

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

The Unwritten Torah

I'm always baffled by the differences in style and content that appear in the book of Devarim in contrast to the preceding four books of our Torah. Any serious student of Torah would notice a host of variations between these texts and the obvious question is "Why?"

Let me explain. First the language is different. In Devarim, Moshe, our teacher often speaks in the first person something that is not found in the first four books of the Torah. Second, there are blatant disparities when contrasting the book of Devarim to the preceding books. For example, the differences in the language of the Ten Commandments. The obvious inclusion of additional words in the text in Devarim as well as a host of laws which do not appear in the preceding books. The section dealing with the blessings and rebukes are markedly different. One can therefore ask the question as to why this discrepancy? Was this book written by someone else? Is it G-d driven, as the other books, or was it written by Moshe?

These questions are indeed the discussion of our sages as well.

When one reads the commandment of Shabbat as it appears in the book of Shmot and Devarim, two divergent languages appear: "Zachor" and "Shamor". Which one appeared on the Ten Commandments? Or did they both appear? Our Rabbis state that these two languages were said at one time, something that no human can achieve. So that each time the Decalogue appeared, the second language was also used.

But the questions still abound. What about all the other dissimilarities in the book of Devarim? The additional laws - the additional curses and blessings - how were they written? Were they written and given by G-d or were they Moshe's words?

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky, author of the book "Emes L'Yaakov", develops an interesting approach. He claims that there are times in the Torah that we see the word written in one way yet we read it in another way. Examples of this can be found in the portion of Ki Tavo, in which the Torah writes one language, yet we vocalize it very differently. This phenomenon is referred to as the axiom of "Kri and Ktiv". He therefore posits the innovative notion that the differences between the text in Dvarim and the conflicting texts in the other sections

of the Torah are just an example of this principle of "Kri and Ktiv", in which one time it appears as we should read it and the next time it appears as it is written or vice versa.

I believe that perhaps there is another explanation to these apparent differences.

In defining how the Torah was given to the Jewish people, the Bais Halevi states that on the original Decalogue were written the unwritten Torah as well (the Torah Shebal Peh). When the second set of tablets were given however, the Oral Torah was omitted. This omission made the Jewish people an integral part in the transmission of the Torah. Before they were outsiders looking at the text as it appeared in writing. Now that the Oral law was not written, the Jewish people were charged to be intimately involved in the transmission, and they became the conduit for the receiving and the transmission of the Oral Torah. They fundamentally became the unwritten law!

It is this line of reasoning that I believe explains the blatant disparities from the book of Deuteronomy to the other four preceding books. I would like to offer the theory that the book of Dvarim is the first example of the Oral law as interpreted by our teacher Moses. Its importance and value remains equal to the other books but it represents the beginnings of the elucidation and expounding of the preceding written Torah and the meanings of those words. In essence then, Moshe, our teacher, in the book of Devarim provided the first example of the exposition of the proceeding books of the Torah: the "Torah Shebal Peh", the unwritten Torah. Using this reasoning we can easily explain the contrast in language, style and content of the book of Devarim when compared to the other books and possibly arrive at the conclusion that one book is an explanation of the others.

I was then fortunate to have found these same words in the writings of Rav Dov B. Soloveitchik. He writes: "Initially, Sefer Devarim was imparted orally by Moses as Torah Shebal Peh, oral law. Only later was it written and incorporated as Torah Shebichtav - the written Torah (Mesoret Harav –Devarim page 217).

With this explanation we can now easily understand the difference in language and content of the book of Devarim without reverting to other difficult explanations. ©2020 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for

over forty years . He and his wife D'vorah live in Efrat. All comments are welcome at ravmordechai@aol.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What is the essence of our faith, the purpose for which the Jewish people have been placed in the world? Fascinatingly enough, the answer is to be found within the central prayer of our Rosh Hashana liturgy: the three blessings, uniquely found within the Additional (Musaf) prayer of Rosh Hashana, of Malchuyot (kingship), Zichronot (remembrances) and Shofarot. These blessings are each punctuated by the sounds of the shofar and, according to the 14th century theologian Rabbi Yosef Albo as well as the 19th-century Franz Rosenzweig, contain the essence of our faith.

The first of these blessings, Malchuyot, begins with the more familiar Alenu prayer. This prayer teaches that the God whom we now accept as the one Lord of the Universe, the God of love, morality and peace, will eventually be accepted by the entire world.

This axiom of our religion, this prophecy of the ultimate endgame, is especially comforting in the face of the dangerous global village in which we live, a global village in which the specter of nuclear proliferation looms.

This blessing affirms that it is the God of compassionate, righteousness and moral justice who will eventually emerge supreme over the totalitarian trinity of Nazi fascism, Stalinist Communism and Islamic fundamentalism. Our broken world will eventually be perfected under the Kingship of the God of righteousness; through the teachings of Abraham "all the families of the Earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3) with a world of peace.

The second blessing, Zichronot, which is a Hebrew term for history, opens with: "You remember the activities from the beginning of the world, and you are mindful of the deeds [or the potential functions, from the Hebrew tafkid] of every creature from earliest times."

Here is a ringing declaration of faith in the process of history; the clear sense that historical time is on the side of humanity, and that individuals and nations have a unique role to play in the cumulative march of history toward redemption. Israel alone of the nations of the world enjoys a special relationship with God, a covenant which ensures its eternity and defines its mission as the messenger of ethical monotheism to all of humanity.

This blessing guarantees that there is an overarching purpose to history, which is not a cyclical, repetitive cycle leading nowhere, but rather a linear pathway leading to peace. Redemption will come about in the fullness of historic time as a result of the cumulative merits of all preceding generations.

How will we carry out our covenantal task of imparting our message to the world? This is told to us by the third blessing, Shofarot, which reminds us of the revelation at Sinai, the 613 commandments which God presented to Israel and the seven commandments of morality, centering around "Thou shalt not murder," which God presented to the world.

Maimonides, the great codifier of Jewish law, insists that just as God commanded Moses to bequeath 613 commandments to Israel, "similarly did He command Moses to coerce the nations of the world to accept the seven laws of morality" (Laws of Kings 8:10).

This is an immensely significant message, especially in our postmodern, relativistic, "everything goes" society, which denies any absolute concept of morality.

"Situation ethics" dominates our conventional wisdom, and the most heinous crime can become transformed into a sacred act "when seen from the perpetrator's point of view." (Hence a suicide bomber who murders innocent children is called a "freedom fighter.") Shofarot tells us that the Seven Laws of Morality which must be accepted by the nations are not options, but absolutes, since – especially in our global village – the lives of all humanity hang in the balance of their acceptance.

Hence the Rosh Hashana Musaf Amida teaches that the nation of Israel must and will teach fundamental morality, or ethical monotheism, to all the nations of the world. Only when this message is accepted, when "this Torah comes forth from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem," only then will "nation not lift up sword against nation and humanity not learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4) and "everyone will sit under his vineyard and fig tree and no one will have reason to fear" (Micah 4:4).

Each of these blessings is punctuated by the shofar sounding. After God's kingship we sound the shofar, the means by which the king in the ancient world was crowned. Take note: It is we, the Jewish people, who must bring God down into this world and crown Him.

After Zichronot, we sound the shofar as a reminder of the aborted sacrifice of Isaac in favor of the ram whose horns were caught in the thicket. Isaac, the future of the Jewish people, was slated for slaughter, but was set free.

The shofar sound after Zichronot reminds us that the Jews will continue to live despite exile and persecution.

We must live so that we may remain God's witnesses and "a light unto the nations of the world" (Isaiah 42:6).

Finally, we sound the shofar after Shofarot since the method by which we must reach out to the world is by teaching our Torah – a teaching revealed at

Sinai amid the sounds of the shofar.

And it will ultimately be that when the Almighty Himself will sound the shofar that all of the dispersed will return to Israel, the Temple will be rebuilt and the nations will come to learn from us to beat their swords into plowshares and to live together in peace. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

I believe that all of us can agree that this year the awesome days of Rosh Hashana will be different than in past years. Many of us may not even be allowed to attend the synagogue for public worship. Others will pray and assemble in open, outside areas. There is a rhythm to our holidays that this coronavirus has interrupted. Nevertheless, Rosh Hashana will take place and Jews worldwide will commemorate it according to our halachic and traditional customs. But perhaps most importantly, I feel, and I certainly hope that it will be a more introspective Rosh Hashana than we perhaps have experienced in past years.

The prayers for life and family, success and prosperity, peace and tranquility, accomplishment and productivity, purposefulness and meaning, will have a more intensive, personal tone. This year it requires little imagination to realize that we stand before the heavenly court and pass, in single file, to be judged and blessed. There are those who because of circumstances in their synagogues or community may curtail the prayer service and omit certain of the paragraphs that are ordinarily so much a part of the holiday service of the day. I respect the opinion of rabbis who chose to follow this route because of the local situation in which they find themselves, however to me every word of the holiday prayer book now takes on even greater meaning and relevance.

I cannot imagine that under the present circumstances that exist here in my synagogue, that we will omit any prayers. We can all do without sermons and other additions but the holy words that have been sanctified over the centuries by the tears and even the blood of millions of Jews who stood before their creator for judgment and blessing should not be absent from our lives and lips. We need to remember that wherever we are it is Rosh Hashana and that it should be treated and observed as such.

The Talmud records that we passed before the heavenly court as soldiers in the army of King David. It also compares us to the sheep that exist around Mount Meron. Sheep and soldiers, at first glance, seem to be opposite descriptions and scenarios. Soldiers stand erect and march proudly, while sheep always have a low profile and are not given to represent strength and firmness. Yet, I believe that we can well understand that the Talmud did not present us here with an either/or choice – soldiers or sheep. Rather, it meant to

teach us that all human beings are both at the same time. We have within us enormous strength and capability, potential and firmness of purpose and behavior while at the same time we are but dust and ashes, putty in the hands, so to speak, of the Holy One who has fashioned us.

It is the challenge of life, its experiences and events that confront us as to when we should stand erect and firm as soldiers or whether we should be humble and adopt a low profile, as do sheep. Rosh Hashana brings us face-to-face with this challenge. As far as Torah values and the Jewish people are concerned, we are certainly to be soldiers in the army of King David. But as far as our own personal wants and desires, social behavior, and communal responsibility, we should lower our egos and allow ourselves to be counted as the sheep of Mount Meron.

I send you my blessings for the new year and for a ktiva v'chatima tova. ©2020 *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 Hashana—where the Jewish nation is told “You are standing this day (Ha-Yom) all of you before the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 29:9)

Indeed, the Rosh Hashana 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 Hashana. 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 God 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 not 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. ©2020 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

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Today is the birth(day) of the world." (Rosh Hashana prayers) These words are said after the blowing of the Shofar on Rosh HaShana. Chazal tell us that Hashem began Creation on the 25th of Elul and Rosh HaShana corresponds to Friday, the day that Man was created. We celebrate Rosh HaShana on this date because before Man was created, there was no purpose to the world yet. As Hashem says, "I did not create the world to be desolate, but formed it to be populated." (Isaiah 45:18)

Though this is the typical translation of the phrase, that this is the day the world was born, the word 'harah' doesn't mean birth, but conception. We find in numerous places (including the Haftarah of Chana on the first day of Rosh Hashana) the phrase, "vatahar vatailed bain," and she conceived and she gave birth to a son. If this is so, then what is meant by saying "this is the day the world was conceived"? The world was created; we should say, "Hayom Huledes Olam."

The truth is that the word used here is very precise. This is the day the world was conceived, when it began its journey to completion. Now that human beings existed, the world could come to its perfection. As R' Akiva told Turnus Rufus HaRasha, Hashem left things in Creation undone so that we might become His partners in it.

All people are born with a 'tzelem Elokim,' the form of Hashem. But we know Hashem has no form! To what, then, are we referring? We are referring to His role as a Creator. Each person is imbued with the ability to create, do, and achieve things in the world. We don't have to accept situations as they are; we can try to improve them.

That is why on Rosh HaShana, when we ask Hashem for a new year to accomplish things on this earth and in the Heavens above, we say this is the day the earth was conceived. It was the beginning of a growth stage that would continue forward with each person adding what they could. Nothing is yet determined or set, and we can maximize the outcomes of our efforts. That is the type of year we can and should ask for: one that will give us opportunities to grow and achieve, and in which we commit to using it as such.

At an engagement celebration, the Kallah's father was asked to put into writing the financial commitment that he promised to the young couple. He did not want to do so, saying that they should take his word for it since he was a very dedicated father who always watched out for his children.

R' Elchonon Wasserman, who was present at the time, immediately answered the Mechutan's claim based on the Tefila we say in Shmoneh Esrei during Aseres Yimei Teshuva. "Zachreinu L'Chaim Melech Chafeitz BaChaim V'Chasveinu B'Sefer HaChaim."

We have already asked Hashem to remember us for life, why do we then say to inscribe us in the book of life? Hashem does not forget and is equally devoted to His dear children. Nevertheless, we ask to have it in writing. From here we see, said R' Elchonon, that as honorable a person may be... always get it in writing! ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Moral Heights

During this period, when our thoughts should be on teshuva (pen-itenance), I want to quote an appropriate passage from this week's parsha. "When all these things befall you -- the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the L-rd your G-d has banished you, and you return to the L-rd your G-d ... (Deut. 30:1-3, trans. JPS). We may ask: what a strange place to do teshuva, among the gentile nations to which we have been scattered. A more appropriate place for teshuva would seem to be Jerusalem, or even New York! In an attempt to explain this, let me quote from a midrash on Bereishis.

It concerns a certain Yosef Misisha, who was one of the "Misyav-nim" (assimilationists) at the time of the Greek occupation of Israel. The Greek authorities decided that the Temple in Jerusalem should be desecrated, and, moreover, that this should

be done in a dramatic way by getting a Jew to do their dirty work. For this purpose they chose Yosef Misisha, and told him to go into the Temple, into the holiest part, and remove any of the holy objects he saw, for his own keeping. He agreed, entered the Holy Sanctuary, and seeing the Menora, decided that that would look good in his home. (Remember, this was the real thing, large, wrought in gold and decorated, not a "chanukia"!) So he removed the Menora from the Temple and took it home. This did not, however, satisfy the Greeks. They thought that the Temple Menora in a private house would not quite do it. After all, everyone had some kind of candelabrum in his home. Something else was needed to make the desecration really spectacular. So they told Yosef to go back into the Temple and remove something else to keep. But this time he refused, and he stuck to this refusal, even under torture, from which he died.

The same Midrash gives another story, about a certain Yakum Ish Tzroros, an assimilationist during the Roman occupation of Isra-el. His brother-in-law, R' Yosi ben Yoezer, was sentenced to death by the Roman authorities for teaching Torah, performing in this way a Kiddush HaShem. As R' Yosi was led into the town square for the execution, Yakum rode up and shouted at him: "Do you see now what happens to you for performing mitzvos?" R' Yosi shot back: "In that case, you can imagine what is going to happen to you for not performing mitzvos!" These words entered Yakum's soul "like a serpent's poison", and he immediately jumped off his horse and did teshuva.

What is the common theme of these two stories? In each story, the central figure stooped about as low as one can, and then did teshuva. In the first story, the person violently desecrated the Temple, and this experience apparently led him to teshuva and a refusal to repeat his sin. In the second story (leaving aside the issue of performing mitzvos versus assimilating), the person was humiliating someone who had been sentenced to death, and in spite of (or perhaps because of!) this disgusting behavior, he was receptive to his brother-in-law's rebuke.

It seems that when someone is in a low enough moral state, he may "bottom out", and derive inspiration from his situation, so as to rise to moral heights. As a matter of fact, one cannot do teshuva unless one has first sinned, by definition.

But we must be careful here! I am not suggesting that we should deliberately sin, in order to do teshuva afterwards! As a rule, the more one sins, the harder it is to extricate oneself from one's situation.

What I am suggesting is that in this period of teshuva, one should not become overly despondent by brooding over all one's sins. As these stories show, it may be possible to use one's sinful state as a springboard to a higher state.

This is perhaps the reason the Torah speaks of teshuva taking place while we are scattered about the nations of the world. We will repent not in spite of this situation, but actually because of it.

It is my prayer that by performing teshuva, we may all rise to moral heights. © 1987 Rabbi Y. Haber

DONIEL TZVI TRENK

A Fleeting Dream

The following question has often been asked: Why doesn't Yom Kippur precede Rosh Hashana? Prior to the Yom Ha'Din of Rosh Hashana, shouldn't we first have the opportunity to attain a full teshuva? Moreover, it seems that teshuva is actually prohibited on Rosh Hashana, as Viduy and Selichos are omitted from its tefillos. How are we to understand this?

Translating the word "teshuva" accurately, we find that it doesn't mean kappara - atonement, but rather returning; the shorsh of the word teshuva is "shuv". The essence of teshuva on Rosh Hashana then is not Viduy and Selichos - that's the Avodah of Yom Kippur - but about returning to Hashem. This is the very purpose of the Shofar as stated by the Rambam: it awakens us, as a morning alarm, from the slumber of the material world: "Oru Y'Sheinim M'Shinaschem."

What, though, is it about sleep that is analogous to being distant from Hashem? What is the connection between the concept of sleep, and being immersed and lost in a material world?

When we sleep at night, our imaginations run wild with nonsensical imagery. In the moment however, we're absolutely convinced what we're experiencing is real and normal. When we awake, however, we realize how absurd and irrational those dreams were.

So too, on Rosh Hashana. The Shofar comes to awaken us to a Divine light illuminating our minds. This pure light - "B'Ohr Panecha Yehalechun" - summons us out from the otherwise aimless wandering of our daily lives. The Shofar of Rosh Hashana welcomes us back into G-d's world of deep purpose and meaningful direction.

This, then, is the essential meaning of teshuva and explains why Rosh Hashana must precede Yom Kippur. For how can there be "atonement" when we remain asleep at the wheel?

Moreover, when we recognize the absurdity of our Olam Hazeh dreams, kapparah is inevitable. We realize that our thoughts, behaviors, and actions of yesterday were not only misguided but, for lack of a better word, plainly stupid. We can't make sense of that person we were in the past.

The Shofar of Moshiach contains this same idea to an unfathomably greater degree. All the world, every crevice of existence and each civilization through history, will awaken to recognize that what we had taken so seriously, and believed to be real and enduring, was no more than a fleeting dream, "k'chalom

ya'uf."

"Shir HaMaalos b'Shuv Hashem es Shivas Tzion, Hayinu k'Cholmim". © 2020 D.T. Trenk

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Knock, Knock!

The repetitive nature of everything associated with Rosh Hashanah is noteworthy. During the entire month of Elul, we blow the shofar at the end of shacharis (morning prayer). Unlike Matzo, where many have a custom to abstain during the month of Nissan -- 15 days before the festival of Passover -- and others will not eat Matzo for a month in joyous anticipation of the spiritual crunch, anticipating Rosh Hashanah seems different. Instead of creating excitement by not blowing the shofar, we diminish the level by becoming accustomed to it. Of course, we must prepare ourselves. There is a lot at stake on Judgement Day, but wouldn't an extemporaneous and unrehearsed blast of the shofar send more of a shiver down the spine and more forcefully a call for repentance, rather than a shofar-sounding ritual performed for 30 days prior that may by now feel quite rote?

The Selichos services are also a lead-up to the great day. Sefardic Jews have the custom to recite the pre-dawn prayers for the entire month of Elul. Moreover, Ashkenazic Jews can recite the selichos for more than a week before Rosh Hashanah. Would there not be a consideration that many Jews would get prayed-out from the pre-holiday supplications? Isn't there a chance that they would get blown-away by the repetitive nature of the month-long shofar exercise?

In the Selichos service, we beseech the Almighty as if we were destitute. "Like beggars and paupers we knock on Your door. On Your door, we knock, Merciful and Compassionate One" (from the first Selichos prayer L'cha Hashem hatzedaka). Again, we knock -- not once, but twice! Isn't once enough? Surely G-d is not in the kitchen. He can hear us the first time!

My brother-in-law, Rabbi Simcha Lefkowitz, Rabbi of Congregation Toras Chaim in Hewlett tells the following story:

A meshulach (a man who raises funds for charity) came one sunny Sunday morning to a large home in the Five Towns of Long Island. Eagerly he rang the bell, and simultaneously knocked on the door. A woman, quite displeased, swung open the ornate portal to her home and, knowing the man's intent, she began to shout.

"What do you want? I never met you in my life! How do you expect me to give charity to someone I have never seen? I'm sorry, but this is my policy and I just can't give you!"

The meshulach was not perturbed. Slowly, he walked around the block and fifteen minutes later he was back at the same door. Again he rang the bell, and again the woman came out shouting. "I told you I never

met you in my life! How do you expect me to give charity to someone I have never seen! Didn't I clearly explain my policy to you?"

The meshulach just smiled as he replied. "You are absolutely correct. However, you forgot one small thing. You know me already! After all, we met ten minutes ago!"

The weeks before Rosh Hashanah we must be wary that we may have to knock a few times to get into the big door. Of course, Hashem knows who and what we are, but we may be a little foreign to him. The daily shofar blasts, the recital of chapter 27 of Tehillim, L'Dovid Hashem Ori, twice daily in our prayers and the recital of daily selichos are all summarized in the words we recite, "like beggars we knock...we knock on Your door, Merciful One."

We realize that we must reacquaint ourselves with the commitments and the great resolutions that we accepted upon ourselves one year ago. But if we knock once and knock again, ultimately we, too, can smile at the One standing at the door and ask for all our desires. After all, we were just there. And He knows us already!
© 2020 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

Seasons of the Moon

"And the voice of the Shofar grew stronger and stronger..." (Shemot19:19) The final shofar blast of Rosh Hashana.

The person playing the shofar takes a deep breath and starts to sound the t'kia gedola, the "great t'kia." Stretching his lungs and the length of the shofar blast to the limit, the sound grows louder and louder.

Ten seconds pass. Then twenty. Then thirty. The shofar gets louder and louder. A full minute passes. The sound of the shofar is almost deafening. After two full minutes, everyone in the shul realizes that the person playing the shofar is no longer playing the shofar.

The Shofar is playing him.

Louder and louder and louder. The shul starts to vibrate. The dust of ages falls on the bima from the chandelier swaying above. The shofar is now playing the shul. The sound has spread outside and cars start to vibrate. The sidewalk starts to vibrate. The houses, the trees, the earth, the sky everything is vibrating in sympathy. Everything is sounding this one long t'kia gedola.

Everything in creation is sounding "Hashem Echad." "G-d is One."

The Rambam (Maimonides) writes that one should not speculate about the coming of the Mashiach, for no-one knows exactly how it will be - until it will be. But if one is allowed a little daydream, this is mine.

Drive down almost any road. You'll see that the line in the center of the road is sometime broken and

sometimes solid. The t'kia is like the straight line. It goes on and on. If there were air enough in the lungs of the person playing the shofar, it would never end. The t'kia is God's chessed, His Kindness. Just as He is without end, so His mercy is without end. Chessed is the straight line that runs for ever.

The terua and the shevarim (literally "broken ones") are the broken lines in the road of history. They are episodic, non-continuous. The terua and the shevarim signify din (strict judgment). Like din they do not go on forever. Hashem does not judge us with unremitting din. Even the most difficult times in Jewish history pass. The terua and the shevarim start and stop. A time of din can last a certain period of time but it then must come to an end. The word din is connected to the word dai, which means enough.

In the service of the Beit Hamikdash (the Holy Temple), the Kohanim brought the korbanot (sacrifices) and the Lev'im played music. The Kohen represents chessed. By bringing korbanot, he activated the channels of chessed from Above. Chessed is the line that goes on forever. The Kohen is the t'kia.

The Levi represents Din - strict judgment. Every korban was accompanied by music. The Levi was the musician. He represents the broken line, the line of din. The Levi is the terua and the shevarim.

What is the connection between music and din?

All music is based on time. A note that has no end cannot be called music. The basis of all music is time even more than pitch. The essence of music is a note that starts and stops. The drum is a musical instrument (unless you happen to live next door to someone who's teenage son practices at all times of the day and the night!), and the drum has a very limited connection to pitch.

Music is based on starts and stops. Din is episodic. When a note does not stop but just goes on and on, it's not called music. It's a tone. It's a siren. But it's not music. A note with no end has no emotional identity. It is a sound with no human correlative, no point of access or reference. It is incomprehensible to us. It is music from beyond.

It is the t'kia.

A fundamental philosophical problem runs as follows: Seeing as G-d is Omnipresent, how can anything apart from Him exist? If He is everywhere, there can be no room for anything else. In which case, how can there be a world? G-d's Omnipresence leaves no room for the world.

G-d created the world by "constricting" Himself to allow the existence of creation. This "constriction" is called tzimtzum. In the mystical view of the world, Din is identical with tzimtzum. (Needless to say, a true understanding of these concepts is beyond all but the greatest and the most holy, but on our level we can try, at least, to catch a glimmer, an echo of an echo...)

This is the connection between din and music: Without tzimtzum there can be no world. Without limitation, without stops and starts, there can be no music. Without tzimtzum, without din, all that exists is the constant note of the t'kia that goes on forever. It is not music. It is a sound as unintelligible to the mind of man as He Who spoke and the world came into existence.

It is the music from beyond. © 2002 Rabbi Y.A. Sinclair and Ohr Somayach International

RABBI DR. ABRAHAM J. TWERSKI

TorahWeb

Democracy may have diminished our yiras shamayim (awe of Hashem). In the Talmud and Torah literature we often find parables that attempt to enhance our yiras shamayim by saying, "If one were in the presence of a mortal king, how cautious one would be with one's words and deeds. How much greater should one's caution be in the presence of the Almighty King." This may not have much impact on us, since we do not relate to a mortal king today. We elect a president for a period of time, who does not have unlimited powers. To the contrary, his powers are limited by congress and the courts. After his term is over, he is an ordinary citizen. Even in countries that do have a king, it is usually a ceremonial position, with power resting in the hands of an elected government.

Compare that with the Talmudical account of R' Yohanan ben Zakai, whose disciples visited him when he was ill, and found him crying. They said, "Light of Israel, the pillar of right, why are you crying?" R' Yohanan replied, "If I was being led to trial before an earthly king, who is here today but in his grave tomorrow, who, if he is angry with me, his anger is not eternal, who, if he imprisons me, the imprisonment is not eternal, who, if he puts me to death, my death is not eternal, and I am able to appease him with words or bribe him with money, yet I would be fearful and cry, and now, that I will be led before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, Whose life and existence is eternal, and if He is angry with me, his anger is eternal, and if He imprisons me, the imprisonment is eternal, and if He puts me to death, my death is eternal, and I cannot appease Him with words nor bribe Him with money, shall I not cry?"

The disciples then asked him, "Our teacher, bless us." R' Yohanan replied, "May your fear of Hashem be as great as your fear of mortals." The disciples said, "Is that all you can say to us?" R' Yohanan replied, "I wish that it were so. You must know, when a person commits a sin, he says, 'I just don't want a person to see me (but is not concerned that Hashem sees him)'."

Shortly before his death, R' Yohanan said, "Remove all the utensils so that they shall not become

tamei (contaminated) when I die, and prepare a chair for Hizkiyahu, king of Judah, who is coming to escort me" (Berachos 28b).

This interchange between R' Yohanan and his disciples is most enlightening. We believe Hashem exists and is all-powerful, but this belief is an abstraction, and may not be enough to deter a person from sin. If we have the emotional experience of the awe we have standing before a powerful earthly monarch, we may perhaps be able to extrapolate and develop the awe of standing before Hashem, the King of kings. But in a democratic country, where one may freely criticize the president or the ceremonial king, this reference point is lacking. R' Yohanan tells us that without this reference point, we may be remiss in awe of Hashem. We do not know what it means to tremble before a king.

Hashem said, "Recite verses of kingship before me, to enthrone Me over you...and with what? With the shofar" (Rosh Hashanah 34b). The prophet says, "If the shofar is sounded in a town, will the people not tremble?...When a lion roars, who does not fear?" (Amos 3: 6-8).

R' Yeruchem of Mir said, "When I saw a lion, I understood its enormous might, and that as king of the beasts, all animals are in awe of him. Primitive peoples, seeing the might of the sun, worshipped it as a god, not realizing that the sun is but one of His many servants" (Daas Chochmah Umussar vol.4 p.248). In our tefillos we pray, "Let everything with a life's breath in its nostrils proclaim 'Hashem, the G-d of Israel, is King, and His Kinship rules over everything.'" In our poverty of having an emotional experience of the awe of Hashem, we must extrapolate from objects that inspire us with awe, as a reference point for awe of Hashem.

"If the shofar is sounded in a town, will the people not tremble?" Beginning with the first day of Elul, we sound the shofar daily to inspire us with the awe of Hashem, that His Sovereignty is absolute. We must know that He controls everything in the universe, from the greatest galaxies to the most minute insects. The only thing that Hashem does not control is a person's moral decisions, because He has given a person freedom to choose between right and wrong."

It is of interest that when Rosh Hashanah occurs on Shabbos, we do not blow the shofar. This is not only to avoid a person's carrying the shofar in a public thorofare, but also because the kedushah of Shabbos, and the awareness that Hashem created the world and is its only Master, can provide the appreciation of Hashem's sovereignty. On Rosh Hashanah we say, "Today is the birthday of the world." Shabbos, like Rosh Hashanah, is a testimony to Hashem's creation of the world.

Belief in the existence of Hashem is not yet malchus. Primitive peoples believed in the existence of G-d, but felt that G-d was too supreme to bother with

this tiny speck of the Earth and with mere mortals. That is why, in our tefillos of malchus we pray, "Reign over the entire universe in Your glory...Let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker." The Israelites, upon their liberation from Egypt did believe in Hashem (Exodus 4:31), but it was not until they witnessed the miraculous dividing of the Reed Sea that they exclaimed, "Hashem shall reign for all eternity!" (Exodus 15:18). Only then were they convinced that Hashem controls the world and His Providence is over all things, animate and inanimate. This is why, on Rosh Hashanah we begin saying hamelech hakadosh. Kedushah means that Hashem is separated and far above everything in the universe, but He is also the melech, the King that operates and controls the universe.

Every day, we cite many berachos and say, Blessed are You, Hashem, Our G-d, King of the world. But precisely because we say these words so often, we do not concentrate on their meaning. Rosh Hashanah should give us a much greater appreciation of malchus, so that when we say the words, "Hashem, Our G-d, King of the world," we will think of Hashem's absolute sovereignty.

When we think of the infinite greatness of Hashem, and that by comparison we are less than infinitesimally small, we may lose our sense of significance. We must be aware that as creations of Hashem, we are endowed with a Divine soul, which makes us potentially great. This is why R' Yohanan, having expressed his utter effacement before Hashem, nevertheless told his disciples before his death. "Prepare a chair for Hizkiyahu, king of Judah, who is coming to escort me." He knew that no less a personage than Hizkiyahu, king of Judah, would greet him.

Rosh Hashanah marks the sixth day of creation, the day on which Hashem created man and endowed him with a divine neshamah. We appreciate the malchus of Hashem, and are proud that we are privileged to be His subjects. © 2011 Rabbi Dr. A.J. Twersky and TorahWeb.org

