

Good Yom Tov, everyone.

Rosh Hashana is called יום תרועה - a day characterized by the sound of the shofar. But what is today all about? What is the focus of the day, that the sound of the shofar helps us understand and internalize?

In our history, the shofar has “shown up” many times. Its early appearances include Akeidas Yitzchak and Har Sinai. And we have been promised that it will be heard yet again when the sound of the shofar ushers in the Y'mos HaMashiach.

But first and foremost—and certainly on an emotional level--the sound of the shofar is a warning and call to action. It is like a modern-day siren or alarm, which is intentionally jarring and jolting. It pushes us to do something immediately--to take shelter, to move to the side of the road, to protect ourselves, to wake up, to make a (dramatic) change!

As the Pasuk in **Amos** (3:1) says

עמוס פרק ג פסוק ו אם יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו

When a ram's horn is sounded in a town, aren't the people afraid??

מלבי"ם עמוס פרק ג פסוק (ו) היתקע. (הקדמה רביעית), אם יתקע שופר בעיר שהשופר הוא סימן שחרב באה על הארץ או שאר צרות הבאות, הכי אפשר שעם לא יחרדו הלא ודאי יחרדו ויפחדו מן הצרה הבאה ויבקשו תחבולות להנצל ממנה.

Commenting on this Pasuk, the **Malbim** writes that the shofar is announcing that something dangerous is coming: beware, do something to save yourselves. The shofar naturally instills fear in our hearts and motivates us to take life-saving measures immediately.

If we look in the Torah, this message of the shofar as an alarm appears in Bamidbar 10:9, discussing war.

במדבר פרק י פסוק ט: וכי־תבאו מלחמה בארצכם עליה־צור הצרר אתכם וקרתם בקוצרות

When you are at war in your land against an aggressor who attacks you, you shall sound short blasts on the trumpets.

And in our own lives, we are all engaged in a war of sorts. As the **Mesilas Yescharim** (Perek 1) teaches: ונמצא שהוא מושם באמת בתוך המלחמה החזקה, כי כל עניני העולם בין לטוב בין לרע הנה הם נסיונות לאדם. . השלוח מצד אחד והיסורין מצד אחד, עד שנמצאת המלחמה אליו פנים ואחור .

Thus, we see that man is truly placed in the midst of a raging battlefield. For all matters of this world, whether for the good or for the bad, are trials for a man. . Tranquility on one hand versus suffering on the other, until the battle is waged against him from the front and from the rear.

ואם יהיה לבן חיל וינצח המלחמה מכל הצדדין, הוא יהיה האדם השלם אשר יזכה לידבק בבוראו ויצא מן הפרוודור הזה ויכנס בטרקלין לאור באור החיים .

If he will be a man of valor, emerging from the battle victorious on all fronts - he will be the "Adam HaShalem" (whole/perfect man) who will merit to cling to his Creator and will emerge from this corridor to enter into the palace to enlighten in the Light of (eternal) Life.

וכפי השיעור אשר כבש את יצרו ותאוותיו ונתרחק מן המרחיקים אותו מהטוב ונשתדל לדבק בו, כן ישיגהו וישמח בו .
According to the extent that he conquered his inclination and lusts, and distanced from the factors which distance him from the good, and exerted himself to cling to G-d, to that extent will he attain it and rejoice in it.

And to win this war, we have been given a clear path to follow. The Torah identifies things we must do, actions we must take, statements we must make—so that we can win this war and cling to Hashem, and fulfill our purpose. The shofar serves as that siren that reminds us of the things we need to do.

But the Gemara in Rosh Hashana (33b) says the shofar has another function, as well. At first glance this function seems almost to be the opposite...not a call to action...but a call to inaction. It is the call at the beginning of the Yovel, to stop—to cease working the land, to give up ownership of possessions.

והעברת שופר תרועה בקדש השבעי בעשור לקדש ביום הפורים מעבירי שופר בכל-ארצכם:
וקדשתם את שנת החמשים שנה וקראתם דרור בארץ לכל-ישרייה יובל הוא תהיה לכם ושבתם איש אל-אחוזתו ואיש אל-משפחתו תשובו:

*Then you shall **sound the horn loud**; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month—the Day of Atonement—you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. **You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants**. It shall be a jubilee, for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family.*

This message of the shofar, as a call to inaction, is that in Judaism, it is not only what we do that matters. Why we are doing it also matters, as does who we are. And this sometimes requires that we deliberately refrain from doing things that we were told to do at other times. At those times, we are told to stop and evaluate; to think, and recalibrate.

At the Akeida, Avraham Avinu was originally told to sacrifice his son—לעולה שם והעלהו שם לעולה. He was told to take a bold action, and then he was told to stop—אל תשלח ידך אל הנער. And at that point, the ram with its horns appeared. bringing the shofar's message of restraint.

Similarly, for six days we are supposed to work hard, create, and accomplish, ששת ימים תעבד. But these six days are followed by a period of rest, וביום השביעי תשב. We are told to stop. And interestingly enough, the minhag in Yerushalayim was for a shofar to be blown to signify that people should stop their work and prepare to accept the Shabbos—that siren is still heard in Yerushalayim on Erev Shabbos today.

And we find another cycle of seven that applies to years. We are told to work the fields for six years, and the seventh year is the shemita year; when we are not allowed to work the land. In addition, all loans were cancelled. We are told to stop and reset to a certain extent.

(ג) שש שנים תזרע שדה ושש שנים תזמר כרמך ואספת את-תבואתה:
(ד) ובשנה השביעית שבת שבתוך יהיה לארץ שבת ליקחך שדה לא תזרע וכרמך לא תזמר:

And the seven Shemita periods lead, in turn, to another cycle, culminating in the fiftieth year—the Yovel year. Following the 7th cycle of shmitta years, the period of “rest” was expanded by another year of rest. In addition to not working the land, all עבדים (Jewish servants) were freed and all land was returned to its original owners. This was a reset on a broader scale. Everything started anew. And a shofar was blown to begin this Yovel year of reset.

The shofar symbolizes that crucial aspect of avodas Hashem, the ability to stop, to make sure every one of our actions is infused with purpose and meaning, and follows the will of Hashem, and that we are transformed through our actions.

What is the main function of these periods of rest--Shabbos, Shemita and Yovel? A שבת לה'?

In explaining the function of the Yovel year, the ultimate in rest periods, the Torah writes

ויקרא פרק כה(י) וקדשתם את שנת החמשים שנה וקראתם דרור בארץ לכל-ישרייה

"Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof"

But what is “liberty”?

We usually think of liberty and freedom as independence, as the absence of slavery. We are free when we are not under someone else's control. This is the essence of the classic definition of freedom by the

17th century English philosopher, John Locke. In his “Treatise on Government,” he defined freedom as follows: “*The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not be under the will or legislative authority of man.*”

But what is דרור of which the Torah speaks? Is it merely independence of slaves? Or is there something more comprehensive, more fundamental to the Jewish idea of freedom, that we proclaim in the Jubilee year?

Rav Moshe Shternbuch, in his Sefer ודעת טעם, asks a fundamental question:

יש לתמוה בפסוק זה שלכאורה היובל דרור הוא לעבדים המשתחררים ולשדות היוצאות וחוזרות לבעליהן, ומהו לכל יושביה הנאמר כאן, והלא הרבה אנשים אין היובל משחררן שלא היו עבדים מעולם?

Why does the Torah describe the freedom for “all the inhabitants”? Isn’t it true that only a small percentage of people, those who were actual עבדים, went free? He answers:

ברם לקושטא דמילתא נתנה מצות היובל לכל אדם מישראל ולכולם נקרא דרור, שכשיתבונן האדם כי כל רכושו ועבדיו מתנת שמים הם, ואין הוא אדון על אחרים, אלא אפוטרופוס שנתמנה על רכושו בעוה"ז, ירגיש אפסותו והבל קניניו, וזו החרות והדרור האמתיים, שמשחרר מעולו של היצר המשעבדו להרבות את הוננו וכבודו. . . ולזה אמר וקראתם דרור לכל יושביה לפי שבשנה זו שחוזרין עבדים ושדות לבעליהן תשתרר הרגשת דרור וחרות אצל כל יושבי הארץ, שיודעים ומכירים איזהו הקנין שאמיתי שירכוש לו האדם בעולמו, אשר אין זה כי אם תורה ומעש"ט.

Through the mitzva of Yovel, real freedom was granted to everyone—not just servants. When society was forced to give up control over fields and servants, everyone came to recognize that everything we have is a gift of Hashem. The greatest slavery we face is the exaggerated illusion of our own power—thinking that we really control our lives. Giving up control during the Yovel year gives us true freedom in knowing and establishing an accurate perspective on Who is really in control. It reminds everyone to live a life of meaning and to control and subdue earthly desires. It reminds us what is really important in life and to love accordingly.

The Yovel requires us to stop and give up our control and, thereby, to recognize Who is actually in control. To understand what is important in life; to step outside the rat race, so we can understand where we are really going and why; to recognize that Hashem is in control, and to acknowledge the existence of a higher calling in life--that is truly freeing. This is ultimately the דרור, the liberty and freedom, that all Jews are meant to experience in the Yovel year. It was a very real reminder of what was truly important in life. It is meant to remind us to evaluate our priorities and to understand our place, to remind us that there is something higher to live for.

Rav Kook, in his commentary on Brachos, *Ein Ay"ra*, writes that, in seeking perfection, there are crucial aspects of both taking action and refraining from taking action. Taking positive actions, actively doing things— is comparable to walking--in order to acquire proper habits and character traits. But there is also a crucial aspect comparable to standing, to make sure that one fully identifies with the new habits and character traits. Just as there is a time to walk, there is also a time to stand still and internalize and integrate. He writes that is what we do three times a day, when we stand still, with our feet together, davening to Hashem.

עין אי"ה ברכות פ"א דף י' (עמ' 61)

המתפלל צריך שיכוין רגליו, שנאמר ורגליהם רגל ישרה הרגלים משמשות פעולת ההליכה ופעולת העמידה. לפעולת ההליכה עיקר שימושן הוא במה שהן נפרדות, בפעולת העמידה עיקר שימושן הוא במה שהן מתאחדות. במהלך שלמות האדם יש הליכה, להוסיף לקנות שכליות ומעלות מדותיות. ויש עמידה, היינו שהדברים שקנה יהיה קנינם חזק בפנשו, לא יפסידם איזה שינוי וניסיון במצבו. וזהו "מי יעלה בהר ד' ומי יקום במקום קדשו" שישאר במעלתו. והתורה מיוחדת היא להוסיף שלמות ומלעה, ע"כ נקראת דרך, ומאן דלא יוסיף. והתפילה מרשמת את המעלות הקניות שיהיו קבועות וקיימות

Israeli Nobel Prize winner **Dr. Yisrael Aumann**, had a cousin who was a brilliant neurologist, who unfortunately abandoned his Orthodox upbringing early in life. In his later years, he had reconnected

with his Israeli cousin and had the occasion to join his family for a Friday night meal. Shortly before his death, as he was dying of cancer, the cousin wrote about that experience: *"The peace of the Shabbos, of a stopped world, a time outside time was palpable, it infused everything and I found myself drenched with wistfulness.... wondering what if... What sort of person I might have been? What sort of life might I have lived? ...And now, weak, short of breath, my once-firm muscles melted away by cancer, I find my thoughts increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good worthwhile life--achieving a sense of peace within oneself. I find my thoughts drifting to the Shabbos, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest."*

So, in the final analysis—the shofar is a call to action—a siren, an alarm, but a call to meaningful and thoughtful, and informed action. A call not just to mindlessly run, and act and do, but to take the time to think and contemplate and work towards a more perfect state of being.

This duality within the nature of shofar —of thoughtful action—of understanding the why as much as the what—of being, as much as doing, is summed up in the **Rambam's** explanation of the shofar:

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג הלכה ד

אף על פי שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזירת הכתוב רמז יש בו כלומר עורו ישינים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו מתרדמתכם וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם,

Notwithstanding that the blowing of the ram's horn on Rosh ha-Shanah is a Scriptural statute, its blast is symbolic, as if saying: "You that sleep, stir yourselves from your sleep, and your slumbering, emerge from your slumber, examine your conduct, turn in repentance, and remember your Creator!"

The **Maharal** sums up the essence of the shofar as follows:

סוד השופר של ר"ה דומה לשופר שנאמר "והיה ביום ההוא" כי כאשר תמצא השופר בתורה לא תמצא אלא בגאולה. וכן אצל יובל הוא סימן שיצאו עבדים לחרות. וכן אמרו בברכות (נ"ו ע"ב) הראוה שופר בחלום יצפה לגאולה. כי השופר משמיע הקול לאסוף הפזורים ולהביאו למקום אחד וזהו הגאולה. . .

The shofar is always connected to the concept of freedom and redemption. It reminds us to take action, and thoughtfully direct our lives towards Hashem, which is the ultimate freedom—achieving purpose and meaning in life.

May the shofar inspire all of us —today and throughout the year-- to live more meaningful, precise and calculated lives, to use our time in this world for avodas Hashem. May we all be inscribed in the Book of Life for a year of good health, nachas, refuos and yeshuos, and much happiness...and may this year be the year that we hear the shofar of the ultimate geula...with the announcement of Mashiach, bimhera viyamenu...Amen.