

The Converstiaon of the Shofar - A Novel look at תקיעת שופר

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A statement found in the Gemara in ראש השנה מסכת enshrouds the enigmatic Mitzvah of Shofar in even further mystery. רבי יצחק¹, poses the following question: למה תוקעין ומריעין כשהן יושבין, - ותוקעין ומריעין כשהן עומדין? - *Why do we blow the Shofar when the congregation sits (prior to the Musaf Amida), and also blow the Shofar while the congregation stands (during the Musaf Amida)?*

The Gemara is asking: why is it necessary to have two sets of thirty sounds, one prior to Musaf and one during Musaf? In order to fulfill the Mitzvah of *Tekiat Shofar* on a Torah level, it is only necessary to blow the Shofar during one of those times! The Gemara cryptically answers, כדי "לערבב את השטן" - "in order to confuse the שטן". In what way is the שטן confused? And how does repeating the Mitzvah of Shofar confuse him? The טור², as well as תוספות and others, quotes a ירושלמי that offers a mystifying explanation:

...וכתיב והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול. כד שמע קול שופר חדא זימנא, בהיל ולא בהיל. אומר: שמא ההיא זימנא דשופר גדול. כד שמע תניינא, אומר: ודאי מטא זמניה, ומירתת ומתערבב ולית ליה פנאי למיעבד קטיגוריא.

"... it is written, " On that day a great Shofar will be blown..." When the שטן hears the sound of the Shofar the first time, he gets partially confused for he says, "Maybe the time has arrived for that great Shofar (of Moshiach)." When he hears it a second time, he says, "The time has definitely arrived (for the great Shofar of Moshiach)." He becomes afraid and confused and doesn't have the opportunity to prosecute."

It is still unclear how this works. How does a simple repetition of a mitzvah have such a profound effect? Why do the second set of sounds, more than the first, convince the שטן that the "great Shofar" is being sounded to herald the arrival of Moshiach? To answer this question, we need to take a step back and delve into the nature of the mitzvah of שופר.

To understand the nature of the Mitzvah of Shofar on Rosh HaShanna, we need to first understand its meaning on a more mundane level. What is the basic function of a Shofar in general? The basic function of a Shofar, put simply, is to be used as a method of communication. In the times of the Torah and beyond, it was used to communicate a message to a large mass of people in a quick and efficient manner. Certain simple sounds (broken, unbroken) were assigned specific meanings in advance. When the sound of the Shofar reverberated, everyone knew what to do. Similarly, we find that the חצוצרות - the Trumpets - were used by the כהנים to convey different messages to the Jewish People. When an unbroken sound was blown (תקיעה), all of בני ישראל knew that a meeting was convening. When a broken sound was blown (תרועה), all of בני ישראל knew it was time to break camp and prepare to journey.

1 ראש השנה דף טז עמוד א, ב

2 אורח חיים סימן תקפה

Even today, we have a similar communication system. When a siren wails with an elongated sound, (such as an air raid siren that unfortunately people in Israel are accustomed to) people know that some sort of warning is being issued. When a siren is sounded in short urgent blasts, everyone knows an ambulance or police car is passing and to pull over to the side of the street.

Since the Shofar is essentially a method of communication, a crucial question needs to be asked about the Mitzvah of Shofar on Rosh HaShanna: **Who** is communicating to **whom** through the Shofar? While there are a number of possible answers to this question, I would like to focus on two:

- a) We are communicating to G-d. (בני ישראל אל ה')
- b) G-d is communicating to us. (ה' אל בני ישראל)

According to the first possibility, the sound of the Shofar is essentially Tefillah. All year round, we communicate to G-d and daven to Him through the medium of words alone, while on Rosh HaShanna, we communicate to G-d and daven to Him through the medium of the Shofar as well. This idea, of course, is well known and substantiated. The clearest indication of Shofar as Tefillah is the placement of the second set of thirty sounds into the Mussaf repetition of the *Amidah* (and in some congregations into the *Amidah* itself.) The sounds of the Shofar merge with the *Amidah* and become a powerful wordless Tefillah. Unencumbered by words, the Tefillah of the Shofar emerges from the depths of the human soul and reaches heights that standard Tefillah cannot attain.

According to the second possibility above, G-d is conveying a message to us through the Shofar's sounds. This aspect of the Shofar is seen in the Rambam as he writes in הלכות תשובה³:

אע"פ שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזירת הכתוב, רמז יש בו: כלומר, "עורו ישינים משנתכם, ונרדמים הקיצו מתרדמתכם, וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה, וזכרו בוראכם... והטיבו דרכיכם ומעלליכם, ויעזוב כל אחד מכם דרכו הרעה ומחשבתו אשר לא טובה."

There is a message to the sound of the Shofar: It is saying, "Wake up from your sleep and from your slumber. Examine your behavior and return through תשובה. Remember your Creator and improve your ways and actions, and let every person abandon his evil ways and his improper thoughts..."

The first approach views Shofar as a form of **Tefillah**. According to the second approach, in a sense, Shofar is similar to **Talmud Torah**. While G-d usually communicates to us through the words of the תורה, on Rosh HaShanna, G-d also communicates to us through the sound of the Shofar.

In summary, the Mitzvah of תקיעת שופר is a two-way communication between עם ישראל and ה'. G-d calls out to us, beckoning us to return to Him, while at the same time, we call out to ה' and express our yearning to be close to Him. The בעל תוקע stands at the crossroads of this conversation and he serves a dual role. On the one hand he is שליח - an agent of ה'. He is sounding the Shofar on behalf of G-d and delivering His message. At the same time, the בעל תוקע

3 פרק ג, הלכה ד

is a שליח - an agent of כלל ישראל. He is sounding the Shofar on our behalf and he is expressing our heartfelt *Tefilot* by generating the Shofar's piercing sounds.

There is a well known question regarding the halachik definition of the Mitzvah of תקיעת שופר. Is the Mitzvah defined as **listening to the sound of the Shofar** as is clearly held by the Rambam,⁴ or is the Mitzvah defined as **creating the sound of the Shofar** i.e. blowing the Shofar which seems to be the view of רבנו תם⁵? Or perhaps the Mitzvah is a combination of these two components - **both creating and listening** to the sound of the Shofar.

These contrasting approaches dovetail nicely with the two views of Shofar presented above. One facet of the mitzvah of Shofar is the תקיעה - to create the sounds, i.e. to blow the Shofar. This aspect of the Mitzvah characterizes Shofar as a form of Tefilah through which we are communicating to G-d. Instead of davening in the standard way by generating **words**, we generate **wordless** sounds. This enables us to communicate to Hashem on Rosh HaShanna in a unique fashion.

A second facet of the Mitzvah of shofar is the שמיעה - hearing the sounds of the Shofar. This aspect of the Mitzvah characterizes Shofar as a form of communication from G-d to us via the Shofar. The Mitzvah is to **hear** the Shofar and to understand and internalize its divine message.

I would like to suggest that חז"ל instituted a second set of thirty sounds for the following underlying reason. חז"ל understood that the Mitzvah of Shofar has two aspects to it, each of paramount importance. G-d is communicating to us and, at the same time, we are communicating to G-d. חז"ל wanted us to focus properly on each aspect of the Mitzvah and experience each element fully and deeply. They realized that it is difficult to focus on both parts of the Mitzvah simultaneously. חז"ל solved this problem by splitting the Mitzvah into two parts enabling us to fulfill each part independently. Instead of hearing one set of thirty sounds, we hear two sets of thirty. One set of thirty we experience mainly as G-d speaking to us while the other set we experience mainly as ourselves speaking to G-d.

To be more precise, the **second** set of thirty sounds, the sounds we hear **during** Musaf, possess the character of Tefilah. As we stand before G-d and express the words of the Musaf *Amidah*, we generate the primal and profound sounds of the Shofar, thereby praying to and communicating with G-d with a powerful form of Tefilah.

The **first** set of thirty sounds, prior to Musaf, we experience as G-d calling to us. It is fitting that we blow these thirty sounds immediately following קריאת התורה. These sounds can be viewed as an extension of Torah reading. First, Hashem communicates to us through the Torah reading and then, through the Shofar. Even at הר סיני, the giving of the Torah was accompanied by the blast of the Shofar! וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחֹזֵק מְאֹד מִשָּׁה יְדַבֵּר וְהַאֲלָקִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל.

4 הלכות שופר פרק א הלכה א : מצות עשה של תורה לשמוע תרועת השופר בראש השנה

5 רא"ש ר"ה פרק ד, סוף סימן י בשם רבנו תם : שיש לברך על תקיעת שופר משום דעשייתה היא גמור מצותה

Perhaps a line in the רמב"ם can indirectly provide evidence for this idea. The רמב"ם⁶ writes: המנהג הפשוט בסדר התקיעות של ראש השנה בצבור כך הוא: אחר שקוראין בתורה ומחזירין הספר למקומו. ותוקע שלשים תקיעות. The רמב"ם makes a point of saying that the Torah is returned to its place before beginning the תקיעות. The fact that we don't follow this halacha of the רמב"ם supports the notion mentioned above. Our מנהג is to leave the תורה out during תקיעת שופר. Perhaps we do this to show that תקיעת שופר is connected to קריאת התורה and is an extension of it. G-d "spoke" to us during קריאת התורה and he continues to "speak" to us through the Shofar.

Further evidence of this idea can be found in a מנהג brought down in the כלבו. The כלבו writes that in certain towns, the מנהג was to ensure that the בעל תוקע received an עליה during קריאת התורה. We can suggest that aside from giving כבוד to the בעל תוקע, this was also for the purpose of linking תקיעת שופר to קריאת התורה.

We can now answer our original question. How does the שטן get confused when we blow two sets of thirty sounds of Shofar (one set prior to Musaf and one set during Musaf)? What does the ירושלמי mean when it says that the first set of thirty sounds partially confuses the שטן while the second set of thirty completely confuses the שטן? Why is he convinced that the second set, more than the first, represents the שופר של משיח?

When the שטן hears the first set of thirty sounds, he is hearing G-d calling out to the Jewish people. G-d is drawing us closer to Him, and as a result, the שטן says, "Maybe the time has come. Maybe G-d is ready to redeem the Jewish people." But the שטן is unsure. Perhaps G-d's call will be left unanswered. Perhaps, חס ושלום, the Jewish People will not be awakened from their slumber and the opportunity for redemption will be lost. But then the שטן hears the second set of thirty sounds during Musaf. These sounds of the Shofar take on an entirely different meaning. Now the שטן hears עם ישראל calling out to G-d and responding to Him through the תפלה of the Shofar. With the persistent crying sounds of the Shofar, we express our intense longing to connect with Hashem. Now the שטן is convinced that the time for redemption is at hand. The Shofar has accomplished its mission. It has awakened the Jewish people, and they indeed, yearn to be close to Hashem. Redemption is sure to follow.

May we be זוכה to see the fulfillment of the *Pasuk*,
והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול.

הלכות שופר פרק ג הלכה י 6