



Awareness Amidst the Abyss

Shofar blowing is one of the most intense spiritual moments of the entire year. In preparation for this elevated moment, *chazal* instituted the recitation of *Tehillim* chapter 47, “*Lamenatzeach livnei Korach mizmor*”. Who were these sons of Korach? Why is it fitting to be reminded of them at this time and what message do they teach us that is applicable to *tekiat shofar*?

“*Benei Korach lo maisu*”, the children of Korach did not die (*Bamidbar 26;11*). Rashi explains that originally, they were part of the rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu and thus were also swallowed by the ground with Korach and his following. It was only upon reaching the lowest level of

Gehenom that they had thoughts of *teshuvah* and were granted an island of asylum to be saved from eternal extinction. The *Saba* of *Slabodka* further points out that it was only when they were amidst the fires of *Gehenom* and could not even open their mouths that thoughts of *teshuvah*, sufficient to make them worthy of salvation, came to them. Each person has free choice to reflect on what Hashem wants at any given moment. Each of us can experience deep remorse for past behaviors and desire to live differently in the present. These thoughts create a powerful transformation within a person. It is no wonder that the song of Korach’s sons is highlighted at such a significant moment as it evokes the necessary inspiration for *tekiat shofar*.

Rav Shach adds that each of us is never alone; Hashem is found inside us always. Consequently, even a small thought of connecting to Hashem creates a boundless



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union. For example, Moshe Rabbeinu merely turned his head to see why the bush was not burning and was immediately granted prophecy. We are mistaken when we think it takes great strides and major changes to access closeness to Hashem. The *Sefat Emet* teaches that the word “*ad*” in “*Shuva Yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha*” (*Hoshea 14:2*), can be understood as “*eid*”, a witness. At times we may have a stirring of *teshuvah* deep in our hearts that could even be imperceptible to ourselves; yet Hashem is our witness. He considers these feelings as an indication of *teshuvah* and enables us to grow from them. When we are about to blow the shofar, we must realize that any thoughts and desires of closeness are so beloved by Hashem and bring us that much nearer to Him.

Rav Reuven Melamed notes that Korach's sons were only partially involved in the insurrection, it did not come from something deeply rooted within. They were therefore able to extricate themselves at the last moment to a haven of salvation. In contrast, says Rav Schwadron, the rest of the group were so entrenched in their rebellion that even when standing at the gates of *Gehennom* they could not do *teshuvah*. When one is controlled by their actions to such an extent, even when they may wish to do *teshuvah*, they have lost their ability to choose and are dragged down by the evil they have embraced. This too is an appropriate reflection for moments before *tekiat shofar*. We never want to reach a point when we are controlled by our impulses and actions and have lost the ability to direct our destiny. ■

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02-6255592, 050-3202909
Madar@netvision.net.il