

**“מִן הַמִּצָּר קִרְאתִי יְהוָה עֲנֵנִי בַמִּרְחָב יְהוָה”**

memory of “Akeidas Yitzchak,” why did HKB”H command us to blow the shofar and produce various sounds?

### Blowing from the Narrow End to Produce a Sound from the Wide End

Let us begin our investigation by introducing the pronouncement of the “michaber” (author) in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 590, 9): “תקע בצד הרחב של השופר לא יצא”—**if one blew from the wide end of the shofar, it is invalid.** The Beis Yosef explains that this halachic decree comes from the teachings of the Ran (R.H. 27b), who writes in the name of the Talmud Yerushalmi: “תקע בצד הרחב לא יצא, ותנא יהיב סימנא (תהלים קיח-ה) מן המצר קראתי יה” Here he provides a passuk which alludes to this halachah (Tehillim 118, 5): “מן המצר קראתי יה”—**from the narrow straits did I call upon G-d (יה).**

This is also the source for what the Arizal writes in Shaar HaKavanos (R.H. Drush 7): “ואחר כך תכוין בענין השופר בעצמו, כי הוא קצר למעלה ורחב למטה, בסוד מן המצר קראתי יה, מקום המצר הוא מקום הקצר—afterwards, he should consider the shofar itself; it is narrow above and wide below, consistent with the passuk: **“From the narrow straits did I call upon G-d”**; the narrow side is the side the blower places in his mouth; the wide side is below. This is also the source of the “minhag” to recite the passuk “מן המצר” before the shofar-blowing, as described in Mishnas Chassidim (R.H. 3, 2): “יאמר פסוק מן המצר קראתי יה, והוא סוד המקום צר של שופר, ענני במרחב יה, והוא פסוק מן המצר קראתי יה, והוא סוד המקום הרחב—**From the narrow straits did I call upon G-d**”—alludes to the narrow end of the shofar; while the second half of the passuk—**“G-d answered me in the wide expanse”**—alludes to the wide end.

We find an incredible allusion to this fact in the teachings of the Bris Kehunas Olam. The two ends of the shofar—the narrow end where the voice enters and the wide end where the sound emerges—are alluded to in the passuk: “מן המצר קראתי יה” ענני במרחב יה. If we take the numerical values of the two words in the passuk alluding to the two ends of the shofar—**מצר** and **מרחב**, they add up to the numerical value of the word **שופר** (shofar without the letter “vav”). The path of the sound travelling from the narrow end to the wide end is represented by the letter “vav”—completing the word **שופר**.

With this introduction, let us now explore the practical significance of this practice. Why do we blow the shofar in such a way that the sound enters from the narrow end and exits

from the wide end—alluding to the passuk: “מן המצר קראתי יה” ענני במרחב יה? Additionally, let us endeavor to explain why the name of G-d—יה—appears twice in this passuk. It appears once in relation to the narrow end—“מן המצר קראתי יה”—and once in relation to the wide end—“ענני במרחב יה”. What does this signify with regards to the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah?

### HKB”H Chooses the Remnants of Our Tefilos

I would like to propose an explanation based on a fundamental concept learned from the great Rabbi Uri of Strelisk, zy”a, and Rabbi Bunem of Peshischa, zy”a. They both address the formula instituted by the Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah (the members of the Great Assembly) in the berachah of Yishtabach: “הבוחר בשירי זמרה”. There is an apparent redundancy in this phrase. A “shir” and a “zimrah” are one and the same. So, why do we state that HKB”H chooses “בשירי זמרה”?

They explain the matter as follows. After a G-d-fearing Jew has finished praying—offering his songs and praises to HKB”H—he pauses to reflect. Perhaps, G-d forbid, his Tefilos to the King of the Universe were lacking. Hence, he wishes with all his heart that he could pray to HKB”H all over again—this time reciting his songs and praises more perfectly. These desires and yearnings issued from a contrite heart are dearer and more valued to HKB”H than the actual songs and praises recited. For, at this point, the person has no further recourse; he is remorseful and heartbroken for his failure to pray adequately.

Now, there is a well-known maxim in the Gemara (Kiddushin 40a): “מחשבה טובה מצרפה למעשה”—**He associates a good thought with an actual deed.** Thus, if a person has these sincere thoughts of remorse, HKB”H views it as if he actually recited the songs and praises in the ideal manner. This then is the interpretation of the phrase: “הבוחר בשירי זמרה”. The word “שירי”, which means “songs of,” is related to the word “שירים”, meaning remnants. In other words, HKB”H chooses the remnants of our songs and praises—those parts that were not actually expressed by Yisrael in their prayers but were longed for after the completion of their prayers—wishing that they had prayed more sincerely. This completes their explanation.

Upon further reflection, this, in fact, is the root of the mitzvah of teshuvah. Say a person fell into the yetzer hara’s trap, chas v’shalom, and failed to perform one of the 248 mitzvos aseh. Subsequently, he reflects back on his failure and omission; and in his state of remorse, he wishes that he could

perform the mitzvah that he neglected. As we have learned, HKB”H associates his sincere, good thought with the actual deed and considers it retroactively as if he had in fact fulfilled the mitzvah properly.

The same applies to a mitzvas lo ta’aseh--where a person actively transgressed and performed an act that was prohibited, chas v’shalom. We have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 39b): “**ישב ולא עבר עבירה נותנים לו שכר כעושה מצוה**”—if a person abstains from committing an aveirah, he is rewarded as if he actually performed a mitzvah. By transgressing, he failed to fulfill this particular mitzvas lo ta’aseh. Therefore, by regretting his transgression sincerely with all his heart and longing that he had withstood the influence of his yetzer, HKB”H will take into account his good intention. It will be regarded as if he did indeed overcome his yetzer and he will be rewarded as if he actually observed the mitzvah.

### In the Ordeal of the Akeidah Avraham Established This Precedent for All Future Generations

Let us suggest that this vital principle of “**הבוחר בשירי זמרה**” was established by Avraham Avinu for all future generations of Yisrael at the time of “Akeidas Yitzchak.” For, although Avraham did not actually sacrifice Yitzchak, HKB”H considered it as if he did. Ever since the “akeidah,” HKB”H prefers and chooses the leftovers, the “shirayim”—the sincere remorse—of a Jew’s Tefilos and mitzvot that were performed inadequately over the Tefilos and mitzvot themselves.

Let us revisit the ordeal of the “akeidah.” HKB”H sent Avraham a malach from above on two occasions. First the malach comes to admonish Avraham not to “shecht” Yitzchak, as it is written (Bereishis 22, 11): “**ויקרא אליו מלאך ה' מן השמים ויאמר אברהם אברהם ויאמר הנני, ויאמר אל תשלח ידך אל הנער ואל תעש לו מאומה, כי עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלקים אתה ולא חשכת את בנך את**—and a malach of Hashem called to him from heaven, and said, “Avraham! Avraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” And he said, “Do not send forth your hand at the lad nor do anything to him for now I know that you are G-d-fearing, and you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me.”

Subsequently, it is written (ibid. 13): “**וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא, והנה איל אחר נאחו בסבך בקרניו, וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעולה תחת בנו**—and Avraham raised his eyes and saw—and behold, a ram!—afterwards, caught in the thicket by its horns; so

Avraham went and took the ram and brought it up as an offering instead of his son. After sacrificing the ram, HKB”H sends a malach to Avraham once again (ibid. 15): “**ה' אל אברהם שנית מן השמים, ויאמר בי נשבעתי נאום ה', כי יען אשר עשית את הדבר הזה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך, כי ברך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי השמים וכחול אשר על שפת הים**—the malach of Hashem called to Avraham a second time from heaven. And he said, “By Myself I swear—the word of Hashem—that **because you have done this thing**, and have not withheld your son, your only one, that I shall surely bless you and surely increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens and like the sand on the seashore.”

This sequence deserves further explanation. Why, on the first mission, didn’t the malach bestow upon Avraham all of the berachos that were bestowed upon him on the second mission? Additionally, on the first mission the malach says: “**For now I know that you are G-d-fearing, and you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me.**” He omits the words: “because you have done this thing,” which are added on the second mission.

### By Sacrificing the Ram Avraham Reveals His True Intentions

We can explain the matter based on Rashi’s commentary (ibid. 12), which is based on the Midrash (B.R. 56, 7): “**אל תשלח ידך, לשחוט, אמר לו [אברהם] אם כן לחנם באתי לכאן, אעשה בו חבלה ואוציא—do not send forth your hand—to slaughter. Avraham said to Hashem, “If so, I have come here for no reason. I will make a wound in him and extract from him a bit of blood.” Hashem said to him, “Do not do anything to him,”—do not put a blemish in him.** We see from here just how much Avraham yearned to sacrifice Yitzchak to Hashem.

Now, it is true that HKB”H associates a sincere, good thought with an actual deed. Nevertheless, since Avraham was the first one to establish this principle for all of Yisrael, his case required a clear-cut demonstration that his intentions were truly sincere. These true intentions were only revealed after he took the ram and actually sacrificed it in place of Yitzchak—as it is written: “**so Avraham went and took the ram and brought it up as an offering instead of his son.**”

Rashi comments, based on the Midrash (B.R. 56, 9): “**תחת בנו, מאחר שכתוב ויעלהו לעולה לא חסר המקרא כלום, מהו תחת בנו, על כל עבודה**



שעשה ממנו היה מתפלל ואומר, יהי רצון שתהא זו כאילו היא עשויה בבני, כאילו—בני שחוט, כאילו דמו זרוק, כאילו בני מופשט, כאילו הוא נקטר ונעשה דשן—**Once it is written: ויעלהו לעולה, the passuk lacks nothing. So why was it necessary to state תחת בנו? Concerning each avodah that Avraham performed, he would pray and say, “May it be Your will that this should be as if it were done to my son; as if my son were slaughtered, as if his blood were sprinkled, as if my son were stripped of his hide, as if he were set smoking and became ashes.”**

This explains very nicely why only on the second mission, after Avraham sacrificed the ram in place of Yitzchak, did the malach add the following: **“כי יעו אשר עשית את הדבר הזה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך—because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only one.** For, by sacrificing the ram instead of Yitzchak, and for praying that each and every step of the sacrificial process should be considered as if it had been performed on Yitzchak, his true intentions were revealed: **עשית**—**עשית**—it was as if he had actually sacrificed Yitzchak.

Thus, Avraham paved the way for all of Yisrael. For them, as well, HKB”H would associate their good intentions with an actual deed, even though they did not actually perform any such deed. By actually sacrificing the ram, Avraham inculcated this matter into the nature and being of every single Jew. Even when they are unable to fulfill a mitzvah in actuality, in their thoughts, they long to fulfill the mitzvah; so that HKB”H will associate their sincere thoughts with the actual performance of the mitzvah.

This then is the interpretation of the berachah bestowed upon Avraham by the malach on the second mission: **כי יעו אשר—due to your sincere, good intentions, which HKB”H associated with the actual performance of the deed; ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך, כי ברך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי השמים—your offspring will be blessed, as well; with the future Bnei Yisrael, as well, HKB”H will associate their sincere intentions with the actual performance of the deed.**

Now, let us introduce a fascinating Midrash. It states that “Akeidas Yitzchak” took place on Rosh HaShanah. Furthermore, Avraham prayed to HKB”H that on every Rosh HaShanah, He would recall the events of “Akeidas Yitzchak” for the sake of his offspring. HKB”H responded by stipulating that He would do so if Avraham’s offspring would blow a ram’s horn before Him. Here is the passage from the Pesikta Rabbati:

“ויקרא אברהם את שם המקום ההוא ה' יראה אשר יאמר היום בהר ה' יראה (בראשית כב-יד). אמר רבי ירמיה, אמר לו [אברהם], רבוננו של עולם גלוי היה לפניך שהיה לי מה להשיבך כשאמרת לי לקרב את יצחק, אילו השבתי אותך לא היה לך מה להשיבני, שהייתי אומר לך, אתמול אמרת לי (שם כא-יב) כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, ועכשיו אתה אומר לי לשחטו, ולא השבתי אותך, אלא עשיתי עצמי כאלם וכחרש...

כשהיו בניו של יצחק נידונים לפניך ביום זה, ואפילו יש להם כמה קטגורים מקטרגים אותם, כשם שדממתי ולא השיבותיך כך אתה לא תשיב להם, ויקרא אברהם את שם המקום ההוא ה' יראה אשר יאמר היום וגו', מהו היום, כהיום מפני שראש השנה היה, אמר לו הקב"ה וכך אני עושה, אמר לו אברהם השבע לי, מיד (שם טז) בי נשבעתי נאום ה'...

וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך בקרניו וגו'... מהו אחר נאחז בסבך, אמר לו הקב"ה ראה מה לפניך, בניך העומדים אחריך כשהיו מסובכים ונאחזים בעבירות, מה הם עושים, בקרניו, נוטלים את הקרנות האלו ותוקעים בהם, ואני נזכר עקידתו של יצחק ומזכה אותם בדין”.

Based on what we have discussed, we can understand the matter as follows. At the ordeal of the “akeidah,” Avraham established this vital principle. By sacrificing the ram as if he were actually sacrificing Yitzchak, HKB”H viewed the act as if Yitzchak himself was on the mizbeiach. Therefore, Avraham prayed to HKB”H that on every Rosh HaShanah, on the Day of Judgment, HKB”H would do the same for all of Yisrael. When Yisrael would be inspired to perform teshuvah and long to correct all of the mitzvos that they had performed inadequately, HKB”H would regard their remorse and sincere, good intentions as the actual, proper performance of the mitzvos. HKB”H agreed on the condition that they would blow a shofar taken from a ram before Him.

## Sounding the Shofar without Speaking Represents Our Inner Thoughts

We can now better appreciate the message conveyed by the sages’ puzzling statement: **‘תקעו לפני בשופר של—אמר הקב"ה, תקעו לפני בשופר של’**—HKB”H said, **“Sound a shofar from a ram before Me, so that I will recall for you the binding of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham.”** As we know, Rosh HaShanah is the Day of Judgment for all of creation; the entirety of creation is held accountable by HKB”H, King of the Universe, who sits atop His throne of judgment on Rosh HaShanah. When Yisrael undergo this self-evaluation process and realize all of their shortcoming with regards to their service of Hashem, they are overwhelmed with remorse and long with all their hearts to serve Hashem properly.

Therefore, HKB”H commanded Yisrael to blow a shofar, fashioned from a ram’s horn, before Him: **כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת** “--so that I will recall for you the binding of **Yitzchak, the son of Avraham**. For, although Yitzchak was not sacrificed, nevertheless it was considered as if Avraham had sacrificed his son--due to the fact that he sacrificed the ram in place of Yitzchak. By doing so, he paved the way for all of Yisrael that their good intentions should be considered like the actual performance of the deed, in keeping with the notion of: **הבוחר בשירי זמרה**. As a result, HKB”H views our thoughts and good intentions as if we performed all of the mitzvot in the ideal manner. Thus, by taking the shofar, fashioned from a ram’s horn, our good intentions are fulfilled—just like Avraham’s good intention to sacrifice Yitzchak was viewed as a fait accompli.

With this understanding, we can begin to understand why HKB”H commanded us to sound the shofar—producing an unadulterated sound without the articulation of letters. For, this unmodified sound represents the thought process before it is verbalized into letters and words. Hence the sounding of the ram’s horn without words expresses our earnest thoughts and desire to serve Hashem in the perfect, ideal manner. For, we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 17a): **רבי אלכסנדר ברת דמצלי אמר הכי, רבון העולמים גלי וידוע לפניך שרצוננו לעשות רצונך, ומי מעכב** “--after praying, Rabbi Alexandri would say the following: **Master of the Universe, it is apparent and known to you that it is our will to perform Your will; and who prevents us from doing so? The yeast in the dough** (referring to the yetzer hara) **and the oppression of foreign regimes**.

This provides us with a very nice explanation for the Arizal’s teaching that when blowing the narrow end of the shofar to produce sounds from its wide end, it is essential to have in mind the passuk: **“מן המצר קראתי יה ענני במרחב יה”**—**“From the narrow straits did I call upon G-d”; “G-d answered me in the wide expanse.”** For, when we sound the shofar without words, we blow from the narrow end representing our dire straits. In this manner, we express our distress at not having fulfilled Hashem’s mitzvot properly. Nevertheless, the sound ascends heavenwards to Hashem from the wide end of the shofar. This alludes to the fact that Hashem has dealt with us magnanimously; He has viewed our good intentions as if we actually fulfilled the mitzvot as they were meant to be performed.

This incredible idea agrees magnificently with the declaration of Yisrael’s sweet psalmist, David HaMelech: **מן המצר קראתי יה**—**from the narrow straits did I call upon G-d**. In other words, when I call out to Hashem from my state of distress and remorse at not having served Him properly, and I sincerely wish that I had been able to complete the mitzvot properly; **ענני במרחב יה**—HKB”H, in His infinite mercy and kindness, regards it as if I had indeed fulfilled the mitzvot in the ideal manner. For, as we have explained, that is the point of blowing the shofar from the narrow end resulting in the sound emerging from the wide end.

### The Name יה Indicates that HKB”H Associates One’s Good Intent with the Corresponding Deed

Continuing on along this path of enlightenment, let us delve into the world of “remez”—lessons conveyed by dint of allusions. As pointed out above, David HaMelech mentions the name יה twice—once in connection with the narrow end: **מן המצר קראתי יה** and once in connection with the wide end: **ענני במרחב יה**. In the Gemara (Berachos 6a), the passuk (Malachi 3, 16) is elucidated: **אז נדברו יראי ה' איש אל רעהו ויקשב ה' וישמע, ויכתב ספר זכרון לפניו ליראי ה' ולחושבי שמו - מאי ולחושבי שמו, אמר רב אשי**—**“Then those who fear Hashem spoke to one another, and Hashem listened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear Hashem and for those who contemplate His name.”** What does “and for those who contemplate His name” mean? Rav Ashi said: **Even if a person contemplated fulfilling a mitzvah and was unavoidably prevented from performing it, Scripture credits him as if he had fulfilled it.**

The Bnei Yissaschar (Shabbasos 6, 15) teaches us that the letters יה in the holy four-letter name Havaya correspond to the thought process, whereas the letters וי correspond to the physical act. Seeing as Yisrael are intimately connected with the blessed name Havaya, as it is written (Devarim 4, 4): **ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם**—**but you are intimately connected with Havaya, your G-d**—therefore, even their thoughts are treated as physical acts. Notwithstanding, his sacred words deserve further explanation. How, in fact, does this prove that HKB”H regards a good intention as an actual deed? It is possible that we are intimately connected with the name Havaya, because we fulfill every mitzvah both in thought and in actual deed. From where do we know that even the fulfillment of a mitzvah in

thought alone—as represented by the letters ה"י—is treated as if the mitzvah was fulfilled in actual deed, as well—as represented by the letters ה"ו?

As a loyal servant, I will grab onto his coattails and complete the explanation. The divine poet Rabbi Eliezer HaKalir wrote (Shacharis on the seventh day of Pesach): "שם יקרא ככתיבתו, מחציו תתמלא תיבתו"—**the Name will be pronounced as it is written; from its half, the entire Name will be completed.** In other words, le'atid la'vo, the name Havaya will be pronounced as it is written—not like it is pronounced today, as אדני (a-do-nai). We must explain the meaning of the statement: "מחציו תתמלא תיבתו"—**from its half, the entire Name will be completed.** It is explained in the Kol Bo Machzor that the entire name Havaya is contained in the first half of the name, ה"י. For, the numerical equivalent of those two letters when fully spelled out--ה"א--equals twenty-six, the numerical equivalent of the four-letter name Havaya. This then is the interpretation of the poet's words: "מחציו"—from the first half of the name Havaya, the letters ה"י; "תתמלא תיבתו"—the entire name is completed.

Notwithstanding, this still requires further explanation. What is the significance of the fact that the letters ה"ו are included within the letters ה"י? What does this curious phenomenon come to teach us? Yet, as we have discussed, it conveys the following. If a person intended to perform a mitzvah but was unintentionally prevented from doing so—leaving the mitzvah solely in his thoughts, as represented by the letters ה"י—it is considered, nevertheless, as if he actually performed the physical mitzvah, as represented by the letters ה"ו. This is why the two letters ה"ו are included within the letters ה"י.

Now, let us introduce what is presented in the Divrei Shmuel (Noach) in the name of Rabbi Shmelke of Nikolsburg, zy"a. He addresses the passuk we have been discussing (Tehillim 118, 5): "מן המצר קראתי יה ענני במרחב יה". When a person finds himself in dire circumstances, HKB"H reveals Himself merely as ה"י; this is implied by the first half of the passuk: "מן המצר קראתי יה". In the merit of this person's Tefilos in these dire circumstances: "ענני במרחב יה"—HKB"H answers him by expanding the name ה"י to its full value--ה"א--י"ד—which is numerically equivalent to the entire four-letter name.

We can now appreciate the Arizal's message. When the shofar is blown from its narrow end, producing a sound from its wide end, we should focus on the passuk: "מן המצר קראתי יה ענני במרחב יה". For, the reason we blow the shofar from its narrow end is to express our distress and remorse for not having fulfilled Hashem's mitzvos properly. We are expressing our sincere thoughts and desire that we could have fulfilled them properly.

Hence, this yearning to fulfill Hashem's mitzvos in thought is conveyed by the words: "מן המצר קראתי יה"—for, fulfillment of the mitzvos in thought only is represented by the letters ה"י; however, since HKB"H associates a good intention with an actual deed, it is considered as if we fulfilled all of the mitzvos by performing the actual deeds. This is the allusion inherent in the sound emanating from the shofar, which is conveyed by the words: "ענני במרחב יה". The name ה"י expands to its full form--ה"א--י"ד—which is numerically equivalent to the full name Havaya. For, it is considered as if we fulfilled all of the mitzvos in physical deed, as well, corresponding to the letters ה"ו.



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