

TorahFax: Ki Seitzei

Rabbi Zalmen Marazov

Monday, Elul 4, 5783 (Hakhel Year) August 21, 2023

We are now in the month of Elul, the last month of the year, 5783. Rosh Hashana will begin Friday night September 15.

Rosh Hashana is the only Biblical holiday which is also celebrated two days in Israel. Being that this year the first Day Rosh Hashana is on Shabbat, and the Shofar is not sounded on Shabbat, there will not be any Shofar blowing this year on the first day Rosh Hashana.

Q. What does the name of this month, Elul, stand for?

A. Elul is an acronym for "Ani Ldodi Vdodi Li." Translated, it means, "I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me." This refers to our relationship with G-d during Elul. During this month we make a greater effort to become closer to G-d, ("I am to my beloved") through repentance (Teshuva), prayer (Tefila) and charity (Tzedakah). At the same time, G-d is closer to us ("my beloved is to me") showing us His mercy and granting our wishes for the coming year.

Q. What is the significance of Rosh Hashana?

A. Rosh Hashana is called "Yom Hadin" - "Day of Judgment." On Rosh Hashana G-d judges the universe. The "U'nsaneh Tokef" - one of the highly emotional and moving prayers of the High Holidays, details the judgment process that occurs in the heavenly spheres on these holy days.

Q. Why, of all days of the year, was the first of Tishrei set as Rosh Hashana - as the Day of Judgment?

A. According to the Talmudic sage Rabbi Eliezer, Rosh Hashana is celebrated on the sixth day of creation, which is the day when Adam and Eve were created. Because Adam and Eve were created on this day, G-d designated it as the Day of Judgment.

Q. Why isn't Rosh Hashana on the first day of creation, when heaven and earth were created?

A. G-d created the universe so that mankind would make it a better world and thus a dwelling place for G-d, through observing His commandments. Adam and Eve and their descendants were entrusted and empowered with the responsibility of spiritually elevating the universe. Thus, Rosh Hashana was established on the day when Adam and Eve were created.

Q. The mitzvah associated with Rosh Hashana is to hear the sound of the Shofar. What is the connection between Rosh Hashana – the day of Judgment - and the sounding of the Shofar?

A. Among the many reasons given, the sounding of the Shofar reminds us of the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, which was accompanied by "thunder, lightning and the sound of the Shofar." Thus, the sound of the Shofar on Rosh Hashana, is a reminder to observe the Torah and mitzvot.

Tuesday, Elul 5, 5783 (Hakhel Year) August 22, 2023

The Shofar is sounded each day throughout the month of Elul, after the morning service, except on Shabbat.

Q. Why do we blow the Shofar each day of this month?

A. After G-d told the Jewish people the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, Moshe went up the mountain to receive the Two Tablets. He stayed on the mountain for forty days. Unfortunately, Jews miscalculated when Moshe was coming back and as a result made The Golden Calf, on the day before he actually descended.

When Moshe came down the mountain and saw what they did, he broke the Tablets. Moshe went up again for forty days to pray and ask forgiveness for the people. G-d told him to bring up two tablets upon which G-d will inscribe the Ten Commandments a second time.

On Rosh Chodesh Elul, Moshe went up again and stayed there for another forty days. Thus, the entire month of Elul and an additional ten days until Yom Kippur, Moshe was on the mountain. On Yom Kippur G-d completely forgave their sin and Moshe came down with the second set of Tablets.

In order to make sure that the people won't miscalculate again, and the sin of the Golden Calf would not be repeated, they blew the Shofar the entire month of Elul to remind the people that Moshe was coming back. From then on it was established to blow the Shofar throughout the month of Elul.

The sounding of the Shofar during this month also serves as a wake-up call. It reminds us of the significance of this month, for it's the last month of the year.

Our sages compare the month of Elul to a businessman who, at year's end takes stock of his business situation. Analyzing his accomplishments during the outgoing year and reflecting upon his mistakes and opportunities which he missed during the year. Taking stock and reflecting on past performances is essential to the continuation and success of the business. The month of Elul serves the same purpose. During this month we take stock of the past year, thus preparing for the new year.

Q. Why is the holiday called "Rosh Hashana?"

A. The literal translation of "Rosh Hashana" is, "Head of the year." Rosh Hashana is not only the beginning of the new year, but even more important, the "head" of the new year.

Our sages explain that just as the head controls and directs the activities of the entire person, so too, everything which will transpire in the coming year is determined on Rosh Hashana.

The numerical value of the word Shana (year) is 355. The regular Hebrew year, which is lunar based, has a total of 355 days, as the numerical value of the word shana-year.

Thursday, Elul 7, 5783 (Hakel Year) August 24, 2023

Questions & Answers about the holiday of Rosh Hashana

Q. What is the significance of Rosh Hashana?

A. Rosh Hashana is called "Yom Hadin" - "Day of Judgment." On Rosh Hashana G-d judges the universe and decides each and everyone's verdict for the coming year. However, the judgment is not sealed until Yom Kippur. The ten days, from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur, are called, "Aseret Yemai Teshuva" – "Ten days of Repentance." During these days, through prayer, repentance and acts of charity, one can have a bad decree reversed to a good one.

In the "Unsane Tokef" prayer, one of the highly emotional and moving prayers of the High Holidays, the judgment process that occurs in the heavenly spheres on this day, is spelled out.

Q. Of all days of the year, why was Rosh Hashana designated for the day of judgment?

A. According to the Talmudic sage Rabbi Eliezer, Rosh Hashana is celebrated on the sixth day of creation. This day has special significance as Adam and Eve were created on that day.

Q. Why isn't Rosh Hashana on the first day of creation?

A. The goal and purpose of the entire creation was so that people will fulfill G-d's commandments and make the world a holy place - a dwelling for G-d. Mankind was entrusted and empowered with the responsibility of spiritually elevating the universe. Rosh Hashana was established on the day when Adam and Eve were created to illustrate the importance and responsibility we all have. The world is judged based on our actions and we have the power to build the world.

Q. The mitzvah associated with Rosh Hashana is to hear the sound of the Shofar. What is the connection between Rosh Hashana – the day of Judgment and the Shofar?

A. The sound of the Shofar, on the day of judgment, serves as a call for self-searching, to repent, correct and become closer to G-d, so that we will be judged favorably.

Another reason: The sound of the Shofar reminds us of the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, which was accompanied by, "thunder, lightning and the sound of the Shofar" (Exodus 20:15). Thus, the sound of the Shofar on Rosh Hashana, when we usher in the New Year, reminds us to observe the Torah and strengthen our adherence to its mitzvot in the New Year.

During the month of Elul, it is customary that we wish each other a "Shana Tova" - A Happy and Healthy New Year. May we all be inscribed for a healthy, successful and Nachas year. Amen

Friday, Elul 8, 5783 (Hakhel Year) August 25, 2023

This week's Parsha is Ki Teitzei – the sixth Parsha in the Book of Devarim (Deuteronomy).

In this Parsha we find more mitzvot, than in any other Parsha of the Torah (74 mitzvot). Most of the mitzvot in this Parsha concern behavior between people.

This Parsha is always read in the month of Elul, as we get closer to Rosh Hashana. It teaches us that as we near the end of the year and prepare for the New Year, we must be very careful and excel in our behavior toward others.

One of the mitzvot in this Parsha is, "Hashavat Aveidah" - "returning a lost object" to its rightful owner.

The Torah states that if you see your brother's ox or sheep go astray you should not hide yourself from them. "You shall bring them back to your brother. If your brother is not close to you or you don't know him, then you shall bring it into your own house, and it shall be with you until your brother seeks it and you shall give it back to him."

The Talmudic sage Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was extremely careful with this mitzvah. Once, a person forgot some chickens near Rabbi Chanina's house. Rabbi Chanina took care of them and was waiting for the owner to come and claim them. As time passed on the chickens multiplied so greatly that it was impossible for Rabbi Chanina to keep them. He then sold the chickens and bought goats instead.

One day, Rabbi Chanina saw a stranger in front of his house. The stranger mentioned that many years ago, he had left a few chickens near the house. When Rabbi Chanina was convinced that this person was the true owner of the chickens, he took him into the yard and, to the stranger's surprise, said "All these goats are yours. They came from your chickens!"

What is the connection between this mitzvah and the month of Elul, in which this Parsha is read? "Hashavat Aveidah" - returning a lost object in its spiritual form refers to "Teshuvah" (repentance) which means "to return." This is especially significant in the last month of the year, Elul, which is the month of Teshuvah, when we return and restore our soul to its original form of holiness and purity.

This mitzvah also applies when we see another Jew who is spiritually lost. It is our duty to help them, to teach them, so they can return to the correct path.

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov told his disciples the following story; "I was once approached by a Polish peasant who asked me to help him lift a heavy load unto his wagon. Realizing that the load was far too heavy for me to lift, I told the man, 'I cannot help you'".

The peasant replied, "You are not saying the truth! You could help but you don't want to". Rabbi Israel explained that this taught him a great lesson in the service of G-d. "At times, when we think

that we cannot accomplish something, it is not that we can't, rather, we are too lazy to make the effort.”