

Salvation of Man and Beast: Noach, Shofar and the Ultimate Mercy

The Rosh Hashana liturgy is a window into the character of this extraordinary day. Often, a familiar theme is given vivid expression via the Machzor's rich and poetic language. Occasionally, the message only emerges through a careful analysis of the text and its linguistic nuances.

Vayizkor Elokim Es Noach: The Lead Reference of the Zichronos Blessing

A passage from *Zichronos* — one of the three core blessings of the Musaf Amida — exemplifies the latter phenomenon.

After affirming G-d's omniscience, the prayer segues into a string of scriptural proof texts. The lead reference states that Hashem remembered Noach along with the beasts and animals that were his companions in the *teiva*; He caused a wind to pass over the earth and the waters subsided. The Machzor introduces this verse as follows:

וגם את נח באהבה זכרת ותפקדהו בדבר
ישועה ורחמים, בהביאך את מי המבול לשחת
כל בשר מפני רוע מעלליהם. על כן זכרוננו בא
לפניך ה' אלהינו להרבות זרעו כעפרות תבל
וצאצאיו כחול הים. ככתוב בתורתך. ויזכר
אלהים את נח ואת כל החיה ואת כל הבהמה
אשר אתו בתבה ויעבר אלהים רוח על הארץ
וישכו המים
תפלת מוסף לראש השנה

*You also remembered Noach with love
and You were mindful of him with
salvation and mercy when You brought*



Rabbi Elchanan Adler

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

flood waters to destroy all flesh because of their evil deeds. Therefore, his memory comes before You, G-d our Lord, to make his descendants like the dust of the earth and his progeny like the sand of the sea. As it states in Your Torah "And G-d remembered Noach and all of the beasts and the cattle that were with him in the ark, and G-d caused a wind to blow over the land and the water calmed."

Mussaf for Rosh Hashana

It is interesting that the remembrance referenced here lacks an overt Jewish connection. On the one hand, this is understandable given that universal motifs overlap comfortably with the central themes of Rosh Hashana and find expression within its liturgy.¹ On the other hand, there are indications that something more profound is at play with regard to this particular verse.

First, this verse's universalism is in marked dissonance with the subsequent citations, all of which speak of Jewish destiny.² Additionally, aside from being first in the list, this citation distinguishes itself from the rest by virtue of the elaborate introduction that provides its background ("You also remembered Noach with love etc."). Finally, to the degree that Rosh Hashana embraces universal themes, these aspects are ancillary to

Israel's covenantal relationship with Hashem; it is, after all, the Jews who are commanded to affirm His Kingship, and who fervently seek favorable mention in the merit of the Patriarchs. How puzzling then that of all the verses cited to affirm G-d's omniscience, it is the one that seemingly lacks any Jewish connection that is accorded the greatest prominence!

The Remembrance of Noach: A Symbol of Jewish Survival

These linguistic clues would suggest that, notwithstanding its universal overtones, this verse carries powerful symbolic significance for the Jewish people.

This finds support in Yeshayahu's prophecy, which links Hashem's promise not to abandon His chosen Nation to His promise never to bring another flood upon the world, with the latter serving as a metaphor for the former:

כי מי נח זאת לי אשר נשבעתי מעבר מי נח
עוד על הארץ כן נשבעתי מקצף עליך ומגער
בך: כי ההרים ימושו והגבעות תמוטנה וחסדי
מאתך לא ימוש וברית שלומי לא תמוט אמר
מרחמך ה':

ישעיהו נד: ט - י, הפטרה לפרשת נח

This is for me like the waters of Noah: as I swore that the waters of Noah will never pass over the earth, so have I sworn not to be angry with you or rebuke you. For the mountains will move and the hills will falter but My kindness will never move from you and My covenant of peace will never falter, said G-d Who has compassion on you.

Yeshayahu 54:9-10

R. Yehuda Halevi (1075-1141), the prolific poet, incorporates this notion in the popular Shabbos hymn, “*Yom Shabason Ein Lishko’ach*”:³

העם אשר נע כצאן טעה יזכור לפקדו בריית
ושבועה
לבל יעבר בם מקרה רעה כאשר נשבעת על
מי נח.

The nation that has wandered like a straying flock — May He remember for them the covenant and the oath

So that no harm should happen to them, as You swore regarding the waters of Noah.

If the Divine promise to never again destroy the world “doubles” as a guarantee for the viability of the Jewish people, then, by extension, the promise’s harbinger stage — G-d’s remembrance of Noah and the animals — should likewise embody within it a favorable element for Klal Yisrael.

Yeshua Ve’Rachamim: Allusions and Associations

The connection between “*Vayizkor Elokim es Noach*” and Hashem’s

everlasting love for His people may be sharpened by analyzing the phrase *yeshua ve’rachamim*, used in the Machzor to provide context for this verse:

וגם את נח באהבה זכרת ותפקדהו בדבר
ישועה ורחמים.

You also remembered Noah with love and You were mindful of him with salvation and mercy.

What is the origin of this phrase? What is the significance of the juxtaposition of its two words — *yeshua* and *rachamim*? Why is this particular word combination used to describe the remembrance of Noah?

Abudarham (14th cent.) identifies two verses which he pairs, respectively, with the words *yeshua* and *rachamim*. Both carry contextual associations with the story of Noah:

ותפקדהו בדבר ישועה ורחמים. ישועה על שם
(תה’ לו, ז) אדם ובהמה תושיע ה’, ורחמים
על שם שכתוב גבי מי נח (ישעיה נד, י) אמר
מרחמך ה’.

You were mindful of him with salvation and mercy. “Salvation” is based on [the verse] “G-d saves man and animal; “mercy” is based on the verse regarding the waters of Noah “said G-d Who has compassion on you.”

The first reference, “*Adam u’ve’heima toshi’a, Hashem*,” speaks of a salvation that encompasses man and animals. This aligns well with the verse at hand which describes Hashem remembering Noah along with the animal inhabitants of the *teiva*.

The source of the second reference, “*amar merachameich Hashem*,” is the aforementioned prophecy in Yeshayahu — “*This is for me like the waters of Noah ...*” — that links Hashem’s eternal love for His people with His promise to never bring another *mabul* upon the earth.

In light of the above, it is surely no coincidence that the very choice of words used to depict Hashem’s remembrance of Noah contains an allusion to Hashem’s bond with His Nation.

In this vein, it is noteworthy that the phrase *yeshua ve’rachamim* recurs in the closing paragraph of the *Zichronos* blessing:

אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו זכרנו בזכרון טוב
מלפניך ופקדנו בפקודת ישועה ורחמים משמי
שמי קדם.

Our Lord and the Lord of our forefathers, remember us with a favorable remembrance before You and be mindful of us with a directive of salvation and mercy from the most ancient of heavens.

In beseeching Hashem to remember us favorably, we harken back to the phrase that appeared in conjunction with the verse “*Vayizkor Elokim es Noach*.” Apparently, the special quality of mercy extended to Noah remains available for the Jewish People to draw on as well.⁴

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**Rav Aharon Lichtenstein
zt"l on the Value of
Ramban's Commentary on
the Torah**

זה אבד הספר "מורה נבוכים", היה זה הפסד אבל לא כביר; עם ישראל היה מחזיק מעמד. אבל אם פירושו של הרמב"ן לתורה היה הולך לאיבוד אני מרגיש שהייתה קטסרופה ... דמותו של הרמב"ן ופירושו לתורה מעמידים את עולמו הרוחני של עם ישראל ... מבחינה היסטורית, הרמב"ן הוא חיבור של תורת אשכנז ותורת ספרד, חיבור של רש"י ואבן עזרא, חיבור של כל מיני מקומות. אבל לא זו בלבד. יש בו גם סינתזה מורכבת הרבה יותר, סינתזה מבחינת התחומים.
מתוך ספר "מבקשי פניך" - שיחות עם הרב אהרן ליכטנשטיין, עמ' 40

If the *Guide for the Perplexed* would have been destroyed (and never published), it would have been a loss, but not a huge loss. The [Torah theology of the] nation of Israel would have been sustained. However, if the commentary of Ramban on the Torah would have been destroyed, I feel that it would have been catastrophic ... The image of the Ramban and his commentary to the Torah support the spiritual world of the Jewish nation ... From a historical perspective, the [commentary of] Ramban is an amalgamation of the Torah of Germany and the Torah of Spain, of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, of all different places. But this is not all. It also contains a multi-layered synthesis, a synthesis of disciplines....

From Mevakshei Panecha: Sichot Im HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein p. 40

**Yeshua Ve'rachamim: A
Transcendent Ethereal Mercy**

Let us explore additional liturgical associations of the phrase "yeshu'a ve'rachamim." When requesting the benevolent remembrance of yeshu'a ve'rachamim at the close of Zichronos, we describe it as emanating "mishmei shmei kedem" — from the most ancient of Heavens. Whatever its kabbalistic connotations,⁵ this appellation indicates, at the very least, that the mercy being described has a transcendental quality and descends from a loftier channel than does ordinary mercy.

We may discern the connection between the phrase *yeshua verachamim* and transcendental mercy in the *Yaa'le VeYavo* prayer whose entire theme is remembrance.⁶ After a lengthy list of entreaties to be remembered favorably — "*ya'ale ve'yavo veyagi'a ... zochreinu Hashem Elokeinu bo le'tova* etc." — the closing words incorporate a plea for *yeshua verachamim*:

ובדבר ישועה ורחמים חוס וחנונו ורחם עלינו והושיענו.

In accord with the word of salvation and mercy, spare us and be gracious to us, have compassion on us and save us.

At first glance, this request seems anticlimactic. Many appeals to remembrance and mercy have already been made — why beg for additional mercy?

Apparently, the mercy implicit in the phrase *yeshua verachamim* refers to a heretofore unmentioned type of grace that transcends the bounds of ordinary mercy⁷ and serves, in effect, as "the mercy of last resort."

**Vayizkor Elokim es Noach:
A Reemergence of the
Primordial Will**

What makes "yeshua verachamim mercy" so transcendent? What sets it apart from ordinary mercy?

I believe that the answer is found in the comments of the Ramban on "Vayizkor Elokim es Noach" (Bereishis 8:1).

The Ramban is troubled by the verse's description of the animals being the beneficiaries of Hashem's mindfulness. Whereas human beings who exercise free will are rewarded in a manner that is commensurate with their accrued merit, animals are creatures of instinct and should not be singled out for special remembrance. What, then, is the meaning of G-d's "remembering" the animals?⁸

The Ramban offers a profound explanation:

ויזכור אלהים את נח ואת כל החיה ואת כל הבהמה - הזכירה בנח מפני שהיה צדיק תמים וזכרת לו ברית להצילו. ונח יכלול זרעו אשר אתו שם, ולא הזכירם כי בזכותו ניצולו. אבל הזכירה שאמר בחיה ובבהמה אינה בזכות, שאין בבעלי נפש זכות או חובה זולתי באדם לבדו.

אבל הזכירה בהם, כי זכר את דבר קדשו שאמר והיה העולם, והרצון אשר לו בבריאת העולם עלה לפניו ורצה בקיום העולם במינין אשר ברא בו, והנה ראה עתה להוציאם שלא יכלו בתיבה. ולא הזכיר העוף והשרץ, כי זכירת החיה שוה עמהם, ויגיד עליו רעו:

And G-d remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle. The remembrance of Noah was because he was a perfectly righteous man, and He had made a covenant with him to save him. The word "Noah" here includes his children that were there with him. Scripture did not mention them specifically, though, for they were saved by his merit. However, the remembrance

stated concerning beast and cattle was not on account of merit, for among living creatures there is no merit or guilt save in man alone. **But the remembrance concerning them was “Because He remembered His holy word” which He had spoken, causing the world to come into existence, and the Will which was before Him at the creation of the world arose before Him and He desired the existence of the world with all the species that He created therein.** Thus He now saw fit to bring them forth so that they should not perish in the ark. Scripture does not mention the fowl and the creeping things for the remembrance of “the living thing” is similar to their remembrance, and “the companion thereof telleth us concerning it.” (Chavel Translation)

According to the Ramban, the remembrance of the animals is a manifestation of the primordial will which brought the world into being, complete with the animal kingdom and all of its distinct species. While the *mabul* raged, this aspect of the Divine Will lay dormant, and reemerged at the pivotal juncture referred to in this verse.

Building on Ramban’s thesis, we may extrapolate that the manifestation of the primordial process was not limited to animals but extended to Noach and the human race as a whole. For all intents and purposes, the *mabul* constituted a suppression of the primordial Will with respect to mankind and animals alike. Only now did Hashem allow it to resurface⁹ on both of these levels.¹⁰

The Ramban’s insight provides a valuable frame of reference to conceptualize the mercy epitomized by the phrase *yeshua verachamim* and why it is said to emanate from *shmei shmei kedem* — the ancient heavens. By definition, this manifestation of primordial mercy cannot be predicated on the normal pathways of reward that are commensurate with the human exercise of free will that are a part of a post-creation world. Rather, it is a unilateral gesture of Divine grace that is self-justifying, and independent of the recipient’s worthiness. Just as He “Willed” the world into existence — “*amar ve’haya ha’olam*” — with a boundless sense of infinite mercy - so did He “Will” - “to make his [Noach’s] descendants like the dust of the earth and his progeny like the sand of the sea.”

The Primordial Will and the Survival of Am Yisrael

How does this serve as an inspiration for the Jewish People? How does Klal Yisrael tap into this reservoir of primordial mercy?

Axiomatic to a Torah-based theology is that the Jewish People are indispensable to the world’s existence. Through fidelity to Hashem’s commandments, Am Yisrael serves as *or la’goyim* — ambassadors to the world at large, leading the world toward its state of *tikun*. Consequently, Am Yisrael’s continued existence is forever bound up with the act of Creation itself.

This concept is explicated by the Ramban as one of the central motifs

of *Shiras Ha’azinu*, the song taught by Moshe Rabeinu to bnei Yisrael on the last day of his life. Among other things, *Shiras Ha’azinu* foretells dire circumstances that will befall the Jewish people at the end of days. The Song concludes on a positive note, stating that when all seems lost, Hashem will intervene on behalf of His people so that the enemies of Israel not gloat and attribute Jewish suffering to their own military prowess. The unmistakable impression is that despite their failings, and even when their collective merit is depleted, the Jewish People will still have recourse to a Divine grace that assures their continuity. The Ramban (Devarim 32:26) explains that in such instances, the Divine intervention is performed for “His own sake”. He eloquently summarizes this idea as follows:

והנה יאמר הכתוב, כי היה במדת הדין להיותנו כן בגלות לעולם, לולי כעס אויב [אגור]. ויורה זה, כי בגלותנו עתה תמה זכות אבות ואין לנו הצלה מיד העמים רק בעבור שמו, כענין שאמר ביחזקאל (כ מא מד) וקבצתי אתכם מן הארצות אשר נפוצתם בם ונקדשתי בכם לעיני הגוים, וידעתם כי אני ה' בעשותי אתכם למען שמי לא כדרכיכם הרעים וכעלילותיכם הנשחתות בית ישראל, וכן נאמר עוד (שם פסוק ט) ואעש למען שמי לבלתי החל לעיני הגוים וגו': ולכך הזכיר משה בתפלתו (במדבר יד טו) ואמרו הגוים אשר שמעו את שמעך לאמר וגו', והשם יתברך הודה לו בזה (שם פסוק כ) ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך. והטעם בטענה הזאת, איננו כרוצה להראות כחו בין שונאיו, כי כל הגוים כאין נגדו מאפס ותוהו נחשבו לו. אבל השם ברא את האדם בתחתונים שיכיר את בוראו ויודה לשמו, ושם הרשות בידו להרע או להטיב, וכאשר חטאו ברצונם וכפרו



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בו כולם לא נשאר רק העם הזה לשמו, ופרסם בהם באותות ובמופתים כי הוא אלהי האלהים ואדוני האדונים ונודע בזה לכל העמים. והנה אם ישוב ויאבד זכרם, ישכחו העמים את אותותיו ואת מעשיו ולא יסופר עוד בהם, ואם אדם יזכיר כן, יחשבו כי היה כח מכחות המזלות והכוכבים וחלף ועבר. והנה תהיה כוונת הבריאה באדם בטלה לגמרי, שלא ישאר בהם יודע את בוראו רק מקעים לפניו, ועל כן ראוי מדין הרצון שהיה בבריאת העולם, שיהיה רצון מלפניו להקים לו לעם כל הימים, כי הם הקרובים אליו והיודעים אותו מכל העמים:

Thus Scripture states that according to the attribute of justice we should remain in this condition of Exile forever “were it not that I was in dread of the wrath from the enemy.” This teaches that, in our present exile, [the protecting influence of] the merits of the patriarchs have ceased and we have no deliverance from the hands of the nations except for the sake of His Great Name, similar to what He stated in the Book of Ezekiel (20:41), “when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations. And ye shall know that I am the Eternal, when I have wrought with you for My Name’s sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel.” And so also it is further stated, “But I wrought for My Name’s sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nation’s etc.” Therefore Moses mentioned in his prayer (Numbers 14:15), “then the nations which have heard the fame of Thee will speak, saying etc.” and G-d, blessed be He, acknowledged him in this (Numbers 14:20), “And the Eternal said: I have pardoned according to thy word.”

This plea is not meant to demonstrate His power among His enemies, for “All the nations are as nothing before Him; they are accounted by Him as things of nought, and vanity.” (Isaiah 40:17)



*Rather, [the explanation thereof is as follows:] G-d created man among the lower creatures in order that he acknowledge his Creator and be thankful to His name, and He placed in his hand the choice to do evil or good. But when people sinned willingly and they all denied Him, only this people [Israel] remained devoted to His name, and so He made known through them by means of signs and wonders that “He is G-d of gods, and Lord of lords,” (Devarim 10:17) and this became known to all nations. Now, if He were to reconsider and their memory [i.e., of Israel] be lost, the nations will forget His wonders and His deeds and they will no longer recount them. And if a person should mention them, they will think that it was [done by] one of the powers of the constellations which is “overflowing as he passeth through,” (Isaiah 8:8) and thus the purpose of the creation of man will be annulled completely, for no one will be left among them who knows his Creator — only those who provoke Him. **Therefore, it is appropriate as a consequence of the [Divine] Will which existed at the creation of the world to establish for Himself a***

***people for all time, who are nearer to Him and who know Him more than all the [other] peoples.** (Chavel Translation)*

In providing a theological rationale for Divine intervention in the face of *chilul Hashem*, the Ramban equates the force that ensures Israel’s continuity with the Divine Will integral to the act of Creation. Pieced together with the Ramban’s own comments on the verse “*vayizkor Elokim es Noach*,” it becomes abundantly clear that the latter verse embodies the extraordinary secret of Jewish survival; hence, the prominent place that it holds among the verses of *Zichronos* is most appropriate.

Activating the Channels of the Primordial Mercy: Instinct over Intellect

Let us sketch the main ideas developed thus far:

1. The message of Hashem’s eternal concern for Am Yisrael is metaphorically linked to His promise to never again destroy the world.

2. This promise was foreshadowed by Hashem's remembrance of Noah and the calming of the raging waters.

3. This remembrance is a manifestation of an attribute of mercy associated with the phrase *yeshua ve'rachamim*, which emanates from the "Ancient Heavens" (*shmei shmei kedem*) and is synonymous with the Primordial Will of Creation.

4. Inasmuch as the Jewish People are essential for the world to achieve its purpose, their survival is vital to the world's continued existence.

5. Consequently, the same attribute of mercy that keeps the world going is what sustains Klal Yisrael, and when all else fails, can serve as the mercy "of last resort."

Our analysis raises something of a paradox. Presumably, "*yeshua ve'rachamim* mercy" may be accessed at any given time, on a collective or individual level.¹¹ But if becoming a beneficiary of this transcendent mercy is not contingent on merit, then what factors, if any, contribute to the opening of such channels? Is there a process by which the flow of this transcendent mercy is generated?

Perhaps an answer lies in the phraseology of the verse "*Vayizkor Elokim es Noach*" which identifies Noah and the animals, despite their vast dissimilarities, as joint beneficiaries of the Divine grace. This depiction is reminiscent of the verse "*Adam u'veheima toshi'a Hashem*" (cited by Abudarham as the source

for the word *yeshua* in the phrase *yeshu'a verachamim*), which speaks of a salvation that bridges man and animals.

Taken homiletically, the message of this verse is that the "equalizing" of man and animals holds the key to opening the channel of primordial mercy. The quality common to animals and humans is that both are creatures of G-d. However, the driving force behind animal behavior is instinct while a human being's actions are rooted in cognition and free will. While the human ability to think and act autonomously is a gift that is meant to be channeled in the service of G-d, there are occasions when one's rational human qualities should be sublimated in favor of an instinctive loyalty to G-d. Otherwise, one's intellectual capacities can potentially compromise basic faith.

This concept is accentuated by Chazal in the following homiletic interpretations on the verse "*Adam u'veheima toshi'a Hashem*":

אדם ובהמה תושיע ה', ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב: אלו בני אדם שהן ערומין בדעת ומשימין עצמן כבהמה.
חולין ה:

[The verse states] "G-d saves man and animal," Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: This refers to people that are sophisticated yet conduct themselves [humbly] like animals.

Chullin 5b

אדם ובהמה תושיע ה', אדם בזכות בהמה תושיע ה' אמרו ישראל רבש"ע כאדם אנחנו כבהמה תושיענו לפי שאנו נמשכין אחריו כבהמה.

ויקרא רבה פרשה כז ד"ה שור

[The verse states] "G-d saves man and animal," G-d will save in the merit of animals. The Jewish people said: Master of the Universe, we are like man, please save us like [You save] animals because we are drawn after You like an animal.
Vayikra Rabbah, Parsha no. 27

Thus, the secret to becoming the beneficiary of special Divine grace may be the ability of a human being to suspend his sophisticated, rational faculty in favor of simple faith,¹² amidst a recognition that when all is said and done, he, along with the animals and beasts of the field, are merely creatures of the One and Only G-d who fashioned us all.

Dependency on Hashem: Our Eyes Turn To You

The self-awareness of being a "creature of G-d" reinforces within oneself a faith and dependency on the One above. On the most instinctive level, this visceral sense of dependency spans humans and animals and is aptly captured in a verse recited thrice daily:

עיני כל אליך ישרו ואתה נותן להם את אכלם בעתו.
תהלים קמה, טו



The eyes of all turn to You with hope and You give them their food in the proper time.

Tehillim 145:15

In effect, gaining access to the primordial mercy entails a measure of subverting our cognitive-based, autonomous self-image and adopting the mindset of being a creature that is dependent on its Creator for its basic needs.

This paradigm shift may be discerned in the phraseology accompanying the closing request of the *Yaale VeYavo* prayer — “*U’vidvar yeshu’ah verachamim ...*” — which, as noted earlier, is a reference to the transcendent mercy that is tied to the primordial will of creation:

ובדבר ישועה ורחמים חוס וחננו ורחם עלינו והושיענו כי אליך עינינו כי א-ל מלך חנון ורחום אתה.

In accord with the word of salvation and mercy, spare us and be gracious to us, have compassion on us and save us because our eyes are turned to You, because You are a G-d, a King who is merciful and compassionate.

Our appeal for the ultimate mercy is followed by three words that capture succinctly the sentiment of dependency on G-d that is necessary for eliciting this extraordinary level of mercy — “*ki eleicha eineinu*” — because our eyes are turned to You. We conclude with “because You are a G-d, a King who is merciful and compassionate” to reinforce the idea that the mercy is a manifestation of G-d’s extraordinary grace.

Accessing this mercy is not a function of merit, nor of erudition or cognition; it lies deep in the recesses of one’s inner being — in the instinctual awareness of being a “creature of G-d” and in a feeling of utter dependence upon Him.

The Power of the Shofar: Embracing an “Animal-like Temimus”

Chazal teach us that the Jews’ blowing the shofar has the capacity to transform the attribute of judgment into mercy:

עלה אלהים בתרועה ה' בקול שופר (תהלים מז) בשעה שהקב"ה יושב ועולה על כסא דין בדין הוא עולה ... ובשעה שישראל נוטלין את שופריהן ותוקעין לפני הקב"ה עומד מכסא הדין ויושב בכסא רחמים דכתיב ה' בקול שופר ומתמלא עליהם רחמים ומרחם עליהם והופך עליהם מדת הדין לרחמים ויקרא רבה פרשה כט ד"ה יהודה ברבי

[*The verse states*] “*The Lord rose with a blast, God, with the sound of the shofar.*” *When the Holy One Blessed be He ascends and sits on the throne of judgment, He rises with judgment ... And when the Jewish people take their shofars and blow them before the Holy One Blessed be He, He rises from the throne of judgment and sits on the throne of mercy as it states “God, with the sound of the shofar.” He fills them with mercy, has compassion on them and transforms strict judgment to mercy.*

Vayikra Rabbah, Parsha no. 29

In Summary

1. The message of Hashem’s eternal concern for Am Yisrael is metaphorically linked to His promise to never again destroy the world.
2. This promise was foreshadowed by Hashem’s remembrance of Noach and the calming of the raging waters.
3. This remembrance is a manifestation of an attribute of mercy associated with the phrase *yeshua ve’rachamim*, which emanates from the “Ancient Heavens” (*shmei shmei kedem*) and is synonymous with the Primordial Will of Creation.
4. Inasmuch as the Jewish People are essential for the world to achieve its purpose, their survival is vital to the world’s continued existence.
5. Consequently, the same attribute of mercy that keeps the world going is what sustains Klal Yisrael, and when all else fails, can serve as the mercy “of last resort.”
6. The secret to becoming the beneficiary of special Divine grace may be the ability of a human being to suspend his sophisticated, rational faculty in favor of simple faith.
7. Accessing this mercy is not a function of merit, nor of erudition or cognition; it lies deep in the recesses of one’s inner being — in the instinctual awareness of being a “creature of G-d” and in a feeling of utter dependence upon Him.
8. By blowing shofar, a Jew momentarily sets aside his autonomy and embraces his fragile existence as a creature of G-d, not unlike the animals. This very gesture generates a measure of reciprocity on the part of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in the form of a primordial mercy that emanates from the ancient heavens.

What is the nature of the shofar's transformative power? What kind of feeling does it evoke?

In light of what we have seen, it would be compelling to equate the mercy engendered by the shofar with the primordial grace synonymous with creation.¹³ The transformative quality inherent in this mitzvah is based on a Jew's ability to set aside his rational faculties and embrace an "animal-like simplicity" as symbolized by the origin of the physical shofar itself.¹⁴ This motif also lies at the heart of the episode of *akeidas Yitzchak* whose symbolism the Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 16a) invokes in connection with the mitzvah of shofar.¹⁵

The blowing of the shofar is the epitome of simplicity — without illusions, trappings, or pretensions. By blowing shofar, a Jew momentarily sets aside his autonomy and embraces his fragile existence as a creature of G-d, not unlike the animals. This very gesture generates a measure of reciprocity on the part of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in the form of a primordial mercy that emanates from the ancient heavens.

May we be the beneficiaries of this extraordinary manifestation of Heavenly grace; inscribed, individually and collectively, for a *shana tova umesuka*.

Notes:

1. For example, the prayers repeatedly acknowledge that Hashem is Sovereign over the entire universe and that His inscrutable judgment extends to every human being.

2. As, for example, the repeated references to recalling the covenant, or of Israel's loyalty in following Hashem into the wilderness.

3. Interestingly, the first part of the song's refrain "*Yona matz'ah vo mano'ach*" also contains an allusion to the story of Noah.

4. Additionally, it should be noted that this phrase appears in the prayer "*Av harachamim Hu yerachem am amusim*," recited as the sefer Torah is brought from the Aron Kodesh to the bima. The tefila focuses on the welfare of the Jewish people and concludes with a petition that our wishes be fulfilled in good measure (*bemida tova*) with *yeshua ve'rachamim*. Here, too, it is evident that this mercy has special significance for Jewish destiny.

5. Within a Kabbalistic framework, the allusion is most likely to the *sefira* of *keser*, the loftiest of the ten *sefiros* through which the Divine celestial energy flows into the world below.

6. See *Tur* (OC 591) who cites approvingly a custom to recite the prayer of *Ya'ale VeYavo* within the *Zichronos* prayer.

7. It is fascinating to note that according to the Gaon of Vilna (*Siddur Ishei Yisrael*, quoted also in printed editions of *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* at the beginning), the various expressions connoting remembrance that appear at the outset of the *Ya'ale VeYavo* prayer (*ya'ale, yavo, yagi'ah* etc.) correspond to the seven Heavens listed by the Talmud (*Chagiga* 12b), each with its own designated name and unique description. Hence, it would be appropriate for the closing request of "*u'vidvar yeshu'a verachamim*" to be linked to a source that transcends the standard seven Heavens. This may correspond with the "*shemei shmei kedem*" (the ancient heaven of heavens) — the appellation that is used in connection with this very phrase at the close of the *Zichronos* prayer.

8. See Rashi *ibid* who cites an answer based on a midrash. By contrast, Ramban's resolution reflects a more peshat-oriented approach.

9. For an elaboration on the concept of Hashem's "activating" an attribute of mercy at a given time, see *Chidushei HaGriz al HaTorah* on this verse.

10. Apparently, the rescuing of the *teiva* inhabitants need not constitute a reaffirmation of the primordial will to repopulate the earth, but may be interpreted as merely providing safe haven in the interim. Interestingly, this approach may shed light on Rashi's comments to 6:17 that Hashem, in informing Noah about his intention to bring the flood, was acceding to the angels' argument against the creation of man. Ramban questions Rashi's explanation given

that in the very next verse Hashem instructs Noah to build an ark, thus ensuring the future of mankind. In defense of Rashi, we may suggest that Hashem's instructions to Noah to build an ark notwithstanding, there was as yet no renewed commitment to the continuity of life thereafter; hence, the mass destruction of the world still represented a concession to the argument put forth by the angels. (See, however, 7:3 which implies that at least with regard to birds there already existed a Divine mandate to perpetuate the species in the aftermath of the *mabul*. For further elaboration, see *Yekev Ephraim* 6:17.)

11. It is undoubtedly this transcendental mercy that underlies a mystical concept associated with the 13 attributes of mercy in which Hashem promises: "*vechanosi es asher achon - af al pi she'eino hagun*" — "I will show grace to whomever I show grace — even if they are unworthy" (*Berachos* 7a). Elaboration goes beyond the scope of this essay.

12. Interestingly, the Ramban, in the continuation of the passage quoted above that ascribes the Divine intervention on behalf of Israel to the primordial will, highlights Israel's loyalty and steadfastness to Hashem in bearing the hardships of the long exile. This suggests that displaying simple loyalty is a prerequisite to benefiting from the Divine grace.

13. This would parallel the notion suggested by many Hassidic works that the blowing of the shofar is reminiscent of the verse depicting the creation of man through Hashem's "blowing into him the breath of life" — "*Vayipach be'apav nishmas chayim*" (*Bereishis* 2:7).

14. Additionally, the wordless sound of the shofar lacks the sophistication that is characteristic of human verbal communication.

15. Apropos the *akeida's* association with the primordial mercy, it is noteworthy that the *parshas ha'akeida's* appearance in the daily liturgy (after *Birchos HaShachar*) features an introductory prayer reminiscent of the petition at the end of *Zichronos*: "*u'fakdeinu bifkudas yeshu'a ve'rachamim mishmei shmei kedem*" — "and be mindful of us with a directive of salvation and mercy from the most ancient of heavens."