

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XXXI: Emor (Lev. 21:1–24:23)

Essay 4. At the covered Moon: Why judgment favors renewal

מדרש רבה על פסוק "ובחדש השביעי באחד לחדש", ר' ברכיה פתח "תקעו בחדש שופר בפסח" וכו' וכי כל החדשים אינם הודש וכו' אלא איזהו החדש שנכסה ויש לו חג וסגו ביומו. אי אתה מוצא אלא בחדש תשרי, בחדש זה תחדשו מעשיכם בשופר בחדש זה תשופר מעשיכם וכו'.

There is a **Midrash Rabbah** (Vayikra 29:6) on the verse “**And in the seventh month, on the first of the month**, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations; it should be a day of shofar-sounding for you.”¹

Rabbi Berekhya began: “Sound the shofar on *the* month, on the new moon for our festival.”² Aren’t all the months “a month”? [I.e., how do we know which month is being discussed when it says “the month”?] “On the full moon [כסה]”—aren’t all the months covered [נקסין] [on Rosh Chodesh]?³ Rather, “of our festive day.” But is Nissan also not a month that is covered [i.e., it has a Rosh Chodesh] and has its own festival? **Rather, which is the month that is covered [i.e., it has a Rosh Chodesh], has a festival, and its festival is on that day [on Rosh Chodesh]? You find it only [with Rosh Hashanah] in the month of Tishrei. In this month, renew your actions with a shofar [שופר]. You should improve [תשפרו] your actions.**

- Lev. Rabbah 29:6

וכתב היפה תואר בשם המדרש הובא בכלבו, שהשטן מקטרג על ישראל שהם חוטאים, והקב"ה אומר לו הבא עדים, והולך ומביא הסמה, אומר לו הבא האחר, הולך להביא הלבנה ואינו מוצא שהיא מתפסה בו, ולזה אומר פאן בפסה לומר שמאת ה' היה לקבוע יום הדין ביום הפסה כדי שלא ימצא אותה השטן להביאה עכ"ל.

The Yefeh To'ar wrote in the name of the Midrash brought in the *Kol Bo*,⁴ that:

The Satan prosecutes Israel that they sin, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to him: bring witnesses. He goes and brings the sun [who remains

* English translation: Copyright © 2026 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays are available at <https://zstorah.com>

¹ Num. 29:1.

² Ps. 81:4.

³ Used as a noun, the word כסה means “New Moon,” while used as a verb, it means “to conceal.” At the beginning of each lunar month, the Moon passes directly between the Earth and Sun, placing the side illuminated by the Sun facing away from Earth. The unlit, dark side of the Moon faces Earth, and thus it is “concealed” in the solar glare.

⁴ *Kol Bo* is a 14th Century halachic work, often quoting Midrashim. Some identify Aharon ben Jacob ha-Kohen as the author.

silent]. The Holy One, Blessed be He, says to him: no one testifies. **He says to [Satan]: bring the other [witness]. [Satan] goes to bring the moon and does not find it, for it is covered on that day. Therefore, it says here “at the covering,” to say that it was G-d who fixed the Day of Judgment on the day of covering [i.e., the new moon] so that the Satan should not find it to bring it.**

- *Yefet To'ar* on Lev. Rabbah 29:6

יש לדקדק מהו הטעם שגזרנו להיפטר ולשיפור המעשים מה שפנייה הכתוב "בכסה ליום חגנו" דמשמע שהשטן אין לו עדים להביא לפי שהלבנה נכסית, וכי בשביל זה יחוייב האדם לעשות טוב ולתקן הקלקול, אדרבא היה מקום לו לומר, חס ושלום, שלום יהיה לו אף אם בשרירות לבו ילך, ושפא לא יתאמץ בתשובתו לפי שאין לו שום פחד. ועוד קשה מהו "ליום חגנו", דהיה לו לומר "ביום חגנו".

One must analyze:

Question 1: What is the reason he gives for renewal and improvement of deeds from that which the verse concludes “on the new moon, for our festival,” which implies that the Satan has no witnesses to bring since the moon is covered.

Question 2: Would a person be obligated to do good and to repair his corruption because of this? On the contrary, there would be room, Heaven forbid, for him to say that even if he follows the stubbornness of his heart, it will be well for him, and perhaps he will not exert himself in repentance since he has no fear at all.

Question 3: Furthermore, it is difficult what is meant by “for our festival,” for it should have said “on our festival.”

ולתרוץ הפל יש לדקדק על מה שאמרו ז"ל על פסוק "ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלהיך שאל מעמך פי אם-ליראה" וכו'. אין לו להקב"ה בעולמו אלא אוצר של יראת שמים בלבד שנגמור "ועתה" וכו'. והלא הוא שואל שייראו אותו וישמרו כל מצותיו דכתיב "ללכת בכל-דרכיו" וכו' "לשמר את-מצות ה'" וכו'.

To resolve everything, one must analyze what [the rabbis] of blessed memory said on the verse: “And now, O Israel, what does the L-rd your G-d ask of you? Only this: to fear the L-rd your G-d, to walk all His ways, to love Him and to serve the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and soul, to keep the L-rd’s commandments and laws, which I command you today, for your good.”⁵ “The Holy One, Blessed be He, has nothing in his treasury other than a treasure of fear of Heaven, as it is stated: ‘And now, O Israel, what does the L-rd your G-d ask of you? Only this: to fear the L-rd your G-d.’⁶ In other words, G-d values fear of Heaven over all else.

But does He not ask that they fear Him and observe all His commandments, as it is written “to walk in all His ways,” etc., “to keep the L-rd’s commandments of Hashem,” etc.?

⁵ Deut. 10:12–13.

⁶ Shabbat 31b. See also Berachot 33b.

וגיש לומר שהדיוק הוא ממלת "מעמך", שהנה לו לומר "מך", אלא בדאי דמיירי על יראת שמים שהיא בידי אדם דנקא כדאמרינו הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים והכתוב אומר "מה ה' אלהיך שאל" אינו רוצה רק דבר שהיא "מעמך" דנקא שאין לו חלק בו.

It may be said that the inference is from the word *mei'imach* ["from you"] [מעמך], for it should have said *me'mech* ["from you"] [מך], a shorter form, to conserve letters, as we know that the Torah doesn't waste even a single letter. Rather it certainly refers to fear of Heaven, which is specifically in the hands of man, as we say: everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven,⁷ and the verse says "what does the L-rd your G-d ask," He desires only that which is "from you" specifically, in which He has no part.

ועדיין קשה על הפסוק למה אמר בלשון שלייה "מה ה' אלהיך שאל מעמך", ולא אמר בדנקא "ה' שאל מעמך היראה".

Still, difficult about the verse is why it speaks in a negative form, "what does the L-rd your G-d ask from you," and does not say explicitly that "the L-rd your G-d asks you to fear Him."

וגיש לומר שאין הכי נמי שהקב"ה רוצה הכל כדכתיב אחר זה "לשמר את מצות ה' ואת חקתיו" וכו', ואדרבא עיקר שבח היראה הוא לפי שעל ידה ישמור כל המצוות, ואם בן היראה אינה עיקר המצנה, ומשום הכי לא רצה לומר בדנקא "ה' אלהיך שאל מעמך" היראה, שהנה נראה שזהו עקר השאלה, ואינו בן שהרי שואל הכל.

It may be said that indeed the Holy One, Blessed be He, desires everything, as it is written afterward "to keep the L-rd's commandments and laws," etc. On the contrary, the primary praise of fear is that through it one will keep all the commandments, and thus fear is not the primary element of the commandment. Therefore, it did not wish to say explicitly that the L-rd your G-d asks of the fear of Heaven, for it would appear that this is the main request, which is not so, since He asks for everything.

והרי זה דומה למה שכתב הט"ז אורח חיים (סימן תרמ"א) שכל מצנה שבעשייתה היא גמר המצנה כגון מילה מברכים על עשייתה, אבל מצנה שאין בעשייתה גמר מצנה כגון שופר מגילה וחנוכה תפילין אין מברכין על עשייתה עכ"ל.

This is similar to what the Taz wrote in Orach Chaim (siman 641, se'if katan 1), that any commandment whose performance constitutes the completion of the commandment, such as circumcision, one recites a blessing over its performance, but a commandment whose performance is not the completion of the commandment, such as shofar, Megillah, Chanukah, and tefillin, one does not recite a blessing over its performance.

⁷ Berachot 33b.

והכי נמי פנונת הכתוב היא קד, הקב"ה שואל הכל ורוצה הכל ומסייע את האדם בשמירת מצותיו, כי הבא ליטהר מסייעין אותו, אלא לפי שתחלת הכל היא היראה והכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים, משום הכי אמר הכתוב "מה ה' אלהיך שאל מעמך" דוקא "כי אם-ליראה", שנה לבדו נוגע באדם לבדו אבל כל השאר התלוי ביראה גם הוא יסייע בהם.

So too, the intent of the verse is thus: the Holy One, Blessed be He, asks for everything and desires everything and assists a person in observing His commandments, for one who comes to purify himself is assisted.⁸ However, since the beginning of everything is fear, and everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven, therefore the verse says, “what does the L-rd your G-d ask of you” specifically? “Only this: to fear the L-rd your G-d,” for this alone pertains to the person himself, whereas all the rest that depends on fear, He will also assist him with.

That is, Scripture highlights fear as what God “asks” of man, but this is because it is the only element fully within human control. The ultimate aim remains the totality of observance, walking in His ways and keeping His commandments. Fear functions as the internal condition that makes consistent observance possible, much as a foundation supports a structure but is not itself the completed building.

והנה לאחר שנוכנסה היראה באדם ממילא הוא זהיר במצנת לא תעשה כדפירש הר' עובדיה ברטנורא בפרק קמא דמסכת אבות (משנה ג'), וצריך שתיכנס בו האהבה נמי כדי שיהיה זהיר במצנת עשה, ואחר כך צריך שישתדל לתקן מה שקלקל דהיינו להתאמץ בתשובתו לעשות הרע טוב, שהרי עתה יש לו מעשים טובים שיסייעוהו מן השמים להצליח בתשובתו.

Now, once fear has entered a person, he is automatically careful regarding negative commandments, as explained by the Rabbi Ovadia Bartenura in the first chapter of Tractate Avot (Mishnah 3), and it is necessary that love also enter him so that he will be careful regarding positive commandments. After that, he must strive to repair what he has damaged, namely to exert himself in repentance to transform evil into good, for now he has good deeds that will assist him from Heaven to succeed in his repentance.

ונידוע שהשופר מכניס היראה בלבבו של אדם, כדכתיב "אם-יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו", ואחר שיש לו היראה שעל ידה הוא זהיר במצנת לא תעשה, צריך שיקנה האהבה.

It is known that the shofar instills fear in a person’s heart, as it is written: “If a shofar is sounded in a city, will the people not tremble?”⁹ The shofar was sounded to signal danger or crisis. The sudden, piercing sound interrupts ordinary consciousness and creates a sense of urgency and vulnerability. After he has fear, through which he is careful regarding negative commandments, he must acquire love. Here, the shofar awakens moral awareness and initiates the process that leads from fear to love, and ultimately to repentance.

⁸ Shabbat 104a.

⁹ Amos 3:6.

וְזֶהוּ "תִּקְעוּ בַחֲדָשׁ שׁוֹפָר" תִּחְדְּשׁוּ מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם, דְּהֵיִינוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת מִצְוֹת, וְאַחֵר כִּדְּ? תִּמְגֵן הַמַּעֲנוֹת וְזֶהוּ תִּשְׁוֹפֵר מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם. וְאַחֵר כִּדְּ אָמַר "בַּכֶּסֶה לַיּוֹם חֲגֵנוּ" כְּלוֹמַר וְלֹא תִפְתְּדוּ פֶּן מִתְחַמֵּת עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם שֶׁעֲשִׂיתֶם לֹא תַעֲלֶה בְיַדְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת הַתְּשׁוּבָה כַּהוֹגֵן מִתְחַמֵּת הַמִּקְטָרְגִים, שֶׁהָרִי אֵין לָהֶם כֹּחַ לְפִי שֶׁאֵין לָהֶם עֵדִים שֶׁהִלְבְּנָה נְכֻסִית, וְעוֹד לַיּוֹם חֲגֵנוּ שֶׁצָּרִיד לְהֶאֱמִין שֶׁהַקֶּב"ה יִקְבַּל תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכְּתָבוּ הַפּוֹסְקִים שֶׁיִּטּוֹל צְפוּרְנָיו וַיִּגְלַח וַיִּלְבוֹשׁ לְבָנִים וַיִּתְעַטֵּף לְבָנִים לְהִרְאוֹת עַל הַבֵּיטָחוֹן שֶׁאֵנוּ בּוֹטְחִים בַּחֶסֶד הָאֵל שֶׁנִּצָּא בְּדִמוֹס.

This is the meaning of “Sound the shofar on *the* month”—renew your deeds, that is, to perform commandments; and afterward he should repair what is crooked, and this is “improve your deeds.” Afterward, it says “on the new moon for our festival,” meaning: do not fear lest, because of your sins, you will not succeed in performing repentance properly due to the accusers, for they have no power since they have no witnesses, as the moon is covered.

This resolves Questions 1 and 2: The lack of witnesses does not mean that sin is absent, but that it is not being actively prosecuted. This removes despair without diminishing judgment, for it signals that repentance remains possible and effective. Thus, the concealment of accusation is not a license for complacency, but a condition that enables sincere repentance.

Furthermore, “for our festival,” that one must believe that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will accept his repentance, as the decisors wrote (Tur, Orach Chaim siman 581) that one should trim his nails, shave, and wear white garments and wrap himself in white to demonstrate the confidence that we trust in the kindness of G-d that we will emerge vindicated. This resolves Question 3: “*For* our festival” instead of “on our festival” indicates not merely the time of the festival, but its anticipated result: a confidence that the Day of Judgment will lead to vindication.

וּבִיאֹר הַמִּדְרָשׁ אֵיזָה חֲדָשׁ שֶׁנִּכְסָה וַיֵּשׁ לוֹ חַג וְחֲגוֹ בְיוֹמוֹ וְכוּ', יוֹבֵן שֶׁפִּיר בְּמָה שֶׁנִּכְתּוּב לְקַמֵּן בַּפְּרָשָׁה עַל פְּסוּק "תִּקְעוּ בַחֲדָשׁ שׁוֹפָר", שֶׁהַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי סוּדוֹ לְהִנְצֵל מִשְׁבַּע קְלִיפּוֹת, אֲלֵא שֶׁיַּעֲקֹב מִצַּד אֶחָד גָּרַם שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לָנוּ צַעַר בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וּמִצַּד אַחֵר גָּרַם שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לָנוּ שְׂמִחָה בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְעֵי"ש, וּמִשּׁוֹם הַכִּי הוּא נִכְסָה לְפִי שֶׁהוּא לְעֵתִיד, אֲבָל מִכָּל מְקוֹם יֵשׁ לָנוּ חַג כְּלוֹמַר שֶׁאֵנוּ שְׂמִחִים בְּשְׂמִחַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֶף בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, אֲמָנָם עֶקֶר הַשְּׂמִחָה הַיָּא לָנוּ לְעֵתִיד שֶׁתִּהְיֶה הַנֶּפֶשׁ בְּשְׂמִחָה שְׁלִימָה, וְזֶהוּ וְחֲגוֹ בְיוֹמוֹ. וְעֵי"ן לְקַמֵּן.

The explanation of the Midrash—“which is the month that is covered [i.e., it has a Rosh Chodesh], has a festival, and its festival is on that day,” etc.—will be well understood with what we will write later in the parashah (Essay 7) on the verse “Sound the shofar on *the* month,” that the secret of the seventh month is to be saved from seven *kliptot*. However, Jacob, from one perspective, caused that we have suffering in this world, when he said to Esau, “thus says your servant Jacob,” and when he appeared to bow down to him. But from another perspective, he caused that we will have joy in the World-to-Come. See there.

Therefore it is covered, because it pertains to the future. Nevertheless, we have a festival, meaning that we rejoice with the joy of the soul even in this world. However, the main joy will be for us in the future, when the soul will have complete joy, and this is the meaning of “and its festival is on its day.” See further below.

* * *