

"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"



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Wonders

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ראש השנה א-ב תשפ"ז 🌸



“ 5787 alludes to the phrase, “May it be a year of gold” (תהא שנת פז). The entire upcoming year—may it come upon us for the good—will be a “golden” (פז) opportunity to bring the Jewish people closer to God and to the Torah ”

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The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

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to publish your classes
in book form.
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בזק האיערין
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Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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STORY

WHERE IS THE YOUNG SCHOLAR?

Once, on the festival of Shavuot, several disciples of the Choizeh of Lublin gathered together; all of them great *tzaddikim*: Rebbe Dovid of Lelov, Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorke, and Rebbe Shmuel of Karov. As they sat together at an inn in the city of Lublin, they felt a desire to drink a little honey mead. There was a young man present, a scholar, who was generous and warm of heart. Hearing their conversation, he went and brought them mead and seeing how they praised the drink, he sent for more.

Several months later, as Rosh HaShanah drew near, the disciples of the Choizeh gathered again at that same inn in Lublin. On the eve of Rosh HaShanah, after they had already performed *Hatarat Nedarim* (the annulment of vows), Rebbe David of Lelov said: "If only we had that young scholar with us now, he who did us such good."

Rebbe Shmuel of Karov replied: "I searched for him but could not find him. And when I recited the Psalm of the day in the morning prayer and came to the verse 'They said: God does not see, the God of Jacob does not understand' (Psalms 94:7), the thought arose within me: perhaps he is among those who say such things, and no longer believes in the God of Jacob." Rebbe David heard this and said: "Even so, we are obligated to repay him for his kindness."

This young scholar had been accustomed to trading with prominent gentiles and had become deeply attached to them. In those very days before Rosh HaShanah he had resolved to convert to Christianity.

The day before his conversion, he was locked in a monastery, as was their custom. That day was the eve of Rosh HaShanah. And at that very moment when the disciples of the Choizeh were sitting together and remembering him, a stirring of repentance arose in the young man's heart. After repenting wholeheartedly of his intention to convert, he resolved to take his own life rather than desecrate God's Name by abandoning his faith. He climbed to the high platform within the monastery, threw himself from it, and died.

The following morning the priest came to the monastery and found the young man's body. Not wishing that those gathered there would know what had occurred, he pryed up a floorboard, concealed the body beneath it, and replaced the board.

On the night following Rosh HaShanah, one of the *chasidim* who had been at the inn returned to his home in a village near Lublin and found that his house had been robbed and everything he owned stolen. He returned to the inn in tears and related what had happened. At once Rebbe Dovid and Rebbe Shmuel accompanied the *chasid* to their master, the Choizeh of Lublin. The Choizeh said to them: "Go to the chief of police, and he will give you a letter stating that wherever you go, government officials must assist you in conducting a search to recover the stolen goods." They did as the Rebbe instructed and received the letter from the chief of police.

On their way they passed through the village where the monastery was located and where the priest resided. The *chasid* whose home had been robbed was afraid of the priest, so Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorka presented himself as the person who had been robbed. In fluent Polish, Rebbe Yitzchak demanded that the priest permit a search of the monastery. The demand aroused the priest's fury, but he was compelled to allow it. When they entered the monastery they at first found nothing. The priest cried out: "How dare you conduct a search in a holy place!" While he was standing there shouting, Rebbe Shmuel of Karov called out: "Look, this floorboard is not level with the others. The stolen goods must be hidden here."

The priest was greatly alarmed and offered them whatever they wished if only they would leave the board alone. The *chasidim* paid him no heed, lifted the board, and found the young scholar's body there. They took him to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. And the priest, not wishing the matter to come to trial, paid them the full sum that had been stolen from the *chasid*.

This peculiar story with all its twists, turns, and intertwining storylines invites reflection on a number of topics. First and foremost is the impact that even a simple connection with *tzaddikim* can have not just on one's life, but even upon one's memory. A simple act of bringing them mead saved a soul from descending to oblivion and its body from being lost. It also invites us to reflect on the way in which leaders of the Jewish people survey the condition of those bound to them on Rosh HaShanah and on the *ru'ach hakodesh*, the Divine spirit of inspiration

present within the Choizeh of Lublin, who resolved both issues—the robbery and bringing the self-sacrificing young man to Jewish burial—with one act.

But let us begin by reviewing the connection between this bewildering story and the prayer of *Shofarot* recited during the Musaf service of Rosh HaShanah.

One of the central verses in that prayer is: "On that day, a great *shofar* will be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those cast away in the land of Egypt will come and bow to God on the holy mountain in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 27:13). What is the

significance of this *shofar*? Of the *shofar* of Mashiach the Sages teach that it is the counterpart of another shofar, the shofar that sounded at Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Torah. Both *shofarot* (plural of shofar) are according to the Midrash the horns of the ram that Abraham offered in place of his son Isaac. It follows that the *shofar* of the giving of the Torah is the "smaller" one, while the *shofar* of Mashiach is, as the verse states simply, the great shofar.

An ordinary *shofar*—a small *shofar*—awakens those who are relatively close: those who, despite their distance, retain some connection to holiness. But to awaken one who has been cast away, or worse, utterly lost, a figuratively great *shofar* is needed. That is why the verse in Isaiah speaks of the *shofar* being blasted without mentioning who will be blowing it. Indeed, in Chasidic teachings, the verse from Isaiah is understood to be speaking of two types of Jews who have grown distant from God for two different reasons. There are, "those lost in the Land of Assyria." Assyria is Ashur (אשור) in Hebrew, related to wealth (עושר) and referring to those who became lost because of material or spiritual prosperity (אושר), like the young scholar in our story, who drifted away from Judaism because of his wealth and his successful commerce with the non-Jewish landed nobility. But there are also "those cast away in the Land of Egypt." The Hebrew name for Egypt (מצרים) suggest hardship and suffering and thus this refers to those Jews who were deprived of their Judaism because of the difficulties of life or the decrees of antisemitic regimes (like Soviet Russia).

Both groups are awakened specifically

by the "great *shofar*" of the redemption, which is blasted as if by itself. This is the prophet's way of saying that it will be God who will blast the Mashiach's *shofar* that will call those who are distant back to Judaism and Divine service. When God is referred to in this way, it alludes to a level of Divine revelation so high that it cannot be expressed in words or grasped in any ordinary way. Thus, the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the word "will be blasted" (יִתְקַעַ) is even greater than the first-person exalted "I" that begins the Decalogue.

In the time of the Redemption, we will all reach a level of awareness in which the commandments and our connection to God occur as if of themselves, spontaneously. This level is the effect of a corresponding revelation at the level of God Himself. If in the Torah and in familiar reality God is revealed as "being" (יְשׁ)—as all that can be grasped by the mind—then in the time of the Redemption, it is the Divine non-being (אֵין) that will be revealed. This means that God will not appear as an active agent but as the source from within which all actions unfold, without any possibility of pointing to where they originate.

Such a level within our own souls can be felt in moments of self-sacrifice, like that of the young scholar who returned to God. A person gives himself over as if without reason, without being able to point to anything that caused him to surrender his life. Yet it is utterly clear that even though he is negating his own being, it remains the most exalted expression of his own soul—of the part of God Above within him, which cannot and will not ever be separated from God.

Even though this level of expression of the soul is most apparent during moments that demand self-sacrifice, it does appear in ordinary times too. To understand how this might be, we look at the numerical value of “lost” (אבד), and “cast away” (נדח), 7 and 62. Their sum is 69, the value of “pauper” (אביון), revealing that when a person feels himself to be an utter pauper—by relinquishing all their achievements all their presence and giving it back to the Almighty—they

arrive at a state of non-being (אין) that awakens the Divine non-being. Of the pauper it is said that they “yearn for all things” (*Rashi* on Deuteronomy 15:4). In this state, the soul yearns for God’s very essence (*ousia*), which is that which “all things,” because everything comes from it and everything is within it. It is precisely such total emptiness that awakens the desire and the sense to cleave to God, and to recognize that everything comes from Him.

ROSH HASHANAH BECOMING ADAM AND EVE IN THE NEW YEAR

Although the *Ten Days of Teshuvah* between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are known as days of awe and judgement, nonetheless, the final purpose of all the spiritual work of these days is to come closer to God and to feel that closeness in the very depths of our being.

A SPIRITUAL PARADIGM FOR THE HOLIDAYS

In this spirit, the Arizal created a paradigm that encapsulates and expresses this great desire to be close to God in the most intimate of ways, comparing various stages of intimacy to the order of the holidays of the month of *Tishrei*.¹ As a basis for this paradigm

he used the model of Adam and Eve and their evolving relationship in the Garden of Eden. The Arizal called this model “the secret of the severing” (סוד ההנסיכה) after the model’s middle stage of separation between Adam and Eve, as will be explained.

The actual events surrounding Adam’s creation and the subsequent separation of Eve from their one unified body occurred according to tradition on Rosh HaShanah. The Arizal borrows the stages of Adam and Eve’s relationship as described in the Torah to model and better appreciate the process we go through from Rosh HaShanah until the eighth day of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret (and beyond). The idea is that this model—the secret of the

1. *Sod HaShem LiYerei’av*, Chapter 40.

severing, or *Nessirah*, in Hebrew—serves as a parable for the relationship between God and every individual. Additionally, this very same paradigm can serve as a basis for understanding the relationship between the body and the soul.

CREATION AND SEPARATION

According to tradition Adam and Eve were originally created as one being, back-to-back, like a pair of conjoined twins. In this state, no real dialogue or deepening of relationship was possible as they could not face each other. They were therefore connected on some unconscious or inherent level yet utterly disconnected on the more conscious levels of being, which require open, face-to-face communication. This reality corresponds to Rosh HaShanah, the beginning of the holidays of *Tishrei*, when we are metaphorically in a relatively back-to-back relationship with God.

After Adam and Eve's being initially one entity, the Torah describes how the feminine aspect was separated from the masculine aspect, creating two separate beings.² This stage middle stage of separation and individuation, according to the Arizal, is called the *nessirah*, which literally means a severing. The stage of cutting and separation ends on Yom Kippur the pinnacle of the intense spiritual work of the Ten Days of Teshuvah between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, when we prepare ourselves to be fully seen and heard by God on Yom Kippur.³

2. Genesis 2:21-24.

3. *Sod Hashem LiYerei'av*, loc. cit.

TWO BECOME ONE

Once Adam and Eve were two distinct self-aware personalities, the next stage of their developing relationship was to turn from the relatively distant type of relationship, represented by being back-to-back, and encounter each other face-to-face. This stage corresponds to the four days between Yom Kippur and the festival of Sukkot.

The next image the Arizal provides in this paradigm is that the masculine and feminine aspects reunite and come together in a loving embrace. This occurs during the holiday of Sukkot when we are enveloped, and in a sense, hugged by God through the surrounding walls and the *schach* covering of the *sukkah*.

The seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshana Rabbah when, after seven revolutions around the *bimah*—the central table upon which we read the Torah—we put down our four species and pick up five willow branches. Each of the four species represents a different part of the body: the *lulav* (the date palm) represents the spine, the *etrog* (citron) represents the heart, the *hadasim* (myrtle branches) represent the eyes, and the *aravot* (willow branches) represent the lips.⁴ Based on this, the Arizal compares the taking of the willow branches on Hoshana Rabbah to the next stage of coming close, that of kissing.

Finally, the eighth day of Sukkot, which is actually a separate festival known as Shemini Atzeret (and Simchat Torah) symbolizes the culmination of all the holidays and the process of evolving

4. *Vayikra Rabbah* 30:14.

intimacy that leads to marital union.

Thus, the Arizal has provided us with a very tangible and descriptive visualisation through which we can relate to the holidays of *Tishrei* as a developing process of the soul as it comes close to God in love and intimacy. Building good and deep relationships takes time, effort and energy. It is no different whether we mean to build our relationship with God, with other people, or even when reflecting on the relationship between our own body and soul. Relationships normally begin with a back-to-back state with a goal of learning to not only coexist, but to eventually arrive at a level of cooperation, love, and integration.

A DAY OF JUDGMENT

Though the Written Torah does not explicitly associate Rosh HaShanah with judgment, the Oral Torah identifies it as the day of judgment for the entire world. The Sages point to the following verse as a textual allusion to the notion of judgment on Rosh Hashanah⁵: “[The Land of Israel is] a land that *Havayah*, your God, seeks out; the eyes of *Havayah*, your God, are always on it, from the beginning of the year until the year’s end.”⁶

The “eyes of God” is obviously an image and is meant to represent Divine Providence and the overall concept of judgment. According to this verse, spiritual surveillance or existential observation takes place at the beginning of the year and lasts to the end of the year, an obvious allusion to Rosh Hashanah. It is interesting

to note that in this passage as it is written in the Torah, the word “beginning [of the year]” (מְרִשִּׁית) is missing the letter *alef*. This missing letter *alef*, as we will explore at the end of the article, is connected to our next two subjects – Adam and the shofar.

THE PARADOX OF GOD AND MAN

The letter *alef* is referred to as the “paradox of God and man.”⁷ In the *Zohar* the letter *alef* symbolizes the “image of God” in which man is created.⁸ Many of the names of God begin with the letter *alef*; more than any other letter.

The name for a human being, Adam, significantly also begins with an *alef*. The name Adam (אָדָם) can be divided into two syllables: *alef* (א) and *dam* (דָם). The *alef* represents the Divine image in man, while the syllable *dam*, which means “blood,” symbolizes the physical, animal nature of man.⁹ This duality is manifest in the soul and the body, respectively. The paradox of God and man is reflected in the ongoing meeting of the soul, rooted in the infinite and eternal nature of God, and the finite and temporal body, formed as it is from the “dust of the earth.”¹⁰

This is very significant to our discussion, because as mentioned earlier, according to tradition, Rosh HaShanah is the sixth day of Creation, the day on which man was created. It is also, according to some accounts, the day that Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and

5. Rosh Hashanah 8a.

6. Deuteronomy 11:12.

7. *The Hebrew Letters*, s.v. *alef*.

8. 3:104b.

9. For more on how the word Adam relates to being created “in the image” of God see *Yaiyn Yitzchak*, Bereishit §28; *Body, Mind and Soul*, p.186.

10. Genesis 2:7.

Evil and were judged, thus stamping Rosh Hashanah forever as a day of judgment.

THE SHOFAR AND THE SOUL

Of all the *mitzvot*, rituals and customs of Rosh HaShanah, blowing the shofar stands out as the most potent of all its symbols. The physical action of blowing the shofar entails breathing deeply in and then blowing out from one's innermost depth. This action is reminiscent of the description of the formation of man in Genesis: "and God blew into his nostrils the soul of life."¹¹ The Torah describes that God created the rest of Creation with speech. But He, as it were, blew man's soul into him. A person can speak for hours without growing tired, but blowing air out of one's lungs is taxing and cannot be done more than a couple of times in succession. According to Chasidic thought the difference between man and the rest of Creation lies in what each represents in the Creator. Whereas Creation reflects God's exterior will, man's soul represents God's inner will and essence.

This idea is an essential foundation of Chasidut and is expressed in the teaching that the soul of man is "a portion of God Above."¹² When Rosh Hashanah is called the "birthday of the world" in the prayers, it

means not only the creation of the physical universe in general, but more specifically, it refers to the anniversary of the creation of man on the sixth day of creation and the revelation of God's inner will and true intent in Creation. The blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah also serves as a remembrance of God blowing the soul of life into man from His deepest essence.

THE MISSING ALEF

The images here of God blowing into Adam a *neshamah*, the "soul of life," and blowing the shofar on Rosh HaShanah, alludes to the revelation of a new energy in the New Year. The Arizal taught that every year a new energy that has never been present before is revealed on Rosh HaShanah and from there spreads to fill the entire coming year. The beginning of its revelation happens with the blowing of the shofar.¹³

The "missing" *alef* of the word "beginning [of the year]" (*מְרִשִּׁית*) as discussed above, hints to energy of the previous year that is now over, making room, as it were, for a new influx of energy to the world in general, and to each soul as well. The sounds of the shofar blowing carry this new energy into our souls and additionally have the unique power to awaken the soul to come close to God.

11. Ibid.

12. Paraphrased from Job 31:2, as taught in the second chapter of *Tanya*.

13. From a class given on the 24th of Elul, 5779.

ROSH HASHANAH 5787

SECRETS OF 5787

Every year, HaRav Ginsburgh reviews some of the most important numerical and linguistic allusions related to the ordinal number of the year. This year is 5787 years since the creation of Adam and Eve. In Hebrew, it is referred to as תשפ"ז, or 787, which is the hundreds-tens-units part of 5787. These following allusions are all related to this form.

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

The first two letters of תשפ"ז, stand for “may it be a year of” (תהא שנה), as does every year in this century. The final two letters are then understood as initials of some phrase, or as a whole word. Our year can then be understood as alluding to the phrase, “May it be a year of gold” (תהא שנה זָהָב). The significance of this phrase is found in a statement made by the Lubavitcher Rebbe following the spiritual awakening brought about by the miracles of the Six-Day War. He made repeated use of the well-known phrase “a golden opportunity” (זָמָנָהּ מְנִיחָהּ; in Yiddish, *a goldene gelegenhayt*) to draw the hearts of Israel closer to our Father in Heaven.

The entire upcoming year—may it come upon us for the good—will be a “golden” (זָהָב) opportunity to bring the Jewish people closer to God and to the Torah, thereby fulfilling the prospect of three dimensions of reality that must be complete and perfect: the People of Israel, the Torah of Israel, and the Land of Israel. It is also a golden opportunity to draw the nations of the world closer to faith in the God of Israel.

THE BREASTPLATE OF JUDGMENT

One of the most important holy articles in the Tabernacle was the High Priest’s breastplate. Without the definitive article, its name has become synonymous with Torah jurisprudence (חֹשֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט), whose value is 787. Thus, this year should be dedicated to the rectification of justice and law, inspired by the *Urim ve-Tumim* within the breastplate. During this year, one should deeply delve into the principles of Jewish law through the *Choshen Mishpat* section of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

Choshen Mishpat also parallels the two words “resilience and salvations” (חֹזֶק וְשׁוּעוֹת), which the Sages state correspond to the two orders of Mishnah known as *Nashim* and *Nezikin*, respectively. In the *Shulchan Aruch* these are the two parts of *Even HaEzer* (laws regarding matrimony) and *Choshen Mishpat*. The juxtaposition of the two hints at the legal claim made by the daughters of Zelophehad—“The daughters of Zelophehad speak right”¹—pointing to special consideration for women’s voices and perspectives (who innovate wondrous insights in our holy Torah, as explained in *Hayom Yom*).

1. Numbers 27:7.

AND YOU SHALL REJOICE IN YOUR FESTIVAL

The value of “And you shall rejoice in your festival”² (וּשְׂמַחְתָּ בַּחֲגֹךָ) is 787, which is then followed by another commandment of joy, “and you shall be only joyful”³ (וְהָיִיתָ אֶךְ שִׂמְחָה). Particularly relevant to 5787 is another mention of joy in the Torah’s teaching on the special days of the year—“on the day of your joy”⁴ (וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחָתְכֶם), which refers to Shabbatot—because Rosh Hashanah of 5787 falls on Shabbat. Thus, we are entering a year that is characterized by rest, pleasure, and joy.

“Your festival” (בַּחֲגֹךָ) is itself an acronym for the four *sefirot* of understanding—the source of joy in all the festivals—loving-kindness, might, and crown. Their combined value (בִּינָה חֶסֶד גְּבוּרָה כְּתֹר) is 975, which is the product of 13 and 75, the values of “love” (אַהֲבָה) and “confidence” (בְּטָחוֹן), respectively. Thus, repentance out of love is multiplied many times over yielding repentance born of great love (תְּשׁוּבָה מֵאַהֲבָה רַבָּה), which is termed “supernal repentance” (תְּשׁוּבָה עֲלֵאָה), referring to repentance that comes through the joy of confidence in God, as in the verse, “For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have placed our confidence in His holy Name.”⁵ Thus, 5787 is a year of joy, love, and confidence. It is simultaneously both a Shabbat-like and festival-like year, where Shabbat and festivals correspond to wisdom and understanding, “two companions that never part.”

A FRESH OLIVE TREE

The number 787 is also the value of a well-known and beautiful idiom, “a fresh [green] olive tree” (זֵית רֵעֵן). This agricultural idiom describes the Congregation of Israel as a verdant and lively olive tree, “A fresh olive tree, fair with goodly fruit, has *Havayah* called your name.”⁶ An olive tree remains fresh and green throughout all seasons—so may this year be.

The olive tree embodies the secret of the foundation of the Father principle (*yesod Abba*), the mature form of the *sefirah* of wisdom, which extends and concludes in the foundation of *Ze’er Anpin* (the small countenance and the mature form of the emotive *sefirot*), thus making it the source of pure oil (*yitzhar*, in Hebrew). The sum of “a fresh olive tree” (זֵית רֵעֵן) and “pure oil” (יִצְהָר) is 1092, the product of 42 and 26, where 26 is the value of God’s essential Name, *Havayah* (י-הוה). 1092 is also the value of the phrase, “And who is like Your people, like Israel, one nation on earth”⁷ (וּמִי כְעַמְּךָ כִּישְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בָּאָרֶץ). The Sages reveal that just as in our tefillin, we have the verse that declares God’s oneness, “Hear O’ Israel, *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is one,” so in His tefillin, the Almighty has inscribed this verse, “And who is like Your people, like Israel, one nation on earth,” declaring the oneness of the Jewish people.

Pure olive oil is symbolic of the secrets of the secrets of the Torah to the Congregation of Israel. Indeed, the

2. Deuteronomy 16:14.

3. Ibid. v. 15.

4. Numbers 10:10.

5. Psalms 33:21.

6. Jeremiah 11:16. See also Psalms 52:10, “I am like a fresh olive tree in the house of God, I trust in the love of God eternally.”

7. 2 Samuel 7:23.

initial of “a fresh olive tree” (זֵיתֹן רֶעֶנָן) spell “secret” (סֵתֶר). The rest of the letters total to 580, or 10 times “grace” (חֵן), alluding to the Torah’s secrets, its inner dimension, which is known as by its acronym, which spells “grace” (חֵן), but stands for “the secret wisdom” (חֵכְמַת נִסְתָּר).

Since the complete verse we began with contains the words, “goodly fruit” (פְּרִי תָאֵר) and this is the title of the holy Or HaChaim’s book on the *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De’ah*, 5787 is a good year to study this work.

HE WHO MAKES A PATH THROUGH THE SEA

Isaiah says, “Thus says *Havayah*, who makes a path through the sea and a path in mighty waters.”⁸ The phrase, “who makes a path through the sea” (הַנוֹתֵן בַּיָּם דֶּרֶךְ) equals 787. This phrase is a pronounced Kabbalistic intention for the repentance we do during the month of Elul in preparation for the new year, specifically the rectification of the procreative faculties and the rectification of the covenant (*Tikkun HaBrit*), which will then continue for the entire year of 5787.

According to the Arizal “in the sea” (בַּיָּם), whose value is 52, refers to the Name *Ban* (the filling of God’s essential Name, *Havayah*: יוֹד הֵא וּו הֵא), which corresponds to the World of Action. Specifically, the depths of the sea are where symbolically transgressions and covenant blemishes are cast, as we say in the 13 Attributes of Divine Mercy in Micah: “And You will cast

all our sins into the depths of the sea.” The word “way” (דֶּרֶךְ) equals 224 is the secret of the Divine Names *Sag* (63) and *Kesa* (161) of *Binah* (*Teshuvah Ila’ah*), elevating the holy sparks fallen into the depths back to their source in Supernal Understanding; the value of both understanding (בִּינָה) and Elul (אֱלּוּל) is 67.

The word “who makes” (הַנוֹתֵן) is equal to 511, which is 7 times wisdom (חֵכְמָה), 73, the union of the Supernal Father and Mother (*Abba ve-Imma Ila’in*). Rebbe Nachman adds that 224, the value of “way” (דֶּרֶךְ) is equal to 2 times *Yabok* (יָבֹק), or “fluent” (בָּקִי), representing his appeal that every person be fluent in the dynamic of run and return. Now 511, the value of the first word, is a multiple of 7, the second word, is a multiple of 13, and the third word again a multiple of 7. This is the secret of “a female [13] shall encompass a man [7]” since as we have explored in past issues of Wonders, the pair of numbers 7 and 13 are considered masculine and feminine, respectively and these two numbers tend to appear together in the Torah.

The value of the first part of the verse and its second half, minus the preamble, “who makes a path through the sea and a path in mighty waters” (הַנוֹתֵן בַּיָּם דֶּרֶךְ וּבַיָּם עֵצִים נְתִיבָה) is 1479, or the product of 17, the value of “good” (טוֹב) and “golden” (פָּז), as above. The value of the full verse is 1771, which is the 23rd tetrahedral number, or the product of “bold” (עָז) and “joy” (חֵדוּה), the mystery of “Strength and joy are in His place”⁹ (עַז וְחֵדוּה בְּמָקוֹמוֹ).

8. Isaiah 43:16.

9. 1 Chronicles 16:27.

BLOWING THE SHOFAR

MATHEMATICAL AND BIBLICAL SECRETS OF THE SHOFAR

The mathematical sequence of powers of 3 reveals a profound connection between the 13 Attributes of Divine Compassion and the shofar blasts—the defining characteristics of the month of Elul, the month of mercy and forgiveness and of course of Rosh HaShanah. The number 3 turns out to be an important part of the laws of blowing the shofar as well.

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THE ATTRIBUTES OF COMPASSION

During the month of Elul, we frequently invoke the 13 Attributes of God's Compassion, which we have dealt with a number of times in the passing month of Wonders.¹ Some begin rising early to recite *Selichot* from Rosh Chodesh Elul, while others join in during the final week of the month. The essence of *Selichot* is the invocation of the Attributes of Compassion—hence the name Elul, the “Month of Compassion and Forgiveness.” In the month of Elul, we also sound the *shofar* every day (apart from the day before Rosh HaShanah) to awaken hearts to repentance (*teshuvah*).

In this article, we will be looking at the mathematical relationships between the numbers 13 and 3. All shofar blasts are based on the number 3. The *tekiah* is 1 simple, unbroken sound. The *shevarim* and *teruah* are

the result of a halachic doubt regarding the Torah's intent with the word *teruah*—whether it resembles a groan (*yevavah*) or a sob/wail (*yelalah*). The difference, as our Sages explain, is that the former consists of 3 parts and the latter of 9 parts. So, all the shofar sounds are powers of 3: $1 = 3^0$, $3 = 3^1$, and $9 = 3^2$.

Before moving to more complex mathematical operations, note that the names of the types of blasts are also all multiples of 3: *tekiah* (תְּקִיעָה) is 585, or 3 times 195; *shevarim* (שְׁבָרִים) equals 552, or 3 times 184; and, *teruah* (תְּרוּעָה) equals 681, or 3 times 227.

Now, adding the three powers of 3 from above, we find that their sum is 1 plus 3 plus 9, or 13.

This relationship is hinted at in the name of the month itself: Elul (אֱלּוּל). In reduced gematria (*mispar katan*, which according to the Arizal signifies *mochin de'katnut*, and is thus suited to the cognitive capacity of young children), the values of the letters of “Elul” are: $6 = \aleph$, $3 = \daleth$, $1 = \aleph$, and $3 = \daleth$, and their sum is 13 providing an allusion linking the blasts, Elul, and the 13 Attributes of Mercy.

1. If you did not get these issues, you can access them either through our website, www.inner.org or through <https://www.calameo.com/subscriptions/7020711>.

THE MATHEMATICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 3 AND 13

In number theory, it is known that the numbers 3 and 13 share an intrinsic connection: the sum of any 3 consecutive powers of 3 is always a multiple of 13. This is the generalization of what we just saw, the zeroth, first, and second powers of 3 total 1 times 13.

Continuing the sequence:

Let us convince ourselves of this statement's verity by looking at the next few consecutive sets of the powers of 3:

$$3^1 + 3^2 + 3^3 = 39 = 3 \cdot 13$$

$$3^2 + 3^3 + 3^4 = 117 = 9 \cdot 13$$

$$3^3 + 3^4 + 3^5 = 351 = 27 \cdot 13$$

This relationship can be readily proven mathematically (the proof is left as an exercise for the interested reader).

SEQUENCES IN MATHEMATICS AND TORAH

In the writings of the Sages of Torah, *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, up to modern times, there is almost no discussion of mathematical sequences (with the exception of a few sequences known in the classical Greek world used by Ibn Ezra and, as recently discovered, by one of the Geonim).

Today, the study of mathematical sequences is a central branch of number theory. Over the years, various reference works were compiled to catalog interesting integer sequences. One such work assigned catalog numbers to sequences for standardized reference. With the rise of the internet in the 1990s, these sequences and their catalog numbers were migrated to an online database known today as the *Online Encyclopedia of Integer Sequences* (OEIS) at oeis.org. The sequence of powers of 3 is officially cataloged there as A000244.

What is missing from that database is an explanation of the sequence's meaning

from a Torah perspective. From a purely mathematical angle, there is no need for additional explanation beyond investigating mathematical properties. However, everything that the Almighty created in His world, He created for His glory; every detail of creation—whether inanimate, vegetative, animal, or speaking, or from the realm of intellectual truths (mathematical, logical, or otherwise)—is intended to reflect a specific attribute of the Creator. The relationship between the powers of 3 and 13 as reflected in the themes of Elul is a Torah-based explanation for why the sum of consecutive powers of 3 is divisible by 13. When studying the properties of the sequence through a Torah lens, mathematical inquiry becomes unified with the Torah and the word of God.

THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S CUSTOM IN THE MONTH OF ELUL

The Sages of Israel, the "eyes of the congregation" who perceive from afar, may not have engaged in formal mathematics, yet their teachings rest firmly upon Torah and Divine service (*avodah*); their directives align naturally even within mathematical frameworks.

About two and a half centuries ago, the Ba'al Shem Tov instituted a custom received from his teacher, Achiyah HaShiloni, regarding the recitation of Psalms (*Tehillim*) during Elul. The Book of Psalms contains 150 chapters (a multiple of 3). The Ba'al Shem Tov's custom is to recite 3 additional chapters sequentially on each day of Elul (over and above the standard monthly portion). On Yom Kippur, the remaining chapters are completed, 9 chapters at a time, in 4 times. The 3 chapters recited daily correspond to 3^1 , while the 9 chapters recited on Yom Kippur correspond to 3^2 . It is commendable to adopt this custom starting this year and complete any missed chapters.

TEKIAH: THE SECRET OF ABRAHAM THE HEBREW

There are many novel insights on the shofar found in the *Shulchan Aruch*² on the laws of blowing the shofar.

It is written that the *tekiah* corresponds to Abraham our father, the *shevarim* to Isaac, and the *teruah* to Jacob—this is the primary intention (*kavanah*) that one should have when blowing the shofar. There is a beautiful point that the Alter Rebbe makes in this regard. He writes that the *tekiah* is also called *ha'avarah*, which means passing through. This is based on the verse, "And you shall pass through [*veha'avarta*] a shofar of *teruah*... you shall pass through your entire land."³ (וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר) (תְּרוּעָה... תַעֲבִירוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּכָל אֶרֶצְכֶם), which implies that one must sound a simple, smooth tone described as "you shall pass through" and afterward comes the sound of the *teruah* followed once again with the idiom, "you shall a shofar throughout your entire land."

In other words, in biblical language, the *tekiah* is called *ha'avarah*. This is an intrinsic connection with our patriarch, Abraham our father, because Abraham is known as "Abram the Hebrew"⁴ (אַבְרָם הָעִבְרִי), where Hebrew is another form of the same word as *ha'avarah*. In addition, the Torah describes that, "Avram passed through the land." He is known for passing through.

In the same vein, we find that in the Laws of the Jubilee (*Hilchot Yovel*), the Rambam rules that one must pass the shofar through the land on the Jubilee year and that it is not enough to just blow it. Just as Abraham our father, the Hebrew walked the land, we are required to pass the shofar through the land of Israel. He truly walks, traverses, and proclaims Godliness

in the world. Among the primary intentions of the *tekiah* is meditating on the Patriarchs. This insight regarding the notion of traversing the land to proclaim God's oneness, at the beginning and at the end, is an essential *kavanah*.

MORE ON THE SHOFAR AND THE NUMBER THREE

Earlier we saw that the names of the three sounds are multiples of 3. There are other words related to this time of year that are multiples of 3. First, we have "Rosh Hashanah" (ראש השנה) whose value is 861, or 3 times 287, where 287 is the value of "Healer" (רופא) and then, "Yom Kippur" (יום הכּפּוּרִים) whose value is 411, or 3 times 137, the value of "Kabbalah" (קבלה).

Where does the connection between blowing the shofar and the number 3 came from? The Alter Rebbe writes the following, "How many blasts is a person obligated to hear on Rosh HaShanah? Nine [three times three]: TaRaT, TaRaT, TaRaT." And what is the reason for this? He writes, "Why must one hear nine blasts? Because the word "teruah" is mentioned three times in the Torah: twice regarding Rosh HaShanah, and once regarding the Yom Kippur of the Jubilee year."

There is a very beautiful and simple allusion here: it is written, "He will revive us after two days; on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him."⁵ It is taught that although biblically Rosh HaShanah is one day, even when all second days of festivals celebrated outside the Land of Israel will be cancelled, Rosh HaShanah will remain two days long; it will permanently remain "days" (plural). Thus, "He will revive us after two days" refers to the two days of Rosh HaShanah, and "on the third day" refers to Yom Kippur. This is hinted at in a

2. *Orach Chaim* 590.

3. Leviticus 25:9.

4. Genesis 14:13.

5. Hosea 6:2.

straightforward way: *teruah* is written twice regarding Rosh Hashanah and once regarding Yom Kippur. It forms a simple structure of the two days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—every Yom Kippur is an aspect of the Jubilee, containing the illumination of *Yovel*, which also means the shofar. Rosh HaShanah is also a multiple of three, as is the word Jubilee (יובל); everything is threefold, as mentioned.

THE WAILING OF SISERA'S MOTHER IN THE BLASTS

Regarding the meaning of *teruah*, which are like a wail, the Alter Rebbe writes,

This *teruah* mentioned in the Torah is translated [in the Aramaic Targum] as *yevava* [meaning, a wail]. And it is written, “Through the window peered and wailed [*vatayabev*] the mother of Sisera,”⁶ which implies that a *yevava* is like the sound a person makes when weeping and wailing.

The entire halachic definition of a *teruah* is derived from the mother of Sisera,⁷ the mother of the Canaanite military commander defeated by Israel as described in the opening chapters of the Book of Judges. In the Song of Deborah, Sisera’s mother peers through her window, anxiously wailing over the delay of his chariot, unaware that he had already been killed by a woman named Yael.

What is special and almost unique about the Alter Rebbe’s version of the Shulchan Aruch is that he does not only bring the ruling, the *halachah*, he includes an explanation for the ruling: *halachah beta’amah*. Were it not for this fact, we would not be reading about Sisera’s mother at all, and we wouldn’t know about her connection to blowing the shofar. Without the underlying reason, verses are not required to prove anything. The reason serves to bring

proof from the verse and expound upon it—the halacha emerges from the verse. Suddenly, Sisera’s mother appears here. Evidently, every time we blow the shofar, during the *teruah* of the Day of Remembrance (*Yom Hazikaron*), we must remember her.

Perhaps every time we blow the shofar, she begins to cry because through the shofar we vanquish and slay her son Sisera. Just as it was Yael, who killed him, so too we blow the shofar which is ideally a “straight ibex [Yael in Hebrew] horn,” suggesting that within us, we have a Yael.

BARAK'S SHOFAR BLAST

Since the Alter Rebbe drew our attention to the mother of Sisera, we might ask, which other mothers are remembered on Rosh HaShanah? The *Haftarah* of the second day of Rosh HaShanah concludes with “Is Ephraim a precious son to Me...”, which is also the verse that seals the *Zichronot* (Remembrances) section of the special Rosh HaShanah Amidah. Rachel is the mother of Ephraim, her son Joseph’s son (for grandchildren are regarded as children). Sisera’s mother is her “impure opposite.” Amazingly, the phrase, “Ephraim’s mother” (אִם אֶפְרַיִם) has the exact same numerical value as “Sisera’s mother” (אִם סִיסְרָא). Sisera was the general of the army of the King Yavin, whose name is related to (understanding). Kabbalah identifies the shofar with the foundation of the mature *sefirah* of understanding, known as the Supernal Mother

When the *shofar* is sounded, who is primarily blowing the shofar, or in other words, who should one have in mind? The two leaders of the Israelites at the time, the ones who led the battle against Yavin and Sisera: Barak and Deborah. Can a woman blow the shofar? The Alter Rebbe rules that a woman can fulfill her own obligation. In any case, the one blowing here is Barak through the power of Deborah (moreover, Barak blows and Deborah recites/sings the *shofar* verses).

6. Judges 5:28.

7. In fact, the phrase “Sisera’s mother” (אִם סִיסְרָא) equals 372, also a multiple of 3: 3 times 127.