



## Rosh Hashana – Rekindling the Spark

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The start of the year is always a very exciting time for me. It is a chance for a fresh beginning; it is a chance to meet new people; and it is a chance to reevaluate the person that I have been during the past year in order to think about who I want to be in the coming year.

In the calendar there are many new years that we celebrate. There is the new year for the shopper (usually right after Thanksgiving), the new year for the baseball season (spring training), for football season (this past weekend), the new fiscal year (based on budgets), the secular new year (January 1<sup>st</sup>), the new school year (this year in mid-August) and in Judaism, four Jewish new years.

In the first Mishna (law) of Tractate (volume) Rosh Hashana of the Talmud (the Oral Tradition), we are taught that there are four new years. 1. The first of Nisan is the New Year for Kings and Festivals. (Nisan was the first month for the Jews. It was the first commandment for the Jewish people.) 2. The first of Elul is the New Year for the tithing of the cattle. 3. The first of Tishrei is the New Year for years, for Sabbatical year (when you have to leave the ground alone for the seventh year by not planting anything, or taking from the trees), for Jubilee years (the 50<sup>th</sup> year when all land went back to its original owner), for seeds and vegetables. 4. The first of Shevat is the New Year for the trees, according to Beit Shammai. Beit Hillel says on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat (which is why we celebrate Tu B'Shevat, the New Year for the trees on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat).

During the month or two before each of our new years, whether Jewish or not, we do some self-introspection to determine where we have been, where we are and where we want to be.

Each human being was created with a heavenly spark. It is the fire that burns in each one of us. The Hebrew word for man is אִישׁ Ish, for woman אִשָּׁה Isha. Both words contain אֵשׁ which means fire. Over the course of the year our fire loses its oxygen and runs the risk of being extinguished. In reference to Psalm 51:9

לִבִּי נִשְׁבַּר וְנִדְבָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִבְזֶה

*A heart, broken and humbled, O God, You will not despise)*

the Zohar (the major book of Kabbala) asks “What is done to a piece of wood which will not catch fire? One cracks it open, and it can then be kindled.” In order to better understand this, Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin explains, “A block of wood that is so hard that the flames cannot penetrate and set it afire must be split, so that the fire will be able to kindle it from the inside.” This analogy is used to explain that we too must be split apart in order to let the flame inside each of us to be rekindled. The sound of the Shofar reminds us how we have been fractured. It is our responsibility to rekindle.

Preparation is the key. If we do not prepare ourselves, we are doomed to be lost, to be disorganized and ultimately to fail in our quest. To me, the goal of Rosh Hashana is to put ourselves back together – to seal those fractured pieces. During the year, we fall apart. We become broken. We lose our spark.

When we blow the Shofar, there are four notes, Tekiah, which is straight \_\_\_\_\_, Shevarim, which is broken into three sounds \_\_\_\_\_, Teruah, which are nine quick notes \_\_\_\_\_, and finally the Tekiah Gedolah a very long straight sound \_\_\_\_\_. We begin the year straight, on the right path, doing good deeds.

During the year, however, our fire starts to burn out. We slowly begin to break apart, like the Shevarim, perhaps listening to, or speaking Lashon Hara (gossip, evil speech), or doing other inappropriate acts. As the year progresses, we may break even more – becoming like

Teruah, being fractured and not following the correct path in our actions. Somehow, we need to prepare ourselves before Rosh Hashana to get back to the Tekiah, back to the straight path, to the correct actions. That is why we have the month of Elul. During the month of Elul, the month preceding Tishrei (the first day of which is Rosh Hashana), we blow the Shofar, sounding each of these notes, ending in the Tekiah Gedolah. Some call it an alarm clock that Rosh Hashana is approaching. I like to think of it as a way to prepare ourselves in small steps to get back on the straight path, to rekindle the fire in ourselves.

May we all use this time of preparation to get ourselves back on the straight path, for a sweet new year, not only as we celebrate Rosh Hashana, but as we begin our school year, realizing that we as a community may break apart at times, but with effort and preparation, we can put ourselves back on the straight path.

**On behalf of my wife, Jessica, and my sons, Nadav, Yaron and Dotan, Shana Tova U'Metuka, A Sweet New Year.**

**AS A FAMILY:**

Rekindle the spark in each of your family members. Remind each member of your family how much you love them and how they light up your life.

Discuss the power of the Shofar, using these questions prepared by Lita Koret, Education Director at B'nai Jeshurun:

- 1. Tekiah is a long blast—like a trumpet celebrating or welcoming good news. *Tequi'ah—a straight unbroken sound that ends abruptly. (M.R.H. 4:9)***  
What good news did you celebrate this year?  
What good news do you expect to welcome this year?
- 2. Shevarim is three short notes which resemble sighing—a sound of disappointment. *Shevarim—a series of three broken sounds whose combined duration equals that of a Tequi'ah (M.R.H. 4:9)***  
What disappointment did you experience this past year?  
What did you learn from this experience?
- 3. Teruah is nine staccato blasts which resemble weeping. *Teruah—a quick succession of short trills made up of nine staccato tones equivalent in combined duration to a single tequi'ah (M.R.H. 4:9)***  
Did anything happen this past year that made you weep or feel like weeping?  
What do these different sounds remind you of?
- 4. The mitzvah of the Shofar is to hear the sounds of the Shofar. (Maimonides, Hil. Shofar 1:1)**  
Because a greater value is placed on listening than playing, does this mean listening is harder than talking? Is this true for you?
- 5. The Shofar should be bent or curved in shape. (B.R.H. 206b)**  
Why do people bend when they ask forgiveness?  
Over the past year, is there someone you would like to forgive for something they did?  
Can you think of any other ritual objects whose shape says something about its meaning?

**6. During the Middle Ages, the Shofar was sounded to usher in Shabbat.**

What do you do to welcome Shabbat?

How do you recognize that Shabbat has arrived?

**7. In modern times, the Shofar is used to inaugurate a new president of Israel.**

What do you think the president might be thinking about when he hears this ancient sound?

During what other events would it be appropriate to sound the Shofar?

Citations: MRH—Mishnah Rosh HaShanah;  
Maimonides Hilchot  
BRH—Babylonian Talmud Rosh HaShanah

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SHOFAR AND ROSH HASHANA, READ ABOUT THE SYMBOLS OF ROSH HASHANA (and include them in your Rosh Hashana meals):**

## **Pomegranates, Fish and Carrots on Rosh Hashanah**

It is customary on *Rosh Hashanah* during the evening meals to eat foods symbolizing sweetness, blessings, and abundance. These foods are eaten as "*simanim*", "good omens", of success and happiness for the coming year.

### **Round Challah**

The roundness of the challah shows us that we should have a smooth year, without a rough transition.

### **Apples and Honey**

The apples remind us that we have come full circle to the beginning of a new year. The honey allows us to make it a sweet new year.

**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.**

**יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתַּחַדְּשׁ עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוֹקָה.**

### **Pomegranates**



The symbolism of this fruit is based on the "fact" that it contains as many seeds as there are *Mitzvot* (Torah Obligations), namely 613. We want to be as full of *Mitzvot* as the Pomegranate is full of seeds.

**יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁיִּרְבּוּ זְכוֹתֵינוּ כְּרַמּוֹן:**

## Carrots

In Yiddish, the word for carrots is "merren", having the additional connotation of "more". We want to have more children, have **more** wealth, gain **more** Torah knowledge, give **more** charity and perform **more** good deeds.

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂתַגְזֹר עָלֵינוּ גְזֵירוֹת טוֹבוֹת:

## Spinach or beets

Eating spinach or beets reminds us of a green year with abundant produce.

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂיִסְתַּלְקוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ וּמִשְׂטֵינֵנוּ:

## Gourds

A gourd is a vegetable with a tough exterior. This teaches us that God will protect us and give us strength during the coming year.

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂתַקְרַע רוּעַ גִּזְרֵי דֵינֵנוּ וְיִקְרָאוּ לְפָנֶיךָ זְכוּתֵינוּ:

## Leeks

Leeks remind us that our enemies should be cut off (the Hebrew word is *kartee*, which also means to cut off).

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂיִכַּרְתוּ שׂוֹנְאֵינוּ:

## Head of a Fish



The symbolism of the head is that we should be "on top" and not "on the bottom". The symbolism of the fish is based on the fact that they are very fertile creatures, but their reproductive activity is hidden from view, and therefore one could say that they embody the very desirable characteristic of "tzniut", "modesty".

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂנַהֲיֶה לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב:  
יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂנִפְרָה וְנִרְפָּה בְּדָגִים: