

## A Shofar Kavannah

## פְּנוּה לְתַקִּיעַת שׁוֹפָר

From narrow straits to broad relief  
Ram's strength in bowed humility  
Smooth and youthful and wrinkled and aged  
Ever-blown, everywhere, ever distinct

Abraham chooses life  
Rachel refuses comfort  
Joshua shatters walls  
Paratroopers liberate home

A psalm for Korach's children,  
Descendants forge anew.  
Don't blast, listen  
Don't hear, listen

Exhale the breath  
God blew into Adam  
Turn up the volume  
On the soul's inner voice

A plea, demand, cry.  
A song, dance, prayer.  
Silence.  
A solo, a harmony.

A trumpet coronates God  
A cymbal startles us — awake  
A drum rallies — gather round  
A flute sings of love

A curved trail - up down up  
*Teki'ah, Shevarim Teruah, Tekiah*  
Blasting success, wailing despair  
Heralding rebirth, higher still

Creation, revelation, redemption  
*Ayeka? Hineni. Yitakah!*  
Where are you? Here I am.  
The great Shofar!

Shattered vessels fixed  
Good deeds supplant bad  
Love overpowers hate  
Light pushes out darkness

Sounds ascending, descending  
Meeting in liminal space  
Drawing earth to heaven, heaven to earth  
Sealing the covenant

*Teki'ah Gedolah*

מִן הַמְצַר הַצָּר אֶל הַרוּחָה הַרְחֵבָה  
עֲצַמְתוֹ שֶׁל הָאֵיל בְּעֲנוּה כְּפוּפָה  
חֶלֶק וְצַעִיר וְזָקֵן וּמְלֵא קִמְטִים  
קוֹלוֹ נִשְׁמַע בְּכָל זְמַן, בְּכָל מְקוֹם, אֶדְ תַּמִּיד מִיַּחַד

אַבְרָהָם בָּחַר בַּחַיִּים  
רַחֵל מְאַנֶּה לְהִנָּחֵם  
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ מוֹטֵט חוֹמוֹת  
צָנְחָנִים שִׁחְרְרוּ אֶת הַבַּיִת

לְמַנְצַח לְבַנֵּי קָרַח מְזִמּוֹר  
עוֹלָם הַצְּאֲצָאִים עֲצַב מַחְדָּשׁ  
אֶל תִּתְקַע, שְׁמַע  
הִנֵּחַ לְקוֹל לְחֹדֵר לְלִבְךָ וּלְנִשְׁמָתְךָ

נָשַׁף אֶת הַרוּחַ  
אֲשֶׁר נָפַח הָאֱ-לֹהִים בְּאָדָם,  
הִגְבִּיר אֶת עֲצַמְתוֹ  
שֶׁל קוֹלָה הַפְּנִימִי שֶׁל הַנֶּפֶשׁ

בְּקִשָּׁה. תְּבִיעָה. זְעָקָה.  
שִׁירָה. מְחוּל. תְּפִלָּה.  
שְׁתִּיקָה.  
לְבַד. יַחְדוֹ בְּתַאוּם מְשֻׁלָּם.

חֲצוּצָרָה מְמַלִּיכָה אֶת הָאֱ-לֹהִים  
מְצַלְתִּים מְטַלְטְלִים אוֹתֵנּוּ – עוֹרוּ!  
תֵּף קוֹרָא לְאַסְפָּה – הִתְכַּנְּסוּ יַחְדוֹ!  
חֲלִיל שֶׁר עַל הָאֱהָבָה

דָּרָךְ מִתְעַקֵּלֶת, עוֹלָה וְיורֶדֶת  
תְּקִיעָה, שְׁבָרִים תְּרוּעָה, תְּקִיעָה  
מְכַרְיָזִים עַל הַצְּלָחָה, מְבַכִּים אֶת הַיְאוּשׁ  
מְכַרְיָזִים עַל הַתְּחַדְּשׁוֹת, בְּכוּחַ גְּדֵל וְגוֹבֵר

בְּרִיאָה, הַתְּגַלּוּת, גְּאֻלָּה  
"אֵיכָה" ? "הִנְנִי" ! "יִתְקַע" !  
הֵיכֵן אַתָּה ? הֵרִינִי כָּאֵן  
הַשׁוֹפָר הַגְּדוֹל !

כְּלִים שְׁבוּרִים תִּקְנּוּ  
הַטוֹב מִחֲלִיף אֶת הָרַע  
הָאֱהָבָה גּוֹבֶרֶת עַל הַשִּׁנְאָה  
הָאוֹר מְגַרֵּשׁ אֶת הַחֹשֶׁךְ

קוֹלוֹת עוֹלָיִם, יוֹרְדִים  
נִפְגָּשִׁים בֵּין טֶפֶח לְטֶפֶח  
מְקַרְבִּים אֶרֶץ לְשָׁמַיִם, שְׁמַיִם לְאֶרֶץ  
מְאַשְׁרִים אֶת חֲתִימַת הַבְּרִית

תְּקִיעָה גְּדוֹלָה

*This Kavannah was composed by Rabbi Avi Weiss, translated into Hebrew by Prof. Avigdor Shinan and vocalized by Araleh Admanit. Rav Avi wishes to thank Rabbi Ezra Seligsohn for his input and encouragement.*

**From narrow straits to broad relief:** The first paragraph offers descriptive meaning of the physical shofar. It is blown from a narrow aperture, with sounds emerging from its other, broader side. This symbolizes a call for rescue in sync with the Psalmist's words, "In my distress I called on the Lord, the Lord answered me and gave me relief" (Psalms 118:5).

**Ram's strength in bowed humility:** While the shofar is the horn of the strong ram, it is curved – *shofar kafuf* (Rosh Hashana 26b). The Talmud notes, built into greatness is humility (Megillah 31a).

**Smooth and youthful and wrinkled and aged:** The surface of the shofar is smooth, and yet, it inevitably includes small indentations, perhaps symbolic of the beauty of intergenerational relationships, young and old in tandem, learning and growing from one another (Bava Kamma 97b).

**Ever-blown, everywhere, ever distinct:** The shofar is the same as used in ancient times and throughout the world. And yet, no two shofarot are identical. This reminds us that while all humans created in God's image are of equal value, each, like God, is unique.

**Abraham chooses life:** This paragraph recalls shofarot "ever-blown" through the ages. At the Akeidah, Abraham replaces Isaac with a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns (Genesis 22:13). So, too, human beings caught in the "thicket" or complexities of life can turn to the shofar for succor. The message for all generations is that ultimate sanctification is not dying, but living for God.

**Rachel refuses comfort:** Jeremiah describes Rachel's voice being heard as she prays for her exiled children. The Hebrew for "voice is heard" (*kol nishmah*) is identical to the shofar blessing "*lishmoah kol*." One wonders, did Rachel lift her voice accompanied by the sound of the shofar (Jeremiah 31:15)?

**Joshua shatters walls:** After circling Jericho, Joshua blasts the shofar and the walls fall (Joshua 6). Perhaps more broadly this is the shofar's call to break down walls between feuding family members, warring nations, and barriers separating us from God.

**Paratroopers liberate home:** In modern times, too, the shofar was blown as Israeli soldiers liberated Jerusalem and the Western Wall during the 1967 Six-Day War.

**A psalm for Korach's children:** This paragraph deals with the preparatory shofar prayers and blessing. Psalm 49, "For the leader, a psalm of the sons of Korach," is recited. In the Torah, Korach rebels, and the earth swallows him. And yet, his children merit to write the psalm said before the shofar is sounded. Whatever our past, we have the power to begin anew.

**Don't hear, listen:** The blessing over the shofar is not "*litkoa shofar*" – to sound the shofar, but "*lishmoah kol shofar*" – to hear the shofar. And yes, to listen, which internalizes the hearing sound, reaching heart and soul.

**Exhale the breath:** This paragraph offers a general interpretation of the sounds of the shofar. In the end, the sound of the shofar comes from the inner breath (Sefat Emet). Could it be that blowing the shofar recalls the biblical image of God breathing into Adam the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). As the shofar is blown, humans breathe out godly breath, infusing godliness into the world.

**Turn up the volume:** For Rav Kook, the highest teshuvah, “is for the person to return to himself or herself, to the root of his/her soul, and [from there] immediately return to God” – elevating the soul to a higher level (Orot HaTeshuva).

**Prayer:** The shofar is not viewed as interrupting the prayer service, as it is a form of prayer itself.

**Silence:** There are halakhot (Jewish laws) dealing with the pauses between the shofar sounds – silence which starkly contrasts with the loud shofar blasts. Yes, silence that transcends words, “sounds of silence.”

**A trumpet:** This paragraph teaches that the shofar is a symphony of instruments. Perhaps it can be seen as a trumpet, reflecting Saadya Ga’on’s teaching that the shofar is nothing less than the coronation of God.

**A cymbal:** A cymbal is a kind of alarm clock, as Maimonides writes, blast the shofar in the spirit of “*uru yesheinim* – arise you slumberers, awake from your sleep” to do, accomplish.

**A drum:** The shofar, too, may be seen as a drum, used to call people together, in unity. The Bible speaks of a *chatzotzrot* used for this purpose (Numbers 10:7).

**A flute:** Maybe, just maybe the shofar is the sound of a flute, lovingly reflecting the deep relationship between God, his people and all of humankind, and the depths of relationships between all people. Indeed, the High Holiday Mussaf liturgy speaks of the still, soft, for me loving sound emerging from the shofar (*demamah dakah*).

**A curved trail:** This paragraph is a more particular presentation of the sweep of the shofar sounds, relating them to life’s journey.

**Higher still:** According to Jewish law, the *teki’ah* before and after are the same length as the middle broken *shevarim-teruah* sounds. My custom as I learned from my father who learned from his father is that the final *teki’ah* be a tiny bit longer than the first, in the hope that the rebirth can take us to even higher levels – as Leonard Cohen writes, “there is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.”

**Creation, Revelation, Redemption:** This paragraph takes us to the crescendo or “higher still” meaning of shofar, reflecting the power of birth and rebirth. The shofar sound reminds us of

the creation story, the birth of the world, when the spirit of God, literally the breath of God, *ruach Elohim*, called out like a shofar, bringing the world into existence (Genesis 1:2). At revelation, basic law is given, outlining the pathway to a more ideal world. The Sinai revelatory moment was punctuated by the *kol shofar*, the sound of the shofar (Exodus 19:16). All of this leads to the ultimate shofar sound, declaring the world redeemed (Isaiah 27:13).

Not coincidentally, the Shofar is blown after the three major sections of the Mussaf service. *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, *Shofarot*. *Malchuyot* declares God's rulership, beginning from **creation**. *Zichronot* reminds us of **revelation**, when God gave us the Torah. *Shofarot* is the hope that with Torah guidance, we arrive at **redemption**. Thus, the shofar sounds after each of these sections offer a spiritual musical uplifting commentary to the basic message of creation, revelation and redemption.

**Ayeka:** After eating from the Edenic tree soon after creation, Adam and Eve hear the voice of God (*vayishme'u et kol*, Genesis 3:8), again the same words used in the shofar blessing (*lishmoa kol*). Perhaps Adam and Eve heard the shofar as God asks the first question in the Torah – *Ayeka* (Genesis 3:9). That query is eternal, as each of us is constantly asked, *Ayeka* – have we done our share.

**Hineni:** Revelation, the giving of the Torah, centers on our response to the *Ayeka* question. "*Hineni*, Here I am," Moses tells God, when called upon at the *sneh*, the burning bush, to lead his people out of Egypt. The *sneh* was a mini Sinai, similar in word, place and medium of fire. At Sinai, the people echo Moses' *hineni* by declaring *na'aseh ve'nishma* – "We will do and we will listen" (Exodus 24:7).

**Yitakah:** The prophet records that on the day of redemption the Lord will "sound (*yitakah*) the great shofar and the castaway will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem" (Isaiah 27:13).

**Good deeds:** Over and over the word "good" is found in the creation story.

**Love:** At the Siniatic revelation, Moses led the people toward God like loving bride and groom coming toward each other (Rashi, Exodus 19:17).

**Light:** Light is a metaphor the prophets used to portray redemption. See, for example, Isaiah 60:1, "Arise, shine, for your light has dawned."

**Pushing out darkness:** There is a Hassidic saying, a little bit of light has the power to push away an abundance of darkness.

**Sounds ascending, descending:** There is a teaching that as we blow the shofar, so does God (Psalm 47:6).

**Meeting in liminal space:** The Talmud records that God and humankind reach for each other, coming close, but not “touching” (Sukkah 5a).

**Heaven to earth:** In Judaism, spirituality is not an escape from the world, but bringing spirituality into earthliness.

**Sealing the covenant:** In the liminal space, is it possible that God and humankind call out to each other through the sounds of the shofar, in covenantal commitment to partner to redeem the world?

**Teki’ah Gedolah:** Redemption begins with small steps within ourselves, moving slowly, slowly outward in concentric circles, encompassing family, community, Jewish nation and the world. This may be the meaning of the *teki’ah gedolah*, the final, long shofar blast at the end of Yom Kippur, concluding the High Holidays.