

# “The Parsha Discussion” by Rabbi Alex Israel

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## Nitzavim-Vayelech. Tekiah-Teruah: Stability and Upheaval



This week we read a double parsha – Nitzavim Vayelech. If we focus just on the names of the parsha, we note that these are a study in opposites. Here are some of my associations:

**Nitzavim** – standing, standing tall, stationary, stable, steady, familiar, rooted, motionless.

**Vayelech** – movement, journeying, in transit, on a voyage to another location, or distancing from an unwanted place, flux, change.

As we anticipate Rosh Hashanna, this stark contrast reminded me of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's commentary to the sounding of the Shofar. He focusses upon the series of Tekiah – the plain note - followed by the broken note – the Teruah – and then again, the long steady Tekiah note. He writes:

The plain note calls different elements in one direction while the broken note causes an upheaval, a violent shaking, a movement.

After having had its effect upon the mind, the plain note brings all the various tendencies of the mind converging upon one point. The broken note penetrates, shatters, moves, softens from this one point. The final plain tone reassembles and redirects the disintegrated mind along one straight path.

These ideas when applied to Rosh Hashanah, convey the following lesson:

**Tekiah** calls you from your continuous living in an outer world and from the dissipation of your powers and energies to introspection and to turning upwards to God. And so it brings you through your innermost self to God.

**Teruah** bids you let this newly gained conception of God permeate the whole of your present inner and outer life, your erstwhile thoughts, feelings, words, deeds and pleasures; the good

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things you enjoy in your inner and outer life today. Immerse your complete self in this rock-shattering 'God-concept.' Test your thoughts and deeds to see whether each and every one comes up to standard. Teruah makes you quiver, it softens you, it subdues you before God.

**Tekiah**, however, puts strength into you, gives you courage and lifts you out of this state of languidness, out of this disintegration of things past to a life before God which ever after will be unified, straight, strong. (Horeb. paragraph 226-228)

Tekiah is reminiscent of Nitzavim; Teruah of Vayelech. We stand to attention (Nitzavim), we move – Vayelech – and then regroup – Nitzavim. Tekiah-Teruah-Tekiah.

Maybe this is a good text to **discuss around the Shabbat or Yom Tov table**. What you think about, what is your inner intention when you hear the Shofar? How do you feel? What do you do during those sacred moments?

- Do you just listen, or watch; following the spectacle in shul? (That's just fine!)
- Do you feel the Shofar's blast as a call for change, an upheaval, as in Rabbi Hirsch's reading here?
- Or is the Shofar a vehicle for our prayers as we are moved by the primal sound of the Shofar, almost a cry, as if it is sobbing and groaning, pleading and exalting as its sounds carry our prayers to heaven.

I have written about the shofar on my website:

<http://www.alexisrael.org/rosh-hashanna---facing-uncertainty>

<http://www.alexisrael.org/coronation-day>

<http://thinkingtorah.blogspot.co.il/2012/09/rosh-hashanna-5773-shofar-and-gods-love.html>

Shabbat Shalom and Shannah Tova!