

שוֹפָר: שוֹפָרוֹת Shofar: Shofarot The Voice of Hope

According to Rabbah, the Holy One said: "On Rosh HaShanah, recite before Me words of *Malchuyot* (sovereignty), *Zichronot* (remembrance), and *Shofarot*. "Sovereignty"—so that you may acknowledge Me as Ruler over you. "Remembrance"—so that remembrances of you may rise up favorably before Me. And how shall all of this be accomplished? Through the sounds of the shofar.

—Talmud Rosh HaShanah 34b

"We read responsive paragraphs"

Prayers for the third and final sounding of the shofar evoke the Revelation at Mount Sinai, when the people experienced God amidst "thunder and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn (*kol shofar chazak m'od*)" (Exodus 19:16). The shofar's blast—a sound conveying warning, triumph, and celebration—here marks a moment of intense spiritual elevation, when a band of newly liberated slaves entered a sacred covenant with the Divine.

"The shofar," according to a *midrash*, "signifies freedom" (*Sifrei B'midbar* 77). In ancient Israel, it was sounded to announce the coming of the jubilee in the fiftieth year—a time of liberation for servants and restoration of land for the poor (Leviticus 25). In the Jewish imagination, the shofar blast remains a symbol of the here-and-now redemption for which Jews have prayed since we first stood at the shore of the Sea of Reeds. In our own time, as well, we pray for freedom from violence, persecution, and injustice.

In the first and second shofar preludes, we have experienced the ram's horn through the lenses of Sovereignty (*Malchuyot*) and Remembrance (*Zichronot*). We call this final set of shofar prayers and reflections the Voice of Hope, for the climactic *t'kiah g'dolah* is a crescendo of our most profound hopes as a people, and of our deepest personal hopes on the threshold of a new year. When the nine individual notes of *t'ruah* unite and flow into one great, expansive final *t'kiah*, we feel ourselves part of a resonant call that transcends the limits of time.

Tradition imbues the final sounding of the shofar with overtones of messianic hope—a yearning for the day when, according to the prophet Zechariah, "Adonai will be one and God's name will be one" (Zechariah 14:9).

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