

CHAPTER 8: SEASONAL MITZVOT □ PARAGRAPH 4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Each one of us is judged in the end -- by family, friends and strangers; by our people, in the light of Jewish history; by society; by history at large; and certainly by G-d Almighty. After all, we each matter; and what matters is always put to the test and adjudged.

In fact, the great preponderance of us do all we can to avoid the very thought of that (so daunting and threatening is it to many) that we lose the myriad of opportunities G-d grants us to excel in the face of judgment. Instead, we tend to cower in a corner of the small world we frame about us and hope for the best.

But the truth be known, every one of us is judged at each day's end; and more so each year on Rosh Hashanah for the year just passed. Which is to say that that Rosh Hashanah is the time when the efforts each one of us has made to grow in the course of the past year are open for assessment, and there's simply no getting away from it.

Not only are we judged then, but *the world itself* is judged as well. As we'd said earlier on (see 2:6:5), G-d designated Rosh Hashanah as the time of year to do that in His Heavenly tribunal. And it's then when the Prosecutor stands up to charge mankind with having committed so many sins. So Rosh Hashanah is obviously an awesome moment for all of humankind.

But Rosh Hashanah is also famous for being the day the shofar is blown. As most know, a shofar is an actual horn extracted from a ram which is then hollowed out and let to dry; and its primitive, raw, bleating call sets the tone for the Holy Day. Ramchal will now show us the connection between the shofar and those other aspects of Rosh Hashanah.

We're taught that our blowing the shofar invokes the attribute of Divine Mercy and confounds the Prosecutor's plans (much the way a last minute point of testimony oftentimes suddenly makes its way into an earthly trial "from out of the blue" that quickly and dramatically throws the defendant's motives into a whole other light, and saves his life).

Of course, the new "testimony" has to fit the court's guidelines. It can't be makeshift or arbitrary. So what's the operative principle behind the permissibility of the shofar's testimony? The one that states that certain distinctive deeds merit overturning strict justice (much the way a defendant's past good

acts and outstanding character traits might elicit the court's mercy).

One such deed, thousands of years old, that still acts in our favor, is that of Abraham binding his son, Isaac, on an altar at G-d's bidding. His willingness to do that in stark faith, only to be stopped in midcourse and allowed to place a *ram* there instead of Isaac has stood us in good stead all this time (see Tractate Rosh Hashanah 16a, based on Genesis 22:1-13). Thus the ram's horn we blow on Rosh Hashanah acts as the piece of evidence brought in at the last minute that saves us once again.

There are many, many details behind all this that touch upon the Heavenly backdrop which always factors into what happens here, on earth (see 1:5:1- 3). Suffice it to say that when we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah -- and we repent of our sins in the course of it -- we help set off the process of having right overcome wrong and subduing the powers of evil, of divesting the Prosecutor of his authority, and of enabling G-d to act as Sovereign of the Universe in all His full glory.

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