

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

With Ha'azinu we climb to one of the peaks of Jewish spirituality. For a month Moses had taught the people. He had told them their history and destiny, and the laws that would make theirs a unique society of people bound in covenant with one another and with God. He renewed the covenant and then handed the leadership on to his successor and disciple Joshua. His final act would be blessing the people, tribe by tribe. But before that, there was one more thing he had to do. He had to sum up his prophetic message in a way the people would always remember and be inspired by. He knew that the best way of doing so is by music. So the last thing Moses did before giving the people his deathbed blessing was to teach them a song.

There is something profoundly spiritual about music. When language aspires to the transcendent, and the soul longs to break free of the gravitational pull of the earth, it modulates into song. Jewish history is not so much read as sung. The rabbis enumerated ten songs at key moments in the life of the nation. There was the song of the Israelites in Egypt (see Is. 30:29), the song at the Red Sea (Ex. 15), the song at the well (Num. 21), and Ha'azinu, Moses' song at the end of his life. Joshua sang a song (Josh. 10:12-13). So did Deborah (Jud. 5), Hannah (1 Sam. 2) and David (2 Sam. 22). There was the Song of Solomon, Shir ha-Shirim, about which Rabbi Akiva said, "All songs are holy but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies."¹ The tenth song has not yet been sung. It is the song of the Messiah.²

Many biblical texts speak of the power of music to restore the soul. When Saul was depressed, David would play for him and his spirit would be restored (1 Sam. 16). David himself was known as the "sweet singer of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1). Elisha called for a harpist to play so that the prophetic spirit could rest upon him (2 Kings 3:15). The Levites sang in the Temple. Every day, in Judaism, we preface our morning prayers with Pesukei de-Zimra, the 'Verses of Song' with their magnificent crescendo, Psalm 150, in

which instruments and the human voice combine to sing God's praises.

Mystics go further and speak of the song of the universe, what Pythagoras called "the music of the spheres". This is what Psalm 19 means when it says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands . . . There is no speech, there are no words, where their voice is not heard. Their music³ carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world." Beneath the silence, audible only to the inner ear, creation sings to its Creator.

So, when we pray, we do not read: we sing. When we engage with sacred texts, we do not recite: we chant. Every text and every time has, in Judaism, its own specific melody. There are different tunes for shacharit, mincha and maariv, the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, Shabbat, the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot (which have much musically in common but also tunes distinctive to each), and for the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are different tunes for different texts. There is one kind of cantillation for Torah, another for the haftarah from the prophetic books, and yet another for Ketuvim, the Writings, especially the five Megillot. There is a particular chant for studying the texts of the written Torah: Mishnah and Gemarah. So by music alone we can tell what kind of day it is and what kind of text is being used. Jewish texts and times are not colour-coded but music-coded. The map of holy words is written in melodies and songs.

Music has extraordinary power to evoke emotion. The Kol Nidrei prayer with which Yom Kippur begins is not really a prayer at all. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. There can be little doubt that it is its ancient, haunting melody that has given it its hold over the Jewish imagination. It is hard to hear those notes and not feel that you are in the presence of God on the Day of Judgment, standing in the company of Jews of all places and times as they plead with heaven for forgiveness. It is the holy of holies of the Jewish soul.⁴

¹ Mishna, Yadayim 3:5.

² Tanhuma, Beshallach, 10; Midrash Zuta, Shir ha-Shirim, 1:1.

³ Kavam, literally "their line", possibly meaning the reverberating string of a musical instrument.

⁴ Beethoven came close to it in the opening notes of the sixth movement of the C Sharp Minor Quartet op. 131, his most sublime and spiritual work.

Nor can you sit on Tisha B'av reading Eichah, the book of Lamentations, with its own unique cantillation, and not feel the tears of Jews through the ages as they suffered for their faith and wept as they remembered what they had lost, the pain as fresh as it was the day the Temple was destroyed. Words without music are like a body without a soul.

Beethoven wrote over the manuscript of the third movement of his A Minor Quartet the words *Neue Kraft fühlend*, "Feeling new strength." That is what music expresses and evokes. It is the language of emotion unsicklied by the pale cast of thought. That is what King David meant when he sang to God the words: "You turned my grief into dance; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent." You feel the strength of the human spirit no terror can destroy.

In his book, *Musicophilia*, the late Oliver Sacks (no relative, alas) told the poignant story of Clive Wearing, an eminent musicologist who was struck by a devastating brain infection. The result was acute amnesia. He was unable to remember anything for more than a few seconds. As his wife Deborah put it, "It was as if every waking moment was the first waking moment."

Unable to thread experiences together, he was caught in an endless present that had no connection with anything that had gone before. One day his wife found him holding a chocolate in one hand and repeatedly covering and uncovering it with the other hand, saying each time, "Look, it's new." "It's the same chocolate," she said. "No," he replied, "Look. It's changed." He had no past at all.

Two things broke through his isolation. One was his love for his wife. The other was music. He could still sing, play the organ and conduct a choir with all his old skill and verve. What was it about music, Sacks asked, that enabled him, while playing or conducting, to overcome his amnesia? He suggests that when we "remember" a melody, we recall one note at a time, yet each note relates to the whole. He quotes the philosopher of music, Victor Zuckerkandl, who wrote, "Hearing a melody is hearing, having heard, and being about to hear, all at once. Every melody declares to us that the past can be there without being remembered, the future without being foreknown." Music is a form of sensed continuity that can sometimes break through the most overpowering disconnections in our experience of time.

Faith is more like music than science.⁵ Science analyses, music integrates. And as music connects note to note, so faith connects episode to episode, life to life, age to age in a timeless melody that breaks into

time. God is the composer and librettist. We are each called on to be voices in the choir, singers of God's song. Faith is the ability to hear the music beneath the noise.

So music is a signal of transcendence. The philosopher and musician Roger Scruton writes that it is "an encounter with the pure subject, released from the world of objects, and moving in obedience to the laws of freedom alone."⁶ He quotes Rilke: "Words still go softly out towards the unsayable / And music, always new, from palpitating stones / builds in useless space its godly home."⁷ The history of the Jewish spirit is written in its songs.

I once watched a teacher explaining to young children the difference between a physical possession and a spiritual one. He had them build a paper model of Jerusalem. Then (this was in the days of tape-recorders) he put on a tape with a song about Jerusalem that he taught to the class. At the end of the session he did something very dramatic. He tore up the model and shredded the tape. He asked the children, "Do we still have the model?" They replied, No. "Do we still have the song?" They replied, Yes.

We lose physical possessions, but not spiritual ones. We lost the physical Moses. But we still have the song. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Remember the days of yore, understand the years (shenot) of each generation." (Deuteronomy 32:7) Are we commanded to study world history? Certainly, I would say, on the basis of the simple meaning of the verse cited at the head of this commentary in accordance with the commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Germany, 1808–1888). A proper study of history will reveal the consistent interplay between Israel and the nations of the world, the intellectual streams which influenced us – and in turn – which we influenced, and the hidden finger of God which guaranteed Jewish survival under the most difficult of conditions. And I would argue that the proper translation of the biblical verse cited above, as one may deduce from the biblical commentary of Rabbi Hirsch, is "understand the differences [shenot, not from 'shana – year,' but rather from 'shinui – difference, change'] of each generation."

It has aptly been said: "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, today is a gift granted to us by God, and that is why it is called 'present.'" I would add that "today" is all that we really have to utilize, and we

⁵ I once said to the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins, in the course of a radio conversation, "Richard, religion is music, and you are tone deaf." He replied, "Yes, it's true, I am tone deaf, but there is no music."

⁶ Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Philosophy*, Duckworth, 1996, 151.

⁷ Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, II, 10.

must utilize it well, with wisdom and with dispatch. And we cannot treat “today” with proper understanding and circumspection unless we are sensitive to the forces of history which preceded it, especially to the changes in zeitgeist (the temper and spirit of the time), which makes “today” different from “yesterday,” and the new opportunities which may enable us to set the stage for a better tomorrow.

The truth is that God revealed Himself to Moses as the God of history. Although in the book of Genesis it is clear that El Sha-ddai or Elo-him is the God of power and creation, when, in the book of Exodus, Moses asks God for His name, the divine response is “Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh,” literally, “I shall be what I shall be” (Ex. 3:14). In effect, God is here introducing Himself first and foremost as the God of future tense, the God of history, the God of becoming, the God of future redemption (“Jehovah,” literally “He will bring about” redemption). This is very much in keeping with Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s Kuzari, who sees God as revealing Himself in history, based upon the first of the Ten Commandments, “I am the Lord thy God, who took thee out of Egypt, the house of Bondage” (20:2).

This name Ehyeh is very different from Maimonides’ emphasis on the God of creation, Elo-him; indeed, Maimonides interprets Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh as I am that I am, I am the God of being, I am the Ground of Being (Paul Tillich), I am the essence of creation (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Foundations of Torah 1:1).

And this name is not as definitive as is Elo-him, the God of creation. The God of creation “worked” (as it were) alone; in contrast, the God of history is dependent first and foremost on Israel (although redemption was in the divine plan almost immediately after the Exodus, the refusal of Israel to conquer the land delayed the process immeasurably) as well as upon the other nations and their actions. There will eventually be redemption, as all our prophets guarantee in God’s name, but since redemption requires Israel’s intervention, God must leave the “end of days” open-ended.

And so the Bible after presenting the name Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh goes on to say, “So shall you [Moses] say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent Me to you; this is My name forever, and this is My remembrance for all generations’” (Ex. 3:15). Note an interesting linguistic nuance: In Deuteronomy chapter thirty-two, the text reads “dor vador,” understand the differences “of each generation” whereas in Exodus chapter three, we find “dor lador,” “this is My remembrance for all generations.” There are two names of God expressed in this passage in Exodus: the God of the patriarchs is the God of Jewish tradition from generation to generation, the God of eternal Torah and halakhic

continuity, the God of the Shulhan Arukh, if you will; the God of history is the God of each generation, with that generation’s specific demands conditioned upon the historical situation of the specific time.

Hence Rabbi Shimon Schwab records in his memoirs how, as a bar mitzva youth, he went to Raden, anxious to meet with the Chafetz Chayim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, the gadol hador, the great luminary of the time. The sage asked the youth if he was a Kohen-priest. When young Shimon answered in the negative, the Torah giant commiserated that when the Messiah will come, only he – a Kohen – would be privileged to enter the sacred precincts of the Holy Temple. The reason for the priests’ elevated status is that their tribal ancestors answered positively to Moses’ call, “Whoever is with God, come to me.” Since young Shimon’s tribal ancestors did not heed that call, he would be excluded.

The Chafetz Chayyim concluded: “And, I do not say these words lightly in order to hurt you. I merely wish to prepare you: in every generation a divine voice calls out the particular summons, challenge, and opportunity of that generation. Do not repeat the mistake of your forebears. Listen for God’s voice in your generation, and make sure that you respond to God’s call!”

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RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT”L

Wein Online

This song of Moshe is the song of the Jewish story. It accurately portrays the arc of Jewish history in its glorious as well as its dolorous moments. The Ramban’s comment as to the proof of the holiness and accuracy of Moshe’s prophetic words – “If someone stood and accurately foretold what would happen many centuries later, would not one in hindsight be forced to admit to the truth of that prophet and his words upon seeing the minute fulfillment of that prophecy” – certainly carries even more weight in our age, a further eight centuries removed from Ramban’s time.

Moshe calls forth the heaven and earth to bear witness to his words of prophecy, for he is aware that human logic and memory can never really be trusted. Unfortunately, memory can be dimmed and lost, and logic distorted and/or ignored. In fact it is these factors – lost memory and flawed logic – that Moshe identifies as the cause of the sins of the Jewish people and of much of the predicted travail that will accompany them throughout their history.

It is not so much that there is a rebellion against God and Torah in our current society as it is

that God and Torah have simply been forgotten, erased from the Jewish consciousness – for many Jews they simply do not exist. And in such a climate of almost willful forgetfulness, certainly any attempt to convince others of the errors of their ways by the use of logic is doomed to frustrating failure.

Moshe concludes his visionary song/poem on an optimistic note. Somehow the covenantal relationship between God and Israel will remain binding and unbroken even unto the end of days. There will always be a core group of Jews who will not allow themselves – as well as others – to forget.

Events will constantly jog the Jewish memory and new generations will arise and ask: “Who are we and why are we here?” And the response to those questions can only be found in the eternal memory bank of the Jewish people and their history.

It is a very difficult task to restore memory but the fact that Moshe promises us that God and Torah will never be completely forgotten by all of the Jewish people reassures us that somehow the restoration of Jewish memory is possible and even guaranteed. And our logic will eventually not fail us as well.

We will survey our world and our situation and come to logical and holy conclusion as to what our policy and path in life should be. A nation of wisdom and insight, creativity and scholarship will not always remain illogical and foolish.

Moshe also encourages us by promising that eventually our enemies will be vanquished and shamed. Their nefarious ambitions will be thwarted and the Lord will balance all accounts with those who attempted to destroy the Jewish people. Good sense, accurate memory, strength of purpose and clarity of ideals will prevail and rule the Jewish world. Moshe’s song will continue to be heard throughout eternity.
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RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Redemption

The “song” of Ha’azinu contains a series of difficult to understand poetic statements that need the words of our masterful commentators to clarify their meaning. The beginning of this parasha is a “song” which tells the story of the Jewish people’s history, past, present, and future. It describes good times and bad; gifts from Hashem and punishments from Him when we strayed. While the words and phrases are difficult to understand in their different layers of comprehension, they give us a limited understanding of Hashem’s promise of the return of the Jewish People to their land and their inheritance.

Moshe describes how Hashem will deal with His people when they have turned from Him and

worshiped other gods. Hashem is referred to as a Rock, a symbol of strength and power, and Moshe speaks of Hashem’s anger when people seek other gods as their rock. The Torah states: “He will say, ‘Where are their gods, the rock in whom they sought refuge, who would eat the fat of their offerings, who would drink the wine of their drink-offerings (libations)? Let them stand and help you! Let him be a shelter for you! See, now, that I, I am He – and no other god is with Me. I put to death and I bring life, I struck down and I will heal, and there is no one who rescues from My hand. For I shall raise My hand to Heaven, and I shall say, “As I live forever, that I shall sharpen the shine of My sword and My hand shall grasp judgment, I shall return vengeance upon My enemies and upon those that hate Me shall I bring retribution. I shall make My arrows drunk with blood and My sword shall devour flesh, because of the earliest incursions of the enemy.”’

“See, now, that I, I am He – and no other god is with Me.” Hashem became angry with the people, for He saw in their future they would seek other gods which offer them nothing in reality. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains, “Now, after everything in which you placed your trust has proved useless and futile, and from nowhere does help or salvation beckon to you, now see that I alone am I, I alone am the Absolute, dependent on nothing, eternally unaltering. I alone am the One Personality on Whom everything and everybody depends, and in opposition to Whom everything else is unsubstantial, from Whom accordingly everything was in the past and from Whom alone any future can be hoped for.”

The Rashbam explains that Hashem was speaking to the other nations of the world after bringing heavy destruction on them. You (these nations) said, “Where are their gods?” Can you now see that I have caused them (the B’nei Yisrael) to be established before your eyes? Sforno understood this to mean that Hashem was also speaking to the B’nei Yisrael. Can you see that these “gods” that you worshipped could not save you from My punishment? I alone cause death and bring life. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin tells us that our Rabbis said that after Hashem had passed judgment on the sinners, He sat and played with them. The word “m’sacheich, played” can also mean taunt. Hashem made the nations believe that Hashem had lost all His power so that the lesson that they would learn when He reasserted that power would be more dramatic for them.

Hashem describes His reassertion of power: “As I live forever, that I shall sharpen the shine of My sword and My hand shall grasp judgment, I shall return vengeance upon My enemies and upon those that hate Me shall I bring retribution. I shall make My arrows drunk with blood and My sword shall devour flesh, because of the earliest incursions of the enemy.” Rashi explains that Hashem will raise His hands to Heaven

(Himself), as a sign that Hashem is taking an oath, making a promise to exact punishment. HaRav Sorotzkin wonders how it is possible to say that Hashem, Whose Glory fills the world, can raise His hands to the Heavens and take an oath to Himself. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that there is no contradiction here because it is talking about the end of days, the battle of Gog and Magog. At that time, Hashem will concentrate His essence on Har HaZeitim, the Mount of Olives, and He will raise His hands from there towards the Heavens and swear to Himself.

HaRav Hirsch explains that the meaning of this oath is an admonishment to the Heavens to fulfil a demand. "I am the Almighty, let the Heavens henceforth carry out My healing and rescuing Good-will towards My people just as they had been the executors of My Ill-will. Moreover, I am the Eternal Life and eternally living not only in Myself and for Myself in contrast to everything mortal, but 'I live for eternity,' am life for everything mortal, let the dead partake of My eternal life, awaken the dead, awake Israel to fresh existence and fresh life."

The Ramban explains that this entire "song" describes the history of the B'nei Yisrael, from the time that Hashem took the people out of Egypt through the end of days, the Redemption. It speaks of all the favors that Hashem did for us in the desert, and that He caused us to inherit the lands of powerful nations. Hashem reminded the people that in spite of the great wealth and honor bestowed on the B'nei Yisrael, they strayed and worshipped other gods. Hashem visited upon the people "pestilence, famine, the evil beast, and the sword, and then He dispersed them in every direction and corner." The Ramban testifies that this has all come about, but the song does not stop there. The song speaks of the revenge of Hashem on all the nations that have mistreated His people, for "they inflicted all these evils upon us out of their hatred of the Holy One."

The Ramban continues his analysis of this "song." The song concludes with the promise of Redemption. The Ramban offers his interpretation of the message found in this song which describes how this redemption will be brought about. "There is no condition of repentance or service [of Hashem as a prerequisite for the coming redemption], but it is a testamentary document that the evils will come and that we will endure them." The remnant of Jews that have chosen Hashem and His ways will be part of this future redemption.

Many will say that we are in the throes of that redemption with the rebirth of the State of Israel. Others will argue that the Ramban is only describing the beginning of the final redemption, but the final redemption will require repentance and service to Hashem. May we repent and serve Hashem, and may our actions bring about the final Redemption. © 2025

Rabbi D. Levin

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Haziv Lach

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

No, this title is not the beginning of a liturgical poem recited on Shabbat Shuvah (the Shabbat before Yom Kippur). In fact, *Haziv Lach* is an acronym that tells us where to start each *aliyah* of Parshat Ha'azinu.

The *Kohen aliyah* starts from the letter *Heh* of the word "*ha'azinu*" and is 6 verses. The *Levi aliyah* starts from the *Zayin* of "*zechor*" and is six verses. The third *aliyah* starts with the *Yud* of "*yarkivehu*" and is five verses. The next *aliyah* starts with the *Vav* of "*va-yar*" and is ten verses. The fifth *aliyah* starts with the letter *Lamed* of the word "*lu*" and is 11 verses. The sixth *aliyah* starts with the letter *Kaf* of "*ki esa*" and is four verses, which takes us to the end of the poem. The seventh and final *aliyah* is nine verses and ends the *parsha*.

This division is codified in *Shulchan Aruch* 428:5. (There is an alternate division of Ha'azinu, which still follows the acronym of *Haziv Lach*.) Thus, we cannot readily add *aliyot* or divide the *parsha* differently. The most we can do is split the final *aliyah*.

The Rambam states that the reason to divide the *parsha* according to *Haziv Lach* is to rebuke the people so that they will repent (*Hilchot Tefillah* 13:5). It's not clear what he means, since all of Ha'azinu is about rebuke. Some explain that what the Rambam has in mind is the rule that we follow the rest of the year, namely to avoid beginning or ending an *aliyah* with words of rebuke. The custom of *Haziv Lach* does exactly what we usually avoid! The Rambam is justifying the custom by saying that it may bring about repentance on Shabbat Shuvah, which is focused on repenting. Alternatively, perhaps it is thinking about the acronym of *Haziv Lach* that can help bring about repentance. For the phrase itself means "Glory (*ziv*) is yours (*lach*)," a reminder that we have great potential to repent.

If this second reason is correct, perhaps it is necessary to follow the division only on Shabbat Shuvah itself (when we read the entire *parsha* and the entire acronym is spelled out), but not at the shorter Torah readings beforehand (on Monday, Thursday, and the previous Shabbat Mincha). This is a subject of disagreement among the *poskim*. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Eternity Has Its Limits

"When I call out the Name of Hashem, declare the greatness of our G-d." Rashi: "The word *ki* [which can be translated in many different ways, including 'because'] in our pasuk means 'when.'

The verse therefore means, 'When I call out and mention Hashem's Name, you are to declare His greatness in response, and bless His Name.' From this pasuk Chazal therefore derived the obligation of answering Baruch Shem kevod malchuso le-olam va'ed / 'Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and for all time' in the beis hamikdosh."

Maharal: "Rashi seemed utterly reasonable -- until his last phrase. If the pasuk calls for a response by people when they hear Hashem's Name, why would it be limited to the beis hamikdosh, rather than anywhere that someone calls out His Name? More accurately, where is there any hint of this in the pasuk? Because Rashi is committed to providing access to the plain meaning of the text -- and not to amplify it with halachic tidbits -- his comment has to be sourced in the understanding of the text itself."

Rashi's halachic source is the gemara; (Taanis 16B) it states that the Baruch Shem response is limited to the beis hamikdosh, and replaced by the simple "amen" everywhere else. The reason must be as follows. The Name mentioned in our pasuk is the Explicit (i.e. Four-Letter) Name. We know (Yoma 69B) that the Explicit Name was uttered only in the Temple. Everywhere else, we substitute the Name that substitutes the notion of adnus/ mastery for the Ineffable Four-letter Name. The response "Baruch Shem..." is appropriate only after the explicit recitation of Hashem's Name as it is actually written.

Here is why. (What follows is R Hutner's explication of the Maharal, but not explicit in his words.) Our pasuk speaks of declaring His greatness upon hearing His Name called out, or pronounced explicitly. The gemara makes two assumptions about "declaring His greatness." It stipulates that it should come as a berachah/ "blessing." It requires that this blessing be of the kind that can continue "forever."

"Forever," it turns out, is relative. We never pronounce the Four-Letter Name as it is written -- other than in the beis hamikdosh. We substitute the adnus-Name. This is not a permanent feature, however. The gemara (Pesachim 50A) observes that this substitution is limited to the here and now. In the messianic future, we will all pronounce the Name as it is written. This means that at the moment we have a disjoint approach to the Name we refer to in the Baruch Shem kevod response. The adnus-Name is a legitimate Name in its own right. It is a Name today, and will always be. Were we to respond to it with the Baruch Shem formula, the "forever and for all time" reference would make complete sense.

But this is not the entire picture. We also use the adnus-Name as a substitute for the Four-Letter Name, which we refuse to explicitly pronounce today. When we use the Baruch Shem formula (as we do in reciting the Shema), we mean something very different when we speak of "forever." We can only mean a

passing, temporary eternity -- the eternity of the current phase of human civilization. We know about (and look forward to!) a new kind of society, in which under the aegis of Moshiach, we will pronounce the Four-Letter Name as it is spelled, mirroring what will then be a much fuller appreciation of its meaning. When we speak today of His Name evoking our declaration of greatness, we mean a limited "forever" -- one that will come to an end with the messianic enlargement of its pronunciation.

Ironically, were we to stand in the beis hamikdosh of old, the "forever" would be a fuller one. The Name is recited there as it is written; this will not change even in the future. Its "forever," therefore, has no expiration date.

The formula "Baruch Shem kevod malchuso" attempts to satisfy our pasuk's requirement of declaring Hashem's greatness upon hearing His Name. As Rashi writes, the declaration is the blessing of His Name. Here, then, is the crucial point. Berachah always implies going beyond the essential. It means surpassing limits, rather than staying within them. [Elsewhere, Maharal observes that the most important legal part of the Torah -- The Ten Commandments -- begins with the letter aleph, whose numerical value is one. Law is monolithic. It doesn't bend for this individual or that group. It is uniform and predictable. The Creation story, however, begins with the beis of Bereishis. Beis is the first plural number, and therefore a good symbol of plurality, of going beyond. The purpose of Creation is to bring His berachah to the world, and the beis gives it a good start.]

In the beis hamikdosh, where the Name was read and will be read in the future in the same way, without change, the Name can indeed be blessed. Even more of the fuller nature of that Name can be revealed to us. That revelation is the berachah of the Name.

Outside of the beis hamikdosh, however, the Name will not expand but contract. Whenever we read the Four-Letter Name, we substitute the adnus-Name. That component will cease to exist in the future. Our projection for the Name, therefore, is one of limitation and shrinking. Meeting it with a Baruch Shem is therefore inappropriate.

The gemara (Berachos 21A) sees our pasuk as the source of answering Amen in all places outside of the beis hamikdosh. We now understand why. The "greatness" that we are asked to declare cannot come in the form of a berachah like "Baruch Shem." Amen is the best substitution and response. (Based on Gur Aryeh, Devarim, 32:3; Pesach 60:8-10) © 2013 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

RABBI YAKOV HABER

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One of the major focal points of the prayer service on Rosh HaShana is the mussaf amida

containing blessings with the three themes of malchiyos, zichronos and shofaros. The Talmud (Rosh HaShana 34b) tells us that HKB"H tells us: "Recite before me malchiyos, zichronos and shofaros: Malchiyos -- so that you shall coronate me as your King. Zichronos -- so that your remembrance comes before me for the good. And with what? With the shofar." Notably, even though each theme has its own beracha the Talmud seems to explain the reason for the first two berachot directly. The third beracha is mentioned only in a secondary way -- "With what? With the shofar." This seems to be an explanation of why we blow the shofar. Why isn't the purpose of the beracha of shofaros more explicitly stated?

Furthermore, when we analyze the text of the three berachos, we see that the first, concerning malchiyos, clearly focuses on coronating Hashem as our King. The second clearly focuses on G-d remembering our actions. The third, though, focuses on G-d revealing His presence in the world starting at Har Sinai. Why doesn't the Gemara spell out this theme rather than just vaguely referencing the shofar?

In addition, each beracha contains three verses from the Torah, three from Tehillim, and three from Nevi'im. In the beracha of shofaros, which, as mentioned, focuses on Revelation, the first three pesukim from the Torah focus on the Revelation of Sinai punctuated by the sound of the shofar. The last three highlight the Revelation of the final redemption also accentuated by shofar blasts. But the middle three p'sukim from Tehillim do not seem to focus on Revelation. One verse speaks of the shofar on Rosh HaShana, "tik'u bachodesh shofar bakesseh l'yom chageinu." One speaks of G-d being elevated with the shofar, "alah Elokim bitru'ah, Hashem b'kol shofar." The final ones of this section, taken from the last psalm, speak of many musical instruments being used to praise Hashem including shofar. How are these verses related and how do they relate to the general theme of Revelation?

Rav Soloveitchik (Yemei Zikaron, "AleI T'eina, v'Kosnos Or") beautifully explains that the pesukim from Tehillim focus on the revelation of Hashem on Rosh HaShana itself. G-d reveals himself to the penitent encouraging him, embracing him, awaiting his return. Elsewhere, (seen in Nifla'os HaRav) Rav Soloveitchik explains that the Torah's statement of "us'machtem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem" indicates that true joy occurs only when in the presence of G-d. The fear of judgment of Rosh HaShana eliminates the ability to recite Hallel which would ordinarily reflect this joy (Arachin 10b). Nonetheless, a hidden Hallel is indeed recited through the verses from the last mizmor of Tehillim indicating all the instruments including the shofar being used to praise Hashem. According to the Rav, then, all of the pesukim do indeed focus on the theme of Revelation.

Based on this idea, perhaps we can answer our other questions as well. The Gemara states "Bameh? Bashofar!" Perhaps the Gemara is referring to both the blessings of malchiyos and zichronos. How are we to coronate G-d? How are we to assure that Hashem remembers us l'tova? The Gemara answers: with the shofar! The shofar represents G-d's revelation to us. But this revelation was not only to be punctuated in the historical record at its endpoints -- at Har Sinai at the beginning of Jewish national history and at the Final Redemption, the last stage of Jewish history. It is also a constant one on both the national and individual levels. G-d constantly reveals himself to us in our lives by exercising His Divine providence over us. His constant knowledge of every, even minute, aspect of our lives, constantly monitoring, modifying, and re-creating all of our life pathways reflect His constant intense connection to us. To be sure, the intensity of the connection to HKB"H depends on our spiritual level, but Hashem's connection to everyone is a given. How are we to coronate G-d, to recognize Him as the ruler of not only the world but also to realize that the entire purpose of our existence is to connect to Him? How are we to assure that we are remembered for the good before the Heavenly court? Bashofar, through being aware of G-d's constant presence in our lives. Not to get caught up in the havlei haz'man which tend to numb ourselves to this awareness of G-d's presence in our lives. The shofar wakes us up (Rambam Hichos Teshuva), breaks down the barriers (Michtav Me'Eliyahu as per the shofar of Yericho) and allows us to start on our journey to return.

The Haftorah for Shabbos Shuva begins "Shuva Yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha -- Return Israel to Hashem, your G-d!" Rather than viewing the return as a journey toward G-d, perhaps we can characterize this as a return inward to that which is already there, to G-d's constant connection to us which we are not taking full advantage of. May we all "re-sign" on the b'ris with HKB"H on Rosh HaShana and may the awareness of His constant presence carry us through a sweet new year! © 2014 Rabbi Y. Haber and The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI YAAKOV WOLBE

Bais Hamussar

One of the thorniest conundrums of Jewish philosophy is the issue of Divine punishment and how to grapple with bad things happening to good people. The Talmud (Brachos 7a) relates that even Moshe did not initially understand why some tzadikim have it good in this world while others suffer, and why the same applies to the wicked, some prosper and flourish and others don't. While these questions of theodicy and eschatology are difficult and are the subject of much debate and discussion in Jewish sources, a central aspect of the issue is addressed in the fourth verse of our parsha: "The Rock, perfect are

His actions, for all His paths are justice; a trustworthy God without iniquity, righteous and straight is He."

The Talmud (Taanis 11a and partially quoted by Rashi) teaches that this verse is referring to the Almighty's justice with regards to the dispensing of reward and punishment: "A trustworthy God" -- [This teaches that] just as the wicked are punished in Olam Haba (next world) even for a minor sin that they do, so too, the righteous are punished in Olam Hazeh (this world) even for a minor sin that they do. 'Without iniquity' -- [This teaches that] just as the righteous are rewarded in Olam Haba even for a minor mitzvah that they do, so too, the wicked are rewarded in Olam Hazeh even for a minor mitzvah that they do." The Almighty is fair. Tzadikim do not have special treatment and have their sins absolved sans Teshuva or punishment. They too are punished even for minor sins. Same thing for the wicked. A person's aggregate wickedness notwithstanding, the Almighty does not withhold reward for even the most minor mitzvahs. No actions -- not sins for the Tzadik nor mitzvahs for the rasha -- are unaccounted. The only difference between the Tzadik and Rasha is the venue of the reward and punishment: The Tzadik is rewarded in Olam Haba and punished here for whatever few sins he may have committed, while the Rasha is rewarded here for his few mitzvahs and punished in the spiritual world for his sins.

But a question remains. The verse ostensibly states that the Almighty is fair and just and therefore even the wicked are rewarded for their mitzvahs. But in truth it does not seem fair at all. The Mishnah teaches that one iota of reward in Olam Haba outweighs all the rewards and pleasures of Olam Hazeh. Olam Haba pleasures are on a different plane. If you could theoretically encapsulate all of this world's pleasures in a single ingestible pill, it would be insignificant compared to the most minute pleasure of Olam Haba. How then can it be fair and just for discriminating against the Rasha by exhausting his reward on a less meaningful world? Should a tzadik and a rasha perform an identical mitzvah, if it was truly fair their respective rewards would be identical. Yet they are not (the same applies with respect to punishment -- punishment in Olam Haba is harsher than here). Thus the question can be raised anew: How is it fair to have a discrepancy of where reward and punishment are doled out for the Tzadik and rasha?

The answer is that all of that is included in the choices that rendered them Tzadik or Rasha. The Tzadik is someone who prioritizes spiritual matters above physical and material ones. Through his actions, values and behavior, he is demonstrating that he prefers the spiritual world and not the material one. Thus he is choosing to be rewarded in the spiritual world, and the Almighty is fair and accedes to his choice. By contrast, the rasha is someone who

eschews the spiritual world, and lives for this material world alone. He is demonstrating that the world that he values, and the world that he seeks to be rewarded in, is this one, and again the Almighty grants his request and all the rewards for his mitzvahs are paid up here.

Perhaps this idea can be used to explain the Mishnah, "Envy, lust, and honor extract a person from the world." On a basic level the mishnah is teaching that a person who is consumed by envy, lust and honor is precluded from living in our world. But perhaps the world in question is Olam Haba. Envy, lust and pursuit of honor are attributes that demonstrate that a person values pleasure, reward and recognition in this world. By doing these things he is opting to get paid here for his mitzvahs, and like the rasha he will have to forego reward in the spiritual world. The Almighty is fair and just and allows us to choose our preferred venue for reward and punishment.

It would be prudent to choose wisely.

Our choices are not limited to reward and punishment. We determine how our entire relationship with Hashem looks like. We are told that the K'ruvim ("cherubs") on the Aron ("Ark") were representative of the relationship between the Jewish people and the Almighty. If we turn away from Him, He too will turn away from us. The Talmud (Bava Basra 10a) informs that if we obey His Will, we will be treated like His children.

However, in the unfortunate situation where we disobey Him, then we are demoted to being His subjects who do not benefit from His fatherly love. My grandfather, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe zt"l, would frequently invoke this idea as a central theme of Rosh Hashana: Everyone has a master, the only question is who. Will we choose the "Melech Elyon", the Lofty King of kings, or will we make the poor and fatal decision to follow the "Melech Elyon", the lowly king, the Yetzer Hara, whose sole purpose is to obstruct us from achieving greatness.

May the Almighty help us to always make the right choices. Kesivah VeChasimah Tovah. © 2017 Rabbi Y. Wolbe & aishdas.org

