

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

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D. Mordechai Schlachter

Happy New Year! does not have a Jewish sound to it. Jews call this holiday “Rosh Hashanah” meaning, the New Year. Does it have the same connotation as the secular new year? Is it the new year for anything else other than counting the “Jewish” calendar year? What is a Jewish New Year?

תִּקְעוּ בַחֲדָשׁ שׁוֹפָר בַּפֶּסַח לְיוֹם חַגְנוֹ: כִּי חַק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא מִשְׁפָּט לְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב:

“Blow the shofar on the new month [also] on the full moon for the day of our festival. Because it is Law for Yisroel and Judgment for the Lord of Yaakov.” (Tehillim 81:4-5).

There is no real context to these pesukim. How do we know they refer to Rosh Hashana? Also, how is Rosh Hashanah the New Year and how do these pesukim help us determine that?

According to Chazal, there are four New Years. (Mishneh Rosh Hashanah 1:1). באֶחָד בְּתִשְׁרֵי רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְשָׁנִים וְלִשְׁמִטָּה וְלִיּוֹבְלוֹת, לְגִטִּיעָה וְלִירְקוֹת. “On the first day of Tishrei [the seventh month] it is Rosh HaShan for the years, shmittah, Yovel, for planting and for vegetables [tithes].” (Ibid). The Mishneh lists several other “New Years” that fall out during other months, such as Nissan [the first month] and even in the middle of Shvat [the eleventh month]. Therefore, this “Rosh Hashanah” that is celebrated and wished upon each other, is just one of many. Why is it the custom to celebrate this day as New Years and wish each other a Shana Tova on this day as opposed to the others? Also, what does the Torah say about this day?

וּבַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֲדָשׁ מִקְרָא-קֳדְשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל-מְלָאכָת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם: “And in the seventh month on the first day of the month it shall be a holy convocation for you. All labor work you shall not do. A day of terura blasts it will be for you.” (Bamidbar 29:1). This pasuk talks about blowing the shofar on this chag but it does not mention it as the new year. The pasuk mentions that it is the seventh month. Further, in the Torah, years are also calculated based on Nissan being the first month. בְּאֶחָד לַחֲדָשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִי לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם “On the first day of the second month in the second year of leaving Eretz Mitzrayim.” (Ibid 1:1). This was what is now called Iyur, the second month and it is called the second year. Therefore, the Torah is calculating the year, also, by the months commencing from Nissan.

There are two ways to look at the numbering of the months. Either, the Torah’s count of the months is specific, in that what is now called Nissan is always the first month. Tishrei is always the seventh month. Another way to look at the months is that the Torah was being geula-centric. It was counting months since Hashem took the people out of Eretz Mitzrayim. Therefore, the numbering of the months in the Torah are non-specific for all time, it is just one way to count the months. It would be odd for the

Torah to say “on the seventh month the people went out.” By default, the month they left Eretz Mitzrayim will be month one.

The month numbering in the Torah is wandering specific – meant to calculate how long Bnei Yisroel traveled between Eretz Mitzrayim and Eretz Canaan. Therefore, when it says Moshe erected the Mishkan on *בְּיוֹם-הַתְּחִלָּה הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ* “on the first day of the first month” it is geula-centric. When it says “the second year” it means this is the second year of the geula. One would even argue that the second year began in Tishrei and that the first six months was considered a year. However, the Torah calls it year forty in Adar [the eleventh month]. (Devarim 2:7). Moshe says it was still year forty then. (Ibid 29:4). If the years changed in Tishrei it would be year forty-one. However, one can say the Torah is merely talking in terms of the geula and the Rosh Hashanah of the months. In terms of counting years from Creation, the Rosh Hashanah is Tishrei, as the Mishneh says. However, where did Chazal know this?

What does the Torah call this chag on the first of Tishrei? Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are not mentioned when Pesach, Shavuot, and Succos are first mentioned. *שְׁלֹשׁ רִגְלִים תִּחַג לִי בַשָּׁנָה:* “Three accustomed festivals shall you celebrate for Me each year.” (Shmos 23:14). There is no mitzvah of appearing before Hashem for Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. The three major chagim are mentioned again without the mention of the other two. (Ibid 34:18, 22). This chag is first mentioned later. *דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן זָכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה מִקְרֵא-קֹדֶשׁ:* “Speak to the Bnei Yisroel and say, ‘on the first day of the seventh month it shall be for you a rest day. Reminder of the terura blast, a holy convocation.’” (Vayikra 23:24). This is mentioned after giving details about Pesach, Shavuot, and Succos. It is also mentioned after a {פ} break, as if it is a new section. Later, the Torah calls this chag “a day of terura blasts.” (Bamidbar 29:1). These are days of shofar blasts but there is no mention of a New Year. Still, why else blow the shofar?

תִּקְעוּ בַחֹדֶשׁ שׁוֹפָר בְּכֹסֶה לְיוֹם הַחֲגִילוֹ: כִּי תֵחַ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא מְשֻׁפָּט לְאֵלֵי יִצְחָק: “Blow the shofar on the new month [also] on the full moon for the day of our festival. Because it is Law for Yisroel and Judgment for the Lord of Yaakov.” (Tehillim 81:4-5). These pesukim mean that blowing the shofar (this chag as mentioned in Bamidbar 29:1) is on the new moon – first of the month. There is also a “festival” on the fifteenth – the full moon. There are two “חַגִּים” that are in the full moon and they are *אֶת-חַג הַמִּצֹּת* “the festival of Pesach” (Shmos 23:13) and *וְחַג הָאֶסְףִּי בְצֵאת הַשָּׂנֶה* “and the festival of ingathering the crops when the year goes out” or Succos (Shmos 23:16). All three major chagim (excluding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) are called chag. Two fall out on the fifteenth. One is commenced with a shofar blowing on the first day of that month – Succos.

In Tehillim it also says the first day of the month is Law and Judgment. Yom Kippur is Judgment and Shmini Atzeres is Law enactment – and extra holiday. Also, it also seems to be saying this day of the first month is Law enactment for Yisroel (when Bnei Yisroel have achdus) and a Judgment Day for Yaakov (each tribe judged separately when they act and live separately). Thus, this day being a special Law and Judgment makes it a commencement of something. However, the pasuk in Shmos says “when the year goes out.” (Ibid 23:16). If the Torah calls Succos “as the year goes out” then the first

of the month cannot seem to be the New Year because fifteen days later the year is ending. How can it begin fifteen days before it ends?

A few things go out with Succos. The crop year is coming to a close as the summer and fall crops are brought in and the winter is coming. Further, Hakel – every seven years the king read the Torah out-loud – is at the end of the seventh-year cycle, on Succos. (Devarim 31:10-12). Further, since the planting season begins just after Succos, prior to winter, shmittah commenced then. (Vayikra 3-4). The Yovel year commenced on Yom Kippur every fiftieth year. (Ibid 25:9). Accordingly, Tishrei is both the month of ending and the beginning. The Torah has several New Years. Hakel on Succos commences the first year of the shmittah cycle. Yom Kippur commences the first day of the fiftieth year – Yovel. Thus, both Succos and Yom Kippur also signal the end of the previous shmittah years. Indeed, shmittah is mentioned first (Shmos 23:11) long before Rosh HaShanah is (Vayikra 23:24).

There must be a reason for the shofar blasts. What is the purpose of a chag with shofar blasts? It obviously is used to usher in the day of judgment – Yom Kippur – and the final chag – succos. It is the New Year but not specifically on one day. It is more the month at that is the end of the previous year and then the commencement of the next year. New Year really could be Shmini Atzres, after the last day of Succos. Judgment more commonly comes at the end of a year – to judge the previous year – than the beginning of a year that has not happened yet. The ingathering is concluding and Succos celebrates the year that was, what Hashem has given. What is this “Rosh Hashanah?”

Rosh Hashanah for Chazal is not a celebration of a new year to come by itself. A year passing and a new calendar year being counted is not something to celebrate. Instead, while a year is concluding and the people are looking at their produce, they are also prepping for a winter. They are also looking ahead to a rainy season where they are unsure if rain will come and what the future will bring. They are looking to a New Year not knowing what blessings lay ahead. The New Year and the wishing one a Shana Tova has to come prior to the chagim. The chagim are what connect Jews to Hashem. Yes, the year does not technically conclude for another few weeks. The Torah is read in Hakel on Succos and not Pesach because it is read at the conclusion of one year. Pesach cannot be the New Year because it is six months after Succos, six months after the year concluded. Perhaps Shmini Atzeres could serve as the New Year and perhaps Chazal were unsure which Yom Tov to make the New Year. However, ultimately, since the following year must commence with celebrating with Hashem and serving Hashem, it has to be Yom Terurah.

The shofar blasts are both “a day of shofar blasts” and a “reminder of the shofar blasts.” It is zichron – remembering one year – and also Yom Terura – the day commencing the next year. In this way, the blessing of Shana Tova is not empty. It comes with all the mitzvos that are done on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succos, and Shmini Atzeres. As one ingathers his grain, he is thankful. He is also connecting the good of this year to the hopes of the year coming. He commences that with a month of mitzvos. I wish everyone a Shana Tova U’Mesukah.