



Rosh Hashanah

How We Get Hashem to Remember

The Malchuyot Focus

The Torah tells us two things about Rosh Hashanah – that it is a day of *terua* (horn blowing) and that its goal is *zikaron* (memory). These two words are the basis for the *berachot* of *zichronot* and *shofarot*.

Two questions need to be asked. The first is the relationship between the two – *terua* and *zikaron*. The second is about the third *beracha* – *malchuyot* – that we not only add, but actually begin with, and emphasize throughout our Rosh Hashanah and *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* liturgy.

Why do we focus on *malchuyot* – the one *beracha* not mentioned (explicitly) by the Torah in reference to Rosh Hashanah?

Zikaron – Who Needs Reminding?

The answer lies in understanding who *zikaron* aims to remind and how it does so. Rashi¹ and the Rashbam² on Vayikra 23:24 explain that *zikaron* aims to remind Hashem – of us (Rashbam) and of *Akeidat Yitzchak* (Rashi). This approach is based on the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16a) that explains we use a ram's horn to remind Hashem of the *akeida*.¹

The obvious question is why Hashem needs reminding? This is probably part of the reason why the Rambam² explains *zikaron's* goal differently. The Rambam understands that *we* are the ones who need reminding – the *shofar* reminds us of Hashem by waking us from the stupor of our normal routines. Though we know that Hashem created us and therefore our life's

mission should be to serve Him, we are often too busy to reflect and focus our lives on this mission. On Rosh Hashanah – the day Hashem created Man – we blow the *shofar* to remind us that we are His creations and that we should work to live up to the goals we were created to accomplish.

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 331) uses the Rambam's explanation to explain the first approach as well. The question is not what Hashem remembers, but what He *associates* with us (*lizkor lachem*). When we identify with *Akeidat Yitzchak* as a model for our religious commitment, Hashem sees us in this same light. Our willingness to sacrifice ourselves for and commit ourselves to *Avodat Hashem* merits us Hashem's *rachamim* (mercy) and His blessings for the continued good life we can use to best serve Him.

Zikaron Hinges on Malchuyot

We can now understand the centrality of *malchuyot*. The mission we are meant to remember on Rosh Hashanah is rooted in the recognition of Hashem as our King and Creator. The Torah focuses on the *goal* – *zikaron*. We focus on the *means* – *malchuyot* – which helps us develop and maintain the *zikaron* mindset.

This approach is summarized by the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16a), which quotes Hashem's explanation of *malchuyot's* goal as 'for you to accept Me as King' and then that of *zichronot* as 'for your memory to rise positively before Me.'

The Shofar as the Common Facilitator

The Gemara concludes by presenting the *shofar* as the tool meant to inspire the unique aspects of both *malchuyot* and *zichronot*.

First, we use the *shofar* as a coronation horn. In addition to the general coronation symbolism, our *shofar* also reminds us of the *shofar* that proclaimed Hashem's presence at *Har Sinai* for *Matan Torah*. We then use the ram's *shofar* to remind us and (through this) Hashem of *Akeidat Yitzchak* – the symbol of the commitment modeled by our forefathers and ancestors for us to emulate. After the *beracha* of *zichronot*, we blow the *shofar* as part of *shofarot*, which describe the *shofar gadol* that will herald the final redemption.

May our sincere and complete *kabbalat ol malchut shamayim* bring Hashem to view us in a way that merits Him blessing us with an upcoming year of good health, *hatzla-cha* and the Final Redemption.

1 The connection of the shofar to the akeida also appears in the Midrash Rabbah (Bereishit Rabbah 56:10). See also Vayikra Rabbah (29 DH Rebbe Yehoshua) that also sees the shofar as aiming to impact Hashem.

2 Mishneh Torah Teshuva 3:4. See also Yerushalayim (RH 58:4) and the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayishlach 2), which also see the shofar as aiming to impact Man.

Rabbi Reuven Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrachi and Dean of the Yeshivat HaKotel Overseas Program.



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Teshuva in the Wake of Pandemic Rupture and Repair

As the Yamim Noraim approach, we are enjoined to take advantage of this time and seek out a relationship with *Hashem* as He is so near (Yeshayahu 55:6). This year in particular, we must undergo personal and national introspection in the wake of a worldwide *מגפה* (plague or pandemic) that has taken hundreds of thousands of lives. The Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ta'aniot 1:1-2) teaches us that when suffering befalls us, we are implored to view it as an indication of our wrongdoings and undergo a process of repentance.

The first time a *מגפה* strikes *Am Yisrael* follows the story of the 10 slandering spies¹, who died in a *מגפה*. Immediately thereafter, Moshe warns *Bnei Yisrael* – who seek to repent² by attempting to engage in battle with the Canaanites and Amalekites as they enter the Land – that they will be unsuccessful in their attempts. *Hashem* will not accompany them for He has already punished them with 40 years in the wilderness (Bamidbar 14:42). They did not properly display belief in *Hashem's* powers of conquest earlier, and therefore they are killed by their enemies.

Perhaps this is the first message we must internalize today: taking advantage of Divinely-destined opportunities to come to *Eretz Yisrael*. Perhaps we have not properly heeded the miraculous “knocks”³ to return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Perhaps a pandemic strikes to remind us to take advantage of “open skies” and a Promised Land before it's too late.

The second time a *מגפה* appears is in the aftermath of the Korach rebellion (Bamidbar 17:6-14). Despite the miraculous punishments of Korach and his followers, *Bnei Yisrael* blame Moshe and Aharon for their deaths,

and *Hashem* warns of immediate punishment. Moshe quickly tells Aharon to take *ketoret* and atone for the people, saving lives amidst the pandemic that killed 14,700 people. In anticipation of future democratic arguments, *Hashem* then manifests Aharon's Divine appointment through the blossoming of his staff – a sign of continued authority.

Our generation has witnessed the waning of leadership in many spheres of government and judiciary. The Torah commands us to ensure that officers of the law are instituted in every community and abide by values of justice and righteousness. Torah leadership as well must be respected in every generation, a phenomenon drastically lacking today in many Jewish communities. Sometimes it takes a pandemic to recognize and respect Torah authorities.

The third and final *מגפה* in the Torah comes as a punishment for the sin of *Ba'al Pe'or*; when 24,000 men were killed after practicing a promiscuous form of idolatry (Bamidbar 25:1-9). After *Hashem* rewards Pinchas for ending the pandemic through publicly murdering two of the perpetrators, He commands Moshe to fight against the people of Midian for sending their daughters to seduce *Bnei Yisrael*. However, before this commandment is carried out, the Torah teaches us what appear to be unrelated narratives including a national census, the petition of the daughters of Tzelofchad, and the laws of the annulment of vows. The common denominator of all these apparent non-sequiturs is the theme of family.

The national census includes the counting of every individual family, to

literally rebuild the family structure that had been destroyed by the sin of *Ba'al Pe'or*. *Bnot Tzelofchad* come to Moshe to appeal for the perpetuation of their father's legacy within his family, and fathers/husbands are taught to listen to their daughters and wives in order to annul relevant vows.

The pandemic of *Ba'al Pe'or* and the ensuing repair reminds us of the dangers various cultures pose to the sanctity of our homes. Only once we rebuild our immediate family structure, restore family values and learn to listen to our family members, are we sufficiently edified to battle our surrounding enemies. How relevant in our post-modern society which has redefined marriage, family and simultaneously disposed of their intrinsic sanctity! *Teshuva* in the wake of pandemic enjoins us to quarantine in our homes with immediate family members and invest in rebuilding our relationships.

In the midst of these days of sensitized introspection, let us take heed of the Torah's messages of pandemics, and stir our souls and selves to reignite our commitment to *Eretz Yisrael*, Torah leadership and family values. Together with *tefillah* and *tzedakah*, may we merit repair and *refuah* for this upcoming year!

1 Bamidbar 14:37. Rashi explains that they died through their tongues *מדה כנגד מדה*.

2 See Seforno (Devarim 1:45), HaEmek Davar (Bamidbar 14:40-45).

3 See Rav J.B. Soloveitchik, “*Kol Dodi Dofek*.”

Rabbanit Shani Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrahi and the Director of the Mizrahi Matan Lapidot Educators' Program