

# Making a Personal Akeidas Yitzchok by Blowing the Shofar

Is the mitzvah of shofar essentially the blowing or the hearing its sounds? The answer to this question could greatly impact our shofar experience on Rosh Hashanah.

Many Rishonim learn that the appropriate brachah to be made upon performing the mitzvah of shofar is “*lishmoa bekol shofar* (to hear the sound of the shofar),” and this is how Rav Yosef Karo paskins in *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 585).

The BaHaG (quoted by the Rosh at the end of RH 4:10) explains that the reason why we make the blessing “to listen to the sound of the shofar” rather than “to blow the shofar” or “on the blowing of the shofar” is because by hearing the sounds of the shofar one fulfills his obligation, and not through blowing it. Accordingly, the mitzvah is to listen to the sound of the shofar, not to blow it. While practically indispensable, blowing the shofar is not essential to the fulfillment of the mitzvah.

It is this approach that understandably lends itself to the famous statement of the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuva* 3:4) that the

shofar’s voice resonates with the message, “wake up from your slumber, etc.”

Rabbeinu Tam (Rosh, Ibid), however, holds that the correct brachah is “*al tekias shofar* (on the blowing of the shofar).” While there are other possible explanations, if we take the rationale of the BaHaG into account, the implication would be that Rabbeinu Tam holds that the mitzvah is essentially to blow the shofar.

In fact, Rav Achai Gaon (*Sheiltos* 171) writes explicitly that the mitzvah is to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. This is also the opinion of Rav Moshe of Coucy (*Sefer Hamitzvos Gedolos* positive mitzvah 42), Rabbi Yitzchak of Corbeil (*Sefer Hamitzvos Katan* 92), and Rav Eliezer of Metz (*Yereim* 419).

How might these Rishonim understand the meaning of the mitzvah of shofar if the essence of the mitzvah is the blowing?

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a) states:

תניא א"ר יהודה משום ר"ע מפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו עומר בפסח מפני שהפסח זמן תבואה הוא אמר הקב"ה הביאו לפני עומר



**Rabbi Etan Moshe Berman**

*Rebbe, Stone Beit Midrash Program  
Rav, Kehillas Zichron Dovid, Pomona, NY*

בפסח כדי שתתברך לכם תבואה שבשדות ומפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו שתי הלחם בעצרת מפני שעצרת זמן פירות האילן הוא אמר הקב"ה הביאו לפני שתי הלחם בעצרת כדי שיתברכו לכם פירות האילן ומפני מה אמרה תורה נסכו מים בחג אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא נסכו לפני מים בחג כדי שיתברכו לכם גשמי שנה ואמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה ובמה בשופר אמר רבי אבהו למה תוקעין בשופר של איל אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא תקעו לפני בשופר של איל כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק בן אברהם ומעלה אני עליכם כאילו עקדתם עצמכם לפני.

*It is taught Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rabbi Akiva: For what did the*

*Torah say bring the omer on Pesach? Because Pesach is the time of grain, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Bring the omer before Me on Pesach so that the grain in the fields will be blessed for you. And for what did the Torah say: Bring the two loaves on Shavuot? Because Shavuot is the time of fruits from trees, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Bring the two loaves before Me on Shavuot so that the fruits from trees will be blessed for you. And for what did the Torah say: Pour water on Succos? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Pour water before Me on Succos so that the rains of the year will be blessed for you. And recite before Me on Rosh Hashanah Malchios, Zichronos, and Shofaros: Malchios so that you will crown Me as King over you; Zichronos so that your remembrance will rise before Me for good; and with what? With the shofar. Rabbi Abbahu said: Why does one blow with a shofar of a ram? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Blow before Me with a shofar from a ram, so that I will remember for you the binding of Yitzchok, son of Avraham, and I will consider it to you as if you had bound yourselves before Me."*

Rebbi Abbahu states that Hakadosh Baruch Hu requests that we blow our tekios from the shofar of a ram, so that He will invoke for us the merit of akeidas Yitzchok. But that is not where his statement ends. In fact, the word *zechus* (merit) does not appear at all. The reason for invoking akeidas Yitzchok is so it will be considered as if we have done our OWN akeidah! Akeidas Yitzchok is not being used as a merit, it is being used as a model. Apparently, on Rosh Hashanah, we are supposed to be making our own personal akeidah.

Similarly, the Gemara is clearly delineating a pattern: if you want brachah in something, you need to first sacrifice it to Hashem. Grain, fruit, water and man.

The midrash (*Psikta Rabasi*, Piska 40) brings a related drashah. By all other

sacrifices, the Torah uses the terminology of sacrifice, *v'hikravtem* (and you shall offer), whereas by the sacrifice of Rosh Hashanah (Bamidbar 29:2), the terminology used is *v'asisem* (and you shall make) an offering. The implication is that vis-à-vis Rosh Hashanah, we are not merely sacrificing the animal; we are making ourselves the sacrifice.

According to one explanation of the Rama, this process includes the preparation before Rosh HaShanah as well. The Rama writes (O.C. 581) that the minhag is for Ashkenazim to have a minimum of four days of Selichos prior to Rosh HaShanah. One reason for this (see *Mishnah Berurah* ibid, s.k. 6), is because it corresponds to the required time for *bikur mumim* (checking a sacrifice for blemishes) prior to its sacrifice. Since we are the sacrifice on Rosh HaShanah, it necessitates a personal *bikur mumim* four days prior.

On Rosh Hashanah, we are to accept the Malchus of Hashem by making our own personal akeidas Yitzchok.

With what? With the shofar.

Rav Moshe Wolfson zt"l (*Emunas Itecha* chelek 3, Rosh Hashanah) explains that our life force comes from the "breath" that Hakadosh Baruch Hu breathes into us, as it says by Adam HaRishon, "And He breathed into his nose the breath of life" (Breishis 2:7). With the blowing of the shofar, we are returning our breath of life to its source. He points out that the *gematria* of "*nishmas chaim*" equals "*yom teruah yehiyeh lachem*" (adding one to represent the *kollel*).

With the blowing of the shofar, we are rededicating our essence to Hashem. We are making our own akeidah.

I would like to suggest that this idea also permeates another minhag brought by the Rama.

The Rama (O.C. 585:1) writes that the minhag is to blow shofar on the bimah, in the location of *krias haTorah*, as opposed

to the location where the *shaliach tzibbur* davens. One could have imagined that the proper place to blow shofar would be next to the chazzan; after all, the shofar in *chazaras hashatz* of Mussaf would appear to be a function of our tefillos.

The *Mishnah Berurah* (ibid, s.k. 3) explains that we want the merit of our public Torah learning (*krias haTorah*) to protect us and allow us to be remembered before Hashem for good.

However, perhaps there is an additional meaning here.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Bais Habechirah* 2) writes that the location of the mizbeach in the Bais HaMikdash had extreme precision; it was the exact location of akeidas Yitzchok.

In a shul, the bimah is our mizbeach. A shul, a *Mikdash m'at*, mirrors the Bais HaMikdash. Every sefer Torah contains the luchos, says the Rambam (see *Hilchos STa"m* 10:10), and therefore requires an aron (see Devarim 10:1-2 and Rashi there). The paroches therefore separates our Kodesh HaKadashim from our Kodesh. The menorah expresses itself with the *ner tamid* and the *mizbeach haketoresh* with the amud from where the chazzan davens, as per the words of Dovid HaMelech, "let my prayer be pleasing to You as ketores" (Tehillim 141:2). The bimah, which stands apart from the front of the shul, is where we learn about—and thereby bring—the korban mussaf every Yom Tov (see *Menachos* 110a and *Yoma* 86b), and we encircle it with our lulavim on Succos. The bimah is our mizbeach.

It is therefore apropos for our blowing of the shofar, our personal akeidas Yitzchok, to be made on our personal mizbeach in each and every shul.