



## Rosh Hashanah: The Silent Sound of the Shofar

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles  
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

In the *Mussaf Amidah* of Rosh Hashanah we ask Hashem to remember the *akeidah*, the binding of Isaac. In the shofrot section of the *Amidah* we refer to the shofar blasts at Sinai. What is the connecting theme between the *shofar*, the *akeidah* and Sinai? And if Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, why don't we mention *teshuvah* or *viduy* (confession) at all?

Rabbi Walkin notes that the *mitzvot* associated with the other holidays don't constitute the essence of that holiday. Eating or not eating *matzah* does not change Pesach, but listening to the *shofar* makes Rosh Hashanah *Yom Teruah*. The purpose of the *shofar* is to arouse our hearts to *teshuvah* as the Rambam writes, "Wake up, sleepers from your sleep...examine your deeds and perform repentance."

What is this sleep? Rabbi Schwab on Prayer observes that removing sleep from our eyes is part of the morning blessings, but it appears out of place, as the last of the blessings instead of the first. Perhaps it is different from the daily sleep we experience each night. After Hashem created Adam, He put him into a deep, trance-like sleep in order to separate him and form Chava. Before this sleep, Adam was fully conscious of God's presence. Then Hashem put him to sleep. But the Torah never says that Adam awoke. Adam and all mankind has been in that sleep state now for thousands of years. The goal of the *shofar* blast is to wake us up to the level of consciousness Man had before that sleep, a consciousness we experienced as isolated flashes in our history, such as during the Exodus, the splitting of the Sea, and at Har Sinai.

How can we try to actualize this conscious-

ness? Our first thought upon hearing the *shofar* must be that I am doing God's will. Whether or not I understand the reason for the shofar, I submit myself fully to His will as we did at Sinai. The service of the day, writes Rav Lugassi, is to connect to God as our King, to be totally dependent on Him, and to submit completely to Him. For this reason a *shofar* from a cow's horn is not kosher for Rosh Hashanah, for it is reminiscent of the golden calf, notes the Talmud. When we blow the shofar, explains the Talalei Chaim, we should imagine ourselves in a state of intimacy with Hashem, akin to that of the *kohen gadol* on Yom Kippur when he entered the Holy of Holies.

This world is a world of mistakes and trance-like sleep. The *shofar* lets us enter the Holy of Holies within ourselves and puts us in contact with our pure souls, for the only way you can blow the *shofar* is by releasing your breath into it, the breath through which God blew the soul into Man at creation. The sound and shape of the *shofar* are meant to break through barriers, to bring us from the narrow point of our lives to open, unstricted space. We can imagine Hashem Himself blowing the *shofar* and calling us back to Him, writes the Shem Mishmuel.

The very sounds of the *shofar* are symbolic of the message of hope for the New Year, writes Rabbi Y. Emmet. Citing Rav A. Soloveitchik, he explains that we are in the troubled state of *teruah*, entangled if not in sin itself, at least in the uncertainty of life. But we started with a strong *tekiyah* of our past, of the pure *neshamah* at our source, and we end with the strong *tekiyah* of hope for purity in the future. Just as Abraham's ram was caught in the thicket by its horns, so are we caught in the entanglements of our sins and troubles all

year. Hashem commanded us to take a *shofar* to remind us that we need to wake up and change our routine to enable us to get out of our entanglements, and then to end with hope that we can return to that initial pure state.

According to one opinion, on Rosh Hashana Hashem conceived the idea of creating the world. So too, writes the *Shaarei Derech*, on this day we go back to the state of thought. Just as Hashem "thought" before He took action, so must we think before we do. *Yiddishkeit* says we are responsible for our thoughts as well as for our actions. In action, circumstances can get in the way of our performance, but nothing can stand in the way of our desire. Our desire itself must be strong and pure. On Rosh Hashanah we are being judged for our thoughts and the strength of our desire to be close to Hashem.

Rabbi Kluger notes that there are three books open before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, the Books of Life, of Death, and of the In Between. These are the imprints in our minds according to our priorities. If God's will is primary, if what we desire is to do His will - even though we often do not succeed - we are in the Book of Life. If earthly pleasures are primary, we are already in the Book of Death. Most of us are in the middle. What motivates the individual will outweigh his actions.

One is judged according to one's current priorities, not the future or the past. We don't say *viduy* on Rosh Hashanah, because Rosh Hashanah is about finding out where we are and making concrete changes, of going back to a place of purity. We ask Hashem to help us improve ourselves and lead us back to Him. May the *shofar* blasts enter our souls and awaken our desire to do His will.



## The Beginning: Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The purpose of this world is to be *marbeh kavod shamayim*, to increase the honor of heaven. Obviously Hashem doesn't need honor. How can we understand this? The root word of *kavod* is *kaved*, weight. To be *marbeh kavod shamayim* is to give weight to the relationship one has with Hashem. It's making spirituality the prime factor in our lives and it is a goal we should all aim to reach.

David Hamelech said, "*Ura kevodi*, wake up my honor." The commentators explain that *kavod* refers to the soul. David Hamelech asks Hashem, "Arouse my soul. Make me realize what is most important in my life." Chazal teach us, "*Kol hamevazeh et ha'moadot ein lo chelek l'olam habah*. One who shames the holidays has no share in the world to come." This seems like quite a severe punishment for a seemingly minor infraction. Yet it indicates where a person's spiritual level is at. Holidays contain a special holy potential. A person who recognizes this approaches these days in a very different way. Losing *olam habah* is not a punishment. It's a statement of one's relationship with Hashem. The definition of the world to come is closeness to Hashem. If the holiness of

*yom tov* doesn't matter to you, then even if you will receive *olam haba* it won't mean anything to you.

Similarly Chazal say, "*Hamalbin pnei chavero b'rabim ein lo chelek l'olam haba*. One who shames his friend in public has no share in the world to come." If someone murders a person and then repents, he can still get *olam habah*. If you would ask someone, would you rather be insulted or killed of course they'd choose to be insulted. How then do we understand the severe punishment here? The inherent value of a person is the soul that Hashem blew into his nostrils. When you show disrespect to another person, you show that you do not value the spark of Hashem contained in the person. If a person does not have the means to appreciate *olam habah*, it cannot be a reward for him.

With the coming of Rosh Hashana we hope to change our actions. Moreover, we can to recreate ourselves by changing our outlook on life. The Torah says in Bereishit, "*Eleh toldot shamayim v'aretz b'hibaram*. These are the generations of heaven and earth when they were created." *B'hibaram* is written with a

small *heh*. Rashi comments, *b'heh baram*. Hashem created this world with a *heh* as the verse says, "*Ki b'kah Hashem tzur olamim*." Rashi points out that the *heh* is closed on three sides, while the bottom is open. This teaches that in this world we cannot remain stagnant. Either we aim upward or we automatically fall. One side of the *heh* is almost completely closed except for a small opening at the top. Rashi says if a person falls, he should climb up to this small opening and come back in.

Why shouldn't he try to re-enter from the bottom which is much easier? Just changing one's actions without elevating oneself will not lead to success. The only way to stick to one's resolutions and to hold on to one's teshuva is to revamp one's entire outlook. Otherwise a person remains the same person and will ultimately fall again. This is why we have Rosh Hashana before Yom Kippur. On Rosh Hashana, Hashem gives us the possibility to skip the first stages of *teshuva* so that we can transform ourselves. We can start at the end, experience rebirth, and then focus on repentance.

## Opening The Gates of the Machzor: Zichronot Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

Rosh Hashana is an auspicious day for miracles. We read in the Torah about how Hashem remembered Sarah and along with her all the other barren women and many sick people. On this day, Hashem remembered Rachel and Chana. Also, Yosef Hatzadik was released from jail. We ask Hashem, "On this day of great miracles, perform for us a miracle. Overcoming a negative *midah*, behaving as a mentch, being ehrlich, just being a good simple Jew, can only happen with your Divine assistance."

"*Teref natan li'reiav yizkor l'olam brito*. Hashem gives food to those who fear him and he remembers his covenant forever." The word *teref* is related to the word *tiruf*, which means insanity. The Sefat Emet explains that

there is so much insanity in this world. We ask Hashem, "Amid all the concealment, amid all the people running after futility and wasting their lives, *yizkor l'olam brito*, may I remember Your covenant, the purpose of my existence in this world." The Satmar Rebbe explains this verse differently. Hashem gives insanity to those who fear him. There were many great leaders in Klal Yisrael who came up with seemingly insane ideas which ultimately proved successful. When the Ponevezher Rav founded Ponevezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, World War II was raging. Everyone thought the idea was preposterous. Yet he proved them wrong. Today Ponevezh Yeshiva is one of the largest *yeshivot* in Israel.

"*Yizkor lahem brito v'hinachem k'rov chasa-*

*dov*. Hashem will remember the brit." We ask Hashem, "Although we have not lived up to your covenant, although we have strayed from the purpose of creation and from our roots, awaken your loving kindness, comfort us and bring us back to the covenant of the *avot*."

"*Zacharti lach chesed ne'ureiyich*." Hashem tells the prophet Yirmiyahu, "I remember the kindness of your youth, the love when we first got married, how you followed Me into the barren desert." This is the highlight of *Zichronot*. We ask Hashem, "Bring us back to that time when we actively pursued our mission on this earth. Bring us back to the moment when we were passionate and committed to serve You."