will remember the land."

"He gave food to those who are in awe of Him, and He always will remember His covenant."

"Go our and call in the ears of Jerusalem to say, 'So says Hashem: I remembered for you the lovingkindesses of your youth, the love of your wedding, your walking behind Me in the wilderness, in the unplanted lands."

"I remembered my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I established with you an eternal covenant."

And finally, "My dear child Ephraim, isn't he a delightful child? For often I speak about him, I will remember him still..."

Zikhronos is G-d remembering our potential, and from that, His plans for us.

Yahadus has a focus on the notion of beris, of a covenant where two parties join together for their common good. (Unlike a contract, where each is aided in their own good in exchange for helping the other.) Man is redeemed through the covenant, through joining together with other and with G-d to work for a good that is greater than Himself.

Teshuvah on our part is critical. But Hashem controls the situations we face. Whether we live in a world that poses challenges to our efforts or makes them easier.

Zikhronos is our calling out to Hashem to invoke that beris. To remember the "delightful child" He created us as, and to make that potential manifest.

This and other material adapted from posts that appeared on Aspaqlaria on the subjects of teshuvah, shofar, the prayers of the season, vidui, and the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah is available in a 42 page printable collection titled "Aspaqlaria: Aseres Yemei Teshuvah".
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RABBI SHMUEL CHOUKA

The Rabbi's Message

On a Rosh Hashanah which fell on Shabbat, R' Levi Yitzchak rose and said, "Lord of the Universe, today You judge each person for the coming year, and grant him life or condemn him to death. But, on this Rosh Hashanah You are forced by Your own Torah to write that You grant Your entire people a good life in the coming year. After all, on Shabbat You have decreed that one cannot write. How then, can You fulfill 'On Rosh Hashanah it is written

down'? There is no way You can inscribe anyone in the Book of Death, because writing is forbidden on Shabbat. On the other hand, You may certainly inscribe us in the Book of Life, for when there is piku'ah nefesh (danger to human life), the prohibition against writing on Shabbat falls aside." (A Touch of Wisdom, A Touch of Wit)

"Our Father, our King, fill our hands with Your blessings." (Rosh Hashanah prayers)

What does it mean to "fill our hands with blessings?" The Maggid of Rotzky explained with a parable:

A villager who wished to purchase some wine loaded an empty barrel onto his wagon and traveled to the large winery in town. He lowered the barrel from the wagon, rolled it into the winery and chose from among all the wines. The workers filled the barrel and helped him load it back onto the wagon. The villager happily drove off towards home.

When he arrived, he called his sons to assist him in unloading the barrel of wine. To his surprise, however, the barrel was empty!

Hardly able to contain his anger, he reloaded the barrel onto the wagon and returned to the winery. "Why did you cheat me?" he shouted. "I paid for a full barrel and received an empty one. This is robbery!"

The winery's owners were shocked, for they knew very well that the barrel was full to overflowing when it left their premises. On the other hand, they could see that the barrel was indeed empty now. As they examined it closely, the mystery was soon solved. There was a small crack between the slats in one place. All the wine had trickled out through the crack on the way home.

"Don't complain to us," they told the villager. "You're the one to blame. Somebody who wants to buy wine has to come with a barrel in good condition."

The same goes for someone who comes with outstretched hands and expects to have them filled with all kinds of sweets. He must make sure to hold his fingers tightly together. If not, the sweets will trickle away...

We are like this villager. We ask G-d for forgiveness and blessing and He is even ready to give, but we must first prepare the vessel with which to receive. And what is the vessel? Our Sages gave us the hint when they said, "There is no vessel that holds blessing better than shalom." The reason for this is that the Jewish people constitute one single vessel made of many slats. When the slats are joined together, the barrel is complete and can contain blessing.

When we ask, "Our Father, our King, fill our hands with Your blessings," we should see ourselves as the fingers of a single person stretching forth his hands. The only condition is that we all join together as one in peace and brotherhood. (The Palace Gates) © 2002
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