



Why does God desire our existence? The Rabbis composed Rosh Hashannah prayers with those crucial ideas that earn us our existence. Use prayer to learn what is so vital.

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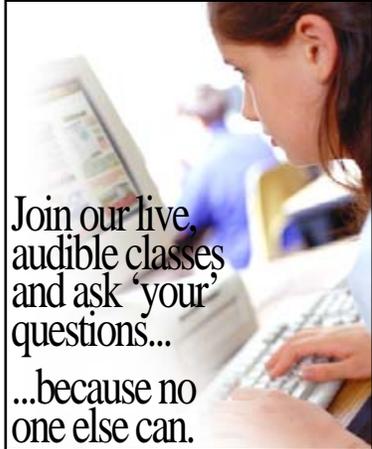
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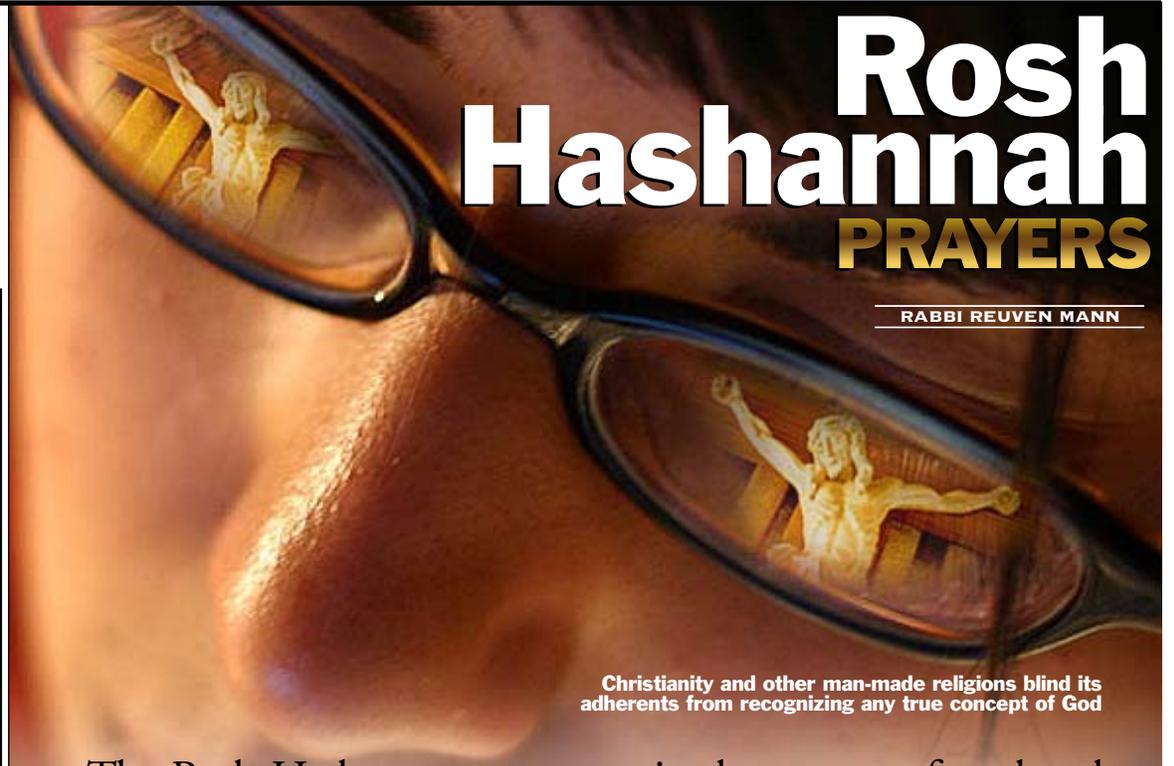
Rosh Hashana

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“Why do they sound the Shofar when they are sitting and again when they are standing? This is done in order to confound the accuser.” (Rosh HaShanna 16a)

One of the mitzvot that is strongly associated with Rosh HaShanna is the sounding of the Shofar. According to the Torah, we are required to sound in

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Rosh Hashannah PRAYERS

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Christianity and other man-made religions blind its adherents from recognizing any true concept of God

The Rosh Hashana prayers contain the most profound and noble concepts that are vitally relevant to the fulfillment of mankind’s purpose. The prayers are based in certain premises: the world was created by God and is designed and destined to achieve a certain purpose.

The “tikkun olam” or repair of the world can only come about if man attains “yediat Hashem”, knowledge of God. All of the problems of the world are due to mankind’s ignorance of God: for how can man serve God and fulfill the Divine will if he does not know Him, or His will?

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Holidays

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blasts – the combination of Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah three times. This is represented by the following table:

Table 1. Requirement described by Torah

Tekiah – Teruah – Tekiah
Tekiah – Teruah – Tekiah
Tekiah – Teruah – Tekiah

However, in order to fulfill this obligation, we are required to sound thirty blasts. How, does the Torah obligation to sound nine blasts translate into an obligation to sound thirty blasts?

There are two factors at play in this conversion of a requirement to sound nine blasts into the requirement to sound thirty. The Torah requires that we sound the series of Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah three times. Part of this obligation is easily understood. The Tekiah is an uninterrupted blast. There is little or no room for uncertainty regarding its character. However, the Teruah is a sound characterized by interrupted notes. This is a much more complicated sound. Complication leaves room for doubts. What is the exact description of the “interrupted” blast? The Sages identified three possibilities. First, the Teruah may be a series of minimal sounds – the sound we refer to as Teruah. Second, the true Teruah may be a more substantial sound that is interrupted – the sound we refer to as Shevarim. Finally, the true Teruah may be a combination of these first two possibilities – the sound we refer to as Shevarim/Teruah. In short, the Torah requires that we sound the combination of a Teruah preceded and followed by a Tekiah three times – a total of nine blasts. However, this nature of the central Teruah is unknown. The three central blasts that we sound – Teruah, Shevarim and Shevarim/Teruah – are actually three possible identities of the true Teruah required by the Torah.[1] The following table represents the result of the doubt regarding the exact nature of the central Teruah sound:

Table 2. Minimum series of sounds required to satisfy Torah obligation:

Tekiah – Shevarim/Teruah – Tekiah
Tekiah – Shevarim/Teruah – Tekiah
Tekiah – Shevarim/Teruah – Tekiah
Tekiah – Shevarim – Tekiah
Tekiah – Shevarim – Tekiah
Tekiah – Shevarim – Tekiah
Tekiah – Teruah – Tekiah

How many sounds are there in the above table? One might reasonably conclude that the above table includes 27 sounds. However by convention, the Shevarim/Teruah sound is counted as two sounds. So, traditionally this table is described as including 30 sounds. This calculation is represented in the following table:

Table 3. Calculation of total number of sounds required to satisfy Torah obligation:

Tekiah – Shevarim/Teruah – Tekiah 4
Tekiah – Shevarim/Teruah – Tekiah 4
Tekiah – Shevarim/Teruah – Tekiah 4
Tekiah – Shevarim – Tekiah 3
Tekiah – Shevarim – Tekiah 3
Tekiah – Shevarim – Tekiah 3
Tekiah – Truah – Tekiah 3
Tekiah – Truah – Tekiah 3
Tekiah – Truah – Tekiah 3
Total sounds = 30

At what point in the service are we required to sound these thirty blasts? The Torah does not establish a specific point in the service during which the blasts should be sounded. However, the Sages did respond to this issue. The Sages established that the blasts should be sounded in the context of the blessings of the Musaf Amidah.[2] The prevalent Ashkenazic custom is to sound the blast during the repetition of the Amidah. The Sephardic custom is to sound the blasts during the silent Amidah and during the repetition.

However, the Sages also established a practice of sounding an additional series of thirty blasts following the Torah reading and before the Amidah. The Talmud asks, “Why do they sound the Shofar when they are sitting and again when they are standing?” In the time of the Talmud, during the blasts sounded before the Amidah it was customary for the congregation to remain sitting. During the blasts sounded during the Amidah, the congregation stood. So, the Talmud is asking, “Why do they we sound the required thirty blasts before the Amidah and again during the Amidah?” The Talmud responds that we sound the required thirty blasts twice in order to confound the Satan – the accuser. Rashi is concerned with the meaning of this response. He explains that the response is to be understood allegorically. Rashi explains that meaning of the Sages response is that we wish to demonstrate our love for the mitzvah of Shofar. We demonstrate this love by performing the mitzvah twice.[3] In other words, we are judged on Rosh HaShanna. We do not want to be accused of performing the mitzvah of Shofar in a mechanical, superficial manner. In order to respond to this possible accusation, we sound the required sounds twice. In doing so, we demonstrate our love for the commandment.

Tosefot asks an interesting question on the Talmud’s response. The Torah commands us to not add or subtract from the commandments. The commandment against adding prohibits adding a new commandment or adding to an existing commandment. Tosefot ask, “How can the Sages add a practice to sound the required Shofar blasts both before the Amidah and during the Amidah? Why is this not a violation of the prohibition against adding to the commandments?” Tosefot respond that the prohibition against adding to the mitzvot is not violated by

(continued on next page)

performing a mitzvah twice.[4] In other words, the Sages' requirement to sound the Shofar both before and during the Amidah might potentially involve a violation of the prohibition against adding to mitzvot. However, the prohibition is not violated because we are merely performing the mitzvah twice. Repeating the performance of a mitzvah is not prohibited.

Rashba asks an obvious question on Tosefot's comments. The premise of Tosefot's question is that an enactment of the Sages can be subject to the prohibition against adding to the mitzvot. Rashba objects to this premise. Rashba argues that the prohibition against adding to the commandments applies to individuals. As individuals, we do not have the authority to enhance mitzvot or modify them by adding or subtracting from them. However, this prohibition does not generally apply to the Sages. This can be easily proven. Outside of the land of Israel, we observe Succot for eight days. The eighth day was established by the Sages. On this eighth day we are obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of living in the Succah. In other words, although the Torah obligation is to live in the Succah for seven days, the Sages require those outside of the land of Israel to live in the Succah for eight days. This requirement is not a violation of the prohibition against adding to the mitzvot. The reason this requirement does not violate the prohibition against adding to mitzvot is obviously because a requirement established by the Sages is not generally subject to this prohibition! So, why are Tosefot concerned with the Sages' requirement to sound two sets of Shofar blasts? [5]

Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik suggests that in order to answer Rashba's question, it is necessary to more carefully analyze the two sets of Shofar blasts. Superficially, it would seem that a single set of thirty sounds is needed to satisfy our Torah level obligation and the Sages instituted a second set of thirty sounds in order to "confound the accuser." However, a more careful analysis indicates that this superficial interpretation of the two sets of Shofar blasts is not accurate.

As explained earlier, the Torah does not require that the Shofar be sounded at any particular moment in the services. However, the Sages require that the Shofar be sounded during the Amidah. How many sets of Shofar blasts are required to satisfy both of these obligations? A single set of thirty blasts sounded during the Amidah is adequate to satisfy both the Torah level obligation and the obligation established by the Sages. The Sages did not create a new set of Shofar blasts. They merely added a qualification to the Torah level obligation. So, by sounding thirty blasts during the Amidah, both the Torah level obligation and the obligation established by the Sages are satisfied. However, this is not our practice. First, we sound thirty blasts before the Amidah. These thirty blasts completely satisfy our Torah level obligation. But we then sound a second set of Shofar blasts which are required to satisfy the obligation established by the Sages to sound the Shofar during the Amidah. In other words, we could economize and satisfy both our

Torah level and Rabbinic level obligation with a single set of thirty blasts sounded during the Amidah. But instead, we fulfill our Torah level obligation separately through the blasts sounded before the Amidah and then satisfy our Rabbinic level obligation with a second set of thirty blasts sounded during the Amidah. Why do we choose this more elaborate system of two sets of Shofar blasts over the more economic option of a single set of blasts during the Amidah? The Talmud is providing the answer to this question when it explains that we sound two sets of blasts in order to "confound the accuser." As interpreted by Rashi, the Talmud is explaining that in order to demonstrate our love for the mitzvah we do not try to economize. Instead, we intentionally fulfill our Torah level obligation separately from our Rabbinic level obligation.

Now, we can restate the dispute between Tosafot and Rashba. Had the Sages established a requirement to sound a second set of Shofar blasts, there would be no dispute between Tosafot and Rashba. The Sages have the right to create new halachic entities. These new entities are not regarded as additions to the mitzvot. However, the Sages did not do this. Instead, they first required that the Shofar blasts be sounded during the Amidah. Second, they instructed us to fulfill this Rabbinic obligation separately from our Torah obligation. Tosefot argue that a single set of Shofar blasts would be adequate to fulfill both our Torah level and our Rabbinic level obligation, but we are required to sound an extra set of blasts. As a result, a unique situation evolves. The Sages did not create a new set of Shofar blasts but

nonetheless, two set of blasts are required in order to fulfill our Torah level and Rabbinic level obligations. According to Tosefot, when the Sages create a new entity, this new entity is not subject to the prohibition against adding to mitzvot. But in our case, no new entity is created. An extra set of blasts is required. Tosefot argue that this extra set of blasts is subject to the prohibition against adding to the mitzvot.

However, Tosefot explain that the prohibition is not violated because we are merely performing the mitzvah multiple times.

performing a mitzvah multiple times does not constitute adding to mitzvot.

Rashba argues that this extra set of Shofar blasts does not involve a potential violation of the prohibition against adding to mitzvot. The prohibition against adding to the mitzvot only applies to individuals. Any activity required in response to either a Torah level or a Rabbinic level obligation is not subject to the prohibition against adding to mitzvot. Therefore, since each set of Shofar blasts fulfills a specific obligation – either Torah level or Rabbinic level – the prohibition against adding to mitzvot does not apply.[6]

It seems that according to Rashba, the primary objective of the prohibition against adding to or subtracting from mitzvot is to discourage innovations that in fact detract from the commandment. Therefore, the prohibition relates primarily to individuals. As individuals, we are not authorized to alter the commandments. However, the Sages are authorized to establish new laws and practices. They also have the wisdom to use this authority

properly. Therefore, the laws and practices that they establish are not subject to the prohibition against adding to the mitzvot. However, according to Tosefot, the objective of the prohibitions against adding to or subtracting from the mitzvot is not to discourage inappropriate innovations. These prohibitions even apply to the Sages. Therefore, it seems that according to Tosefot, these prohibitions are designed to permanently preserve the integrity of the Torah law. Even the Sages are subject to the prohibition against adding to a mitzvah in such a manner as to alter the Torah requirement. Instead, even the Sages are required to work within specific boundaries.

In summary, this dispute between Tosefot and Rashba reflects the unique structure of the Shofar blasts – specifically the interrelation between the set sounded before the Amidah and those sounded during the Amidah. The dispute also reflects two perspectives on the prohibition against adding to mitzvot. □

[1] Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 33b – 34a.

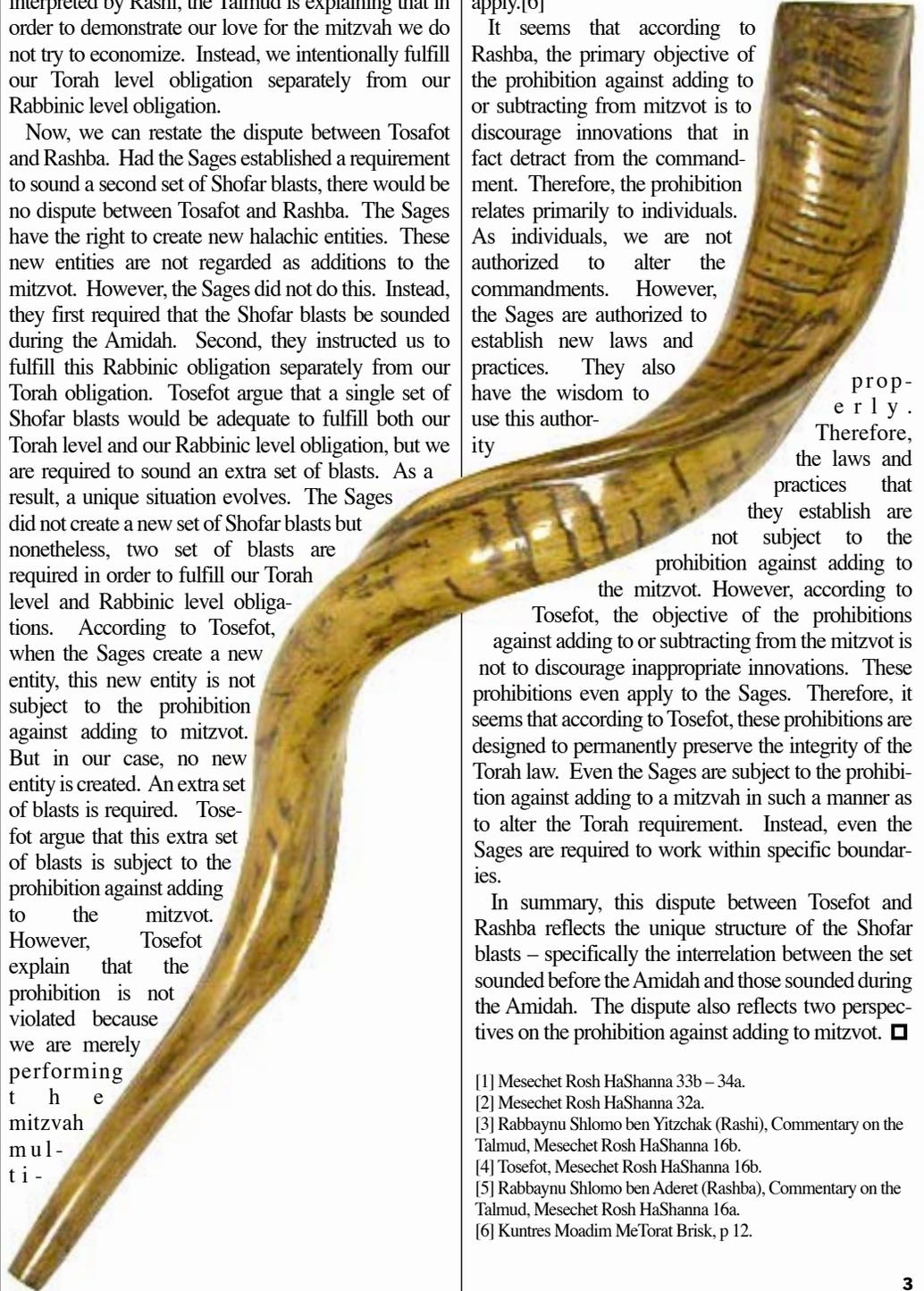
[2] Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 32a.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 16b.

[4] Tosefot, Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 16b.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 16a.

[6] Kuntres Moadim MeTorat Brisk, p. 12.





(Rosh Hashannah continued from page 1)

Thus, the prayer on Rosh Hashana is a universal one: that all mankind will be “corrected”. This is a significant point, one we must not gloss over. The prayers uncompromisingly demand that a correction of the “mistake” must take place. This is stated in the “Alainu” prayer, which forms an introduction to the “Malchius” blessing. It is in the second paragraph, the “Al Kayn Nekaveh Loch”, “We hope that Hashem will uproot idolatry, and fix the world under One God”, to remove the false ideas that people have of God.

The problem is not so much mankind’s ignorance of God, in the sense that man is blind to His existence and His will. Ignorance in itself would not be so bad. For then it would only be a matter of instruction and this is the mission of the Jewish people: to instruct the nations in the ways of Divine service. However, the problem is that the nations are not in the appropriate state to receive instruction. For they have not merely rejected God, but they have also falsified the very concept of God and supplanted appropriate worship, with human inventions. We therefore need Divine assistance to correct the problem. For the idolatrous religions are powerfully entrenched and religious people are the most stubborn and obstinate. They are fanatically attached to their theological

falsehoods. The world is in a state of disrepair. And we pray for Divine assistance in uprooting falsehood from the world – so that all flesh will recognize Hashem and the “redemption” of mankind can then take place.

The “correction” involves two steps: recognition of the true God, i.e., abandonment of false concepts of God – what we call “Malchius” expressed in “Shimcha”, or “Your Name”. We pray that God’s name and fame spread to all members of mankind. “Shimcha” represents the true concept of Hashem, how we should refer to Hashem. This is the first aspect of perfection – to divest oneself of falsehood in the realm of Hashem and to have an accurate notion of what we mean when we speak of Him. However, this alone is not enough, for the prayer continues.

It would seem that mere recognition of Hashem, while exceedingly important is, in itself, not enough. The objective is to follow through on the practical implications and significance of that recognition. This must infuse a person with awe, and a desire to live a life, which is in accordance with, and finds favor in the eyes of Hashem. Thus, the discovery of Hashem must lead to a new attitude toward life based upon acting in accordance with His Will.

However, the question then arises: If I know Hashem, does this mean that I know His Will? Does correct action automatically stem from affirmation of His Existence? Judaism answers in the negative. The third of the middle blessings is called “Shofrot” (shofar blasts). This is a reference to the heavenly shofar blasts, which were part of the Divine Revelation at Sinai. Judaism is founded on the notion that Hashem has revealed His laws and His “Derech Hachaim” (path of life) to mankind. Those who seek to serve Him must search out the authentic Revelation.

The path to proper Divine service is blocked by counterfeit religious systems, all of which, have brazenly appropriated the claim of having been “revealed” religions, or Divinely given. Just as the righteous person must differentiate between the true God and the idolatrous notion, so too he must be wise and discern the true religion, i.e., the revealed religion, from the falsified ones, which have been invented by man and whose claim of Divinity is arrogant and unfounded.

Rosh Hashana is thus a challenge to the Jew as well as to the world. Indeed we must awaken from our slumber and activate our minds to confront the central truth of human existence. ■



TRIALS

RABBI DANIEL MYERS

From the early chapters of Tanach, it is evident that it was the will of God to inculcate in our forefathers a most fundamental belief regarding Yediat God, man's knowledge of God. Rashi (Braishit 7:17) writes: "Even Noach was lacking in Emunah, he was Maamin V'aino Maamin, believing but not believing that the flood would arrive. Therefore, he did not enter the Ark until the flood waters forced him in." This is a difficult Rashi; how can one say of Noach that he was believing but not believing, when he just spent over a century building the Ark? Furthermore, is it not possible that he was waiting and hoping that the people would do Teshuva, resulting in a nullification of the decree? We see from Rashi (7:12) that there was still time for the people to do Teshuva; God first brought down rain water, if they would repent, then the water would be Gishmai Bracha, a Divine blessing, if not, then the flood would arrive. Is it not possible that Noach was not lacking in Emunah at all, but was simply waiting outside to see if there would be a change in the Divine decree; when the

Flood arrived, making it clear that there would be no salvation, and only then entered the Ark?

The answer to these questions may be found in an earlier Pasuk (7:1), which states that God told Noach and his family to enter the Ark. Rashi understands that there was something wrong when Noach did not enter the Ark immediately as commanded, but waited until he was forced to. Why did he delay? Why did he not enter right when he heard the Divine command to enter? Rashi answers that there must have been a flaw here that caused Noach to tarry in his fulfillment of a Mitzvah from God. What was the flaw? We may say the following: Noach had a strong conviction that God would not destroy the world and mankind. He thought to himself, "How could God wipe out this magnificent earth and all of its inhabitants? It is true that He threatened mankind with annihilation, however, that was only in order to coerce them to repent, but, at the end of the day, there will be some kind of salvation, He will not carry out the threat." Noach did not enter the Ark

until he actually saw and felt the floodwaters. One may argue that this is not a flaw, on the contrary, it is a sign of his love and compassion for God's creations, and he was simply hoping for a salvation from the all-merciful Creator. (See Sanhedrin 39b, Rashi Braishit 7:7) The answer is that although this mercy may have been an appropriate and noble feeling, however, it should in no way have prevented him from fulfilling the Divine decree to enter the Ark with alacrity. The fact that he neglected this Mitzva indicated a flaw, namely, a conviction – not just a hope – that God would not destroy the world, even though He indicated to him otherwise.

Another example of this concept is seen when God brought about a famine in Israel immediately after Avraham was first commanded to go to the Promised Land. (Braishit 12:10) Avraham left Israel and traveled to Egypt when the famine arrived. Was it wrong for Avraham to leave Eretz Yisrael when the famine arrived? According to the Ramban (ibid), Avraham should have remained in Eretz Yisrael; Rashi, however, maintains that it was perfectly fine for Avraham to leave temporarily to find food in Egypt. According to Rashi, God tested Avraham to see if he would challenge God, who initially told Avraham to travel to Israel, and then forced him to leave. What is the nature of this Nisayon, Divine test? Regarding Noach, we learned that one must have the humility to accept that he can not intuit God's plans; at times, one may be convinced that God will or will not bring about a certain result, and the exact opposite occurs! In connection with Avraham, however, one may think that he did have a right to assume that he was privy to such information since he just received a prophecy regarding Eretz Yisrael and its future inhabitants, B'nai Yisrael! (12:1-3) The fact is that Avraham did have a right to be optimistic that God would carry out the prophecy as promised (See Rashi Braishit 15:1, 32:11); however, there were many, many details that were not conveyed to Avraham, such as the length of his stay in Eretz Yisrael, the possibility of him being exiled from the Chosen Land, the choice of the Matriarch of the nation, etc. What would Avraham do with the missing details: fill them in, assuming the right to intuit the missing parts of the Divine plan, or humbly accept the fact that unless he receives another prophecy he could not know the details until they unfolded? This is the Nisayon (trial) according to Rashi: Would Avraham challenge God, Chas V'shalom, or would he accept that, although his initial thoughts may have been that he was to go to Eretz Yisrael to stay, this was not the Divine Plan, and he would humbly submit to it.

One must always recognize that his perception of this world must be based on true Chochma, Bina and Daat, a clear and proper understanding of God's world as expressed through His revelation at

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Sinai and His physical creation. We learn Torah, we study His inspiring Creation, and appreciate any insights that we can have into God's world. At times, we may even be privileged to know the future as well, such as the specific events that the Torah explicitly predicts; some examples include the ingathering of the Jewish exiles, universal recognition of God, resurrection of the dead, rebuilding of the Temple, etc. Of course, we have complete conviction in the veracity of these prophecies; however, events not predicted in the Torah should not be embraced prematurely as real and true until they actually occur. We cannot understand how God runs the world, and what He will or will not do. People often feel that they "intuit" the future, and are totally mistaken! For example, the majority of the world and many secular Jews assumed for two millennia that B'nai Yisrael would never return Home; Baruch Hashem, reality proved differently. (One of the first innovations of the Reform movement over two centuries ago was the removal of any reference in the liturgy to the return to Zion.) It is arrogant to think that we can somehow think or feel that we know what God's "next move" will be. It is an absolute gift that God has given us the ability to have any insight into His magnificent and complex world-both physical and spiritual-and we beseech God daily regarding this unique attribute, in Birchat Hatorah (V'haarev Na, 'let the words of the Torah be sweet,') and Ahava Rabbah (V'tain B'libainu, 'instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate, to listen, learn, teach...all the words of your Torah's teaching with love.')

Recognizing the discretion between our "perception" of what should be, and the reality as God dictates it to be, is a most crucial component of our spiritual growth and maturation. For as long as we are operating in the former framework, we are not completely fulfilling the Mitzvah of Ahavat Hashem, loving God; the Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 10:2. See Biur Halacha 1:1) writes that one should love Emmet Mipnai Shehee Emet, love God's world because it is an expression of God's will. The Rambam writes that one who fulfills this Mitzvah is compared to an individual who is Cholat Ahava, lovesick, who thinks of his friend constantly, and yearns for the latter always. So too, the Ohaiv Hashem is enthralled with God's world, and is in love with its beauty, complexity and depth, which are all reflections of the omnipotent Creator. The more he learns about God, the greater his appreciation and love. However, as long as one perceives the world through his a-priori, preconceived notions, then he is not sincerely loving and exposing himself to God's world, rather, he is embracing a world created in "his own image." Our goal must be to always grasp and appreciate God's world, even - and especially - when it appears to be different than the one we anticipated and dreamed of; we must embrace the unexpected

reality and grow with it.

With the birth of our son Shlomo Zvi, God has blessed us with a very special gift. Many of us live life with certain hopes and aspirations for ourselves, and our families, and naturally assume that all the variables that are necessary for our plans to come to fruition will, more or less, fit smoothly into place. The fact is that God set up this world in a way, which does not necessarily coincide with our fantasies and dreams; on the contrary, He set up a world, which is fraught with surprises and shocks along the way, which could and should stimulate growth, insight, sensitivity and greater Ahavat Hashem and Avodath Hashem. Having a child with unique qualities, abilities and potential is a wonderful opportunity for growth; it is the beginning of a spiritual odyssey which should IY'H, with God's assistance, help us overcome false assumptions that we may have made regarding the meaning and goals of life, the definition of Jewish Nachat, the significance of Chanoch L'naar Al Pi Darko (raise each child according to his level), the concept of spiritual perfection, etc. We thank God for the very precious Neshama that He has shared with us, and the golden opportunity for growth and Chesed that He has bestowed upon us. I personally am bubbling with confidence and Hakarat Hatov, knowing that Malky-a woman of great courage, sublime dignity, total commitment and uncompromising truthfulness-is the mother of Shlomo Zvi. (See introduction to Rav Soloveitchik's The Lonely Man of Faith.) We are optimistic that with the help and support of our family, friends and of course, God, Shlomo Zvi will be a great asset to our family, the entire community and Klal Yisrael.

Postscript

In Halakic Man (p. 140 footnote 4) the Rav writes:

"That religious consciousness in man's experience which is most profound and most elevated, which penetrates to the very depths and ascends to the very heights, is not that simple and comfortable. On the contrary, it is exceptionally complex, rigorous and tortuous. Where you find its complexity, there you find its greatness. The ideas of temporality and eternity, knowledge and choice, love and fear (the yearning for God and the flight from His glorious splendor), incredible, overbearing daring, and an extreme sense of humility, transcendence and God's closeness, the profane and the holy, etc., etc., struggle within his religious consciousness, wrestle and grapple with each other. This one ascends and this descends, this one falls and this rises" Yes, it is true that during the third Sabbath meal at dusk, we sing the psalm "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me besides the still waters" (Ps. 23) and we believe with our entire

hearts in the words of the psalmist. However, this psalm only describes the ultimate destination of the religious man, not the path leading to that destination. For the path that eventually will lead to the "green pastures" and to the "still waters" is not the royal road, but a narrow twisting footway that threads its course along the steep mountain slope. The pangs of searching and groping, the tortures of spiritual crises and exhausting treks of the soul purify and sanctify man, cleanse his thoughts, and purge them of the husks of superficiality and the dross of vulgarity. Out of these torments there emerges a new understanding of the world, a powerful spiritual enthusiasm that shakes the very foundations of man's existence. The spiritual stature and countenance of the man of God are chiseled and formed by the pangs of redemption themselves."

According to the Rav, challenge and pain are not enemies from which one must escape, but, on the contrary, are allies to be harnessed for spiritual growth and perfection. Chazal discuss the concept of Yissurin Shel Ahava, afflictions inflicted by God for the purpose of benefiting the recipient. (Brachot 5a-5b) The Rabbis state that in certain cases, an individual may choose to avoid the afflictions and their accompanying rewards, as the Gemara writes "Lo Hain V'lo Scharan." (See Maharsha ibid. for an explanation why Chazal may have chosen to do away with the Yissurin.) Obviously, this Gemara is not applicable to a situation such as ours, since we have not been afflicted, only challenged. Nevertheless, I would like to apply the latter part of Chazal's expression to our personal situation: I express my personal Hakarat Hatov to God, I am quite sure that if this challenge arose in previous years-during times when, for me, the world appeared so simple, harmonious, carefree and pure, when the greatest challenge in life consisted of finding a Halachically appropriate time i.e. when the beach was deserted, to climb up the lifeguard chair by the Belle Harbor ocean with Saifer in hand as the sun set beside me-I may have screamed out to God "Lo Hain V'lo Scharan", "I reject the challenge, I reject the spiritual growth, and I even reject the rewards." After several years of Yishuv Haaretz, which Chazal tell us is a gift given only through Yissurin, afflictions, I have had the merit to see the world in a more complete manner; it is not as simple and safe as originally imagined. The lifeguard chair is still there, as well as the glorious sunrise and sunset, but, at times, there are storm clouds strewn along the skies as well. This complexity is part of the richness of life, and is a crucial component of our spiritual growth. It is with this perspective that I thank Him, B'laiv Shalaim, with a complete heart, declaring "Hain U'scharan," with love and appreciation, "I accept the challenge, I accept the opportunity for growth, and I accept the potential reward." ■



ROSH HASHANNAH

Prayers and Themes

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

“ZICHRONOS”

In the Gemara Rosh Hashana (34b), the Rabbis state that God instructed us to recite the paragraph of Zichronos (Remembrances) on Rosh Hashana in order that our memories (or our being mentioned) should come before God for good. At first glance, this statement seems quite problematic. While it is true that Zichronos focuses on God's Omniscience and knowledge of everything that has occurred and will occur in the world, why does our recital cause us to be remembered, in a favorable light? How do we understand this “cause and effect”? Additionally, what does it mean to be “remembered for good”? If this is really a reference to our being judged (in Hebrew, the word is ‘din’) and the intent is for us to obtain a favorable judgment, why isn't that the term “din” used?

When we look at the actual text of Zichronos in the Additional Prayer (Musaf), we observe some seeming contradictions. On the one hand, the prayer repeats numerous times that God remembers all, “You remember the actions of the world... Before You is revealed all that is hidden”. Yet at the same time, we continuously speak of how God never forgets, “There is no forgetfulness before Your Seat of Honor”. The question then presents itself: if nothing is forgotten before God, then how can we speak of Him remembering? This contradiction is most glaring at the end of the paragraph, just before the final blessing, when we

say, “For You Remember all that is forgotten eternally and there is no forgetfulness before Your Seat of Honor and the ‘Sacrifice’ (in Hebrew, “Akeidas”) of Isaac, may You remember mercifully today for the sake of his offspring”. In one statement we say that God remembers all and never forgets, and yet at the same time we ask that He remember the Akeidas Yitzchak. How could this request make sense? If God does not forget, then how can we ask him to remember? We need to establish the meaning of the words ‘remember’ and ‘forget’ in relation to God.

A basic foundation of Judaism is that any term we use when we speak about God, is only allegorical and not literal. Man cannot have any positive knowledge of God. The Rambam in his Laws of Foundations of Torah (1:9) writes that the Torah speaks in the “language of man”, meaning, any time a term is used in reference to God, it cannot be understood literally. Rambam says that man can never attain any positive knowledge or perception of God, and so the Torah, and thus our Sages as well, used terms that we are familiar with as an allegory: a means of conveying some notion of God, though they in no way reflect the true, accurate knowledge of God. The terms are used strictly in an allegorical sense in order that man should possess some notion of God so as to relate to Him.

With this principle in mind, we can establish the meaning of these words: “There is no forgetfulness” means that in contrast to the human framework where certain events and knowledge may be forgotten or unknown at certain times, as an Omniscient Being who is outside the realm of time, there is no such notion with regards to God. We must have in mind that before God there is nothing that is known at one time and not known at another time. So what does it mean for God to “remember”? As the Rambam says, these terms are all allegorical, so that we may have some notion of God to be able to relate to Him. The allegory here would be that, again, from our perspective it is as if God remembers in that He has knowledge of that, which for us is in the past, and is no longer remembered. The parable brings to mind the notion that information, which for us is ‘forgotten’, lost in history or somewhere in our minds, God ‘remembers’ and has knowledge, as His Knowledge is different from ours.

This understanding of the terms resolves the seeming contradiction - though we know that God as an Omniscient Being who never changes, never ‘forgets’ and therefore never literally ‘remembers’.

On this day in which we are being judged and we stand before God with all our past deeds and thoughts, it is to us as if He ‘remembers’ everything. We relate to this day as one in which everything is remembered.

Thus, in referring to God, the term “not forgetting” is applied: He does not forget. While in reference to His lack of forgetfulness about “ourselves”, we use the term “remember”. Remembrance is applied to God only in as much as the object of remembrance is concerned, i.e. mankind's actions. Thus, God is not One Who “forgets”, therefore, He “remembers” our past.

This understanding of the blessing leads to a new insight about Rosh Hashana: as we stand before God in judgment, we must keep in mind that even our notion of God as ‘Judge’ is only allegorical and not precise. The human notion of a ‘Judge’ is one in which a person is presented with evidence for and against the defendant, as well as the defendant trying to persuade the judge of his innocence or goodness. Thus, the judge is very limited in his ability to be exact and precise; he may not have access to all the facts, he may also be influenced in how the evidence is presented, and he may have his own biases or emotions that influence his decision. From the blessing of Zichronos we see that Rosh Hashana is different - God has all the information, nothing is concealed from Him, even our thoughts: He knows the precise state of our souls. The only reason we refer to ‘Judge’ is because we know that in effect there is a ‘Judgment’, as the Mishnah on 16a says, that the whole world passes before God and there is some form of decree. However, in no

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way is the term “Judge” accurate.

Now we are in a position to answer our original questions. Why is it that Chazal use the term “zicharon”, our memory, as opposed to “din”, our judgment? As we said, when we come before God for a decree, it is not a regular judgment; we stand before God with everything - all our deeds and thoughts - and it is on that basis that a decree is established. What is meant that our memories should be favorable? We mean that when all we have done or thought is ‘remembered’ by God on this day, it should be for a good decree. We emphasize that.

What is the cause and effect relationship between saying Zichronos, and our being remembered for good? With what we have said, an essential idea to Zichronos is that God’s Knowledge is completely different from ours; whereas man is subject to memory loss, God, Who is beyond time, never forgets and always remembers. When we reflect on this idea, we are involved in the most basic and important notions of man: his notions of God. How man relates to God is a fundamental part of his state of the soul and therefore it is these notions that will determine how man is remembered on Rosh Hashana and what his decree will be. For that reason, when we reflect on how God is a different being and His Knowledge is different from ours, we are placing ourselves in the correct relationship to God and it is for that reason that we may be remembered for good on this day.

When man possesses the correct notions of God, he thereby renders himself a being that embodies God’s desire. He partakes of God’s plan for mankind, and his life is therefore worthwhile before God. God may then remember him for life, and all good might then be decreed for him.

“SHOFAROS”

One of the three main berachos (blessings) of the Tefilas Musaf (literally, added prayer) on Rosh Hashana is Shofaros, literally “horns of rams”, referring to the ram’s horn which we use in our mitzvah to blow shofar on this day. Generally, the Tefilas Musaf expresses the essential themes of the holiday. For example, on Pesach we mention that it is the time of our redemption and on Shavuos we mention that it is the time of our having received the Torah. The question then becomes: why do we mention the shofar in our tefila? It is true that there is a commandment to do a certain activity with it on this day, but that doesn’t necessarily imply that it must be mentioned as an essential theme of the day. Proof of this would be the mitzvah of Lulav—on Succos we are commanded to pick up the Lulav with other objects, but we don’t mention

this mitzvah in our tefila. What is it about shofar that makes it an essential theme of Rosh Hashana?

Even a cursory reading of the text of the bracha raises a few questions. Firstly, the bracha begins by talking about G-d’s Revealing Himself at Mt. Sinai to Bnai Yisrael and how the Shofar was used to create fear in the nation. As the first verse quoted says “...and the voice of the shofar was very strong and the entire nation that was in the camp trembled.” Also in the third verse “And the nation saw...the voice of the shofar...and the nation saw and moved and stood from a distance.” Clearly the images of trembling and moving to a distance create an association of fear with the Shofar. On a factual level, we can relate to this; hearing a loud, thunderous blast of noise can certainly put people into a state of fear and panic. The question is, though, why was it important that the people be in a state of fear at the time of G-d’s Revelation?

Furthermore, the next verses quoted from Psalms express how the Shofar was used as a means of praising G-d. This seems to be contradictory to the previous function of Shofar; whereas first the shofar was used to instill fear in people and express the concept of distance from G-d, now its used as a means of praising G-d, which implies some type of positive expression of our relationship with Him. How do we resolve these seemingly inconsistent ideas of shofar?

When we look at the verses quoted from the Neviim (prophets) in the bracha, we notice yet another application of the shofar. All the verses express the fact that shofar will be sounded as a prelude to the future redemption and the coming of the Messiah. One must ask why shofar must introduce the redemption. In addition, how does this fit with the previous functions and themes of shofar?

Lets start with the beginning of the blessing. As we mentioned above, the first three verses quoted show that shofar took part in producing a state of fear in the people at Sinai. The shofar produces a blasting, thunderous noise that can scare a person, making him feel insecure about the future. This is really the meaning of fear, to feel insecure and unsure about what will happen next. Apparently, this state of insecurity was integral to the event at Sinai, but we need to understand why.

A common notion in the world is that a ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ experience is one of feeling close to G-d. The person feels some sense of security in what he views as a personal encounter with Him. Often we may hear people speak of how they feel G-d is with them, or that they feel safe with G-d. The common religious man feels that G-d is with him in everything he does and because of that he is not worried about his future.

The Torah, with the description of the event of Sinai, teaches us that such a notion is impossible. Sinai was the ultimate ‘experience with G-d’ where

G-d revealed Himself and communicated directly with man. If any religious experience could be imagined, this was it. Yet, the Torah emphasizes that throughout the event, man felt scared and distant from G-d. Why? Because in Judaism, an encounter with G-d is an opportunity to gain insight into the world and G-d’s Wisdom that otherwise would not be known to man. The goal of Sinai wasn’t for man to ‘experience G-d’; it was for man to gain knowledge of G-d and the correct way of life in this world. However, in gaining such knowledge and perceiving G-d, His Greatness and Wisdom must naturally overawe man. As King David says in Psalms (8:5), “What is man that You remember him?” When man gains insight into the existence of G-d, he must be overawed by how Great this Existence is and how removed He is from ourselves. The encounter with G-d and gain in knowledge was not an ends to itself, which provided man with a sense of emotional security and comfort; it could only allow for a feeling of insecurity that result from the awareness of his own limited and insignificant existence relative to this Perfect Existence. (At Sinai, G-d did give the Jewish nation a means to achieve true security, that of living in line with G-d’s Will and relating to his Divine Providence on this world. As the verse in Psalms says, “Blessed is the man that takes security in G-d”; our knowledge of G-d is our only source of security.)

With this perspective, we may now return to our original questions. At Sinai, there was a danger that man could mistake the experience for a reason to have an emotional sense of security and not have to worry about himself. Man could falsely attribute this ‘close encounter’ with G-d to a sense of self-worth, so that he feels special and unique in the world because ‘G-d is with him’. The shofar was the response to this danger; it created a sense of fear and insecurity, showing that this encounter with G-d, in its own right, doesn’t provide any sense of security for man. It was an experience that was awesome and humiliating, making man feel insignificant and distant from this Ultimate Existence, so that he must feel insecure about himself. When man was confronted with the reality of G-d, the only Real and Independent Existence, there was no room for an emotional security that stems from an over-estimation of man’s own value, since.

Now we can see why the shofar was used as an instrument to praise G-d. In Judaism, praise of G-d doesn’t stem from a feeling of closeness with G-d or positive knowledge of G-d. It’s the opposite—we recognize that man’s praise of G-d falls way short of the Infinite Greatness of G-d due to man’s limited understanding of G-d. As the verse in Nechemiah (9:5) says “And He is Above all blessing and praise.” We praise G-d only because we recognize Him as deserving of all praise but not

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because the praise contains an accurate description of G-d. In every expression of praise towards G-d, we recognize this distance between man and G-d and how G-d is so great that man is nothing relative to Him. This is why Shofar is used as an instrument of praise; by using an instrument that causes fear and insecurity, we express how part and parcel of our praise of G-d is that we are distant from Him and are overawed by His Existence, so that we must feel insecure about our own self-worth when we talk of His Existence. (See the commentary of the Malbim, on the verse from Psalms 150:3 for support of this idea).

We are now in a position to explain why shofar will be used a prelude to the coming of the future redemption. When we look at the common notion of redemption and the coming of the Messiah, we find that most people look at this as a time in which people will have physical and emotional security. To most, it's a time of 'no worries' where man will be able to exist with all his needs provided for him. He will be able to just sit back and relax, without a worry for what the future will bring. The Torah teaches just the opposite; the only goal and benefit of the time of redemption and the coming of the Messiah is that man will be able to gain knowledge of G-d. The Rambam in Hilchos Melachim (Chapter 12 Law 4) explains that the sages and prophets of the Jewish people desired the days of Messiah, not for its physical and emotional security per se, but for the ability they will have to be concerned only with the Torah and its wisdom and the pursuit of existence in the world to come. In Judaism, redemption is a time where recognition and knowledge of G-d will be disseminated throughout the world and all will gain insight in His Wisdom. Now we see why shofar is appropriate before the redemption—the correct state of mind in entering the time of the redemption is not one of looking towards emotional security but rather insecurity and fear about seeing the true value of one's personal existence. At this time, mankind will be overawed by new knowledge of a Being and Greater Existence of which previously he had no knowledge. As a result, man will see that his existence is insignificant relative to that of G-d. The goal of this new period in mankind is not for man to feel comfortable with his own existence but rather to see that his own physical existence is worthless if not for his pursuit of knowledge of G-d, which the redemption will give him the optimal opportunity to do. This is what the Shofar teaches us as an introduction to the redemption. It expresses the idea of the proper perspective of this new era in time, namely that man will gain knowledge that will make him feel insecure with regards to his own personal existence.

With this concept of Shofar, we can see why Chazal, our sages, put it in the tefila. The mitzvah of Shofar on Rosh Hashana expresses an idea that

is essential on this Day of Judgement. Chazal, in putting Shofaros into the tefila, are teaching us that man must reflect on where he stands in the world; not in the physical world but in the 'real' world, that of the metaphysical and philosophical world which contains the true ideas. The Shofar teaches us that as man stands before G-d to be judged, man must acknowledge that relative to G-d, man is small and must feel insecure about himself. It is only through pursuing G-d and His Wisdom that man can give his soul significance and in that manner warrant a favorable verdict that will allow him to continue this pursuit.

DAY OF “JUDGMENT”

Each Jewish Yom Tov (holiday) has its own 'Tefilas Musaf' (added prayer) in which the unique theme of that holiday is expressed. For example, on Pesach the tefila mentions that it is the time of our redemption and on Shavuot it mentions that it is the time that we received the Torah. However, when we look at the Musaf of Rosh Hashana we notice that the essential theme of the day is mysteriously lacking. Everyone knows that the basic theme of this holiday is Yom HaDin—the Day of Judgment. The Talmud in Rosh Hashana 16a says that on this day everyone in the world passes before G-d to be judged. Yet, when we search the Musaf, we find that there is no mention of this theme at all. The only reference that we find to the Day of Judgment is in the middle bracha (blessing), that of Zichronos (remembrance) where we speak of G-d remembering all creatures on this day and deciding their fate. However, we are still left to wonder why Chazal (our sages) only inserted this in the greater theme of Zichronos, when we focus on ideas about G-d, rather than constructing a blessing that focuses on our being judged.

Even more curious is how Chazal didn't even construct a bracha that has at its essence a request of G-d to pass a favorable 'verdict'. When we think of being judged, we naturally think of going before a judge to plead our case or at least asking for mercy in the outcome. Our tefilos contain no such request. With these observations we are left with some strong questions: Why would Chazal leave out the essential theme of Judgment from the tefila? Why would they not construct a blessing in which we can express our request for a favorable verdict?

One may respond simply that there are specific requests that we make with regards to the judgment. There are four extra insertions that we add in to our tefilos on Rosh Hashana and on the following days until Yom Kippur; these additions contain requests,

such as "write us in the book of life" and the like. But upon closer examination, we see that this just raises more questions. Firstly, why are our requests for life and a good year limited to additions and not an actual bracha? Shouldn't there be a specific bracha formulated for this purpose? Furthermore, the Tur, in Orach Chaim Siman 582, says that these additions were allowed by our sages but only with difficulty. This seems extremely problematic—if the additions are appropriate then why were they only allowed with difficulty? If they're not appropriate, then they shouldn't be allowed at all!

Apparently, when they constructed the tefila, Chazal did not want to emphasize the idea that we are being judged. What did they want us to focus on? Let us examine the basic themes they established for the Musaf prayer of Rosh Hashana. There are three brachos unique to this day (what follows is an extremely brief summary of the blessings for reference; a deeper understanding of each one demands analysis beyond the scope of this article). The first one is 'Malchios', kingship, in which we speak about G-d as King of the universe and how in the future all of mankind will recognize this idea. 'Zichronos', remembrance, is the second bracha; the basic concept here is that G-d is an Omniscient Being who on this day decides the fate of all beings for the upcoming year (again, notice the lack of the term 'din', judgment, in the bracha). The third bracha is 'Shofaros' which expresses ideas behind the commandment to blow a ram's horn on this day; here the basic idea is the distance between man and G-d, as it says at the end "and none is similar to You." All these berachos express ideas about G-d, without any focus on man or man's needs. Even from our cursory examination we see that on the Day of Judgment, Chazal felt that it is inappropriate for us to focus on ourselves, despite the fact that we are being judged. Just the opposite—man must focus on that which is beyond himself and the physical world. Chazal constructed the Tefila in such a way that one must draw his attention to philosophical ideas about God. Of course the question we need to ask is why.

Clearly, Chazal are teaching us that Judaism has a different view of 'Judgment Day'. The Torah's concept of Yom HaDin isn't how most people look at judgment, like a court case for every individual where we sit in front of the judge and argue our case. It's true that we are judged, but in Torah the din, the verdict, isn't based on a simplistic notion of whether we are 'good people' or 'bad people', innocent or guilty. Of course it is true, as many statements of Chazal point out, that there is a verdict passed based on whether we are righteous or evil individuals. However, this really depends on one concept—the state of the soul. Man's level isn't a simple question of his good deeds or bad deeds; it has to do with his perfection and how he has attached himself to the truth. God, of course, is the Ultimate Truth and

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Existence—He is the Prime Mover of the Universe, upon which all other existences are dependent. For our souls to attain any level of existence we must exercise our 'bechira chofshis', our free choice, to use our G-d given wisdom in pursuit of truth and G-d; only in this way can we attain true metaphysical existence for our soul.

It is based on this concept that we are judged; come Yom HaDin, man really has no right to come before G-d and 'plead his case'. Such a notion is against Torah—G-d knows what level man is on and all that he has encountered in this world. This isn't a court case where man tries to convince the judge of his innocence—such an idea is absurd with reference to G-d. Our notion of Din is totally different—its based on a philosophical, metaphysical foundation of Judaism, that of the state of man's soul. In Torah, the notion of 'Judgment' means that man must reflect on where he stands with regards to reality for ultimately that is how he is judged; for us, it is a chance to reflect on the true ideas behind the physical universe and give our souls real existence. It is only in this way that we may warrant a favorable verdict.

With this understanding of Judgment, we can see why our tefilos don't mention Yom HaDin and don't have specific requests that pertain to the judgment. Chazal didn't want man to be caught up in his own personal judgment; there's no point in it since it won't accomplish anything. The judgment is based on G-d's knowledge of man and the level of his soul. For man to win a favorable verdict, there is only one thing he needs to do—to reflect on the ideas about real existence, and there is no Real Existence other than G-d.

We may now explain why the Tur writes that the additions in Tefila that contain requests were only allowed with difficulty. Clearly, Chazal didn't want man to focus on his own physical needs on this day and it is for this reason that there is no specific bracha that talks about this. The essential goal is for man to focus on what is true and real, and attach himself to those ideas. However, Judaism doesn't deny human nature, and it is only natural that if man is being judged then he be concerned about himself. Man by his very nature is egoistic and must think about himself and his physical needs. Recognizing this, Chazal made a concession to human nature and allowed for him to ask for a good verdict. However, this was only a concession and Chazal ensured that this idea be clear by only allowing these requests to be expressed as additions in pre-existing brachos. When we look closely at the specific berachos in which the additions are inserted, the first two and last two of the tefila, we notice that these are berachos that focus on G-d and Divine Providence and not man's own needs. It is clear that on this day, the Day of Judgment, our sages wanted to guide us in gaining "real life", focusing on ideas about G-d and giving existence to our souls. □

the Shofar

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



What is the significance of the shofar - the ram's horn? Its primary focus is its blasts, blown during our prayers on Rosh Hashanna. We also have the custom to blow it each morning during the month of Elul. This month precedes the month of Tishrei - the first day of which is Rosh Hashanna. During this month of Elul, the shofar is to act as a "wake-up call". "Uru yshanim mi-shinasschem", "Awaken you slumberers from your sleep." At this crucial time, when we are soon to be judged for life, prosperity, and health, the shofar alerts us to our impending judgment. We are to arouse ourselves, waking up from our routine activities and backsliding during this past year. We are to examine ourselves, detecting our flaws, and responding with a renewed strengthening of Torah values and actions. But why use a shofar? What is its significance?

Purpose of the Blasts

We learn that the blasts of the shofar are meant to resemble the weeping and sobbing of Sisra's mother. This is why we have long and short blasts, as weeping takes on different types of cries. Sisra's mother awaited his return from battle. (Judges, Chap. 5) Sisra delayed in returning. Sisra's mother assumed he was dividing great booty, so this must have taken time. But later, her assumption of good, turned towards reality, and she realized he must have perished at war. Her sobbing was a response to recognizing reality. The shofar blasts are to make us associate to Sisra's mother's sobbings - her return to

reality. We too must return to reality, that is, returning to a life of Torah. This is enforced by Rosh Hashanna, a day when we direct our attention to G-d's exclusive role as King, Who knows all our thoughts and actions, and Who rules the entire world. During our last prayer on Yom Kippur, "Neila", we say, "so that we may disengage from the oppression of our hands." Our daily activities of work, family and other pursuits distract us from what our true focus must be - the study and application of G-d's Torah system.

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 26b teaches that a shofar used for Rosh Hashanna must be bent, not straight. This is to resemble man's "bent" state of mind - he is bent over in humility. This parallels a contrast: G-d is King, but we are His creations. Our undistorted recognition of G-d's role as our Creator and King, results in our sense of humility.

The Shofar at Mount Sinai

We find the shofar associated with many events. The shofar waxed increasingly louder at Sinai when G-d gave us His Torah, "And it was that the sound of the shofar went and grew increasingly loud..." (Exod. 19:19) Why was shofar integral to Sinai? Sinai was also much earlier than Sisra. So does Sinai's shofar convey a different idea than sobbing? It would seem sobbing is unrelated to Sinai. What is Sinai's shofar to teach us? Rashi states that it is the custom of man that when he blows for a long period, the sound gets increasingly weaker and more faint. But here, at Sinai, the sound grew louder. Rashi

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clearly indicates the lesson of shofar is to teach that man did not orchestrate this event. Shofar is to reflect the Creator's presence. Why was this lesson required at Sinai? Perhaps the very act of accepting the Torah is synonymous with our recognition that this Torah is G-d's ideas. Only such an appreciation will drive our studies towards answers, which resonate with absolute truth. G-s knowledge is the only absolute truth. Truth is the purpose of Torah study. Torah was therefore given with the sound of the shofar, embodying this idea. Rashi also mentioned that the sound of the shofar on Sinai "breaks the ears". This means it carries great impact. Why was this quality of "sound" necessary? The miracles alone proved G-d's existence!

There is one difference between a sound and a visual: sound is perceived unavoidably. You cannot "hide" your ears. Turning away from a visual removes its cognizance, but this is inapplicable to sound, certainly a loud sound. It would appear that besides the grand spectacle of Sinai ablaze, when receiving the Torah, the Jews required uninterrupted attention. The shofar blast kept them attentive to the divine nature of this event.

Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 16a: "Rabbi Abahu said, 'G-d says blow before Me with a ram's horn, so that I may recall for you the binding of Isaac, son of Abraham, and I will consider it upon you as if you bound yourselves before Me.'" Since the ram is what Abraham offered in place of Isaac, our blasts of the ram's horn are to recall this event before G-d. It is clear from this Talmudic statement that Rosh Hashanna demands a complete devotion to G-d - we must render ourselves as if bound on the altar, like Isaac. We accomplish this via our shofar blasts. This act attests to our commitment to Abraham's sacrifice. We gain life in G-d's eyes by confirming Abraham's perfection. We follow his ways. This merit grants us life. The lesson of Abraham is not to end when Rosh Hashanna ends. This holiday is to redirect our focus from the mundane, to a lasting cognizance of G-d's presence and role as Creator. He is to occupy our thoughts throughout the year. "Bichol diracheha, da-ayhu, vihu yiyashare orchosecha", "In all your ways, know Him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs, 3:6)

But let us ask: why is the binding of Isaac central to the theme of Rosh Hashanna? There were many instances where great people sacrificed themselves in the name of G-d? Let us take a closer look at that event.

When Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac, and was subsequently commanded not to do so, he found a ram caught in the bushes: (Gen. 22:13) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in

place of his son." Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram "in place" of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed - a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that G-d wished Abraham to "replace" his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of sacrifice, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to express the perfection of adherence to G-d's command. Therefore, G-d prepared this ram. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that G-d intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

My close friend Shaya Mann suggested the following, insightful answer: Abraham was not "relieved" when subsequently, he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham. Abraham did not remove his attention from G-d, once 'he had his son back'. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son would remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention to anything else. But Abraham's perfection didn't allow such a diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham's attention and love was still completely bound up with G-d. This is where Abraham's energies were before the sacrifice, and even afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from G-d, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac's life, more than he rejoiced in obeying G-d. The ram teaches us this. Abraham remained steadfast with G-d. Abraham's perfection was twofold; 1) he was not reluctant to obey G-d, at any cost, and 2) nothing surpassed his attachment to G-d.

Maimonides on the Binding of Isaac

Maimonides discusses the significance of Abraham's binding of Isaac. I will record his first principle: "The account of Abraham our father binding his son, includes two great ideas or principles of our faith. First, it shows us the extent and limit of the fear of G-d. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions, which are believed to be contrary to human feelings. He had been without child, and had been longing for a child; he had great riches, and was expecting that a nation should spring from his seed. After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great

must have been his delight in the child! How intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared G-d, and loved to do what G-d commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of three days. If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the commandment proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of G-d. There is no necessity to look for the presence of any other idea or of anything that might have affected his emotions. For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that G-d might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man's duty to love and to fear G-d, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment. We have repeatedly explained this. The angel, therefore, says to him, "For now I know," etc. (ibid. ver. 12), that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a G-d-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of G-d. This idea is confirmed in Scripture: it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of G-d, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples, for it is said, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy G-d," etc. (Deut. xxviii. 58). This is one of the two purposes of the 'akedah' (sacrifice or binding of Isaac)"

Maimonides teaches that the binding of Isaac, represented by the ram's horn, displays man's height of perfection, where he sacrifices what he loves most, his only son, for the command of G-d. Shofar, the ram's horn, thereby conveys the idea of the most devoted relationship to G-d.

We see why Rosh Hashanna focuses on the shofar as a central command. It is on Rosh Hashanna that we focus not on G-d's miracles, salvation, or laws. Rather, we focus on G-d alone. This means, a true recognition of His place in our minds, as King. He is our Creator, Who gave us existence, the greatest gift. Abraham's sacrifice is the ultimate expression of man apprehending the idea of G-d, and loving G-d. Not the idea of G-d Who saves, heals, or performs miracles, but more primary, as Creator.

Shofar and the Jubilee

Another area requires shofar, the Jubilee year. This is the 50th year in the Hebrew calendar. After the shofar is blown, all slaves are set free, and all lands returns to their original inheritors apportioned by Joshua upon his initial conquest of Israel. What is the role of shofar here? Additionally, the shofar on Rosh

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Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee shofar. We are to use the same shofar on Rosh Hashanna as we use on the Jubilee. It would seem counter intuitive. Doesn't the day of Rosh Hashanna have more significance than a day, which occurs only once every 50 years? Why is the shofar of Rosh Hashanna derived from some area, which on the surface seems less significant? Maimonides states that once the shofar is blown, there is a pause: until ten days later, Yom Kippur, although free, slaves remain in the domain of their masters. Why do they not go free immediately upon the shofar blast?

The Jubilee year teaches us yet another facet in recognizing G-d as Creator: man's "ownership" (slaves and land) is a mere fabrication. In truth, G-d owns everything. He created everything. Our ownership during our stay here is not absolute. We learn from the release of slaves and land, that ownership follows G-d's guidelines. It is a means by which we again come to the realization of G-d's role as our Master.

Perhaps Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee for good reason. The Jubilee attests to a more primary concept: G-d as Creator. Rosh Hashanna teaches us that G-d judges man, but this is based on the primary concept that G-d is Creator. Our recognition of G-d's judgment must be preceded by our knowledge of His role as Creator. Therefore, Rosh Hashanah's shofar is derived from the Jubilee's shofar.

Why don't slaves go free immediately upon the shofar blast? If slaves would be freed, their freedom during the entire ten-day period would eclipse their repentance. The law is perfect: masters cannot work these slaves anymore for fear of their preoccupation with ownership, and slaves cannot leave their masters homes, for fear that they would be self-absorbed in their new found freedom. Both, master and slave must focus on G-d's role as King during these ten Days of Repentance.

Summary

In all our cases, we learn that shofar has one common theme: the recognition of G-d as our Creator. This recognition was essential for the Jews' acceptance of Torah, for our acceptance of G-d as the true Judge, and for us to view G-d as the absolute "Owner". Abraham expressed the zenith of man's love of G-d, so this event of the binding of Isaac is remembered, and reenacted via our shofar blasts. As a Rabbi once said, G-d created everything, so there must be great knowledge in all we see - I refer to our command of Shofar.

Question to Ponder

What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? The Torah does not record superfluous information.

the Shofar

PART II

In the last article we were left with one unanswered question: What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? The Torah does not record superfluous information. Why was this enacted by G-d? Let us review.

Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac. Subsequently, he was commanded not to do so, and saw a ram caught in the bushes:

(Gen. 22:13) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son."

Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram "in place" of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed - a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that G-d wished Abraham to "replace" his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of sacrifice to G-d, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to adhere to G-d. Therefore, G-d prepared this ram to enable Abraham's desire to be actualized. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that G-d intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

Abraham's Two Perfections

Last week we mentioned the following, insightful answer offered by my close friend Shaya Mann: Abraham was not "relieved" when subsequently, he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham: Abraham did not remove

his attention from G-d, once 'he had his son back'. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son will remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention directed elsewhere. But Abraham's perfection didn't allow any diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham's attention was still completely bound up with G-d. This is where Abraham's energies were before the sacrifice, and even afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from G-d, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac's life, more than he rejoiced in obeying G-d. The ram teaches this. Abraham remained steadfast with G-d. Abraham's perfection was twofold; 1) he was not reluctant to obey G-d, even at the cost of losing his beloved, only Isaac, and 2) nothing surpassed Abraham's attachment to G-d.

The very fact that Abraham was not commanded to sacrifice this ram, but did so of his own desire, demonstrates his perfection.

One might ask, "is there not the rabbinical dictum, 'Greater is one who is commanded and performs, than one who is not commanded?'" Based on this principle, Abraham would be more perfected, had G-d commanded him to offer the ram!

A Rabbi once taught, one is more perfected when commanded and acts, as he overcomes the resistance to the "command". Being commanded in a matter, man has a tendency to rebel. Overcoming the rebellious emotion displays one's higher state. But what about our case, where a command did not apply, i.e., Abraham was not commanded to offer the ram? In such a case, we must compare what the actual possibilities were; either, Abraham offers the

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ram of his own desire, or he does not. Clearly, Abraham's act of offering the ram is greater than inactivity. The Talmudic dictum applies only when a command is applicable. Now, let's return to the main issue, the significance of the ram.

In reviewing the verses, we note something quite interesting: After Abraham offered the ram, he was addressed a second time by the angel:

(Gen. 22:13-18) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place 'G-d Appears', as he said, 'on this day on the mountain, G-d appeared.' And the angel of G-d called to Abraham a second time from the heavens. And he said, 'by Me I swear, says G-d, on account that you have done this thing, and you have not withheld your son, your only. Behold I will certainly bless you and greatly multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the seashore and your seed will inherit the gates of your enemies. And all nations will bless your seed, on account that you listened to My voice.'"

But in Genesis 22:12, Abraham was already praised for not withholding Isaac! Why the repetition? Klay Yakar states that there were actually two acts of perfection, 1) "on account that you have done this thing", and 2) "and you have not withheld your son." Besides not withholding Isaac, Abraham did one other thing: I believe this refers to the ram offering. This is fully supported by the second, angelic address occurring immediately after Abraham offered the ram. Through the Torah's method of teaching that this second address occurred on the heels of the ram offering, the Torah calls our attention to this offering. It was an act of perfection. It warranted an additional blessing for Abraham. I feel this substantiates my friend's insight. Abraham's sacrifice of the ram was of great importance, as we said, G-d prepared this ram during the six days of creation. It was of utmost importance that Abraham had this opportunity, and that we witness Abraham's perfection in our Torah.

We also learn that Abraham's perfection was not simply his one time sacrifice of Isaac. The ram offering displays his sustained devotion to G-d. Both acts, Isaac and the ram, reveal his inner perfection. The Rabbis teach that Abraham would not have been subjected to this trial, had G-d known he would fail. This teaches that G-d helped Abraham actualize his perfection, which was already present.

The Ram Caught in the Thicket

What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? Perhaps such a phenomenon is unlikely. A ram has its horns to the rear of its head. They are used solely for bucking, and are not engaged when eating the vegetation of a bush. There is virtually no way for the ram to get its horns caught, as they are behind its head, and its mouth is the only

thing that comes close to the thicket. Animals are quite agile, and accurately sense their range of safety. Being caught by its horns would not happen. But here it did. Why? Answer: it was divinely intended. Again, why?

Two possible explanations come to mind: 1) Perhaps Abraham saw this oddity, and concluded there was divine intent for his sacrifice of this animal. 2) The Torah records this to underline for us - not Abraham, as he did not have a Torah - so we may understand G-d's intent that this ram offering by Abraham was intended by G-d. The Rabbis deduced such, that G-d created this ram during Creation. This teaching causes us to focus, not just on the attempted sacrifice of Abraham's son, but also on the steadfast and unceasing attachment Abraham had to G-d and His command. Abraham would not remove his attention from G-d, even though others would be tremendously relieved to have their child safe.

Shofar, the ram's horn, is taken from this ram sacrifice of Abraham, and incorporated into our Rosh Hashanna prayers. We are to be as devoted to G-d as was Abraham, even AFTER the return of Isaac. Shofar imbues us with a call for a double-edged perfection; 1) sacrifice in the face of adversity (binding of Isaac), and 2) devotion to G-d while in the best state (having Isaac returned).

Sinai and the Messianic Era

We must now recognize one more area, which deals with shofar. I refer to our most familiar blessing of our daily Tefilah (prayer) of "Tika b'Shofar Gadol", "Blow with a Great shofar". In this prayer, we anticipate the forecast made in Isaiah 27:13:

"And on that day, there will sound a great shofar, and there will come all those lost in the land of Ashure, and those cast away in the land of Egypt, and they will prostrate themselves to G-d in His holy mountain in Jerusalem."

What does shofar have to do with the ingathering? Metsudas Dovid mentions that "holy mountain" refers to Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered Isaac. Interesting.

In Otzar HaTefilos, on the phrase "Tikah B'Shofar Gadol" (weekday shacharis) the Iyun Tefilah says as follows:

"And the matter of 'great' (shofar) was explained by the Rabbis at the end of chapter 31 in the chapters of Rabbi Eliezer, 'There were two ram's horn shofars, with the left (one) G-d blew on Mount Sinai, and the right horn is greater than the left, and in the future, G-d will blow with it, in the ultimate future, to gather the exiles.'"

Why is the right horn greater? What is greater about ingathering the exiles, than Mount Sinai? This is apparently the lesson of the right horn being "greater", that the future ingathering is incomparable to Sinai, in some aspect. We also learn that there is some commonality between the two shofars, as both come from one ram - the "left and right" horns indicate this. What's the connection between Sinai and the Messi-

anic era?

What does shofar have to do with the ingathering? Quoting Rabbi Reuven Mann, "Why is the event of the Messiah part of Maimonides' 13 Principles? These principles deal with our understanding of G-d. How is the Messiah equivalent to ideas such as the existence, unity, or non-physical nature of G-d, commencing the 13 Principles?" Rabbi Mann answered, "This event marks the fulfillment of G-d's promise - the ultimate state of perfection for mankind. Messiah is the culmination of G-d's system for man, coming to its pinnacle of perfection through the validation of G-d's word. G-d is absolute truth." (Paraphrased) This Messianic event is the last "piece of the puzzle." It displays G-d's perfection that His words do not 'fall to the ground'. We gain the ultimate appreciation for G-d via the Messiah and the ingathering of the exiles. Long since unfulfilled, man will comprehend the absolute and complete truth of G-d's word, when His ancient oath is actualized.

Sinai is eclipsed by the Messianic era. Although Sinai gave man indisputable proof of G-d, the Messiah's arrival and the ingathering, are the completion of the Torah system, only commenced at Sinai. Thus, the Rabbis teach that the horn, the shofar, blown in the future ingathering, is the "right" horn, the greater horn. It is a far greater event, in terms of our recognition of the truth of Torah, via the fulfillment of the Messianic promise.

This now explains what the common thread is between Sinai and the Messianic era: Sinai was the commencement of the system of Torah, and the Messianic era is its completion. Both partake of one theme - the formation of Torah - and are therefore described by the Rabbis as two horns from the same ram. They are the two greatest elements in the formation of the Torah system; Sinai is the guidebook, and the Messianic era is the final circumstance required for man's perfect fulfillment of the guidebook's laws.

Mount Moriah

Once messiah arrives, all will prostrate to G-d at His Holy Mountain, as stated by Isaiah. Why? Since Mt. Moriah's distinction is derived from the binding of Isaac, it embodies the perfection in man (Abraham) that all is rightfully sacrificed in the fulfillment of G-d's word. In the era of the Messiah, this will be clearly understood, and enacted by all peoples. Messiah will teach with lucid insight, why service of G-d is to be man's primary focus, where all else is inconsequential. Man will arrive at this knowledge, and will demonstrate this by prostrating at G-d's mountain.

Again we see that Rosh Hashanna incorporates the shofar for perfectly sound reason: it hearkens back to Abraham's perfection in service to G-d, and it anticipates our greatest state of recognizing G-d's perfection and ultimate reality and truth, via His fulfillment of His word. ■

Letters

Misrepresentation of Judaism

Dear Jewish Week,

A gross misrepresentation of Judaism appeared in "Pa. Jews and Intelligent Design" (The Jewish Week 9/30/05)

Rejecting Intelligent Design, Rabbi Schertz said science alone (not religion) is guided by proof: "religious views should be based on faith...[while] science has things that are proven." The Torah's words reject Rabbi Schertz's theory, although he has sufficiently contradicted himself: he 'demonstrated' his religious distinction between religion and science.

Unfortunately, Rabbi Schertz is ignorant of Judaism's core fundamental – its distinction from every other religion: Judaism offers and demands reason and proof for God's existence. God records Moses' words which recall Revelation at Sinai, "Lest you forget what your eyes saw" (Deut. 4:9), "You have been shown to know that God is God" (Deut. 4:35), and "And you shall know it today" (Deut. 4:39). Moses teaches that God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai, a "demonstration", precisely so mankind might witness God's existence, and so future generations receive this proof of the Creator. Faith is insufficient.

Moses' statements are only sensible if man possesses the faculty of reason, which provides proof. God and Moses state that Judaism mandates "knowledge" – not belief – as the means of following Him. Moses teaches that Revelation at Sinai was designed for the very reason that man follows God with his mind – with proof – and not with faith.

Sadly, Rabbi Schertz's error is shared by others, who together contribute to intermarriage and assimilation. Misinformed educators misguide our youth to live by faith and emotions. But emotionally-guided Judaism is subject to rejection by the alluring tactics of missionaries. Jewish educators and leaders must teach our youth and communities Judaism's Fundamentals, starting with the reason why God granted man intelligence: that we possess absolute conviction in Judaism. One's conviction that 2+2=4 will never be doubted, no matter how emotionally appealing the argument. We can possess this same conviction in other areas, and as God says, we must possess this conviction in His existence. Our greatest Rabbis and sages echoed this fundamental. It is merely today's ill-informed masses that 'feel' differently.

Every person considering himself a Jew must heed Moses' words recorded by God: we are to achieve unwavering conviction in His existence and His Torah, via His intended proof of Sinai.

God granted mankind intelligence, for good reason.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, Founder
www.Mesora.org

Reincarnation I

Dear Rabbi Ben-Chaim,

I've read the argument that Saadia Gaon was silent on reincarnation because: 1) he lived in a PLACE dominated by Islam, which would place his life in danger for promoting the concept of reincarnation, and 2) he lived at a TIME when Kabbalists were ordered to hide their knowledge.

Except, Saadia Gaon was NOT silent on reincarnation. He unequivocally denounced it; and he provided logical arguments that it's a false doctrine. While I could understand a Rabbi staying SILENT to protect himself and others, I can't fathom a Rabbi deliberately writing a passionate and argumentative DENUNCIATION of something he knows to be actually true! If so, how do we know when a Rabbi is lying or telling the truth? Doesn't this leave us in chaotic ignorance of what is Truth and what is False?

Would you please reprint Saadia Gaon's own words on reincarnation? If another reader can explain with a convincing argument that Saadia Gaon was lying, I would truly like to learn and understand.

I've read one counter-argument, that Saadia Gaon was not actually privy to the Kabbalistic knowledge of reincarnation and THAT is why he wrote as he did. Yet, my understanding is the opposite, that he was a Kabbalistic master. Although his approach toward Kabbalah was more philosophical than mystical, I thought he did possess the Kabbalistic knowledge obtainable by scholars of the highest stature. Is this a correct understanding?

Many thanks, Debby Kobrin

Saadia Gaon: "The Book of Beliefs and Opinions"

"Yet, I must say that I have found certain people, who call themselves Jews, professing

the doctrine of metempsychosis (reincarnation) which is designated by them as the theory of "transmigration" of souls. What the mean thereby is that the spirit of Ruben is transferred to Simon and afterwards to Levi and after that to Judah. Many of them would go so far as to assert that the spirit of a human being might enter into the body of a beast or that of a beast into the body of a human being, and other such nonsense and stupidities."

"This in itself, however, indicates how very foolish they are. For they take it for granted that the body of a man is capable of transforming the essence of the soul so as to make of it a human soul, after having been the soul of a beast. They assume, furthermore, that the soul itself is capable of transforming the essence of a human body to the point of endowing it with the traits of the beasts, even though its form be that of men. It was not sufficient for them, then, that they attributed to the soul a variable nature by not assigning to it an intrinsic essence, but they contradicted themselves when they declared the soul capable of transforming and changing the body, and the body capable of transforming and changing the soul. But such reasoning is a deviation from logic.

The third [argument they present] is in the form of a logical argument. They same, namely: "Inasmuch as the Creator is just, it is inconceivable that he should occasion suffering to little children, unless it be for sins committed by their souls during the time that they were lodged in their former bodies." This view is, however, subject to numerous refutations.

The first is that they have forgotten what we have mentioned on the subject of compensation in the hereafter for misfortunes experienced in this world. Furthermore we should like to ask them what they conceive the original status of the soul to be – we mean its status when it is first created. Is it charged by its Master with any obligation to obey Him or not? If they allege that it is not so charged, then there can be no punishments for it either, since it was not charged with any obligations to begin with. If, on the other hand, they acknowledge the imposition of such a charge, in which case obedience and disobedience did not apply before, they thereby admit that God charges His servants with obligations on account of the future and not at all on account of the past. But then they return to our theory and are forced to give up their insistence on the view that man's suffering in this world is due solely to his conduct in a previous existence."

Reincarnation III

Reader: “I place before you today; life and goodness and death and evil,” which you interpret as final death. That is OK for the case of choosing death, but what does it mean to choose “life”? Could one not interpret that “life” in this context means reincarnation; that is, life over and over again? I don’t see how logic forces the conclusion you draw. Secondly you point to Karase (death of the soul) as proving the end of the soul, therefore foreclosing the possibility of reincarnation. OK again, but could one not logically conclude that only those subject to Karase don’t come back, and others do? Again I don’t see how logic forces your conclusion versus one that proves reincarnation. I look forward to understanding how these pasukim conclusively prove your point.

Mesora: Moses tells the Jews they might choose one option: life or death. Choosing “one” – life or death – means they are mutually exclusive. Thus, if I choose death, which Moses says is “not life”, then life cannot be experienced by me any more: no reincarnation. My death is terminal.

Alternatively, if I choose life, and I will not experience death, this means I will experience no successive deaths: meaning no reincarnations. Again, choosing life means the alternative of death. Therefore, death will not be included in what I receive. To suggest this means a successive cycle of deaths and lives, and this is the “life” to which Moses refers, is a rejection of the plain meaning of Moses’ words. For Moses said life is not death.

You suggest that those who do not receive Karase (spiritual death) may experience reincarnation, since their souls are not destroyed. However, Moses’ ultimatum as explained above teaches this is not the case. Additionally, what proof do you have that reincarnation is a reality, that you should suggest this? In fact, the converse is true: nothing in Torah supports reincarnation, and it is actually traced back to Pythagoras and Egyptian culture.

We should do Moses justice and remain true to Moses’ words. When he gives an ultimatum of life or death, it must be understood as just that: one or the other. There are no grounds to project onto Moses’ any notions of reincarnation, a belief Moses never mentioned.

Reincarnation and Job

Debby: Moshe, Thanks for all your articles on the topic of reincarnation - and for the many published letters that explore additional Torah-based refutations of reincarnation. I’m working hard to put aside my preconceived ideas, in order to examine your articles from a rational point of view. May I ask you to please comment on the following?

“One of the texts the mystics like to cite as a scriptural allusion to the principle of reincarnation is the following verse in the Book of Job: Behold, all these things does God do -- twice, even three times with a man -- to bring his soul back from the pit that he may be enlightened with the light of the living. (Job 33:29)”

http://www.aish.com/literacy/concepts/Reincarnation_and_Jewish_Tradition.asp

Many thanks, Debby

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Debby, read the context:

“22. Yea, his soul draws near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. 23. If there be an angel with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness: 24. Then he is gracious unto him, and says deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. 25. His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s: he shall return to the days of his youth: 26. He shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. 27. He looks upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; 28. He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. 29. Lo, all these things works God twice or three times with man, 30. To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.”

This clearly refers to saving man from “descending to death” (pit) two or three times.... not resurrecting, but from initiating a deathblow. I am baffled that someone looks at

these very clear words, as proof to reincarnation. A wise Rabbi once wrote the following on the angel:

“There are two explanations for this idea of the angel:

1) The angel refers to man’s intellect. Meaning, if man reflects (one in a thousand means even a minute reflection) God will save the individual. This follows Maimonides’ explanation, as he maintains that God’s Providence is directly inline with the perfection of man’s intellect. If he is highly perfected, God’s Providence will be directly inline with him. And if he is corrupt, God’s Providence will not relate to him. What is the idea of “once or twice”? This means that God’s Providence offers man two or three chances in life to follow the intellect. But if this person keeps falling back into the emotions, that individual is too corrupt for God’s two or three mercies, and Divine Providence is removed from him. Maimonides states this in his Laws of Teshuva, “For the first few sins, a person are forgiven.”

2) The second explanation of the angel means nature. Maimonides explains in the Guide that “angel” refers to a force of nature. The Rabbis also state, “every blade of grass has an ‘angel’ helping it grow.” This means that certain laws of nature govern every blade of grass – no matter how minute. This second view of “angel” maintains that when man falls sick, a natural phenomena can occur (two or three times, but not always) in which the man gets well (viz., end of the disease). But this only happens two or three times because when one usually gets very sick, he does not recover. After recovery, the saved individual may tell his friends about his miraculous “close call.” He feels that the natural phenomena that saved him have to do with God desirous of his health; he now feels that God saved him. This religious feeling is based on the desire to have God take care of him.”