

Parsha Ponders

Bereishis | September 22, 2025 | 29 Elul 5785

*Loving judgment*¹

ותתן לנו יקוק אלקינו באהבה את יום הזכרון הזה

Hashem, our G-d, give us, with love, this day of remembrance...²

In the middle blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* on Rosh Hashanah, we ask Hashem to give us, with love, this day of remembrance, a day of shofar blasts, a holy convocation. The obvious question is how could our Sages establish the text of the blessing for Rosh Hashanah to be that He give us, with love³? This is the same expression used with other festivals. However, Rosh Hashanah is a day of judgement. It's a day that Hashem sits on His throne of judgement⁴. The whole world is judged one by one, like sheep⁵. Everyone's fate hangs in the balance⁶. This is exactly the reason that we don't say Hallel on Rosh Hashanah. As it says in the *gemarra*, how could it be that the King sits on His throne, with the books of life and death before Him, and the Jews should sing song⁷? The Rambam elaborates⁸ that these are days of fear and trepidation. If so, how can we say that Hashem gave us this day with love, like all the other Festivals?

In truth, this question is exasperated by the *poskim*. The Levush rules⁹ not to say on Rosh Hashanah which occurs on Shabbos that it's "a day of remembering the shofar blasts, with love, a holy convocation." This is unlike other Festivals which occur on Shabbos, where we mention this aspect of love. The reason is that since the shofar blasts connote Hashem's judgement. Therefore, it would be incongruous to mention Hashem's love adjacent to those shofar blasts, "for they do not accept the judgement with love".¹⁰ We see then that it's not appropriate to mention love adjacent to Hashem's judgement. So why then at the beginning do we mention Hashem's love?¹¹

If we analyze the Ramban in *parshas Emor* regarding the *mitzvah* of blowing the shofar, he writes¹² the following: The Torah does not explain the *mitzvah* of shofar, what it's for. Why are we blowing it? Why do we need to have our remembrance be before Hashem on this day, more than any other? What's the point of the holy convocation, anyway? The Torah commands us to make this whole Festival, but it's not

¹ Based on Yerach LaMoadim Rosh Hashanah § 20, by Rav Yerucham Ulshin

² *Shemoneh Esrei* for Rosh Hashanah

³ This question is credited to a Rav Yehudah Gershenbaum

⁴ Rosh Hashanah 32b

⁵ Ibid 16a

⁶ See Ohr Yisroel § 7

⁷ Rosh Hashanah 32b

⁸ Mishneh Torah Hilchos Chanukah 3:6

⁹ Levush HaChur 582:7, brought by Taz ad. loc. § 3

¹⁰ Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 5:38 § 7 says this is referring to the people who don't accept Hashem's judgement with love. Rav Moshe, however, rejects this and says of course we are to accept His judgement with love

¹¹ The Eliyahu Rabbah ad. loc. 14 actually infers from the Levush that he wouldn't say it even at the beginning. However, Abudraham Seder Tefillas Rosh Hashanah, Kol Bo 28:2, Tanya Rabassi § 73 say explicitly to mention love at the beginning. This also appears in the Pri Megadim ad. loc. § 4 in his understanding of the Magen Avraham, as well as in the Matteh Efraim ad. loc. § 15-16

¹² Ramban to Leviticus 23:24

clear what's the reason, and what it's for¹³. This is contrast to all the other holidays. There's no mention in the Torah that it's a day of judgement¹⁴.

However, the Ramban clarifies that the Torah does in fact allude to this aspect of the day. Since it's in the same month as Yom Kippur, on Rosh Chodesh, it makes sense that these would be days of judgement. It's also alluded to by being called a day of remembrance. Hashem, on this day, will remember all of His creations, and sit in His throne of judgement and rule justly. Now, despite these allusions, it's still not clear why this day is considered a *Yom Tov*, a Festival.

This can be resolved with the Sefer HaChinuch's explanation of Rosh Hashanah¹⁵. He writes that Rosh Hashanah is from the *chessed*, loving kindness, of Hashem, to His creations. It's a day to recall them, to examine their ways, one day a year, every year. Since their indiscretions are minor, He forgives them. If there happens to be some outstanding transgressions, He'll slowly ensure their atonement, little by little. Yet if Hashem would wait a long time to judge our ways, all of these slight infractions would build up. They would be so great that Hashem couldn't, so to speak, overlook them, and the world would basically be judged for annihilation. It comes out then that this special day is what enables the continued existence of the world. Therefore, concludes the Sefer HaChinuch, it is certainly worthy for this day to be deemed a *Yom Tov*, like any other Holiday.

We see from the Chinuch that really, Rosh Hashanah's status as a *Yom Tov* comes from the very fact that it's a day of judgement. Without the judgement, our sins would become too great to bear, G-d forbid. When we celebrate Rosh Hashanah it's as if we're celebrating the salvation of the world from a possible calamity.

With this explanation of the Chinuch, we have a new understanding of a *pasuk* we say every Shabbos¹⁶: "The heavens will be happy, the earth will rejoice, the water and its contents will revel, the fields and everything in them will be exuberant, and then all of the trees of the forest will gladly sing, before Hashem, for He has come to judge the land." We see from this verse that the entirety of creation will be happy in every expression of happiness, when Hashem comes to judge the land. What kind of joy can this possible arouse¹⁷?

However, according to the Chinuch, it makes total sense. For the *Midrash* teaches us¹⁸ that this judgement is referring to the judgement of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. If so, it's understandable why the creation would be happy with this judgement of Hashem. For without this judgement every year, the world would cease to exist, for the sins would accumulate and be too great to ignore. The creation is happy since this judgement ensures its continued existence.

This also explains why Rosh Hashanah is a day that was given with love. For, in truth, this day was totally given as a tremendous gift for our benefit. It is this that we are referring to when we mention "love".

May we all be inscribed in the book of life, for good.

¹³ Ramban in his Derasha L'Rosh Hashanah

¹⁴ See Rosh Hashanah 8a that derives the source for this is from Psalms 81:4

¹⁵ Sefer HaChinuch § 311

¹⁶ Psalms 96:11-12

¹⁷ Rav Yerucham heard this question in his childhood from Rav Simcha Zissel Broyde

¹⁸ Vayikra Rabbah 30:4