B.H.

Parsha Halacha – Rosh Hashana

Shofar Thoughts

Understanding the Prayers and Meanings

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Parsha Halacha is underwritten by a grant from Dr. Stephen and Bella Brenner and Dr. Morton Borg in loving memory of Stephen's father, Shmuel Tzvi ben Pinchas, and Bella's and Morton's parents, Avraham ben Yitzchak and Leah bas HaRav Sholom Zev HaCohen

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Since Rosh HaShanah coincides with Shabbat this year, we do not blow the shofar until the second day of Yom Tov. Despite this we can learn about the meanings of this important mitzvah and the prayers associated with it. As such, this article will discuss the meanings of some of the prayers and the shofar blowing (and not blowing).

Preparing to Blow the Shofar

The *Ba'al Toke'a* (one who blows the shofar) and the *Makri* (the one who directs him as to which notes to blow) should learn the deeper meanings behind prayers and the various shofar blasts.[1] Here are some of those ideas.

- **Most Importantly**

The most important intention one should have is simply to fulfill the will of their Creator by blowing the Shofar. In addition, one should feel great joy that they are able to fulfill this mitzvah, as according to the holy sefarim, when one does a mitzvah with joy it's considered as if he had all of the intentions associated with that mitzvah.[2]

[1] Mateh Efrayim 585:2.
[2] Elel HaMagen, 582:3 in the margin.

- **The Merit of the Forefathers**

The Midrash says[3] that, in order to be found meritorious in judgment on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish people should evoke the merit of the Avot (patriarchs). In light of this the Zohar[4] and later commentaries associate the various shofar blasts with the patriarchs.[5] As follows;

- **First *Tekiah* – Avraham**

The first *tekiah* evokes the merit of Avraham who served G-d with the trait of kindness and proclaimed G-d's existence to the world.

- ***Shevarim* – Yitzchak**

The *shevarim* evokes the merit of Yitzchak who was bound on the altar and nearly sacrificed (*shevarim* means broken and connotes difficulty and adversity).

- ***Teru'ah* – Ya'akov and King David**

The *teru'ah*, which is even more broken than the *shevarim*, evokes the merit of Ya'akov and King David both of whom experienced many troubles yet never stopped serving the Almighty faithfully.

- **Second *Teki'ah***

The second *Teki'ah* is also reminiscent of Ya'akov who served G-d in a perfect manner ("*Ya'akov Ish Tam* – Ya'akov was a complete man"[6]) despite all of his travails.

The Zohar adds that the three (major) colors of the rainbow allude to the patriarchs which is why the word for rainbow is קשת, an acronym for רועה **ת**ברים **ש**יעה **ת**ק, the notes that allude to the patriarchs.

Hearing the voice of Teruah

The Previous Rebbe explains[7] that the main purpose of the blowing of the Shofar is to awaken G-d's mercy. Since Ya'akov's trait is that of mercy and the sound of the *teru'ah* is associated with Ya'akov, the bracha of *shofarot* (the third of the long *brachot* in the Musaf prayer) finishes with the words שומע קול תרועת עמו ישראל ברחמים – "(Who) listens to the sound of the *teru'ah* of

[3] Vayikrah Rabbah 29:7. See also Zohar Parshat Emor.
[4] Raya Mehemna, Parshat Pinchas, page 230b.
[5] Cited in Elef HaMagen 585:4. See also Mo'ed lechol Chai by Rabbi Chaim Palagi (14a) in the name of the Shulchan Gavoha (585:7)
[6] Genesis 25:27.
[7] Sefer HaMa'amarim 5683, page 108.

His Jewish people with mercy." As it is the *teru'ah* which especially causes G-d to "arise from his chair of judgment and sit on His chair of mercy."[8]

No Shofar on Shabbos

The Previous Rebbe further explains that the *teru'ah* which is a broken sound represents the breaking of one's physical desires and ego which in turn brings about the "building of *Malchut*" (establishing G-d as our King and eliciting His desire to continue creating the world). Since this involves *borer*/"selecting" insofar as we're removing the bad traits from the good, it's forbidden to do on Shabbat.

Not Blowing - A Higher Level of *Bitul*

Normally we express our complete *bitul* (self-abnegation) to G-d by blowing the shofar – a cry of yearning to connect to G-d from the depths of the soul. This causes great delight to G-d and consequently He re-energizes the world for the coming year. Many Chassidic discourses explain[9] that when Shabbat coincides with Rosh Hashanah, G-d receives pleasure from Shabbat itself and the blowing of the shofar isn't necessary in order to elicit the Divine will to recreate the world.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out[10] that the entire reason Rosh HaShanah was set on the 1st of Tishrei – when man was created, rather than on the 25th of Ellul – when the world was created, was to emphasize the importance of man and his Divine service (*avodah*). Why then is it that when Rosh Hashanah coincides with Shabbat mankind doesn't *do* anything to merit the ongoing creation?

The answer is that *not* blowing the shofar also involves an *avodah* (Divine service) as one is still supposed to learn about the meaning of the shofar blowing and why we don't blow it. Therefor, the fact that one doesn't blow the shofar due to the halachic restriction is also an *avodah*. This is an even higher level of *bitul* than is accomplished by the blowing of the shofar because in that case the person blowing (or hearing) has to *do* something in order to nullify himself. This indicates that he's a separate being that needs to be nullified. *Not* blowing the shofar however, involves no action and it therefor represents a state of total *bitul*. This can be compared to one who is standing in front of the king and is in such a state of awe that he cannot even lift a finger.

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[8] Vayikra Rabbah 29:3.
[9] See Likutei Torah, Rosh HaShanah 56. D.H. Lehavin HaMishnah and in many places
[10] Sefer HaSichot, 5749, page 704 and on.

In Tractate Sofrim (19:2) it says that on Rosh HaShanah we recite the 47th chapter of the Psalms which contains the words עָלָה אֱלֹהִ֥ים בִּתְרוּעָה ה בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר.

As such, it's customary to recite this chapter seven times before blowing the shofar. This chapter includes the name *Elokim* (the name of G-d associated with judgment) seven times so by reciting it seven times we mention that name 49 times.[11] By reciting it with concentration we nullify and sweeten all harsh and soft judgments.[12]

Kera Satan

Many have the custom to recite six verses from the 119th chapter of Tehillim[13] which spell out the words *Kera Satan* (let Satan be ripped [apart]).

The Blessing – To Hear the Sound of the Shofar

The blessing recited before the blowing of the shofar ends with the words לשמוע קול שופר which means to hear the sound of the shofar. The reason for this wording is that the mitzvah is to hear the shofar rather than to blow it per se. (Although one must blow the shofar in order to hear it, if one blows it but doesn't hear it [e.g. a deaf person] he hasn't fulfilled the mitzvah.) We don't say לשמוע **ב**קול שופר (with a *bet*) as this can be understood to mean that the mitzvah is to listen (or to accept[14]) to the shofar's message.[15] Although this is a good thing to do, it isn't the definition of the mitzvah which is to simply hear the sound of the shofar blasts.[16]

Getting the Message

Some of the Rishonim[17] are of the opinion that לשמוע קול שופר is the correct version of the bracha. It would seem that, in their opinion, although the main mitzvah is to simply hear the sound of the shofar, this *bracha* alludes to the fact that it is important to understand and internalize the message of the shofar.

Hear G-d's Shofar

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[11] See Maharsha on Eiruvin 13b regarding the student who would explain things in 49 different ways.
[12] Elef HaMagen 585:6.
[13] According to some machzorim, the first verse is from the book of Eicha (3:56) - קוֹלִי שָׁמָעְתָּ אַל תַּעְלֵם אָזְנְךָ לְרַוְחָתִי לְשַׁוְעָתִי. According to the Arizal and the Siddur HaRav however the verse from Tehillim 119:166 is recited - קִוִּיתִי לִישׁוּעָתְךָ ה וּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ עָשִׂיתִי. The reason for this may be that it's more appropriate to use a verse from Tehillim than from Eichah (Lamentations) at this time (Pardes Yeshayahu vol. 4 by Rabbi Yeshayahu Hetzel [Natzeret Illit 2017], page 130).
[14] See Exodus 19:5 אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי which refers to accepting the Torah.
[15] See Deut. 28:1 והיה אם שמוע תשמע בקול ה which refers to obeying Hashem's will.
[16] Shulchan Aruch HaRav 585:4.
[17] Siddur Rashi, Roke'ach (Hilchot Brachot 363) and many others.

The Tzemach Tzedek explains[18] the spiritual reason as to why we make the bracha on hearing the sound of the shofar rather than blowing the shofar as this alludes to the fact that we should be listening to the sound of the Divine shofar blowing[19] which we elicit by our shofar blowing. As the Zohar says,[20] "When the shofar awakens, and when people return in teshuvah from their sins, they sound the shofar from below. That sound then rises upward, and another, supernal shofar is awakened; mercy is awakened, and judgment is removed."

This, in turn, will cause G-d to "blow the great shofar for our redemption,"[21] with Moshiach.

May he arrive speedily in our days!

May you be inscribed and sealed for a good sweet year with safety and security for our brethren in the holy land, long life, good health, *nachat*, plentiful *parnasah* and great success in serving Hashem.

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[18] Ohr HaTorah, Parshat Re'eh page 696 quoted in Sefer HaMa'amarim 5714, page 224.
[19] See Zechariah 9:14, "וַאדֹנָי ה' בַּשּׁוֹפָר יִתְקָע – "The L-rd our G-d will blow the shofar."
[20] Parshat Emor.
[21] Isaiah 27:13.