



**RABBI SHALOM**

**ROSNER**

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# The Sound of the Shofar

Why do we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana? There are several reasons given, but we will focus on three.

## **BREATH OF LIFE - ויפח באפיו**

There is a discussion in the gemara as to the month in which the world was created (Rosh Hashana 10b). Rabbi Eliezer posits that the world was created in the month of Tishrei while Rabbi Yehoshua believes the world was created in Nissan. The accepted view however, based on Hazal is that the world was created on the 25th of Elul and therefore man was created on Rosh Hashana! (see Vayikra Raba 29a; Shem M'Shmuel RH 37). Perhaps the act of blowing the shofar is a reminder of man being created by God blowing life into our souls as is stated:

וַיִּצַר ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה  
וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נֶשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.  
(בראשית ב:ז)

*And God formed man of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul.* (Bereshit 2:7).

On Rosh Hashana, when we stand before God in judgment, we are to recall that He is our creator, and our mission is to serve Him. Perhaps through the blowing of the shofar we are reminded of that breath that infused us with life – and are therefore

indebted to Him for having provided us with life.

## **COMPLETE THE PRAISE**

Rav Soloveitchik (Yemei Zikaron 140) views the shofar as a means to complete our praise of Hashem. We reach a point where we realize that we can never finish our praise of Hashem. There is a *gemara* in Brachot (33) that describes a situation that transpired in Rav Haninah's shul. The *hazan* was reciting the repetition of the *Amida* and inserted several descriptions of God, in addition to the standard descriptions that appear in the siddur (*hagadol, hagibor, vehanora*, which are derived from a biblical source).

Rabbi Hanina was very upset with the *hazan's* rendition. When the *Hazan* finished, Rav Haninah inquired – *did you cover all God's attributes?* When it comes to praising God, sometimes, *kol hamosif gorei'a* (supplementing with new ideas can detract from the praise). When it comes to praising God's greatness, it goes without saying that if we start using our own words, we can go on forever. We can never include a complete description of all of God's characteristics, so it is better to refrain from attempting to do so.

Perhaps the sound of the shofar is a means in which we are stating to God:

“please complete our prayers for us”. We want to praise you, but we are unable to do so as we are limited in our ability to express comprehensive praise.

Rav Soloveitchik asks why at the end of the service we recite *עלינו לשבח לאדון הכל* – that we are to praise the master of the world? This statement is something that should be said at the beginning of davening, rather than at its conclusion. The Rav explains that as we reach the end of the davening, we recognize that we are never done with *tefillah*. This statement is an acknowledgment of that fact. Even though we are about to leave shul, we ought to remain and continue praising God.

#### FILL IN THE BLANK

The sounding of the shofar is a form of prayer, albeit one without any words. At times, man becomes speechless. When another performs an act of *chesed* for us, we may respond: “*There are no words to express my gratitude*”. We are overtaken by emotion, and it is difficult for us to place our feelings into words. On Rosh Hashana we turn to Hashem and state: “You know what is in our best interest. We may request something, but You know it will not turn out favorably for us”. The Rav claimed that he had prayed that he would never have to leave Europe, where Torah flourished. Luckily Hashem had other plans for him, and he was saved from the devastation that transpired in the region and was able to spread Torah for many years.

On Rosh Chodesh we ask Hashem to fulfill our requests, but we coat it in the following manner:

ימלא ה' כל משאלות לבינו לטובה

God should fulfill our requests **for the good**.

We do not merely ask God to fulfill our requests. We add at the end of the phrase – that He should fulfill our requests *for the good*. If in the end our request will be detrimental, don't allow it to come to fruition.

When we blow the shofar, we ask God to fill in the blank. We want to ask you for a good year, but we do not know what to specifically request, so we leave it up to you to “**fill in the blank**”. Only **You** know what is in our best interest.

As we hear the sound of the shofar, may we contemplate (i) that we are *avdei Hashem* – here to serve our creator; (ii) our love and appreciation of Hashem and how the shofar expresses our unspoken praise; and (iii) that we place our trust in Hashem who knows what is best for us. May we all be granted a happy and healthy year! ■

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