

The Big Bang and Me

We learned the unparalleled significance of Rosh HaShanah in the first Morasha class on Rosh HaShanah – God judges us on this day for life, health, prosperity, and the opportunity for spiritual growth that we will be granted for the entire year. With such towering stakes, how should we marshal a case to ensure a successful outcome? One of the most effective ways is to focus on and integrate the three central themes expressed in the Rosh HaShanah Mussaf service. In the section called *Malchiyot* (Kingship), we contemplate and reaffirm God's sovereignty over the world; in the section called *Zichronot* (Remembrances) we highlight God's omniscient recollection of all our deeds; and finally in the section called *Shofrot* (Blowing of the Shofar) we concentrate on discerning and integrating the messages of the shofar blasts.

We will be seeking to answer the following questions:

- ❧ How can Rosh HaShanah jump-start a sustained personal effort to reach one's potential?
- ❧ Why does the Rosh HaShanah Mussaf prayer service focus on Kingship, Remembrance, and the shofar?
- ❧ How does Rosh Hashanah provide an extraordinary annual opportunity for rejuvenation?
- ❧ What pivotal events in Jewish history are mentioned in the Rosh HaShanah prayers and why?
- ❧ Why do we listen to the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah and what messages can we take from it?

Class Outline:

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SECTION I. THE BIG BANG AND ME: REACHING ONE'S POTENTIAL VIA THE MUSSAF SERVICE

Current theory regarding the nature of the origin of the universe is commonly referred to as the Big Bang Theory. This theory posits that before the Big Bang occurred, there was no time, space, matter, or energy. What was there? you may ask. Obviously there was nothing. Well, if there was nothing, how does “nothing” explode in a Big Bang and become a universe?

What preceded the Big Bang was an infinitesimally small mathematical point that was not made up of matter, contained no energy, occupied no space, and preceded time itself. Paradoxically this inconceivably tiny point contained within it the entire universe. This tiny primordial point represents ultimate potential. Whatever it was, when it “exploded” it unleashed an entire universe.

Rosh HaShanah is like the Big Bang. On Rosh HaShanah we neither ponder our future nor grapple with our past. On Rosh HaShanah we confront our ultimate potential. Each one of us is destined to “explode.” Each one of us, with our lives, will create an entire universe. Each one of us possesses a profoundly immense and unique potential. The question is this: Will the universe we create be a true reflection of the potential we possess?

Rosh HaShanah is the Day of Judgment. Yet never once during the prayers on Rosh HaShanah do we mention our past or ask for any kind of forgiveness. For this we wait until Yom Kippur. But that's odd, how can we be judged if we don't deal with our past deeds?

The answer is that we all make mistakes in life, mistakes that move us further and further from a realization of our potential as human beings and as Jews. If we are not whole-heartedly committed to pursuing a path to our ultimate potential, then we are inevitably doomed to repeat the mistakes of our past and find new ways to move ever further from our potential. From being the person we truly want to be and can be. (From Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf, Rosh HaShanah Yom Kippur Survival Kit, p. 66.)

By focusing on and integrating the essential themes of Rosh HaShanah expressed in the Mussaf service, we can begin developing the framework to reach our potential. What are those themes?

1. **Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 119 – The three central components of the Rosh HaShanah prayers.**

The Rosh HaShanah prayers are found in the Rosh HaShanah *Machzor* (festival prayer book). They are divided into three main sections, each focusing on one of the primary themes of the day. As we progress through the prayers, these meditations help us achieve a mental and spiritual state conducive to real change and self-improvement.

Malchiyot (Kingship): One of the central themes of the Rosh HaShanah prayers is the emphasis on recognizing God as the King. Since there cannot be a King without a people and God created man, His “nation,” on Rosh HaShanah, it is on that day that He was, so to speak, crowned as King. In order to impress upon ourselves on this Divine “coronation day” the fact that God is King with all attendant rights and privileges, we repeatedly refer to Him as King in our prayers. This is the message of the section known as Malchiyot, Kingship, which consists of verses from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings about God's Kingship.

Zichronot (Remembrances): God's knowledge of human events, thoughts, and actions is the second theme of the Rosh HaShanah prayers. This section, called Zichronot, “memories,” describes God as the One Who “remembers the Covenant” that he made with the Patriarchs. He is the One Who “remembered Noah” in the midst of the flood, the One Who “knows all the deeds of humanity.” Verses from the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings that describe God remembering everything are included.

Shofrot (Shofar Blasts): The third major section of the Rosh HaShanah prayers is called Shofrot (plural of shofar). This refers to the sound of the shofar that was heard when God gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai, and to the shofar blast that will herald the ingathering of the exiles and the coming of the Messiah. These ideas remind us, respectively, of our obligations to other people, to God, and ourselves (the Torah), and our ultimate destiny (the Messianic Era). They encourage us to reassess our priorities and strive to become better people in the coming year.

The source for reciting the Rosh HaShanah prayers is found below and also includes blowing the shofar:

2. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Rosh HaShanah 16a – The verses recited during Mussaf on Rosh HaShanah, interspersed at specific times by the sounding of the shofar.**

[God says] Recite before Me verses about Kingship, Remembrance, and the shofar.

Verses of Kingship in order to make Me King over you;

Verses of Remembrance in order that I shall remember you in a good light.

With what shall you accomplish this?

With the shofar.

אמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות.

מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם.

זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה.

ובמה?

בשופר.

The three central themes of the Rosh HaShanah prayer service focus us on the key ideas that will help us relate correctly to the spiritual energy of the day, as described above.

3. **Maharsha, Chidushei Agadot, Rosh HaShanah 32b (see also Rabbi Yosef Albo, Sefer HaIkkarim 1:4) – Malchiyot, Zichronot, and Shofrot correspond to three principles of Jewish belief: the existence of God, the Divine origin of the Torah, and the concept of reward and punishment.**

It is clear that Malchiyot, Zichronot, and Shofrot parallel three central principles of Jewish belief, namely belief in God, the Divinity of the Torah, and reward and punishment. Malchiyot, “So that you accept my Kingship upon yourselves,” and all the verses that go into the Malchiyot section express the existence and uniqueness of God. Zichronot, “So that our memory should rise before Him favorably,” and all the verses that go into the Zichronot section express the concept of reward, the opposite of which is punishment. The Shofrot section expresses the idea that the Torah was given by God with the sound of the shofar, as the verses state.

והוא מבואר שהמלכיות זכרונות ושופרות הם נגד ג' העיקרים שהם מציאות השם ותורה מן השמים ושכר ועונש מלכיות שתמליכוני עליכם וכל פסוקי מלכיות מורים על מציאותו ואחדותו זכרונות שיעלה זכרוני לטובה בשכר טוב שההפך בעונש וכל פסוקי זכרונות מורים ע"ז שופרות על עיקר תורה מן השמים בקול שופר כמו שמורים ע"ז הפסוקים.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ≈ The Mussaf service is divided into three sections that focus us on the major themes of Rosh HaShanah: God's Kingship, His omniscience, and the symbolism of the shofar.
- ≈ Understanding and meditating on these themes is what is conducive to real change on Rosh HaShanah. In the sections to follow we will see how.

SECTION II. KINGSHIP (MALCHİYOT) AND THE OPPORTUNITY FOR REJUVENATION

While God is judging us, the essence of our own job on Rosh HaShanah is the reaffirmation of God's Kingship over the universe. Our act of coronating God is a testament to our desire to play a significant role in the unfolding of human history as an expression of God's Will.

1. **Rabbi Gedaliah Shor, Ohr Gedaliyahu, Moadim, p. 2 – The principal task of a person on Rosh HaShanah is accepting God's reign.**

A person's foremost task on this day is to focus on accepting upon oneself the sovereignty of God. The degree to which one accepts God's reign determines how meritorious he emerges in the day's judgment. For this reason we do not find mention of personal requests in the Rosh HaShanah liturgy, rather the majority of the prayers focus on honoring Divine Kingship.

עיקר תפקיד האדם יום הזה לקבל עליו מלכות שמים, וכפי מה שמקבל עליו מלכותו יתברך כן הוא יוצא זכאי בדיון, ולכן ראינו כי בתפילת היום אין האדם מבקש על צרכיו הפרטיים, אלא רוב התפילות הם על כבוד מלכות שמים.

The essential goal of Rosh HaShanah is our acceptance of God's Kingship. How do we coronate God? Formally speaking, we accomplish this according to the prescription of the Talmudic passage cited above (Section I. 2): we recite verses about God's Kingship in our prayers. The purpose of focusing on these verses is to arouse within us the inspiration we will need to best utilize this spiritually potent day.

2. **Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, Lakewood, N.J., 1988, Vol. II, p. 196 – The proclaiming anew of God's Kingship on Rosh HaShanah is a chance for us to recreate ourselves as servants of God.**

The essence of Rosh Hashanah is Kingship – that God directs us to proclaim Him King over us, as the verse says, "Today is the beginning of Your work, a remembrance of the First Day [of Creation]" This means literal rejuvenation, i.e. one becomes a new person ... God, Blessed be He, gave a person the power of renewal. It is as if he was created today [on Rosh HaShanah] and he accepts upon himself the Kingship of Heaven.

ר"ה יסודו מלכויות שתמליכוני עליכם זה היום תחלת מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון גדרו הוא התחדשות במציאות, כאדם חדש ... נתן הקב"ה לאדם כח של התחדשות והוא בבחינת אדם חדש כאילו היום נברא, ומקבל מלכותו יתברך.

The opportunity for self-renewal is a function of the world being created anew each Rosh HaShanah. This presents an annual opportunity for us to identify with God's Kingdom and achieve extraordinary levels of personal growth.

3. **Rabbi Nosson Weisz, “Why Judgment?” from aish.com – The renewal of God's Kingdom refers to the redistribution of His Divine Energy in the world according to the acts of man.**

The conceptual foundation of Rosh HaShanah is that a created universe has no inertia; it consists entirely of Divine Energy whose input comes up for renewal annually. Each year, God in effect recreates the world by renewing and redistributing the Divine Energy of Creation. This renewal of Creation is referred to in our prayers as the establishment of a brand new Kingdom. This new kingdom isn't merely forests and trees; it is also people and events. The people of the world and the events in which they will be involved in the coming year are powered by Divine Energy just as much as the physical environment they inhabit. The energy that keeps people alive and the energy they must expend in the course of their lives must also be renewed.

In fact, the annual renewal of God's Kingdom is only significant in terms of the changes that take place in people's lives and the developments of human history. God is perfectly happy with the physical universe as is, just as He brought it into being in the Six Days of Creation. When He finished creating the physical universe and all its creatures, He declared, “*And God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good*” (Bereishit/Genesis 1:31). There is no need to tinker with what is already very good.

The only aspect of the Creation that requires readjustment and therefore comes up for review is the arrangement of the forces of nature in terms of the manner in which they impact on people's lives. The Heavenly Court will rearrange the world according to the dictates of the fundamental principles of Divine policy: “whoever undertakes to purify himself, We shall assist him. Whoever undertakes to shut himself to spirituality, We shall provide him the opportunity to carry out his designs.” The world will be recreated in a manner that will place every individual in the circumstances that are precisely appropriate to his situation following these two guidelines.

Because the world is recreated every Rosh HaShanah, the day marks the occasion of the establishment of a brand new Divine Kingdom.

4. **Ibid. – Rosh HaShanah is our opportunity to tell God that we want the opportunity to grow spiritually in the coming year.**

Jewish tradition maintains that God informed us about Rosh HaShanah to allow us to have some input into how this new kingdom is to be fashioned. The purpose of Creation is to allow man to actualize his spiritual potential. As I stand before God on Rosh HaShanah, He is waiting to hear from me about what I plan to do to actualize my spiritual potential in the coming year.

If all that issues from me is my desire to live on in prosperity and good health for another year, I am actually informing God that I do not require the renewal of His Kingdom at all. I am perfectly happy with the world just as it is. But God did not intend this world to be a comfortable place where I merely keep living on and on. He created the World to Come as the place of enjoyment and living the good life. The sole reason for the existence of this world is to provide man with a place in which he can work. If my main interest in being in this world is to live well and enjoy myself, I don't need to be here at all.

On the other hand, if I sincerely resolve to invest my energy [really the Divine Energy that I am asking God to renew, and out of which I am fashioned] in the coming year into developing my spiritual potential, not only do I need this world to be recreated, I also need it to assume the particular shape that will maximize my ability to work efficiently, and develop as much of my potential as possible.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ≈ The verses of Malchiyot focus us on the existence of God and His role as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.
- ≈ On Rosh HaShanah we annually coronate God as King of the Universe. This is done in recognition that, as the annual day of re-creation, God is “deciding” how to reallocate the Divine Energy that keeps Creation going.
- ≈ We do not just recite verses to coronate God; the act of accepting God as King takes internal spiritual work.

SECTION III. REMEMBRANCE (ZICHRONOT) ON ROSH HASHANAH

In Zichronot, we impress upon ourselves the seriousness of the day by openly acknowledging God's creation and absolute mastery of the universe. God has complete knowledge of human events, thoughts, and actions. Since He remembers everything anyone has ever done or thought the basis of His judgment is just. We affirm that God revealed his plan for the world from the earliest times.

It should be noted that Zichronot focuses on the positive aspects of God's memory because, as the Talmud states, on Rosh HaShanah we are not only especially careful to act properly, we also avoid self-incrimination by not even mentioning anything about sin (Rosh HaShanah 32a). This is the source for the custom not to eat certain nuts on Rosh HaShanah for the numerical value of the word for nut, *egoz*, has the same numerical value as the word for sin, *chet*.

We affirm that all of humanity is called to judgment on Rosh HaShanah, and every individual is evaluated on the extent to which he has fulfilled his mission in life. God is praised for acting kindly with people on the basis of His memory. Those who trust in God are themselves lauded for remembering God when they act.

1. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. I, p. 165 – The more we remember God, the more He will remember us.**

The recommendation for Rosh HaShanah is, “Say before Him ... Zichronot (Remembrances) [verses recalling Jewish historical events and our covenant], in order that your remembrance will rise before Him for your benefit” (Rosh HaShanah 16a).

It is understood that it is insufficient to merely recite [these verses]; rather one must articulate them before God in a way that shows that he has truly internalized their meaning. Through the articulation of these verses and the blessing, we need to clarify for ourselves that our entire existence is dependent on the extent that we remember God, Blessed be He.

העצה ליום ראש השנה היא: “אמרו לפני ... זכרונות, כדי שיעלה זכרונכם לפני לטובה” (ראש השנה טז.).

מובן שלא די באמירה בעלמא, אלא צריך להיות אמירה לפני ה', אמירה פנימית אמיתית. על ידי אמירת הפסוקים והברכה, אנחנו צריכים להבהיר לעצמנו שכל חיותנו תלויה במידה ושיעור של זכרון השי"ת.

To the extent to which we remember this, we will merit that our remembrance will rise before Him for our benefit and we will merit an abundance of goodness.

ובאותה מידה שנזכר זאת – נזכה שיעלה זכרוננו לפניו לטובה, שנזכה לשפע הטוב.

In the final section of Zichronot, we plead that God remember us for the good, and that on the basis of this memory He will treat us with greater mercy.

2. **Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts for Rosh HaShanah, pp. 204-5 – In calling upon God to remember certain events we are asking Him to activate the merit of those events in His dealings with us.**

When referring to “remembrance” as applied to God, we must realize that we are merely borrowing a term from our own experience to aid our understanding. Thus, when we mention reminding God of the covenant that He made with our forefathers, we realize that He always “remembers” it. Instead, we are referring to God’s presently activating this idea that is in His constant memory and putting it into action by applying the efforts of our ancestors’ meritorious acts in today’s world ...

[In our prayers] we say, “For it is You ... Who eternally remembers all forgotten things” and “There is no forgetfulness before Your throne of glory.” From this we understand that God always remembers everything, but we immediately add, “May You mercifully remember today the Akeidah (binding) of Yitzchak (Isaac) for the sake of his offspring.” This means that while God perpetually remembers everything, nevertheless on Rosh HaShanah He decides to act on the basis of this memory so that the Akeidah will be a mitigating factor enabling a favorable judgment for His children.

Judaism does not believe in a free lunch; it is not enough simply to recite the verses. We strive to identify with and internalize their message as well.

3. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. II p. 73 – We benefit from God’s remembrance of our ancestors’ righteous actions only if we internalize the lessons of their great acts.**

There are those who remember something, and there are others who remember everything, and there are still others who remember things so well that it is as if it were happening right now. The memory of God, Blessed be He, is certainly in the realm of actually happening, because the past and future are not relevant to Him, rather everything is always in the present ... And this principle is reflected in our prayers: “See before Yourself the Akeidah ...” Only if the Akeidah reminds us and becomes actualized in our hearts, only if we look toward Avraham (Abraham) our father and learn to include ourselves in the Akeidah through our sincere perseverance according to our qualities, based on His Torah and His blessed service, only then is it possible that we can earn to be joined together with the merit of the Akeidah, as seen before God as one continuous chain through all the generations.

יש שזוכר משהו ויש שהדבר חקוק בזכרוננו ויש שזוכר את הענין כאילו הוא חי עדיין לפניו. זכירת השי"ת היא בודאי בבחינת חי ממש, כי לא שייך אצלו עבר ועתיד, אלא הכל בהווה תמיד ... ודבר זה מרומז בתפילה: ... “ותראה לפניך עקידה” ... רק אם העקידה זכורה לנו והיא מציאות בלבנו, רק אם נביט אל אברהם אבינו ונלמד לכלול את עצמינו בעקידה ע"י מסירות נפש שלנו, לפי ערכנו, על תורתו ועל עבודתו ית', רק אז שייך שנזכה שתצטרף אלינו זכות העקידה כשייראו לפני השי"ת שלשלת כל הדורות במאוחד.

Other events that are mentioned in Zichronot include the covenants of God with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov (Jacob), and how the Jewish nation, newly freed from Egypt, unconditionally followed God into the desert to receive the Torah. Here too, we must identify with their unswerving dedication to Judaism.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ≈ God “remembers” us to the extent that we remember Him. Rosh HaShanah is therefore a time to focus on what role God plays in our lives.
- ≈ We call upon God’s favorable memory of the accomplishments of our ancestors so that He will activate their merit when judging us, their descendants.
- ≈ We understand that it is not enough to just mention the past, but that we should strive to live up to the standards set by those who came before us.

SECTION IV. WHY DO WE BLOW THE SHOFAR ON ROSH HASHANAH?

This was my first Rosh HaShanah with observant Jews. The smorgasbord from the unknown had thrown me for a loop. My host was a young rabbi type in a black suit. He had a face full of beard.

“Rosh HaShanah is the day of radical Jewish consciousness,” he said matter-of-factly.

“Judaism is radical?” I asked.

He grabbed his beard and glowered at me in mock rage. “Do I look like a conformist goon to you!?” he shouted. “Our people have been outside the mainstream since the beginning of time. Being a Jew means to be a part of the counter-culture. Did you eat your fenugreek?”

“I don’t get it. What’s this have to do with Rosh HaShanah?”

“On Rosh HaShanah the Jewish idealist declares his dream of global unity. He prays for the day when the whole world will work together under a unified banner. It’s revolutionary”

“How? Every hippie wants global unity.”

“The shofar, man, the shofar. Weren’t you listening?”

I was very confused. I asked if I could leave the table.

“Sure,” my host said. “We don’t believe in religious coercion.”

I was agitated. I walked around for a while thinking. “What is he talking about?” I thought to myself. I went back to my room and looked through a copy of the Rosh HaShanah prayer book. I read some of the commentaries. My host had been right. The prayers did talk about global awareness. Unity was a big theme. I noticed that not only was the goal to unify humanity, but if everything worked according to plan, then on a spiritual level all of Creation would be operating in unison, from rocks and plant life, all the way up to the highest metaphysical realms.

It was a beautiful image. But what was the point? How was this different from any other utopian vision? I reluctantly wandered into synagogue the next morning. I sat in a corner reading about more themes of the day as the people around me prayed. It was hot in the room and there wasn't air conditioning. A few hours into the service, everyone stood up in silence. The only audible sound was the hum of the fans. I felt guilty, so I stood up, too. A man in the center of the room took out a shofar. He blew a number of blasts on command.

I closed my eyes. I felt myself back in the desert. The hot sand kissed my bare feet. I saw camels and Bedouins. I began to appreciate what my host had been talking about. Judaism was earthy. The jagged blast of the horn reverberated in my spine. I woke up. I hadn't been asleep, but I had been. I had been deaf to the real message of Rosh HaShanah. The shofar was a wake-up call. It wasn't about paying lip service to ideological platitudes about a better world. It was about waking up and doing something about it. The shofar was screaming, "Be real. If you want this world to be amazing then get up and do something!"

I wanted to change the world, but first I had to change myself. This is what the shofar had taught me. This was the message of Rosh HaShanah.

After services I ran over to my host.

"I understand you!" I yelled. "I want to put on a robe and wander off into the sunset. I want to dramatically affect humanity. I can make a difference. Where do we begin?"

"After lunch, brother. You can't conquer the world on an empty stomach. Tonight we're eating star fruit."

I was ready for anything. (Revolutionary Shofar by Tzvi Gluckin, aish.com)

As we will soon see, the basic reason we sound the shofar on Rosh HaShanah is because the Torah so commands. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of profound explanations in the Jewish sources, discussed below.

PART A. THE TORAH SOURCE FOR BLOWING THE SHOFAR ON ROSH HASHANAH

1. Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16a – The basic reason is a *chok*, Heavenly decree.

Why do we blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah?
Because the Torah has commanded us to sound the shofar!

למה תוקעין בר"ה... רחמנא אמר תקעו.

2. Bamidbar (Numbers) 29:1 – The Torah source for blowing the shofar.

In the seventh month, on the first of the month, you shall hold a holy gathering, you shall do no work, it shall be a day of sounding the shofar.

ובחדש השביעי באחד לחדש מקרא קדש יהיה לכם
כל מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו יום תרועה יהיה לכם.

PART B. AROUSING THE INNER SELF

Even though the "technical requirement" for blowing the shofar is the Torah obligation cited in A.1 above, known as a "*chok*" – statute, Rambam (Maimonides) teaches us there is an eternal lesson:

1. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah (The Laws of Repentance) 3:4 – A wake-up call to focus on Jewish priorities.

Although the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah is a Scriptural decree, there is a hint to its [performance] which means to say: “Awake you sleepers from your sleep and you slumberers from your dozing, inspect your actions, return in repentance, and remember your Creator.” These are the people who forgot the truth ...

אע"פ שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזירת הכתוב רמז
יש בו כלומר עוררו עוררו ישנים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו
מתרדמתכם וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה וזכרו
בוראכם. אלו השוכחים את האמת...

There are many lovely explanations for why we blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah, but one of the most powerful is given by Moshe Maimonides. For Maimonides the shofar is God's alarm clock, waking us up from the “slumber” in which we spend many of our days. What did he mean?

God's greatest gift to us is time, and He gives it to us on equal terms. Whether we are rich or poor, there are still only 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, and a span of years that is all too short. Often we spend our time on things that in Maimonides' words “neither help nor save.” How many people look back on a lifetime, saying, “I wish I had spent more time at committee meetings?” By contrast, how many say, “I wish I had spent more time with my children, or helping others, or simply enjoying being alive?”

Sometimes we can be so busy making a living that we hardly have time to live. Experts on time management speak about two types of activity: the urgent and the important. Often our days are spent on the urgent, and we lose out on the important. I remember a conversation with someone who had been working seven days a week ... He decided to keep Shabbat. He later told me it was the best decision he ever made. “Now,” he said, “I have time for my wife and child and for my friends. Going to shul has made me part of a community. The strange thing is that the work still gets done, in six days, not seven.”

Shabbat teaches us to take time for what is important, even though it isn't urgent. Thirty years ago, when technology was less advanced, most people who wrote about the future saw it as an age of leisure when we would have far more free time. It has not happened that way. We seem more pressurized than ever and less relaxed. Mobile phones, e-mails and pocket computers mean that we are constantly on call. As Wordsworth said, “The world is too much with us; late and soon / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.” The Psalmist put it best: “Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are when we number our days. Asking to be written in the book of life, we think about life and how we use it. In this context the three key words of the “Unetaneh Tokef” prayer are fundamental: teshuvah (repentance), tefillah (prayer) and tzedakah (charity). Teshuvah is about our relationship with our self. Tefillah is about our relationship with God. Tzedakah is about our relationship with other people.

Teshuvah means not only “repentance” but also “returning” – to our roots, our faith, our people's history and our vocation as heirs to those who stood at Sinai more than 3,000 years ago. Teshuvah asks us: did we grow in the past year or did we stand still? Did we study the texts of our heritage? Did we keep one more mitzvah? Did we live fully and confidently as Jews? Teshuvah is our satellite navigation system giving us a direction in life ...

Knowing that none of us will live forever, we ask God for another year: to grow, to pray and to give. That is what Maimonides meant when he called the shofar “God's alarm call,” asking us not to slumber through life, but to use it to bring blessings. (From Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, God's Alarm Clock, aish.com)

2. Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #405 – The shofar motivates us to pray earnestly.

Since people are physical beings, they can only become inspired from an external source, just like when soldiers rush into battle, who trumpet and shout in order to inspire themselves to fight better.

Rosh HaShanah is the day designated for the judgment of all the inhabitants of the world, as the Rabbis taught: “On Rosh HaShanah all the inhabitants of the world pass before God as *Bnei Maron* ...” Therefore, a person must inspire himself to request mercy from the Master of mercy, and the sound of the shofar can greatly inspire those who hear it.

לפי שהאדם בעל חומר לא יתעורר לדברים כי אם על יד מעורר, כדרך בני אדם בעת מלחמה יריעו אף יצריחו כדי שיתעוררו יפה למלחמה,

וגם כן ביום ראש השנה שהוא היום הנועד מקדם לדון בו כל באי עולם, וכמו שאמרו זכרונם לברכה בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון... על כן צריך כל אחד להעיר טבעו לבקש רחמים על חטאיו מאדון הרחמים... וקול השופר מעורר הרבה לב כל שומעיו.

The Sefer HaChinuch tells us that we must understand the nature of “man,” human beings. As “man” is a creature from the physical realm, he is only aroused and inspired to action by something stirring, something that will cause him to snap out of the ordinary routine. We see this concept in practice at a time of war: In order to stir up the troops, trumpets are sounded, in the hope that this arouses and motivates the soldiers to action. On Rosh HaShanah, we do the same. We “awaken,” by means of the shofar, all who are to be judged on this day. (Rabbi Yehudah Prero, The Shofar: A Wake-Up Call, torah.org)

PART C. THE MECHANISM OF MALCHIYOT AND ZICHRONOT

1. Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16a – The shofar crowns God as King and inspires us to become dedicated to Jewish life.

[God says:]

Recite before Me verses about Kingship, Remembrance, and the shofar.

Verses of Kingship in order to make Me King over you;

Verses of Remembrance in order that I shall remember you in a good light.

With what shall you accomplish this?

With the shofar.

אמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות.

מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם,

זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה.

ובמה?

בשופר.

2. Ritva, ibid. – The shofar is the tool for crowning God as King and arousing His favorable remembrance of us.

The correct interpretation is that [the final clause about shofar] is referring to both of them.

עיקר הפ' דאכולהו קאי.

How shall we make God King and how shall we be remembered in a good light?

Through the blowing of the shofar.

במה ראוי להמליכי ולהזכיר זכרונכם לפני?

בשופר.

3. **Rabbi Avraham of Sochatchov, Ne'ot Desheh, Vol. I, p. 153 – The shofar creates an indelible impression for the entire year.**

It should have been enough to accept God as King in our hearts. However, this would not leave a lasting impression. Only through the act of blowing the shofar is this feeling able to last and influence us throughout the year.

היה די בקבלת עול מלכות שמים בלב בלבד, אלא שלא היה נשאר קיים, אך על ידי שעושין מעשה תקיעת השופר יותר מתקיים ומשפיע לכל השנה.

PART D. IT'S ALL IN THE PREPARATION

1. **Rabbi Yaakov Astor, Hearing the Shofar's Call, www.aish.com – Is the shofar an emotional or intellectual experience?**

The shofar – it has an aura of awe and holiness about it. Its blast can shatter hearts of stone and wash away layers of complacency. Its call is capable of bringing us back to places inside ourselves impenetrable by any other means.

The Baal Shem Tov said, “In the palace of the king there are many chambers and each one needs a different key. There is one key, one instrument, however, which can open all the doors – the ax. The shofar is an ax. When a person passionately breaks his heart before the Almighty, he can smash any gate in the palace of the King of Kings.”

The Baal Shem Tov is teaching that the shofar is an emotional, intuitive way of gaining access to the deepest recesses of our heart, of divine experiential knowledge. Its blast, this wordless sound, speaks to the heart in a way all the greatest words and insights cannot approach.

King David, on the other hand, seems to contradict this. In reference to the shofar he says, “Happy is the people who know the truah [i.e. the shofar blast]” (Psalms 89:16). King David does not say, “Happy is the people who hear the truah.” The emphasis seems to be on intellectualization. Accordingly, we would need to use our intellects with great effort if we truly wanted to benefit from the shofar.

Which is it? Is shofar an emotional, intuitive experience, as the Baal Shem Tov suggests, or is it an intellectual one, as the words of King David imply?

The Dubno Maggid offers a parable that can perhaps help answer this question.

A poor farmer had a wealthy uncle who lived in the city and who once invited him for a visit. Thrilled with the invitation the farmer wasted no time setting out for his rich uncle's home. When he arrived he was greeted warmly and led immediately into a large dining hall with a long table.

As they spoke and shared stories about family, the uncle picked up a brass bell and clanged it. Immediately, a troop of servants emerged from side doors with trays of appetizers. The farmer had never seen such enticing

food in his life. The servants returned to the kitchen quarters and the two relatives continued the conversation. Shortly thereafter, the uncle clanged the bell again and the servants reappeared, taking away the old trays and bringing out new ones with the first course. The farmer's eyes bulged. He had never seen such enormous quantities of food and such dedicated service.

This pattern continued throughout the evening. Each time the uncle rang the bell an entourage of servants answered his call, removing the old food and replacing it with the new. And with each clang the poor farmer was more dumbstruck.

When it was time to leave, the farmer thanked his uncle heartily and made a stop at a local store before rushing home. When he arrived he woke up his wife and excitedly told her. "You'll never believe what I did."

"What?"

"I spent our last penny!"

"You what?!!"

"Don't worry. I spent it on something you will thank me a million times for buying. Here, look." And he took out of his pouch a brass bell just like his uncle's. "This," the farmer said, "is a magic bell." His wife looked at him as if he was crazy. Undaunted, the man said, "You'll see, all I have to do is ring it and, immediately, servants will come out and serve us the most exquisite food which we can eat till our hearts' content."

Of course, the servants didn't appear. The bell possessed no magic. It only worked when used as a signal to servants already waiting in the wings.

2. **Rabbi Yaakov Astor, Hearing the Shofar's Call, www.aish.com – If we work on ourselves prior to Rosh HaShanah, the shofar can then make its ideal impact.**

So, too, the shofar.

For the shofar to really take effect, we have to work on ourselves prior to Rosh HaShanah.

If, beforehand, we have no reservoir of response waiting in the wings, then the shofar has as much ability to move us as that farmer's "magic" bell. For it to work we need to prepare. This is what King David meant when he emphasized the importance of "knowing" the *truah*. We have to work on ourselves prior, inducing the proper frame of mind, for the shofar to really take effect. And this, indeed, is why we blow the shofar every weekday morning during the Hebrew month of Elul until the day before Rosh HaShanah: to sensitize ourselves to its message.

Therefore, we can relate to the shofar emotionally and/or intellectually. Either way, it is best to prepare ourselves to hear the shofar's message. And if for some reason we are not able to prepare, there's always "Plan B" – the importance of listening to the shofar on Rosh HaShanah and acting on the information on hand. It's an opportunity too critical to forego, as we see in the following insight contrasting Yitro who listened and Yoash who did not.

3. **Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon, Matnas Chaim, p. 276 – Listening to the sound of the shofar has the power to improve our ability to hear, understand, and be inspired by God's messages to us.**

We learn more regarding the concept of listening from Yitro. The Sages teach (Midrash Tanchuma Yitro 2):

ועוד בענין שמיעה לומדים מיתרו. חז"ל אמרו (מדרש תנחומא יתרו סימן ב):

“And Yitro heard.’ There are those who hear [the messages in the world around them but do not respond] and lose the opportunity; and there are those who do listen and benefit. Yoash listened but did not act and lost out ... but Yitro heard and benefited.”

The explanation is not that Yoash lost something else by listening; rather he lost [the opportunity presented by] listening itself! [Yoash, also known as Machlon, the son of Elimelech, relinquished hope in the redemption of the Jewish people by marrying and settling in Moab. He should have returned to marry and live in Israel. (See Maharsha, Bava Batra 91b)]

Similarly we see regarding positive things – Yitro profited from the listening itself. As it is written about him: “What did [Yitro] do as a result of his listening?” His act of listening caused him to act; because of it he came to convert.

On Rosh HaShanah we have the merit to develop the power to listen – to listen and to better understand, to become more inspired, and to bring ourselves to action through listening.

“וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ, יֵשׁ שְׁמוֹעַ וְהַפְסִיד וַיֵּשׁ שְׁמוֹעַ וְנִשְׁכַּר, יוֹאֵשׁ שְׁמוֹעַ וְהַפְסִיד וְכוּ’... אֲבָל יִתְרוֹ שְׁמוֹעַ וְנִשְׁכַּר” וכו’, עכ”ל.

אין הביאור שיואש הפסיד דבר אחר ע”י השמיעה, אלא הפסיד את השמיעה עצמה!

וכן הוא במידה טובה – יתרו נשכר את השמיעה עצמה! ומה אמרו עליו – “מה שמועה שמע ובא”, השמיעה הביאה אותו לידי מעשה, שבא להתגייר.

[בראש השנה] יש לנו זכות לפתח את כח השמיעה שלנו – לשמוע ולהבין יותר, ולהתפעל יותר, ולהביא את עצמנו לידי מעשה ע”י השמיעה.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ≈ The Torah gives us a mitzvah to sound a shofar on Rosh HaShanah. At its most basic level this is simply a Divine decree that defies rational explanation. Nevertheless, we can find meaning in this mitzvah and listen to the wake-up call of the shofar blast.
- ≈ If we let the shrill of the shofar penetrate our souls then the messages of Rosh HaShanah will leave an indelible mark on our consciousness.
- ≈ If we work on ourselves prior to Rosh HaShanah, the shofar can then make its ideal impact.
- ≈ If we are not able to prepare for the shofar’s message, there’s always “Plan B” – the importance of acting on the information on hand.

SECTION V. SYMBOLISM OF THE SHOFAR

We have seen that the shofar is God’s choice of instrument for us to use in crowning Him and that it helps lead to a favorable judgment. But how does it do this?

In exploring its symbolism we will gain greater understanding as to why the shofar is so central to what we

are trying to accomplish on Rosh HaShanah. In this section we will explore the following three themes and then see how they are all interrelated: the *Akeidah* (Binding of Isaac), the giving of the Torah at Sinai, and the future Redemption.

PART A. THE AKEIDAH

1. Bereishit 22:1-13a – God tests Avraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son for Him; in the end Avraham offers a ram in place of his son.

After these events, God tested Avraham.
“Avraham!” He said.

“Here I am.”

“Take your son, your only one, the one you love – Yitzchak – and go away to the land of Moriah. Take him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I will tell you.”

Avraham got up early in the morning and saddled his donkey. He took his two men with him, along with his son Yitzchak. He cut wood for the offering, and set out, heading for the place that God had designated. On the third day, Avraham looked up, and saw the place from afar. Avraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go to that place. We will worship and then return to you.”

Avraham took the wood for the offering and placed it on [the shoulders of] his son Yitzchak. He himself took the fire and the slaughter knife, and the two of them went together. Yitzchak spoke with Avraham, his father, and said, “My Father.”

And he replied, “I am here, my son.”

Yitzchak then said, “Here is the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb for the offering?”

“God will provide the lamb for the burnt-offering, my son,” replied Avraham. The two of them continued together.

When they finally came to the place designated by God, Avraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood. He then bound his son Yitzchak, and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. Avraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והאלהים נסה את אברהם
ויאמר אליו אברהם

ויאמר הנני:

ויאמר קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק
ולך לך אל ארץ המריה והעלהו שם לעלה על אחד
ההרים אשר אמר אליך:

וישכם אברהם בבקר ויחבש את חמרו ויקח את שני
נעריו אתו ואת יצחק בנו ויבקע עצי עלה ויקם וילך
אל המקום אשר אמר לו האלהים: ביום השלישי
וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום מרחק: ויאמר
אברהם אל נעריו שבו לכם פה עם החמור ואני והנער
נלכה עד כה ונשתחוה ונשובה אליכם:

ויקח אברהם את עצי העלה וישם על יצחק בנו ויקח
בידו את האש ואת המאכלת וילכו שניהם יחדו: ויאמר
יצחק אל אברהם אביו ויאמר אבי

ויאמר הנני בני

ויאמר הנה האש והעצים ואיה השה לעלה:

ויאמר אברהם אלהים יראה לו השה לעלה בני וילכו
שניהם יחדו:

ויבאו אל המקום אשר אמר לו האלהים ויבן שם
אברהם את המזבח ויערך את העצים ויעקד את יצחק
בנו וישם אתו על המזבח ממעל לעצים: וישלח אברהם
את ידו ויקח את המאכלת לשחט את בנו:

God's angel called to him from heaven and said, "Avraham! Avraham!"

And he replied, "I am here."

"Do not harm the boy. Do not do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God. You have not withheld your only son from Him."

Avraham then looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. Avraham went and took the ram, and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

ויקרא אליו מלאך יקוק מן השמים ויאמר אברהם אברהם

ויאמר הנני:

ויאמר אל תשלח ידך אל הנער ואל תעש לו מאומה כי עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלהים אתה ולא חשכת את בן את יחידך ממני:

וישא אברהם את עינו וירא והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך בקרנו וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעלה תחת בנו:

While Jewish law does not require that a shofar be made specifically from a ram's horn, nevertheless such has been the prevalent custom among the Jewish people for thousands of years.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16a – The shofar from a ram reminds God of the Akeidah and gives us the merit of that incredible act.**

Rabbi Avahu said: Why do we blow with a shofar from a ram? God said, "Blow with a shofar of a ram in order that I should recall the binding of Yitzchak, son of Avraham, and I will thereby consider it as if you had bound yourselves before Me."

אמר רבי אבהו: למה תוקעין בשופר של איל? - אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: תקעו לפני בשופר של איל, כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק בן אברהם, ומעלה אני עליכם כאילו עקדתם עצמכם לפני.

3. **Ritva, Rosh HaShanah 16a – Using the shofar from a ram shows our love for the mitzvah.**

This does not mean to say that it is obligatory to blow with the horn of a ram ... Rather, Rabbi Avahu was bothered by the following question: since any curved horn will do, why have the Jewish people adopted the custom to use a ram's horn specifically? ... Evidently it must be as he says [to allude to the Akeidah]. We go to lengths to do this even though it is just a custom.

Nevertheless, God says that He has promised Avraham that whenever his descendants go in his ways and perform a mitzvah with love that He will recall the Akeidah, as the verse says, "On the Mount of God it shall be seen." As such, it may be said that God is telling us, "Blow before Me with a shofar from a ram by which you show your love for this mitzvah, which is a remembrance of the Akeidah, and since you go in the ways of Avraham I will then consider it as if I told you to bind yourselves before Me and you did so."

לאז למימרא שיהא חובה לתקוע בשופר של איל ... אלא לפי שנהגו כל ישראל לתקוע בשופר של איל קבעי ר' אבהו מאחר שכל שופר כפוף סגי ואפילו למצוה מן המובחר מפני מה נהגו לתקוע בשופר של איל ... אלא ודאי כדאמרן, והא דמהדרינן אמר הקב"ה, אע"ג דאינו אלא מנהג.

מ"מ הרי הבטיח הקב"ה לאברהם שכל זמן שמוחזיקין בדרכיו ועושין המצוה בחיבה שיזכור להם עקידתו שנאמר בהר ה' יראה, ומשום הכי אפשר לומר אמר הקב"ה תקעו לפני בשופר של איל שאתם מחבבין מצוה בו וזכר לעקידת יצחק והולכין בדרכיו מעלה אני עליכם כאילו אמרתי לכם לעקוד עצמכם לפני ועשיתם.

PART B. THE GIVING OF THE TORAH**1. Shemot 19:16, 19 – The Revelation at Mount Sinai was accompanied by the sound of the shofar.**

The third day arrived. There was thunder and lightning in the morning, with a heavy cloud on the mountain, and an extremely loud blast of a ram's horn. The people in the camp trembled.

There was the sound of a ram's horn, increasing in volume to a great degree. Moshe (Moses) spoke, and God replied with a Voice.

ויהי ביום השלישי בהית הבקר ויהי קלת וברקים וענן
כבד על ההר וקל שפר חזק מאד ויחרד כל העם אשר
במחנה:

ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאד משה ידבר והאלהים
יענו בקול:

2. Rosh HaShanah Machzor, Mussaf Prayer – God appeared at Mount Sinai amid the sound of the shofar.

You were revealed in Your cloud of glory to Your holy people to speak with them. From the heavens You made them hear Your voice and revealed Yourself to them in thick clouds of purity. Moreover, the entire universe shuddered before You and the creatures of Creation trembled before You during Your revelation, our King, on Mount Sinai to teach your people Torah and commandments. You made them hear the majesty of Your voice and Your holy utterances from fiery flames. Amid thunder and lightning You were revealed to them and with the sound of the shofar You appeared to them.

אתה נגלית בענן כבודך על עם קדשך לדבר עמם. מן
השמים השמעתם קולך, ונגלית עליהם בערפלי טהר.
גם כל העולם כלו חל מפניך, ובריות בראשית חרדו
מך, בהגלותך מלכנו על הר סיני:
ללמוד לעמך תורה ומצוות. ותשמיעם את הוד קולך,
ודברות קדשך מלהבות אש. בקולות וברקים עליהם
נגלית, ובקול שופר עליהם הופעת.

PART C. BEACON OF THE REDEMPTION**1. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 27:13 – The final Redemption will be initiated with a great shofar blast.**

And it shall come to pass on that day that a great shofar shall be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those exiled in the land of Mitzrayim shall come and they shall prostrate themselves before the Lord on the holy mount in Jerusalem.

והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול ובאו האבדים
בארץ אשור והנדחים בארץ מצרים והשתחוו ליקוק
בהר הקדש בירושלם:

2. Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Zuta 22:8 – A shofar blast will herald the coming of the Mashiach and the ingathering of the exiles.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha says, "The shofar was only created for the benefit of the Jewish people, for [with the blowing of] the shofar the Torah was given to them ... and through [the blowing of] the shofar the walls of Jericho collapsed ... and in the future the Holy One, Blessed be He, will sound the shofar at the time when the son of David, our

רבי יהושע בן קרחה אומר לא נברא שופר אלא לטובה
לישראל שבשופר נתנה התורה לישראל... ובשופר
נפלה חומת יריחו... ובשופר עתיד הקב"ה לתקוע בעת
שיתגלה בן דוד צדקנו... ובשופר עתיד הקב"ה לתקוע
בשעה שמכנס גליות ישראל למקומן...

righteous one, will be revealed ... and in the future the Holy One, Blessed be He, will sound the shofar at the time of the ingathering of the exiles ...”

3. **Rosh HaShanah Machzor, Mussaf – The shofar is a symbol of freedom yet to come.**

Sound the great shofar for our freedom; raise the banner to gather our exiles. Draw our scattered ones near from among the nations, and bring in our dispersions from the ends of the earth!

תקע בשופר גדול לחרותנו, וישא נס לקבץ גלותינו,
וקרב פזוֹרֵינוּ מִבֵּין הַגּוֹיִם, וּנְפֻצוֹתֵינוּ כְּנֶס מִיִּרְכְּתֵי אֶרֶץ.
וְהִבֵּיאֵנוּ לְצִיּוֹן עִירְךָ בְּרִנָּה וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם בֵּית מִקְדָּשְׁךָ
בְּשִׂמְחַת עוֹלָם,

PART D. CONNECTING THE DOTS

Blowing the shofar on Rosh HaShanah at once invokes the Akeidah as well as the giving of the Torah, the future Redemption, and the ultimate crowning of God as King. But, as the sources below demonstrate, these are not three disparate themes unrelated to each other. Rather, these three themes are intimately intertwined.

1. **Pirkei D' Rabbi Eliezer 31 – By invoking the ram that Avraham offered in lieu of Yitzchak, we not only recall the Akeidah itself, but also many events and personalities throughout Jewish history.**

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa said, “Nothing went to waste from the ram [that Avraham brought in lieu of Yitzchak]. Its ashes form the foundation of the inner altar (of the Temple). Its sinews were made into strings for the harp that King David played. Its skin was used for Elijah the Prophet's loincloth. Its horns: the left was blown from at Mount Sinai, while its right, which is bigger than its left, will be blown from in the future to come, as the verse says, ‘The day will come when He will blow the great shofar and God will be King over the entire earth.’”

ר' חנינא בן דוסא אומ' אותו האיל לא יצא ממנו דבר
לבטלה, אפרו של איל הוא יסוד שעל גבי המזבח
הפנימי..., גידיו של איל הם עשרה כנגד עשרה נבלים
של כנור שהיה דוד מנגן בהם, עורו של איל הוא אזור
מתניו של אליהו... שתי קרניו של איל שופרות, בשל
שמאל נשמע קולו הקדוש ברוך הוא על הר סיני... וקרן
של ימין הוא גדול מן השמאל ועתיד לתקוע בו לעתיד
לבא בקבוצ של גליות, שנ' והיה ביום ההוא יתקע
בשופר גדול.

2. **Based on Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts for Rosh HaShanah, p. 233 – The spiritual power to accept the Torah unconditionally was rooted in the Jewish people through the Akeidah.**

Through the complete dedication of our forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, to God on Mount Moriah, Israel merited to receive the Torah at Sinai. It was this spiritual power which led the Jewish people to declare the seemingly incomprehensible words “we will do” and only afterwards “we will understand.” This power stemmed from the fact that Avraham and Yitzchak carried out the feat of heeding and only subsequently understanding the seemingly unfathomable command of the Akeidah. There, on Mount Moriah, the strength and unique ability to say “we will do and we will understand” was implanted into the hearts of the Jewish people.

3. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Ma'amar HaChochmah (An Essay on Wisdom) – The shofar initiated the process of perfecting the world when the Torah was given; it will again be present when that process comes to its completion.**

The first major step toward the perfection of the world was accompanied by a shofar blowing, as the verse states [regarding the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai], “The sound of the shofar was gaining in strength.”

[And it will accompany] the final completion of the world in the future, when good will completely triumph over evil, as it is written [in the prophecy describing the coming of the Mashiach], “He will blow a great shofar blast ...”

We are commanded to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah to reinforce the perfection that began at the giving of the Torah, and to prepare the future for what will be done then.

החיוזק הא' שנעשה לטוב נעשה על ידי השופר דמתן תורה והוא ענין ויהי קול השופר וכו',

והשלמת התיקון לעתיד לבא שהטוב ינצח נצחון גמור, גם הוא יהיה על ידי השופר והוא ענין יתקע בשופר גדול...

ואולם נצטוונו לתקוע בשופר בראש השנה לחזק התיקון העשוי כבר במתן תורה ולהזמין העתיד ליעשות לעתיד לבא.

4. **Talmud Yerushalmi, Ta'anit 2:4 – The horn of the Akeidah will be used to signal the final Redemption.**

Rabbi Yudah bar Simon said: God said to Avraham, “In the future your descendants will be caught up in many transgressions and they will suffer much hardship. Yet in the end they will be redeemed with the horns of this ram, as the verse says, ‘The Lord, Your God, will sound the shofar, etc.’” (Zechariah 9).

א"ר יודא בר' סימון [אמר ל' הקב"ה לאברהם] אחר כל הדורות עתידין בניך ליאחז בעונות ולהסתבך בצרות וסופן להגאל בקרניו של איל הזה, שנאמר (זכריה ט') וה' אלהים בשופר יתקע וגו':

As the birthday of Creation, Rosh HaShanah is the day upon which we express our longing for the purpose of Creation to be finally realized. “And God will be King over all the earth; on that day God will be One and His name will be One” (Ovadiah 1:21).

5. **Avudraham, Machzor, Rosh HaShanah – A summary of ten ideas to focus on during the shofar blasts.**

Rav Saadiah wrote ten explanations why the Creator, Blessed be He, commanded us to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah:

1. Rosh HaShanah marks the beginning of God's Creation of the world and His rulership over it. Just as it is customary to sound trumpets and cornets at the inauguration of a new king to publicize the beginning of his reign throughout his kingdom so do we proclaim God's sovereignty on this day.

כתב רבנו סעדיה מה שצונו הבורא יתברך לתקוע בשופר בר"ה יש בוזה י' ענינים.

הענין הא' מפני שהיום היתה תחלת הבריאה שבו ברא הקב"ה את העולם ומלך עליו וכן עושין המלכים בתחלת מלכותם שתוקעים לפניהם בחצוצרות ובקרנות להודיע ולהשמיע בכ"מ התחלת מלכותם. וכן אנו ממליכים עלינו את הבורא ליום זה...

2. Rosh HaShanah is the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance, so the shofar is sounded to publicize ... the opportunity for those who want to repent to do so.
3. To remind us of [receiving the Torah] at Mount Sinai ... to reaffirm that which our forefathers accepted upon themselves by saying, "We will do, and we will understand."
4. To remind us of the words of the Prophets, which are compared to the blowing of the shofar.
5. To remind us of the destruction of the Temple ...
6. To remind us of the Binding of Yitzchak ...
7. That when we hear the shofar blasts we will have profound awe [of God].
8. To be reminded of the final Day of Judgment ...
9. To remind us of the Ingathering of the Exiles ...
10. To remind us of the Resurrection of the Dead and to [awaken] our belief in it ...

והענין הב' כי יום ר"ה הוא ראשון לעשרת ימי תשובה ותוקעין בו בשופר ... כמי שמזהיר ואומר כל הרוצה לשוב ישוב...

והענין הג' להזכירנו מעמד הר סיני ... ונקבל ... מה שקבלו אבותינו על עצמם נעשה ונשמע.

והענין הד' להזכירנו דברי הנביאים שנמשלו כתקיעת שופר ...

והענין הה' להזכירנו חרבן בית המקדש...

והענין הו' להזכירנו עקידת יצחק...

והענין הז' כשנשמע תקיעת שופר נירא ונחרד ... לפני הבורא.

והענין הח' להזכיר יום הדין הגדול...

והענין הט' להזכירנו קבוץ נדחי ישראל...

והענין הי' להזכירנו תחיית המתים ולהאמין בה...

KEY THEMES OF SECTION V:

- ⌘ The Jewish people have adopted the custom of using a ram's horn for the shofar. This is a way to recall the Akeidah of Yitzchak that ended with the sacrifice of a ram instead of Yitzchak himself. While such a practice is not required in order to fulfill the mitzvah of blowing the shofar, nevertheless doing so is our way of showing our love of the mitzvah. In this way we are actually following the path of our forefathers who followed God's command with love by performing the Akeidah.
- ⌘ The self-sacrifice of the Akeidah laid the spiritual groundwork for the unconditional acceptance of the Torah by the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. As such, this event was appropriately accompanied by the sounds of a shofar.
- ⌘ The shofar will also be used in the future to herald the coming of the Mashiach and to initiate the ingathering of the exiles. At that point, the perfection of Creation initiated on an individual basis by Avraham, and on a national level by the Jews who received the Torah, will come to completion.

CLASS SUMMARY:

HOW CAN ROSH HASHANAH JUMP-START A SUSTAINED EFFORT TO REACH MY POTENTIAL?

- ✧ Rosh HaShanah is like the Big Bang. On Rosh HaShanah we confront our ultimate potential. Each one of us, with our lives, will create an entire universe. Each one of us possesses a profoundly immense and unique potential. The question is this: will the universe we create be a true reflection of the potential we possess? By focusing on and integrating the essential themes of Rosh HaShanah expressed in the Mussaf service, we can begin developing the framework to reach our potential.

WHY DOES THE ROSH HASHANAH PRAYER SERVICE FOCUS ON KINGSHIP, REMEMBRANCE, AND THE SHOFAR?

- ✧ In general, Kingship, Remembrance, and shofar focus on three central principles of Jewish belief: the existence of God, reward and punishment, and the Divinity of the Torah.

HOW DOES ROSH HASHANAH PROVIDE AN EXTRAORDINARY ANNUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR REJUVENATION?

- ✧ Kingship relates not only to God's existence but to His active control of the universe. As the anniversary of the day of Creation, Rosh HaShanah is the day upon which God's Kingship is renewed. As such, we focus our energies on coronating God as King of the Universe, as well as King of our own little universe.
- ✧ The conceptual foundation of Rosh HaShanah is that a created universe has no inertia; it consists entirely of Divine Energy whose input comes up for renewal annually. Each year, God in effect recreates the world by renewing and redistributing the Divine Energy of Creation.
- ✧ The purpose of Creation is to allow man to actualize his spiritual potential. As I stand before God on Rosh HaShanah, He is waiting to hear from me about what I plan to do to actualize my spiritual potential in the coming year. This provides the opportunity to identify with God's Kingdom, draw from this Divine Energy, and prepare a basis for higher levels of personal growth during the coming year.

WHAT PIVOTAL EVENTS IN JEWISH HISTORY ARE MENTIONED IN THE ROSH HASHANAH PRAYERS AND WHY?

- ✧ On Rosh HaShanah we recall the great acts of our ancestors, such as the covenants of God with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov; the Akeidah; and the fact that the Jewish nation, that had just been freed from Egypt, unconditionally followed God into the desert to receive the Torah. In doing so we are not literally reminding God, but asking that He should activate His memory of these events and deal more mercifully with us in light of them.
- ✧ Just mentioning these events alone is not enough. What will give us merit in God's eyes is the attempt on our part to live up to the high standards of our ancestors.

WHY DO WE LISTEN TO THE BLOWING OF THE SHOFAR ON ROSH HASHANAH AND WHAT MESSAGES SHOULD WE TAKE FROM IT?

- ✧ While the shofar is essentially a non-rational mitzvah, we can glean several messages from it. It is as if God is sounding an alarm and telling us that it is time to wake up from our spiritual slumber.
- ✧ Within the context of Malchiyot and Zichronot, we can see that the shofar serves as a tool for crowning God King, bringing that message into clearer focus for us.
- ✧ The shofar, or more specifically a shofar made from a ram's horn, is an allusion to the Akeidah, the Binding of Yitzchak. As such it is a symbol of the Jewish dedication to fulfilling the Will of God.
- ✧ Similarly, the shofar blasts also allude to the giving of the Torah, which was itself accompanied by such sounds. Here we again express our dedication to the fulfillment of God's Will as it is expressed in the Torah.
- ✧ The Prophets tell us that the final Redemption will also be accompanied by shofar blasts; hence blowing the shofar on Rosh HaShanah expresses our wish that God's plan for Creation come to fruition.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

Rabbi E. E. Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Volume II

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, *Sifsei Chaim*, *Moadim*, Volume I