

“New Year” or “Beginning of The New Year”?

Yoel Bin Nun

Abstract: This article addresses a number of biblical textual difficulties, namely, “Why is there no mention of *Rosh ha-Shanah*?” and “How is it possible that the year begins on the first day of the seventh month (*Tishrei*), while the ‘festival of the ingathering’ (i.e., *Sukkot*) occurs at the end of the year? It is clear from other passages in the Pentateuch that the “festival of the ingathering”, i.e., the festival of *Sukkot*, represents the end of the year; not the beginning. The article argues that in biblical language *Rosh ha-Shanah* means “the beginning of the year” and that *Rosh ha-Shanah* is not one day, but a period when the end of the previous year and the beginning of the new year overlap.

Biography: Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun is an Israeli educator and Rosh Yeshivah who has spearheaded the revolution in *Tanakh*-study in Israel, primarily at *Yeshivat Har Etzion* and the Herzog Teachers’ College in *Alon Shevut*. He has written numerous articles and books on *Tanakh*, Jewish history, Jewish thought and *halakhab*.



Meorot 7:1
Tishrei 5769
© 2008

A Publication of
Yeshivat Chovevei Torah
Rabbinical School

“New Year” or “Beginning of The New Year”?

Yoel Bin Nun

A. The “Year” in Torah

Our Sages refer to 1 *Tishrei* as “*Rosh ha-Shanah*”—the New Year. This appellation, however, goes unmentioned in the Torah, which even contains verses that clearly contradict the idea that this date represents the beginning of the year.

Several verses state explicitly that the year ends with the festival of *Sukkot*:

And the festival of the harvest, the first fruits of your labors, which you have sown in the field, and the festival of the ingathering, at the end of the year, when you gather in your labors from the field” (Exod. 23:16).

And you shall observe the festival of weeks, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the festival of the ingathering, at the end of the year” (ibid. 34:22).

At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of *shemittah*, on the festival of *Sukkot*...” (Deut 31:10).

In the various textual units devoted to the festivals, *Sukkot* and *Shemini Atzeret* are always at the end of the year. We find this in *Parashat Emor* (Lev. 23), again in *Parashat Pinhas* (Num. 29), and again in the listing of the festivals in *Parashat Re'eb* (Deut.16), which concludes with the summation:

Three times in the year all of your males shall appear before the Lord your God, in the place which He will choose: on the festival of *matsot*, and on the festival of weeks, and on the festival of *Sukkot*...” (Deut. 16:16).

According to all of these sources, the “festival of the ingathering” i.e., *Sukkot*, is at the end of the year, with the new year beginning after *Sukkot*.

To this we must add, of course, the fact that the day which we call *Rosh ha-Shanah*, and which the Torah refers to as “the day of the [*shofar*] blast” (*yom teru'ah*), falls on the first day of the *seventh month* (Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1), not of the first month. The first month is the “month of *aviv* [spring]” (Exod. 12:2; 13:4). The first day of the seventh month is the “day of the [*shofar*] blast,” but nowhere does the Torah refer to it as the “New Year.”

The Torah attests unequivocally that the new year begins after the festival of Sukkot

The verses cited above from various places in the Torah attest unequivocally that the year begins after *Sukkot*. While we may point to contradictions, contrasts, and different aspects of a great many subjects in the Torah, here the matter is clear: the evidence is unequivocal, and it would appear to stand in stark contradiction to our tradition.

Seemingly, we would expect, the “beginning of the months” (“the month of spring”) should be referred to in the Torah as the “New Year.” But this is not the case: according to all of the verses cited above, the festival of *Sukkot* represents the end of the year, such that the “year” in the Torah starts immediately thereafter. Moreover, another group of verses proves that a “year,” as the Torah perceives it,

* Translation by Joel Linsider.

is the agricultural year; it begins in the sowing season, with the first rains:

So long as the earth remains—sowing time and reaping time, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, will not cease. (Gen. 8:22).

And for six years shall you *sow* your land and *gather* in its produce. But the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat... (Ex. 23:10-11)

For six years you shall *sow* your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and *gather* in its produce. But in the seventh year there shall be a Shabbat of rest for the land, a Shabbat for God; you shall **not sow** your field, nor shall you prune your vineyard. You shall not reap that which grows on its own of your harvest, nor shall you gather the grapes of your undressed vine; it shall be a Shabbat of rest for the land. (Lev. 25:3-5).

You shall count for yourself seven Shabbat cycles of year... and you shall sanctify the fiftieth year... that fiftieth year shall be a jubilee to you; you shall not sow, nor shall you reap that which grows on its own in it, nor shall you gather in it the grapes of your undressed vine. (ibid., 8-11).

According to the number of years following the jubilee shall you buy from your neighbor; and according to the number of years of produce shall he sell to you... (ibid., 15).

For the land to which you come, to take possession of it... it is a land of hills and valleys; it drinks water from the rain of the heavens; [a land] which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. And it will be, if you diligently obey My commandments... and I will give the rain of your land at its time – the first rain and the latter rain – and you will gather in your corn and your wine and your oil... (Deut. 11:10-15).

Here again, we find that the verses are unequivocal in their testimony that the Torah “year” is agricultural; it begins in the season of sowing, with the first rains (*yoreh*). Therefore the expression “From the beginning of the year until the end of the year” means: “the first rains and the latter rains” (i.e., the rainy season) and the ingathering of the corn, wine and oil (i.e., the days of summer and the ingathering). Such a year would seemingly begin and end in the month of *Marheshvan*, which is when the first rains come and when the olives are pressed, rather than in *Tishrei*. The verses mentioning the festival of *Sukkot* (= the festival of ingathering) at the end of the year, and those concerning the sowing at the start of the rainy season (the *yoreh*) at the beginning of the year, are manifestly in accord with each other. The problem is that they do not conform to the idea of the first day of the seventh month as the “New Year”.

B. Beginning of the Year

One point, however, undermines the uniformity of the textual presentation: the Torah lists no festival that falls on *Rosh Hodesh* except for this “day of the [*shofar*] blast.” Indeed, it is logical that *Rosh ha-Shanah* should fall on *Rosh Hodesh* (if for no other reason than that in a leap year we do not add a day, but rather an entire month). The answer to this puzzle is to be found in the unit describing the jubilee year:

And you shall cause the *shofar* to be sounded on the tenth day of the seventh month; on *Yom Kippur* you shall cause the *shofar* to be sounded throughout your land. And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year. (Lev. 25:9-10).

The annual “day of the [*shofar*] blast” (*yom teru`ah*) falls on the first day of the seventh month. In the verse above we are told that the “sounding of the *shofar*” (*shofar teru`ah*) heralds the start of a new and special year—the jubilee year, and this takes place on *Yom Kippur*. Why? What can we learn from this? Here, in the middle of a unit that has touched several times

on the agricultural year, beginning with the sowing, we discover an explicit “New Year” that begins with a “sounding of the *shofar*,” and in the seventh month—prior to *Sukkot*. But this New Year falls on *Yom Kippur*, on the tenth of the month! Clearly, then, the year still begins in the seventh month, with a sounding of the *shofar*, on a festival which falls on *Rosh Hodesh*; it is only the jubilee year which starts on *Yom Kippur*. But why does the jubilee year start on *Yom Kippur*, on the tenth of the month? And how can we reconcile all those verses that talk about an agricultural year that begins with sowing, with the first rains (in the month of Marheshvan), with the verse that establishes the beginning of the jubilee year on *Yom Kippur*?

The answer occurred to me after years of searching and pondering: *Rosh ha-Shanah* in the Torah is not a day, but rather a *season*. It is a period of transition which includes all the festivals of the seventh month (*Tishrei*), from the “day of the [*shofar*] blast” up until *Shemini Atseret*. The “day of the [*shofar*] blast” is nothing more than the beginning of the month in which the year begins, and in which the previous year also ends.

The agricultural year is a solar year (approximately 365¼ days), and it is approximately eleven days longer than a period of twelve lunar months. The new year, if it is counted by months, must therefore begin, in the formal sense, before the previous year has ended. The seventh month is the period during which a new year starts and the old one ends; in other words, it is the “marking of [the period of] a year” (*tequfat shanah*). The agricultural year, on the other hand, is not dependent in any way on a lunar *Rosh Hodesh*, and therefore the principal ingathering – of the threshing floor and of the vineyard – ends with the festival of ingathering (*Sukkot*).

Shemini Atseret is therefore the agricultural “*Rosh ha-Shanah*”—the New Year for sowing and for rain, and this remains so to this day, in our prayers and in our consciousness. This reconciles all the verses which prove that the

“festival of the ingathering” (*Sukkot*) is “at the end of the year,” as well as all those verses in which the year begins with the first rain (*yoreh*) and with the sowing. Indeed, *Shemini Atseret* is close to the beginning of the rains and the sowing, but the “New Year” cannot fall in the middle of a month—just as a month cannot formally begin in the middle of a day or night, even though that may technically be the case. Therefore, the Torah establishes the *Rosh Hodesh* of the seventh month as *the start of the month which represents the beginning of the year* (*rosh reishit ha-shanah*), and this in itself bears ample testimony to its special role.

*Rosh ha-Shanah in the Torah is not a day,
but a season.*

Why does the Torah not refer to the day as “*Rosh ha-Shanah*”? Because, as posited above, the “New Year” in the Torah is not a day, but rather a period of twenty-two days, starting on *Rosh Hodesh* of the seventh month, the “day of the [*shofar*] blast”; continuing through *Yom Kippur*, the start of the jubilee year; and ending on *Shemini Atseret*, which follows immediately after the “end of the year” on the festival of ingathering, and which is the beginning of the agricultural year, for rain and for sowing.

Each day during this period has something of “*Rosh ha-Shanah*” about it, but the “day of the [*shofar*] blast,” *Yom Kippur*, and *Shemini Atseret*, are special days; each of them has a special connection with some or another aspect of “*Rosh ha-Shanah*.” The “day of the [*shofar*] blast” is the beginning of the lunar month that introduces the agricultural, solar year, since it is the beginning of the lunar month in which the year changes. *Yom Kippur* is the general day of atonement for the entire year that has passed, for all of its sins; and it is in fact the last complete day of the previous year, as we shall see below. *Shemini Atseret* is indeed the agricultural New Year because it comes at the time of the rains and the sowing.

The *Tanakh* offers proof for and a hint to this perception: The proof is from the expression used by the prophet Ezekiel (40:1) for *Yom Kippur*: “In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, on the New Year [i.e., beginning of the year] on the tenth of the month”. This could have been a jubilee year, which is declared on *Yom Kippur*, as taught by our Sages (*Arakbin* 12a). But this is not necessarily the plain sense of the verse, which may simply mean, “at the beginning [period] of the year, on the tenth of the month.”

The perception of time in the Torah and in religious thought is not linear and detached.

The hint lies in the fact that the *musaf* (additional) sacrifice specified for the “day of the [*shofar*] blast”, for *Yom Kippur*, and for *Shemini Atseret* are all the same: **one** ox, one ram, and seven ewes (and a goat as a sin offering; Num. 29). This is in contrast to the additional sacrifice of *Rosh Hodesh*, the festival of *matsot*, and the festival of Shavuot, which are likewise characterized by identical additional sacrifices (two oxen).

Still, we must ask: if the festival of the ingathering (*Sukkot*) must fall “at the end of the year,” and if the agricultural New Year is related to the season of rain and sowing, and if “*Rosh ha-Shanah*” must fall on “*Rosh Hodesh*,” then why did the Torah not choose *Marheshvan*, and establish a festival on *Rosh Hodesh* of this *eighth* month, which is actually closer to the beginning of the sowing and the rainy season?

Furthermore, for what reason does the “day of the [*shofar*] blast” (*yom teru`ab*) mark the *Rosh Hodesh* of the beginning of the year every year, while in a jubilee year the “sounding of the *shofar*” (*shofar teru`ab*) announces the sanctification of the jubilee year specifically on *Yom Kippur*? More generally, why in fact should

there not be one day that that the Torah recognizes as the beginning of the year, in the way that “*Rosh ha-Shanah*” is perceived by the Sages?

C. The Cyclical Significance of the Calendar: Links in a Chain

The answer requires two introductory remarks—one theoretical, the other going back to the foundations of the dual calendar and the calculation of the leap years. The perception of time in the Torah particularly, and in the world of religious thought in general, is not linear and detached. It is inconceivable, from this perspective, to circle specific dates in an office diary, or to tear off pages with days that have gone by. Nor is the perception a legal, contractual one, where the date is nothing but a device to be used for thoughtful and fair management of the complex relationships between people with their inclinations and their disagreements.¹ Rather, the religious view of time is built on a consciousness of continuity, cyclical repetition, and remembrance.

In a continuous consciousness, no day stands alone; it is always connected with the previous day and the following day, in a chain of successive links (as reflected in the Hebrew expression, *mi-yamim yamimah*, meaning “year in, year out”). In a cyclical consciousness neither a day nor a period can stand alone. They are part of a chain that connects them to periods that have already come and gone, and especially to the parallel period last year and in previous years. They also look into the mists of the period that is to come, and of future years.

This consciousness is also inseparably bound up with the cyclical order of nature. Every season in nature is accompanied by its own special feelings, appearance, and familiar smell of sunsets and sunrises; days growing shorter and growing longer; alternations of heat and

¹ Obviously, the legal, contractual perception prevailed even in the ancient world, as evidenced by the thousands of contracts which have been discovered in ancient archives, especially in Mesopotamia. See: Y. Finkelstein, entry “*Mishpat, ha-mishpat be-mizrah ha-qadmon*,” *Biblical Encyclopedia* (Heb.) (Jerusalem 5728), pp. 589-590, and in the bibliography at the end of the entry (p. 614).

cold, humidity and dryness, sowing and reaping, fertilization-blossoming-ripening-withering. This is nature *mi-yamim yamimah*—year in, year out; “a remembrance of the act of creation.” In a consciousness of memory, even years do not simply pass by in accordance with this natural, primal cycle, but rather are connected to years gone by in the memories of individuals, families, nations, and history. This is the significance of the expressions, “in remembrance of the act of Creation” (*zekher le-ma`aseh bereishit*), and “in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt” (*zekher li-yetsi’at mitsrayim*).

A consciousness of continuity, of cyclical repetition, and of memory, creates life with meaning; severance, segregation and forgetting are associated with death. The chain of time and the consciousness of memory are life. The dead, who are remembered on days of remembrance, for years and years, live on in consciousness; they are dead only in body. But where “there is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any memory of things to come for those who will come after them” (Eccl. 1:11), then there is no meaning or significance even to the cyclical order of nature itself, with its sunrises and sunsets, and the winds that blow, and the water cycle. It is all just “vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (ibid. 2).

Had the Torah chosen *Rosh Hodesh* of the eighth month as the festival of the *shofar* blast announcing the new agricultural year, it would mean that only *after the previous year had ended*, after the end of the ingathering, after we had left behind us a year of successes, failures, and scars—only then would we start the new year, with its hopes and expectations for a year of blessing, abundance and flourishing. This would entail a *severing* of one year from the next; it would not be a continuous, vital chain.²

Following this theoretical introduction, let us return to the “beginning of the year” in the Torah and assert that it occurs at precisely the same time as “the end of the year” (*aharit shanah*, *tseit shanah*, or *tequfat shanah*): one year is

inseparably interwoven with the next, like links in a chain. The new year begins before the old year has ended.

Continuity, cyclical repetition, and memory, create life with meaning; severance, segregation and forgetting are associated with death.

So it is in nature: the setting of the sun ushers in a new 24-hour cycle, while the day gone by is still murmuring its farewell. The period of twilight (*bein ha-shemashot*) belongs to both days, and is the subject of some halakhic uncertainty. In various contexts we decide the matter one way or the other, but ultimately it remains a unit of time that belongs to both days. (The same applies to the earliest part of the morning, between dawn [*alot ha-shahar*] and sunrise.) For this reason, Shabbat lasts 25 hours rather than 24; we hurry to bring it in and take our time in parting from it.

The same applies to the agricultural cycle. Preparations for plowing and sowing for the next year are in high gear, while the farmers are still intensively involved in gathering the crops of the previous year and removing the produce from the fields before the rains come. This is not a miraculous vision; rather, it is the image of blessing and abundance of natural produce, in fulfillment of the prophetic promise:

Behold, days are coming—says God—when the ploughman [in the vineyard—YBN] will overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes [will overtake] him who sows the seeds; and the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will melt. (Amos 9:13).

The parallel in the verse proves our interpretation: the ploughman (in the vineyard) corresponds to the treader of grapes. And even when the kingdom of Israel is being punished and vanquished, the prophecy of Amos presents these natural images as full of significance and a source of consolation.

The same idea is echoed in the prophecy of Zechariah:

So says the Lord of Hosts: Old men and old women will yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem—and each man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. (Zech. 8:4-5).

Once again, the blessing of nature's abundance is regarded as an amazing miracle.

The period of the festivals of *Tishrei*, the point of encounter where the ingathering comes together with the plowing and sowing, is the “twilight” between *tzzeit ha-shanah* and *tequmat ha-shanah*; the end and the beginning together, just like the place where two links in a chain overlap, is a faithful expression of the Torah's consciousness of continuity, cyclical periodicity, and memory. It belongs to the year that is ending as well as the year that is beginning.

D. Customs for the Beginning of the Year

Our customs “understand” and express this principle. The customs pertaining to *selihot* (penitential prayers), prayers concerning God's judgment, and supplications continue in various forms (*selihot/hoshanot*) up until the end of *Sukkot*—until *Hoshanah Rabbah*. The Divine verdict concerning rain, passed on *Sukkot*—which obviously affects all forms of life—makes *Hoshanah Rabbah* the final day of sealing the verdict—in custom, in prayer, and in our consciousness. Psalm 27 (“By David: The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, Whom shall I fear?..”), which is recited throughout the

month of Elul, is also recited during *Tishrei*, up until the end of *Sukkot*. The honey which is placed on the table, according to Ashkenazi custom, signifying the new year's abundant, sweet blessing, remains there until *Shemini Atseret*. In terms of the annual cycle of reading the Torah, *Shemini Atseret* is the “*Rosh ha-Shanah*” of the Torah reading, in addition to its historical role as “*Rosh ha-Shanah*” for prayers for rain, at the beginning of the agricultural year.

*The time of the festivals is the “twilight”
between the end of the year and the beginning
of the year together*

Our customs fail to acknowledge any single day as representing, alone, the New Year. The relevant discussion in the *gemara* likewise tends towards the view that a single, specific, fixed day for the New Year is important mostly for bills and contracts, in accordance with the legal, contractual perception of time. This perception reigns over the profane dimension of our lives: “On the first of *Tishrei* is the New Year for years. What does this mean practically? Rav Pappa said: [It is the New Year] for bills, designating those bills of debt

that date from before then as invalidated, while those dated after then are valid...” (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 8a). My friend and colleague Reb Menahem Katz brings an interesting proof from the wording of *Tosefta Rosh ha-Shanah* 1:7 (Lieberman edition, p. 306): “*Tishrei* is the New Year for [counting] years...”: “*Tishrei?*”, rather than “the first of *Tishrei*.” This sits well with the view of *Yerushalmi Rosh ha-Shanah*, chapter

²We are familiar with this consciousness of “severed units of time” in the context of the academic year: after end-of-year examinations, grades, rejoicing and disappointment, summing up and bidding farewell, comes the “summer vacation.” The new academic year will begin after the summer vacation, with everything clean and shining, new textbooks and empty notebooks, clean and devoid of any scribbles, mistakes or failures, full of the “perfection” of nothingness, and with grand hopes for infinite achievement. In general, this happens in the month of Elul (coinciding approximately with September), which is the month of summing up and repentance in the Jewish year – i.e., the “month of tests and grades.” Indeed, there is an absolute contradiction between the feeling of a new beginning, clean and clear of all the burdens of the past, and the Jewish sense—like the agricultural one—of an end-of-year laden with its successes and failures, approaching its summation during the days of Divine judgment and mercy.

1, 56b), which sets a full thirty days of a year as the minimum interval that can be considered a year for kings, rather than a single day, as maintained at *Bavli Rosh ha-Shanah* 2b. *Rosh ha-Shanah*, the New Year, extends over most of the month of *Tishrei*.

E. Calculations of a Dual Calendar

Within the “twilight” period there are some moments that are closer to the day while other moments are closer to the night. During the month of *Tishrei*, too, there is a difference between the “Ten Days of Penitence” (*aseret yemei teshuvah*) and the festival of *Sukkot*. Here we come back to the structure of the dual calendar, with its lunar and solar aspects. The twelve calendar months do not constitute a year, because twelve (lunar) months add up only to approximately 354 ± 1 days, while a full (solar) year is slightly less than $365 \frac{1}{4}$ days long. Therefore, if we declare the new year to begin on the (lunar) *Rosh Hodesh* of the seventh month – the month in which the old year ends and the new one begins, then the ensuing 29th of Elul—the end of the sixth month—will not conclude a (solar) year, but only twelve (lunar) months.

Thus, the Ten Days of Penitence belong to the year that is ending, too, even from the simplest arithmetical perspective. “*Yom Kippur*” is day number 364 ± 1 in the year that is ending, and this is far more important than its role as the tenth day in the new year. “*Yom Kippur*” is the last day of the previous year, and its purpose is to allow for atonement for all sins and a complete purification. The fact that the “day of the [*shofar*] blast” has already ushered in the beginning of the new year, on the lunar *Rosh Hodesh*, only emphasizes the importance of *Yom Kippur* as the conclusion of the previous year.

Why does *Yom Kippur* not fall on the 11th of the month? Because on the 11th day of *Tishrei* we are sometimes exceeding the 365 days of a full year, whereas *Yom Kippur* is a constant: it

must always be the last full day of the previous year.

In accordance with the plain meaning of the text, it is clear why the jubilee year is sanctified only on *Yom Kippur*. The jubilee year is a unique case where two years of special sanctity follow consecutively. It is impossible for the jubilee year to be sanctified before we reach the end of the seventh *shemittah* year, which formally began on *Rosh Hodesh* of the seventh month in the previous year, and which will conclude only on *Yom Kippur*.

The Jubilee Year is a unique case where two years of special sanctity follow consecutively.

Further proof is hinted at in the interval between the days: there are ten days between the “day of the [*shofar*] blast” (*Rosh ha-Shanah*) and *Yom Kippur*, while twenty-two days separate the “day of remembrance” (*Rosh ha-Shanah*) and *Shemini Atzeret*—representing twice the eleven days’ difference between a full solar year and the average twelve lunar months. In other words, it is the difference between twenty-four lunar months and two solar, agricultural years. Indeed, in the third year a leap month is added, so as to make up the difference. This creates a simple and wondrous balance between the lunar months and the solar year, with its exact calculations reserved for the Sages. What this tells us is that *Yom Kippur*, the start of the jubilee year, is the last day of the solar year, which began on *Rosh ha-Shanah* of the previous year. At the same time, *Shemini Atzeret* serves as the New Year from the point of view of the holidays and pilgrim festivals; the conclusion of the ingathering in preparation for the sowing. The “day of the [*shofar*] blast” and *Shemini Atzeret* begin the year, while *Yom Kippur* concludes the year (paralleling *Hoshanah Rabbah*—the final day of the festival of ingathering [*Sukkot*], according to custom).

The *beraita* concerning the incense (*Keritot* 6a) likewise represents proof for this view. The offering of the incense in the Temple follows a solar calendar: there are 368 (365+3) portions, with half a portion offered in the morning and half in the afternoon of every day of the year—regular days, Shabbat, and festivals alike (365 days). On *Yom Kippur* the cycle concludes, with the three leftover portions of incense serving as a special offering of atonement for the entire year.

Therefore, these two days—the “day of the [*shofar*] blast” and *Yom Kippur* – are opposites which relate to and complement one another as two calendrical festivals: the “day of the [*shofar*] blast” introduces a new year, while *Yom Kippur* concludes the previous one. For this reason they appear in the Torah together, linked with the word “*akh*” (“but”): “But on the tenth of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement...” (Lev. 23:27). They do not appear together with the three pilgrim festivals, because they are calendrical festivals. The “day of the [*shofar*] blast” which commences the year is a “holiday, a holy convocation,” while *Yom Kippur*, which concludes the year, is a day of fasting, affliction and atonement.

How did the “day of the [*shofar*] blast” become “*Rosh ha-Shanah*”?³ The “day of the [*shofar*] blast” is unquestionably the start of the lunar month which represents the beginning of the year. Since the months and their days are counted based on the new moon, the (lunar) *Rosh Hodesh* that *precedes* the solar start of the year must be singled out especially as a day of *shofar* blast and remembrance in God’s judgment, as the introduction to the prolonged period of remembrance and judgment at the beginning of the year (which is also the end of a year). Therefore this is the only *Rosh Hodesh* in the year which is established by the Torah as a festival of “*shabbaton*”—a holy convocation with a prohibition on labor (Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1). However, what the Sages refer to by the simple,

popular name “*Rosh ha-Shanah*” is, in the Torah, nothing more than the first day of the month that commences the new year; the only festival in the Torah which falls on *Rosh Hodesh* (a day of remembrance in judgment and sounding of the *shofar*).

This lengthy, complex concept has been abbreviated in the language of the Sages and in popular consciousness in the following way: The “first day of the month that commences the beginning of the year,” becomes “the first day of the beginning of the year,” which in turn becomes “the first day of the year” (New Year).

The Torah cannot refer explicitly to *rosh ha-shanah*—not only because of the emphasis that it places on the first month (*Nisan*, the “month of spring”), but also because this name would not be an accurate description of the festival. No single day can be called the New Year in a calendar which has lunar months, but whose year is a solar, agricultural one. Indeed, our interpretation is precisely suited to the one verse in the Torah which mentions a similar idea: “from the beginning of the year to the end of the year” (Deut. 11:12)—not a single day, but rather a period. It is the period which precedes the first rains, as we read further on: “And I shall give your land its rain at the proper time--the first rain and the latter rain—and you shall gather in your corn and your wine and your oil” (v. 14). The beginning of the year, which is also the end of the year, is the period of overlap between the ingathering and the first rain.

Indeed, the Talmudic discussion (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 8a) seeks in this verse the biblical source for *Rosh ha-Shanah*, and immediately poses the question: “From where do we know that this refers to the month of *Tishrei*?” The answer relies on a verse (Ps. 81:4-5): “Sound the *shofar* at the new moon, at the concealment of the moon on our day of feasting, for this is

³ It should be pointed out that even in the prayer service our Sages refer to this day as *Yom ha-Zikkaron* (the Day of Remembrance), and not as *Rosh ha-Shanah*.

a statute for Israel, [with] judgment of the God of Jacob.” Actually, this is simply a *different formulation* for the only festival in the Torah that falls on *Rosh Hodesh*: on which festival is

the moon concealed? This must refer to *Rosh ha-Shanah*; a day of “judgment of the God of Jacob,” with a “remembrance of sounding [of the *shofar*]”.