
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

for ROSH HASHANA shiur

To our surprise, the holiday that we call **Rosh Hashana** is never referred to as such in Chumash! In fact, Chumash tells us very little about this holiday that we are told to celebrate on the 'first day of the **seventh** month' (see Vayikra 23:23).

So how do we know that this day is indeed a 'day of judgment'?

And why should this day mark the beginning of a 'new year'?

In the following shiur, we attempt to answer these fundamental questions from within Chumash itself.

INTRODUCTION

The laws of **Rosh Hashana** are discussed only twice in Chumash, once in Parshat Emor (Vayikra 23:23-25), and once in Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar 29:1-6). Therefore, we must begin our shiur by taking a quick look at these two sources, noting how scant the Torah's detail of this holiday appears to be:

1) In Parshat Emor -

"On the **seventh** month, on the first day of that month, you shall have a shabbaton [a day of rest], **zichron tru'a**, mikra kodesh [a day set aside for gathering], do not work, and you shall bring an offering to God" (Vayikra 23:23-5).

2) In Parshat Pinchas -

"On the **seventh** month, on the first day of that month, observe a 'mikra kodesh', do no work, it shall be for you a **yom tru'a**..." (Bamidbar 29:1-6).

Note that Chumash never refers to this holiday as Rosh Hashana! Instead, we are told to make a holiday on the first day of the **seventh** month [that's closer to '**mid-year**' than '**new-year**'].

Furthermore, the Torah never tells us **why** this day is chosen. Instead, we are instructed to sound a **tru'a** [yom tru'a], or to remember a **tru'a** [zichron tru'a], but it is not clear at all precisely what these phrases - yom tru'a and zichron tru'a - imply.

[Note that the Torah provides reasons for all of the other holidays, either explicitly: chag ha-matzot is to remember Yetziat Mitzrayim, shavuot for the grain harvest ('chag ha-katzir') and Sukkot for the fruit harvest ('chag ha-asif'); or implicitly - Yom Kippur for it marks the day on which Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai with the second Luchot & God's **midot ha-rachamim**" (based on the three groups of 40 days in the account of those events in Sefer Devarim chapter 9).]

Finally, nowhere in these psukim in Parshat Emor or in Parshat Pinchas do we find even a hint that this day should be considered a 'day of judgment'.

So what's going on? How does this enigmatic biblical holiday become the **Rosh Hashana** that we are all so familiar with?

To answer this question, we must explore other sources in the Bible where these very same topics are mentioned, namely:

- A) the cycle of the agricultural year in Chumash, and
- B) the biblical meaning of the phrases:

"**yom tru'a**" & "**zicharon**"

TISHREI - NOT THE 'JEWISH' NEW YEAR

To understand what is special about the seventh month, we must return to the two parshiot of the chagim in Chumash, i.e. Parshat Emor (Vayikra chapter 23) and Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar chapters 28->29).

First, quickly review the internal progression of each of these two units, noting how they both list the entire set of holidays - in

an order that begins in the spring. Most likely, this 'spring start' is based on God's earlier command in Parshat Ha'Chodesh to count the months from the first month of **spring** - corresponding to our redemption from Egypt. [See Shmot 12:1-2; 13:2-3 & 23:15.]

Hence, there seems to be every reason in Chumash to consider **Nissan** as the **Jewish** New Year, and not Tishrei! What then is special about the **seventh** month, and why do we refer to it as Rosh Hashana?

[Even though it is commonly assumed that the first of Tishrei marks the anniversary of the creation of the world, this specific point is a controversy in the Talmud between R. Eliezer (created in Tishrei) and R. Yehoshua (created in Nissan). [See Mesechet Rosh Hashana 11a]

According to R. Yehoshua who claims that the world was created in Nissan and not in Tishrei, could it be that there is nothing special about this day? Furthermore, even according to R. Eliezer, why should the anniversary of the Creation provoke a yearly 'Day of Judgment'? In any case, Chumash never states explicitly that the Creation began in Tishrei.]

To answer this question, we must take into consideration the basic cycle of the agricultural year in the Land of Israel.

THE END OF THE AGRICULTURAL YEAR

In addition to the biblical year that begins in Nissan (see Shmot 12:1-2), we find another 'calendar' in Chumash, which relates to the agricultural cycle of the year. Take for example the Torah's first mention of the holiday of Sukkot, noting how it explicitly states that **Sukkot** falls out at the **end** of the year:

"Three times a year celebrate for Me... and the 'gathering holiday' [**chag ha-asif**], when the year goes out [**be-tzeit ha-shana**], when you gather your produce from the Land..." (see Shmot 23:14-17).

From this pasuk we can infer that Chumash takes for granted that we are aware of a 'year' that 'goes out' when we gather our fruits. If this 'agricultural' year 'goes out' when the produce is harvested, then it must begin when the fields are first sown (in the autumn).

When Sukkot is described in greater detail (in Parshat Emor), we find the precise 'lunar' date for this 'gathering' holiday:

"On the 15th day of the **seventh** month, when you **gather the produce** of your Land, you shall observe a holiday for seven days..." (see Vayikra 23:39).

From these two sources it becomes clear that Chumash assumes that there is an 'agricultural year' that ends in Tishrei.

This assumption is confirmed when we examine yet another agricultural mitzva that requires a defined yearly cycle - the laws of **shmitta** [the sabbatical year].

In Parshat Behar the Torah describes a cycle of six years when we work the land, and the seventh year of rest (see 25:1-7). Clearly, this implies that there must be a certain date when the year of this **shmitta** cycle begins. And sure enough, the Torah informs us of this date when it describes immediately afterward the laws of the **yovel** [Jubilee] year, celebrated after each seven **shmitta** cycles:

"And you shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, and then you shall sound a **shofar** tru'a on the **seventh** month, on the tenth of the month..." (see Vayikra 25:8-9)

Here we are told explicitly that the years of the **shmitta** cycle begin in the **seventh** month.

[One could assume that the year actually begins on the first of Tishrei, but on the yovel year we wait until Yom Kippur to make the 'official declaration'. This may be for a thematic reason as well, for on yovel land returns to its original owners & we annul all debts, etc. [like starting over with a clean slate]. Therefore, we pronounce yovel on Yom Kippur, at the same time when we ask God to annul our sins.]

Finally, the mitzva of **hakhel** (see Devarim 31:10-12) provides conclusive proof that the year of the **shmitta** cycle begins in Tishrei. We are commanded to conduct the **hakhel** ceremony 'be-mo'ed shnat ha-shmitta be-chag ha-Sukkot' - at the appointed [or gathering] time of **shmitta** (i.e. the time of year when cycle increments) on Sukkot. This clearly implies that the **shmitta** cycle increments in Tishrei.

THE BEGINNING OF THE AGRICULTURAL YEAR

In addition to the above sources that assume the existence of an 'agricultural year' that ends in Tishrei, another source in Chumash informs us more precisely when this agricultural year begins. In fact, this source is the **only** time in Chumash where we find an explicit mention of the word '**rosh**' in relation to the beginning of a year!

In Parshat Ekev, the Torah explains how farming in the 'land of Israel' differs from farming in the 'land of Egypt' (see Devarim 11:10-12). Unlike Egypt, which enjoys a constant supply of water from the Nile River, the Land of Israel is dependent on 'matar' (rain) for its water supply. Hence, the farmer in the land of Israel must depend on the rainfall for his prosperity. But that rainfall itself, Chumash explains, is a direct function of God's 'hashgacha' [providence]. In this context (i.e. in relation to the rainfall in the land of Israel), we learn that:

"It is a Land which your Lord looks after, God's 'eyes' constantly look after it - mi-**reishit shana** - from the **beginning** of the year - until the end of the year" (11:12).

[Recall that in the land of Israel it only rains between Sukkot and Pesach, hence the cycle begins in Tishrei.]

Here, God assures Am Yisrael that He will look after the 'agricultural' needs of our Land by making sure that it will receive the necessary rainfall. To prove this interpretation we simply need to read the following parsha (which just so happens to be the second parsha of daily 'kriyat shma'):

"[Hence,] should you keep the mitzvot... then I will give the **rain** to your land at the proper time... [but] be careful, should you transgress... then I hold back the heavens, and there will be no **rain**... (see Devarim 11:13-16)].

In this context, the phrase 'reishit shana' in 11:12 implies the beginning of the rainy season. Hence, the biblical agricultural year begins with the rainy season in the fall - **reishit ha-shana** - i.e. the **new** (agricultural) **year**.

A CRITICAL TIME

But specifically in the land of Israel this time of year is quite significant, for in Israel it only rains during the autumn and winter months. Therefore, farmers must plow and sow their fields during those months in order to catch the winter rain. In fact, the rainfall during the months of Cheshvan & Kislev is most critical, for the newly sown fields require large amounts of water. If it doesn't rain in the late autumn / early winter, there will be nothing to harvest in the spring or summer.

[Note that in Masechet Ta'anit (see chapters 1 and 2) we learn that if the rain is not sufficient by mid-Kislev, a series of 'fast-days' are proclaimed when special prayers for rain are added, including a set of tefillot almost identical to those of Rosh Hashana (see II.2-3). This may explain why Seder Moed places Masechet Rosh Hashana before Masechet Ta'anit, rather than placing it before Yoma (where it would seem to belong)!]

From this perspective, the fate of the produce of the forthcoming agricultural year is primarily dependent on the rainfall during the early winter months. Should the rainfall be insufficient, not only will there not be enough water to drink, the crops will not grow! [See Masechet Rosh Hashana 16a!] A shortage of rain can lead not only to drought, but also to famine, and disease throughout the months of the spring and summer. Furthermore, a

food shortage is likely to lead to an outbreak of war between nations fighting over the meager available resources.

Consequently, it may appear to man as though nature itself, i.e. via the early rainy season, determines 'who will live' and 'who will die', who by thirst and who by famine, who by war and who by disease...'. [from the 'netaneh tokef' tefilla on Rosh Hashana]

NATURE OR GOD?

Even though it may appear to man that nature, or more specifically - the rain - will determine the fate of the forthcoming agricultural year, Chumash obviously cannot accept this conclusion. As we discussed (or will discuss) in our shiur on Parshat Breishit, a primary theme in Chumash is that the creation of nature was a willful act of God, and He continues to oversee it. Although it may appear to man as though nature works independently, it is incumbent upon him to recognize that it is God, and **not** nature, who determines his fate.

Therefore, in anticipation of the rainy season (which begins in the autumn) and its effect on the fate of the entire year, the Torah commands Bnei Yisrael to set aside a 'mikra kodesh' - a special gathering - in the **seventh month** in order that we gather to declare God's kingdom over all Creation. In doing so, we remind ourselves that it is He who determines our fate, based on our deeds, as explained in Parshat Ekev (see Devarim 11:10-19).

Now that we have established why the **seventh** month should be considered the beginning of a **new year**, i.e. the new agricultural year, we must now explain why the Torah chooses specifically the **first** day of this month to mark this occasion.

THE OVERLAP

Based on the Torah's definition of **Sukkot** as 'be-tzeit ha-shana' (the end of the year / see Shmot 23:16), it would seem more logical to consider **Shmini Atzeret** - which falls out immediately after Sukkot - as the first day of the New Year. After all, it is not by chance that Chazal instituted 'tefillat geshem' - the special prayer for rain - on this day. Why does the Torah command us to gather specifically on the **first** day of this **seventh** month, before the previous year is over?

One could suggest very simply that an overlap exists, as the new agricultural year begins (on the first day of the seventh month) before the previous year ends. However, if we examine **all** of the holidays of the **seventh** month, a more complex picture emerges.

A SPECIAL MONTH

Note that in Parshat Emor and Parshat Pinchas, we find four different holidays that are to be observed in the seventh month:

On the first day - a **Yom tru'a**

On the 10th day - **Yom Ha-kippurim**

On the 15th day - '**Chag Sukkot** for seven days

On the 22nd day - an '**Atzeret**'

[Note how all these holidays are connected by the Torah's conspicuous use of the word '**ach**' in 23:27 & 23:39.]

Why are there so many holidays in the **seventh** month? For Sukkot, the Torah provides an explicit reason: it marks the end of the summer fruit harvest [**chag ha-asif**]. However, no explicit reason is given for the celebration of any of the other holidays on these specific dates. Nonetheless, based on our above explanation concerning the biblical importance of the forthcoming rainy season, one could suggest that **all** of the Tishrei holidays relate in one manner or other to the yearly agricultural cycle that begins in the **seventh** month.

More conclusive proof of an intrinsic connection between these three holidays of the **seventh month** - Yom Tru'a, Yom Kippurim, and Shmini Atzeret - can be deduced from their identical and unique korban mussaf, as detailed in Parshat Pinchas. Unlike any other holiday, on each of these holidays we offer an additional **ola** of 'one bull, one ram, and seven sheep' for the mussaf offering.

[See Bamidbar chapter 29, note that no other korban has this same korban mussaf. See TSC shiur on Pinchas. See also further iyun section in regard to the double nature of the mussaf of Sukkot, which may actually include this offering as well.]

But why are three holidays necessary to inaugurate the New Year?

One could suggest that each holiday relates to a different aspect of the anticipation of the forthcoming agricultural year. In this week's shiur, we discuss the meaning of **yom tru'a**, which we are commanded to observe on the **first** day of this month. In the shiurim to follow, we will discuss Yom Kippur and Shmini Atzeret.

YOM TRU'A

As we explained in our introduction, according to Chumash the only unique mitzva of this holiday is that we are commanded to make a **yom tru'a** according to Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar 29:2), or a **zichron tru'a** according to Parshat Emor (Vayikra 23:24).

Each of these two phrases requires explanation. Why would 'sounding a **tru'a**' have any connection to the beginning of the rainy season? Likewise, what does "zichron tru'a" imply?

YOM TRU'A IN THE BIBLE

To understand these phrases, we must consider how a **shofar** was used in biblical times.

Today, a **shofar** is considered a religious artifact. If you are shopping for a shofar, you would inquire at your local "seforim" store or possibly a Judaica shop [or search the internet].

However, in Biblical times, its use was quite different. Back then, if you were shopping for a shofar, you would have most probably gone to your local 'arms dealer' - for the shofar was used primarily in war, as a shofar was used by military commanders and officers to communicate with their troops.

[See for example the story of Gideon and his 300 men, each one sounding a shofar to make the enemy think that there are 300 commanders, and hence thousands of soldiers / see Shoftim 7:16-20.]

Similarly, civil defense personnel used the shofar to warn civilians of enemy attack and to mobilize the army. [See Amos 3:6 & Tzefania 1:16.]

Now, there are two basic types of 'notes' that the **shofar** blower uses:

- 1) a **teki'a** - a long steady note (like DC current);
- 2) a **tru'a** - a oscillating short note (like AC current).

Usually, a **teki'a** long steady sound was used to signal an 'all clear' situation, while the oscillating **tru'a** signal warned of imminent danger (like a siren sound today). This distinction between a **teki'a** & **tru'a** is easily deduced from the mitzva of the 'chatzotzrot' (trumpets) explained in Parshat Beha'alotcha (see 10:1-10 / highly suggested that you read these psukim inside). According to that parsha, the teki'a was the signal for gathering the camp for happy occasions (see 10:3-4,7,10), while the tru'a was used as a signal to prepare for travel in military formation and war (see 10:5-6,9).

[Note, both a 'shvarim' and 'tru'a' are examples of **tru'a** (AC). The difference between them is simply an issue of frequency / 3 per second, or 9 per second.]

Hence, in biblical times, if someone heard a **shofar** sounding a **tru'a**, his instinctive reaction would have been fear, preparation for war, and/or impending danger. [Sort of like hearing sirens today.]

Elsewhere in Tanach, we find many examples. The prophet Tzefania, for example, uses the phrase 'yom **shofar u-tru'a**' to describe a day of terrible war and destruction. Tzefania's opening prophecy speaks of the forthcoming 'yom Hashem', a day in which God will punish all those who had left Him. Note how the following psukim relate **shofar & tru'a** to God's providence

['hashgacha']:

"At that time ('yom Hashem') I will search Yerushalayim with candles and I will punish ('u-pakadeti') the men... who say to themselves 'God does not reward nor does He punish..."

The great day of the Lord is approaching...

it is bitter, there a warrior shrieks.

That day shall be a day of wrath,

a day of trouble and distress ('tzara u-metzuka'),

a day of calamity and desolation....,

"**yom shofar u-tru'a** ..."

a day of blowing a shofar and tru'a..."

(see Tzefania 1:12-16).

Here, 'yom **shofar u-tru'a**' clearly implies a day of imminent danger and war - a day in when God enacts judgment on those who have sinned. [See also Yoel 2:1-3,11-14 & 2:15-17!]

The strongest proof that the sound of a shofar would cause intuitive fear is from Amos:

"Should a shofar be sounded in the city, would the people not become fearful?!" (see Amos 3:6).

With this background, we can return to Parshat Pinchas. The Torah instructs us to make a **yom tru'a** on the first day of the seventh month (29:1-2). Obviously, the Torah does not expect us to go to war on this day; however, we are commanded on this day to create an atmosphere that simulates the tension and fear of war. By creating this atmosphere in anticipation of the new agricultural year that is about to begin, we show God our belief that its fate - and hence our fate, is in His hands (and not nature's).

Therefore, to create this atmosphere of a 'day of judgment', to help us feel that our lives are truly 'on the line' - in God's Hands, the Torah commands us to sound a tru'a with the shofar.

ZICHRON TRU'A

Now we must explain the phrase **zichron tru'a**, which is used to describe this holiday in Parshat Emor. The key to understanding this phrase lies in the same psukim mentioned above concerning the chatzotzrot. There, we find the link between tru'a, war, and zika'ron:

"Ve-ki tavo'u milchama be-artzechem... va-harei'otem be-chatzotzrot, ve-nizkartem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem..." -

When war takes place in your land... you should sound a **tru'a** with your trumpets that you will be **remembered** by (and/or that you will **remember**...) Hashem, and He will save you from your enemies" (see Bamidbar 10:8-9).

Here we find a special mitzva to sound a **tru'a** prior to, and in **anticipation** of, impending battle. To show our belief that the outcome of that battle is in God's Hands, and not in hands of our enemy, we are commanded to sound a **tru'a**. Obviously, it was not the tru'a itself that saves Bnei Yisrael, rather our recognition that the ultimate fate of the battle is in God's Hands.

We can apply this same analogy from war to agriculture. Just as the Torah commands us to sound a **tru'a** in anticipation of war - to remember that its outcome is in God's Hand; so too we are commanded to sound a **tru'a** on the first of Tishrei in anticipation of the forthcoming agricultural year - to remind ourselves that its outcome is in God's Hand as well.

Therefore, Rosh Hashana is not only a yom tru'a - a day of awe on which our lives are judged, but Chumash defines it as a day of zichron tru'a - a day on which we must sound the tru'a so that we will remember our God, in order that He will remember us. On this day, we must proclaim His kingdom over all mankind in recognition of His mastery over nature and our destiny.

In summary, we have shown how the most basic aspects of Rosh Hashana, which at first appeared to be totally missing from Chumash, can be uncovered by undertaking a comprehensive study of the biblical importance of the seventh month. Obviously,

our observance of Rosh Hashana is only complete when we include all of its laws that have been passed down through **Torah she-ba'al peh** (the Oral Law). However, we can enhance our appreciation of this holiday by studying its sources in **Torah she-bichtav** (the Written Law) as well.

In today's modern society, it is difficult to appreciate the importance of an agricultural year. Rarely do we need to worry about our water supply and other most basic needs. Nevertheless, especially in the Land of Israel, we are faced with other serious national dangers such as war and terror. Even though we must take every precaution necessary against these dangers, the basic principle of the above shiur still applies, that we must recognize that the ultimate fate of the forthcoming year is in God's Hands, and that He will judge us based on our deeds.

Even though all the nations are judged on this awesome day, Am Yisrael's custom is to sound the **tru'a** specifically with the shofar of an **ayil** (a ram), a symbol of 'akeidat Yitzchak' - a reminder to the Almighty of our devotion and readiness to serve Him.

With this shofar, together with our tefillot, our heritage, and our resolve to conduct our lives as an 'am kadosh' should, we pray that God should not judge us like any other nation, rather as His special Nation.

shana tova,
ve-ketiva ve-chatima tova,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In Chodesh Tishrei, the 'seventh' month, we find many chagim that relate to nature, especially the 'seven' days of Sukkot marking the culmination of the harvest season of the previous year. We also find three days of 'Judgement', Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Shmini Atzeret.

1. Compare the korban mussaf of each of these three chagim. (one par, one ayil, seven kvasim and one se'ir le-chatat).
2. In what way are these chagim connected?
3. According to Chazal, when are we judged for water? How does this relate to the above shiur?
4. Relate this to the tefilla of the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur! (it's in your machzor at the end of seder avoda)

B. Why does Hashem need Am Yisrael to proclaim him king? The one thing Hashem, ki-vyachol, can **not** do, is make Himself king. A kingdom is meaningless if there are no subjects. A king becomes king when and because he is accepted by his subjects. Similarly, only when God is accepted and recognized by man does He become Melech.

1. Relate this to our davening on Rosh Hashana.
2. Explain changing 'E-I HaKadosh' to 'Melech Hakadosh' according to this concept.

C. The Jewish New Year, the New Year special and unique to Am Yisrael is actually Nissan - Ha-chodesh ha-zeh lachem rosh chodashim rishon hu lachem le-chodshei ha-shana (Shmot perek 12/v1-2). Yetziat Mitzrayim which took place in Nissan marks the birth of the Jewish Nation.

1. What aspects of Pesach and Chag HaMatzot emphasize that we are a special nation, different from other nations.
2. What aspect of the chagim in Tishrei relate to all mankind. (Note 70 parim on Sukkot etc. - see also Zecharya chap 14)

D. In the shiur of the '13 midot' you may recall our explanation that Hashem's hashgacha over Am Yisrael after brit Sinai was broken due to chet ha-egel and defaulted to 'u-veyom pokdi u-pukadti' (Shmot 32:34). As opposed to immediate punishment, God will punish them from time to time, allowing for good deeds to balance out the bad deeds. In the manner, Bnei Yisrael would

be judged no different from other nations. Note the Ibn Ezra on that pasuk - there he explains - 'from Rosh Hashana to Rosh Hashana'!

1. Relate this peirush by the Ibn Ezra to the above shiur!

E. Note that from the story of the flood in Parshat Noach, we could also deduce the year begins in Tishrei, i.e. according to the agricultural year. The heavy rains of the flood began to fall on the 17th day of the **second** month, which would correspond to Cheshvan. (See Breishit 7:11.) However, this specific point is a controversy among the commentators.