

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### THE MYTH OF ‘TALMUD KOREA’

“You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem...” (Devarim 29:9)

After reading my piece last week, Torah Weekly reader Ze'ev Smason pointed out (according to Chat GPT) –

- Myth: South Korea teaches the full Talmud in schools.
- Reality: Some Koreans (especially parents and educators) use simplified storybook versions of the Talmud to impart lessons in wisdom and ethics.
- Depth: Its mention and lessons, not deep study.

I appreciate the clarification; what I wanted to point out was that “...unlike other nations who nurture the poisonous illusion that the Jews conspire to control the world, the Koreans came to a much more honest conclusion: they said, maybe the Jewish people are more successful because their guidebook to life is wiser than any other guidebook. They said, we want to understand the Talmud.”

Large numbers of chidushei Torah will not be flowing from South Korea, and the Mir Yeshiva will not be opening a branch in Seoul, yet the fact that they recognize that there's something special unusual about the Jews – and not because of the mythical “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” – is a reminder that Hashem blessed us above all nations and we need look no further than our own back yard. We don't need to get a stiff neck contemplating our navels on top of the Himalayas.

Some have felt that it was “odd of G-d to choose the Jews” (not odd at all, the Goyim annoy Him), but like it or not, we have been placed at the pinnacle and the fulcrum of existence. That is what one needs to keep in mind when “You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem...” at the coronation of the King next week. May all Israel be written in the Book of Life!

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# Q & A - Nitzavim

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## 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.

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# Q & A – Rosh Hashanah

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## 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 shehechiyanu 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 shehechiyanu 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*)

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## KRIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH (PART 24)

“The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more.”  
Wilson Mizener – American Playwright

*Kriat Shema al Hamitah* continues: **In the Name of Hashem, G-d of Israel, may [the angels] Michael be at my right, Gavriel at my left, Uriel in front of me, and Raphael behind me; and above my head, the Presence of Hashem.**

Our Sages teach us that the vast majority of angels have no permanent name. Rather, each angel's name is defined by the mission that it has been entrusted with. After completing its mission, the angel is given another name reflecting the new task it has been commanded to perform. There is, however, a small cadre of angels whose names remain consistent. These are the angels considered to be closest to Hashem, whose names remain unchanged due to their constant and consistency role in Hashem's Masterplan. The four angels mentioned in *Kriat Shema al Hamitah* are a part of this exclusive group. Their names reveal the reason for their existence and define their essence.

The first angel is Michael. “Michael” is a composite of two words, “*Mi ka-Kel – Who is like Hashem*”. Throughout Tanach, the angel Michael always represents Hashem's Infiniteness, the fact that Hashem is not restricted or constricted in any way by the physical world.

For example, when the three angels come to visit *Avraham Avinu* (*Bereshit 18 and Rashi there*) it is Michael who tells Avraham that he and his wife Sarah will have a child, despite it being physically impossible for the two of them to have a child together.

Why is Michael found at our right? The right side represents our physical strength. Most people's right hand is their stronger hand. Michael stays at our right side to remind us that, regardless of how strong we think we are, Hashem is immeasurably stronger.

The second angel is Gavriel. “Gavriel” is also a composite of two words: “*Gevurat Kel – the might of Hashem*”. Gavriel represents Hashem's absolute power. In the same narrative as above, it is Gavriel who informs *Avraham Avinu* that Hashem decreed that the city of Sedom be obliterated together with its inhabitants due to their wickedness which had become untenable. Gavriel is at our left, our weaker side, to inform us Hashem's strength is with us always.

The third angel is Uriel. Uriel means “*Uri Kel – Hashem illuminates for me*”. Uriel is in front of us lighting up our way, just as a person walking in darkness shines their flashlight ahead of them. The Rabbis explain, however, that the true light in our world comes from the Holy Torah. And it is Uriel who bathes our world in the only light of any real consequence. Standing in front of us, Uriel lights our way, showing us how to forge a stronger connection to our Father in Heaven.

There is a story that illuminates (pun intended) just how a person can access the precious light that Uriel brings into this world. Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld (1925-1990) was one of the most influential spiritual mentors of his generation in America. Under the guidance of his beloved Rebbi, Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner, he established the famed Sh’or Yeshuv Yeshiva in Far Rockaway. The very last time he met with Rabbi Hutner, Rabbi Freifeld cited a verse from *Sefer Iyov* (38:19): “*Eizeh haderech yishkan ohr?* – How does one acquire light?” Rabbi Freifeld used the verse to obliquely ask what one needs to access the wisdom of the Holy Torah.

Rabbi Hutner answered him in Yiddish: “*M’darf zein freilech* – You have to be happy!” The last of the four angels mentioned is Raphael. As with his “colleagues”, his name is comprised of two words, ‘*Refuat Kel – Healing from Hashem*’. Raphael’s essence is healing. Hashem thus sent Raphael to *Avraham Avinu* to cure him after he had a *Brit Milah* at the age of ninety-nine (*ibid.*).

Raphael’s position is behind us. Not having eyes in the back of our heads makes the back our most vulnerable side. Sickness is not something that one chooses; it creeps up from behind and afflicts a person. It is therefore Raphael who stands behind us to protect us.

And finally, above us is the Presence of Hashem. Without Hashem’s continuous Presence everything would unravel. Even the boundless powers of the angels Michael, Gavriel, Uriel and Raphael would be ineffectual without Hashem conducting His magnificent symphony from above.

*To be continued...*

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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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)*

## 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 ask about this verse: Do not all nations know how to blow trumpets?! Rather, 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 about Kingship, Shofar, and Remembrance. Thereby, we coronate Hashem as our King, we echo the awesome shofar-blowing at the time of the Giving of the Torah and in the future, and we recall that this awesome King remembers and judges every one of His creatures on this day of Rosh Hashanah. He remembers the smallest sins, He remembers the smallest merits and deploys them mercifully, and He remembers the Redemption and moves the world a step closer to that goal of perfection.

The sound of the shofar is directed toward us as well. *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!*

Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4



*Sefer HaChinuch* elaborates on the need for a reminder: Since a person is earthly, he does not awaken to matters [of the spirit] unless by means of some awakening device, as sound has a great influence on emotion. 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. The broken shofar sounds (i.e., *teruah*) shake our hearts and awaken repentance, and they remind us to “break” the evil inclination that urges us to pursue earthly pleasure and sins.

We specifically use a ram’s horn because it recalls the merit of the binding of Yitzchak and signifies that we submit ourselves to Hashem’s kingship the same way. Its bent shape reminds us to bend our hearts into submission to Hashem (*Sefer HaChinuch*).

## TEMPORARY CONFUSION OF THE SATAN

The Gemara explains that we blow multiple sets of shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah to confuse the Satan (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b). *Ran* (3a in *Rif* pgs.) writes that “Satan” in this context is a reference to the evil inclination within each person, based on the well-known idea that “the evil inclination and the Satan are one.” In other words, the shofar shakes and subdues the evil inclination of our hearts, as explained above (see also *Rashi*, *Aruch*, *Maamar Hachachmah*, and *Targum Yonasan* to *Bamidbar* 29:1). We may suggest that the Gemara is referring to *both* the Satan and the evil inclination, as follows:

When we become stricken with fear upon hearing the shofar blasts and repent with all our hearts, part of our repentance will remain permanent throughout the coming year, but much of it is temporary and will fade along with the dread of the Day of Judgment. Indeed, repentance is a lifetime’s work. Even so, our complete repentance is highly effective at the time of shofar-blowing and throughout Rosh Hashanah, when we coronate Hashem, for He then judges us to see if we are worthy of this lofty status and its accompanying blessings — and the Satan stands to accuse. Our evil inclination then becomes confused: on the one hand, we have repented fully and are on our best behavior, but on the other hand, we know deep down that we still require much work. And the Satan becomes confused as well: on the one hand, he knows that most of this repentance will fade, but on the other hand, he has no right to prosecute about something that someone may or may not do in the future. The prosecutor is silent, and Hashem tilts the stalemated scales in our favor. Thus, although much of the repentance inspired by the shofar-blowing may be temporary, it is greatly effective in holding back decrees regarding the previous year and allowing us another year of blessings and opportunities to prove ourselves.



## PERMANENT REPENTANCE

Be that as it may, Hashem most desires repentance that translates into action. In this vein, the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 29:5 with *Radal*) relates the word “shofar” to “*shippur*,” meaning “beautification” (*Radak* in *Sefer HaSharashim*). The Midrash expounds as follows: In this month of Tishrei, beautify your deeds and adopt a new conduct. Hashem says, “If you beautify 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 on My Throne of Mercy, transforming the Attribute of Justice into the Attribute of Mercy.” Just as childbirth entails a hundred cries, with the hundredth bringing new life (*Tanchumah* to *Tazria* §4), every cry of the shofar brings us toward repentance, with the hundredth bringing us to complete repentance and a new year of good life (*Meshech Chachmah* to *Vayikra* 23:24).

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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### 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.