



# SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

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The moments when the *Shofar* is sounded on *Rosh Hashana* are perhaps the most emotionally charged and spiritually significant island in time of the entire *Yomim Noraim* period. The *Shofar* has many profound messages; its most familiar message is of course to remind us of the *Akeidat Yitzchak* and the ram that takes the place of *Yitzchak Avinu* as a sacrificial offering. But there are many other messages inherent in the *Shofar's* sounds as well.

Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neriah, zt'l one of the close students of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook zt'l, edited a beautiful work called *Moadei HaReiah-* which is a collection of essays, stories, and sound bytes from the life and work of Rav Kook specifically regarding each of the Jewish Holidays. There is a particularly powerful story, which occurred one *Rosh Hashana* in the late 1920's that really sums up the multi-tiered inspirational messages contained within the *shofar's* sounds.

It became known to Rav Kook on the eve of *Rosh Hashana* that there was a particular construction project that was quickly nearing completion, and that those involved in building this particular edifice, planned to continue to work toward completing this project, even on *Rosh Hashana*. Obviously saddened by this news, Rav Kook decided upon a strategy as to how he must address

this situation.

The next morning, Rav Kook sent one of his *gabbaim* (ritual assistants) to visit the workers, and to bring a *Shofar* with him. Rav Kook gave the *gabbai* careful instructions not to speak any harsh words, rather to merely go to the construction site, and to simply sound the *Shofar*.

Upon hearing the familiar sounds of the *Shofar*, construction ceased, and most of the laborers quickly changed their clothing and made their way to synagogues. When the *gabbai* returned to the synagogue, he asked Rav Kook how come the rabbi did not simply go and address these workers himself; surely a visit from the esteemed Chief Rabbi would have encouraged all of the laborers to join the many who had decided to return to the synagogue with the *gabbai*. Rav Kook's answer is perhaps the most powerful point of this entire story. Rav Kook explained that had he arrived at the site, surely he would have caused great embarrassment, even shame to the many workers! Although the public desecration of this holiest of days certainly pained him deeply, the pain he felt when the Torah's honor was tarnished in such a public manner enveloped his entire being; but what pained him most was to know that there were Jews who might go through an entire *Rosh Hashana* and not

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hear the beautiful sweet sounds of the *Shofar*.

Three times each day we recite the *Amida*—the nineteen blessing benediction which forms the foundation of Jewish prayer. Included among these blessings are the following words:

“Sound the great *Shofar* for our freedom, raise the banner to gather in our exiles and gather us together from the four corners of the Earth....”

This blessing is of course a reference to the prophetic vision of the “Great *Shofar*” which will be sounded, with the onset of the Messianic era.

However, Rav Gedalia Schorr zt'l, one of the giants of American Jewish life in the twentieth century, explains this blessing in relation to the *Shofar* we will sound in just a few days on *Rosh Hashana*. In his masterpiece of Torah essays, *Or Gedalyahu*, Rav Gedalia wrote these moving words:

“It is through the experience of the sounding of the *Shofar* on *Rosh Hashana* that every person has an awakening within his heart, that rouses the pure spark innate within each of our hearts, and can bring us to true freedom; the freedom from all that clouds our vision in the here and now, and ultimately it is this clarity which will help us to usher in the era of true freedom, of peace and harmony in the world, represented by the sounding of the Great *Shofar of Moshiach*...”

The words of Rav Kook and Rav Gedalia Schorr are particularly profound as we are

about to commemorate *Rosh Hashana* in the here and now of these unprecedented days of the on-going global pandemic. If these two giants had such a deep understanding of how the *Shofar*'s emotionally charged sounds had the power to literally transform each and every soul scattered throughout the four corners of the world, and to inspire harmony and unity, how much more vividly does this message resonate for the times we live in today.

But it is Rav Kook's beautiful lesson which must guide us and must serve as the basis for building bridges with all our brothers and sisters. The *Shofar*'s sweet sounds remind us of the beauty that is a Jewish way of life, the enrichment, fulfillment and contentment that *Torah* can bring to each of our lives. The *Shofar*'s sounds reach that pure spark within each of us, and softly remind us that we can indeed leave behind all those issues and confusing circumstances that cloud our vision- our vision of ourselves, our vision of the world, and our vision of each other.

When we hear the *Shofar* this *Rosh Hashana*, may it inspire within us a new-found desire for true freedom; freedom to leave behind the many challenging events of this past year, freedom to leave behind whatever lingering grudges and preconceived notions we may hold toward family, friends, and neighbors. May the sounds of the *Shofar* this *Rosh Hashana*, soon be echoed with the sounds of Great *Shofar* of Freedom, that we have been longing for so, so long... *Shana Tova U'metuka* - Warmest wishes for a happy sweet New Year. ■

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