

O H R N E T

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SPECIAL ROSH HASHANA ISSUE

PARSHA INSIGHTS

JOURNEY TO BEYOND

“...to love the L-rd, your G-d, to listen to His voice and to cleave to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days...” (30:20)

It seems that for once, curiosity has not “killed the cat”. In a mind-boggling feat of near-science-fiction, the United States has managed to send a remote exploration vehicle called “Curiosity” weighing nearly a ton, the biggest capsule NASA has ever used, bigger even than the Apollo Command Module, to explore the surface of our nearest planetary neighbor in space – the planet Mars.

Let’s consider this journey: Eight and half months after leaving Earth, a distance of 250 million kilometers, it found its “entry keyhole” in the sky just a few kilometers across. Had it not done this, it would have had no chance of arriving at its target. The capsule entered the outer limits of Mars’ atmosphere traveling at 20,000 km/hr. All that speed had to be reduced to a mere stroll, for when the rover’s wheels touch the ground a mere six-to-eight minutes later, it was moving at no more than half a meter a second.

As the capsule raced downwards, it ejected ballast blocks to move its center of gravity and tilt its angle of approach. This gave the vehicle lift. And with the aid of thrusters and some dead-reckoning, the entry capsule flew a path through the upper atmosphere, the underside of the capsule heating up to over 2,000 degrees Celsius.

Then more ballast blocks were ejected to straighten the vehicle before, at 11 km altitude and with the descent velocity now reduced to 1,400 km/hr, the capsule deployed a supersonic parachute. This immense canopy opened instantaneously and absorbed an impulse of almost 30 tons.

The parachute further slowed the fall to about 450 km/hr, and, at that point, at an altitude of about 1.5 km, we saw what flight system manager Mike Wallace called the “crazy” stuff.

A “sky crane” holding the rover dropped away from the parachute and using thruster rockets to further slow its descent, it headed down towards the surface of the planet.

At just 20 meters above the ground, the sky crane hovered and lowered the rover down to the surface on three nylon cords. The wheels made contact, the cords were cut, and the crane flew away to crash at a safe distance.

Quite a journey!

But this journey pales in comparison to another journey.

It says in the Book of Ecclesiastes, “...and the day of death is better than the day of birth. It’s better to go to a house of mourning than to a wedding feast.” (Kohelet 7:1-2)

The best advice comes from someone who is about to leave this world, someone who can look back over his life with the objectivity of someone who is leaving it.

And the best advice comes from the best teacher, and no teacher was better than Moshe Rabbeinu.

And what was Moshe’s advice to his beloved people on the last day of his life as he looked back over his journey through this world?

“...to love the L-rd, your G-d, to listen to His voice and to cleave to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days...”

When we are born we face a journey that dwarfs the journey of “Curiosity.” From the moment we leave the “launch pad” of birth, our days are filled with difficult and sometimes seemingly insurmountable obstacles. At every turn we can make mistakes, sometimes fatal for our spiritual well-being.

Only when we touch down on the surface of the World-to-Come can we finally relax. The whoop of exaltation in the control room of the JPL in Pasadena when Curiosity landed is nothing compared to the whoop of the soul when it finally touches down in the World-to-Come to be satiated with its just reward for having traversed a universe of trials and challenges.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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, in spite of 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 which will result from failure to heed G-d's *mitzvot*. Descendants of that generation 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 — 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. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually G-d will bring them back to *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe tells the people to remember that fulfilling the Torah is not an impossibility; rather it's within the grasp of every Jew. The *parsha* dramatically concludes with Moshe comparing the Jewish People's choice to follow the Torah to a choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

ISRAEL Forever

DO THEY KNOW THEIR OWN POSITION?

The current talk in secular circles about limiting deferment from military duty to *iluyim* (geniuses) and drafting all the rest is an echo of the attempt made almost a century ago by the Zionist leadership to create a "yeshiva" for exceptional students that would be fully supported by the World Zionist Organization.

To achieve this goal the head of the WZO, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, met in 1918 with the rabbinical leadership of Jerusalem. In response to his eloquent presentation of what such a "modern yeshiva" could do for Jewry, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld rejected his proposal with an unequivocal "no" and urged him to leave the fate of *yeshivot* in the hands of people to whom Torah is sacred.

One compromising participant in that historic meeting called the stunned Weizmann to the side and tried to comfort him by telling him that Rav Sonnenfeld was a fanatic and

that if the reforms Weizmann sought would be introduced gradually, they could eventually be accepted. Weizmann placed his hand on this fellow's shoulder and said to him:

"I know my position and I believe in it. Rav Sonnenfeld knows his position and believes in it. But I don't know your position and I suspect that neither do you."

The polarization in Israel today has created a virtual cultural war with the religious and secular publics taking well-defined positions on issues such as the future of *yeshivot* in Israel. The political leadership, which must make the ultimate decision on whether to force yeshiva students to perform military or national service, do not seem to know what their own position is in regard to what *should and can* be done.

May Heaven bless them with the understanding of what *really* can secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

OLD-FASHIONED DIPLOMACY

“Why is there no dome atop your synagogue as there are on the synagogues in my empire?” This was the question put to his Jewish escorts back in 1870 by Franz Joseph, Emperor of Austro-Hungary during a visit to Jerusalem. This European ruler, respected for his benevolent policy



towards his Jewish subjects, was being shown the yet unfinished Nisan Beck Synagogue by some of those subjects now living in Jerusalem.

“Your highness,” one of them diplomatically explained, “even the synagogue wishes to pay tribute to you by removing its hat!”

PARSHA Q&A?

1. Why did Moshe gather the Jewish People together on the day of his death?
2. Who are the wood-cutters and water-drawers mentioned in verse 29:10?
3. How do two parties “pass” into a covenant?
4. What is the connection between the verse “*Atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous parsha?
5. Why can't G-d disassociate himself from the Jewish People?
6. How many curses were listed in *Parshat Ki Tavo*?
7. Which two leaders followed Moshe's example and assembled the people at the end of their rule?
8. With whom did Moshe make the covenant and oath?
9. Why did the Jewish People see only idols of wood and stone in Egypt?
10. What is meant by the punishment of “adding drunkenness to thirst (29:18)”?
11. The Hebrew word for nose and anger are the same. What is the connection?
12. Why is G-d described in anthropomorphic terms?
13. What two cities were destroyed along with Sodom and Amorah?
14. When is the entire nation punished for the sins of an individual?
15. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other's sins (*areivim zeh lazeh*)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 29:9 - To initiate them into the covenant with G-d.
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who came to join the Jewish People.
3. 29:11 - The two parties place objects in two parallel lines and pass between them.
4. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, “Who can survive such curses?” Moshe comforted them, saying, “You've done a lot to anger G-d, and yet — ‘*Atem nitzavim*’ — G-d didn't destroy you ...you're still standing before Him.”
5. 29:12 - Because He told them He wouldn't and because He swore to the Avot (Patriarchs) that the Jewish People would always remain His nation.
6. 29:12 - Ninety-eight.
7. 29:12 - Yehoshua and Shmuel.
8. 29:14 - With the people standing before him and all future generations.
9. 29:16 - Because these were exposed openly. The idols of gold and silver, however, were locked away by their owners for fear of theft.
10. 29:18 - Even unintentional sins will be considered by G-d as if they were committed intentionally. “Drunkenness” refers to sins committed unintentionally. “Thirst” refers to sins committed intentionally.
11. 29:19 - When one gets angry, his nostrils flare.
12. 29:19 - The Torah speaks in terms that people can understand.
13. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
14. 29:28 - When the Jewish People fail to bring the sinner to judgment.
15. 29:28 - When the Jewish People took the oath at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval.

שנה טובה
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Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

BERACHOT 44 - 50

“One should always come early to the synagogue in order to gain the merit of being one of the first ten worshippers. If even a hundred more people join them, his reward will be equivalent to all of theirs.”

This advice of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi follows a story about the difficulty that was faced by Rabbi Eliezer in putting together a minyan. That story and the above-mentioned advice teach us not only the importance of “making a minyan” with your participation, but also the extra dimension of being there early.

• *Berachot 47b*

“Open wide your mouth and I shall fill it.” (Tehillim 61:11)

This passage is explained by Rabbi Dimi as a reference to a Jew receiving a promise from G-d that his prayers for great success in learning Torah will be fully answered.

In contrast to the humility which should restrict one in praying for material things, the Jew is encourage to be bold in soliciting Divine assistance in achieving great success in his study of Torah.

• *Berachot 50a*

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WHY NO HALLEL ON ROSH HASHANA?

From: Arthur in Chicago

*Dear Rabbi,
Since in addition to being the beginning of the New Year, Rosh Hashana is also the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, why don't we say Hallel on Rosh Hashana as on other days of Rosh Chodesh?*

Dear Arthur,

Good question. Since Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgment, each person should feel anxiety and awe. He should guard against levity and anything that distracts him from the awe of judgment.

So great is awe of judgment among Israel on Rosh Hashana that despite it being a festival, they do not recite the Hallel song of praise recited on the New Moon or festivals. For Hallel is said only with a joy-filled heart, whereas during the days of judgment there should be more fear and trembling in Jewish hearts than rejoicing.

Thus our Sages taught, "The angels said before G-d, L-rd of the Universe, why does Israel fail to utter song before you during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur? He replied, When the King sits on the throne of judgment and the books of life and death are before him, can Israel utter song?" (Rosh Hashana 32).

Nevertheless, a person should not be saddened by fear of judgment. One should have a haircut, wash, and wear special clothes in honor of the festival. A husband should also give his wife a gift in honor of the day, and buy treats for the children. This demonstrates our faith that G-d will show us favor.

So we find that when Ezra the Scribe read the Torah before the assembly gathered on Rosh Hashana, and all the people wept on hearing the admonitions of the Torah, Ezra and Nehemiah said to them, "Do not mourn and do not weep. Go eat delicacies and drink sweet drinks and send gifts to whoever has no food, for the day is sacred to our

L-rd". (Nehemiah 6:10)

Similarly, our Sages taught: "Usually a person who has a judgment pending against him dresses in black and neglects his appearance in worry of the outcome. Israel, however is different. They dress in white, they eat, drink and rejoice in the knowledge that G-d will perform miracles in their behalf [and forgive them]." (Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashana, ch. 1)

ORDER IN THE COURT – ROSH HASHANA OR YOM KIPPUR?

Kevin from Johannesburg asked:

*Dear Rabbi,
I understand that Rosh Hashana is the day of judgment, and Yom Kippur is the day of repentance and forgiveness. Shouldn't Yom Kippur be first? Wouldn't we be better off doing Teshuva (repentance) before Rosh Hashana, and go into Rosh Hashana to be judged, already having been forgiven?*

Dear Kevin,

On Yom Kippur, G-d showers the world with forgiveness: But just like a shower, if you want the cleansing effect, you have to get into the water!

'Getting into' Yom Kippur, however, is easier said than done. We earthlings relate to things that are tangible, i.e., French fries and phone bills. Spiritual matters - *mitzvot*, *Olam Haba* (the World-to-Come), repentance, etc. — are harder for us to get excited about.

Therefore, we have Rosh Hashana first. On Rosh Hashana all our physical needs are determined. Will we live or will we die? Will we have money for the phone bill? Once we begin thinking about these issues, asking G-d for a year of health and wealth, *we can then hopefully go one step further*, asking G-d to enlighten us, forgive us, and to help us towards *Teshuvah* (returning to the way of Torah).

• Source: *Kochvei Ohr, Ma'amar 83*

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HONORING THE OLD BOOKS

Question: As the *gabbai* of my synagogue it is my responsibility to see that there are *Siddurim* and *Chumashim* for the use of the congregants. After a while these holy books become very worn and must be rebound. The problem is that it is cheaper to buy new ones than to bind the old ones so that it is common practice in synagogues to discard the old ones by placing them in the *geniza* collection box for proper burial. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: In response to such a question Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, ruled that it is preferable to bind the worn books even at a greater cost than purchasing new ones. This was

based on the obligation to honor sacred books in the manner that we honor a Sefer Torah.

The problems which you and other synagogue trustees face is that congregants are eager to donate new books in memory of deceased relatives but will not pay for binding old ones. This inevitably creates a crisis of sufficient space for both the old and new. Nevertheless, an attempt should be made to create a "*Tikun Sefarim*" fund in your synagogue to restore these books which have provided so much service, and to offer the rebound ones to a synagogue or yeshiva in need of them before giving up and putting them into the *geniza*.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHOSE LAND IS IT?

Rabbi Meir Simcha Hacoen, the rav of the Latvian city of Dvinsk in the last century, and the author of the "Ohr Somayach" (for whom Yeshivat Ohr Somayach is named), was famous for the brilliance and sensitivity that made him such an outstanding judge and arbitrator.

Two men once came before him to resolve a dispute between them over ownership of a certain property. When his efforts for reaching a compromise failed, the rav told the

litigants that they must join him in a visit to the disputed land. He there placed his ear to the ground and then turned to the two claimants to inform them as to what he heard the land say:

"Each of these men says I belong to him but the truth is that both of them will belong to me."

This shocking reminder of mortality moved the two to reach the compromise suggested by the rav.

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Who Will the Jews Choose?

A Torah Perspective on the US Presidential Elections

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

Who is going to win the crucial vote of Jewish citizens in the upcoming elections for president – Republican candidate Mitt Romney or incumbent Democratic President Barack Obama?

Nothing so much occupies political analysts these days as speculating whether Jews in such states as Florida and Ohio will switch from voting Democrat to voting Republican.

Without getting involved in what is “good for the Jews”, which is a matter of great debate among Jews themselves, it is important for all Jews to maintain a Torah perspective in regard to the leadership of Israel’s most important ally.

Of course, a Jew who firmly believes that either of the candidates is better for Israel and the US has every right to vote and even campaign for that man.

But what about the “day after”?

“The heart of the king is in the hand of G-d; He directs it anywhere He wishes.” (*Mishlei 21:1*)

These words from the wisest of men are important to remember both now and afterwards. Although G-d has given each individual person free-will to decide on good or evil, this free-will is suspended from a leader when it comes to the fate of a nation. History is replete with examples of choices made by leaders who went against their own evil designs because Heaven orchestrated the effects of the choice imposed upon them.

No matter who wins the election, his decisions will be determined by Heaven, and this should enable us to be calm spectators or activists.

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A Sticky Situation

BY RABBI REUVEN LAUFFER

Rosh Hashana – truly a time of awe and awesomeness

It is a time when we are placed under a spiritual microscope and judged for everything we have (or haven't) done over the year. We wait with bated breath to hear the Shofar's "voice" and to be shaken by its soul-splitting clarity. We spend many hours in introspective prayer trying to reach the inner dimension of who we really are. Then we try to make that connection so tangible that it will stay with us for longer than the time that it takes to walk out of the Synagogue.

The whole Rosh Hashana period is designed specifically to reinforce its gravity and seriousness. And, yet, there is one symbol of Rosh Hashana that seems to project an almost opposite concept. Honey. When I was a child, Rosh Hashana was one of my most favorite holidays because I loved to eat the apple smothered in honey and then the Challah dripping with its sticky sweetness. When I was small I couldn't get enough of it. I must confess that I am still very partial to the combined flavors of apple and honey. But, somehow, the sweetness of the honey on the one hand, and the awe and trembling of Rosh Hashana on the other, don't really seem to belong together.

There was a great Chassidic Rabbi called Rabbi Hershel from Riminov. Once, a heartbroken widow came to him to cry over her sad plight. After her husband passed away, she entered into a legal battle with her stepchildren over her inheritance. The Beit Din (Jewish court of law) was presided over by one of the most prominent scholars of the generation. He carefully listened to both sides, interrogated the witnesses, and studied all the relevant sources in the Talmud and the Code of Jewish Law. After a thorough perusal of the whole case, he ruled in favor of the children. The widow was left with almost nothing, and so she came to Rabbi Hershel to ask for help. As is customary, the Beit Din wrote an extensive "response" to explain their decision and explaining how they based their decision on the Torah, by citing conclusive proofs from the Talmud and legal authorities. Rabbi Hershel asked the widow to show him the court's ruling. He looked through the ruling carefully two or three times, examining the sources and considering the matter. After a long time he looked up and told her to go back to the Beit Din and tell them in his name that their ruling was mistaken. They should go back to the original sources and they will see that they had misjudged.

As could be predicted, the Beit Din at first refused to hear her claims. Rabbi Hershel was known in those days as a holy Rebbe of Chassidim, but not necessarily as one of the pre-eminent Talmudic geniuses of the generation. "What business is it of his to interfere with our rulings?" they asked. However, the widow was so upset and begged them so profusely to reconsider that they finally consented. The Beit Din was convened again, the judges interviewed the two claimants and their witnesses for a second time and, once again, they went through all the sources. This time, however, they noticed several crucial points that they had overlooked the first time. After a careful deliberation, they decided to annul their first ruling and they awarded a substantial portion of the estate to the widow, granting her enough money with which to live comfortably for many years.

For years afterward, the head of the court wondered how Rabbi Hershel had noticed the mistake. The point on which the case was based was such a fine nuance that it would take a veritable Talmudic genius to notice it. Finally, they had the opportunity to meet and he was able to ask him. "King David writes in the Book of Psalms that the Torah is sweeter than honey," explained Rabbi Hershel. "Perhaps I am not as great a Talmudic scholar as you, but I love learning Torah so much that whenever I learn I can taste the sweetness of Torah on my lips. When I read through your reasoning, I could not taste the sweet honey of Torah and I understood that it could not possibly be true! I couldn't see what oversight might have missed your attention, so I left it up to you to reconsider the matter, trusting that you would catch your own mistake."

Rosh Hashana – truly a time of awe and awesomeness. But, what is sometimes overlooked in our trepidation is that Rosh Hashana is also a day that allows us to taste the sweetness of being G-d's children. More than that, it is a time that inspires us to want to live that sweetness, not just for Rosh Hashana but also for the entire year!

So, maybe this year when the apple and honey are being passed around the table on Rosh Hashana, let's use the opportunity to savor its physical sweetness and, even more importantly, to relish in its spiritual sweetness as well.

And may we all be blessed with a truly sweet and delicious year!

ROSH HASHANA Q&A ?

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 Tishrei is Rosh Hashana?
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 G-d on Rosh Hashana?
7. A person’s yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashana, 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 Hashana, 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 Hashana which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

ROSH HASHANA Q&A ?

Answers to Rosh Hashana’s Questions!

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 G-d has blessed...” (*Bereishet 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this “field” as an apple orchard. (*Ta’anit 29b, Bi’ur 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 Hashana it was decreed that these barren women would bear children. (*Tractate Rosh Hashana 10b*)
7. Expenses for Shabbat, Yom Tov, and the cost of one’s children’s Torah education. (*Be’er Heitiv 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 Hashana. Since Rosh Hashana 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 Hashana 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 Hashana.) (*Taz 600:2*)