



El Ami - El Atzmi  
Learning Together



# ROSH HASHANA AND ITS COMMANDMENTS

The Torah refers to the holiday falling on the first day of Tishrei as "The Day of Blowing" and "The Day of Remembering the Blowing", due to the mandatory commandment of hearing the shofar blowing on this day. The Mishna refers to this day as "Rosh Hashana", while in the prayers it is referred to as "The Day of Remembrance".

Why are different names used for this day? What exactly happens on this day? What are we supposed to remember on this holiday? We will study these questions and more in this learning session.

## ROSH HASHANA

Our Rabbis learned that the first day of Tishrei is the New Year for various matters:

### 1. Tractate Rosh Hashana, chapter 1, Mishna 1:

On the first of Tishrei is the New Year for years, for Release and Jubilee years, for plantation and for tithing of vegetables.



### 1a. Commentary - Harav Pinchas Kehati

**New Year for years** - The first of Tishrei is the New Year for the counting since the time of creation. (For example, this year is 5776 years since the creation of man).

**For Release** - The Shmitta year begins on the first of Tishrei. (The seventh year, which is a Sabbatical year during which agricultural work is forbidden).

**For Jubilee** - The Jubilee year begins on the first of Tishrei. (A special year at the end of seven cycles of *Shmitta*).

**For plantation** - Referring to the three orlah years for fruit. (The prohibition on *orlah* fruit (lit. "uncircumcised" fruit) is a command not to eat fruit produced by a tree during the first three years after planting).

**For tithing of vegetables** - The tithe system was organized in a three-year cycle, corresponding to the *Shmitta* cycle. The tithes were distributed locally to support the Levites and assist the poor.

### QUESTION:

1. Why is it important to know when the New Year is?



## JUDGMENT DAY

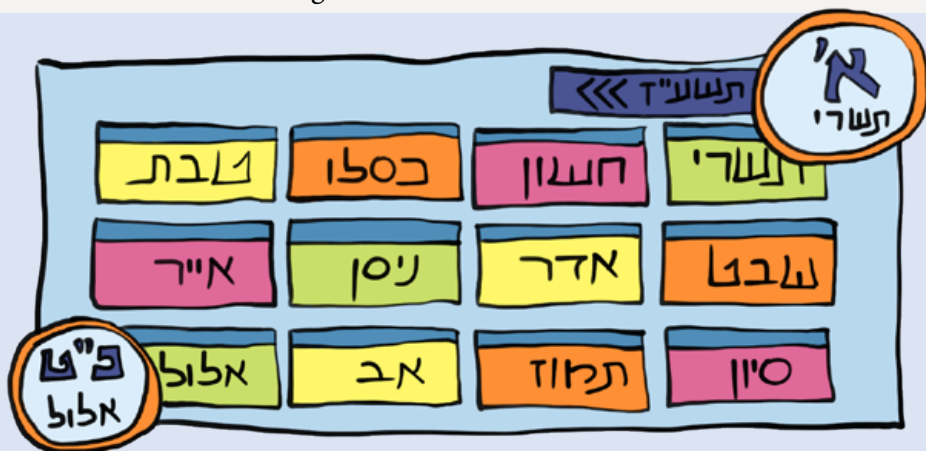
The Talmud provides three explanations for the name "Rosh Hashana". One explanation is that this day is a day of judgment – the day when G-d judges each and every one of us and this day has a direct effect on the entire year to come (as the "head" affects the whole body).

### 2. Talmud Bavli, Tractate Rosh Hashana, 8a:

R. Nahman b. Isaac [explained the Mishnah to refer] to the Divine judgment as it is written; "From the beginning of the year to the end of the year", [which means], from [at] the beginning of the year, sentence is passed as to what shall be up to the end of it.

### 2a. Commentary – Rashi:

**Judgment** - In Tishrei, G-d judges all creatures and decides what will happen to them until the following Tishrei.



The Mishna explains that G-d judges everyone personally:

### 3. Tractate Rosh Hashana, Chapter 1, Mishna 2:

At four seasons [divine] judgment is passed on the world; at New Year all creatures pass before him [G-d] like Bnei Maron, as it says, "he that fashions the heart of them all, that considers all their doings".

### 3a. Commentaries

**at four seasons** - G-d judges the world at four different times throughout the year (Harav Pinchas Kehati).

**like Bnei Maron** - Cattle, which when brought to a narrow passage way can only pass through one at a time (Rabbeinu Ovadiah MiBartenura).

Rabbi Kruspedai describes the consequences of the "trial" which begins on Rosh Hashana:

#### 4. Tractate Rosh Hashana, page 16b:

R. Kruspedai said in the name of R. Johanan: Three books are opened [in heaven] on Rosh Hashana; one for the thoroughly wicked, one for the thoroughly righteous, and one for those of intermediate stature: The thoroughly righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life; the thoroughly wicked are immediately inscribed in the book of death; the doom of the intermediate is suspended from Rosh Hashana till the Day of Atonement; if they deserve well, they are inscribed in the book of life; if they do not deserve well, they are inscribed in the book of death.

### EXTRA!

The Rambam elaborates on this teaching:

#### 5. Laws of Repentance, chapter 3:

Just as a person's merits and sins are weighed at the time of his death, so, too, the sins of every inhabitant of the world, together with his merits, are weighed on the festival of Rosh HaShanah. If one is found righteous, his [verdict] is sealed for life. If one is found wicked, his [verdict] is sealed for death. A Beinoni's verdict remains tentative until Yom Kippur. If he repents, his [verdict] is sealed for life. If not, his [verdict] is sealed for death.

### NOTE:

**Beinoni** - One whose merits and sins are equal.

According to the opinion of R' Eliezer, the first of Tishrei is also the day that Adam was created. On that very day, Adam sinned, was judged and was forgiven by G-d.



#### 6. Vayikra Raba, Parsha 29, Chapter 1

It was taught in the name of R' Eliezer: On the 25th day of Elul the world was created, meaning that Adam was created on Rosh Hashana.

On the day of Rosh Hashana, during the first hour, it occurred to His (G-d's) thought (to create man); in the second (hour), He took council with the ministering angels; in the third, He gathered together his dust (from which to create Adam); in the fourth, He kneaded him; in the fifth, He shaped him; in the sixth, He completed his form; in the seventh, He breathed into him a soul; in the

eighth, He placed him in the Garden (of Eden); in the ninth, he was commanded (not to eat from the forbidden fruit); in the tenth, he sinned (by eating the forbidden fruit); in the eleventh, he was judged; and in the twelfth, he went free.

G-d told Adam: "This will be a sign to your children; just as you stood in judgment on this day and were released, so will your children after you also stand in judgment and will also be released. When? In the seventh month, on the first of the month, it shall be a Sabbath for you, a remembrance of [Israel through] the shofar blast, a holy occasion.

## NOTE:

**remembrance** - The remembrance of that first day in the Garden of Eden will bring about a positive remembrance for all succeeding generations.

According to R' Eliezer, the first of Tishrei is a special day on which G-d judges Am Yisrael and begins to forgive us, as He did to Adam.

### 7. Ramban on Tractate Rosh Hashana

On Rosh Hashana every being is judged; if he merits – he receives life and peace and riches and property. Otherwise – he receives death, suffering, sorrow and poverty...

This is what our Sages enacted in the prayers: "On the nations it will be declared – which to the sword, which to peace, which to famine and which to prosperity.

In the Talmud it is stated: "Just as a person's income is decided on Rosh Hashana, so are his expenses decided then, as all his profits and losses are decided on Rosh Hashana.



## QUESTIONS:

1. Why does G-d judge all creatures?
2. Who are the "Bnei Maron" in the parable?
3. Is the judgment for everyone "signed and sealed" on Rosh Hashana?
4. Regarding which things are people judged on Rosh Hashana?
5. Regarding which things are the nations of the world judged on Rosh Hashana?



## EXTRA!

6. How does the Rambam explain the saying "are immediately inscribed"?
7. Why is Rosh Hashana regarded as a day of judgment?

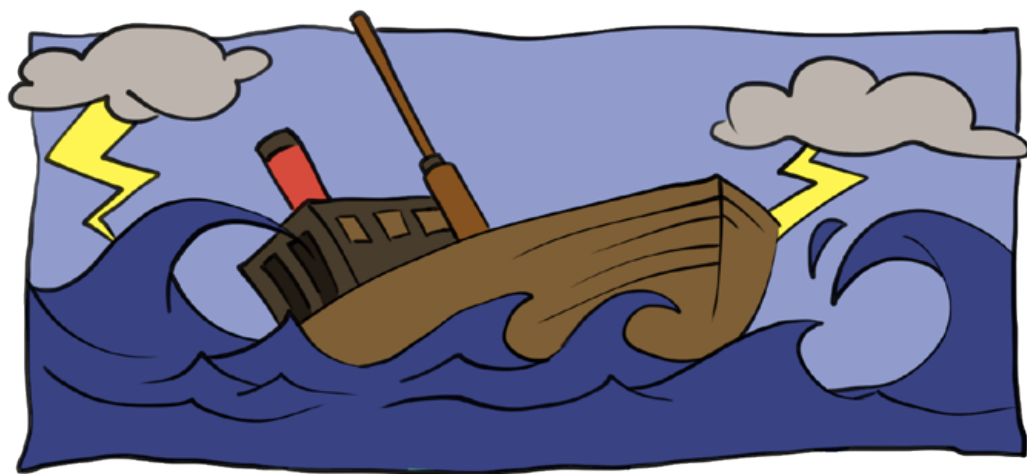


## EVEN ON THE HIGH SEAS, THE SHOFAR REVEALS THE GREATNESS OF G-D

A great and saintly Rabbi was once aboard a ship, together with two of his disciples. *Rosh Hashanah* drew near and land was not yet in sight. So the Rabbi and his disciples prepared to spend the Holy Days of *Rosh Hashanah* on the High Seas.

On the night of *Rosh Hashanah* a terrible storm broke out. The ship was tossed about by the huge waves and was in grave danger of breaking up. The big waves swept over the ship again and again, flooding it from bow to stern. The sailors worked hard to bail the water out, until their strength was sapped. It seemed only a matter of time before the ship would sink, unless the storm passed immediately.

During all this time, the saintly Rabbi sat in his cabin, engrossed in prayer, paying no attention to the storm threatening the ship. At dawn, when the storm had not let up, his two disciples decided to tell the Rabbi of the danger that threatened all of them.



Entering his cabin, and finding him engrossed in prayer, they hesitated and withdrew, finding no courage to disturb him. A little while later they tried again, but again they turned back, not daring to disturb him. Finally, when the storm seemed to have reached its height, and it was a matter of minutes before they would all be drowned, the disciples decided there was no time to be lost. With trembling voices and tears in their eyes they approached the Rabbi and told him of the danger they were in.

"If this is the case, then waste no time. Bring the *shofar* quickly and let us fulfill the sacred commandment of sounding the *shofar* while we still are alive," the Rabbi said.

The disciples brought the *shofar*, and soon the sound of the *shofar* was heard through the boat -- *tekiah, shevarim, teruah, tekiah... ah... ah...* And the high winds seemed to snatch up the sounds of the *shofar* and carry them far away...

Suddenly the wind began to calm down, as if afraid to drown out the holy sounds of the *shofar*. Also, the roar of the sea grew quieter and quieter and before long there was perfect calm over the water. The last sounds of the *shofar* rang clearly in the stillness of the early morning.

It was a wonderful miracle!

The captain and the sailors and many passengers, following the sound of the *shofar*, came to the Rabbi's cabin, where they found the Rabbi and

his two disciples joyfully concluding the solemn shofar service.

Amazed and full of awe, they bowed their heads in respect, and when the Rabbi concluded the service, the captain said, "that is certainly a magical horn that

you have there, for it has changed the stormy sea into a calm lake. If you will sell it to me, I will give you anything you wish for it."

The Rabbi smiled as he answered: "No, my friend, it is not a magical horn, but a shofar, a simple ram's horn, which we Jews are commanded to sound on the solemn days of our New Year. It raises a storm in our hearts, which is mightier than the storm of the sea, for it calls us to return to G-d with humility.

"I did not know," the Rabbi continued, "that it would save us all. All I wanted to do was to fulfill one more Divine commandment in the last moments of life left to us. But G-d is merciful, and spared us all, so that we might live a good and holy life. Let us show our gratitude to G-d by obeying His commandments always, in times of safety as well as in times of danger, for we are always at His mercy. Excerpted from *"The Complete Story of Tishrei*



## "DAY OF REMEMBRANCE"

### DID YOU KNOW?

Rosh Hashana is termed a day of remembrance in our prayers and in the "Kiddush". There are two reasons for this:

- a. G-d remembers all creatures on this day, especially the deeds of people, and He judges us accordingly.

This remembrance is referred to in the Mussaf prayer on Rosh Hashana.

- b. We are supposed to remember our past and present deeds and find ways to improve ourselves in the coming year.

## HEARING THE SHOFAR

There is a positive commandment in the Torah regarding this special mitzvah:

### 8. Vayikra 23, 24:

"In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial proclaimed *with the blast of horns*, a holy convocation."

### 9. Bamidbar 29, 1:

And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation: you shall do no manner of servile work; *it is a day of blowing the horn* unto you.

The halacha was decided accordingly:

#### 10. Rambam, Laws of Shofar, Chapter 1, Halacha 1:

It is a positive commandment from the Torah to hear the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, as it states: "It shall be a day of sounding [the ram's horn] for you".

The shofar, which is sounded both on Rosh Hashanah and on the *Yovel*, is a bent ram's horn.



The great 10th-century sage, Harav Sa'adia Gaon, compiled a list of 10 interpretations as to what the Shofar represents and why we blow it on Rosh Hashana. Here are a few of them:

1. The Shofar recalls the trumpets that are used to coronate a king... and it is appropriate that we "coronate" G-d as our King on this day.
2. The haunting sound of the Shofar arouses us to examine our deeds and renew our relationship with God.
3. To recall that the Shofar will be blown when the Mashiach comes, to announce the redemption of the entire world.

#### EXTRA!

In Vayikra it is written: "a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns", while in Bamidbar the expression differs: "it is a day of blowing the horn".

Our commentators explain:

- ➡ By sounding the shofar, G-d will "remember" you (Rashbam - Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir)
- ➡ When Rosh Hashana falls on Shabbat, there is no "blowing", rather only "a remembering of the blowing". "a day of blowing" - This refers to when Rosh Hashana is on a week day and not on Shabbat (Hizkuni - Rabbi Hizkiya ben Manoach)

#### QUESTIONS

1. What are we commanded to do and what are we commanded not to do on Rosh Hashana?
2. What exactly is the mitzvah: to blow the shofar, or to hear the sound of the shofar?
3. What is the difference between "a day of blowing" and "a memorial of blowing"?



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