

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



ROSH HASHANA

Blow Your Own Horn

As we turn the page on 5786, we think about our hopes and possibilities for the new year. We contemplate and conjecture how we can be a better version of ourselves in this, as yet unwritten, chronicle of our lives. There is something magical happening every year on Rosh HaShana. It's our job to bottle that magic and use it to improve next year's version of ourselves.

Where does this optimism come from? Well, let's look at the two verses in our Torah describing this event we call Rosh HaShana:

Speak to the Israelite people thus: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts. (Vayikra 23:25). And: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded. (Bamidbar 29:1)

Pretty similar. Obviously, the date's the same. They both reference the holiness ('sanctity') of the day. But then comes the day's special, unique

ingredient: The SHOFAR is sounded.

What is the SEGULA or one-of-a-kind nature of this instrument? Boy, are there a lot of answers to that question!

Rashi offers the most famous approach: I recall for you the offering of Yitzchak in whose stead a ram was offered having been caught by its horn. In other words, on this the anniversary of the AKEIDA (abortive offering of Yitzchak), we blow the ram's horn to access the merit garnered by Avraham and Yitzchak that momentous day. I'm proud to live on Route 60, which was DERECH AVOT (the Patriarchal Path), the most likely route used by father and son on the way to the AKEIDA.

The S'forno suggests a more sociological idea, which aptly describes the nature of this day: When celebrating the king, one employs blasts on the trumpets to demonstrate regard for the king. The expression ZICHRON means that God sits on the throne of Justice remembering the deeds of His subjects and as a judge.

These great scholars reference the merit of the day and the trepidation of the day. After this the ideas get more esoteric.

The Ramban references the mood set by the weeping-like aspect of the T'RU'A notes, and explains: So, 'a day of T'RU'A unto you' means that the

day which is set aside for T'RU'A [when the world is judged], will be to our strength for we will be remembered in compassion for our wailing before God.

The Ramban concludes that these tears, both real and symbolic, facilitate our salvation, and therefore we proclaim: Fortunate (ASHREI) is the nation who knows the T'RU'A (T'hilim 89:16). We Jews don't agree with poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox: Laugh and the world laughs with you; Cry and you cry alone. We Jews not only laugh together, we cry together.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch and Rabbeinu Bechaye agree that the wording employed to introduce our YOM TOV is unusual and, perhaps, even enigmatic when compared to introductions of other festivals. Rabbeinu Bechaye says that's because this commemoration has deeper theological ideas attached to it than any other holy day. It teaches us about our relationship to the Creation, and to the AVOT and to our own commitment to Torah and Mitzvot. So, it became a day of judgment.

Rav Hirsch declares that the unique character of the day stems from the fact that this is the only holiday on which we don't commemorate any amazing gifts from God to our nation. Instead this day invites us to work on ourselves. He doesn't say it, but I

believe on this anniversary of the Cosmos, we proffer our own gift to God: An improved version of ourselves.

The S'fat Emet understands that the annual renewal of Creation which occurs on Rosh HaShana unfolds based upon how the Jews prepare themselves to accept God's sovereignty. God was able to say that Creation was 'very good' that first year because Adam had already done T'shuva for his sin. How 'goodly' succeeding anniversaries turn out is totally up to us.

As a result of Adam's T'shuva, God produced Shabbat! This amazing gift to the world was 'blessed and sanctified' by God, and, as a result, became this wonderful piece of the world which existed before the Creation and will emerge again as the World to Come. As a result of the remarkable spiritual status of Shabbat, the Rebbe declares: Therefore, on Shabbat, there is no need to blow the Shofar, because this unity is awakened on its own. The purpose of blowing the Shofar is to awaken that extraordinary aspect of God's unity.

The Mei Shilo'ach adds to this idea about Shofar blowing being perhaps superfluous on Shabbat by adding: The purpose of the shofar is to awaken the inner dimension of creation, for the inner dimension of creation is the Torah... Shabbat

encompasses all the commandments, and just as all human actions are forbidden on Shabbat, because Shabbat is greater than all the commandments, so, too, we omit the Shofar.

But the Mei Shilo'ach adds: In the Beit HaMikdash, however, the sacrifices override Shabbat. Therefore in the Beit HaMikdash they blew the Shofar on Shabbat.

The Mei Shilo'ach anticipated this year's controversy. There are those who want to go up onto Har HaBayit this Shabbat and blow Shofar, because that's what we did in the 'good ol' days'. But it's not that simple. (Is anything?) Some authorities differ with the analysis of the Mei Shilo'ach and say that it was the presence of the Sanhedrin, great court, which allowed us to blow on Shabbat, not just the physical location of the Beit HaMikdash. Others say that we should be able to blow Shofar anywhere within the walls of the Old City.

All of this is cool and fascinating. Personally, I'm old school and have gotten used to no Shofar on Shabbat, but I criticize no one. What's most important is our commitment to become a better version of ourselves in service to our Creator. Let's work on that with or without the Shofar on Shabbat. SHANA TOVA UMTUKA to all of AM YISRAEL! 