

Zichron Teruah Kolel Kol Inyanei Rosh Hashanah

Moreinu Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Aharon Feldman, shlit"ta

Two *pesukim* in the Torah refer to Rosh Hashanah. In one place it is called, “*Yom Teruah*”—“a day of sounding the Shofar”; in another, “*Zichron Teruah*”—“a remembrance of the sounding of the Shofar.” That is the entire basis in the written Torah for the holiday of Rosh Hashanah. The Torah does not explicitly mention the fact that Rosh Hashanah is a day of judgment or that it is followed by *Aseres Yemey Teshuva*—the Ten Days of Atonement. These teachings regarding the nature of Rosh Hashanah are derived in *Torah She-be'al Peh* from the four above-mentioned words which describe Rosh Hashanah. How do these teachings lie in these words?

Another puzzling question: Given that Rosh Hashanah is a day of judgment, there seem to be contradictory perspectives by the Sages as to the nature of Rosh Hashanah. On the one hand, we are taught that the verse “*Dirshu Hashem b'himatzo*”—“Seek Hashem when He is close” refers to the ten days between, and including, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They are a time when God is close to His creatures and can be sought out by them. If so, then the *Aseres Yemey Teshuva* are a time of love by God for His people. On the other hand, these days are also known as *Yomim Noraim*—the Days of Fear--of God. Love and fear are two opposite emotions. Yet we seem to employ these two opposite ideas to describe our relationship to God on these days.

To add to the puzzle, there is even a universal custom of Jews to dress in holiday clothing on Rosh Hashanah, and we are obligated to eat a festive Yom Tov meal on Rosh Hashanah similar to every other Yom Tov—which are joyous occasions. This seems to be odd. A day of judgment—when we are being judged whether we will live or die—should be a time of serious introspection and repentance, not a time of festive clothing and meals.

The key to the explanation of all of this, lies in the curious anomaly that there is nothing in the Torah which explicitly states that we are required to blow the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah. The Shofar is used only as a description of what sort of day is Rosh Hashanah. The words “*Yom Teruah*” and “*Zichron Teruah*” imply that we should awaken our remembrance before God on Rosh Hashanah by blowing a Shofar. From this we derive that we are obligated to blow the Shofar. How is the description of the day as a day of remembrance contain a command to blow Shofar?

The explanation is that if a remembrance is necessary on Rosh Hashanah, this implies that it must be a day of judgment. It is a day of judgment for all of mankind, not merely the Jewish people; for the Sages teach us, “*Kol ba'ei olam ovrin lefanecha kiv'nei maron*” – “The whole world [non-Jews and Jews] passes in judgment like sheep being counted by their master.”¹ But only the Jewish people were given the mitzvah of blowing the Shofar in order to create a remembrance of their special merits before God. Only they are guaranteed that they will merit a favorable judgment if they blow the Shofar.

Thus, from the words *yom teruah* and *zichron teruah* we derive two truths about the nature of Rosh Hashanah:

a) That it is a Day of Judgment; b) that Jews have a special relationship with Him.

This explains the conflicting emotions which Rosh Hashanah evokes. It is a day of awe, because it is a day of judgment, and at the same time it is a day of joy, because we are able to evoke our remembrance before God in order to succeed in that judgment. The fact that Hashem ordered us to blow shofar to evoke our merits, shows that it is a day when He is close to pay attention to our remembrance.

Thus, even though Rosh Hashanah is a day of fear, it is also a day of joy. Collectively the Jewish people as a whole is assured of a positive outcome in their judgment. The blowing of the Shofar will cause their merits to be remembered, so that they will emerge from the judgment successfully. From this perspective Rosh Hashanah is a day of joy, worthy of festive behavior. By commanding us to blow the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem is

¹ Rosh Hashanah 17a.

saying to us: “I want you to survive the judgment, so remind Me of your merits.” What could be a greater reason for joy than that?

However, although the Jewish people as a whole will pass through the judgment successfully, there still remains a question as to whether each individual will merit a favorable judgment. The Jewish people needs to have a minimum of twenty-two thousand Jews (*rivevos alfey Yisroel*) to survive.² But how shall each person individually know that he will emerge unscathed? For each individual, these days are therefore Days of Fear.

There is an important lesson to be derived from this dichotomy. Each individual has the capacity to emerge victorious from the judgment if he identifies himself with the goals of the Jewish people. Thus, each person who awakens within himself the remembrances which the blowing of the Shofar awakens for the entire people will also be assured of a personal success in the judgment.

This is why the Zohar says that one should not daven for one’s own personal needs on Rosh Hashanah; it even censures one who does. Not all authorities agree that this is applicable to everyone; however, the principle which this Zohar teaches for everyone is that optimally everyone should daven on Rosh Hashanah not for himself but for the entire Jewish people as a whole. Even when we daven for personal needs our intention should be that our needs be met so that we will be enabled to serve God better. We need sustenance, health and peace but we should be asking for these only so that we will be able to serve God as a member of Klal Yisroel.

² Yevamos 64a.