

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Hershel *ben Wolf a”h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## Rosh Hashanah in History

## PARSHAS NITZAVIM 5776

(The following is based largely on R’ Yerucham Olshin’s *sefer Yerach L’mo’adim [Yamim Nora’im]*, vol. I, part II, § 32.)

One of the highlights of the Rosh Hashanah prayers is the Mussaf service, which features the inclusion of three groups of Scriptural verses. As the Mishnah outlines (*Rosh Hashanah 4:6*):

אין פוחתין מעשרה מלכיות, מעשרה זכרונות, מעשרה שופרות.

“We include a minimum of ten verses of *Malchiyos* (Kingship), ten of *Zichronos* (Remembrances) and ten of *Shofaros*.”

Each of these selections, of course, are laden with meaning, and – if we take the time to study them – have much from which we may learn about this awesome day. For our purposes, we shall focus here on one of the *Malchiyos* verses and see if we may unlock some of its potent secrets.

### (Benign) Cover-Up

One of the Torah verses appearing in the *Malchiyos* section contains a term that has something of a double connotation. In the midst of his prophecy, Bilaam declares the following about Hashem’s relationship with His people: לֹא־הִיבִיט אֵין בְּנִעֻקֵב וְלֹא־רָאָה עֵמֶל – “(Hashem) looks not at sin amongst Ya’akov, nor does he see transgression amongst Yisrael; Hashem his G-d is with him, and the *teru’ah* of the King is with him” (*Bamidbar 23:21*). The word “*teru’ah*,” in this context, is conventionally understood as a term of love: “and the King’s love is with him.” And such is it rendered by Rashi.

However, as may be obvious, the term also seems to carry overtones of the central mitzvah of the day: the blowing of the shofar (reminiscent of the Torah’s characterization: “*Yom teru’ah yiheyeh lachem* – It shall be for you a day of **blowing**” [*Ibid. 29:1*]). As we shall see, these two meanings are not contradictory but actually complement each other.

This idea is borne out by Chazal’s exposition of the following verse (which is included in the *Shofaros* section of Mussaf): תִּקְעוּ בַחֹדֶשׁ שׁוֹפָר בְּכֶסֶה לְיוֹם חַגְנוּ – “Blow a shofar on the (beginning of the first) month, on the day designated (*kesseh*) for our festival” (*Tehillim 81:4*). This root of “*kesseh*” also means “covering,” a fact picked up on by Chazal. Thus, in expounding the verse, they quote Hashem as relating to Yisrael: בְּשׁוֹפֵר אֲנִי מְכַסֶּה עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם: – “Through the (blowing of the) shofar, I shall **conceal** your iniquities” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim, § 631*).

Now, this is quite a remarkable aspect of the day; the implication seems to be that even if Yisrael has sinned and those sins have not yet been fully expiated – Hashem will nonetheless look away from them when the shofar is blown on Rosh Hashanah. R’ Shneur Kotler (*No’am Si’ach*) ties this idea to the *passuk* above: “*Lo hibit aven b’Ya’akov* – (Hashem) looks not at sin amongst Ya’akov.” Rashi interprets these words as reflecting this theme, stating that Hashem does not overly scrutinize their deeds to focus on their iniquities. That is, their deeds

may not as of yet been completely atoned for; nonetheless, they are covered over during this time of judgment. Why? The *passuk* continues: “*U’seru’as Melech bo.*” It is a result of Hashem’s great love for His people (along the lines of the poignant words of Shlomoh Hamelech: תַּכְסָּה אֶהְבֶּהּ – “Love covers over all transgressions” [*Mishlei 10:12*]). We learn, then, that the *teru’os* of the shofar arouse Hashem’s love for His people – and He thus looks away from their sins.

It may be somewhat ironic that this wondrous and powerful aspect of the day was revealed by the wicked Bilam. But as we shall see, he may have (inadvertently) played a major role in contributing to this very phenomenon.

### **The Great Turn-Around**

This notion emerges by viewing Rosh Hashanah in the greater context of the nature of this day throughout history. Rosh Hashanah began, of course, right at the very beginning – on the sixth day of Creation, when Adam Harishon came into being. On that very day, he sinned by partaking of the fruit of the Eitz Hada’as (Tree of Knowledge) and was judged and punished. Kayin perpetrated his act of murder against his brother Hevel on Rosh Hashanah, as well. It certainly appeared that this day would be marked as one on which Hashem’s wrath would increase.

This was not lost on Bilam. In fact, as R’ Yehonasan Eibshitz points out (*Ya’aros Devash*), the episode involving Balak and Bilam took place on Rosh Hashanah. And it was no accident; Bilam specifically sought to curse Yisrael on this day, as he relied on its quality as a day of Divine judgment and anger.

Alas, we know how the story turned out; as the *passuk* sums up: וְלֹא-אָבָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׁמַע – “And Hashem your G-d did not desire to listen to Bilam; and Hashem your G-d reversed for you the curse into blessing, for Hashem your G-d loves you” (*Devarim 23:6*). “Therefore,” R’ Yehonosan writes, “it became established as a permanent decree that at this time – just as in the days of Bilam – Hashem does not wield His anger; rather, these are days of Divine favor and mercy.” Thus we see that not only was Bilam’s curse turned around to become blessing, but even the nature of the day was reversed from one of Divine anger to one of Divine mercy. On the very day that Bilam sought to utilize the day’s character to bring down Yisrael, he ended up, instead, broadcasting the tremendous Divine favor that exists for Yisrael at this time. Rather than focusing on and prosecuting their misdeeds, Hashem instead would look away: וְתִרְוַעַת מְלָךְ: לֹא-הָיִט אֲנִי בְּיַעֲקֹב... וְתִרְוַעַת מְלָךְ: בּוּ.

Of course, every Jew must still do his part in order to arouse this Divine favor and love. But if we truly put forth the effort to come closer to Hashem and fulfill the day’s mandate – proclaiming and accepting His Kingship, dedicating ourselves to His service, engaging in earnest repentance – then we may merit the great bounty of the day: the “*kesseh l’yom chageinu* – concealment (of misdeeds) on the day of our festival.”

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