



Yamim Noraim Tefillot



SHOFAROT

Giving Words to a Wordless Act

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Of the three blessings unique to *Mussaf* on Rosh Hashanah, *Shofarot* is perhaps the most obscure and, on face value, superfluous. Whereas the other two blessings evoke themes related to the essence of the day, the blessing of *Shofarot*, whose content is about the *shofar*, seems to be wholly unnecessary. Why, if we are already blowing the actual *shofar*, is it necessary to recite a blessing dedicated specifically to this act?

This notion is further exacerbated upon analyzing the rationale provided in the Gemara for the recital of *Shofarot*: “Recite before Me on Rosh Hashanah *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot: Malchuyot* – so that you will crown Me over you; *Zichronot* – so that your remembrance will ascend before Me for good; And with what? With the *shofar*” (Rosh Hashanah 16a).

This statement appears to be somewhat flawed. It commences with all three blessings and enumerates the purpose of each one yet, ultimately, it omits the rationale for *Shofarot*, substituting it with the all-encompassing role of the *shofar* itself.

Ritva (ad loc.) raises this question, and offers two explanations: “It is obvious that once there is a *shofar* there should also be verses about the *shofar*.”

Furthermore, this is what it means: And with what? With the actual *shofar* and with the verses of *Shofarot*, for the blessing of *Shofarot* is for the *shofar*, so that even when one has no *shofar*, he

will mention it and establish a blessing for it...”

I believe that Ritva’s two explanations indicate different understandings as to the nature of *Shofarot*. According to Ritva’s first answer, *Shofarot* is an articulation of one of the facets of the day. Just as there are blessings of *Malchuyot* and *Zichronot* which reference the holiday’s themes of kingship and remembrance, so too is there a blessing of *Shofarot* which references the day’s *shofar* blowing.

Ritva’s second answer, however, offers a different approach for understanding *Shofarot*. According to this explanation, *Shofarot* is not a reference to the *shofar* blowing which occurs on Rosh Hashanah; rather, it is a substitute for it. The *shofar* blowing that is a pinnacle of Rosh Hashanah is referenced in prayer and embodied therein. The *shofar* blowing is incorporated in the text itself.

To emphasize his point, Ritva evokes the following statement from the Tosefta: “Recite... *Shofarot* – so that your prayers will ascend in *terua*” (Tosefta Rosh Hashanah 1:11).

Ritva’s reference to this source is clear. The verses of *Shofarot* are, so to speak, akin to the *terua* sounds of the *shofar* which accompany our prayers before G-d. *The blessing of Shofarot is in some sense a textual equivalent to the shofar blasts, a provision of words for the wordless act of shofar.*

This notion is reflected in the text of *Shofarot*. Like *shofar* blowing itself, the blessing of *Shofarot* has multiple meanings. The blessing commences with a colorful description of the Divinely-induced *shofar* at Sinai, citing verses therefrom which convey G-d’s kingship – “the sound of the *shofar* grew very

loud,” proceeding on to general calls to sound the *shofar* as a declaration of G-d’s majesty – “praise Him with the *shofar* blast.” *Shofarot*, like the *shofar* blasts, is a declaration of G-d as King.

The blessing then progresses, from the *shofar* that once was to that which is yet to come, from the *shofar* of Sinai to the “great *shofar*” that will be sounded at the time of the redemption. We now pray that G-d should “sound the great *shofar* for our freedom” and ingather the exiles with its call. Just like the *shofar* blasts, the text of *Shofarot* is timeless and all-encompassing in the themes that it evokes.

We ultimately conclude, however, not with the wish that G-d should “sound” the *shofar*, but that He should *hear ours*: “Blessed... who hears the sound of the *terua* of His people Israel with mercy.” Thus, *Shofarot* is a two way relationship between G-d and us, much like the *shofar* blasts themselves. On the one hand, we recognize the Divine *shofar* call throughout history and yearn for His “great *shofar*” that is yet to come. Yet we also sound our own *shofar* and recite our own *Shofarot*, praying that G-d hears our *terua* in musical and textual form. Hence, it is both the *shofar* blasts and their textual counterpart which accompany our Rosh Hashanah prayers before G-d: “And with what? With the *shofar*.”

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