

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir



What's New About Our New Year?

We are so used to the word “new” but the Torah asks us to stop and contemplate. To truly renew ourselves. What actually becomes “new,” in our world and in ourselves, at this time of year? Our Sages ask us to contemplate three things each day, as if they were new:

1. Torah

One of the most popular words in Devarim, which we read throughout the month of Elul, is הַיּוֹם – “today.” Again and again, as we read about entering the Land of Israel, we are asked to relate to past events as if they are actually happening to us this very morning, and not 3,000 years ago in the desert. “On this day the L-rd your G-d commands you” (Devarim 26:16). Rashi comments: “Each day, let them (the commandments) be brand new as if you had just been commanded to perform them.”

Elsewhere we read “On this day you have become the L-rd your G-d’s own people” (Devarim 27:9) and Rashi, in the same spirit of perpetual renewal, comments: “Let every day be in your eyes as the very same day you entered into a covenant with Him.”

Now is the most appropriate time of the year to refresh and renew our connection to the Torah, to think of it as a gift we just received this morning, and to visualize how the new year will look when a completely new light of Torah – one never seen before – shines upon it from within.

2. Eretz Yisrael

The Land of Israel is the Promised Land, the Holy Land, but is it a new land? Indeed, we justifiably tell ourselves and the entire world that we have an ancient, historical right to this Land. Nevertheless, we should never

allow our relationship to the Land of Israel to become old or stale.

As the verse states, “And it will be when the L-rd brings you to the land of the Canaanites as He swore to you and to your forefathers, and He will give it to you” (Shemot 13:11), upon which Rashi elaborates: “And He will give it to you, that is, you should consider it as if He gave it to you on that same day and not as an inheritance from your ancestors.”

It does not matter where we live. We must create a personal, vibrant and emotional connection with the Land of Israel. We cannot rely only on what we were told by our great-great-grandparents. Again, the months of Elul and Tishrei are the perfect time to think about how to bring a new and authentic connection with the Land of Israel into our lives.

3. Marriage and Family

In Devarim, we receive many instructions on married life and the education of our children – the questions children will ask, the answers we will give, and the manner in which we should educate them.

And it is precisely here, in what we think is our comfort zone, we are called upon to find something new.

Under the *chupah*, we say, “Behold, you are now holy to me, with this ring, according to the religion of Moshe and Israel.” A hundred years ago, Rabbi Tzvi Kunstlicher, in “Be’er Tzvi,” asked why we emphasize “according to the religion of Moshe and Israel.” He answered that our marital relationship should be the same as our relationship to the Torah given by Moshe to Israel – a relationship of daily renewal. That is, “every day should be like new,” as new as the day you stood under the *chupah*. Here too, we would be wise to devote time, thought and creativity to renew our most important relationships within the intimate surroundings of home.



Our Sages defined the biggest challenge of our times in this way: we should not take our greatest gifts – Torah, the Land of Israel, our families – for granted. The prevailing culture broadcasts a message that loyalty to a text (Torah), a Land (Israel), or fellow members of a covenant (family) are values that have vanished from the world. This culture sees newness as external to ourselves and not something to be sought or attained within.

On Rosh Hashanah, we are called upon to find new meaning in those elements of our lives that have stood

the test of time – Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the sanctity of the Jewish family.



Two Thoughts on the Shofar

■ Before blowing the *shofar*, we recite chapter 47 of Tehillim seven times, *לְמִנְצַח לְבָנֵי קֹרַח מִזְמֹר*, “For the sons of Korach, a psalm...” It is a very special moment.

So why at this very moment must we remember Korach’s sons? Korach started the controversy against Moshe and Aharon. A controversy about honor, pride and personal gain, ending in tragedy – Korach and his whole congregation were swallowed up in the ground and died.

But what about Korach’s sons? They did not die. At the last minute, they regretted their actions. To this day, we learn from them that one should never give up hope of repentance and returning to G-d.

Have we prepared for this moment of blowing the *shofar*? Were we in a mindframe of learning and *teshuva* and reflection during Elul? For many of us, the first day of Tishrei, Rosh Hashanah arrives uninvited, as if we never knew it was upon us, and we find ourselves standing in somber silence waiting for the *shofar* to blast. What can we do to compensate for our lack of preparation? “For the sons of Korach, a psalm...”

You can always connect and fix things, even now. It’s never too late. This is the message for this one-time moment, once a year. You can always

repair and improve. No matter where you have been the past year. No matter what your Elul looked like. Here, in just another second, we will hear the *shofar*, and together we will anoint G-d.

■ Some data about the past year: Every 60 seconds the world watches more than four million videos on YouTube, sends 156 million emails, asks Google 3.5 million questions and sends about 20 million WhatsApp messages. What was once called the Information Highway is now the Information Intifada, attacking us with constant bombardments of data. No human brain is capable of absorbing so much information.

The main *mitzvah* on Rosh Hashanah is to hear the *shofar* – “*Yom Teruah*.” Other nations mark their new years with street celebrations, a loud countdown, drinking and eating – while we gather inside to be silent and listen. As the outside world becomes louder and louder, this silence for the *shofar* takes on added meaning and significance.

We are resetting the system. Stop talking and shouting and arguing. Remain silent and listen to a voice above words, texts and videos: “Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, who has made us holy through His commandments, and has commanded us to listen to the sound of the *shofar*.”

Stop making the noise. Listen!

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