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In order to achieve this, we have created a dynamic, original curriculum that features:

- Thought-provoking issues
- Helpful, informative synopses
- Materials for 40 minutes of study
- Clear, easily understandable language and layout
- Challenging questions to consider at the end of each lesson

Our sincere aspiration is that your learning leaves you with a distinct sense of personal enrichment and a desire to continue growing in your studies.

We look forward to making many more rewarding learning experiences available to you in the future.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehoshua Werde
Director

P.s. Please email me with any comments or questions at Director@torahlp.com

ב"ה



Lesson Outline

- What is Rosh Hashanah?
- The Names of Rosh Hashanah
- There's More than One Rosh Hashanah!
- How did Rosh Hashanah become a day of judgement?
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- A Day of Judgement for All Creation
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Rosh Hashanah

What is Rosh Hashanah all about?

There are various things we say and do during Rosh Hashanah, as well as ideas and events that Rosh Hashanah represents, how do we make sense of them all? (At least the big ones)

And when we daven that we be inscribed and sealed for a shanah tovah umesukah, a good and sweet new year, what does that mean? And what happens when I don't daven well? Do I chas veshalom not make it into the book of life? How do these things work?

What is Rosh Hashanah?

When you think of Rosh Hashanah, a few central themes come to mind:

1. The beginning of the Jewish new year
2. The day that commemorates the creation of the world
3. A day of judgement
4. The day we coronate Hashem as King
5. A day when we blow the shofar

The Names of Rosh Hashanah

From all of these themes, the Torah refers to Rosh Hashanah as:

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן זְכוֹרֹן תְּרוּעָה

*In the seventh month, on the first of the month,
shall be a day of rest for you, a memorial
proclamation with the blast of the shofar*

The posuk refers to it simply as a Yomtov on which the shofar is blown. Similarly, and even more clearly, in Bamidbar (29:1) Rosh Hashanah is referred to simply as “yom teruah” a day of blowing the shofar.

Only in the Mishnah do we first find that it is called Rosh Hashanah (the beginning of the year).

Interestingly, while Rosh Hashanah represents the start of a new year, Tishrei is not the first month of the year, it's the seventh month counting from Nissan.

In fact...

There's More than One Rosh Hashanah!

Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1

ארבעה ראשי שנים הם: באחד בניסן, ראש השנה למלכים ולרגלים. באחד באלול, ראש השנה למעשר בהמה; רבי אלעזר ורבי שמעון אומרין, באחד בתשרי. באחד בתשרי, ראש השנה לשנים לשמיטים וליובלות, ולנטיעה ולירקות. באחד בשבט, ראש השנה לאילן, כדברי בית שמאי; בית הלל אומרין, בחמישה עשר בו.

*There are four New Years. On the first of Nissan is
the New Year regarding kings and the Festivals. On
the first of Elul is the New Year for the tithing of*

the cattle. Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say: on the first of Tishrei. On the first of Tishrei is the New Year for the shemittah and the Yoveil count, for planting and for vegetables. On the first of Shevat is the New Year for trees according to the words of the School of Shammai, but the School of Hillel say: It is on the fifteenth of the month.

The Rosh Hashanah we know, is therefore only really the Rosh Hashanah for certain things, including for counting a new year.

In the shemona esrei, in kidush, and in candle lighting, we refer to Rosh Hashanah as Yom Hazikaron, a day of remembrance. It is called this because our actions are judged on Rosh Hashanah and we implore Hashem to remember us for the good.

How did Rosh Hashanah become a day of judgement?

As we know, Rosh Hashanah is the day when Adam was created, it is also the day he sinned by eating the fruits of the Eitz Hadaas and was judged for his actions:

Vayikra Rabbah 29:1

ביום ר"ה בשעה ראשונה עלה במחשבה בשניה נתייעץ עם מלאכי השרת בשלישית כנס עפרו ברביעית גבלו בה' רקמו בו' עשאו גולם בו' נפח בו' נשמה בח' הכניסו לגן בט' נצטווה בי' עבר י"א נידון בי"ב יצא בדימוס. אמר הקב"ה לאדם זה סימן לבניך כשם שעמדת לפני בדין היום הזה ויצאת בדימוס כך עתידין בניך לעמוד לפני בדין ביום זה ויוצאין לפני בדימוס

On the day of Rosh Hashanah, in the first hour the idea of creating man entered Hashem's mind; in the second hour He took counsel with the Ministering Angels; in the third He assembled Adam's dust; in the fourth He kneaded it; in the fifth He shaped him; in the sixth He made him into a lifeless body; in the seventh He breathed a soul into him; in the eighth He brought him into Gan Eden; in the ninth [Adam] was commanded [against eating from the fruit of the Eitz Hadaas]; in the tenth he transgressed; in the eleventh he was judged; in the twelfth he was pardoned. Hashem said to Adam: "This will be a model for your descendants: just as you stood before me in judgment on this day and left with clemency, so the future generations of your descendants will stand before me in judgment on this day and will leave with clemency."

How does the judgment on Rosh Hashanah work?

Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16b

א"ר כרוספדאי א"ר יוחנן שלשה ספרים נפתחין בר"ה אחד של רשעים גמורין ואחד של צדיקים גמורין ואחד של בינוניים צדיקים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה בינוניים תלוין ועומדין מר"ה ועד יוה"כ זכו נכתבין לחיים לא זכו נכתבין למיתה.

Rabbi Cruspedai said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "Three books are opened on Rosh HaShanah: One of totally evil people, one of

completely righteous people, and one that includes people with both good and bad deeds [Beinonim]. The completely righteous individuals are written and sealed immediately for life. The totally wicked individuals are written and sealed immediately for death. The [sentence for the] individuals with both good and bad deeds is suspended from Rosh HaShanah until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are inscribed for life, if they do not merit, they are inscribed for death.”

Why don't all reshaim die?

If reshaim are immediately inscribed in the book of death, each year we would see all reshaim dying over the course of the year. Obviously, this does not appear to be the case. What does the Gemarah mean when it says that reshaim are written and sealed immediately for death?

Tosefos, ibid.

וכל זה דקרי הכא גבי רשעים מיתה וגבי צדיקים חיים כלומר לחי עולם הבא.

Therefore, the definitions of death for the wicked and life for the righteous refer to life in the World to Come.

What are the books of life and death?

What type of life and death in the World to Come do you think this is referring to? (And isn't the world to come after death, or at a time when everyone will live forever when

Moshiach comes?)

The World to Come is the world of truth. It is the reality in which the truth about everything is revealed.

Talmud Bavli, Berachos 18b

והמתים אינם יודעים מאומה אלו רשעים שבחייהן קרויין מתים

“And the deceased know nothing” this refers to the wicked who even in their lifetimes are called deceased.

Obviously, we are dealing with a different definition of life and death to the literal one. What does it mean to be alive? When someone is alive, the neshamah fills and animates the body, however, when the neshamah leaves the body, the body can no longer remain alive.

Every aveirah that we transgresses disconnects us from our neshamah, from our connection to Hashem (our life-source). Whereas every mitzvah we perform, connects us with our neshamah.

A wicked person is one who has disconnected from his neshamah, and is spiritually dead.

During the time of Beis Hamikdash, the spiritual state of death would take hold physically as well and reshaim would die young. This makes sense if we accept that the spiritual is what powers the physical, and when the spiritual vitality leaves the body, so does the physical.

Tanya, Igeres Hateshuvah Ch. 6

כשעבר עבירה שחייבים עליה כרת, הי' מת ממש קודם חמשים שנה

A violator of a sin punishable by kareis would actually die before his fiftieth year.

The Alter Rebbe explains why:

Ibid., Ch. 5

גם בחייב כרת ומיתה, נשאר עדיין בו הרשימו מנפשו האלקית ועל ידי זה יכול לחיות עד נ' או ס' שנה, ולא יותר

Even if one has incurred kareis or death (by the hand of heaven), there yet remains an impression within him of his Divine soul, and through this he may live until fifty or sixty years, but no more.

So why do we find that this isn't this the case anymore?

Ibid., Ch. 6

אמנם זהו בזמן שהיו ישראל במדרגה עליונה, כשהיתה השכינה שורה בישראל בבית המקדש ואז לא היו מקבלים חיות לגופם רק על ידי נפש האלקית לבדה...אך לאחר שירדו ממדרגתם, וגרמו במעשיהם סוד גלות השכינה... אזי יכול גם החוטא ופושעי ישראל לקבל חיות לגופם ונפשם הבהמיות כמו שאר בעלי חיים ממש

However, all this applied when Yidden were on an elevated level, when the Divine Presence dwelt among the Jewish people in the Beis HaMikdash. then the body received its vitality only through the divine soul...But they then fell from their estate, and through their actions brought about the mystic exile of the Divine Presence...Hence, even the sinful and deliberate Jewish transgressors may receive vitality

[from it] for their bodies and animal souls, exactly as other living creatures do.

The Alter Rebbe explains that nowadays, during golus, we receive our vitality in a similar way to non-Jews, animals, and other creatures—unrelated to our performance of Torah and Mitzvos. This is only because the G-dly nature of reality is hidden. However, behind the scenes, in the reality of “the World to Come,” reshaim are instantly inscribed and sealed in the book of death, a natural consequence for their behavior.

A Day of Judgement for All Creation

Earlier, we saw in the Midrash that Rosh Hashanah is the day when man is judged, because it is the day when man was created, and also the day he sinned and was judged.

Yet, we find that it is considered the day of creation for all other creatures as well, and they too are judged on Rosh Hashanah:

Rosh Hashanah Musaf

הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הָרַת עוֹלָם הַיּוֹם יַעֲמִיד בְּמִשְׁפָּט כָּל יְצוּרֵי עוֹלָמִים

Today is the birthday of the world; on this day, He calls all the created beings of the worlds to stand in judgement.

When was the world created?

“The birthday of the world” implies that Rosh Hashanah is the day the world was created. However, not all creations were created on Rosh Hashanah:

Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 29:1

תני בשם ר"א בכ"ה באלול נברא העולם

It was taught in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: On the 25th day of Elul the world was created.

If creation began five days before Rosh Hashanah, why is Rosh Hashanah the birthday of the world?

If we look carefully at the musaf of Rosh Hashanah, we find it doesn't refer to the day as the day the world was created as we say elsewhere in musaf:

Rosh Hashanah Musaf

זה היום תחלת מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון

This is the day which is the beginning of Your work, a remembrance of the first day

Rosh Hashanah is considered “the beginning of Your work,” yet it is only “a remembrance of the first day,” it was not actually the first day of creation.

Why isn't Rosh Hashanah on the day of creation?

Why is the Rosh Hashanah for *all* of creation established on the sixth day—the day man was created—instead of on the first day of creation? And why is man's creation considered “the beginning of Your work?”

The Alter Rebbe asks this question in Likutei Torah:

Likutei Torah, Devarim 54d

בכ"ה באלול נברא העולם ור"ה הוא יום ו' לבריאת העולם יום בריאת

אדה"ר, וצ"ל למה אין עושין ר"ה בזמן חידוש העולם ממש שהוא יום ראשון למע"ב.

The world was created on the 25th of Elul and Rosh Hashanah is on the sixth day of creation—the day on which Adam Harishon was creation. So, why don't we celebrate Rosh Hashanah on the actual day the world was created, which is the first day of creation?

Calling Creation's Bluff

The Alter Rebbe answers by examining what actually took place in creation, and why Hashem created the world in the first place.

We tend to think about creation as a transition from nothing into something, from lack of existence to existence.

In reality, for Hashem, creating is not a process of revealing an existence that didn't exist before, but of concealing His infinite light to enable a finite reality to take shape (within our limited perception).

The ultimate purpose of this concealment is for man to call creation's bluff and reveal Hashem's presence in the world.

Kingship vs. Dominion

This is the key theme of Rosh Hashanah, to coronate Hashem as king, by revealing the true reality, that all is under Hashem's dominion and is really just concealed G-dliness.

However "kingship" is not when Hashem has a world to dominate, but when He has subjects who submit themselves

to His will, and this can only be accomplished by man!

Ibid., 55b

מלכותו נק' מה שמקבלים מלכותו ברצון כמ"ש שום תשים עליך מלך
כי בלא רצון נק' ממשלה

Kingship is when they accept kingship wilfully as the posuk says "appoint you shall appoint over you a king" because when it is unwillful, it is [not called kingship but] dominion.

The Alter Rebbe thus answers the question:

Ibid.

עושים ר"ה ביום ו' ביום ברוא אדה"ר שאז היה התחלת גילוי מלכותו
ית' להיות היש בטל לאין, משא"כ חמשת ימי המעשה הראשונות היו
רק סדר ההשתלשלות מאין ליש יהי אור יהי רקיע תדשא הארץ וכו'

We [therefore] celebrate Rosh Hashanah on the sixth day [of creation], the day of Adam's creation, because that was the beginning of the revelation of Hashem's Kingship, i.e., for all existence to become nullified to the nothingness from which it was created; whereas during the five preceding days of creation, there was only the order of descent from nothingness into existence, "Let there be light," "Let there be a firmament" "Let the earth sprout" etc.

We appoint Hashem as our King by rejecting the desires of our heart and subjecting ourselves wholly to His will.

This was not present during the first five days of creation, as

the creations of the other days are programmed to behave in certain ways always following instinct and don't have the ability to overcome and act against their nature. This trait is strictly human.

This is why one cannot be a king over animals, because animals cannot subject themselves to another's will (a dog can follow orders e.g., to retrieve a bone and receive a reward, but only when there is a reward, never because dogs can choose to act against their will and nature). And if this is true of animals, certainly it is true of other creations as well. Only man can appoint a king.

How do we coronate Hashem as king?

So only we can do it, but what is it that we must do in order to live up to the purpose of creation and appoint Hashem as our king?

Ibid.

והיינו דרך כלל על ידי תורה ומצות... כי המצות עיקרן הוא לעשותן בבחי' בטל רצונך סור מרע ועשה טוב לכוף את לבו הגשמי ולהכניע תחת יד הקדושה...ע"י האדם העושה אותן בבחי' ביטול רצונו למעלה מטבעו והרגלו להפוך את לבו מן הקצה אל הקצה שכל מה שלבו נוטה במטבעו לעשות לא יעשה ומה שלבו נוטה שלא לעשות יעשה.

And this is generally achieved through torah and mitzvos...since the primary function of mitzvos is to perform them in a manner of nullifying your will by turning away from evil and doing good...by man going beyond his nature and habitual practice to transform his heart from one extreme to the other,

that he refrains from doing everything his heart is naturally inclined to want to do and doing what his heart is inclined to not want to do...

Rosh Hashanah in a nutshell is about committing to not doing everything you'd like to do, and instead doing only what Hashem wants (i.e., Torah and mitzvos).

The reason for this is because originally, before it descended into this world, the neshamah was united with Hashem, and through the creation process, it was sent to a place that is distant from its source. The purpose of creation is to return the neshamah to its spiritual high. We achieve this by revealing that our true will is not to do all the earthly things that we crave, rather to do what Hashem wants, and by doing so we make Hashem King over us and announce His Kingship to the world.

Why we cry on Rosh Hashanah (and blow the shofar)

This explains another interesting idea related to Rosh Hashanah that is found in the writings of the Arizal:

Ibid.

ולכן איתא בכתבי האריז"ל כל מי שאינו בוכה בר"ה אזי אין נשמתו שלימה. ולכאורה מה ענין בוכה אל ר"ה. אך ע"פ הנ"ל יובן שהבוכה היא לנשמתו דוקא שירדה ממקום כבוד ונתגשמה. וזהו מים התחתונים בוכין אנן בעינן למהוי קדם מלכא כדאיתא במדרש בשעה שהבדיל הקב"ה בין מים למים נקראים מים התחתונים בשם מי בוכים שבוכין על ירידתן בבחי' מים תחתונים וצועקין אנן בעינן למהוי קדם מלכא. וזהו ענין תקיעת שופר... קול פשוט הוא בחי' התשוקה ברעותא

This is why it says in the writings of the Arizal that one who does not cry on Rosh Hashanah, his Neshamah is not complete. Seemingly, what does crying have to do with Rosh Hashanah? But based on the above it is understood since the crying is for the Neshamah that descended from its place of honor and materialised. And this is the lower waters crying "we want to be before the king" as stated in the Midrash that when Hashem separated the higher and lower waters, the lower waters are called weeping waters, because they weep over their descent to become lower waters and they cry out "we want to be before the king." And this is the concept behind blowing the Shofar...the idea of a simple call, the yearning of the heart's arousal and...the aforementioned concept of crying

The sound of the shofar is the call of the Yiddishe neshamah sensing that it has been estranged from its home in the heavenly palace and been banished from Avinu Malkeinu, from our Father, our King, wishing to return home.

Recalling the Akeidah

As we have seen, the theme of Rosh Hashanah is to go against our nature to serve Hashem. This is why for kriyas hatorah on the second day of Rosh Hashanah we read the story of Akeidas Yitzchok, where Avraham Avinu goes against his ever-so-kind and loving nature in order to fulfill Hashem's instruction to sacrifice his only son Yitzchak as a korban.

And he does so even if it made absolutely no sense to him and ran against everything he believed in and everything he stood for. How was Avraham able to do it? The answer is that he was unable to bring himself to do it, but he didn't do what he wanted to do, he put himself aside completely to do what Hashem wanted from him, even if it meant sacrificing his only son which he loved dearly. This is another symbolism of the shofar:

Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16a

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

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."

A Twisted, Bent Shofar

This is also apparent in the shape of the shofar:

Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah 26b

א"ר לוי מצוה של ר"ה...בכפופין...דכיף איניש דעתיה טפי מעלי

Rabbi Levi said: The mitzvah on Rosh Hashanah is fulfilled with a bent shofar. because the more a person bows his mind [submits himself to Hashem] the better.

From Narrow to Wide

Another feature of the Shofar is that it is narrow on one side and wide on the other because it represents a call from the narrow, hidden depths of our hearts, to reveal our deep yearning to be reunited with our spiritual source and to reveal Hashem's presence in the open from its narrow place of hiding.

This is also why we read the following posuk before blowing the shofar:

Tehillim 118:5

מִן הַמִּצָּר, קָרָאתִי יְיָ, עֲנֵנִי בַמִּרְחֹב יְיָ

From out of distress (lit. a place of narrowness) I called to Hashem, with abounding [relief] Hashem answered me.

Malchiyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros

Now we can understand the connection between the various aspects of Rosh Hashanah:

Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 16a

אמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות. מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם. זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרונכם לפני לטובה. ובמה? בשופר.

[Hashem 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

The pinnacle of the Rosh Hashanah davening is the mussaf that is divided into three separate brochos (in addition to the standard opening and closing brochos of every shmoneh esrei).

- 1) Malchiyos - in which we recite pesukim from Torah, Neviim, and Kesuvim proclaiming Hashem's Kingship;
- 2) Zichronos - in which we recite pesukim beseeching Hashem to remember the merits of our forefathers, and remember us in a good light; and
- 3) pesukim of Shofros (and the actual blowing of the shofar), because both appointing Hashem as King and asking Hashem to remember us in a good light are accomplished by the shofar.

In Summation

CREATION: Rosh Hashanah is the day that commemorates creation because on Rosh Hashanah, man was created, and man is charged with the mission of bringing creation to the goal of its creation, to reveal that Hashem is King.

KINGSHIP: Thus, the goal of our avodah on Rosh Hashanah is malchiyos, to accept Hashem as king over us by submitting to His will and renewing our commitment to serve Him through Torah and Mitzvos— instead of doing what we want, we submit ourselves to Hashem and do what He wants of us, .

JUDGEMENT: This is why it is a day of judgement when the

question of whether or not creation is living up to its mandate is called into question. And that is why we recite zichronos in which we ask Hashem to recall the merits of our forefathers and the merits of our mitzvos to stand us in good stead and provide us with all of our needs.

SHOFAR: And all of this is accomplished through the shofar, since in essence this is the truth about the way things are, it's just a truth that is hidden deep within reality, and deep within our neshamah, and through shofar we reveal that.

The Yearly Reminder

Because we are human and cannot remain conscious of this reality all year round, Rosh Hashanah is a window in time to remember and connect with this timeless reality and realign ourselves with this reality (which is the true reality all year round, although we may not be conscious of it). Ideally, Rosh Hashanah should influence the entire year that all year long we should be conscious of this reality.

Chassidus explains that on Rosh Hashanah we reconnect with this deeper reality (of Hashem as King), and then through Yom Kippur, Sukkos, and Simchas Torah we unpack this new reality so that it can influence our perception throughout the entire year.

Davening

This is why the most part of the day is a day of davening. Davening is about kavanah. Kavanah means direction, to direct our minds in a particular direction. In the case of Rosh Hashanah, the tefillos are there to make us aware of this deeper reality, and to that end, the paytnim—the poets that

lived around a millennium ago—composed piyutim, poems that help draw our attention to the themes of Rosh Hashanah.

In order for davening to be effective, in addition to saying the words, we should understand what we are saying and allow ourselves to become conscious and intimately aware and connected with the themes of Rosh Hashanah mentioned above that are echoed throughout the tefillos.

When we do this, we are assured that every one of us be written and sealed for a good and sweet year (i.e., a year in which Hashem's goodness - of which all of reality is comprised - is not hidden but expressed as revealed good).

Take-aways

- Rosh Hashanah has various names representing different themes : Creation, New Year, Day of Judgement, Day of Remembrance, Blowing the Shofar
- The books of life and death refer to the World to Come where the truth is revealed and connection to Hashem equals life, whereas disconnection from Hashem equals death. Nowadays this doesn't necessarily mean that reshaim will actually die
- The purpose of creation is not for creation to exist, but to call nature's bluff by revealing Hashem as king
- Man is the only creation that is capable of choosing to go against his will and nature to appoint and serve a king, this is why Rosh Hashanah is on the day of man's creation (instead of the first day of creation)
- The shofar represents the cry of our neshamah in its deep desire to overcome the confines of the body and of creation that conceal Hashem's presence and to return to Hashem
- While the truths Rosh Hashanah represents are true all year round, we need a yearly reenactment to remind us forgetful beings
- Davening helps direct our attention to connect with the themes of the day