

FREE AT LAST!

by Shlomo Katz

Elul / Rosh Hashanah & Haazinu

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Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the new year, is, this year, the first day of the shemittah / sabbatical year for the land of Eretz Yisrael. R' Chaim Yeshayahu Hadari shlita (rosh yeshiva emeritus of Yeshivat Hakotel in Yerushalayim) observes that the Rosh Hashanah prayers take on a special meaning during the shemittah. He explains:

R' Yosef Albo z"l (Spain; died 1444) explains that the three themes of the Rosh Hashanah mussaf prayer--Malchuyot / Kingship, Zichronot / Remembrances and Shofarot--parallel the three fundamental beliefs of Judaism. These are (according to R' Albo): The existence of Hashem, His interest in man's affairs (including that He rewards and punishes), and the Divine nature of Torah. Malchuyot speaks of the existence of Hashem; in it we pray that all of mankind come to recognize Him. Zichronot speaks of Hashem's remembering our deeds and knowing our secrets, a prerequisite to reward and punishment. Shofarot speaks of the giving of the Torah amidst the sounds of shofarot. By acknowledging these fundamental tenets, we crown G-d as our King on Rosh Hashanah. (Sefer Ha'ikarim I:4)

R' Hadari continues: The Zohar teaches that man can have only one master. For this reason, slaves are exempt from the mitzvah of Kri'at Shema. They cannot acknowledge G-d as their true Master since they are subjugated to another master. R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (Gerrer Rebbe, known as the "Sfas Emes"; 1847-1905) writes that this is the idea behind the shemittah as well. Originally, the Jewish People were slaves in Egypt, while Eretz Yisrael was occupied by the Canaanite nations. Hashem arranged for the Jewish People to be liberated from Egypt and to then liberate the Land. When shemittah comes, we are liberated from the Land, and the Land is liberated from us. When both the Jewish People and Eretz Yisrael are free of any other master, both can crown G-d as our sole Master, our King. (Shabbat U'mo'ed Ba'shevi'it pp.358-363)

From the Parashah. . .

"Listen, heavens, and I will speak; and may the earth hear the words of my mouth." (32:1)

R' Moshe Alshich z"l (1505-1585) writes: The prophet Yeshayah said (Yeshayah 1:2), "Hear, heavens, and listen, earth, for Hashem has spoken." The midrash comments on the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu mentioned the heavens first and the earth second, while Yeshayah reversed them. Moshe, who had gone "higher" into the heavens than any other person, mentioned the heavens first, while Yeshayah, who was closer to the earth, mentioned the earth first. However, R' Alshich notes, there are other differences between the two verses. He explains:

When Moshe Rabbeinu rebuked Bnei Yisrael and warned them of the consequences of sinning, he wanted to inform them of the power that a tzaddik has to intervene with G-d and annul harsh decrees. Even the legions of angels in the heavens are subservient to the righteous. Thus we find, for example, that angels accompanied and served Yaakov Avinu. In contrast, no one, not even a tzaddik, can control another human being, for humans have bechirah / free will.

In this light, R' Alshich continues: When Moshe Rabbeinu addressed the heavens, he could command them, "Listen!" Moreover, he could use the Hebrew root "dbr" (speak), which represents a relatively harsh form of address. Finally, he could say, "I," for a tzaddik decrees and all of creation obeys. In contrast, when Moshe spoke to the earth, i.e., to humans who have free will, he could not command their attention; he could only request, "May the earth listen." And he said, "The words of my mouth," for our Sages say that Hashem spoke through Moshe's voice, so-to-speak. Moshe did not ask that humans listen to him; only to Hashem.

Yeshayah did not have the same confidence as Moshe Rabbeinu. Therefore he made no demands in his own name. He said only: "Earth and heavens! Pay attention because Hashem has spoken." (Torat Moshe)

"And, so, too, Hashem, instill Your awe upon all Your works . . . Then You, Hashem, will reign alone over all Your works . . ." (From the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayers)

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (1749-1821) observes that the Rosh Hashanah prayers, from beginning to end, are about Hashem's honor, not our personal needs. We pray that Hashem's honor should be uplifted as it was before the sin of Adam Ha'rishon. Moreover, R' Chaim writes, even though the weekday prayers do appear to be about our personal needs, the Sages who authored the prayers clearly did not have our personal needs as their primary focus. Proof of this is the Gemara's statement that the daily prayers parallel the korban tamid / daily offering. The tamid was a korban olah, the type of offering which was burnt entirely on the altar. It was all for Hashem, and so our prayers should be. Indeed, how could we presume to ask Hashem to fill our needs? Do we know better than He what we need? Would we not be like a patient who gives the surgeon advice about

how to operate? Rather, the focus of our prayers should be to increase Hashem's honor. If we ask that we not suffer it should be with the intention that our suffering not cause a chillul Hashem / desecration of His Name. (Nefesh Ha'chaim II ch.11)

R' Yitzchak Blazer z"l (1837-1907; rabbi of St. Petersburg, Russia; also known as R' Itzele Peterburger) says in the name of his teacher, R' Yisrael Lipkin Salanter z"l (1810-1883; founder of the mussar movement) that the lofty level of which R' Chaim of Volozhin wrote does not apply in our day. We are indeed permitted to request our personal needs on Rosh Hashanah, including life, sustenance, etc.

Why? R' Itzele explains: Once upon a time, people were on a lofty level and could actually feel the "pain" of the Shechinah resulting from the exile. They were capable of praying for the uplifting of Hashem's honor. Even at the moment when they were being judged, they were capable of sacrificing their own needs and thinking of Hashem's "needs," so-to-speak.

In our generations, in contrast, it is rare for a person to feel Hashem's "pain" when a person is worried about his own sustenance. If we would focus exclusively on Hashem's honor on Rosh Hashanah, it would not be an act of devotion. Rather, it would make a statement that we don't really believe that Hashem is judging us on this day. [Of course, we still say the text of the prayers that the earlier sages authored, but we may have in mind or even articulate our own needs at the appropriate places.]

R' Itzele adds: There is a general lesson here, as well. One should never fool himself and reach too far above his spiritual level. Rather, one should always serve Hashem on the level that is appropriate for him. (Quoted in Rabbi Itzele Mi'Peterburg p.499)

Shofar

R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-2012) writes: In addition to the shofar-blowing on Rosh Hashanah, there are other occasions when the Torah commands that the shofar be blown. We read (Bemidbar 10:9-10): "When you go to wage war in your Land against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall sound short blasts (teruah) of the trumpets, and you shall be recalled before Hashem, your Elokim, and you shall be saved from your foes. And, on a day of your gladness, and on your festivals, and on your new moons, you shall sound (tekiah) the trumpets over your olah-offerings and over your feast shelamim-offerings; and they shall be a remembrance for you before your Elokim; I am Hashem, your Elokim." Both of these occasions--war and festivals--call for shofar-blowing, but there is a difference between them, R' Elyashiv notes. On the festivals, the Torah calls for long tekiah blasts, a sound of joy. [This mitzvah is performed only in the Bet Hamikdash, as the verse says, "over your olah-offerings and over your feast shelamim- offerings."] At a time of war, the Torah calls for a plaintive tekiah sound, short bursts like crying. The teruah, R' Elyashiv explains, is a cry for mercy.

On Rosh Hashanah, we make both sounds: tekiah, because it is a festival, and teruah, because we need mercy. [The shevarim is only an alternate form of teruah.] On the one hand, Rosh Hashanah is a festival, as we read (Tehilim 81:4), "Blow the shofar on the new moon, when [the moon] is hidden on the day of the festival." The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 8a) explains: "On what holiday is the moon hidden? On Rosh Hashanah [which falls at the beginning of the month]." But, Rosh Hashanah is different from other festivals. Other festivals commemorate events in the distant past: the Exodus (Pesach), the Giving of the Torah (Shavuot), and the Clouds of Glory (Sukkot). Rosh Hashanah does not commemorate a historical event; it is about what is happening on each and every Rosh Hashanah. It is the day on which we are judged, when everything hangs in the balance. Therefore, in addition to the festive tekiah, we blow a teruah, a cry for mercy.

R' Elyashiv continues: Through the sound of the shofar, we can, and should, fulfill an additional mitzvah. Rambam z"l writes: "There is an affirmative mitzvah of the Torah to sound a teruah whenever trouble befalls the congregation. . . This is one of the ways of teshuvah." Rambam does not mean only when there is an active aggressor attacking the Jewish People, R' Elyashiv writes. Rather, any time we are aware of threats there is a mitzvah to cry out through the sound of the teruah. This mitzvah can be fulfilled simultaneously with the shofar-blowing of Rosh Hashanah. (Kitvei Ha'GRYSh: Yamim Noraim-Sukkot p.147)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **[Torah.org](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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