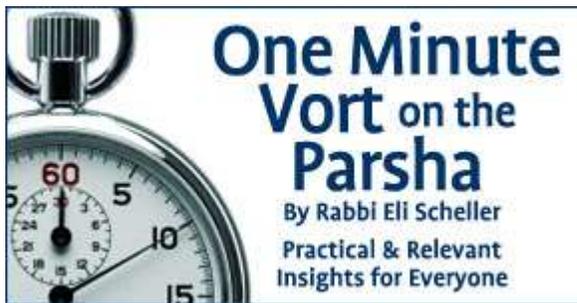


In This Issue:

- **"One Minute Vort on the Parsha"** by Rabbi Eli Scheller
- **"Torah for Your Table"** by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis
- **"Shabbat Shalom"** by Rabbi Kalman Packouz
- **"Family Parsha"** by Nesanel Yoel Safran
- **"Language of Tomorrow"** by Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein



Choose Life!

And you shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring. (Deut. 30:19)

The Torah stresses that choosing life is not only for the benefit of the one making the choice, but also for the benefit of his offspring so that they will live. How does your decision to want life help your children? Don't they have to choose life as well?

It is possible for a person to learn Torah and do mitzvos, and yet these actions won't have any positive effect on his children. If one does mitzvot because he believes in God and knows that he has to do it, but does so half-heartedly, or with the attitude that they are a heavy burden, his children may well choose not to follow his path of Torah and mitzvot. For example, after spending \$100 on an etrog he says, "Oiy, s' iz shver tzoo zaiyn a yid" (it is hard to be a Jew). Naturally, his children will be reluctant to follow the Torah. They'll reason, "Our father is doing

all this because he has to. We are not as strong as him and it is just too hard for us to keep the Torah."

However, if one does mitzvot with joy and pride, making it clear that this is what gives him life and energizes him, then they will want to experience the same enjoyment in life that their father experienced. Therefore the Torah tells us, "You shall choose life in a way that will inspire your children to choose it and live." (1)

NOTE

1. R' Moshe Feinstein.



The Covenant of Mutual Responsibility

The study of the parashah is not only the study of our past, our present, our future, but most significantly, it is the Word of God. If you know how to study it and plumb its infinite depths, you will see that the parashah always gives illumination and enables you to better respond to the challenges of the moment. The reading of Parashas Nitzavim always coincides with the High Holy Days and gives us guidance as to how we might best prepare ourselves for the awesome days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The stirring opening words, "Atem nitzavim hayom kulchem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem - You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your God,"[1] speak volumes. In gematria these words are the equivalent of "La'amod l'selichos - to stand before God and seek forgiveness." During the entire year we run from place to place, from activity to activity, and some of us run so fast that we forget why we are running, what our lives are all about.

But now, God's Day of Judgment is upon us and we are commanded to stand still, probe our souls, examine our hearts, and give an accounting of our lives. The passage goes on to enumerate the various strata of the population: the leaders, the elders, the officers, the men, the small children, the women, and the proselytes, down to the hewer of wood and the drawer of water. The question arises: Since the text already stated "all of you," why would the Torah find it necessary to mention each group separately? Surely they fall under the canopy of "all of you." So, since every word in the Torah is significant, why this redundancy?

The answer to this question can serve as our road map for life, and particularly for the season of High Holy Days. We are all responsible one for the other. Our destiny is intertwined. The Jewish people are like one body, and if just one joint is injured, the entire body hurts; if just one limb is amputated, the entire person is disabled. Similarly, if just one of us is missing, we are all diminished; if just one of us is guilty of a grievous wrong, all of us are implicated. To impress this teaching upon us, all our prayers are said in the plural, i.e., r'fa'einu - heal us - shema koleinu - hear our voices, and so on. This teaching is especially relevant to us today, for we are the generation that has been destined to experience the travails that accompany the birth pangs of Mashiach. Our Sages teach that one of the ways in which we may protect ourselves during that difficult period is to unify, to forgive and feel for one another. If we can do that, we can anticipate that God will forgive us as well.

To further reinforce this concept of mutual responsibility, the parashah teaches us: "The hidden [sins] are for Hashem, our God, but the revealed [sins] are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah." [2] From this we learn that we will not be held accountable for sins of individuals who are unknown to us, but for those violations that are public, we are all liable, for our very silence signals our consent. In Judaism there is an adage: "Shtikah k'hodaah - silence is acceptance." [3] When we see a wrong, when we witness an injustice, when we see our Torah laws violated and abandoned, we have a responsibility to speak out and remind our brethren of their higher calling: to live as Jews by Torah Law.

This responsibility to remind one another of our God-given destiny, of our Jewish heritage, is, in and of itself, a covenant. In the holy tongue, it is referred to as "areivus - mutual responsibility. That is why, prior to his death, Moses addressed

each and every segment of the population and charged them all with this mission. Has this covenant of mutual responsibility remained the hallmark of our lives? Has it been borne out throughout the centuries? Yes and no.

On one hand, we, the Jewish people, can be separated by oceans and continents, language and culture; nevertheless, we have remained one. If our brethren in Russian, Ethiopia, or wherever they may be are oppressed, we hear their cry, and if our people in Israel are under attack, we are there. Yes, we are one. The covenant of mutual responsibility that Moses engraved upon our Jewish hearts has survived the centuries. But, on the other hand, we are also witness to alienation, complacency, and indifference. Those of us who are sensitive to this covenant of mutual responsibility must try to make all our brethren aware of it.

WHAT IF IT'S BEYOND YOU?

It is not only for those who are oppressed or in crisis that we must feel responsibility, but for those who are Torah-deprived and Jewishly impoverished as well. If our brethren are unaware of the meaning of our faith, it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to do everything in our power to make them aware of our mutual heritage.

Some situations, however, are beyond our capability, in which assimilation has been so all encompassing that individuals no longer identify as Jews and there is no way for us to reach them. Such cases fall under the umbrella of hidden. It is God Himself Who will bring them home. When Moses charged the nation with this covenant of mutual responsibility, he spoke to all of us, for all eternity. "Not with you alone do I seal this covenant ... but ... with whoever is not here with us today." [4]

From this we learn that every Yiddishe neshamah born in future generations was present and heard Moses' voice. Moses left nothing to chance, and in his message, he reminded us that God made His covenant with us for a special purpose: "[T]o establish you today as a people to Him, and that He be a God to you, as He spoke to you and as He swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." [5] This, then, is our mission, our raison d'être as individuals and as a nation. If we would only take a few moments to contemplate these words, we would be filled with a sense of exhilaration. We have been granted the awesome privilege of being God's people. Can there be a greater

calling than that? Tragically, however, so many of our people are unaware and do not know their true essence.

THE ETERNITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

There is yet another interpretation to "Atem nitzavim - you are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your God." In the previous parashah, the people were told of all the terrible and painful calamities that would befall them, and they became terrified. So much so, the Midrash teaches us, that they turned colors. Moses reassured them with the powerful opening words of our parashah: "Atem nitzavim hayom kulchem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem.... You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your God." In those words are to be found the secret of our miraculous survival.

No matter where destiny may lead us, no matter in which century, in which culture, in which country we may reside, we must always see ourselves standing before God; that is the secret of our miraculous survival. So it is that we have outlived the tyrants of history. We have seen the empires, the great powers of the world, soar to their zenith, only to disappear. From Pharaoh to Hitler to contemporary demagogues, we have experienced them all and triumphed, because, at all times, we stand before Hashem, our God. And even if we should forget our calling, the words, "Atem nitzavim hayom," come to redeem us. In gematria, that is the equivalent of "standing up for Selichos, asking forgiveness, and returning to God. The Almighty granted us a magnificent gift - Selichos, giving us the ability to rejuvenate ourselves by asking for His forgiveness. At first glance, this may appear to be an overwhelming task, but in this parashah we are also assured that "... this commandment that I command you today - it is not hidden from you and it is not distant Rather, the matter is very near to you - in your mouth and in your heart - to perform it." [6] This covenant is embedded in our souls and is so deeply engraved on our hearts that we need only call out unto God and the covenant will emerge and transform us into the people that stood at Sinai.

Throughout the centuries, we have seen the amazing renewal of our people. Even those who appear to be hopelessly lost, can come back in an instant.

NOTES

1. Deuteronomy 29:9.

2. Ibid. 29:28.
3. Tractate Yevamos 87b.
4. Deuteronomy 29:13-14.
5. Ibid. 29:12.
6. Ibid. 30:11, 14.



Rosh Hashana begins Sunday evening, September 29th! Many Jews all over the world are rushing to make sure that they have places reserved in their synagogues. I am reminded of the classic story of the person who had to deliver a very important message to a man in a synagogue on Rosh Hashana. The usher wouldn't let him in because he didn't have a ticket. "Please, I just need a moment to tell him the message!" "No way!" says the usher, "No ticket, no entrance!" "Please," begs the man, "I promise ... I won't pray!" If you need a place to pray and don't belong to a synagogue, call synagogues or your Federation and ask.

Q & A: WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF ROSH HASHANA AND HOW DO WE OBSERVE IT?

Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year. Unlike the secular New Year which is celebrated in many parts of the "civilized" world by partying, drinking to excess and watching a little ball descend a tower in Time Square, the Jewish New Year is celebrated by reflecting upon the past, correcting one's mistakes, planning for the future, praying for a healthy and sweet year and celebrating with holiday meals.

Rabbi Nachum Braverman writes, "On Rosh Hashana we make an accounting of our year and we pray repeatedly for life. How do we justify another year of life? What did we do with the last year? Has it been a time of growth, of insight and of caring for

others? Did we make use of our time, or did we squander it? Has it truly been a year of life, or merely one of mindless activity? This is the time for evaluation and rededication. The Jewish process is called "teshuva," coming home -- recognizing our mistakes between ourselves and God as well as between ourselves and our fellow man and then correcting them."

On Rosh Hashana we pray that we are inscribed in the Book of Life for life, for health, for sustenance. It is the Day of Judgment. Yet, we celebrate with festive meals with family and friends. How can we celebrate when our very lives hang in balance? Ultimately, we trust in the kindness and mercy of the Almighty ... that He knows our heart and our intentions and with love and knowledge of what is best for us, will accordingly grant us a good decree for the new year.

It would seem to make more sense to have the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) before the Day of Judgment (Rosh Hashana). However, until we recognize our Creator and internalize the magnitude and consequences of our actions, we cannot truly seek to change ourselves or to seek atonement. That is why the three essential themes of Rosh Hashana are: Malchuyot (Kingship), Zichronot (Providence) and Shofrot (Revelation). The musaf (additional) prayer service is structured around these three themes.

The Book of Our Heritage clarifies:

In the Kingship section we acknowledge God's creation of all existence, His active supervision of the entire universe, and our acceptance of His eternal rule. It is our job on Rosh Hashana to make God our King.

In the Providence section we proclaim our understanding that:
1) the Creator has a one on one relationship with every human being
2) God cares about what we do with our lives and sees and remembers everything
3) there are Divine consequences for our actions.

In the Revelation section we accept the Torah as if it were given once again with thunder and lightning and mighty shofar blasts. We also await the final redemption which is to be heralded by the "shofar of the mashiach (messiah)."

At the festive meal both nights of Rosh Hashana it is customary to dip the challah (special round bread for Rosh Hashana) as

well as an apple, into honey symbolizing our hopes for a sweet year. There is a custom to eat various Symbolic Foods -- primarily fruits and vegetables -- each one preceded by a request. For instance, before eating a pomegranate, "May it be Your will ... that our merits increase like (the seeds of) a pomegranate." Many of the requests are based on "plays on words" between the name of the food and the request. The "plays on words" are lost on many who don't know Hebrew, but there is a deep, kabbalistic power in these requests.

Another custom is Tashlich, a symbolic casting off of transgressions. It is done after the Mincha, the afternoon prayers, on the first day of Rosh Hashana -- and on the second day when the first day of Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbat. Remember -- these symbolic acts help you relate to what you need to do in life, to awaken your emotions and passions; they are not an end in themselves. It is worthwhile to get a copy of the Rosh Hashana Yom Kippur Survival Kit to get a better understanding of the holiday, the prayers, the prayer services and the opportunity that is afforded to you to grow in spirituality, to come closer to the Almighty, to perfect yourself and to perfect the world! It is available at your local Jewish bookstore, at JudaicaEnterprises.com or by calling toll-free 877-758-3242. For more insights -- aish.com/holidays .

THOUGHTS TO PONDER BEFORE ROSH HASHANA

Thought 1: There is a Midrash (a commentary on the Five Books of Moses in the form of a parable) about a successful businessman who meets a former colleague down on his luck. The colleague begs the successful business man for a substantial loan to turn around his circumstances. Eventually, the businessman agrees to a 6 month loan and gives his former colleague the money. At the end of the 6 months, the businessman goes to collect his loan. The former colleague gives him every last penny. However, the businessman notices that the money is the exact same coins he loaned the man. He was furious! "How dare you borrow such a huge amount and not even use it? I gave this to you to better your life!" The man was speechless.

Likewise, the Almighty gives each of us a soul. He doesn't want us to return it to Him at the end of our days in the same condition that we received it. He wants us to better ourselves, to enhance our souls by doing the mitzvot (613 commandments). It is up to us to sit down before Rosh Hashana and make a list of

what we need to correct in our lives between us and our fellow beings, us and God and us and ourselves!

Thought 2: The story is told of an elderly sage named Reb Zusia who lay on his deathbed surrounded by his students and disciples. He was crying and no one could comfort him.

One student asked his Rebbe, "Why do you cry? You were almost as wise as Moses and as kind as Abraham." Reb Zusia answered, "When I pass from this world and appear before the Heavenly Tribunal, they won't ask me, 'Zusia, why weren't you as wise as Moses or as kind as Abraham,' rather, they will ask me, 'Zusia, why weren't you Zusia?' Why didn't I fulfill my potential, why didn't I follow the path that could have been mine."

On Rosh Hashana we confront our potential as human beings, but even more so, as Jews. Let each of us use the opportunity to reevaluate our lives, our potentials, and our commitment to our God, our Torah, our People and ourselves. A sweet year to you and yours!

Torah Portion of the Week: Nitzavim

On the day of Moshe's death he assembles the whole Jewish people and creates a Covenant confirming the Jewish people as the Almighty's Chosen People for all future generations. Moshe makes clear the consequences of rejecting God and His Torah as well as the possibility of repentance. He reiterates that Torah is readily available to everyone. He warns us against idolatry (thinking anything other than God has power) and assures us that eventually the Jewish people will do teshuva (repent) and will be redeemed and brought back to the land of Israel -- and those who hate the Jewish people and pursue us will get their just recompense.

Nitzavim concludes with perhaps the clearest and most powerful statement in the Torah about the purpose of life and the existence of freewill: "I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil ... the blessing and the curse. Therefore, choose life that you may live, you and your descendants." (Now that's a real Quote of the Week!)nto 6:48

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

People don't fail -- they give up.



The
**Family
Parsha**
By Nesanel Yoel Safran
Lessons, stories and
discussion questions
for parents and kids

Real Life

Real life has a lot to offer -- from the beauty of nature (even in our own back yard) to the warm feelings of being part of a family and a community. The simple pleasures of our daily encounters with the people around us can make our lives feel happy and rich. Yet nowadays with so many types of entertainment to choose from, and all the exciting new gadgets that seem to be springing up everyday, we can get lost in fantasy and almost forget about our real lives. The Torah portion this week reminds us to "choose life" -- to choose to fully live and appreciate the specialness of the real lives that God had given us; to realize that there is a lot to enjoy for each of us everyday.

In our story, a boy helps his brother to choose life and realize it has a lot to offer.

"SMOKE SCREEN"

"DO NOT DISTURB -- DEFENDER AT WORK!" read the sign in bold black letters hanging on the door to Eitan's room.

Eitan would lock himself alone in there for hours at a time and submerge himself in what he liked to call his "control center."

His "control center" included a surround-sound audio system and a state of the art large screen computer/video hook-up complete with the latest interactive game software. His grandparents had given it to him for his birthday and lately it seemed to be all he was interested in.

One afternoon his older brother Doron knocked on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again, harder, causing the "Do Not Disturb" sign to swing back and forth on its hook.

"Go away earthling," barked out an annoyed sounding voice from within the room.

"Hey, come on out, Eitan," Doron shouted. "I need to talk to you."

Finally the door opened a crack and Doron could make out his younger brother's silhouette from behind it. He was wearing his new silver and day-glow wireless virtual space helmet.

"Eitan, I could use your help. I'm putting up screens on the windows. It's getting to be bee season and they're coming in. One even stung Rachel," he added, referring to their kid sister who could be heard crying in the background.

"Forget it!" answered the younger boy. "First of all I told you my name's not Eitan anymore, it's 8-N. And secondly I'm busy with something much more important right now -- saving the world!"

"What do you mean?" asked Doron, incredulous.

"I mean," said Eitan, "That the Zilgons have practically entered our atmosphere. If I don't monitor the situation there will be a total invasion."

Doron rolled his eyes. "That's just a video game," he said. "It isn't really happening. Come on out and help me, or at least help Avi rake the leaves, you know how mom's allergic. Besides," he added, "It's beautiful outside. The fresh air will do you good."

"Rake the leaves!" gasped Eitan. "How can you worry about such trivia while the future of the galaxy is at stake?!"

"Listen, brother," said Doron in an understanding tone. "I know you're really into your video games. I like to play too sometimes. But there's more to life. You live in a real family, with real people who care about you and expect you to be part of us. If you care about invasions, come help me with the real-life bee invasion that's going to happen soon if we don't get these screens up."

Eitan was quiet. He opened the door, took off his space helmet, looking a little embarrassed. "I guess I am getting a bit carried away," he said. "It's just that the games are so ... exciting. Real life is boring," he sighed.

"Only if you let it be," countered Doron. "Believe me it was pretty exciting when that bee was chasing me a few minutes ago. And when I finally managed to trap it and looked at it up close, it really looked like something from out of this world. God created an amazing world -- right here, right now. And you don't need any special helmets to enjoy it. So what do you say, 8-N?"

The younger boy chuckled. "You can call me Eitan," he said. "My real name is exciting enough too, I suppose. Hand me a force-field ... er, a screen, and let's get going!"

Discussion Questions Ages 3-5

Q. How did Eitan feel when his brother first asked him to stop playing the video game and help out in the house?
A. He was upset because he felt that what he was doing was more important.

Q. Was Eitan really helping more people by pretending to "save the world" on his video game or helping his family in the house?
A. By helping his family.

Q. Why?
A. Because even though his game was fun and exciting for him, it wasn't real. But helping out his family was something real he could do to actually help people.

Ages 6-9

Q. Would it really make any difference in the lives of Eitan and his family if the "Zilgons" in his video game invaded the Earth or not?
A. No.

Q. So why do you suppose Eitan was so caught up as to sit for hours in front of the screen in order to "defend the world?"
A. Things like video games, TV, etc., are designed to get a person excited. They simulate situations that, if they really happened in our lives, would be terrifying. (Imagine if aliens really had invaded!) But since in the end, these games aren't really a part of our real lives, a person ends up getting all excited about nothing. These games can be fun for a while. But sooner or later, we all want more. We find that we want to put our energy into things with real meaning, and that when we do,

it's much more interesting than any video game. This is called "choosing life."

Q. Would you say that it's necessary to be exposed constantly to new and different people and things for life to be interesting and exciting? Or can a person still feel that way around the same people and places everyday?

A. When we see the same people and places everyday it's easy to get used to them. But in reality we only have to look deeper and we can see the wonders that God has put into the everyday. Next chance you get, pick up a flower or even a leaf and look at. Really look at it. You might be amazed at the awesome detail and incredible design that you see. Poets and artists are able to see this way and find the spectacular within the everyday things. Scientists teach us that the inner workings of the most simple flower or insect contain wonders that boggle the mind. Each person you meet is like a world waiting to be discovered. Life around us is amazing once we open our eyes.

Ages 10 and Up

Q. Unfortunately we often hear of people who become caught up in dangerous habits and self-destructive behavior. They claim that they engage in this behavior in order to "escape." From what do you think they're trying to escape? Do you think they succeed?

A. Life can be challenging. God put us in the world and designed our lives to include many challenges. When we face these challenges and try our best to meet them, we grow as people. This is spiritual growth and while at times it can be uncomfortable or even painful, it can be the most valuable and meaningful part of life. Of course, there is always the temptation to try to escape or sidestep these challenges by blurring our minds and numbing ourselves to what is uncomfortable in reality. But ultimately this technique is about as effective as the ostrich who buries its head in the sand when it sees a lion. Sooner or later all challenges must be faced in order to grow. How much better to face them with our eyes open.

Q. In your opinion, who do you think is doing a more important job: a teacher who spends long days helping physically challenged (handicapped) kids learn how to walk and talk to live happier and fuller lives, or a big movie star, who spends his free time on the beach?

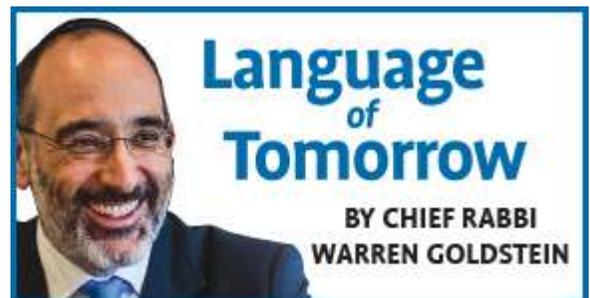
A. The teacher.

Q. Which one do you think receives more money and fame?

A. The actor.

Q. How do you explain this?

A. It can happen that those who are the real heroes of our society can be overlooked and at the same time somebody else doing something that in a real sense is not very important is considered a "star." One of the reasons is that the work that the real heroes are doing, although more important, doesn't always seem as glamorous as the movies. Also, people who are genuinely interested in helping others and helping to make the world a better place often aren't so concerned about their own fame and fortune. They know that what they are doing has real meaning in their eyes and in the eyes of God. This is enough of a reward for them. People like this, even if nobody ever hears of them, really make the world go around.



The Shofar: The Difference between Hearing and Listening

Why is it that music has such a deep effect on us? Sometimes it seems as though music has a direct line to our souls. It affects our mood and our emotions. It can make us laugh or cry. It can make us get up and dance, and it can make us stop and think. It can soothe us, uplift us, and stir us to the depths of our being.

Music is unique in that it can go where other external stimuli can't - it can access our innermost thoughts, where logic and speech are no longer able to reach. Alzheimer's sufferers, stroke victims, even coma patients often respond to music in ways they can't even respond to their loved ones.

This is especially true when it comes to the shofar. The notes of the shofar affect several parts of the brain in a profound manner. It startles us into alertness and increases activity throughout the brain, propelling us into a heightened state of consciousness that allows us to see things clearly and act resolutely.

Friends - the mitzvah of shofar on Rosh Hashanah requires active intentionality. It requires not just hearing the sound, but listening to it. Based on the Talmud, the Rambam rules that both the one who is blowing the shofar and the one who is listening to the shofar must have in mind that they are fulfilling a specific Torah obligation. But the Rambam goes a step further, emphasizing the importance of attuning ourselves to its potent moral and spiritual message.

He writes: "Even though the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a decree of the scripture, there is a hint in it which is to say 'awaken those who sleep from your slumber... search out your deeds and return in repentance and remember your Creator those who forget the truth in the emptiness of the time...!'" (Laws of Repentance 3:4)

The shofar is a call to return to our best selves. It goes beyond the physical process of converting air vibrations into nerve impulses and then ordering them in our brain. It's an enriching, potentially life-changing intellectual, emotional and spiritual experience.

Sometimes, we cruise through life on autopilot, not thinking too much about what we say or do, not stretching ourselves to be better. The shofar is our Divine wake-up call. It can arrest our moral and spiritual slumber, jolt us into being present, jumpstart our lives. It can reawaken us to our priorities and purpose, and return us to a path of personal and spiritual growth. The moments of hearing the shofar being sounded in shul on Rosh Hashanah can become a truly deep spiritual experience for us, as we are literally hearing God calling out to us through the sounds of the shofar to become better people, to fulfil our potential.

The notes of the shofar are particularly specific. Essentially, the pattern is a straight sustained note (a tekiah), followed by a broken note (either a shevarim or a teruah), followed by another straight note. What is the significance of these notes? What does this pattern mean?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch connects this sequence to the sounds of the chatzotzrot, the silver trumpets used to direct the movements of the Jewish people in the desert, where we journeyed for forty years after leaving Egypt. The straight blast, the tekiah, was sounded to call people to attention. The broken blast, the teruah, was an indication to the people to break camp - to dismantle their tents and pack their belongings and move on to the next place. This was followed by another straight blast, indicating that the time had come to proceed on their journey.

In the context of the shofar, Rabbi Hirsch explains that the first unbroken note, the tekiah, is God calling us to attention - to accept His authority in our lives and prepare to receive His message. The broken notes, the shevarim-teruah, represent breaking camp with our past selves, our entrenched bad habits. This requires doing a deep, honest reassessment of our lives, in terms of the Torah's values and principles, to determine what needs to be reinforced and taken with us on our new journey, and what we need to leave behind. The final straight note, the tekiah, is a call to move forward into the future with our new resolutions and a renewed sense of direction, aligned with God's will and our true, elevated purpose.

Like our ancestors, we are on a journey in life. And that journey requires a map, a compass. Our Creator has put us on this earth for a particular purpose, and in order to ensure we fulfil it, we need His direction. In the same way the Jewish people in the desert needed to be alerted when to break camp and go forward, we too need that wake-up call to break from the harmful things we are doing, to find new, positive, productive things to do, and to journey forward in a new direction. The map and the compass of our lives is the Torah, but sometimes we forget that, and we need a reminder. The shofar is that reminder. It calls us to take note, to step away from the turbulence of day-to-day life and to hear the crystal clear call of God, the blast of the shofar that pierces our souls. It stops us in our tracks, and calls on us to disengage from all the things that we become attached to, all the extraneous things that are not part of the map of our lives. And it calls us to move forward, into the future, with determination and with conviction.

These three steps of the shofar - stopping, assessing, and moving forward - mirror the process of repentance itself, which the Rambam defines as regret for the wrongdoing of the past, disengagement with this wrongdoing in the present, and a resolve not to engage in this wrongdoing in the future.

It's interesting that in the blessing recited before the sounding of the shofar, we refer to lishmoa kol shofar - "hearing the voice of the shofar". The shofar isn't just a sound, it's a voice. It's a voice with an explicit message, something directly intelligible. We are called on to hear that message, not just in the sense of hearing the notes, but to listen intently and receive it. Listening is foundational in Judaism. The mission statement of the Jewish people is Shema Yisrael - "Listen O' Israel." We recite the Shema every day before we go to bed and when we wake up. We begin and end each day with listening.

This Rosh Hashanah, we will hear the sound of the shofar 100 times each day in shul. It is the sound that can awaken us. It is the sound that stirs us to look deep inside ourselves and make changes. It is the sound that opens the door and beckons us to a new, glorious future - to who we were meant to be. And all we need to do is listen.

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