

FROM THE VERY FIRST BREATH...

by Rabbi Label Lam

It shall be that if you hearken to the (Kol) voice of HASHEM your G-d to observe and perform all of His commandments that I command you today then HASHEM your G-d will make you supreme over all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you hearken to the (Kol) voice of HASHEM your G-d. (Devarim 28:1-2)

But if you do not hearken to the (Kol) voice of HASHEM your G-d to observe and perform all His commandments and all His decrees that I command you today then all these curses will come upon you and overtake you...(Devarim 28:15)

Wow! So much depends on hearkening to the Kol- the voice of HASHEM. What is a Kol? Where exactly can it be heard?

Just moments after our first child was born, drops were placed in his eyes, he was weighed, foot printed and placed into my arms. Then he let loose an amorphous little gurgle-like cry. My wife responded to her child's first sound by rhetorically asking, "Did you ever hear a cry like that before?!" I was a little stunned. It was not an unusually profound or poetic utterance he had made.

Later I reasoned that just as when his foot prints were taken to identify him for New York State or official hospital business, so the mother instinctively latches onto the sound print of her child because this is the voice that she will be responding to for the next 15 or 40 years, however long adolescence lasts. This theory helps explain why when mothers meet in the park and someone falls and cries, the correct mother always turns around. This is how I misunderstood things for exactly 13 years.

On a Wednesday night 13 years later we made a public meal to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah. The next morning, a Thursday morning, my son had arranged on his own to read from the Torah in his Yeshiva a portion of the portion he had spent months preparing for that Shabbos. It would be his first time being called to the Torah. I asked him if he didn't mind if I would be there. He looked at me with a look that said, "OK, but just don't let anybody know you're my father." I stood in the back and listened well. Right after the reading the sounds of "Kaddish" were heard. Immediately I asked myself, "Who's that saying Kaddish?" Before I could answer my own question, I answered the call of the Kaddish, "Y'hei Shmei Rabba...May His Great Name be blessed for ever and ever..."

Then it was like a faucet turned on and my eyes started running with tears. I couldn't control myself. What had happened? I realized in a flash that this was indeed the voice of my son but it is not just the voice we would be responding to take care of some local need but rather this will be the voice that we will respond to when Kaddish is recited after 120 years when we no longer have hands or a voice in this world.

A Kol is the unarticulated sound right before speech. It is the expression of overpowering will or desire to create prior to any detail. It drives the creative process into reality. It is found within and between words. I can say or write something convincingly like a bottle of seltzer bubbling forth or flatly and lifeless like soda without fizz. The Kol implies the passion of the underlying purpose.

On Rosh HaShana we are revisiting the day life was originally blown into the nostrils of humanity. On the first day of the year, every year, it is entirely appropriate to tune into the Kol of that Shofar which reminds us of and expresses both ours and The Almighty's noblest of aspirations for us and His world. Invested within each of us and woven into every letter of Torah is that sound amongst all the other sounds that abound in the universe that we are to be most responsive to far beyond the first breath of life. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.