

למנצח לבני קורח: Teki'at Shofar

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There is tension in the air on Rosh Hashanah morning as the congregation begins to recite *Tehillim, Perek 47* seven times before the piercing sounds of the shofar burst through the air.

To the conductor, a song (inspired) by the sons of Korach

Just prior to being swallowed up into the abyss after having rebelled, the sons of Korach reached the height of repentance – an appropriate preamble to the *mizmor* (psalm) said prior to *tekias shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, a day of introspection. B'nei Korach, whose descendants sang in the Beis Hamikdash declare the coronation of Hashem, the King of Kings. The overarching theme of Rosh Hashanah is to acknowledge G-d as the King. In this Psalm, the sounds of the shofar blast, the call to sing to the King on His throne and the assembly of nations under one reign, converge to paint a picture of mankind celebrating Hashem as the King of Kings. This is a Messianic vision, but like much of our liturgy and psalms, it transcends the barrier of time and traverses the past, present and future.

Throughout this *mizmor*, we see references to the sounds of the shofar, such as *tekiah* and *teruah*. In addition, peppered throughout are references to some of the reasons attributed to the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, one of which is that the shofar calls to mind the ceremony of a royal coronation, where instruments were played, celebrations took place and the sounds of trumpets were heard.

All of the nations join their hands together (or clap hands) and shout sounds of joy to G-d in song.

כָּל־הָעַמִּים תִּקְעוּרְכָף הֲרִיעוּ
לְאֱלֹקִים בְּקוֹל רִנָּה

(הֲרִיעוּ and תִּקְעוּרְכָף – certainly call to mind the sounds of *tekiah* and *teruah* of the shofar.)

We revel at the condition where we are not coerced, but we willingly accept Hashem as King. We are referring to the ideal state where it is not just the Jewish nation that accepts G-d, but it is a universal acceptance - כָּל־הָעַמִּים תִּקְעוּרְכָף – *all of the nations are joining hands*. This is a transformed United Nations that is finally full of integrity and honesty whose songs will ultimately blend with perfect harmony with our songs.

הֲרִיעוּ לְאֱלֹקִים – A *teruah blast*, implying a calling out from the depths of our emotions. While this may not be referring to blowing the shofar specifically, we are creating a sound from our souls, similar to the actual blowing of the shofar. Rav Samson R. Hirsch points out that we are solemn and we stand in awe of אֱלֹקִים – the G-d of strict justice. However, tempered with that solemnity is בְּקוֹל רִנָּה – our souls rejoice in that realization with a voice of song. This is indeed the theme of this *mizmor* where our service to G-d is highlighted as being characterized by fear and trepidation on the one hand - and joy and celebration on the other.

The next verse answers the question of why it is that we should clasp hands together and shout sounds of joy?

Because G-d is on high, and is awesome, a great King over all of the land.

עֲלִינוּ נוֹרָא מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל
עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כִּי ה'

Another symbolism of the shofar is referenced in this verse, where the blowing of the shofar at Hashem's coronation declares that He is the creator of the world, the completion of which took place on Rosh Hashanah – as we say in our prayers – *Hayom Haras Olam* – Today is the birth date of the world.

The Malbim points out that unlike some schools of thought which maintain that G-d created the world, but subsequently left the world to run on its own, we proclaim the opposite - מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל - על-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ – that G-d is the King over all of the land and has supervised it from the beginning of time. This dovetails with the theme of Rosh Hashanah as being a day of judgment on all aspects of creation.

He leads nations under us and regimes under our feet

יִדְבֵּר עַמִּים תַּחְתֵּינוּ
וְלְאֻמִּים תַּחַת רַגְלֵינוּ

In Messianic times, we are promised that the nations will be under the auspices of the Jewish people. Rav Hirsch understands יִדְבֵּר to imply gathering together - the nations will gather together willingly and proclaim Hashem as King because they will see the integrity of the Jewish mission statement.

He will choose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loved. Selah.

יִבְחַרְלֵנוּ אֶת-נַחֲלָתֵנוּ אֶת
גְּאוֹן יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר-אַהֲבָה סֵלָה

This verse is referencing that Hashem will choose the best location for the *Beis Hamikdash*, which is at the *makom Hamikdash* in Yerushalayim which is in the Land of Israel. This calls to mind yet another symbolism of the shofar: the shofar blast - or the horn blast of the enemy that mobilized armies to destroy the Holy Temple. As Yirmiyahu tells us:

Oh, my suffering, my suffering! How I writhe! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart moans within me, I cannot be silent; For you have heard the sound of the shofar, oh my soul, alarms of war. (Yirmayahu 4:19).

מֵעִי | מַעֲלֵי אוֹהֵלָה
קִירוֹת לִבִּי הִמָּה-לִּי לִבִּי
לֹא אַחֲרִישׁ כִּי קוֹל שׁוֹפָר
שָׁמַעְתָּ נְפְשִׁי תְרוּעַת
מִלְחָמָה

When we hear our shofar, we pray that the day will come when we will be able to proclaim that the dreaded sound of the horn blast of our enemies will be replaced by the exciting and celebratory sounds of the shofar at the time of *Mashiach* when the third Temple will be built - *יִבְחַר - בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר* in the place that Hashem will choose. (Mussaf of Festivals).

It is noteworthy that the reference to the Land of Israel which is inserted in the middle of the *mizmor* describing the coronation of Hashem, highlights the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in the Jewish consciousness, and particularly on Rosh Hashanah. We typically do not think of Eretz Yisrael as the main focal point of the day, yet this verse and its insertion in the central part of the *mizmor* would suggest otherwise. In *Parshas Re'eh*, the Torah tells us of the characteristics of the Land of Israel.

It is a land which the L-RD your G-d looks after, on which the L-RD your G-d always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end. (Devarim 11:12)

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ
דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָמִיד עֵינֵי ה'
אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּהַ מְרֻשֵׁית הַשָּׁנָה
וְעַד אַחֲרֵית שָׁנָה

Within this verse, we see the juxtaposition of the words מְרֻשֵׁית and שָׁנָה, a reference to Rosh Hashanah. These words are not used in the Torah even with reference to the holiday of Rosh Hashanah itself, yet the phrase is used in reference to Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, Ramban alerts us to the Gemarah in Rosh Hashanah that

the success of the Land of Israel is judged on Rosh Hashanah and the success of this land impacts the rest of the world. By extension then, the land of Israel indeed is a focus of Rosh Hashanah. This leads us to recall that the shofar blast reminds us of the future *kibutz galiyos* where all of the Jews who had been in exile will gather to the focal point of the world, the Land of Israel:

And on that day, a great ram's horn shall be sounded; and the strayed who are in the land of Assyria and the expelled who are in the land of Egypt shall come and worship the L-RD on the holy mount, in Jerusalem. (Yeshaya 27:13)

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְקַע
בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל וּבָאוּ
הַאֲבָדִים בְּאֶרֶץ אַשּׁוּר
וְהַנִּדְחִים בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לֵה' בְּהַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ
בִּירוּשָׁלַם

G-d ascends in the blast, G-d with the sound of the shofar.

Another symbolism of the shofar is to recall the *teruah* blast at *Matan Torah*, which according to the Midrash is alluded to in these words. The shofar indeed is featured very prominently in the account of the *Matan Torah*:

The blare of the shofar grew in intensity. As Moses spoke, G-d answered him in a voice. (Shemos 19:19)

וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשׁוֹפָר הוֹלֵךְ
וְחֶזֶק מְאֹד מִשֵּׁה יִדְבֵר
וְהָאֱלֹקִים יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּקוֹל -

Another parallel, is that the *teruah* blast of the shofar is a quick staccato burst resembling the deep emotion of anguish and fear that surfaces as we contemplate our actions and that our lives hang in the balance. The shofar evokes terror— as it says in *Sefer Amos*:

When a shofar is blown in the city, do the people not tremble? (Amos 3:6)

אִם יִתְקַע שׁוֹפָר בְּעִיר וְעָם
לֹא יִחְרְדוּ

Yet the emotion of fear of Hashem's *midas hadin*, as characterized by **עֵלָה אֱלֹקִים**, must be tempered with the emotion of joy, which manifests through the *midas harachamim* - as implied by **בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר**. To highlight the tension of the two emotions, the Midrash tells us:

In the moment when Hashem sits on the Throne of Judgment, Hashem ascends with (the attribute) of strict justice, as it says “G-d (Elokim) ascends in the blast”, and when Israel takes the shofaros in their hands and blows before G-d, He gets up from the seat of strict justice and sits on the seat of mercy, as it is written, “G-d (YKVK) in the sound of the shofar,”, He is filled with mercy for them and shows mercy on them and changes from the attribute of strict justice to that of mercy... (Vayikra Rabba: 29:3).

בְּשַׁעֲהָ שֶׁהִקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא יוֹשֵׁב וְעוֹלָה עַל כִּסֵּא
דִּין, בְּדִין הוּא עוֹלָה, מֵאִי
טַעַם, עֵלָה אֱלֹקִים
בְּתַרְוֵעָה, וּבְשַׁעֲהָ
שִׁישְׂרָאֵל נוֹטְלִין אֶת
שׁוֹפְרֵיהֶן וְתוֹקְעִין לִפְנֵי
הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, עוֹמֵד
מִכִּסֵּא הַדִּין וְיוֹשֵׁב בְּכִסֵּא
רַחֲמִים, דְּכַתִּיב: ה' בְּקוֹל
שׁוֹפָר, וּמִתְמַלֵּא עֲלֵיהֶם
רַחֲמִים וּמְרַחֵם עֲלֵיהֶם
וְהוֹפֵךְ עֲלֵיהֶם מִדֵּת הַדִּין
לְרַחֲמִים

The duality of the day of Rosh Hashanah is encapsulated within this *posuk*. It is a day of *din*, which engenders fear; however, the blowing of the shofar, accompanied by our intents and thoughts that we immerse into absorbing those sounds, facilitate Hashem's mercy which results in our being joyful and optimistic about the Day of Judgment.

Sing, Oh sing to G-d; sing, Oh sing to our King.

זָמְרוּ אֱלֹקִים זָמְרוּ זָמְרוּ
לְמַלְכֵנוּ זָמְרוּ

This is a missive to call out songs of praise to G-d. Whereas we have previously seen the dual emotions that the shofar evokes – of both fear and joy - we now encounter the sense of joy that bursts forth and takes center stage. Perhaps if we follow the imagery of the above Midrash, we are celebrating Hashem shifting from the seat of *din* to the seat of *rachamim* following the shofar blast. On a *peshat* level, however, we are singing because G-d is the King – as we see from the next verse:

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| for G-d is King over all the earth; Sing, oh enlightened One! | כִּי מֶלֶךְ כְּלֵהָאָרֶץ אֱלֹקִים זָמְרוּ מִשְׁכִּיל - |
|---|---|

The singing is the result of a deep perception, and recognition (as characterized by the word *מִשְׁכִּיל*) that Hashem is the master of the universe, that leaves us feeling a tremendous sense of fulfillment

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| G-d reigns over the nations; G-d is seated on His holy throne | עַל־גּוֹיִם אֱלֹקִים מֶלֶךְ יָשֵׁב אֶל־כִּסֵּא אֱלֹקִים קְדָשׁוֹ: |
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These words highlight the shofar as representing the fear of the day when G-d sits on His throne in judgment and the shofar stirs our hearts to remind us that we are being judged.

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| The nobles of the peoples are gathered together, the people of the G-d of Abraham; for the protectors of the earth are G-d; He is greatly exalted. | נְדִיבֵי עַמִּים נֶאֱסָפוּ עִם אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם כִּי לְאֱלֹקִים מִגְנֵי־אָרֶץ מֵאֵד נִעְלָה |
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In this last verse, we reference Avraham Avinu which highlights perhaps one of the most famous symbolisms of the shofar, that of *Akeidas Yitzchak*. It recalls the horn of the ram that Avraham Avinu sacrificed in place of his son, Yitzchak. The shofar blast reminds us, and alternatively “reminds” Hashem, of that sacrifice, and in that merit facilitates Hashem’s mercy on us. In addition, when contemplating *Akeidas Yitzchak*, we see the investment and its

return for generations to come, as the precedent for sacrifice has been passed to future generations, allowing us to infuse our service to G-d with our own *mesiras nefesh* which in turn brings Hashem to look upon us with *rachamim*.

In conclusion, the passage of “*Lamenatzeiach*” that we recite before hearing the shofar depicts the loud shofar blast and the awe and pageantry as we imagine the nations acknowledging Hashem and crowning Him as the ultimate King in Messianic times. It is also a passage that hints to the alarming sounds of the shofar: the shofar of war, the shofar of crying, the shofar of trepidation, the shofar of *din*. However, those somber sounds and emotions are balanced with the more upbeat blasts of the shofar that accompany joyous sounds of singing. This preamble to the shofar blowing demonstrates the dual emotions that pervade the day of Rosh Hashanah. We shudder at the judgment that awaits us from - **אלקים** the G-d of strict justice, yet we are full of hope and we rejoice with the knowledge that G-d is also **YKVK**– the G-d of *rachamim*.

May we merit that the shofar blast this Rosh Hashanah facilitate Hashem’s mercy on us and herald the anticipatory and exciting sounds of the ultimate, שׁוֹפָר גְּדוּלָה, that will play melodious and joyous music with the coming of Mashiach.