

A TIME FOR FEAR, A TIME FOR JOY

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Meir was nervous. He had barely been out of his village during his lifetime. Now, he was on his way to the city, about to embark on a major journey. No, this would not be a wagon ride. It would not be a train trip. Meir was about to get on a large ship, crossing the ocean, to meet family he had never seen on the other side.

As Meir neared the port, he saw the large boats docked. To him, they appeared like buildings, huge buildings, the like of which he had never seen. How these monstrosities stayed afloat was on Meir's mind. He knew people crossed the seas all the time. Yet, as he took his first step on the gangplank to embark, he was shaking. He gripped the railing until his knuckles were white, breathing slowly, trying not to feel faint.

The captain greeted him, along with others traveling on the ship, once he got on the boat. The captain sensed that Meir was nervous, and he attempted to assuage his fears. He explained to Meir how the ship worked, how many times he had made the trip, how safe and seaworthy the vessel was. Jokingly, the captain said to Meir, "Look, just in case worse comes to worse, I want you to have this." He handed Meir a round, doughnut shaped object - a life preserver. The humor was lost on Meir, however, and the gift of the life preserver absolutely terrified him. He took his belongings, and his nerves, to his cabin.

Unfortunately for Meir, the trip did not go well. The seas were stormy, and for much of the time, the ship rocked and rolled, swaying precariously from side to side. Many a time, Meir thought, his end was rapidly approaching. And then, as the shore was in sight, the worst happened: the ship began to sink. The constant battering of the sea had been too much for the craft. The ship began to go down rapidly. Panic and pandemonium prevailed. Meir remembered his "gift" from the captain, and clutched onto it for dear life. As the ship began disappearing under water, and Meir saw others frantically looking for some method of salvation, Meir was incredibly grateful that the captain had given him the life preserver. What initially had caused him fear and anguish now literally saved his life. To say that Meir was happy with his gift of the life preserver would be an understatement.

Sefer Inyano Shel Yom quotes a query cited in Sefer HaMichtam (Sukkah 46a): Why is it that we do not find that a person who fashions a shofar makes the blessing of "Shehechiyanu," "Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season?" The Ra'avad answers that the fashioning of a shofar reminds a person of what the shofar is used for and when the shofar is used: It is used when

we are standing in judgment, to arouse feelings of repentance within us. It is an object associated with judgment, and the fear of judgment makes that time one we would rather not recall. Hence, the recitation of the Shehechyanu bracha would be inappropriate.

However, we know that on Rosh HaShana itself, the very day on which we are judged, we make the bracha of Shehechyanu prior to the blowing of the shofar. Why, then, if we fashion a shofar six months prior to the Day of Judgment, we have cause to fear and we do not make a bracha, but in the midst of judgment itself, we can make the bracha, and fear is not an impediment to making the blessing?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky answered simply: once you are in the midst of judgment, you are happy to have the opportunity to perform a mitzvah, to do something that helps tip the scales in your favor. Just as the life preserver was initially a source of concern and fear, yet ultimately a source of salvation, so too, is the shofar. It reminds us of a time that rightfully inspires fear. Yet, while in the midst of judgment, when we need help, any opportunity we have to perform G-d's dictates is welcome. It is therefore appropriate at that time to say the blessing of Shehechyanu.
