

CALL OF THE SHOFAR

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon gives ten different reasons for blowing the Shofar. One is in order to recall the gathering of the Jews at Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, where "the sound of the Shofar was very great." [Exodus 19:16] Also, we remind ourselves of the future, when the call of the great shofar will bring an end to our exile.

The Ohr Gedalyahu, Rav Gedalia Schorr zt"l, points out that in the Talmud, Tractate Rosh HaShanah, many of the laws concerning blowing of the Shofar are derived from the laws of blowing the Shofar at the Jubilee Year. In the 50th year, all land returned to the family that originally inherited it, and slaves went free. So we see that the call of the Shofar is connected to the Shofar blast of the Jubilee, which signified freedom, like the great shofar at the end of exile will proclaim our freedom. Here as well, on Rosh HaShanah, the Shofar is calling for freedom -- freedom from the evil inclination.

G-d freed us from slavery and brought us to Mt. Sinai, where He gave us the tools to be truly free of the worst master of all. It is easy for a person to fall prey to laziness, temptation, depression, all derived from the same source. There is nothing the evil inclination wants more than for a person to be too tired to care, too upset by his or her perceived inadequacy to imagine that G-d wants or cares for his or her repentance. Yet G-d gave us the tools to free ourselves.

Maimonides writes in his Laws of Repentance, 3:4: "Although the blowing of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a decree of the Torah [a law issued without an accompanying reason], there is a hint [of meaning] within it, as if it were saying, 'awake, sleeping ones, from your slumber, and those napping arise from your naps, examine your actions and return sincerely to G-d, and remember your Creator.'"

The Shofar cries out: wake up! You are free! You can set aside all that came before, and break the chains -- break the patterns of misbehavior and self-destruction which have dogged your path.

This, says Rav Schorr, is the message of the Shofar -- to awaken a person to this freedom, to the promise which awaits every one of us. We have the opportunity -- let's grasp it. Let us truly hear the call!

At this point, on behalf of all of us at Torah.org -- I'd like to say thank you for reading, for participating in our program. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to be in touch with you every week.