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**ROSH HASHANAH:
IS JUDGMENT DAY SUPPOSED TO BE JOYFUL?**

This guide corresponds to the video:
[Is Judgment Day Supposed To be Joyful?](#)

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◀Segment 1: A Day Of Judgment Or A Day Of Joy? – Video Outline▶

In the first video of the series, Rabbi Fohrman explores the concept of Rosh Hashanah in both the Mishnah and the Talmud and introduces Rosh Hashanah as a day of judgment. Focusing on the text of Nehemiah Chapter 8, he introduces the idea that a day of judgment could actually be celebrated instead of dreaded.

- I. Rosh Hashanah is coming up - slightly blasphemous question: How excited are you? How many look forward to the High Holidays?
 - a) There are a lot of holidays towards which we do kind of look forward: Purim is a lot of fun, Passover is very participatory; but Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment
 1. That's a pretty scary notion
 2. It's the day on which God judges humanity
 - b) Reading medieval poetry, angels tremble, God sifts through our deeds from the past year and inscribing us in one of these two books
 1. It's can make you want to run for the hills
 2. How should we relate to Rosh Hashanah? What emotional stance should we take to it?
 - Maybe fear, but it's terrible to emotionally avoid a holiday
 - Can we do any better than that?
- II. In beginning to come to grips with this notion of Rosh Hashanah as Judgment Day, maybe we can look at the sources from which these ideas come
 - a) The Mishnah itself, going back to the early times of Rabbinic literature, characterizes Rosh Hashanah as a kind of Judgment Day (Mishnah - Rosh Hashanah 1:2)
 1. On the New Year (first of Tishrei), all who have entered the Earth pass before Him, one by one, like young sheep; there is some kind of individual Judgment for person
 2. Later, in the Talmud, there is a tradition that the world was created in Tishrei (Babylonian Talmud - Rosh Hashanah 10b)
 - Perhaps Rosh Hashanah commemorates creation itself – like a birthday
 - This idea reflected in the machzor itself – “Hayom harat olam” (today, the universe was conceived)
- III. Taking these two together - birthday and Judgment Day - they don't go together all that easily
 - a) Would you celebrate a birthday with Judgment?
 1. Imagine trying this at home with little kids
 2. The kids would be terrified
 - b) Is this really how God celebrates our planetary birthday?
 - c) How happy is he to have us if the great celebration is Judgment Day?
- IV. Another difficulty with Rosh Hashanah as a Judgment Day relates to the day's prayers
 - a) If you were writing the machzor, what would you have people say in their prayers?
 - b) What if you were putting together the amidah for Rosh Hashanah, and there would be three great themes for the prayers - what would they be?

1. Rabbi Fohrman would make the first section the bargaining section - allow space to bargain for your life and make promises in exchange for what you want; a section for resolutions
 2. Then a lawyering section to explain yourself, trying to represent yourself as best as possible
 3. If all of this fails, there can be a last-ditch repentance and forgiveness section - tell God how sorry you are for misdeeds, ask for forgiveness
- c) The actual prayers for Rosh Hashanah do not support any of these three main themes
1. There is no bargaining, no lawyering, and no repentance/forgiveness
 2. People ask for forgiveness from each other right before Rosh Hashanah, but the prayers for the holiday don't support any of that
 3. The prayers do not actually beseech God for forgiveness
 - There is no confession
 - There are those themes during Yom Kippur, but why not here?
 - It should be the first thing on our mind on Judgment Day
- d) Is this a Judgment Day or not?
- V. That confusion only deepens if we go back earlier in time
- a) Looking at the Bible itself, what do we find in reference to Rosh Hashanah?
 1. There is no record of a Rosh Hashanah *celebration* in Torah
 - b) Find in Nehemiah 8
 1. One of the last Books of the Bible, in Ketuvim, Writings
 2. 70 years before this, the Temple had been destroyed, but now a few of the first pioneers are coming back to the Land with Ezra and Nehemiah in an attempt to build the Second Temple
 3. We hear about the events of a certain Rosh Hashanah when they came back
 4. During the 7th month, all of the people gather together and bring a Torah scroll - the scroll is read, and the people cry (Nehemiah 7:72-8:9)
 - Rashi says, they cried because they felt they weren't keeping the Torah
 - If you were Ezra or Nehemiah, and it was Rosh Hashanah, and the people were crying because they felt they weren't keeping the Torah well enough, how would you respond?
 - Rabbi Fohrman would be totally delighted
 - It's a rabbi's dream that the people would be so moved by the Torah, thinking they weren't fulfilling the Torah well enough
 - It's Judgment Day - that's what you're supposed to be thinking and feeling
 - How did Ezra and Nehemiah respond to those tears?
 - Nehemiah speaks up and says that today is a holy day, and the delight of God is your strength (Nehemiah 8:9-10)
 5. How do we understand that? What is he telling them?
 - Seems like there are two possibilities:
 - Nehemiah doesn't believe it's Judgment Day
 - His idea of Judgment Day is very different from what we might have expected
 6. Rabbi Fohrman thinks it's the latter possibility

- Nehemiah understands that this is Judgment Day, but he thinks Judgment Day is a day to be celebrated and not dreaded
- If we can understand what he understood, maybe we wouldn't dread the day either
- Maybe we could discern some real meaning that touches our lives rather than simply the awful fear

◀ SEGMENT 2: REMEMBERING THE SHOFAR FROM SINAI – VIDEO OUTLINE ▶

In this video, Rabbi Fohrman delves into the meaning of Yom Zichron Teruah, or A Day of Remembrance of the Shofar, showing how the shofar is God's way of communicating directly with the people at Sinai. He connects that shofar to three main themes of Rosh Hashanah prayer: kingship, remembrance, and shofar/Judgment.

- I. If we're having difficulty understanding Rosh Hashanah as a day of judgment as described in the Mishnah, maybe the Sages can explain what they meant by calling it that
 - a) Mishnah in Tractate Rosh Hashanah that calls it a day of judgment
 - b) What does the Gemara say by way of explanation?
 1. It doesn't say anything directly, but a few lines later we get the Rabbis' formulation of the basic themes of the prayers on that day
 2. The Talmud says that the prayers on that day should have three basic themes - not lawyering, bargaining, and forgiveness
 - Malchiyot - verses of God's kingship
 - Zichronot - verses that describe memories God has of Israel
 - Shofarot - verses that mention shofar
 3. It's a kind of mysterious three-fold formulation of the day
 - Maybe the overall idea of the Day of Judgment is really a fusion of three other ideas: kingship, memory, and shofar
 - What would that mean?
- II. In order to figure it out, play connect-the-dots; ask how the Rabbis evolved these concepts
 - a) Where did they get these ideas of kingship, memory, and shofar?
 1. The Torah describes Rosh Hashanah in cryptic words: זְכֵרֹן תְּרוּעָה - a day of remembrance of the shofar blast (Leviticus 23:23-25)
 2. That seems hopelessly ambiguous - what does that even mean?
 3. Whatever it means, it certainly doesn't seem to be saying "Day of Judgment"
 - b) They must have started where we did - the Bible and "Day of Remembrance of Shofar"
 1. How do they understand those words? What did they think it meant?
 2. If we begin there, we can see how they got to this idea of Day of Judgment
 - c) It's almost as if there is some event that we're supposed to remember involving a shofar; an event that is so obvious it doesn't need much explanation
 1. What is so obvious to the Torah that we're not getting?
 - d) Is there any Rabbinic text they left us that would give us their interpretation?
 1. Turns out the missing text for which we've been looking is actually the preamble to the verses we know as shofarot - "You, God, revealed Yourself in a cloud of glory... when You, our King, revealed Yourself on Mt. Sinai"
 - That's the event we're supposed to be remembering - it's the memory of the cry of the shofar that we all heard at Sinai
 - There is a shofar blast in the text of Sinai (Exodus 19:16)
- III. If on Rosh Hashanah we're meant to remember Sinai, why doesn't the Torah just say that?
 - a) Torah is emphasizing the shofar blasts as some key part of the experience at Revelation
 1. We would have said that the main aspect of Sinai was that we got the Torah
 2. Rosh Hashanah says, remember Sinai as about shofar – why?

- b) The Sages gave a hint in the paragraph we're reading: You revealed Yourself in a cloud
 - 1. God cannot reveal himself in a cloud - you cannot see anything in a cloud!
 - Why was it so cloudy?
 - In Deuteronomy, when discussing Sinai, Moses tells the people to remember that they couldn't see anything (Deuteronomy 4:12) - all they heard was God's voice, coalesced into words
 - Even before the Ten Commandments, heard the shofar
 - What they heard was a supernatural sound; the sound of the shofar without any physical shofar – sound of God communicating with them
- IV. Why was voice the medium through which we encountered God, not sight?
- a) If we could choose to encounter God with any one of our senses, probably would choose sight - it's the most direct way of receiving something
 - 1. Would want to see God, but God says that's not how it works
 - b) Fragile human beings cannot have that direct of an experience with God - they don't last
 - 1. But they can hear God's voice – hearing is indirect perception, an emanation
 - But hearing is still a genuine encounter
 - God says, sound is the most direct encounter that I can provide
- V. The shofar at Sinai was God's way of saying, "This is me"
- a) Later on, the first words of the Ten Commandments would be "I am your God"
 - b) But before the voice coalesced into words, the voice was also saying, "This is me"
 - 1. There is something about voice that stirs up old memories
 - 2. When you hear a song from childhood that you haven't heard in 30 years, it transports you back to those memories, and you feel like you're back there
 - 3. When you hear an old friend call out to you, you recognize the voice
 - c) At Sinai, God came into our lives – so strange, but also so familiar
 - 1. This was our Creator, we know that voice from somewhere
 - d) The earliest memory humanity has is that voice
 - 1. Adam and Eve, the very first humans, had heard that voice (Genesis 3:8), the voice of God strolling through the garden
 - e) Adam and Eve had just sinned and then heard God's voice coming closer, so they hid
 - f) At Sinai, it's a similar scene
 - 1. It's no longer a garden, but a mountain
 - 2. The people were standing from afar
 - 3. But it was a good kind of fear
 - 4. It was awe in the face of God
 - 5. Here they were hearing the voice once again
 - 6. It was as if the voice was walking, getting louder and louder (Exodus 19:19)
 - Just as it was in the Garden
 - Our collective memories were awakened that day
 - Every year, we have Yom Zichron Teruah, day of remembering the voice
 - Shofar sound stirs something in our human soul
 - We know that voice
 - It was the moment we made contact, changed everything for us
 - After that moment, we could never be the same
 - g) It's a moment that implies kingship, remembrance, and shofar and Judgment
 - h) All of these are implications of the moment that changed everything

◀ SEGMENT 3: ACCEPTING GOD AS KING – VIDEO OUTLINE ▶

In this video, Rabbi Fohrman focuses on the theme of kingship, going back to the Garden of Eden as the source, explaining that Adam and Eve thought of themselves as the masters. Rabbi Fohrman connects their feelings of fear to our feelings of fear, which stem from a creature meeting his creator.

- I. Everything the Rabbis of the Talmud and Mishnah tell us about Rosh Hashanah - that it's a day of judgment, that we should say kingship, remembering, shofar, all of this - flows organically
- II. Start with kingship - their insistence that on this day, we recite all of these verses of kingship. Where is that coming from?
 - a) The answer is clear - Sinai, Revelation - was the day we recognized God as King
 1. It was, in a word, coronation day, even the Torah itself seems to call it that
 2. God proposes a grand bargain to Israel at Sinai - they will be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6)
 - There is no such thing as a kingdom without a king
 - God's being King for the nation of Israel had its genesis on that day
 - b) Why is that actually the case?
 1. Kingship is not such an easy concept for us to wrap our minds around – let's say "leadership"
 2. To accept God as King is really to accept him as leader
 - To express a willingness to follow Him, to let Him lead you
 - That was a facet of the Sinai experience
 - We accepted the Torah - these laws were the directives of the Master of the Universe
 - Our acceptance of those directives indicated our willingness to allow Him to lead us
 - We considered those laws binding - we accepted that it was okay and right for Him to make the rules, and for us to follow them; there was a context for that acceptance
 - c) The context goes all of the way back to the first time we heard God's voice
 1. When we first heard that voice, we hid
 - d) When God asks, "Where are you?" and Adam answers, "I'm hiding because..." what would you expect him to say? (Genesis 3:9-10)
 1. Hiding because I heard You coming or because I cannot bear to confront you
 2. What Adam actually says, shockingly, is that he is hiding because he is naked
 - Not because he can't bear to see God, but he can't bear to see himself!
 - We became uncomfortable with ourselves after we ate from the tree
 - It was our own humanity that bothered us about ourselves
 3. Think about what we had just done
 - We had eaten from this tree, a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil
 - In doing so, we lost our bearings on who we were
 - We were trying to imagine that we could eat from the Master's tree because we could make the rules
 - But if you pretend to be the master, you don't know who you are anymore, you get uncomfortable with your own skin
 4. After that sin, we got a second chance to rectify that sin – through voice

- God approached us with his voice, calling out to us
 - We could have responded to that voice with our own voice
 - Acknowledging our sin, but still called out to Him
 - How would history be different?
5. But we didn't, we hid, continued to play master, and we were exiled from Eden
- People continued to think of themselves as the arbiters of good and evil
 - They continued to identify right and wrong with what they liked to do, with disastrous results
 - Indeed, Israel itself were victims of this delusion
 - They were oppressed in backbreaking Egyptian slavery
 - No moral qualms there in the Egyptian view of good and evil!
 - These Israelites are strangers, not even really human

III. Now, at Sinai, even before Ten Commandments

- a) Are you prepared just to hear My voice? (Exodus 19:5)
- b) If you are, we can rectify the disaster that happened when you left the Garden
 1. You'll understand who I am - your Creator
 2. You'll understand who you are - the creature in the presence of the Creator
 3. Will that make you uncomfortable?
 4. Will you have butterflies in your stomach when you encounter me?
 - Of course you will, and it's okay
 - This is the good kind of fear, the fear that redeems the corrupted fear from the Garden when you were hiding
 - Awe, true product of an encounter between creator and me
 - It's not the shameful kind of fear of hiding from yourself

IV. At Sinai there was the sound of the shofar, the voice of God without words

- a) Just after that, God gives the Ten Commandments
- b) It's just really a formality at that point – because we've already heard God's voice
 1. We understood who He was, and who we were
 - He's the creator; we're the creature
 - We understand and accept that He is the ultimate lawgiver
- c) Now, we're just accepting the laws themselves
 1. We accept that You can make the rules, that You decide right and wrong
 2. Now tell us what right and wrong is

V. All told, if our experience in the Garden was a failure to recognize God's leadership, Sinai was a second chance

- a) When Israel said, everything God said, we will do (Exodus 19:8), they replayed the events of the Garden and redeemed themselves
- b) So do we, every year when we remember that day
 1. We remember that voice on Rosh Hashanah
 2. We crown God anew
- c) Kingship, then, is the central theme that flows from Rosh Hashanah as a Day of the Remembrance of the Shofar at Sinai
 1. Kingship is not the only theme that flows from it
 2. Kingship has implications concerning some of the other great themes of Rosh Hashanah: Judgment, memory, and shofar

◀ SEGMENT 4: ENTERING GOD'S STORY – VIDEO OUTLINE ▶

In this video, Rabbi Fohrman shifts his focus to the theme of remembrance and memory, explaining that there is a great soundtrack to life that only the Creator is privy to, which helps connect our lives. He then focuses on the theme of shofar as our way of communicating with God and asking to be a part of that soundtrack.

- I. Talked about kingship aspect of Rosh Hashanah in last video
 - a) Sages insist that kingship is followed by verses of memory
 - b) Does memory, too, take us back to the Sinai experience?
 1. Go back to Sinai and really consider that experience
 - c) As wonderful as Torah and accepting God's kingship is, Sinai can also provoke a crisis.
 - If you experience Revelation, the being who originated the universe is right here and you are standing on the ground
 - It changes everything; who are you anymore?
 - You are tiny in the face of immensity
 - You are so overwhelmed that you are in danger of losing your entire sense of self
 - Your little story doesn't seem to matter anymore
- II. That is the crisis; but if kingship provokes that crisis, it also contains the seeds of an answer to it. Those seeds are known as remembrance, the notion of God's memories; an idea of memory
 - a) What does memory do? What, exactly, is its function?
 1. Memory helps you remember, right?
 2. Memory does more than that
 - It's actually the way we understand ourselves and who we are
 - Identity, itself, is wrapped up in the idea of memory
 3. Memory is really about story telling
 - When you remember things, you're actually connecting the dots between your experiences, weaving them together to form a story
 - That's actually the only way you do remember anything
 - How easy would it be to remember 75 disconnected things? Or 1000?
 - When you remember things that happened to you yesterday, you remember them like a story, weaving together those dots into one memorable story
 - When we remember our lives, we're remembering a story that we tell ourselves
 - Our identity emerges from that story
 4. Some points in life are more important to the story than others
 - Some disconnected dots don't contribute to the grand story of life
 - The crisis of kingship: If there is a king in this universe, maybe there's a grander story than this one
 - b) Maybe the Creator has a story
 1. That's a scary notion – we don't know the Creator's story
 - A good friend once called Rabbi Fohrman the day before Rosh Hashanah
 - He said, the trouble with life is that it doesn't come with a soundtrack

- A soundtrack to a film helps you understand the film
2. You think your life is about your story
 - But maybe the Creator, in His story, has a different perspective
 - Maybe the dots we don't think of as being meaningful really are meaningful, and everything needs to be seen as how to connect to those dots
 - Maybe your life is viewed differently in the Master's view
 3. You don't know what the soundtrack is for your life
 - On one level, that's scary, but it's deeply comforting on another level
 - If there is a Creator, there is a grand soundtrack out there
 - There is a story in the universe, and you could be part of that
 - If you could be a dot that connects in some visceral way, how could there be more meaning in life than that?
- III. We speak about Rosh Hashanah as the opening of the Days of Awe
- a) What is awe?
 1. We feel awe when we're in the presence of the Grand Canyon or stars at night
 2. Why do you feel awe? Just because you feel like you are small, and this is big?
 3. You feel awe when you get a sense of a larger story
 - b) You want to be a part of that larger story
 1. If you want, you don't have to
 2. You can continue telling your own story, but at what price?
 - In Harry Potter, there is a moment when Harry is at Platform 9 3/4, and he's trying to figure out where the train to Hogwarts is
 - He asks someone, and he doesn't know
 - Imagine you're that person, and then you read about yourself in the Harry Potter books, realizing you're part of something bigger
 - In that moment of revelation, when you see the creator and realize there's a story here, the Sinai moment as it were, what do you want most deeply?
 - You want to petition the author and ask for a bigger role!
 - You don't just want to be the guy Harry asked about the train!
 - c) How can you be weaved into the story more significantly?
 1. On the one hand, Sinai, the encounter with kingship, implies Judgment
 - But that Judgment is a glorious thing
 - It's not Judgment in order to be punitive, in order to see what terrible things you should be subjected to, in order to pay for your sins
 - This Judgment is a marvelous opportunity to be a part of the grand, unfolding story - take me in!
 2. How do you make that plea to the author?
- IV. This brings us to shofar, the final element of kingship, remembrance, and shofar
- a) The author knows you better than you know yourself
 1. What are you going to do? Come to the author and argue with him?
 2. How do you make the case to be included in the story?
 - b) Think about the moment of Revelation itself in our national experience. How did we confront the Author?
 1. We heard His voice

- We heard the untrammelled cry and ethereal sound of the shofar
- It wasn't a physical shofar, but it was the sound that the Almighty channeled towards us as a way of reaching out to say, "Here is who I am" in the deepest way He could represent himself to us
- 2. The most powerful thing we could do is to match voice with voice, to give our voice back to the Almighty in the deepest way we can
 - Not with words, but with something deeper than words – the shofar
- 3. When we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, on one level we are remembering the cry of the shofar we heard at Sinai
 - We are showing that we remember by echoing that voice – and we are matching that voice with a voice that comes from us
 - If God revealed himself to us most deeply through that voice, we reveal ourselves, in turn, to God most deeply through our shofar calling
 - The Sages confirm this – we say verses of remembrance so that God will bring us into the web of His memory, but the way we will truly be remembered: through shofar (Babylonian Talmud - Rosh Hashanah 16a)
- c) It goes all of the way back to the Garden, the first time we heard God's voice
 1. He was reaching out to us with His voice
 2. That moment was catastrophic
 - We hid from the voice and from ourselves
 - We couldn't bear to understand who we were
 - We were choosing to think that we're the ultimate master, and we're going to continue doing our own thing
 3. Back in the Garden, what could Adam and Eve have done?
 - They had just sinned and eaten from the tree
 - Maybe they were afraid of the Master's story - they had sinned; maybe there wasn't a place in their story anymore
 - What could they have done in that moment?
 - They could have matched voice with voice, expressing that the deepest desire they have is to be part of His story
 - God, the great arbiter of good and evil, will decide what fits

V. Kingship provokes a crisis - the possible loss of self

- a) But remembrance and shofar provide the deepest of answers to that crisis
 1. You can be more meaningful than you ever thought possible
 2. You could be part of God's story
- b) So on these Days of Awe, Rabbi Fohrman wants you to let go of the way you've approached the holiday for years: fearful, dour, nervous, a little depressed
 1. Embrace this day emotionally and spiritually
 - Let go of the fear of Judgment, revel in being part of God's story
 2. That seems like a tall order, and what if he's wrong?
 - Rosh Hashanah isn't a good day to get wrong
 - Is there any additional evidence?

◀ SEGMENT 5: HERE IS MY VOICE – VIDEO OUTLINE ▶

In this final video, Rabbi Fohrman connects the narrative in the Book of Nehemiah to that of the Revelation at Sinai, showing the parallels that exist and showing that even seemingly insignificant events can have deeper meaning in the grand story.

- I. The last few videos have advanced a theory of Rosh Hashanah which may seem new
 - a) Maybe we should fact check it a little bit
 - b) Does this theory really work?
 - c) Go back to the only episode in Tanach of a Rosh Hashanah celebration (Nehemiah), looking for evidence of the themes we've been discussing

- II. Nehemiah 8
 - a) What's the point of this story?
 1. What is Nehemiah telling us by relating the details of this Rosh Hashanah?
 1. Pay attention to any superfluous details in the narrative; is there anything that is apparently trivial that gets included for no good reason?
 - b) General story
 1. Takes place about 70 years after Nebuchadnezzar has conquered the land of Israel and exiled inhabitants to Babylonia
 2. Small band of people coming back to try to rebuild life in ancestral homeland
 - The richer class and well-off people stayed behind in Babylonia
 - The people who come seem to be rather ignorant
 3. They find this Torah scroll and don't seem to be so aware of what's in the Torah
 - Ezra and Nehemiah constantly tell them to stay away from intermarriage, but they are doing it anyway
 - They're not aware it's even Rosh Hashanah until Nehemiah tells them
 - They don't have that much going for them in terms of infrastructure
 - This is the group of people there with Ezra and Nehemiah
 4. The people gather together - it seems like Nehemiah is going out of his way to give the exact place (Nehemiah 8:1)
 - Why would we need to know that they gathered on the street?
 5. They found a Torah scroll and asked Ezra to bring it, and he does (Nehemiah 8:1-3) - we are told again about the specific location
 6. He reads all morning until midday
 - It seems like it's new to them; they cried (Nehemiah 8:9)
 - Rashi: they cry because they don't feel as if they are actually observing this Torah well enough, they barely know what's written in it
 7. Meanwhile, Ezra is standing on a platform made of wood that had been made specifically for this event (Nehemiah 8:4) - do we need to know this detail?
 8. Then we hear about the people that surrounded Ezra, to his right and left
 - They seem to be like extras in a movie
 - The names are also really strange
 - It seems kind of coincidental - Shema, שמע, is related to listening, and next to him is a guy named עניא, Anaiah, which means "answering"

- There are others on his left; why do we need to know about all of this?
- 9. Ezra reads, and when he's done reading, he blesses God, and all of the people answer (Nehemiah 8:6)
 - Does it remind you of anything in the Torah itself?
- c) Replay the elements of this event
 1. When else was there an entire nation, as described here, gathered together as if they were one person?
 2. When else were people listening to the Torah God had commanded Moses?
 3. When else was one man set apart, a little bit higher than the rest of them?
 4. When else did the people answer "yes, yes!" when they heard it?
- d) It sounds pretty reminiscent of the Revelation of the Torah at Sinai
 1. Revelation is something that hits you in the eyes, and it's new
 2. It was ultimately new at the Revelation itself, but here are those people who are unaware of what was written in the Torah
 - It's new to them, it's like a big Revelation to them!
 3. It sounds like it's an echo of the very first Revelation!
 - There, the people gathered - they were gathered around this mountain
 - There, too, they were all together, standing as one
 - There, too, they were listening to the Torah
 - There, too, there was a man who was perched higher than them
 - There, too, the people answered "yes!"
- e) It's not just the general themes; even the specific words are the same
 1. Ezra opens up the scroll and reads it "in the eyes of all of the people" / לְעֵינֵי כָל- (Nehemiah 8:5)
 - It sounds like an ordinary phrase, but it only appears one other time, at Sinai when God descended לְעֵינֵי כָל-הָעָם (Exodus 19:11)
 2. The people say וַיִּעֲנוּ כָל-הָעָם אָמֵן אָמֵן (Nehemiah 8:6)
 - That phrase also appears only one other time when, at Sinai, they say that everything God has said, they will do - וַיִּעֲנוּ כָל-הָעָם (Exodus 19:8)
- f) It really sounds as if the Nehemiah/Ezra event is echoing the original Revelation at Sinai
 1. It seems to be a message that Nehemiah is conveying with word play as well
 2. Look at some of the superfluous elements
 - Remember the street? Who cares that they are on a street
 - Sinai is known as Horev – same letters, but rearranged - רחב
 - What about all of the people on the right and left of Ezra?
 - By listening to their names, they are familiar from Sinai
 - Mattithiah, the gift given by God; what was Sinai about? The Torah given by God
 - Next Shema and Anaiyah, hearing and answering; what happened at Sinai? The people heard the voice of God and answered that everything God says, they will do
 - On the left of Ezra is a man named Pedaiah, meaning "redeemed by God," which is exactly how God introduces himself at Sinai; he redeemed the people from Egypt
 - Next there is a man named Malchijah, God is King; what was Sinai about? it was about God's revealing himself as King

- Zechariah, the remembrance of God; echo of theme from Rosh Hashanah
- What about Hashbaddanah? Seems like a contraction of the words meaning "to think" and "to judge" - What is the Sinai day that Rosh Hashanah commemorates year after year? Day when God is King, when God remembers, and a day when God thinks of his creatures and figures out where they fit/judges them

3. It all evokes Sinai

III. Now, why? What, exactly, is the message here?

a) Nehemiah associates this Rosh Hashanah with Sinai and the original Revelation

1. It does seem to support our idea that Rosh Hashanah is linked to Revelation at Sinai, is a replay of that day
2. Is that the purpose of Nehemiah? To teach that Rosh Hashanah is linked to Sinai?

b) Perhaps Nehemiah's point is something a little more nuanced than that

1. See it by looking a little more closely at some of the parallels
2. Yes, it's true that the Sinai Revelation seems to be playing itself over again, but not exactly the same way
 - There is no mountain this time around
 - Instead of Horev, the mountain, there's just this little street
 - A mountain is a big God-made edifice, and this is a little flat, man-made street
 - There's no God coming out of the sky this time around
 - Horev stretched out to the heavens
 - This time around, the street just meets the water gate - not *shamayim*, שמים, but *shaar-hamayim*, שַׁעַר-הַמַּיִם
 - A water gate actually has the same function as the heavens
 - שמים, *shamayim*, as the Torah first describes it way back in Genesis, was the sky that separated between two bodies of water - the upper waters (clouds) and lower waters (seas)
 - That's what the water gate is, except man-made, not God-made

3. Everything is so diminished in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah

- The crowd is smaller, it's a little street, it's a little gate of water
- Yes, the man talking to the people is standing on something, but it isn't a big, imposing mountain; it's a little platform

4. That is the whole point of Nehemiah – it didn't look like much

- That was the people's point, too
- That's why they were crying, they felt insignificant
- Here they were in a ruined Jerusalem on a crazy, idealistic mission to come back and try to rebuild this land
 - There was no infrastructure, no great Jewish state
 - It was just them and Ezra and Nehemiah
 - They were excited to find this Torah, but they were sad to hear it because it wasn't familiar at all
 - It's a revelation to them
 - Half of them are intermarried

- They don't even know it's Rosh Hashanah, so they cry
- Nehemiah addresses them and tells them to stop crying
 - This day is holy to the Master, and that delight is your strength (Nehemiah 8:9-11)
- The Torah was just read for six hours, and they listened
 - They may find themselves deficient in thinking about some of its dictates, but the Torah contains God's vision of good and evil
 - The people want to be part of that vision – they need strength
 - Part of the delight of God
- Apparently insignificant life might seem like nothing
 - The return to Jerusalem is part of everything, too
 - These people were building the Second Temple
 - They are playing starring roles in Jewish history

IV. Interesting curiosity in text

- a) When they go home and celebrate that day, Nehemiah describes it as *simchah gedolah*, שמחה גדולה - a great rejoicing (Nehemiah 8:12)
 1. That phrase is only used one other time - at Solomon's coronation (I Kings 1:40)
 2. The height of kingship for the nation - Solomon, builder of the First Temple
- b) It's like Nehemiah is drawing attention to the echoes
 1. What they are doing is just as significant as Solomon's coronation
 2. He was the builder of the First Temple, and they are the builders of the Second
 - It's coronation day, but there's no earthly king, only God
 - It's Rosh Hashanah, the day the King comes into our lives

V. You don't know what the larger story is, the soundtrack – only the Master knows

- a) That's what Nehemiah was telling the people
 1. They don't get to hear the violins, but they are there
 2. The echoes of Sinai and of Solomon's coronation are here
- b) What's going on today matters, if only you could hear the Master's soundtrack

VI. Here we are 24 centuries after Nehemiah

- a) What does Rosh Hashanah mean to us?
 1. We wonder whether anything we do really matters in the grand scheme
 2. We wonder about our sins and whether we are worthy
 - Maybe Nehemiah's words continue to serve us well
 - The delight of God is your strength
- b) Rosh Hashanah is not a day to be sad or to be weighed down with guilt
 1. It's a day to approach God and say, "This is my voice; I've heard your voice."
 2. I remember the shofar blast in my collective memory
- c) Here's my voice, my most genuine self
 1. Just want to be part of this great story, can You delight in me?
 2. Can You help me find a role and advance Your purposes somehow
 3. Bring me into the weave as a human being
- d) I know, through You, I can be part of everything