

Good Yom Tov everyone. May this be a year of *bracha, hatzlacha, parnassa*, and good health, and a year of *yeshuos and refuos*, and *shalom* and *achdus* for all of עם ישראל.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Yakov and Esther Friedman, “in honor of Rabbi and Dr. Marwick and Family.” Thank you!
- Shlomo and Devorah Rivka Gelfand, “in memory of our dear niece Laurie Bondareff, Chanah bas Reuvain, who left us at the tender age of 6 to dance with the angels. May her pure *neshama* have an *aliya* in Gan Eden.”
- Hillel and Dena Soclof, in memory of Hillel's father, Abe Soclof, Avraham Abba ben Shmryahu, 27 Elul. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- Shragie and Yehudis Sunness: “For a Year of *Bracha* for us and all of *Klal Yisrael*.” Amen!

May the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with a year filled with good health, happiness, *bracha* and *hatzlacha*!

Today is the 718th day of the war in Eretz Yisrael. We must continue to *daven*, especially today, for the brave soldiers who are *moser nefesh* to protect our people. We must continue to *daven* for the release of all the hostages. We must continue to *daven* for a *refuah shleima* for all those who have been wounded, injured and traumatized in this war. I think it is important to know that 20,000 soldiers have been wounded in Gaza, and half suffer from PTSD. We must continue to *daven* for the safety and security of *acheinu bnei Yisrael* in Eretz Yisrael and throughout the world. May Hashem keep us all safe.

Although we call this day Rosh Hashana, the Torah calls it Yom Teruah, a day defined by the shofar. What is the meaning behind the shofar? How does it define the day? Traditionally, the shofar is viewed as an instrument, a siren sounding the alarm, or as a trumpet coronating the king. But the **Brisker Rav** in a famous explication of the Rambam understood that the shofar is a form of *tefilla*, a raw and unadorned cry, or call, צעקה in the words of Chazal.

תלמוד בבלי ראש השנה דף טז א: דאמר רבי יצחק: יפה צעקה [תפילה] לאדם, בין קודם גזר דין, בין לאחר גזר דין.

It is the simple crying out in *tefilla* of the Jewish people in *Mitzrayim* that went directly to Hashem and brought their *geulah*.

שמות ב:כג: ויהי ביקום הרבים ה' וילת מלך מצרים ויאנקו בני ישראל מן העבדה ויעל שועתם אל ה' והעבדה:

That is why **Rashi** (*Rosh Hashana* 26) explains the opinion that advocates using the horn of an ibex for a shofar a יעל פשוט, because it is straight, דמידי דתפילה בעי פשיטות and *tefilla* needs to be straight; honest and raw ... clearly Rashi understands a shofar as an instrument of prayer...

That is why we say in the Rosh Hashana *tefilla*: ומאזין תרועה: Hashem hears the shofar and listens to the teruah—we are communicating with Hashem through the shofar.

In *Forgotten Memoirs*, **Dr. Esther Farbstein** brings a written account of Holocaust survivor, **Rav Yehoshua Grunwald** known as the **Chuster Rav** about his Rosh Hashana *tefillas* in Auschwitz 1944 “... *summer ended, and still we were not saved. The Holy Days were almost upon us—days when the Jewish heart is extremely sensitive. Memories spontaneously cropped up of recent months of Elul and Tishrei, when we were in our homes. My soul wept in secret when I looked around me and saw the bitter present into which we had been flung. Hashem's face was so concealed... Nevertheless with mixed feelings, frightful and encouraging, we approached the High Holy Days. Despite the terrible, bitter ordeals and sad thoughts that consumed us, we did not despair of mercy... I found out that one prisoner in the camp, in a barracks far from ours, had the one and only siddur in the entire camp so I went to him secretly with a piece of paper that I had found outside when we were on our way to work, and I copied down the Shemoneh Esrei prayer for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur for myself. On Rosh Hashana day we prayed in one of the barracks without the knowledge of the Germans who were standing guard around the camp. I recited Shemoneh Esrei from what I had written, and all the people, about two thousand in number, repeated it after me in a whisper, with copious tears and shattered hearts, groans and wails.*

Rav Grunwald compares his *tefilla* that year to the sound of the shofar, the groans and wails—a clear reference the *shevarim* and *teruah*. In times of distress, Jews have always turned to *tefilla*. Chazal write in many places that the armament of choice of the Jewish people is *tefilla*; הקול קול יעקב.

We spend so much time during these *Yamim Noraim* immersed in *tefilla*. We really must ask ourselves today: are we prepared to *daven* properly? Do we appreciate the **power** of prayer, the **value** of prayer?

In one of the most moving sections of the Rosh Hashana liturgy, *Unesane Tokef*, we say *u'seshuva, u'sefilla u'tzedaka maavirin es roah hazezera*. *Tefilla* has incredible power and great abilities...to overturn decrees...to accomplish so much.

The *sefer Maaseh Ish* (מעשה איש ח"א עמ' קנ"א, ח"ז עמ' פ"ז) writes about the **Chazon Ish** and *tefilla*...

וידוע על רבינו החזון איש זצ"ל שהשקיע כוחות עצומים בתפילה, והעיד על עצמו שהתייגע בתפילה עוד יותר מיגיעתו בסוגיות החמורות שבש"ס. ועוד אמר על עצמו שמרגיש כי זכה והשיג בתורה ויראת שמים, יותר על ידי תפילתו מאשר על ידי התמדתו.

It is known that Rabbeinu, the Chazon Ish, zt"l, invested enormous energy in prayer, and testified about himself that he labored even more in prayer than he did in the serious issues of Shas. He also said about himself that he feels that he attained in Torah and fear of Heaven, was more through his prayer than through his perseverance.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky, in *The Life and Legacy of the Sar HaTorah* (ch. 24, p. 271) the author shares that “*The Steipler would daven for his dear Chaim daily. Even when Rav Chaim was over fifty years old, the Steipler told his grandson, R’Avrohom Yeshayah Kanievsky, “Not a day goes by that I don’t implore Hashem that your father be successful in his Torah learning and writing of sefarim, and that he have Yiras Shamayim.”*”

And it is not just the Chazon Ish and Steipler who have this *koach hatefilla*...

Rav Yaakov Galinsky, the Magid of Bnei Brak, writes (*Vehigadta, Breishis*, pp. 127-129) that we all do:

כל אדם, כל יהודי, "כי אתה שומע תפלת כל פה עמך ישראל ברחמים...כמה יכולים אנו לפעל חיים ושבוע ושלוש שפע ברכה והצלחה עבורנו בתפלתנו

Every person, every Jew’s prayers make a difference as we say in our tefillos; “for You hear the prayers of every mouth of every member of Klal Yisrael with mercy... How much can we accomplish-- life and sustenance and peace, abundance, blessing and success for us through our prayers.

But real *tefilla* cannot be just empty words or a lifeless experience. It has to be genuine...coming from a deep place like the shofar. **Rav Moshe Shternbach** writes about his memories of the *tefillas* of his mother, a”h:

ספר ביאורים והנהגות מתורת מרן פוסק הדור רבי משה שטרנבוך שליט”א: וראוי להזכיר את אמי הרבנית דבורה ע”ה שהיתה מתפללת בכיות ודמעות, והיה קול בכייתה נשמע עד היכל בית הכנסת, עד שהיו מהמתפללים שבאו בטענה לפני רב בית הכנסת על שקול בכיותיה של אמי ע”ה בתפילה מגיע לאזניהם, [אבל רב בית הכנסת ה”ה הגרי”צ דינר זצ”ל לא קיבל טענתם ואמר שבית הכנסת מיועד להתפלל ולבכות בדמעות, ואדבה עי”ו יתקדש שם שמים כשכולם יראו מהו כוח התפילה של אם בישראל]

It is worth mentioning my mother, Rebbetzin Devorah a’h, who used to pray with cries and tears, and the sound of her crying could be heard all the way to the main synagogue hall, until some of the mispalelim came to the Rav with a complaint that the sound of my mother’s crying in prayer disturbed them. But HaGaon HaRav Yosef Tzvi Dunner did not accept their claim, and said that a shul is made for praying and crying with tears and the name of Heaven will be sanctified when everyone will see the power of prayer of a mother in Israel.]

Tefilla takes work. The **Gemara Rosh Hashana 18a** teaches that two people can be facing the same predicament and both *daven*—one is answered but not the other: Because only one davened a *tefilla shleima*...

רבי מאיר אומר: זה ניצל וזה לא ניצל? זה - התפלל ונענה, וזה התפלל ולא נענה. מפני מה זה נענה וזה לא נענה? זה התפלל תפלה שלימה - נענה, וזה לא התפלל תפלה שלימה - לא נענה.

Rabbi Meir used to say. One will live and one will die. Why is this so? One prayed and his prayers were answered, the other prayed and his prayers were not answered. The Gemara elaborates – the one who prayed a “complete prayer” was answered and the one who did not pray a “complete prayer” was not answered.

Thus, we see that not all *tefilla* is equal.

Rashi explains that *שלימה* requires *כוונה*, intent. What *kavana* is Rashi referring to?

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik famously taught that the essential *kavana* for *tefilla* is appreciating that one is לפני ה', literally standing in front of Hashem. This requires a belief that Hashem is **really there**, that He genuinely cares and truly listens to us all... because without this awareness, *tefilla* lacks the most basic element—acknowledging a direct relationship with Hashem. This is the plain meaning of the **Gemara in Brachos 28b** when Rabbi Eliezer told his students *וכשאתם מתפללים דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים, ובשביל כך תזכו להי העולם הבא*. Following his grandfather's position, **Rav Soloveitchik**, in his writings, provides a fundamental statement about *tefilla* as an expression of being in God's presence. In *Exaltation of God and Redeeming the Aesthetic*, "*It is impossible to imagine prayer without, at the time, feeling the nearness and greatness of the Creator... We cling to Him as a living God, not as an idea, an abstract Being. We are in His company and are certain of His sympathy. There is, in prayer, an experience of emotions which can only be produced by direct contact with God.*"

The experience of sincerely connecting to Hashem, feeling His presence, is paramount, **beyond the specific words we use**. That is the message of the shofar... It is the sincere cry to Hashem that matters most.

But I would like to suggest נתכוון means focusing on something else as well. **Rav Kook** in his *siddur* framed prayer as connecting not only to Hashem, but also to our *neshamos*, our core beings. In his words:

הקדמה לספר עולת רא"ה: אין התפילה באה כתקונה כי אם מתוך המחשבה שבאמת הנשמה היא תמיד מתפללת. הלא היא עפה ומתרפקת על דודה בלא שום הפסק כלל, אלא שבשעת התפילה המעשית הרי התפילה הנשמית התדירית היא מתגלה בפעל... ולכן "הלואי שיתפלל אדם כל היום כולו." *Prayer comes to fruition from the awareness that the soul is always praying. After all, she flies and embraces her beloved without any cessation at all. At the time of tangible prayer, the perpetual prayers of the soul are revealed in action... therefore the statement of Chazal "If only a person would pray all day long."*

This helps us understand David Hamelech's statement in *Tehillim* 109:4, ואני תפילה, **I am tefilla**... it defines me and shapes me. I am connected to my soul, that genuine part of me that is "always praying," always connected to God.

The shofar, and all tefilla, is supposed to connect us to our inner selves. The **Rambam** writes about shofar:

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג הלכה ד: אף על פי שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזירת הכתוב רמז יש בו כלומר עורו ישינים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו מתרדמתכם וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם... **הביטו לנפשותיכם** והטיבו דרכיכם...
Even though the sounding of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah is a decree, it contains an allusion. It is as if [the shofar's call] is saying: Wake up, you sleepy ones from your sleep, and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator. Look to your souls. Improve your ways and your deeds...

Rav Yaakov Emden calls this a healthy "gaava," or proper pride, when we identify with our holy soul within...

הג"ר יעקב עמדין זצ"ל בהקדמת סולם בית אל (סידור): דע כי יש גאווה אחרת רוחנית טובה מאד וכו', ר"ל שנדע ונכיר ערך צורת הנפש הקדושה שהיא עצמותינו האמיתית היותר חלק אלוך ממעל כנודע, ולא נשעבדנה לפחות וגרוע, שהוא החומר הגס ותכונותו המקיפים אותה לנסותה, ומטים אותה אליהם להשמע להם להשחית צורתה ולהפסיד מעלתה הנכבדת.

There is a positive "gaava" to know and be confident that we possess a holy soul that is a "chelek Eloka mimaal" and not suppress or lower the soul by corrupting it...

Prayer gets us in touch with ourselves and our mission here. **Rav Soloveitchik** in *Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah* (pp. 65-66) wrote: *Prayer tells the individual, as well as the community, what his or its genuine needs are, what he should, or should not, petition God about. God needs neither thanks nor hymns... through prayer man finds himself. Prayer enlightens man about his needs. It tells man the story of his hidden hopes and expectations. It teaches him how to behold the vision and how to strive in order to realize this vision, when to be satisfied with what one possesses, when to reach out for more. In a word, man finds his need-awareness, himself in prayer. Of course, the very instant he finds himself, he becomes a redeemed being.*

Prayer is about the intended effect on ourselves, as much as the "effect," so to speak, on Hashem. Prayer is a time to focus on our place in the world and our dependence on God. To focus on what He expects from us and what we must expect from ourselves; about our purpose and mission here. It is a time to think about the *neshama* within, evident in the fact that when we call out to Hashem, He is there to listen... makes time for us and takes us seriously. During the *aseres*

y'mei teshuva, we insert the formulation וכתבנו בספר החיים למענך אלקים חיים. We ask Hashem to inscribe us in the book of life—but not for ourselves—but למענך so we can serve Hashem better. But we must know what that means—and that requires understanding ourselves and our relationship with Hashem.

The **Maharal**, in *Nesiv Ha'Avoda*, writes that *tefilla* is about transforming ourselves by realizing and expressing our relationship and complete dependence on God. Thus, it allows Hashem to send *bracha*.

Ramchal writes that Hashem programmed the world, to require our *tefilla* to trigger certain blessings.

דרך ה' חלק ד פרק ה אות א:א. ענין התפילה הוא, כי הנה מן הסדרים שסידרה החכמה העליונה הוא, שלהיות הנבראים מקבלים שפע ממנו, יתברך, צריך שיתעוררו הם אליו, ויתקרבו לו, ויבקשו פניו, וכפי התעוררותם לו כן יימשך אליהם שפע, ואם לא יתעוררו - לא יימשך להם. והנה האדון, ברוך הוא, חפץ ורוצה, שתרבה טובת ברואיו בכל זמניהם, והכין להם עבודה זו דבר יום ביומו, שעל ידה יימשך להם שפע ההצלחה והברכה, כפי מה שהם צריכים לפי מצבם זה בזה העולם.

One striking example: The **Ramban** wonders why Hashem did not heal Moshe's speech impediment when Moshe said it was holding him back? His answer: Moshe never asked for it...**if only he would have requested...**

רמב"ן שמות פרק ד פסוק י (פרשת שמות): והקב"ה כיון שלא התפלל בכך לא רצה לרפאותו.

There is so much we are meant to accomplish...many times **we just have to ask for it...** absent the expressed will of a human being, Hashem is restricted, *kaveyachol*, from providing us that bounty...

Rav Soloveitchik remarked in *Worship of the Heart* (p. 35): *When man is in need and prays, God listens. One of God's attributes is shomea tefillah. "He who listens to prayer." The efficacy of prayer is not the central term of inquiry in our philosophy of avoda she-balev. Acceptance of prayer is a hope, a vision, a wish, a petition, but not a principle or a premise.* The **Gemara** in *Rosh Hashana 16a* writes יפה צעקה לאדם that prayer is good for us, even when the results are different from what we hoped for.

Tefilla means speaking to Hashem; connecting with Hashem. This is something we must do at all times, especially in times of crisis and challenge, but also in happy times. We do not need to have things all worked out; we do not need to know how Hashem will help. We just need to communicate, really attach ourselves to Hashem through *tefilla*, predicated on an awareness that we are in front of Hashem, that He is listening to us.

Holocaust survivor and Gadol **Rav Pinchas Hirschprung** in *The Vale of Tears* (p. 68) wrote: *"As day dawned, I put on my tefillin and began reciting the morning prayers. In the prayers I found support. I prayed with feeling, with complete attention, from the depth of my heart. My worries, my wayward thoughts about despondency, about being trapped with no way out, left me. Every word of prayer seemed to caress me, and thanks to my great outpouring of emotion I felt strangely well. An exalted feeling impossible to convey in words overtook me. I truly felt that I was enveloped in compassion and loving-kindness and I felt good, very good."*

Why did *tefilla* have this effect on him? Because these two *kavanos* are linked—connecting to Hashem and our *neshama*. *Tefilla*, and specifically the צעקה of a shofar, are meant, as **Rav Yitzchak Hutner** writes, to evoke memories of the original ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים when Hashem and man were originally connected by that breath of God...with no barriers or separation. When we find that place of self-awareness, in its truest sense, we meet Hashem and we connect to our true selves, and we feel a certain calm, because we are where we belong, back where it all began. And things feel very good; it feels right.

Let me offer one final thought on *tefilla* which is so relevant today, 717 days into a long and difficult war, with 50 hostages still in captivity. The **Abarbanel** writes that our last *galus* will involve persecution from Yishmael. The **Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer** writes that he was named ישמעאל, because in the future, it is **our prayers** that will help us defeat Yishmael...and Hashem will hear those *tefillas*.

פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק לב: ולמה נקרא שמו ישמעאל, ששתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא לשמע (ו) בקול נאקת העם, ממה ששתידין בני ישמעאל לעשות בארץ באחרית הימים, לפיכך נקרא שמו ישמעאל, הרד"ל: לכן דרש לי' שתידי ה' לשמוע בקול נאקת בני שרה מעוני ישמעאל אותם.

Rav Chaim Vital writes, in *Etz HaDaas Tov*, that ultimately it is the *tefillas* of the Jewish people, and only the *tefillas* that will defeat Yishmael, no strategy or military operations will be able to accomplish this task alone. We have been praying for our *geula* for many centuries and many generations. The **Mabi"t** writes in *Beis Elokim (Shaar HaTefilla* (ch. 17), that it is the **cumulative** effect of the *tefillas* of centuries, that will bring Mashiach. As **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** said, "the world we build tomorrow is born in the prayers we say today." May we savor our *tefillas* on this Rosh Hashana and may it be His will that 5786 be a year of *shalom*, a year of *bracha*, good health and *parnassah*, and a year of *shalom*, *achdus*, and healing, for our people and for the world.