

# THE SOUND OF TRUE DEVOTION

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

The Shofar that we sound on Rosh HaShana is traditionally made from the horn of a ram. The ram is the animal that Avraham offered instead of his son Yitzchak. Rav Gedalya Schorr zt"l explains the connection between Akaidas Yitzchak, The Binding of Yitzchak, and the sounding of the Shofar. He quotes Rav Sa'adia Gaon, who wrote "The sounding of the Shofar is to remind us of Akeidas Yitzchak, that he gave over his life for the sake of (G-d in) heaven. So too are we to give over our lives to the holiness of His name, and our remembrance will rise before Him for good."

The manner in which Avraham demonstrated his devotion to Hashem in this incident is exactly what we want to highlight on Rosh HaShana. Avraham never actually carried out that which Hashem had commanded him to do: he did not offer his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice to Hashem. However, Rav Schorr writes, he did not need to for a very good reason. Avraham, after he was given the commandment to offer Yitzchak, set his mind to accomplish this task. As difficult as this task was - to give up his only son, for whom he had waited most of his life - Avraham was committed to seeing this task through to its fruition. Avraham, in his mind, was so dedicated to the accomplishment of this task, that these thoughts and intents were sufficient in Heaven as if Avraham had actually performed the commandment.

In the normal course of events, the fulfillment of an action is required to demonstrate one's devotion to accomplish the task at hand. Good intentions and the mere desire to accomplish do not suffice for actually getting the job done. The reason for this is that it is impossible for a person to have that level of dedication and devotion so that these mere thoughts are truly equal to performing the action. Avraham, however, was able to break that barrier. Avraham was driven to fulfill the word of Hashem . He was told in the end not to offer his son as a sacrifice. In place of his son, he offered a ram. Because Avraham's dedication and devotion to Hashem were whole, his offering of the ram was truly as if he had offered his son Yitzchak.

We find in the prayers of Rosh HaShana a focus on the monarchy of G-d. The reason for constant repetition of this theme - that Hashem is our King and we are His subjects - is to help us put the entire day of Rosh HaShana in context. Rosh HaShana is, so to speak, the anniversary of the coronation of the King of Kings, the anniversary of the creation of the world. A flesh and blood king, on such an occasion, takes stock of the state of his kingdom; are his subjects loyal, is the kingdom stable? Rosh HaShana is a functional equivalent. Hashem, on each anniversary of the creation of His kingdom, conducts an accounting - are His subjects loyal and devoted to Him? Hashem looks at

each and every one of His subjects to determine how loyal they have been. Based on this determination, G-d can make a decision on what role each subject will play in the monarchy: some will be productive; some will want; some will thrive; some will suffer.

We, the subjects of the Almighty King, realize that we have been less-than-perfect subjects. We have to convince the King that any lapses in devotion should not be construed as acts of rebellion, but rather temporary moments of weakness. We try to inspire ourselves to repent. We make affirmations of our devotion to our King. We make resolutions on methods of bettering ourselves. But all of these are thoughts, in our head. As we mentioned, in most cases, we actually have to get the job done in order for the job to be considered finished. Avraham was able to reach a level of dedication that as far as G-d was concerned, Avraham did achieve his goal, even though as far as his actions went, he did not. In a short time, it is difficult for us to truly demonstrate in tangible, visible actions, that we are loyal subjects of G-d. It is hard to prove that we have returned to the path from which we previously strayed. All that G-d has are our thoughts. We need to reach a level where our dedication to G-d and His service is so full and complete that the thought alone suffices for action.

Yet, we know that this is a difficult task. When we blow the Shofar on Rosh HaShana, we try to do what Rav Sa'adia Gaon says. We, at a time when, in our hearts and souls, are devoting ourselves to G-d, giving over our lives to the holiness of His name, recall someone who epitomized such service to G-d. We sound the Shofar. We sound the horn of a ram, the animal sacrificed by Avraham in place of his son. We invoke the incident of Akeidas Yitzchak, when Avraham's thoughts accomplished more than his actions, hoping that Hashem, in His infinite mercy, will accept our thoughts of repentance as if we actually demonstrated that we have repented. If our repentance is sincere, and we are truly committed to doing the right thing, being a true blue loyal subject, the sound of the Shofar will rise before G-d and tip the scales in our favor.

May we all be blessed with a year of happiness and health, peace and prosperity, and meet with true tangible accomplishment, in both the physical and spiritual realms.