YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**In memory of Batya Furst z"l
Niftera 28 Elul 5765.
Dedicated by her family.**

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[**“I Will Be Exalted Among the Nations”**](http://etzion.org.il/en/%E2%80%9Ci-will-be-exalted-among-nations%E2%80%9D)

**Based on a sicha by**

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Translated by Kaeren Fish

God is elevated with the *teru’a*, the Lord with the sound of the shofar. (Ps. 47:6)

The first reason that Rabbi Saadia Gaon gives for the sounding of the shofar is to declare that God is King. He explains that just as trumpets are sounded before a human king on the day of his coronation, so we sound the shofar on Rosh HaShana, “the day of the commencement of Your works,” the day when God began to rule over His world.

The sounding of the shofar serves many purposes. The Gemara teaches:

Say before Me on Rosh HaShana the *Malkhuyot*, *Zikhronot*, and *Shofarot*: *Malkhuyot* – so that you proclaim Me King over you, and *Zikhronot* – so that your remembrance will rise favorably before Me, and how will you say them? With the shofar.” (Rosh HaShana 16a)

Ritva comments:

“With the shofar” refers to both *Malkhuyot* and *Zikhronot.* What is the proper way to make Me king and to bring your remembrance before Me? With the shofar.

In other words, we need the shofar to perform both the *Malkhuyot* and the *Zikhronot*. It serves both to coronate God and to raise Israel’s remembrance before God with favor.

One can suggest that the shofar that raises our remembrance before God is the shofar that we sound during the *Amida* prayer. We say the *Malkhuyot*, *Zikhronot*, and *Shofarot*; we plead, “Remember us with a good remembrance before You”; and we sound the shofar. In contrast to these shofar blasts that follow the order of the *Amida*, the “seated blasts” have as their purpose the coronation of God. Sounding the shofar is a heralding of royalty: “Sound the shofar and say, ‘Long live Solomon the King’” (I Kings 1:34). When we coronate God with the shofar blasts that precede Musaf, we make no supplication for ourselves. But when we raise our remembrance before God with the shofar blasts during the *Amida*, we ask, “Remember us for life,” “Inscribe us in the Book of Life.”

The Gemara teaches:

Why do we sound long blasts and broken blasts while seated, and long blasts and broken blasts while standing? In order to confound Satan. (Rosh HaShana 16a)

It may be the special nature of the “seated blasts” (those sounded before Musaf), with no personal supplications, that confuses Satan. When we pray for ourselves and say, “Remember us for life,” Satan, i.e., the evil inclination (see Bava Batra 16a), can criticize the way we live our lives. The evil inclination is part of a person, and therefore takes part in the plea that God “remember us for life.” The evil inclination plants desires within us other than the desire to fulfill the mitzvot. However, the “seated blasts” are a pure expression of God’s sovereignty, with no personal requests, so they offer no place for the evil inclination. Then Satan is confounded and cannot criticize.

The custom is to say Psalm 47 seven times before sounding the shofar. This psalm mentions the sounding of the shofar – “God is elevated with the *teru’a*” – but its real focus is God’s sovereignty in the world. This is indeed the most appropriate preparation for the “seated blasts” – the sounding of the shofar that is a coronation of God.

At the beginning of the same psalm we find: “Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy. For the Lord, most High, is awesome; a great King over all the earth” (vv. 2–3). What is the source of this joy that is expressed by all the peoples over God’s kingship? Do all the nations appreciate the profound significance of God’s kingship? Do they already fulfill the vision, “All the inhabitants of the earth shall acknowledge and know that to You every knee should bow and every tongue should swear?” Has the time arrived when “the Lord will be King over all the world; on that day the Lord will be one and His name – one” (Zech. 14:9)? To this the Midrash replies:

“To the chief Musician, a psalm for the sons of Korah: Clap your hands, all you peoples” – This is what is meant by the verse, “When the righteous are on the increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked man rules, the people mourn” (Prov. 29:2). When wicked people rule the world, everyone mourns, and everyone suffers, and no one walks upright…. When one man rules over another unfavorably, it is difficult for the Holy One, blessed be He, and hence we find it written, “There is a time when one man rules over another to his own disadvantage” (Eccl. 8:9). (Midrash Ps., Ps. 47)

The revelation of God’s sovereignty in the world brings an end to human rule over men, the end of despotism. All the nations will seek to clap hands and to rejoice in God, so as to remove the reign of evil and tyranny.

The psalm goes on to describe:

He subdues peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chooses our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loves, Selah! (vv. 5)

This is most surprising: Does the Jewish nation harbor imperialistic aspirations of ruling over the other nations? Is this itself not an example of “one man rules over another to his disadvantage?” Rather, the aim here is establishing God’s sovereignty in the world. If no one rules over another, there will be no order in the world. Indeed, *Hazal* tell us (Mishna Avot 3:2) to “pray for the welfare of the monarchy, for were it not for the fear of it, man would swallow his neighbor alive.” However, the rule that we aspire to is not one of tyranny, not political, economic, or military dominion, but the rule of morality. The prophet Isaiah foretells:

And it shall be at the end of days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” And He shall judge among the nations, and shall decide among many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Is. 2:2–4)

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Yishai, and a branch shall grow out of his roots; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears. (11:1–3)

It is in this sense that the psalmist speaks of God “subduing peoples under us”: spiritual, moral leadership of the entire world.

Rosh HaShana is the Day of Judgment for all of humanity, the day when all people pass before God like sheep. The Day of Judgment is essential to establishing God’s sovereignty. God rules over all of His creations, and nothing in the world can deviate from the essence and nature that God has implanted in it: “He assigned them a law and a time, that they not alter their designated task.” However, there is one exception, and that is man, who enjoys autonomy through the endowment of free will. It seems that where one has autonomy, the King of kings has no sovereignty. For this very reason there is a need for a Day of Judgment, where the sovereignty of the Creator is felt by those endowed with autonomy. God reviews the deeds of each and every individual; each must give an accounting for his conduct. Thus, judgment is an expression of God’s sovereignty over man.

A person might approach his judgment with anxiety, consumed with fear and concern for his personal welfare. On the other hand, we can approach judgment with the joy of accepting God’s sovereignty over us. Our personal fears and concerns sometimes cause us to forget a fundamental aspect of the Day of Judgment, concerning which the *Tur* writes:

R. Hanina and R. Yehoshua say, “What nation is like this one, which knows the nature of its God” – meaning, His customs and laws. For throughout the world a person who faces judgment dresses in black and wraps himself in black and grows his beard long and does not cut his nails, for he does not know how his verdict will turn out. But this is not the case with Israel: they wear white, and wrap themselves in white, and trim their beards and cut their nails, and eat and drink and are joyous on Rosh HaShana, because they know that the Holy One, blessed be He, will perform a miracle for them. (*Tur, Orah Hayim* 581)

Surely we have no guarantee that God will perform a miracle for us. However, if we put our personal problems second to our acceptance of God’s sovereignty, then certainly God will perform a miracle for us in judgment. The traditional interpretation of the verse, “God is elevated with the *teru’a*, the Lord with the sound of the shofar” (Ps. 47:6) is that the shofar blast effects a shift from the divine attribute of justice to that of mercy. When is this true? When the sounding of the shofar carries with it all that is expressed in Psalm 47. A sounding of the shofar that expresses the universal joy of the manifestation of God’s sovereignty in the world, and the end of man’s dominion over others to their disadvantage, is the shofar blast that transforms divine justice into divine mercy, when God promises to “perform a miracle” for us.

Some years ago we witnessed the shattering of the idol that had brazenly put itself in place of the Sovereign of the world. I refer to the Communist regime established by Josef Stalin, the tyrannical and cruel despot who claimed to be able to repair the world and make people happy without divine involvement. While Christians tried to take the place of the Jewish people, the Communist regime tried to take the place of God. That abhorrent regime murdered millions of people, all in the name of repairing the world. Those who served that despotic god accepted this as necessary.

But this is not the way God rules:

Righteousness shall go before Him. (Ps. 85:14)

Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow, and cuts the spear in sunder; He burns the chariots in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. (46:9–11)

If the sovereignty of Heaven means the end of men ruling over others, let us also examine ourselves to ensure that we are not tainted with the same domineering impulse in our relations with those around us. Let us make God king not only over the whole world, but also over ourselves.

Let us approach the sounding of the shofar as a mitzva and a prayer. As a mitzva – we remember the exaltation of “who sanctified us with His commandments”; and as a prayer – with humble submission, using a bent shofar because “the more a person bends himself, the better.” “A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:19).

[This sicha is excerpted from Rav Amital’s book, [*When God Is Near: On the High Holidays*](https://www.korenpub.com/maggid_en_usd/when-god-is-near.html) (Maggid, 2015).]