

Hoshana Rabbah 5787: The Last Open Gate

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 2 October 2026

Daily Learning Portions through the Elul Arc, Sealed on 21 Tishrei

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Friday, 2 October 2026 / 21 Tishrei 5787

Hoshana Rabbah — seventh day of Sukkot; Erev Shabbat; in Jerusalem, Erev Shemini Atzeret–Simchat Torah

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Today's Portions

- **Hebrew date:** 21 Tishrei 5787, Friday, Hoshana Rabbah (Chol HaMoed in status, yet a day of judgment in substance).
- **Seasonal place:** Not Elul. Elul opened the field; Rosh Hashanah wrote; Yom Kippur sealed; Hoshana Rabbah is the day the sealed notes are delivered. The Elul themes — teshuvah, bechirah, the King in the Field, cheshbon hanefesh, limited power under higher law — are applied here as their last living window.
- **Chumash:** Parashat Vezot Haberachah, sixth aliyah, Devarim 33:27–29, with Rashi.
- **Tehillim (monthly cycle):** Chapters 104–105.
- **Tanya:** Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 23, middle: from the allotment of reward as illumination of “the soul that seeks Him” through the light of Torah, to the close on reward given by chesed, “for You repay each man according to his deeds.”
- **Rambam:** Three-chapter cycle at the hinge of Sefer Taharah and Sefer Nezikin — Hilchot Mikvaot 8–10 as indexed at the turn of this civil date, or, one day further in the same sequence, Mikvaot 11 and Hilchot Nizkei Mammon 1–2. One-chapter cycle continues on its three-year track. Sefer HaMitzvot tracks the commandments of the three-chapter group: immersion unto fitness, and liability for harm.
- **Hayom Yom (21 Tishrei):** In the Tikun of Hoshana Rabbah night, Parashat Berachah is said once. (The Previous Rebbe instructed certain individuals to say it with Rashi; this was not a general instruction.) On Erev Simchat Torah, Berachah is said twice and its Targum once. Before Hallel, remove the top two rings from the lulav, leaving the three that bind lulav, hadassim, and aravot. The entry also lists eiruv tavshilin; this year none is made, since Yom Tov falls on Shabbat itself. On Hoshana Rabbah the hamotzi piece is dipped in honey; not on Shemini Atzeret or Simchat Torah.
- **Customs of the day:** Night learning — many remained awake last night, completing Devarim and Tehillim. Hoshanot: seven circuits. Aravah: a bundle of five willows, struck toward the ground five times after the circuits. Festive meal in the sukkah. In Jerusalem, this is the last day of the sukkah obligation. Honey on the bread, for the last time. Yahrzeit candle this evening, before holiday candles, because Yizkor is tomorrow. No eiruv tavshilin this year, since Yom Tov falls on Shabbat itself.

I. The Date Governs the Lens

This reading does not invent a new daily curriculum. The permanent structure remains: the aliyah, the psalms of the day of the month, the Tanya portion, the Rambam cycle, the Hayom Yom. What changes is the light in which they are read.

On an ordinary Friday in Elul, that light is the King who has left the palace and is in the field, receivable by any subject who turns. Today the calendar will not permit that sentence to be written as if it were still Elul. Friday, 2 October 2026, is 21 Tishrei 5787, Hoshana Rabbah. The field-season has done its work. The books have been written and sealed. What remains, in the language of the Zohar, is delivery.

The Zohar in Pekudei describes the judgment of Tishrei in three stages rather than two: writing on Rosh Hashanah, sealing on Yom Kippur, and the going-forth of the decree-notes — the *pitkin* — from the King's house on Hoshana Rabbah. A sealed envelope still inside the palace can be recalled. Once it has been handed to those appointed to carry it out, the window has closed. An adjacent Zoharic strand (Vayechi) treats Hoshana Rabbah itself as the sealing, and Shemini Atzeret as the point after which the verdict stands. Either way, the practical halachic and kabbalistic consensus of the day is the same: this is the last open gate of the season that began in Elul.

That is the honest frame. Elul is not restaged. Elul is completed.

In Jerusalem the day carries a further edge. Tonight is Erev Shemini Atzeret, and in Eretz Yisrael Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are one day. The sukkah is left after today. The honey is set down after today. The Torah is completed and begun again tomorrow. The family that dips bread in honey this morning is performing the last sweetness of a season of judgment, not the first.

II. The Aliyah: An Ancient Dwelling above the Arms of the World

The sixth aliyah of Vezot Haberachah is three verses, and they are the close of Moshe's blessings before the narrative of his death.

מענה אלהי קדם ומתחת זרעת עולם ויגרש מפניך אויב ויאמר השמד. וישכן ישראל בטח בדד עין יעקב אל ארץ דגן ותירוש אף שמיז
יערפו טל. אשריך ישראל מי כמוך עם נושע ביקוק מגן עורך ואשר חרב גאותך ויכחשו איביך לך ואתה על במותימו תדרך

“A dwelling is the G-d of old; beneath Him, the arms of the world. He drove the enemy out from before you and said, Destroy. Israel dwells in safety, alone, the fountain of Jacob, in a land of grain and wine; his heavens too drip dew. Fortunate are you, Israel. Who is like you, a people saved by the L-rd, the Shield of your help, and Who is the Sword of your majesty. Your enemies shall come cringing to you, and you shall tread upon their high places.”

Rashi reads *me'onah* as the skies appointed for the dwelling of the G-d who preceded every other claim to power. Beneath that dwelling sit *zero'ot olam* — Sichon, Og, and the kings of Canaan, the strong men of the world. They tremble not because Israel has become a rival absolute, but because fear of the higher falls upon the lower. Power is real. It is not ultimate. The verse then does not hand Israel a blank warrant. It says that He drove the enemy out, and that He said “Destroy.” The command is spoken. The sword is not self-authorizing.

On *betach badad*, Rashi is precise: each person under his vine and under his fig tree, scattered, with no need to cluster together out of fear of the enemy. Security is not the abolition of solitude. It is solitude that does not have to become a garrison. *Ein Yaakov* is the blessing of Jacob added to the blessing of Yitzchak — dew from heaven upon grain and wine — and not the bitter solitude of Yirmiyahu's "I sat alone."

The last verse refuses inventory. After the tribal blessings, Moshe says, in Rashi's paraphrase: why should I specify further? All of it is yours. Salvation is *ba-Hashem*. The Shield is the help. The Sword of majesty is His. The enemies' denial — Rashi's example is the Gibeonites, who concealed themselves as wayfarers — and the treading upon high places, as Yehoshua set feet upon the necks of kings, are the aftermath of a salvation that was not seized from below.

Elul, completed in these three verses

Elul's King in the Field is the same G-d of old who is not locked in the palace of inaccessibility. *Me'onah Elokei kedem* is not a distant bureaucrat. The Ancient One has a dwelling that faces the world, and beneath it every arm of worldly power is already subordinate. The field-accessibility of Elul and the heavenly dwelling of this verse are not opposites. The King can walk in the field only because His authority is not one more arm among the arms of the world. He is not campaigning for a share of sovereignty. He precedes the contest.

Free will sits inside the verse "and He said, Destroy." A people that is merely an instrument does not need to be addressed. A people addressed can refuse, delay, or obey. Hoshana Rabbah does not repeal *bechirah*. The notes have not yet left the house. The same will that could turn in Elul can still turn while the willow is still in the hand.

Cheshbon hanefesh is the verse's refusal of self-salvation. *Am nosha ba-Hashem* — a people saved by the L-rd — is a political theology of non-usurpation. The Shield and the Sword are not offices Israel fills by force of will and then holds against Heaven. National strength is real, and the aliyah blesses it. National strength that forgets the dwelling above it has become one more *zero'a olam*, and the verse has already located those arms underneath.

The covenantal-republican resonance is in the text, and it does not need to be imported. Limited authority under higher law is *zero'ot olam* beneath *Elokei kedem*. Non-domination is *betach badad*: a people secure enough not to live in permanent mobilization against its own members or its neighbors, each household under vine and fig, not because the world has become harmless, but because protection has a source the household does not have to become. Consent and return remain possible because the people is spoken to, not merely used. Accountability is the last verse's warning hidden inside the blessing: fortune is ours because salvation is not our possession.

Traditional readings, held together

The pshat of Rashi is geographical and historical: skies as dwelling, Canaanite kings as the arms beneath, entry into a land of grain and dew, enemies brought low. The Sifrei, which Rashi cites, ties the dew to Yitzchak's blessing and the solitude to a peace that does not require crowding. Midrashic reading hears *Elokei kedem* as the G-d of the beginning, before the world, so that Israel's dwelling is guaranteed by a loyalty older than the enemy.

Chassidic reading does not cancel that. It interiorizes the arms of the world. The powers that pretend to be ultimate — habit, fear, status, the inner king who will not be audited — sit beneath the Ancient Dwelling whether or not a Canaanite city is in view. Hoshana Rabbah makes the interior reading urgent without making it exclusive. The circuits around the bimah recall the circuits around the altar. The national and the personal are one procession.

A clean synthesis: the aliyah blesses a people whose security is delegated, not seized; whose solitude is fruitful, not besieged; whose enemies fail, not because Israel has become the highest arm, but because the highest arm has spoken. On the day the decree-notes go out, that is the standard under which a Jew stands in the sukkah.

III. Tanya: A Light That Can Be Worn, and a Light That Can Only Be Given

Iggeret HaKodesh 23, in today's middle portion, distinguishes two relations of the soul to Divine light.

The allotment of reward, the Alter Rebbe writes, is what occurs when G-d illuminates “the soul that seeks Him” with the light of His Torah, which is truly the garment in which He clothes Himself. Through that garment the illumination enters the seeking soul. It is commensurate. It can be received by finite faculties. It can be received in this world. Torah study is not a ticket to be cashed later only. It is a vesting of light in the very powers that learned.

The other relation is *hashra'ah*, indwelling of a different order: an infinite radiance that cannot be vested in a finite soul, but encompasses it from head to foot, as the Shechinah rests over ten who sit and occupy themselves with Torah. That encompassing light is elicited above all by collective study and collective mitzvot. Angels, were they present at such a resting, would be nullified. The finite soul is not destroyed by it; it is surrounded. And because this world is finite, the Sages said that there is no reward for mitzvot in this world — meaning this infinite elicited radiance. It is received in the World to Come, and even there by way of chesed: “Yours, L-rd, is the chesed, for You repay a man according to his deeds.”

The Epistle thus holds a tension that Elul already knew and Hoshana Rabbah must not forget. There is a service that fits the vessel. There is a gift that exceeds the vessel. The first without the second becomes spiritual self-sufficiency. The second without the first becomes a piety that will not learn, will not bind tefillin, will not open a book, because only the infinite is thought worthy of the name light.

The garment and the field

Elul's image of the King in the Field is an image of accessibility without the abolition of kingship. Epistle 23 is the same structure in the register of light. Torah is the garment by which the inaccessible becomes learnable. The seeker is not asked to leap out of his faculties. He is asked to seek, and the seeking soul is given a light cut to the measure of the seeking. That is teshuvah as return into a receivable relation, not as theatrical self-erasure.

The encompassing light corresponds to the palace the King will re-enter. It cannot be worn on an ordinary afternoon. It is drawn down by the minyan, by shared learning, by mitzvot done as a people. Hoshana Rabbah night is, in practice, that drawing-down: a community awake over

Devarim and Tehillim, a bimah circled seven times, a Torah held at the center as the Midrash Tehillim pictures the chazzan standing with the scroll while Israel circuits as around the altar. The Alter Rebbe's "ten who sit" is not a metaphor on this night. It is the room.

Chesed as the mode of the infinite reward is the season's last word against despair. The vessel does not earn the encompassing light by becoming infinite. It is repaid according to deeds, and the repayment of what exceeds the deed is called chesed. On a day of judgment, that sentence is not indulgence. It is the reason the gate is still a gate.

Accountability inside the gift

"According to his deeds" preserves judgment inside mercy. Free will is not flattered and not cancelled. What was chosen can be answered for. What was chosen can still be revised before the notes leave. The Epistle refuses both the doctrine that finite service is nothing and the doctrine that finite service is everything. For chinuch, this is the sentence to put on the table: we learn because learning itself is a light we can bear; we learn together because there is a light none of us can bear alone; we do not confuse either light with an excuse.

IV. Tehillim 104 and 105: Garment, Creature, Covenant

The monthly portion is Tehillim 104–105, and the Hayom Yom confirms the same chapters for 21 Tishrei. They are also chapters a Jew may already have said in the night Tikun. Repetition today is not redundancy. It is the day hearing itself.

Psalm 104 opens, "Bless the L-rd, my soul. L-rd my G-d, You are very great; You are clothed in majesty and splendor." The Tanya's garment and the psalm's garment interpret one another. Creation is a clothing of majesty. Torah is a clothing of the same G-d for the sake of a seeking soul. The psalm then walks the six days: earth set upon foundations, the deep covered, waters fleeing at the rebuke, springs for the beasts, grass for the cattle, bread from the earth, wine and oil, the trees of the L-rd, the young lions seeking their food from G-d, the sun knowing its setting, and man going out to his work until evening. "How many are Your works, L-rd; all of them You made with wisdom."

Read from Elul through Hoshana Rabbah, the psalm is a cheshbon of dependence. Every creature seeks its food from G-d at its time. The pretension of the *zero'a olam* — that strength feeds itself — is refused by the young lions. Renewal is in the psalm's close: "You send forth Your spirit and they are created, and You renew the face of the earth." Teshuvah is not an exception to the created order. It is the human form of that sending-forth. A face can be renewed because the earth's face is renewed.

Psalm 105 turns from creature to covenant. "Give thanks to the L-rd, call on His name, make His deeds known among the peoples." The center is verse 8: "He remembers His covenant forever, the word He commanded for a thousand generations." Then the story: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef in irons, Moshe and Aharon, the plagues, the going-out with silver and gold, the cloud and the fire, the quail and the bread of heaven, water from the rock, and the land given so that they might keep His statutes.

Hoshana Rabbah does not invent a new covenant for the sake of a soft ending. It stands inside a remembrance older than the decree of this year. The pitkin go out from the King's house; the covenant does not go out with them. National return, in this psalm, is not a mood. It is the land given in order that statutes be kept. Personal return is the same structure in a single life: a place given in order that a life be livable under command.

The two psalms together are the aliyah's blessing in the register of prayer. Psalm 104 is grain, wine, dew, and the beasts seeking in their time. Psalm 105 is *am nosha ba-Hashem*, salvation narrated so that it cannot be mistaken for self-rescue. A family that says them in the sukkah on this morning is not adding poetry to the meal. It is placing the honey inside a covenant that outlasts the honey.

V. Rambam: Immersion, Then Liability

The three-chapter cycle stands at the end of Hilchot Mikvaot and the beginning of the laws of monetary damage. The indexed lesson at the turn of this civil date is Mikvaot 8–10; the next advance is Mikvaot 11 and Nizkei Mammon 1–2. The hinge matters more than the dispute of a single day.

Mikvaot is the law of fitness restored. Drawn water invalidates. Living water, or rainwater gathered under the conditions the halacha names, restores. Interposition — a barrier clinging to the body — blocks the immersion even when the water is valid. The quantity is measured. Intention and fact both have their place. This is teshuvah in legal form. Return is not a feeling that declares itself complete. Return is a body passing through water that is not our manufacture, with nothing interposed, in a measure the tradition fixed rather than the self.

Nizkei Mammon, as the cycle turns, is the other half of Elul. Damage creates liability. The ox, the pit, the fire, the human foot that trespasses — each is a case of power meeting a boundary. Strength that harms must answer. The Elul cheshbon and the Hoshana Rabbah delivery are not only about ritual fitness before G-d. They are about what our power did to another person's field. A republican intuition lives here without being borrowed from elsewhere: authority, including the small authority of ownership and animal and tool, is legitimate inside a law of liability and illegitimate as bare force. The King above the arms of the world is mirrored, at the scale of a courtyard, by a law that will not let an arm strike and walk away.

Sefer HaMitzvot, read beside these chapters, keeps the same pair: the commandment that immerses unto purity, and the commandments that forbid and price the harm one person does another. On the day the willows are struck, the striking is toward the ground, a sign of lowering, not a license to strike what is not ours.

VI. Hayom Yom: Rings, Honey, and a Portion Said Once

The Rebbe's entry for 21 Tishrei is practical, and the practice is the discourse.

In the night Tikun, Vezot Haberachah is said once. The Previous Rebbe told certain individuals to learn it with Rashi on this night; the instruction was not general. On Erev Simchat Torah the portion is said twice and the Targum once. The distinction teaches measure. Hoshana Rabbah night is a vigil of completion and pleading, not yet the dancing repetition of Simchat Torah. In

Jerusalem those two nights touch: last night the Tikun, tonight the hakafot. The child who sees both should be told that they are not the same joy. One is the last vigil of judgment. The other is the embrace of the Torah that judged us and remains ours.

Before Hallel, the top two rings of the lulav are removed. Three rings remain, binding lulav, hadassim, and aravot. The bundle is loosened at the top and held together at the heart of the mitzvah. Elul's work was a loosening of what had stiffened, without the dissolution of the bond. The species stay bound. The extra rings, serviceable on the earlier days, are set aside when the day of seven circuits arrives. Not every restraint remains in force at the same tightness. The bond itself is not optional.

Eiruv tavshilin is named in the entry, but this year none is made. In Jerusalem tomorrow's Yom Tov, Shemini Atzeret–Simchat Torah, falls on Shabbat itself; the eiruv is needed only when Yom Tov falls on Friday, so that cooking may continue into Shabbat. The law will not let urgency erase a boundary; where one must be crossed, it provides a legal act by which the boundary is honored and the need is met. This year there is nothing to cross: the cooking is finished before candle lighting. That too is limited power under higher law in the kitchen.

Honey on the hamotzi piece, today and not tomorrow. Sweetness has a term. The season of dipping does not quietly become the whole year. Children should see the honey pot put away. Judgment is sweetened; it is not denied; and the sweetening ends on schedule, so that Simchat Torah is not a continuation of the plea but a different standing before the same Torah.

VII. Avodah for the Last Open Gate

The practical service of this day is not a new resolution list. Elul already asked for the list. Hoshana Rabbah asks whether the list has become an act before the notes leave the house.

Those who stayed for some real part of last night's learning kept the classical Tikun: Devarim completed, Tehillim completed. A household that could not sustain the night can still, before candles, sustain a single aliyah with Rashi — today's three verses — and Tehillim 104–105 said slowly enough that “He remembers His covenant forever” is heard as a sentence about this year.

The seven circuits are said as people who still have bechirah, not as people performing a souvenir of the Temple. *Hoshana* is a plea to save. The willow bundle is taken as a lowering. Five strikes toward the earth: the arms of the world put down under the Ancient Dwelling.

The meal is in the sukkah. In Jerusalem it is the last such obligatory meal of the chag. Bread is dipped in honey for the last time. Something should be named aloud at the table that is being released — a grudge, a pretense, a dominance inside the house that the season has already judged. The naming should be small enough to be true.

Tzedakah before Shabbat and Yom Tov is the classic partner of teshuvah and tefillah in the Unetaneh Tokef's own formula, and it remains available today. A gift given on the day of delivery is not too late.

The cooking for Shabbat and Yom Tov is finished before candle lighting; no eiruv tavshilin is made this year, since Yom Tov falls on Shabbat itself. The yahrzeit candle is lit before the holiday candles, because memory of the dead belongs to the day of Yizkor and must not be crowded out by the beauty of the festival lights.

VIII. Chinuch: What a Child Should See

A child does not need the Zohar's map of pitkin to understand this day. He needs to see that adults are still capable of asking to be saved on the seventh day, after the great days have passed. The danger of chinuch around the High Holidays is that children learn a theater of seriousness that ends when the guests leave. Hoshana Rabbah contradicts that theater. The sukkah is still standing. The willows are unbeautiful by design. The night is long. The honey is real and then it is finished.

Show the three remaining rings. Say that we loosen what we no longer need and keep what binds the mitzvah together. Show the sukkah in Jerusalem and say that tomorrow we will not eat there, not because the mitzvah bored us, but because its time ended. Time that ends is a teacher of limited power.

Read the three verses with them. *Ashrekha Yisrael* can be said to a child without irony. Fortune is not the absence of judgment. Fortune is a people saved by a Shield it does not have to become.

If a child asks whether the decision is already final, the honest answer is the traditional one: written, sealed, and not yet beyond mercy. We do not know the heavenly procedure. We know the human procedure. We learn, we give, we strike the willow downward rather than upward, and we enter Shabbat and Shemini Atzeret as people still addressed.

IX. Synthesis

Different traditional lines emphasize different hours of this day. Halacha emphasizes the aravah, the circuits, the sukkah, the status of the day as Chol HaMoed with a distinctive prayer. The Zohar emphasizes the going-forth of the decree. Midrash Tehillim emphasizes the circuit around the scroll as around the altar. Rashi on the aliyah emphasizes subordinate worldly power, secure solitude, and a salvation that is G-d's. The Alter Rebbe emphasizes a light the soul can wear and a light only chesed can give. The Hayom Yom emphasizes measure: once, not twice; two rings removed, three retained; honey today, not tomorrow.

They do not need to be ranked. The banner they raise together is this: the last open gate is still a gate; the arms of the world remain beneath the Ancient Dwelling; return is still an act of a free person; reward is real and not identical with self-measurement; covenant outlasts the year's decree; and a house in Jerusalem can close the sukkah, put away the honey, finish its cooking before candles, and walk into Simchat Torah having told the truth about the season that began in Elul.

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