

# THAT ANCIENT MEMORY

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

What's the Shofar trying to say? I know this might sound like a college poetry class but I believe it is a legitimate question. Imagine the president convenes both houses of congress and the nation awaits his much anticipated speech. He strolls confidently out to the podium and begins grunting and groaning in long and short spurts as if he has a mouth full of marbles and tape over his lips. It's certainly an attention grabber but few would get the message. Most would wonder, "What did he just try to say? Why did he not use words?"

The Torah has plenty of words and could have chosen a fine speech for us to hear at the beginning of each year but for some reason we are invited to tune into the "KOL"-the sound- the tone of the Shofar. What is the meaning of that raspy one note wonder? What's the Shofar trying to say?

Let's key into the following statement of the Talmud, "The Ribon Shel Olam says, 'Recite before me "Kingship" in order that I should be King over you- "Remembrances"- that I will remember you for good- and through which means- By way of the Shofar!" (Rosh HaShana 34B) Somehow the Shofar is a ceremonial coronation tool and at the same time a reminder of our goodness. How so?

It is no mistake that Rosh HaShana, the first day of Tishrei corresponds with the 6th day of creation, the day "man"- mankind came into being. The Torah describes the event in one sweeping term, "And HASHEM Elochim formed man from the dust of the earth and He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living being!" (Breishis 2:7) Could it be that the blowing of the Shofar hearkens back to that original blowing? Is it for no reason both events intersect that same day, year after year?! So what's the message?

Happy Birthday! Those words excite the mind, not only of the birthday boy or girl, but of the parent as well. It wakes up feelings of nostalgia and reminiscences of all the ideals and hopes present at that momentous occasion. At the risk of oversimplifying, on Rosh HaShana we are revisiting and being asked to justify the investment of that sublime blast of breath in the lucid light of original intent. Teshuvah is the answer to this supernal audit.

The Shofar wakes up these sleeping questions: "What have we done with that breath? What should we ideally be doing with it? Have we made ourselves more worthy or less worthy of that gift of life? Have our ideals and deeds matched or approached the aspirations of the Holy Investor?"

Why is the Shofar more eloquent than this clumsy explanation? For what reason are non-words more clear than any collection of verbiage? The Shofar represents and expresses the first urge to

create before any details of a plan ever existed. Just as when a person goes through the laborious efforts to build himself a house, he has to have had an itch, a yearning first to create.

"The last act is the first thought"- we recite in Lecha Dodi on Friday nights in Shul. First is the overpowering desire to create. Then the artist's rendition is etched in the mind with unspecified detail. Next are the architectural plans. After that the gritty work begins.. There is an identification of a plot of land and digging and pouring of cement and framing. Finally, at the very end the designer enters his completed dream home to survey, celebrate, and measure how well his ideals, his great expectations are matched by reality.

How is that-longing best expressed? This crowning notion comes from a "place" prior to words and specific architectural plans. It enunciates only the initial desire for a residence, mixed with fear. Therefore the Shofar is emanating from and reminding of a "time" beyond time, and before articulated speech. It utters urgency and arouses **that ancient memory**.