

# OHRNET

---

SHABBAT PARSHAT NITZAVIM, VAYELECH, HA'AZINU  
25 ELUL 5784 - 10 TISHREI 5785 - 28 SEPTEMBER - 12 OCTOBER 2024  
ROSH HASHANAH - 4 OCTOBER • YOM KIPPUR 12 OCTOBER  
• VOL31 NO. 37

---

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Resisting Resentment and Revenge

*"You are standing..." (29:9).*

One of the great things about having been part of Ohr Somayach for more than three decades is that I have met some people who are clearly living on a different level. One of these great souls distilled the essence of one's relationship with one's fellow into three principles: His first principle is, "I was created to serve others, and no one was created to serve me."

The second is, "I wouldn't do it to you. But if you do it to me – it's okay." This doesn't mean that a person should be a doormat and invite the world to trample on him, but *post facto* – if you did something to me that I could really take you to court for and get back at you — and I give up on that — I get forgiven for all my sins.

The source for this is the Gemara that says, "Anyone who 'passes over on his character traits,' meaning one who resists the knee-jerk reaction that many people have, to resent and want revenge — and just lets it go - so, concomitantly, Hashem lets go on all our sins.

It's true that this level of saintliness is beyond the letter of the law, but it sure sounds like a good deal to me. *All of my sins?* Another source for this idea is the Tomer Devorah, which says that even though we constantly flout the Will of Hashem and use our G-d-given abilities to go against His Will, nevertheless, He constantly grants us the power to continue to do this and doesn't "hold a grudge."

During this week, before Hashem opens the Books of Judgment, I can think of no better exercise than to think of someone who has wronged us — and remove all resentment from our hearts. And with that, we may approach the Heavenly Throne.

---

# Q & A – Nitzavim

---

## Questions

1. What is the connection between the verse "atem nitzavim" and the curses in the previous parsha?
2. Who were the wood-choppers and water-carriers?
3. Why can Hashem never "swap" the Jewish People for another nation?
4. One who ignores the Torah's warnings "adds drunkenness to thirst." What does this mean?
5. What two cities were destroyed along with S'dom and Amarah?
6. "The hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, and the revealed things are for us..." What does this mean?
7. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be "great and difficult"?
8. Where is the Torah not to be found? Where is it to be found?
9. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other's sins?
10. How do the earth and sky remind us to keep the mitzvahs?

## Answers

1. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, "Who can survive such curses?" Moshe responded, "You've done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet 'atem nitzavim'— you are still standing before Him."
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who joined the Jewish People under false pretenses.
3. 29:12 - Because Hashem swore to their ancestors that He would never do so.
4. 29:18 - He causes Hashem to reckon his unintentional sins alongside his intentional ones, punishing him for all.
5. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
6. 29:28 - There is collective culpability only for "open" sins, but not for "hidden" ones.
7. 30: 3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.
8. 30:12-15 - The Torah is not found in Heaven, nor is it across the ocean. Rather, it is "very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart."
9. 30:28 - When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath on Mount Eval and Mount Grizim.
10. 30:19 - The earth and heavenly bodies, although receiving neither reward nor punishment, always obey Hashem's will. How much more so should we, who stand to receive reward or punishment, obey Hashem.

---

## Q & A – Vayelech

---

### Questions

1. Moshe said, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in..." How do we know this does not refer to physical inability?
2. Which of Moshe's statements to Yehoshua was later contradicted by Hashem's command?
3. Why does the Torah refer to Succot of the eighth year as though it occurred during the shemita year?
4. Why does the Torah command that babies be brought to the Torah reading?
5. What does it mean that Hashem "hides His face?"
6. What function does the song Ha'azinu serve?
7. Which verse promises that the Torah will never be totally forgotten?
8. What is the difference of opinion regarding the placing of the Torah scroll which Moshe gave the levi'im?
9. On the day of Moshe's death, why didn't Moshe gather the people by blowing trumpets as he normally would have?
10. Moshe said, "For I know that after my death you will act corruptly," but, in fact, this didn't occur until after Yehoshua's death. What does this teach us?

### Answers

1. 31:2. Because verse 34:7 says "His (Moshe's) eye never dimmed, and his (youthful) moisture never departed."
2. 31:7 - Moshe told Yehoshua to share his leadership with the Elders. Hashem later commanded Yehoshua to rule alone.
3. 31:10 - Because the laws of the seventh year still apply to the harvest.
4. 31:12 - To give reward to those who bring them.
5. 31:17 - He ignores their distress.
6. 31:21 - It warns what will befall the Jewish People if they abandon Torah.
7. 31:21 - "For (the Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring."
8. 31:26 - Whether it was placed outside but adjacent to the Ark, or inside next to the Tablets.
9. 31:28 - Blowing the trumpets expressed Moshe's dominion, and "there is no dominion on the day of death." (Kohelet 8)
10. 31:29 - That a person's student is as dear to him as himself. As long as Yehoshua was alive it was as though Moshe himself was alive.

---

## Q & A – Ha'azinu

---

### Questions

1. Why were heaven and earth specifically chosen as witnesses?
2. How is the Torah like rain?
3. How is G-d "faithful without injustice"?
4. Why is G-d called "tzaddik"?
5. How many major floods did G-d bring upon the world?
6. What group of people does the Torah call "fathers"? Cite an example.
7. Why did G-d separate the world's nations into exactly 70?
8. Why is the merit of the Jewish People's ancestry called a "rope"?
9. How is G-d's behavior toward the Jewish People like an eagle's behavior toward its offspring?
10. Regarding the Jewish People's punishment, G-d says, "I will spend my arrows on them." What is the positive aspect of this phrase?
11. How does the idea of "chillul Hashem" prevent the nations from destroying the Jewish People?
12. What will happen to the nations that conquer the Jewish People?
13. When G-d overturns a nation that persecutes the Jewish People, His attribute of Mercy is "replaced" by which attribute?
14. When G-d punishes the heathen nations, for whose sins does He exact punishment?
15. How will G-d's punishment change the way the nations view the Jewish People?
16. On what day was Ha'azinu taught to the Jewish People?
17. Verse 32:44 calls Yehoshua "Hoshea." Why?
18. In verse 32:47, what does "it is not empty from you" mean?
19. Why did G-d tell Moshe that he would die a similar death to that of Aharon?
20. If Moshe had spoken to the rock rather than striking it, what would the Jewish People have learned?

## Answers

1. 32:1 - They endure forever.
2. : 32:2 - The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
3. 32:4 - He is "faithful" by rewarding the righteous, and "without injustice" by rewarding even the wicked for any good deeds.
4. 32:4 - All will agree that His judgments are righteous.
5. 32:7 - Two. One in the time of Adam's grandson Enosh and one in the time of Noach.
6. 32:7 - The Prophets. Elisha called the Prophet Eliyahu "My Father." (Melachim II 2:12).
7. 32:8 - To correspond to the 70 Bnei Yisrael who entered Egypt.
8. 32:9 - Their merit is "woven from" the merits of the Avot.
9. 32:12 - He mercifully wakes them gently, hovering over them, and carrying them on His "wings".
- 10.32:23 - "The arrows will be spent" implies that the afflictions will cease but the Jewish People will not.
- 11.32:27 - The nations would attribute their success to their might and the might of their gods. G-d would not let His name be desecrated like this.
- 12.32:35 - They will eventually be punished.
- 13.32:41 - His attribute of Justice.
- 14.32:42 - For their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
- 15.32:43 - They will view the Jewish People as praiseworthy for cleaving to G-d.
- 16.32:44 - The Shabbat upon which Moshe died.
- 17.32:44 - To indicate that although he was the Jewish People's leader, he still maintained a humble bearing.
- 18.32:47 - That you will receive reward for studying Torah and that there is nothing meaningless in the Torah.
- 19.32:50 - Because Moshe wanted this.
- 20.32:51 - The Jewish People would have reasoned as follows: If a rock, which receives neither reward nor punishment, obeys G-d's commands, all the more so should they.

---

# Q & A – Rosh Hashanah

---

## Questions

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashanah?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of Tanach does the beginning of the Tashlich prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were "remembered" by Hashem on Rosh Hashanah?
7. A person's yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashanah, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: "Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah..." What was Abraham's prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashanah, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the shehechyanu blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashanah which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

## Answers

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah. (*Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*)
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it "a day of shofar blowing." (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai). (*Bamidbar 29:1*)
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed..." (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this "field" as an apple orchard. (*Ta'anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*)
4. "Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar," and the shehechyanu blessing. (*Orach Chaim 581:2*)
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashanah it was decreed that these barren women would bear children. (*Tractate Rosh Hashanah 10b*)

7. Expenses for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and the cost of one's children's Torah education. (*Ba'er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*)
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (Onkelos 22:14). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac. (*Rashi 22:13*)
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The "two-day festival" arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashanah. Since Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashanah it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the shehechyanu blessing. Thus, the shehechyanu blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no shehechyanu blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashanah.) (*Taz 600:2*)

---

## Q & A – Yom Kippur

---

### Questions

1. Passover commemorates the going out of Egypt. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah. What historical event can Yom Kippur be said to commemorate?
2. For what kinds of sins does Yom Kippur not atone?
3. What should someone do if the person he wronged does not forgive him the first time?
4. Why is the vidui confession included during the mincha prayer the afternoon before Yom Kippur?
5. On Yom Kippur we refrain from: Working, eating, drinking, washing, anointing, family relations and wearing leather shoes. Which three of these prohibitions are more severe than the others?
6. In what two ways does the prohibition against eating food on Yom Kippur differ from the prohibition against eating pork the entire year?
7. Who wrote the prayer "Unesaneh Tokef" said during the chazan's repetition of musaf?
8. Why do we read the book of Yona on Yom Kippur?
9. In what two ways does havdalah after Yom Kippur differ from havdalah after Shabbos?
10. Ideally, what mitzvah should one begin immediately after Yom Kippur?

## Answers

1. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the tenth of Tishrei with the second set of Tablets, signifying forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. Yom Kippur can be said to commemorate this event, the first national day of forgiveness for the Jewish People.
2. Sins committed against other people, including hurting someone's feelings. Yom Kippur does not atone for these sins until the perpetrator gains forgiveness from the victim himself. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
3. He should try at least two more times to gain forgiveness. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
4. Lest one choke while eating the pre-Yom Kippur meal and die without atonement, or lest one become intoxicated and unable to concentrate on the prayers at night. (*Mishna Berura 607:1*)
5. Eating, drinking, working. (*Mishna Kritut 1:1*)
6.
  1. Although any amount is forbidden, eating on Yom Kippur is not punishable by a Sanhedrin until one has eaten food equal in volume to the size of a date. Eating pork, on the other hand, is punishable for eating even an olive-sized piece, which is smaller than a date. (*Mishna Berura 612:1*)
  2. Eating on Yom Kippur incurs the punishment of karet - spiritual excision, whereas eating pork does not.
7. "Unesaneh Tokef" was written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany about 1000 years ago.
8. The repentance of the people of Ninveh serves as an inspiration to us to repent, and shows us that repentance can overturn a Divine decree. (*Shelah Hakadosh*)
9. After Yom Kippur, the blessing over spices is omitted from havdalah. Also, the source of the flame used for havdalah after Yom Kippur must be a fire kindled before Yom Kippur. (*Orach Chaim 624:3,4*)
10. Building the succa. (*Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5*)

The Ohr Somayach family wishes our students, alumni, friends and all of Klal Yisrael a meaningful, peaceful and fruitful New Year holiday season.

May you and your families be written and sealed in the Book of Life, and be blessed from Above with much good health, happiness and success in the coming year — and for many more years to come.



---

# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

---

## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Shake & Quake

In the Chazzan's opening supplication of Shacharit Shemoneh Esrei on the first day of Rosh HaShanah, the poetic introduction reads: "I am scared as I open my dialog to extract [words from my mouth] / I have arisen to supplicate the face of the awesome (nora) and fearsome (dachil) One / I am small [i.e. lacking] from [good] deeds therefore I trepitate (azchil)... / Power me and strengthen me from weakness and fear (chil)." In these few lines, the Kalonymide poet Rabbi Yekutiel bar Moshe who authored this piyyut uses three different terms that refer to "fear," and all three of them actually rhyme with each other — dachil, azchil, and chil. In this essay, we will explore the etymologies of these three terminologies and consider whether or not they are truly synonymous.

Let us begin our exploration of these words with the term chil, which is the most common of the three in Biblical Hebrew. The term chil, or chal, refers to "fear" and to "the bodily tremors resulting from fear." A famous instance of these words in the Pentateuch appears in the Song of the Sea, which reads, "The nations heard and they were trembling [yirgazun] / a fear [chil] had taken hold of the inhabitants of Philistine" (Ex. 14:15). Similarly, in describing how the nations of the world began to fear the Jewish People after they successfully defeated Sichon, king of Cheshbon, the Torah says, "and they will tremble [ragzu] and fear [chalu] from before you" (Deut. 2:25).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 14:15) explains that chil refers to a specific type of fear, whereby the old guard becomes scared of how they will be affected by a changing paradigm. He explains that this is why chil is a type of fear often associated in the Bible with childbirth (Jer. 6:24, 22:23, 50:43, Mic. 4:9, Ps. 48:7), as the mother is scared of what her place will be in the family after the birth of a new child — or perhaps, she even fears whether she will survive childbirth itself. In the same way, when the Philistines heard about the Jews crossing the Red Sea, they realized that the Jews were set to conquer the Holy Land. This led them to worry about what their situation will be in that new reality and how it will affect them.

The CHET-LAMMED string from chil/chal is sometimes doubled to produce the word chalchal, which denotes a physical reaction to an especially scary situation that causes a person to tremble or shake out of sheer fright (see Isa. 21:3). The prophet Yechezkel foretells of a time when the nation of Cush will experience such tremors (Ezek. 30:4, 30:9). Similarly, the Book of Esther relates that when eponymic heroine Esther first heard about Haman's decrees against her people, her reaction was vatitchalchal — body spasmed and shook out of fear (Est. 4:4). Indeed, the rabbis (Megillah 15a, Esther Rabbah §7:14, §8:3) said about Esther that on the spot she either menstruated, miscarried, or defecated/urinated because she was unable to control her bodily movement in reaction to the terrifying news.

Now we can segue to the word dachil, which derives from the trilateral root DALET-CHET-LAMMED. That term does not occur in Biblical Hebrew, yet declensions of that root nonetheless appear six times in the Aramaic parts of Daniel (Dan. 2:31, 4:2, 5:19, 6:27, 7:7, 7:19). The most famous of those cases is when Daniel saw the Fourth Beast, which he described as dechilah (Dan. 7:7) — “scary.” Besides for appearing in Biblical Aramaic, inflections of dachil are typically used by Targum in rendering the Hebrew terms yirah (“fear”), nora (“fearsome/awesome”), and pachad (“fear”). For examples of this, I refer the reader to Rabbi Eliyahu Bachur’s work Meturgaman. For our purposes, it is pertinent to note that Targum Onkelos translates the word chil in the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:14) as dachla, as he does with the word chalu used to describe the other nations fearing the Jews after the victory against Sichon (Deut. 2:25).

*\*To read the full version of this article, please visit us online at: [https://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)*

---

## TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

---

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

*“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)*

### Rosh Hashanah Special

#### SHOFAR

Mitzvah #405 (*Vayikra* 23:24; *Bamidbar* 29:1)

“Praiseworthy is the nation that knows how to blow the trumpet” (*Tehillim* 89:16). The Sages remark about this verse: Do not all nations know how to blow trumpets?! Only, the verse means to praise the Jewish people for knowing how to appease Hashem by means of the shofar (*Vayikra Rabbah* 29:3). *Rashi* explains that the Jewish people know to accompany the shofar-blowing with verses of Kingship, Shofar, and Remembrance. In other words, by reciting verses of Kingship, we show that we are blowing the shofar to coronate our king. By reciting verses of Shofar, we show that we are blowing the shofar to recall our King’s awesome glory, which was displayed through the shofar-blowing at the time of the Giving of the Torah and which will be displayed through the shofar-blowing in the future. And by reciting verses of Remembrance, we show that we are blowing the shofar to recall our King’s merciful remembrance of our merits, and especially the merit of the ram that was offered instead of Yitzchak. Only the Jewish people know how to appease Hashem in this unique manner.

By blowing the shofar, we are not only “reminding” Hashem about these ideas; we are reminding ourselves as well. When we blow the shofar with these intentions, we joyously submit our lives to Hashem’s will in emulation of that self-sacrifice of our Patriarch, and that is why He becomes appeased and sees fit to pardon our misdeeds. *Rav Shalom Sharabi* writes (cited in *Avodas Rosh Hashanah* ch. 8): “The sound of the shofar does not have an effect in Heaven unless its sound rises with the awakening of the heart in repentance. Otherwise, it is like blowing a musical instrument.”

As to the nature of this awakening, *Rambam* writes that the shofar calls to us: "Awaken slumberers! Examine your deeds, remember your Creator, and return to Him! You who have forgotten the truth amidst the temporal vanities of this world and have spent the year in worthless pursuits, consider your souls, rectify your deeds, and abandon your improper thoughts!" (*Teshuvah* 3:4). *Sefer HaChinuch* elaborates on the need for a reminder: Since a person is earthly, he does not awaken to [spiritual] matters unless by means of some awakening device. This is the idea behind the battle cries and trumpet blasts of soldiers when they want to awaken their spirits in order to maximize their performance. We are in similar danger on Rosh Hashanah, when our lives are on balance, and the broken shofar sounds (i.e., *teruah*) shake our hearts awake with repentance.

*Sefer HaChinuch* adds that the broken sounds remind us to "break" the evil inclination of our hearts that urges us to pursue earthly pleasure and sins. We use the medium of sound because it has a great influence on emotion. We specifically use a ram's horn, which is bent, to remind ourselves to bend our hearts into submission to Hashem.

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 29:5 with *Radal*) relates the word “shofar” to “shippur,” meaning “beautification” (*Radak* in *Sefer HaSharashim*), and it thus expounds as follows: In this month of Tishrei, beautify your deeds and adopt a new conduct. Hashem says: “If you have beautified your deeds, I will be for you like a shofar. Just as air enters the narrow side of the shofar and exits through the wide side, so too, I will stand up from My Throne of Justice and sit down on My Throne of Mercy, transforming the Attribute of Strict Justice into the Attribute of Mercy.” Every shofar blast breaks away another layer of our evil inclination and with the completion of the hundred blasts, we experience rebirth. For just like childbirth may entail a hundred cries, with the hundredth bringing new life (*Tanchuma* to *Tazria* §4), every cry of the shofar brings us toward repentance, with the hundredth bringing us to full repentance, and a new year of good life (*Meshech Chachmah* to *Vayikra* 23:24).”

---

# TALMUD TIPS

---

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Signed and Sealed for Life

*We have learned in a beraita, “Rabbi Meir says: Everything is judged on Rosh Hashana and their judgment is sealed on Yom Kippur. Rabbi Yehuda says: All are judged on Rosh Hashana and the judgment for each category is sealed at the suitable time — on Pesach for grain produce, on Shavuot for tree fruits and on Succot for water. And a person is judged on Rosh Hashana and his judgment is sealed on Yom Kippur; Rabbi Yossi says that a person is judged every day, as the verse Iyov 7:18 states: “That You should visit him every morning.” Rabbi Natan says that a person is judged every second, as the same verse in Iyov states, “and try him every moment.”*

Later in the *sugya* we learn a different opinion on this matter from another Tana. Rabbi Kruspedei writes that the righteous (whose merits outweigh their demerits in Divine judgment) are written and sealed for life on Rosh Hashana. The wicked (whose demerits outweigh their merits) are written and sealed for death on Rosh Hashana. Those whose merits and demerits are equal (called *beinonim*) are written on Yom Kippur in the appropriate Book (of Life or Death), depending on their final balance of merits and demerits.

The commentaries ask numerous questions regarding the nature of the procedure of this Divine judgment on these specific days for the various categories of people. One question concerns our prayers between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. We pray to Hashem during these days that He “write us in the Book of Life.” According to Rabbi Yehuda it appears that the result of judgment on Rosh Hashana was *already written* for everyone on Rosh Hashana and all that remains is for a sealing of the judgment to occur on Yom Kippur. So what “writing” are we praying for during these days? And even according to Rabbi Kruspedai the prayer for writing seems unclear. The judgment for both the righteous and the wicked was already written and even sealed on Yom Kippur, and the *beinonim* are actually awaiting the sealing of their judgment on Yom Kippur — and should be praying for sealing and not for writing.

The key to understanding an answer to this question is in contemplating the nature of the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. These days are known as the *Aseret Y’mei Teshuva* — “The Ten Days of Repentance” — an auspicious period of time in the calendar year for introspection, improvement and repentance, which we pray will increase our merits and draw us as close to Hashem as possible.

Therefore, according to Rabbi Yehuda, we pray to be written in the Book of Life in case we were *not* judged on Rosh Hashana to be in the Book of Life, and that Hashem will *now* write us in the Book of Life as a result of our new merits of giving charity, prayer, repentance and more. And according to Rabbi Kruspedai, the prayer is on behalf of the *beinonim* — whose

judgment had not been sealed on Rosh Hashana — to now *at least be written* in the Book of Life, and then sealed there on Yom Kippur. Some commentaries explain that the prayer is even for the wicked, whose judgment for death was both written and sealed on Rosh Hashana. However, Hashem in His great mercy continues to consider their prayers and merits and may decide to now write them in the Book of Life. (Obviously, the topic of this *sugya* is of such vital importance and complexity that it is the topic of countless teachings from Chazal and great Rabbis throughout history — to this very day. For example, I suggest learning the Zohar Hakadosh on this topic for Vayechi, and the writings of the Gaon from Vilna in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 582.)

I would be remiss in not noting how Tosefot understands the significance of the judgments taught in our *gemara*. From a “simple reading” of our *gemara*, it would perhaps seem that the concept of judgment on Rosh Hashana refers to the worthiness of the person to continue to live *in this world*. However, Tosefot notes that we can witness incongruities to this premise. Many righteous people suffer in this world and live relatively short lives, while many wicked seem to happily thrive in this world and live long lives. Therefore, explains Tosefot, the judgment on Rosh Hashana is for the World to Come. (The need to judge a person’s status for the World to Come on Rosh Hashana — while the person is still living in this world — is elaborated upon by many commentaries, including Rabbeinu Asher.)

• *Rosh Hashana 16a*

---

## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

---

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 12)

#### UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

*“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”*

(Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah then continues with the following sentence that is repeated three times: “May there be a *siman tov* [good sign] and *mazal tov* [good fortune] for us and for all of Israel, Amen.”

At this point in Kiddush Levanah, after having wished *Shalom Aleichem* to those around us, we pray for “*siman tov* and *mazal tov*.” Not just for ourselves, but for the whole Jewish nation.

What is the difference between siman tov and mazal tov? A siman is a sign. Hashem is continuously giving us signs in our lives. Most of them, we seem to blithely ignore, or perhaps even worse, we don't even recognize them as simanim. What differentiates a siman tov from a siman ra'ah – a bad siman? Many times, the only differentiating factor is how we relate to it. If we look at the siman as being good, that is what it will be. And if a person looks at the siman in a negative way, they can turn it into something bad.

Mazal, on the other hand, is normally connected to the constellations. We are taught that each month has its own mazal. The earliest recorded source for the phrase “mazal tov” is in the Aramaic translation of the Torah by the great Tana Yonatan ben Uziel, whom the Sages describe as being the most prominent of Hillel the Elder's students. In Genesis (30:11), when Leah hears that her maidservant had given birth to a boy, the verse describes her reaction, “And Leah declared, ‘Bah Gad [good luck] has come!’ So she called his name Gad.” Yonatan ben Uziel translates the words “Bah Gad” into Aramaic as “Mazlah Tavah.”

The generally accepted translation of “mazal” is luck. However, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Spira (1868-1937) the saintly Rebbe of Munkatch, offers a thought-provoking alternative (Divrei Torah 6:44). He says that the word mazal is rooted in the word “nozel,” which means to pour. He explains that Hashem is continuously pouring mazal into the world. Each person is the recipient of Hashem's mazal, uniquely calculated and intended for them. But a person can choose to ignore their own mazal and cause themselves immeasurable losses.

Rabbi Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli (1260-1320), known by his acronym, Ritva, the head of the famed Yeshiva in Seville and the author of one of the classic commentaries on the Talmud, writes (end of Pesachim, Haggadah Shel Pesach) that people tend to blame their inadequacies on their life circumstances. When they look around and see others who are more successful than they are, who are more brilliant than they are, they blame it on their own lives. So often we explain our shortcomings by comparing our lives to others. We tell ourselves that obviously others are more successful because they were born with better mazal. To prove how misconceived this approach is, the Ritva points out that Yaakov and Eisav were born to the same parents, they had the same mazal and they were brought up in the same home. Yet, Yaakov, by choosing the path of righteousness, became the founding father of the Jewish nation, whereas Eisav chose the path of debauchery and wickedness. Ultimately, my successes are not defined by my mazal. Rather, my successes are defined by the choices that I make with the mazal that Hashem has blessed me with.

This is why we declare “May there be a siman tov and mazal tov for us and for all of Israel, Amen.” As we enter into the new month, we are entreating Hashem that He will send us a good month. A month with easily identifiable simanim and good fortune. But, we are also reminding ourselves that the amount of siman tov and mazal tov we will experience during the month is dependent upon us and the way we connect to it.

*To be continued...*

---

# PARSHA OVERVIEWS

---

## Nitzavim

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers all the people, young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women, in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because despite having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality.

Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel that will result from failure to heed Hashem's mitzvahs. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — that the Jewish People have forsaken the One Who protects them, in favor of powerless idols. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. And, however assimilated they will have become among the nations, Hashem will eventually bring them back to the Land of Israel. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility, but rather that its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. This Torah portion concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death, with Moshe exhorting the people to choose life.

## Vayelech

On this, the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to keep the faith. Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, Hashem is with them and will vanquish their enemies. Then he summons Yehoshua, and, in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader. Moshe teaches them the mitzvah of *Hakhel*: That every seven years on the first day of the intermediate days of Succot, the entire nation, including small children, will gather together at the Temple to hear the king read from the Book of *Devarim*. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to Hashem, the covenant, and reward and punishment.

Hashem tells Moshe that Moshe's end is near, and that he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the Mishkan, where Hashem will teach Yehoshua. Hashem then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods. Hashem will then completely hide His face, so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. Hashem instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song — *Ha'azinu* — which will serve as a witness against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to the Jewish People.

Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah and instructs the *Levi'im* to place it to the side of the *Aron* (Holy Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah scroll that is different from the original — for there will always be a reference copy.

## Ha'azinu

Most of the portion of Ha'azinu is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons heaven and earth to stand as eternal witness to what will happen if the Jewish People sin. He reminds the people to examine world history and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation — that Hashem "pulls the strings" of world events so that the *Bnei Yisrael* can fulfill their destiny as Hashem's messengers. Hashem's kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a land of amazing abundance, and for defeating their enemies. But, this physical bounty leads the people to become self-satisfied and over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt their morals. They worship empty idols and indulge in depravity. Hashem will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world. However, the purpose of these nations is to act as a rod to chastise the Jewish People. When these nations think that it is through their own power that they have dominated Israel, Hashem will remind them that they are no more than a tool to do His will. The purpose of the Jewish People is to make mankind aware of the Creator. Neither exile nor suffering can sever the bond between Hashem and His people, and in the final redemption this closeness will be restored. Hashem will then turn His anger against the enemies of Israel. Hashem then gives His last commandment to Moshe: That he ascend Mount Nevo and be gathered there to his People.

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach  
Institutions,  
POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. [info@ohr.edu](mailto:info@ohr.edu)

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller - Rosh  
HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi  
Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov  
Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi  
Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz,  
Mrs. Helena Stern.

©1992-2024 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved - This publication  
contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Editor's disclaimer -  
Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to be a source for halachic rulings. In any real  
and specific case one should consult a qualified halachic authority for ruling.