



The Rosh Hashana Musaf Rabbanit Gloria Nusbacher

Class of 2020

The musaf of Rosh Hashana, together with the sounding of the shofar, forms the heart of the Rosh Hashana prayer service. And the heart of the musaf is the three central brachot of the amidah – *malchuyot* (kingship), *zichronot* (remembrances), and *shofarot* (shofar) – which, together, reflect the themes of the day.

The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 32a) derives the source of these brachot from biblical verses. The brachot of *zichronot* and *shofarot* are derived from Vayikra 23:24 (in parshat Emor):

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ, יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן;
זְכֵרוֹן תְּרוּעָה, מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ.

In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, there shall be for you a day of rest (*shabbaton*), a remembrance (*zichron*) by means of loud blasts (*teru'ah*), a holy convocation (*mikra kodesh*).

The source of the bracha of *malchuyot* is the subject of debate. One Sage derives it from a reading of parshat Emor: Immediately before the verses dealing with Rosh Hashana, the Torah describes the holiday of Shavuot, concluding with the statement that “I am the Lord your God” (Vayikra 23:22). This statement is seen as an allusion to God as Master, which forms the basis for connecting God’s kingship to the subsequent verses about Rosh Hashana. The second Sage finds this juxtaposition within parshat Emor to be a stretch. Instead, he looks to Bamidbar 10:10:

וּבְיוֹם שְׂמֵחַתְּכֶם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם, וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֳדָשֵׁיכֶם--
וַיִּתְקַעְתֶּם בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת עַל עֲלֵיתֵיכֶם וְעַל זְבָחֵי שְׁלֵמֵיכֶם;
וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן לְפָנַי אֶ-לֵהֵיכֶם, אֲנִי ה' אֶ-לֵהֵיכֶם.

On the day of your rejoicing, at your appointed times, and on your New Moons, you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your peace offerings; they shall be for you a remembrance (*zikaron*) before your God; I am the Lord, your God.

This verse deals with sounding the trumpets (*chatzotzrot*) rather than specifically with a shofar, but it is in the context of rejoicing on the festivals, and also picks up on the idea of remembrance. Thus the second Sage reads this verse as expansive enough to apply to Rosh Hashana. The Sage uses the apparently redundant language “I am the Lord your God” at the end of the verse to derive the principle that in every place that verses of remembrance are stated, verses of kingship should also be stated – thus, since we recite the bracha of *zichronot*, we should also recite the bracha of *malchuyot*.

The order of the three central brachot is explained in the midrash (Sifrei, Bamidbar 77):

מה ראו חכמים לומר מלכיות תחילה ואחר כך זכרונות ושופרות? אלא
המליכהו עליך תחילה ואחר כך בקש מלפניו רחמים כדי שתזכר לו. ובמה?
בשופר.

And why did the Sages see fit to say *malchuyot* first, and then *zichronot* and *shofarot*?
First make Him king over you, and then beseech Him for mercy so that you will be
remembered by Him. And with what? The shofar.

These basic themes are developed and expressed in the three central brachot of the musaf Amidah. These brachot share a common structure – an introduction, a set of ten *psukim* (scriptural verses) and a concluding bracha. In each of these brachot, the ten psukim also share a common structure – the first three are from the Torah, the next three are from the *ketuvim* (holy writings), specifically Psalms, followed by three from the *nevi'im* (prophets), with a concluding pasuk from the Torah.

The first of these three central brachot is that of *malchuyot*, God's kingship. The introduction to the bracha is the prayer Alenu, which was originally recited only on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and was later incorporated into our daily prayers. The prayer begins by acknowledging our belief in God as Master of all and Creator of the world, and concludes with the hope and prayer that in the future all people will recognize God as King.

The last line of the Alenu prayer as presented in the machzor serves as the first of the three psukim from the Torah. It is the statement from the end of the Song of the Sea, that "The Lord will reign for ever and ever" (Shmot 15:18), which was the first proclamation of God's kingship by the Israelite nation. The second pasuk (Bamidbar 23:21) comes from one of the blessings delivered by Bilaam in which he refers to God as King of the Jewish people. The third pasuk (Devarim 33:5) comes from V'Zot Habracha, in which Moshe says that "He [God] became King in Yeshurun [Israel] when the heads of the people were assembled, the tribes of Israel together" – presumably a reference to the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. All three of these verses relate to God as King of the Jewish people.

By contrast, the psukim chosen from the Psalms all speak of God as King from a universalist point of view:

"Kingship is the Lord's, and He rules the nations" (Psalms 22:29),

"The Lord is King; He is robed in grandeur;
The Lord is robed; He is girded with strength;
The world stands firm; it cannot be shaken."
(Psalms 93:1)

"O gates, lift up your heads! Lift them up, you everlasting doors,
So the King of glory may come in!
Who is the King of glory?
The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory!"
(Psalms 24:9)



Of the verses quoted from the Prophets, the first two (Isaiah 44:6 and Ovadiah 1:21) refer to God as King of Israel, while the third verse (Zecharia 14:9), which is the verse with which we conclude the daily Alenu prayer, expressly refers to a future time in which God will be King over all the earth. The tenth and final verse is the pasuk of Shema Yisrael (Devarim 6:4), which is the fundamental statement of our acceptance of God's kingship. The conclusion of the bracha of *malchuyot* longs for a time when God rules over the world and all living things acknowledge God as King.

The second bracha, *zichronot*, deals with God's remembrances. The introduction begins with the statement that God remembers all past deeds and nothing is hidden from God. This transitions to a description of Rosh Hashana as the Day of Judgment, the day on which the fate of all people and all nations is determined.

The three psukim from the Torah quoted as part of this bracha all deal with God remembering and saving people who are in trouble. After the flood, God remembers Noah and the animals in the ark, and causes a wind to blow so that the waters subside (Bereishit 8:1). God hears the Israelite slaves in Egypt crying out and remembers God's covenant with the Avot (Shemot 2:24). And in the *tochacha*, the verses of rebuke at the end of Vayikra, God recounts that the Israelites will sin, will be punished, will atone, and then God will remember God's covenant with the Avot (Vayikra 26:42).

Each of the three verses from Psalms pairs a reference to remembrance (either to God's wonders or to the covenant) with a reference to God's compassion, providing sustenance, or kindness (Psalms 111:4, 111:5, 106:45). Each of the quoted verses from the Prophets recalls God's remembering the early days of the Israelite nation and their great love for God at that formative time (Jeremiah 2:2, Ezekiel 16:60, Jeremiah 31:19).

The final pasuk from the Torah is woven into the conclusion of the bracha, which calls upon God to remember us favorably on account of the covenant (*brit*), the loving-kindness (*chesed*), and the oath (*shevuah*) that God swore to Avraham at the time of *Akeidat Yitzhak* (the binding of Isaac). Just as Avraham suppressed his mercy – his intense feeling at that moment – in order to do God's will, we call on God to suppress God's anger at us – God's intense feeling in the moment of judgment – and to fulfill the promise, made at the end of the *tochacha*:

“I shall remember for them the covenant of their ancestors, that I took them out of the land of Egypt” (Vayikra 26:45).

Rabbi Steinsaltz points out that the nature of a covenant is that it remains intact even if one of the parties fails to fulfill its obligations. Thus the main point of the bracha of *zichronot* is to call on God to remember the merit of our ancestors and our special national relationship with God, even as God remembers and judges us for our personal shortcomings.

The third bracha, *shofarot*, deals with the shofar. While our tradition provides many reasons for sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashana, the introduction to this bracha focuses on the revelation at Sinai. And all three of the psukim from the Torah speak of the voice of the shofar (*kol shofar*) at the time of the revelation (Shemot 19:16, 19:19, and 20:15).



The verses from Psalms quoted in this bracha have two anomalies – there are four sources quoted, rather than three, and the last of these quotes all six verses of the applicable Psalm rather than solely the verse about the shofar. The first two of these sources (Psalms 47:6 and 98:6) refer to the shofar in the context of acknowledging God’s kingship. The third source (Psalm 81:4-5) refers to sounding of the shofar on the new moon and days of rejoicing. The fourth source is the entirety of Psalm 150, which contains ten commands to praise God, including with the sound of the shofar and with various other instruments, and which ends with a call that

כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה, תְּהִלֵּל יְיָ

– all living things should praise God, or perhaps each person should praise God with each and every breath. The three verses from the Prophets (Isaiah 18:3, Isaiah 27:13, and Zecharia 9:14-15) all relate to a future redemption when God will appear accompanied by the sound of the shofar.

The final verse from the Torah, which is woven into the conclusion, is Bamidbar 10:10 (quoted above as a possible source for the bracha of *malchuyot*). As noted above, this verse deals with the sounding of trumpets (*chatzotzrot*) rather than specifically with a shofar, in the context of rejoicing on the festivals, and also provides that “they” – the trumpet blasts? the festivals? – shall be a remembrance for us before God. It is thus a fitting conclusion to the three central brachot of the Amida of Rosh Hashana, combining as it does the themes of God’s kingship, God’s remembrance of us (hopefully, for mercy at this time of judgment), and the shofar – a symbol of God’s initial revelation and of the ultimate revelation to come – as the vehicle for triggering God’s mercy.

Rabbanit Gloria Nusbacher came to Maharat after a career in corporate law, including almost 20 years as a partner at one of the 100 largest U.S. law firms. She interned at Congregation Ohev Sholom - The National Synagogue in Washington, DC, the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, and New York Presbyterian - Allen Hospital, and co-founded and ran her community’s women’s tefilla group. Rabbanit Gloria earned an AB from Barnard College and a JD from Columbia Law School, and has studied at Drisha. She lives in Riverdale and West Hempstead, NY with her husband, Burt, and is a proud mother and grandmother.

