

ROSH HASHANA (Continued from Page 1)  
with Yom Kippur.

In the Pentateuch, the holiday known to us as Rosh Hashana is spoken of only as "the first day of the seventh month". That holiday is mentioned twice, while the Pilgrimage Festivals (Pesah, Shavout and Sukkot) are described in four separate passages. Even more remarkable is the fact that the three Pilgrimage Festivals are associated with events in early Jewish history, but there is no commemoration for Rosh Hashana. In Leviticus, chapter 23, verse 24, we read: "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts" (Zikron Trua). In Numbers, chapter 29, verse 1, we read: "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion... as a day when the horn is sounded" (Yom Trua). In neither citation is the name of the holiday mentioned as Rosh Hashana, nor is any reason given for its observance. The name of the instrument to be sounded is not identified as a Shofar (a ram's horn). The term "Trua" used in both passages means a loud blast such as came from the two silver bugles which Moses fashioned in the wilderness, at God's command. (Numbers X:1-10). These were used to give the signals for assembly and for marching.

However, the importance of a holiday is not determined by its origin, but by its subsequent development. Somewhere along the line, the Jewish people found it desirable to invest the first day of the seventh month with vital meaning and observance. They determined to regard it as the beginning of a new year. They associated it with the creation of the world, possibly at the time when Jewish chronology was changed and the years were counted from the Biblical record of the story of creation. The years were then dated from the first day of the seventh month which became Rosh Hashana.

The sounding of the horn which the Tora prescribes as the ritual for that day was associated with the sounding of the ram's horn (Shofar) when the Children of Israel received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. (Exodus XX:18). The Shofar blasts were a call to duty which the revelation at Sinai imposed. In addition, the Shofar sounds suggest a warning and danger -- "Blow the Shofar and

warn the people". (Ezekiel XXXIII:3). The next step was to regard the New Year day as a day of judgment on which God decrees the fate of individuals and of nations for the coming year. As we appear before the Heavenly tribunal, we realize our frailty and unworthiness, and so we invoke the merits of our ancestors, the Patriarchs, to come to our aid. The sounding of the Shofar recalls the dedication of Abraham at Mount Moriah when he was ready to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to carry out what appeared to him as the Divine behest. A ram was substituted as a sacrifice-- and the Shofar is a ram's horn. Thus, Rosh Hashana became a "Yom Hadin", a Day of Judgment. Poets and liturgical composers embellished this concept. The selection "U-ne-ta-neh To-kef," recited and chanted in the Musaf service of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, portrays a vivid picture of the Heavenly court over which God presides. It is modeled after a terrestrial court of justice with its prosecutor (Satan) and its angelic defenders. The merits and demerits of each individual are weighed in the balance to determine which outweighs the other. On the basis of this, man's fate for the coming year is determined. The vividness of the procedure appealed to the people and they accepted it as literal truth in every detail.

For centuries Rosh Hashana was regarded as the High Holiday.

As we approach the modern period, we find that many of

our people no longer accept literally the explanation given to Rosh Hashana as a Day of Judgment. They feel that the picture of God sitting as a trial judge is too anthropomorphic and has no basis in reality. The concept of Rosh Hashana was frequently interpreted to imply that man is required to sit in judgment on himself and to subject himself to self-examination, rather than appearing before a Heavenly tribunal to receive its decree. This interpretation, however, fails to suggest the sense of imminence and genuine peril which the High Holiday implied before. The symbolism of the Shofar and its clarion call gradually faded away. It no longer warned or terrified many of our people. Does this mean that Rosh Hashana has lost its significance as a High Holiday? Not at all! We must seek a reinterpretation which will restore its meaningfulness. It is a vital part of the pattern of Jewish living and must be retained as such. Otherwise, we shall lose our identity with the Jews of past generations. The institution must be retained, but it must be invested with meaning that is relevant to our need and to our time.

Rosh Hashana as a High Holiday must speak to us in terms of the spiritual needs of our times. If it has ceased to terrify us as a Day of Judgment with the possibility of being subjected to severe decrees, it now calls us to positive action that will perpetuate a meaningful Jewish life. May it be a happy and productive year for all of us.

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