



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER



ROSH HASHANA

Inner Illumination

Tekiat Shofar, blowing the shofar, is a central part of the Rosh Hashanah service. In designing the structure of each section, Chazal meticulously chose seven verses to be recited responsively before shofar blowing, and three verses following the blasts. These verses direct our minds and hearts to focus on the objective of the mitzvah to blow shofar and indeed the objective of the *Yamim Nora'im*, the High Holy Days.

After blowing the first thirty shofar blasts, the chazzan calls out, "*Ashrei ha'am yod'ei teruah, Hashem be'or panecha yehaleichun* – Praiseworthy is the people that knows the shofar's cry; O Hashem, they will walk by the illumination of your countenance!" The latter part of the verse affords us a glimpse into the theme of the day and the power of the shofar.

Rav Elya Roth zt"l in *Sichat Eliyahu* quotes the famous idea that the moments during which

the shofar is blown is akin to the moments the Kohen Gadol stands in the Holy of Holies to do the exclusive Yom Kippur service. When listening to the shofar blasts, each of us metaphorically enters "*lifnai ve'lifnim*," into the innermost chamber of Hashem's presence. We are judged on Rosh Hashanah "*k'venei maron*" as an individual. This is a unique experience as people are generally social creatures, we like to interact with others and often define ourselves in terms of our relationship with others. In contrast, on Rosh Hashanah we stand completely alone before Hashem. Rav Roth notes that this is one of the reasons that the word '*emet*,' truth, is repeated often throughout the Rosh Hashanah liturgy. We are given the opportunity to face who we are without pretenses, to confront our core self. In the innermost chamber, we encounter who we really are.

Rav Yehudah Leib Chasman zt"l shares a powerful parable to illustrate the dynamic of these moments. Imagine a simple villager who hears about a cinema. He is intrigued by the idea and saves up money to buy an entrance ticket to see a film. He enters the darkened theater and is entranced by the images he sees on the screen. One thing, however, bothers him terribly. Everyone is sitting in the dark! He imagines how much more they would enjoy themselves if they could see better and instinctively turns on the light. The people in the theater yell at him, "Fool! Don't you know that the visuals only appear in the dark!"

On Rosh Hashanah, we are privy to the "*ohr panecha*," the Divine illumination that allows us to see the fantasies we live and the misdirected

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goals that we chase.

In his sefer on teshuvah, Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein explains that all year we deceive ourselves into believing that we are the owner of the house, the business, **we** are the center of the universe. Indeed, we sometimes have the attitude that we 'invite Hashem into our lives,' but only at our own convenience. Rosh Hashanah is the time when we are gifted with the light of clarity; it is Hashem's world, and we must adjust ourselves to realign our values and mindsets with His. The theme of this section is that of restoring our vision; to walk and live in the 'light of Hashem' - with His truth, His word, His command.

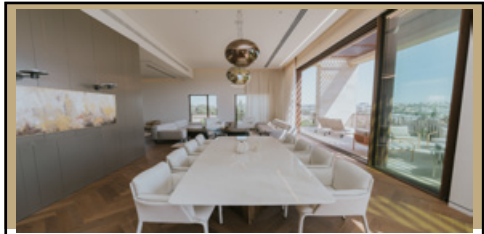
The shofar turns on the light, shining it into the inner recesses of our soul. It enables us to see our crafted illusions for what they are and only then can we live sincerely with the Divine truths that Hashem has set for us. ■



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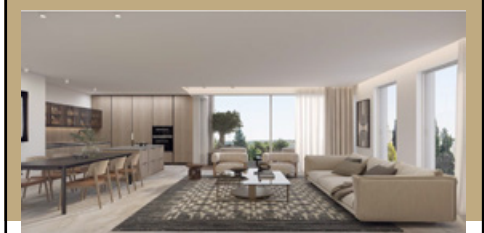
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Deborah Tuitou +972(0)54-480-4767
www.real-estate-jerusalem.co.il
deborah@realestatejerusalem.co.il

