

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XXXI: Emor (Lev. 21:1–24:23)

Essay 15. The power of the shofar

מדרש רבה על פסוק "בחדש השביעי", "עלה אלהים בתרועה ה' בקול שופר", בשעה שהקב"ה עולה, בדין הוא עולה שנאמר "עלה אלהים בתרועה", ובשעה שישראל נוטלין שופרותיהן ותוקעים לפני הקב"ה עומד מכסא דין ויושב על כסא רחמים דכתיב "ה' בקול שופר" עכ"ל.

There is a **Midrash Rabbah** on the verse, “**In the seventh month**, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts.”¹

“**G-d [*Elokim*] ascends with an alarm blast [תרועה] [*teru'ah*]; the L-rd [the Tetragrammaton], to the voice of the shofar.”²**

At the hour that the Holy One, Blessed be He, ascends, it is in judgment that He ascends. As it is said, “G-d ascends with an alarm blast.”

And at the hour that Israel take their shofars and blow before the Holy One, Blessed be He, He rises from the throne of judgment and sits on his throne of mercy. As it is written, “the L-rd, to the voice of the shofar.”

[I.e., the verse first uses the name “*Elokim*,” which is symbolic of judgment, and then switches to the Tetragrammaton, which is symbolic of mercy.]

- Lev. Rabbah 29:3

ומקשים העולם כיון דבתקיעת שופר נהפך לרחמים איך קאמר "עלה אלהים בתרועה" דמשמע שפשיש תרועה עדיין יש שם אלהים דמשמע דין.

The world asks about this, since according to the end of the verse, by blowing the shofar, [judgment] turns to mercy, how does it initially say, “G-d [*Elokim*] ascends with an alarm blast.” For this means that when there is an alarm blast, which is itself sounded by the shofar, that there is *Elokim*, which has the meaning of judgment?

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¹ Lev. 23:24.

² Ps. 47:6.

וַיִּבְנוּ בָמָה שְׂפָתַי הָרֶב גַּאֲלֵנְטִי עַל פְּסוּק "הִרְגֵתָּ בַיּוֹם אֶפְדִּי" וְכו', דְּלִמְעַלָּה יֵשׁ שְׁלוֹשָׁה מִיָּנִי גְבוּרוֹת הַדְּנוֹת אֶת הָעוֹלָם. וְהֵינּוּ הַגְּבוּרוֹת חִיצוֹנִיּוֹת שְׁפוּעָלוֹת בְּאַכְזָרִיּוֹת חִימָה בְּלִי רַחֲמִים כָּלֵל. וְלִמְעַלָּה מֵהֶן יֵשׁ גְּבוּרוֹת קְדוּשׁוֹת דְּהֵינּוּ ע"ב סִנְהֶדְרִין שֶׁבְּהִיכַל הַזֵּכוֹת. וְהַיּוֹמֵר טוֹב הוּא כְּשֶׁנֶּגְמָר הַדִּין עַל יְדֵי הַגְּבוּרוֹת שֶׁבְּאַצִּילוֹת שֶׁהֵן כְּלוּלוֹת בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְחֻסִּידִים. וְעַל זֶה הָיָה מִתְפַּלֵּל דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ ע"ה "וּבְגִבּוּרְתָּךְ תִּדְיִנֵנִי", רָצָה לֵאמֹר בְּגִבּוּרָה שֶׁלֹּא שֶׁל אֲצִילוֹת, וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "מִלְפָּנֶיךָ מִשְׁפָּטִי יֵצֵא" עכ"ל.

This will be understood by what Rabbi Galanti wrote on the verse, “You slew them on Your day of wrath, You slaughtered without pity”³:

Above there are three kinds of *Gevurot*, powers of strict justice, that rule the world. These are: (1) external powers, that act with the cruelty of wrath, without any mercy whatsoever; above them are (2) holy powers, namely the seventy-two members of the [Heavenly] Sanhedrin in the Palace of Merit; the best, however, is when judgment is completed by the (3) *Gevurot* of *Atzilut*, the world of Emanation,⁴ which are blended with mercy and kindness. About this, King David, peace be upon him, prayed, “by Your power vindicate me,”⁵ meaning, with Your *Gevurah* from *Atzilut*. Similarly, he says, “my vindication will come from You.”⁶

- Sefer Kol Bochim⁷

וְנוֹדַע שֶׁמִּי שֶׁמְכַוֵּן כְּרָאוֹי בְּעֵת עֲשִׂיַּת הַמִּצְוָה אוֹתָהּ הַמְחַשְׁבָּה עוֹלָה לְמַעְלָה לְמַעְלָה, מָה שֶׁאֵין כֵּן מִי שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה אוֹתָהּ בְּלִי הַכּוֹנֶנָה הָרְאוּיָה אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁאֵף מַעֲשֶׂה הַמִּצְוָה לְבַדּוֹ נִחְשָׁב לְזָכוֹת מִכָּל מְקוֹם אֵינָה עוֹלָה כָּל כָּךְ לְמַעְלָה.

It is known that regarding one who has proper intention at the time of performing a mitzvah, i.e., such as reciting the prayers with the Kabbalistic *kavanot*, such a thought rises very high above, unlike one who performs it without the proper intention. Even though the act of the mitzvah alone is considered a merit, it nonetheless does not ascend as high.

³ Lam. 2:21.

⁴ There is a Kabbalistic concept of AbiYA, of four central worlds: Atzilut (“the world of emanation”), Beriah (“the world of creation”), Yetzirah (“the world of formation”), and Asiyah (“the world of action”). The last three terms appear (in verb form) in Isaiah 43:7, “Every one that is called by My name, and for My glory, I have created him, I have formed him, indeed, I have made him.” Atzilut emerges directly from G-d’s infinite light (revelation); this world is all good. Atzilut is the soul and the source of life to Beriah, the first world created from nothing, where Seraphim are created. Beriah is mostly good, with some bad. Beriah is the soul and the source of life to Yetzirah, where angels are created, forces entrusted with performing tasks without any free choice. Yetzirah is half good and half bad. Yetzirah is the soul and the source of life to Asiyah, our finite world in which created beings have a strong sense of independence. Asiyah is mostly bad, though there is some good. Therefore, the worlds are all linked, and all have a connection to G-d’s infinite light.

⁵ Ps. 54:3.

⁶ Ps. 17:2.

⁷ Rabbi Avraham Galanti, a student of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (“the Ramak”), was the author of *Sefer Kol Bochim* (Venice 1589), a Kabbalistic commentary on Lamentations.

ומעתה כְּשִׁישָׁרְאֵל עוֹשִׂים הַתְּרוּעָה בְּיוֹם רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה וְאֵינָם מִתְּפוֹנְגִים אֶלָּא לְקִיּוֹם הַמִּצְוָה בְּלִבָּד, אִזּוֹכִים שְׂדִינָם מִסְתַּלֵּק מִהַגְבוּרוֹת חֵיצוֹנוֹת הַקְּשׁוֹת וְיִהְיוּ גְדוֹנִים מִהַגְבוּרוֹת שֶׁבְּהִיכָל הַזְּכוֹת שְׂאִינָם כָּל כֶּף קִשּׁוֹת. וְזֶהוּ "עֲלֵה אֱלֹהִים בְּתְרוּעָה" שֶׁהֵדִין עוֹלָה לְמַעְלָה, אֲבָל מִכָּל מְקוֹם בְּדִין הוּא עוֹלָה שְׂאֵף שֶׁם דְּגִים בְּמִדַּת הַגְבוּרָה.

Now with that understanding, **now on, when Israel sound the alarm blast on Rosh Hashanah, but intend only to fulfill the mitzvah, they merit that their judgment is removed from the harsh external powers and judged instead by the powers in the Palace of Merit, which are not so harsh. This is** the meaning of the beginning of the verse, **“G-d [Elokim] ascends with an alarm blast.”** The judgment indeed ascends above the lowest level of the *Gevurot*, the external powers that act with the cruelty of wrath. **However,** there is still the Name of *Elokim*, representing judgment, for even though **it ascends**, it is still **in judgment, as even there** in the Heavenly Sanhedrin in the Palace of Merit, **they judge with the attribute of severity.**

אָמְנָם כְּשִׁישָׁרְאֵל נוֹטְלִים שׁוֹפְרוֹתֵיהֶן שֶׁמִּתְּפוֹנְגִים לְהַשְׁמוֹת הַקְּדוּשִׁים הַיּוֹצְאִים מִהַשּׁוֹפָר וְכָל הַסּוּדוֹת הַתְּלוּיִים בְּמַלְת "שׁוֹפָר", דְּהֵינּוּ לְהַמְתִּיק הֵדִין לְגַמְרִי, כְּדִכְתִּיב "וּמִצּוֹר דָּבָשׁ אֲשַׁבֵּיעֶד", שְׂדָב"שׁ גִּימָטְרִיָּא ש"ו מ"שׁוֹפָר", אִזּוֹ הוֹפֵךְ לָהֶם הֵדִין לְרַחֲמִים לְפִי שְׂדָן אוֹתָם בַּגְבוּרוֹת הַיּוֹתֵר עֲלִיוֹנוֹת, וְהֵינּוּ "מִלְּפָנֶיךָ מִשְׁפָּטִי יֵצֵא" כְּנֶאֱמַר לְעֵיל שְׁהֵם רַחֲמִים וְחֶסֶדִים גְּדוֹלִים. וְעַיִן עוֹד לְקַמֵּן בְּסוּמָה.

However, the end of the verse, “the L-rd [the Tetragrammaton], to the voice of the shofar,” refers to **when Israel takes their shofars that, by use of the *kavanot*, are directed toward the Holy Names that emerge from the shofar, and all the esoteric secrets tied to the word shofar. That is,** their intent is **to sweeten the judgment completely, to raise it to the *Gevurot* of *Atzilut*.**

This is as it is written, “and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”⁸ That is, the word דָּבָשׁ [*devash*] [“honey”], has a Gematria of 306, the same as the first two letters, שׁוֹפָר, shin and vav, of שׁוֹפָר [*shofar*]. Then the judgment is turned to mercy for them, because they are judged by the highest powers of *Gevurot*, which is the meaning of “my vindication will come from You,” as it is said above, which are great mercy and kindness.

See further below, Essay 16.

Thus the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashana, even when performed on the most basic level, ensures that we are not judged with the greatest severity, but at a lesser level of severity. But when the shofar is blown with the proper intent, with the appropriate *kavanot*, then we are judged with great mercy and kindness.

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⁸ Ps. 81:17.