



## The Powerful Prayer of the Shofar

The *shofar* has been a symbol of Jewish pride and salvation throughout the ages. Its cry was heard before the Jewish people entered into battle and it will be blown to herald the coming of the Messiah. And who can forget the emotional and hugely meaningful blowing of the *shofar* by Rav Goren after we liberated Jerusalem and the Western Wall in 1967?

Whilst there are many *minhagim* (customs) surrounding Rosh Hashanah, the primary *mitzvah* is the sounding of the *shofar*. Both in Vayikra and Bamidbar, Rosh Hashanah is described as a day of *shofar* blowing. Much has been written about the *shofar* and what its different blasts represent but there are also many different sources in *Chazal* that point to the *shofar* as a form of prayer before the Almighty.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 26a), when discussing which animals' horns are fit for the making of a *shofar*, disqualifies that of a cow. The reason is אין קטיגור נעשה קטיגור (the accuser cannot become the defender.) Since the *shofar* pleads our case before the Heavenly Court, it is inappropriate it should come from a cow, because that 'reminds' G-d of the sin of the Golden Calf and its disastrous consequences.

The Mishna (Rosh Hashanah 26b) discusses the shape of the *shofar* that should be used on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The *Tanna Kama* (first opinion) holds that we use a straight horn on Rosh Hashanah and a bent or curved one on Yom Kippur.

Rav Yehuda disagrees and holds the reverse. He sees the shape of the *shofar* representing a person's posture. During the Day of Judgment, we are supposed to be bent over in prayer asking forgiveness from the Almighty and so the shape of the *shofar* must represent that.

According to Rabbeinu Tam, the *mitzvah* of the *shofar* is one of hearing and not blowing. One who listens but does not blow fulfills his obligation through the *halachic* principle of שומע כעונה (one who hears is considered as if he heard it himself.) This principle usually only applies in the realm of prayers or blessings.

The question then arises, what type of prayer are we offering before G-d when we blow the *shofar*? Unlike any other prayer, the *shofar* has no words to express what we are asking for and no structured paragraphs and texts to help us organize our thoughts. What is the meaning of the *shofar's* prayer and what are we trying to express?

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 32b) derives the different sounds of the *shofar* from the cries of Sisera's mother at the death of her son. Sisera was a wicked army general who tried to destroy the Jewish people. How can we possibly learn the details of such an important *mitzvah* from the death of such a wicked person?

Even within a culture and society permeated with evil, there is nothing more natural and pure than the cry of a mother longing for her child. This is why we also read about the

*Akeida* on Rosh Hashanah and Sarah's cries when she heard about the binding of her son Yitzchak (Vayikra Rabbah 20:2). Whilst Sarah and Sisera's mother represent very different things, their stories are bound together on Rosh Hashanah, by the natural fear and concern of a mother for her son. A mother's cry comes from the very depths of her soul.

This might explain why the *shofar* is a prayer without a sound. We spend most of our year organizing our thoughts and putting them in writing or expressing them during conversation. Nevertheless, there is something destructive, limiting, about having to organize our thoughts. We lose the ability to express how we really feel and what we are really going through. The most authentic messages are lost when we need to translate them into words.

On Rosh Hashanah, we are instructed to blow the *shofar* and express a prayer on a completely different level. A wordless prayer expressing our deepest feelings and emotions as our lives and the lives of our loved ones hang in the balance.

This is the beauty of the *shofar's* prayer. In its merit may we be blessed with a wonderful year ahead.

Rabbi Shua Solomon is the Senior Rabbi of Mizrachi Bondi.