



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles
Study Guide

Rosh Hashanah
תשפג

Authored by Rabbi Avi Cohen
Partners Detroit

9/5/2023

Partners In Torah

Mission Statement:

Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for coming!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

The Torah (Deuteronomy 29:1) calls Rosh Hashanah, “יום תרועה” a day of “*teruah*.” The exact meaning of the word “*teruah*” is a mystery. A bit of detective work was necessary to determine its meaning. The first step was to look at the Aramaic translation of Onkelos for a hint. There it says, יום יבבא a day of *Yebbava*. But exactly what is a *yebbava*? A verse from Judges (5:28) gives us the answer to this.

(כח) בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן נִשְׁקָפָה וְתִיבַב אִם סִיסְרָא בְּעַד הָאֶשְׁנָב מִדּוֹעַ בְּשֵׁשׁ רְכָבוֹ לְבוֹא מִדּוֹעַ
אֶחָרוֹ פְּעָמֵי מְרַכְבוֹתָיו

28) *Through the window she gazed, Sisra's mother sobbed by the window. "Why is his chariot delayed in coming? Why are the hoofbeats of his carriages so late?"*

This verse is part of the song that Devorah the Judge sang after defeating the mighty king Sisra. He fell prey to the enticements of Yael, who killed him in her tent. The word ***yebbava*** is used to describe Sisra's mother's sobbing at the window as she waited in vain for his return from the battlefield. We deduce from this that the ***teruah*** blasts from the shofar sound like sobbing. A sob is an expression of deep anguish and despair. When one sees no way forward and feels himself against a brick wall, this profound frustration triggers sobbing that emanates from deep within. Sobbing is done in short cries one after the other. Hence, we learn that a “*teruah*” is the short, broken blasts of the shofar. The long, unbroken sound of the shofar is called the תְּקִיעָה—*tekiah*.”

Maimonides writes (Laws of Teshuva 3:4):

(ד) אַע"פ שֶׁתְּקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה גִּזְרֵת הַכְּתוּב רִמּוֹ יֵשׁ בּוֹ כְּלוֹמֵר עוֹרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִשְׁנַתְּכֶם וְנִרְדַּמְתֶּם הִקִּיצוּ מִתְרַדְמַתְּכֶם וְחַפְּשׂוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂיכֶם וְחִזְרוּ בְּתִשׁוּבָה וְזָכְרוּ בּוֹרְאֵכֶם אֱלֹהֵי הַשּׁוֹכְחִים אֶת הָאֵמֶת בְּהַבְלֵי הַזְּמַן וְשׁוֹגִים כָּל שְׁנַתְּכֶם בְּהַבֵּל וְרִיק אֲשֶׁר לֹא יוֹעִיל וְלֹא יַצִּיל הַבֵּיטוֹ לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם וְהִטִּיבוּ דַרְכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם וְיַעֲזוּב כָּל אֶחָד מִכֶּם דְּרָכָה רַעָה וּמַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא טוֹבָה

Even though the mitzvah to blow the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah is an edict from the Torah, there is a message in it. It is saying, "Wake up you sleeping people from your slumber! Wake up from your slumber and inspect your deeds and return to Hashem in teshuva. Remember your Creator, those who forget the truth in the throes of time, and while away their time in frivolous matters that don't help or save anyone. Look into your souls and improve your ways and deeds; each person should leave his evil ways and thoughts.

Having said this, we can understand a deeper meaning in the day of Rosh Hashanah as a *Day of Teruah*. Maimonides teaches us that the sound of the shofar is supposed to work like the alarm clock that wakes us up in the morning so that we don't oversleep and miss important events. When it goes off, as tired as we are, we are grateful that it woke us up, and, somehow, we get ourselves out of bed.

This is how we should react when we hear the shofar's blasts. It carries the same message. A person tends to get caught up in the daily grind of earning a living, and many other distractions which take him away from his obligations to Hashem and the Torah. One doesn't ever pause for a moment to contemplate what he is doing with his life. The shofar urges us to *"remember our Creator who we tend to forget in the throes of time."* One should pause for a moment and ask himself, "How much do I acknowledge Hashem in my life? How much do I realize that I owe Hashem a deep, heartfelt "thank you" for every blessing in my life? My health, my wealth, my children, etc. Am I fulfilling my obligations to Him for all the good that He gives me?"

The shofar urges us to, *"Look into your souls and improve your ways and deeds"*. Find the areas that you are deficient in Hashem's service! Improve your relationship with Hashem. The short, broken blasts of the shofar, which represent sobbing and remorse, tell us to

take a break from our routine and look into our souls to improve our ways and deeds. Moreover, a little sob would go a long way to convey our sincere remorse to Hashem for having neglected Him.

There is another approach as to how the shofar helps us on Rosh Hashanah.

This year, the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls out on Shabbat. Because it is Shabbat, the shofar will not be blown. What is behind this law? What is it about the Shabbat that prevents us from sounding the shofar?

The Talmud explains (Rosh Hashanah 29b).

אמר רבא מדאורייתא מישראל שרי ורבנן הוא דגזור ביה כדרבה דאמר רבה הכל
חייבין בתקיעת שופר ואין הכל בקיאין בתקיעת שופר גזירה שמא יטלנו בידו וילך
אצל הבקי ללמוד ויעבירונו ארבע אמות ברשות הרבים

Rava said: There is no Torah prohibition against sounding the shofar on Shabbat, rather, it was the Rabbis who forbade it. Their reason was, because all men are obligated to hear the sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, but they don't all know how to blow it expertly. Therefore, perhaps, someone will take the shofar in his hand and go to an expert to learn how to blow it Rosh Hashanah - Shabbat. Carrying the shofar in the street would violate the Shabbat, so the Sages cancelled the whole mitzvah, rather than take a chance that someone violate the Shabbat.

At first glance, this rabbinic decree seems very harsh. Why deprive all Jewish men of the mitzvah of hearing the sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah for such a remote concern? Furthermore, what type of person would make such an obvious mistake; not a very educated or important one. So why were the Sages so concerned about him, rather than the multitudes of people who would lose out on this special mitzvah year after year for thousands of years?

This question takes on a greater depth when we consider the benefit of sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah.

The Midrash (Midrash Rabbah Vayikra 29:3) tells us.

ובשעה שישראל נוטלין את שופריהן ותוקעין לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא עומד מכסא
הדין ויושב בכסא רחמים

When the Jewish people take their shofars and blow them before Hashem, He stands up from the chair of strict judgment, and sits down on His chair of mercy, and judges them with mercy.

How does the shofar have such a powerful effect on Hashem? Our Sages explain.

In the Rosh Hashanah prayers we say:

אָמַת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא דַּיִן וּמוֹכִיחַ וַיּוֹדֵעַ וְעַד. וְכוֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם (וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֶה). וְתִזְכֹּר
כָּל הַנְּשָׁכָחוֹת. וְתִפְתַּח אֶת סֵפֶר הַזְּכוּרוֹת. וּמֵאֱלֹוֵי יִקְרָא. וְחוֹתֵם יַד כָּל אָדָם בּוֹ.
וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע. וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה דְקָה יִשְׁמַע. וּמִלְאָכִים יִחְפְּזוּן. וְחֵיל וְרַעְדָה יֵאֱחָזוּן.
וַיֵּאמְרוּ הִנֵּה יוֹם הַדִּין. לִפְקֹד עַל צְבָא מְרוֹם בְּדִין

It is true that You alone are the One Who judges, proves, knows and bears witness. Who writes and seals (and counts and calculates) Who remembers all that was forgotten. You will open the Book of Chronicles- it will read itself, and everyone's signature is in it. The great shofar will be sounded, and a thin soft sound will be heard. The angels will tremble – a trembling and terror will seize them, and then they will say, "Behold it is the Day of Judgment to bring the heavenly host for judgment..."

The sound of the shofar in the heavenly courtroom symbolizes the beginning of the judgment, calling the court to order to begin the case, similar to the tapping of the gavel in an American courtroom. When we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana, it is as if we are calling Hashem's heavenly court to order to begin our judgment. The question is, why

are we doing this? Why would we be requesting our own judgment? We know full well, this won't end well! No matter how good we are, we still have a great number of sins we are going to be held accountable for, and ultimately have to pay for in some way. So why are we sealing our own fate by asking for the judgment to commence?

Imagine the following scenario. Your son took your car on a Saturday night to go out for a night on the town with his friends, without permission. If that wasn't bad enough, he ended up crashing the car. No one was hurt, but you are livid. He had the nerve to take the car without permission, and on top of that, you don't have a car to use because of his negligence. In your mind you are trying to think of the most severe punishment possible for this infraction disqualifying them one at a time, as not strong enough.

As you are thinking of the various options, you hear a meek knock on your door. As you get up from your chair, you think to yourself, "Boy, am I going to let him have it!!"

When you open the door, you see your son head bowed, with tears coming down his cheeks. Before you can open your mouth, he begins talking. "Dad, I am so ashamed of myself. I don't know how I will ever express to you how truly sorry I am for what I did. I was wrong for taking the car without permission, and what's more I banged it up. I don't know how I will ever make it up to you and receive your forgiveness. I understand that I am deserving of a punishment, and I will willingly accept any punishment you decide to give me without any protest or argument. Please forgive me for what I have done; I promise I will never do something like this ever again."

By accepting responsibility for his actions, feeling shame, and presenting himself for the punishment, your son has completely disarmed you. All of your hollering and punishments were geared to making him realize what a terrible thing he had done, but he already understands everything you were going to yell at him, so what's the point?

Suddenly, you feel compassion for him, and you feel bad that he feels so bad about what he has done. You start looking for things to say to console him and to help him to deal with his shame and guilt. He is really distraught and you don't want him to be scarred for life over this. It could have been so much worse; he and his friends are ok, and it's just a car.

This is what we are doing on Rosh Hashanah when we blow the shofar to call the courtroom to order for our own judgment. We are saying to Hashem, "I know I have messed up and that I am worthy of great punishment. I feel ashamed for what I have done and I am submitting myself to You for whatever punishment you decide to give me. I just want to clean my slate and restore my close relationship with You."

This is how the shofar causes Hashem to go from the chair of strict judgment to the chair of mercy. By presenting ourselves for our judgment and telling Hashem that we are guilty and prepared to accept His just punishment in order to restore our relationship with Him, He is disarmed, so to speak, and looks at us with compassion instead of anger.

Understanding the power of the shofar in this way, our question of how the Rabbis could have given up sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah becomes ever so much stronger!

Rabbi Aharon Kotler זצ"ל (1892-1962) provides the following answer to this difficult question.

The Rosh Hashanah Musaf service has three special blessings, מלכות – Kingship, זכרונות - Remembrances, and שופרות - Shofarot. The Sages composed these three blessings based on a teaching from the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 16a).

ואמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכות זכרונות ושופרות מלכות כדי שתמליכוני
עליכם זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה ובמה בשופר

Hashem told the Jewish people, “On Rosh Hashanah say before me **Kingship, Remembrances** and **Shofarot**. Kingship – so as to make me your King, Remembrances – so I will remember you fondly, and how should you do this, with a shofar.”

Each of the three special blessings in the Rosh Hashanah Musaf was composed to focus on one of these themes. The shofar is blown with each of the three blessings to complement and bring out the goal of that theme. How is that?

Kingship – The shofar should remind us of the coronation of a king, with trumpets sounding and great fanfare in his honor. Similarly, as we hear the blasts of the shofar during the blessing of Kingship, we should think about how we wish to accept Hashem as our personal King. This is most appropriate on Rosh Hashanah, when Hashem is judging us for the next year. As His loyal subject, we can be sure that Hashem will grant us all that we need to fulfill our aspirations on His behalf. If we wish to remain independent agents, free of the Kings yoke, Hashem can tell us, “Okay, you are on your own! Let’s see what you can accomplish without Me.”

Remembrances – When we think about how Hashem remembers, we immediately realize that it is metaphoric. Hashem is outside of time and is aware of everything, all the time. He sees Adam, Noah, Avraham, us, our grandchildren and everything in between, all at once. He doesn't need to remember anything; it is happening before Him every second. He also sees our every thought, feeling and action. This poses a great problem. I just said I am accepting Hashem as my King, but what of my past? What of all the many instances where I ignored Hashem's instructions and put my personal desires first. I must look pretty silly to Hashem.

Enter the shofar. The recommended shofar to use for Rosh Hashanah is a ram's horn. Why a ram? To remind us of the ram that was caught in the thicket by its horn and brought as a sacrifice instead of our forefather Yitzchak. As we hear the "ram's horn" blown, we should identify with our grandfather Yitzchak and think to ourselves, "*I would also be prepared to give my life for Hashem, if ever put to the test.*" This single thought, overrides any selfish actions we may have done, and elevates our status in Hashem's eyes for the best. The shofar helps put us in the proper state of mind so Hashem will judge us favorably.

Shofarot – The third blessing describes the Sinai event, when Hashem revealed Himself to the Jewish people and gave them the Torah. In describing the Sinai event, the Torah says (Exodus 19:16),

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְּהִיט הַבְּקָר וַיְהִי קֶלֶת וּבְרָקִים וַעֲנַן כָּבֵד עַל הָהָר וְקוֹל שֹׁפָר
חָזַק מְאֹד וַיִּחַרְדוּ כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה

*16) On the third day when it was morning, there was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain, **and the sound of the shofar was very powerful**, and the entire people that were in the camp shuddered.*

Our Sages teach us that the secret power of the shofar is to strengthen the good spiritual forces and subdue the evil ones. That is what happened at Mount Sinai when the Jewish people received the Torah. Through the sound of the shofar that penetrated them, the evil was purged from within them. This prepared them to accept the holy Torah which entered them and became part of their essence. (Unfortunately, all of this was lost when the Jewish people sinned with the golden calf.)

As we hear the sounds of the shofar during the blessing of “Shofarot” we should be thinking about what happened at Sinai, and how we would like the shofar to have the same effect on us so that we may have an easier time of doing Hashem’s will in the future.

We have accepted Hashem as our King, and have stated that we are prepared to give our lives for Hashem if put to the test, and now we are requesting Hashem’s help to strengthen the good within us and subdue the evil within us so that we can actually fulfill our deepest wishes to serve Him.

The shofar is blown in the three blessings in the silent Musaf and another three times in the Musaf’s repetition. These are the mandatory ones to fulfill the requirement of the Talmudic statement quoted above. However, the shofar is also blown before Musaf even starts. These blasts are called the “sitting” blasts, because since they are not part of the Musaf which must be recited standing up, one may sit while listening to them.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 16a) wants to know the reason for these blasts. They seem to have no source.

למה תוקעין ומריעין כשהן יושבין ותוקעין ומריעין כשהן עומדין

Why do we blow the shofar when they are sitting and when they are standing? (We know the reason for the standing ones, but what of the sitting ones?)

The answer. כּדי לערַבב השטן - *in order to confuse the Satan.*

The Satan is the angel whose job it is to prosecute us in the heavenly court. When he hears the extra blasts of the shofar, he gets totally confused and cannot do his job. How is the extra set of blasts so effective in confounding the Satan?

Rashi explains. כּדי לערַבב – שלא ישטין, כשישמע ישראל מחבבין את המצוות מסתתמין דבריו:

When he hears how the Jewish people embrace Hashem's commandments, all his claims are silenced.

The Satan's claim against us is always that we have abandoned Hashem's commandments and therefore are worthy of punishment. But when the Satan sees us sounding the shofar extra times out of our love for the mitzvah, his claim is falsified, and he can say no more.

The Sages have employed a very clever tactic here to secure a good judgment for us on Rosh Hashanah. By instituting extra blasts of the shofar, they have neutralized the opposition, and put us in the best light.

When Rosh Hashanah falls out on Shabbat, the Sages saw an even greater opportunity to confound the Satan. They chose to show the love of the entire Jewish people for the sacred Shabbat. The Shabbat is like the heart of the Jewish people, and essential to our existence. So precious is it to us, and so important is it to us that its laws be upheld and uncompromised, that we are even prepared to give up our secret weapon, sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, in order to guaranty that it is properly observed. This act of self-sacrifice on the part of every

Jew for the sake of the Shabbat, creates such a storm in heaven that the Satan is totally defeated and is completely silenced.

There is yet another powerful component to this act of foregoing the shofar on Shabbat of Rosh Hashanah. Hashem has told us in the Torah (Deuteronomy 14:1) that we are His children and this makes us all brothers. Nothing gives Hashem more pleasure than when His children get along peacefully and take care of each other.

Why are we doing this? To prevent one of our brothers from possibly desecrating the Shabbat. Not only are we concerned about the holy Shabbat, we are also so concerned about the spiritual welfare of our brother that we are prepared to give up the shofar for him. That's quite a sacrifice! What a demonstration of love for a fellow Jew.

As we stand in Shul on Shabbat and Rosh Hashanah this year, missing the shofar blowing, we are demonstrating to Hashem our love for His precious Shabbat, and our love for a fellow Jew. These are two of the most precious matters to Hashem, and when the Satan sees how far we are prepared to go for them, he is completely stultified. Now the path is clear for us to use the Kingship, Remembrances and Shofarot blessings to state our dedication to Hashem for the coming year. Kingship to accept Hashem as our King, Remembrances, to remember the Binding of Yitzchak, and Shofarot to remember the Sinai event, and to accept the Torah upon ourselves. If we sincerely have these thoughts on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem will surely grant us a most favorable judgment so that we can fulfill all of our commitments and show Hashem's Kingdom to the world through our actions.

May we all be inscribed for a sweet new year!