

”את הברכה אשר תשמעו”

It Is Vital that the Berachos of Olam HaZeh Not Prevent Us from Hearing the Voice of Hashem from Matan Torah that Reverberates throughout the World to This Very Day

This coming Shabbas Kodesh is Rosh Chodesh Elul. Parshas Re'eh is always read on the Shabbas on which we bless the upcoming month of Elul or on Rosh Chodesh Elul itself. Thus, it is only fitting that we examine the association and the allusions in this week's parsha to the month of Elul. We will begin by examining the first three pesukim in the parsha (Devarim 11, 26): **”ראה אנכי גותן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה. את הברכה אשר תשמעו אל מצוות ה' אלקיכם אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום. והקללה אם לא תשמעו אל מצוות ה' אלקיכם וסרתם מן הדרך אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם—See, I place before you today a berachah and a kelalah. The berachah—that you listen to the mitzvos of Hashem, your G-d, that I am commanding you today. And the kelalah—if you do not listen to the mitzvos of Hashem, your G-d, and you veer from the course that I command you today, to follow other gods, that you did not know.**

The Month of Elul Has the Power to Confer Berachah on Rosh HaShanah

In Tzvi LaTzaddik (Chodesh Elul 1, 1), the great Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Blozhev, zy”a, writes that HKB”H alludes to the month of Elul in these pesukim. HKB”H mercifully and magnanimously gave us the month of Elul prior to the Day of Judgment—Rosh HaShanah—affording us a last minute opportunity to perform teshuvah and make amends for all of the past year's transgressions. In the merit of this teshuvah, we will deserve the berachah of “kesivah vachasimah tovah” on Rosh HaShanah and we will be inscribed for a good and blessed year.

Now, the word “היום”—“the day”—is an allusion to Rosh HaShanah, as the Zohar hakadosh (Bo 32b) teaches us with regards to the passuk (Iyov 1, 6): **”ויהי היום, דא ראש השנה”**. So, let us apply this allusion to our pesukim: **”ראה אנכי גותן לפניכם—behold that I am providing you with an opportunity before “the day” of Rosh HaShanah to determine whether it will confer berachah or the opposite, chas v'shalom; “את הברכה אשר תשמעו אל מצוות ה' אלקיכם”—the berachah is the teshuvah that you can perform during the month of Elul to make amends for all of Hashem's mitzvos that you failed to perform properly; “והקללה אם לא תשמעו אל מצוות ה' אלקיכם”—and the kelalah, G-d help us!**

In this manner, he proceeds to explain the use of the term **“to listen”** in these pesukim: **”את הברכה אשר תשמעו.”** He interprets this as an allusion to the minhag of blowing shofar during the month of Elul, as a means of arousing Yisrael to perform teshuvah. The Tur describes this minhag as follows (O.C. 581): **”התקינו חכמינו ז”ל שיהו תוקעין בראש חודש אלול בכל שנה ושנה וכל החודש, כדי להזהיר ישראל שיעשו תשובה, שנאמר (עמוס ג-ו) אם יתקע שופר בעיר—our sages of blessed memory instituted that they blow (shofar) on Rosh Chodesh Elul and throughout the month, every single year, in order to warn Yisrael to perform teshuvah, as it states: “Is the shofar ever sounded in a city and the people do not tremble?”**

This then is the message conveyed by the passuk: **”את הברכה—אשר תשמעו אל מצוות ה' אלקיכם אשר אנכי מצוה היום.”** If you perform this mitzvah that HKB”H commanded you to perform on Rosh HaShanah—namely the sounding of the shofar—prior to

Rosh HaShanah, during the month of Elul, to arouse teshuvah and clean the slate by the end of the year, then you will be deserving of a good and blessed year on Rosh HaShanah.

Then, in his own inimitable way, he adds an amazing allusion. The numerical value—the gematria—of the entire passuk as it appears in the Torah: “רא”ה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום” —is exactly equal to the gematria of the passuk (Tehillim 81, 6): “תקעו בחדר ש שופר” —**blow the shofar at the New Moon**. This indicates that in the merit of hearing the shofar during the month of Elul, we will succeed in bestowing berachah upon the heads of Yisrael and kelalah upon the heads of our enemies. This summarizes his incredible insight.

In fact, we can find another allusion in the passuk: “ראה” אנכי נתן לפניכם היום” based on what the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (107) writes in relation to Balak’s remark to Bilam (Bamidbar 22, 6): “ועתה לכה נא ארה לי את העם הזה” -- **so now, please come and impose a curse upon this people for me**. With these words, he indicated his wish to annul the power of teshuvah of Elul and Rosh HaShanah. For, the word “ראה” can be interpreted as an abbreviation for “אלול ראש השנה”—**Elul, Rosh HaShanah**. Accordingly, we can suggest that this is also why this week’s parsha opens with the word “ראה”, which is also an abbreviation for “אלול ראש השנה”. For, this alludes to the fact that the month of Elul is a preparation for Rosh HaShanah.

“Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will obey!”

As it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, we will suggest a practical association between these pesukim and the month of Elul that is relevant to each and every one of us. Let us refer to the wonderful teachings of the Yismach Moshe (Terumah). He explains Yisrael’s lofty intent at the time of Matan Torah when they declared “na’aseh” prior to “nishma.” The passuk states (Shemos 24, 7): “ויאמרו” —**and they said, “Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will obey!”** Why was this so admirable?

He explains that it is a Jew’s goal to be connected with Hashem and His Torah even when he is engaged in matters pertaining to Olam HaZeh. Yet, the Gemara (Megillah 21b) teaches us that regarding the obligatory Torah-reading,

it is prohibited for two people to read simultaneously. Rashi explains: “דברי קלא לא משתמעו” --**two voices are not discernible**. So, when a person is burdened and occupied with earthly concerns, how can he be attentive to the voice of Hashem? After all, we have this principle that two voices cannot be discerned simultaneously.

Notwithstanding, he provides a solution based on the Gemara (ibid.): “ובהלל ובמגילה אפילו עשרה קורין, מאי טעמא, כיון דחביבה יהיב דעתיהו ושמעי.” In other words, with regards to Hallel and the reading of the Megillah, even if ten people read simultaneously, the listeners fulfill their obligation. Seeing as those mitzvos are so dear to us, the listeners concentrate to hear and discern even several separate voices.

Therefore, if a person cherishes the Torah enough, he can discern the voice of Hashem even when he is occupied with earthly matters. This then was the deeper significance of Yisrael’s declaration at that historic event: “כל אשר דיבר ה’ נעשה ונשמע.” The declaration “na’aseh” related to their occupation with earthly matters; while the declaration “v’nishma” conveyed their intent to hear and heed the voice of Hashem even when occupied with earthly matters, due to their love for the Torah.

The Everlasting Voice

Let us elaborate further upon this notion. Regarding the revelation at Har Sinai, the Torah states (Shemos 19, 1): “בחדש השלישי לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני” —**in the third month from the exodus of Bnei Yisrael from the land of Mitzrayim, on this day, they arrived at Midbar Sinai**. Rashi comments: **The Torah only needed to say “on that day.” So, what is the significance of “on this day”? That the words of Torah should be new to you as if it was given today**. This teaches us that it is our obligation to feel the novelty of the Torah on a daily basis, as if we had just received it.

We find this same idea expressed in the first passage of Krias Shema (Devarim 6, 6): “והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך” —**and these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart**. Here Rashi comments: **They should not be in your eyes like an old edict to which a person does not attach importance, but rather like a new one, towards which everyone runs**. This is a fantastic

concept, but how is it possible to experience the novelty of the Torah on a daily basis?

It appears that we can suggest an answer based on that which is written in Parshas Vaeschanan (Devarim 5, 19): **“את הדברים האלה דיבר ה' אל כל קהלכם בהר מתוך האש הענן והערפל קול תרי קול לא משתמעי”**—these words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain, from the midst of the fire, the cloud and the fog—a powerful voice that was never-ending. Rashi interprets the end of this passuk as the Targum does: **“קול רב ולא נסק”**—a powerful voice that does not stop. We learn from here that Hashem’s voice that Yisrael heard at the time of Matan Torah is eternal and does not cease even for a single moment.

With this in mind, we can appreciate the Turei Zahav’s (O.C. 47, 5) explanation regarding the formula we recite for the berachah over the Torah-- **“נותן התורה”** in the present tense instead of the past tense **“נתן התורה”**: **The Blessed One gives us His Torah constantly, every day. That is, we occupy ourselves with it, and the Blessed One provides us with new explanations.**

Let us explain this concept based on our current discussion. That **“powerful voice that never ceases”** continues to reverberate throughout the space of the universe. Anyone who toils in the study of Torah is privileged to perceive the voice of Matan Torah just as on the day it was given. This is why they instituted the formula: **“נותן התורה”**—in the present tense; because we receive the Torah anew on a daily basis. Now, this explains very nicely how it is possible to sense the novelty of the Torah every day, as if it was given today. After all, the Torah is indeed given on a daily basis from that powerful, everlasting voice.

Now, let us introduce the incredible words of the divine kabbalist, the Mahari of Komarna, zy”a, in Heichal HaBerachah (Vaeschanan):

“העידו על מרן הקדוש רבינו חיות נפשינו אור זורה האר”י הבעש”ט, כשהיה לומד תורה עם התלמידים הקדושים היה אש מלהטת סביבותיהם ומתקבצין מלאכי השרת, והיו שומעין הקולות והברקים ואמירת אנכי ה' אלקיך מפי השי”ת, וזה ידוע ומפורסם הרכה”.

Based on reliable testimony, he reports that when the Ba’al Shem Tov would study Torah with his holy students, flames

of fire would surround them and heavenly malachim would gather around. They would hear the thunder and lightening and the words **“אנכי ה' אלקיך”** uttered by the Almighty.

That being the case, the insight of the Yismach Moshe is all the more significant. As he taught us, when a person is immersed in earthly activities and overwhelmed by the sounds of Olam HaZeh, it is difficult for him to hear the never-ceasing, awe-inspiring voice of Hashem from Matan Torah. For, we have a well-known principle: **“תרי קול לא משתמעי”**.

Yet, if the Torah is dear to him and all of his earthly endeavors are merely means to better serve Hashem, then he remains attuned to Hashem’s voice. This was the message delivered by Yisrael with the declaration: **“כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה”**—and we heard. Even while we are engaged in the performance of earthly, material tasks, we will nevertheless continue to hear and heed the eternal voice of Hashem from Matan Torah, because the Torah is dear to us.

“הקול קול יעקב” —Two Simultaneous Voices

I would like to introduce to our esteemed audience an explanation based on this concept that we presented in Parshas Toldos. When Yaakov Avinu, following Rivka’s instructions, entered to receive the berachos from Yitzchak, it is written (Bereishis 27, 22): **“ויגש יעקב אל יצחק אביו וימשהו, ויאמר הקול קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו”**—so Yaakov approached his father Yitzchak, and he felt him and said, **“The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.”** Note the redundancy in both clauses of Yitzchak’s remark; the word **“קול”**—**“voice”**—is mentioned twice and the word **“hands”** is mentioned twice.

First, however, let us address an issue that bothers the commentaries. What possessed Yitzchak to consider bestowing the berachos upon Eisav rather than upon Yaakov, who is described by the Torah as (ibid. 25, 27): **“איש תם יושב”**—**a wholesome man, dwelling in tents?** Rashi explains that this refers to the fact that Yaakov studied Torah in the tents of Shem and Eiver. Thus, we can suggest that Yitzchak feared that if Yaakov and his offspring occupied themselves with earthly matters, they would become so engrossed in them that they would fail to hear the ever-present voice of Hashem. Rivka Imeinu, however, was well aware of her son’s extreme

kedushah; she knew that he was capable of hearing Hashem's voice even while occupied with earthly matters. Therefore, she instructed Yaakov to don Eisav's garments and receive the berachos pertaining to Olam HaZeh from Yitzchak.

Hence, when Yitzchak touches Yaakov, the pillar of Torah, he is inspired by his "ruach hakodesh" to remark: "הקול" "קול יעקב"—you are capable of discerning and heeding two overlapping voices. Since the Torah is so dear to you, you are able to discern the voice of Hashem even when you are occupied with matters of Olam HaZeh. Moreover, in this merit: "והידיים ידי עשו"—you may receive Eisav's berachos and engage in matters of Olam HaZeh, using your hands for two types of functions—implied by the repetition of the word "**hands.**" Firstly, you will use your hands for the actual performance of Hashem's mitzvos. Secondly, you will use your hands to perform earthly tasks in order to support yourself. All the while, you will be cognizant of Hashem's voice reverberating throughout the universe.

This notion provides us with a very nice interpretation of the following passuk (Shir HaShirim 2, 14): "השמיעני את" "קולך כי קולך ערב"—**let Me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.** The gematria of the word "ערב", meaning sweet or pleasing, equals twice that of the word "קול", meaning voice. Thus, HKB"H is telling a Jew that He loves hearing his voice, while he is occupied with mundane, earthly matters. Then He explains: "כי קולך ערב"—since the Torah is so dear to you, you are able to hear the voice of the Torah even while your voice is making the sounds of Olam HaZeh. As a result, you hear two voices, two times "קול", which is "ערב"—pleasing to Me.

Let us apply what we have discussed to the incident depicted in the following Gemara (Sanhedrin 98a). Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi met Mashiach and inquired of him: "אימתי" "היום"—when are you coming? Mashiach replied: "היום"—**today.** When he failed to arrive, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi complained to Eliyahu HaNavi, z"l. Eliyahu explained that Mashiach meant that he would come if the following was fulfilled (Tehillim 95, 7): "היום אם בקולו תשמעו"—**even today if you heed His voice.** We can suggest that Mashiach was saying that he would come only if the following condition was met: "היום אם בקולו תשמעו"—that even when you are engaged in mundane, earthly matters, you continue to hear and heed the voice of Hashem resonating: "אנכי ה' אלקיך".

The Best Way to Fulfill Mitzvos without Interference Is to Learn the Mitzvah as It Is Written in the Torah

Following this exalted path, let us proceed to explain the purpose of HKB"H sounding the voice of Matan Torah without cease: "קול גדול ולא יסף". Let us refer to a lesson from the Arugot HaBosem (Mishpatim) that he heard from the holy mouth of the esteemed Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz, zy"a, citing the holy Ba'al Shem Tov, zy"a. Say a person wishes to fulfill a particular mitzvah, but the yetzer hara is preventing him from doing so. Or else he is confronted by a prohibition—a mitzvas lo sa'aseh—and is being swayed by the yetzer hara. It is advisable to repeat the mitzvas aseh or lo sa'aseh exactly as it is written in the Torah. This practice represents an amazing segulah for being able to perform a mitzvah without interference.

Simply understood, this segulah suggested by the Ba'al Shem Tov is based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): "כך הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל, בני בראתי יצר הרע" "ובראתי לו תורה תכלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו"—**Thus has HKB"H said to Yisrael, "My son, I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand."** As explained, the Torah is a segulah for overcoming the yetzer hara. Therefore, if a person preemptively recites the mitzvah as it appears in the Torah, he will be able to perform the mitzvah or avoid the prohibition without the meddling of the yetzer hara.

In truth, we can provide an alternative explanation for the Ba'al Shem Tov's suggestion based on an important principle taught by the divine kabbalist, the Rama of Pano, zy"a, in Asarah Ma'amarot. He teaches us that all of the mitzvos of the Torah—whether they are mitzvos aseh or mitzvos lo sa'aseh—are comprised of two essential elements. On the one hand, they constitute a command obligating us to perform Hashem's mitzvah. On the other hand, they constitute a promise and guarantee that we will be able to observe the mitzvah without any hindrance.

For example, we have the mitzvas aseh (Shemos 12, 18): "בערב תאכלו מצות"—**in the evening, you shall eat matzot.** On the one hand, this is a command requiring us to eat matzot. On the other hand, it is also an assurance that if you wish to

observe this mitzvah, you will be able to do so without any hindrance. This also applies to every mitzvas lo sa'aseh, such as (Devarim 14, 21): “לא תאכלו כל נבילה”—**you shall not eat any carcass**. On the one hand, this is an admonition not to eat unslaughtered meat. On the other hand, it is an assurance that if one chooses to observe Hashem’s commands, he is assured that he will not consume unslaughtered meat.

Thus, we have achieved a novel understanding of HKB”H’s statement to Yisrael: “כני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין”. The Torah, which was presented as a command and a promise, is the antidote created by HKB”H to counteract the yetzer. This is also the inherent meaning of the Ba’al Shem Tov’s teaching—that reciting the mitzvah as it appears in the Torah is a segulah, enabling a person to fulfill the mitzvah without any interference. For, by reciting the mitzvah, he successfully activates HKB”H’s promise, inherent in the mitzvah, that he will be able to fulfill the mitzvah.

It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that we can now reflect on the wonders of Hashem. He chose to have the powerful voice of Matan Torah continue to reverberate throughout the world without cease. Now, we have learned that the “dibrot” represent aids given to us by HKB”H. They are not only commands that we must observe, but they also include His promise that we will be able to fulfill the mitzvos. Therefore, when we hear these voices every day, we are being assisted from above to fulfill all the mitzvos of the Torah.

To Hear the Sound of the Shofar of Matan Torah

Now, we can begin to comprehend why HKB”H commanded us to hear the sound of a shofar on Rosh HaShanah, as it is written (Bamidbar 29, 1): “יום תרועה יהיה לכם”—**it shall be a day of shofar-sounding for you**. As the third of his ten reasons for the mitzvah of blowing shofar, Rabeinu Sa’adya Gaon writes that it is intended to remind us of the revelation at Har Sinai, because the giving of the Torah was accompanied by the sound of the shofar, as it is written (Shemos 19, 16): “וקול שופר חזק מאד”—**and the sound of the shofar was very powerful**. Thus, the purpose of the mitzvah of hearing the sound of the shofar is to evoke the sound of the shofar that we heard at Har Sinai, when we received the Torah, and our ancestors declared “na’aseh v’nishma.”

Let us elaborate based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Beitzah 16a): “כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד יום הכיפורים”—**all of a person’s meals (income) are allotted to him from Rosh HaShanah until Yom HaKippurim**. Accordingly, if a person became submerged in mundane, earthly matters during the past year, to the point that he could no longer hear Hashem’s voice—in keeping with the concept of “תרי קלא לא משתמע”—how does he dare approach HKB”H on Rosh HaShanah to request an ample livelihood for the upcoming year? Therefore, HKB”H provided us with a wonderful solution—to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah. Doing so will inspire us to perform teshuvah, regretting the fact that we have neglected the sound of the shofar of Matan Torah in the past. Furthermore, we will accept upon ourselves from this time forward to hear the sound of the shofar of Matan Torah even when we are occupied with the endeavors of Olam HaZeh.

This explains very nicely why our blessed sages instituted the formula: “לשמוע קול שופר”—**to hear the sound of the shofar**—for the berachah related to the mitzvah of blowing shofar. They wanted to teach us that the purpose of the mitzvah is to hear the sound of the shofar of Matan Torah that grows stronger and stronger (Shemos 19, 19): “ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאד”. This should help us realize that the institution to blow shofar during the month of Elul, prior to Rosh HaShanah, is also meant for the same purpose. It is to arouse us to perform teshuvah to make amends for the fact that we neglected to notice and heed the sound of the shofar of Matan Torah throughout the past year.

Now, it appears that this is the meaning of the passuk: “ראה אנכי נותן לפניכם היום ברכה וקלה”—All matters related to Olam HaZeh that HKB”H gives us “היום” contain both berachah and occasionally, chas v’shalom, kelalah. Then the Torah explains: “את הברכה אשר תשמעו אל מצוות ה’ אלקיכם”—earthly matters can only contain berachah on the condition that you are able to hear the voice of Hashem from Matan Torah: “אשר אנכי מצוה”—**that is ever-present, as if it was given today**. And seeing as the mitzvos of the Torah were stated in the form of a promise, hearing the voice of Matan Torah ensures that you will be able to observe the mitzvos without any interference. As a result, HKB”H will bestow upon you all forms of berachah and salvation.

On the other hand: “והקללה”-- matters related to Olam HaZeh can be a kelalah, chas v’shalom; **“אם לא תשמעו אל מצוות ה' אלקיכם אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום”**—if you fail to hear and be aware of the awe-inspiring voice of Hashem from Matan Torah that is ever-present. For, as a result of that failure, you will sink, chas v’shalom, into the meaningless mire of Olam HaZeh until you eventually fail to appreciate and cherish the Torah. Consequently, you will not be assisted from above in your efforts to observe the mitzvos of the Torah.

Thus, we have demonstrated the amazing, intimate relationship between the opening pesukim of our parsha and the month of Elul. Chazal instituted the practice of blowing shofar throughout Elul in order to inspire us to perform

teshuvah for having submerged ourselves in matters of Olam HaZeh. As a result, we failed to notice and hear the awe-inspiring voice of HKB”H emanating from Matan Torah. Hence, it is incumbent upon us to sanctify ourselves in all of our earthly pursuits and endeavors by doing everything “l’shem shamayim,” in keeping with the notion of: **“בכל דרכיך דעהו”-- in all your ways, know Him.** If we act in this manner, we will surely hear the sound of the shofar of Matan Torah, and we will merit the fulfillment of HKB”H’s promise: **“ראה אנכי נותן לפניכם היום ברכה.”** We will successfully prepare as necessary for Rosh HaShanah--**“היום”**—to receive all of the heavenly blessings and salvations until the coming of the “go’el tzedek”—the righteous redeemer—swiftly, in our times. Amen!



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