



One Hundred Sounds of the Shofar Offset the One Hundred Wailings of Sisera's Mother

In honor of the new year, Rosh HaShanah 5777, which approaches auspiciously, it is fitting that we examine our minhag to hear one hundred sounds of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah. This minhag is based on the teachings of the Arizal and is also mentioned by the esteemed possek, the Magen Avraham, in the name of the Shela hakadosh.

Tosafos (R.H. 33b), citing the Aruch, provides us with the source for this minhag. According to our minhag, we sound thirty shofar blasts while it is permitted to sit—"תקיעות דמושב"; another thirty blasts are sounded while standing during the silent "amidah"—"תקיעות דמעומד"; thirty more are sounded during the chazan's repetition; the last ten shofar blasts are sounded during the kaddish after the chazan's repetition. Altogether, one hundred blasts are sounded, corresponding to the one hundred sobs of Sisera's mother. Upon seeing that her son's chariot did not return from the battlefield, she emitted one hundred sobs.

Notwithstanding, the minhag differs among the various congregations as to how the one hundred blasts are arranged. The chassidim follow the minhag of the holy Ba'al Shem Tov and his disciples; they follow the order prescribed by the Aruch, described above. Others, omit the thirty shofar-blasts referred to as "תקיעות דמעומד"; they add those thirty blasts to the ten blasts sounded after the chazan's repetition.

In truth, the commentaries have struggled to explain the surprising fact that the one hundred shofar blasts are derived from the one hundred sobs of Sisera's mother. It is mind-boggling! Why would our blessed sages institute such a minhag on Rosh HaShanah corresponding to the act of such a wicked woman—the mother of the wicked Sisera, who aimed to destroy Yisrael on the battlefield?

Natan HaYarchi, introduces in Sefer HaManhig. He presents the words of the Aruch mentioned above that the practice of blowing one hundred shofar-blasts: כַּךְ כִּנְגַד מֵאָה פְּעִיּוֹת דְּפַעִיָּא אִימִיָּה דְּסִיסְרָא, כַּךְ "קִיבֵּלְתִּי"—corresponds to the one hundred sobs sobbed by Sisera's mother; that is what he was taught. He adds that he found support for this minhag in the Midrash Tanchuma (Tazria 4 and Emor 11). According to the Midrash, a woman in childbirth screams one hundred times.

Yet, the author of the Sefer HaManhig does not explain the connection between the one hundred sounds of the shofar and the one hundred screams a woman cries during labor. However, we find a wonderful explanation offered by the Meshech Chochmah in parshas Emor (Vayikra 23, 24). He refers to the formula we recite in the Mussaf service on Rosh HaShanah: הַיּוֹם הִרְתָּ עוֹלָם, הַיּוֹם יַעֲמִיד "הַיּוֹם הִרְתָּ עוֹלָם—בְּמִשְׁפַּט כָּל יִצְרָי עוֹלָמִים—today is the birth of the world; today He stands up all of creation in judgment.

The Meshech Chochmah explains why those who established the tefilos characterize Rosh HaShanah as "the day the world was conceived" --"הַיּוֹם הִרְתָּ עוֹלָם". For, on Rosh HaShanah, all creatures have the status of an embryo in its mother's womb. They stand before HKB"H in judgment to determine whether or not they are worthy to be born anew into the world. Perhaps, due to their transgressions, chas v'shalom, they do not deserve to be born again. It is for this very reason that we blow one hundred shofar-blasts similar to a pregnant woman in labor, who screams one hundred times in the process of childbirth. We are beseeching HKB"H to give birth to us once again on Rosh HaShanah and to endow us mercifully with a new lease on life in honor of the new year that approaches auspiciously.

The One Hundred Blasts of the Shofar corresponding to the One Hundred Screams of a Woman in Labor

Let us begin to shed some light on the matter by referring to what one of the Rishonim, Rabbi Avraham the son of Rabbi

One Hundred Blasts to Arouse Us to Perform Teshuvah

Based on his incredible insight, we can elaborate further on this subject. We know that the shofar-blasts are aimed at arousing

us to perform teshuvah. In his seventh reason for the mitzvah of blowing-shofar on Rosh HaShanah, Rabeinu Sa'adya Gaon writes: "הענין השביעי, כשנשמע תקיעת שופר, נירא ונחרד ונשבר עצמנו לפני הכורא, כי כך הוא טבע השופר מרעיד ומחריד, כמו שכתוב (עמוס ג-1) אם יתקע שופר בעיר "when we hear the shofar-blast, we will fear and tremble and submit ourselves to the Creator; for, such is the nature of the shofar, it provokes fear and trembling, as it is written: "Is the shofar ever sounded in the city and the people do not tremble?" In a similar vein, the Rambam writes (Hilchos Teshuvah 3, 4): "אף על פי שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזירת הכתוב, רמוז יש בו, כלומר עורו ישנים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו מתרדמתכם, וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו -- Even though the sounding of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah is a decree from the Torah, it contains an allusion. It is as if [the shofar's call] is saying: "Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator."

Now, we know that a person who performs teshuvah is considered like a newborn infant. This is especially true of someone who performs teshuvah during the Yamim HaNoraim—the High Holidays—as the Midrash teaches (Yalkut Shimoni) in relation to the passuk (Tehillim 102, 19): "ועם נברא יהלל י"ה, אלו הדורות שהם כמתים: במעשיהם, ובאים ומתפללים לפניך בראש השנה וביום הכיפורים, ואתה בורא אותם בריה "so that the newborn people will praise G-d." These are the generations who are like the dead with regards to their deeds. Yet, they come and pray before You on Rosh HaShanah and Yom HaKippurim and You create them as new creatures.

This illuminates for us the underlying rationale for the minhag of sounding the shofar one hundred times corresponding to the screams of a woman in labor. For, by means of these shofar-blasts, we are aroused to perform teshuvah and to be born anew—like a newborn infant, perfect and healthy, without any spiritual blemishes, from death to life.

We can suggest that this is the message conveyed by the Navi (Yeshayah 26, 17): "כמו הרה תקריב ללדת תחיל [מלשון חלחלה] תזעק בהקליה: כן היינו מפניך ה" like a pregnant woman about to give birth, she is in travail, she screams in her pangs. So were we before You, Hashem. The Bnei Yissaschar (Tishrei 1) explains at great length how the prophet is discussing the teshuvah that Yisrael perform on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. According to our current discussion, we can suggest that the navi is alluding to the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah, sounds that resemble the cries of a woman preparing to give birth. Just as the woman screams one hundred times in order to give birth to a healthy, viable child, so, too, do we awaken, performing sincere, complete teshuvah, so that HKB"H will endow us with life and give birth to us anew.

One Hundred Sobs for Rabbi Akiva's Neshamah that Came out of the Klipah

Based on this introduction, let us proceed to explain the amazing connection between the one hundred shofar-blasts and Sisera's mother's one hundred sobs. Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen, zy" a, teaches us in Risisei Lailah (46) that Sisera's mother wailed one hundred times over the holy spark of Rabbi Akiva's neshamah that Yael extracted from Sisera. As a result, the klipah lost a valuable possession that had been concealed in its midst.

The source for this revelation is the following Gemara (Horayos 10b): "גדולה עבירה לשמה ממצוה שלא לשמה, שנאמר תבורך מנשים יעל אשת חבר: "an aveirah committed with good intent (I'shma) is greater than a mitzvah performed for ulterior motives, as it is stated: "May Yael, the wife of Chever HaKeini, be blessed . . . with something of the blessing of the women in the tent." Who are "the women in the tent"? Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. The Gemara is teaching us that Yael committed an "aveirah I'shma." She enticed Sisera to come to her, so that she could kill him and save the people of Yisrael.

Furthermore, our blessed sages inform us that the union of Sisera and Yael ultimately produced Rabbi Akiva. We learn in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 96b): "מבני בניו של סיסרא למדו תורה בירושלים" — the descendants of Sisera learned Torah in Yerushalayim. The Dikdukei Sofrim brings an alternative version this Gemara: "מבני -- בניו של סיסרא למדו תורה בירושלים, והוא רבי עקיבא" — the descendants of Sisera learned Torah in Yerushalayim, namely Rabbi Akiva. A similar version is brought down by the Ran (Berachos 27b).

Concerning this subject, we find an incredible allusion in the Megaleh Amukos (Vaeschanan 88) related to the passuk (Shoftim 4, 16): "ויפול כל מחנה סיסרא לפי חרב לא נשאר עד אחד" — and the entire camp of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left. The passuk can be interpreted simply as implying that everyone was killed except for one; after all, Sisera survived. Interpreted by dint of allusion, however, the passuk can be alluding to the neshamah of Rabbi Akiva that was concealed within Sisera. In other words: "לא נשאר עד אחד" — but one did remain, Rabbi Akiva, whose neshamah departed while he uttered the word "אחד". This is depicted by the Gemara (Berachos 61b): "היה מאריך באחד עד שיצתה: נשמתו באחד, יצתה בת קול ואמרה, אשריך רבי עקיבא שיצאה נשמתך באחד" — he (Rabbi Akiva) was drawing out the word "אחד", until his neshamah departed with "אחד". A heavenly voice went out and proclaimed: "Praiseworthy are you Rabbi Akiva that your neshamah departed as you uttered "אחד".

Accordingly, Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen explains brilliantly the matter of Sisera's mother's one hundred sobs at the moment Yael extracted the neshamah of Rabbi Akiva from her son. We learned from the Midrash Tanchuma above: **One hundred screams does a woman scream during childbirth, while she is in labor.** So, Sisera's mother wailed one hundred times like a woman in labor, who wails one hundred times until she gives birth to a viable offspring. After all, she also gave birth to the neshamah of Rabbi Akiva via her son Sisera, albeit involuntarily.

One Hundred Blasts to Arouse the Neshamah of Rabbi Akiva Who Ruled: "בין כך ובין כך קרויים בנים"

I would like to expand on Rabbi Tzaddok's notion. First of all, what is the connection between the extraction of Rabbi Akiva's neshamah from the klipah and the sounding of one hundred shofar-blasts on Rosh HaShanah? At first glance, this seems incomprehensible.

I believe that we can provide a legitimate explanation based on what the Bnei Yissaschar (Sivan 2, 5) brings down in the name of the Gaon Chida (Rosh David, Emor). He analyzes the fact that teshuvah only affords a Jew tikun for his sins. The Chida explains that HKB"H is like a father to Yisrael; they are the Omnipresent's children. For, it is written (Devarim 14, 1): "בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם"—**you are children to Hashem, your G-d.** Furthermore, the Gemara (Kiddushin 32a) teaches us: "האב שמחל על כבודו - כבודו מחול"—a father is permitted to forego his honor. Therefore, it is permissible for HKB"H to accept Yisrael's teshuvah and to forego his "kavod." With respect to the goyim, however, HKB"H is a king, as it is written in Tehillim (47, 9): "G-d reigns as King over the nations (goyim). Concerning this latter situation, the Gemara teaches (Kiddushin 32b): "מלך שמחל על כבודו אין כבודו מחול"—even if a king renounces his "kavod," it is not renounced. Therefore, it is inappropriate to accept their acts of teshuvah.

Notwithstanding, the difficulty raised by the commentaries is well known. We find in the Gemara (Kiddushin 36a) a pivotal dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir regarding the interpretation of the passuk (Devarim 14, 1):

"בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם, בזמן שאתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אתם קרויים בנים, אין אתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אין אתם קרויים בנים, דברי רבי יהודה, רבי מאיר אומר, בין כך ובין כך אתם קרויים בנים, שנאמר (ירמיה ד-כב) בנים סכלים המה."

"You are children to Hashem, your G—d": when you behave like children, you are referred to as children; when you do not behave like children, you are not referred to as children; this

is the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah. Rabbi Meir says, under all circumstances, you are considered children (of Hashem). For it is stated: "They are foolish children."

This still poses a difficulty, however. According to Rabbi Meir's opinion — that Yisrael maintain the status of HKB"H's children even when they do not act accordingly — all is well. Yisrael's teshuvah is effective, since they are considered to be G-d's children. Yet, according to Rabbi Yehudah — who holds that when the people of Yisrael sin, they are no longer considered G-d's children but, rather, are considered slaves — how can their teshuvah be effective? After all, a king cannot forego his "kavod" with regards to his slaves' misconduct. This question intensifies according to what we find a fundamental principle in the Gemara (Eiruvin 46b): "רבי מאיר ורבי יהודה, הלכה כרבי יהודה"—**in disputes between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah, the halachah accords with Rabbi Yehudah.** According to this principle, it would seem that we are only considered G-d's children when we act according to His will. So how can their teshuvah be effective?

I want like to propose a new idea to answer this question, based on the fact that the holy Tanna, Rabbi Akiva, who was Rabbi Meir's and Rabbi Yehudah's Rav and mentor, established the halachah like the viewpoint of Rabbi Meir. Let us refer to the Gemara (B.B. 10a):

"שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את רבי עקיבא, אם אלקיכם אוהב עניים הוא מפני מה אינו מפרנסם, אמר לו כדי שניצול אנו בהן מדינה של גיהנם. אמר לו [טורנוסרופוס] אדרבה זו שמחייבתן לגיהנם. אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה, למלך בשר ודם שכעס על עבדו וחבשו בבית האסורין, וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו, והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו, כששמע המלך לא כועס עליו, ואתם קרוין עבדים שנאמר (ויקרא כה-גה) כי לי בני ישראל עבדים."

אמר לו רבי עקיבא אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה, למלך בשר ודם שכעס על בנו וחבשו בבית האסורין, וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו, והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו, כששמע המלך לא דורון משגר לו, ואנן קרוין בנים דכתיב בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם."

אמר לו [טורנוסרופוס], אתם קרויים בנים וקרוין עבדים, בזמן שאתם עושין רצונו של מקום אתם קרוין בנים, ובזמן שאין אתם עושין רצונו של מקום קרוין עבדים, ועכשיו [בגלות] אין אתם עושין רצונו של מקום, [ואם כן איך מותר לכם לתת צדקה]. אמר לו [רבי עקיבא], הרי הוא אומר (ישעיה גח-ז) הלא פרוס לרעב לחמך ועניים מרודים תביא בית, אימתי עניים מרודים תביא בית. האידינא [בגלות] כשאינן עושין רצונו של מקום, וקאמר הלא פרוס לרעב לחמך."

The wicked Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva: If your G-d loves poor people, why doesn't he provide for them? He replied: So that by giving them tzedakah, we may be saved from the judgment of Gehinom. Turnus Rufus responded: On

the contrary! This is what condemns you to Gehinom. I shall provide you with an analogy. This is analogous to a human king who was angry at his servant and confined him in prison; he ordered that he not be given food or drink. One man went and fed him and gave him drink. When the king hears of this, won't he be angry at this man?! And you are called servants, as it says: "For unto Me are Bnei Yisrael servants."

Rabbi Akiva responded: I shall provide you with an analogy. This matter is analogous to a human king who was angry at his son and confined him in prison; he ordered that he not be given food or drink. One man went and fed him and gave him drink. When the king hears of this, won't he send the man a reward?! And we are called sons, as it is written: "Sons are you to Hashem, your G-d."

Turnus Rufus said to him: You are called sons and you are called slaves. When you act in accordance with the will of the Omnipresent, you are called sons; when you do not act in accordance with the will of the Omnipresent, you are called slaves. Now (in galut), you are not acting in accordance with the will of the Omnipresent (so it is not permissible for you to give tzedakah). Rabbi Akiva answered him: Scripture states: "You will break your bread for the hungry, and wailing poor you will bring to the house." When does "wailing poor you will bring to the house" apply? Now! And the passuk stated: "You will break your bread for the hungry!"

In other words, this passuk teaches us that even in galut—when we are not acting according to the will of the Almighty—it is imperative to give tzedakah, because we are still considered His children. Thus, we have explicit proof from Rabbi Akiva that the halachah accords with Rabbi Meir—under all circumstances, we are called His children.

To reconcile this matter, we will refer to the Gemara (Yevamos 62b). There we learn that Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah did not become Rabbi Akiva's disciples until after his previous twenty-four thousand pupils perished:

"אמרו שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא מגבת עד אנטיפרס, וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה, והיה העולם שמם, עד שבא רבי עקיבא אצל רבותינו שבדרום ושנאה להם, רבי מאיר ורבי יהודה ורבי יוסי ורבי שמעון ורבי אלעזר בן שמוע, והם הם העמידו תורה אותה שעה."

They said: Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of disciples, extending from Gevas to Antiparis. They all died during one period of time, because they did not treat each other with respect. Thus, the world was left barren (of Torah), until Rabbi Akiva came to our Rabbis in the south and taught it to them. They were Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua; it was these disciples who upheld Torah-study at that time.

Accordingly, we can suggest that Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah disputed this issue well before they became Rabbi Akiva's disciples. However, after they became Rabbi Akiva's disciples, he established the halachah according to the viewpoint of Rabbi Meir—in any event, we are called His children. He proves this point from the fact that HKB"H commanded us to give the poor tzedakah even during times of galut. Therefore, in the heavens, the halachah was also established according to Rabbi Meir. Since we are still considered His children, HKB"H can renounce His "kavod," like any father.

We can now better appreciate the reason for Yisrael's established minhag to sound one hundred shofar-blasts corresponding to the one hundred sobs of Sisera's mother. She wailed in distress when Yael extracted Rabbi Akiva's neshamah from the klipah. The shofar is sounded to arouse Yisrael to teshuvah. Therefore, we sound one hundred blasts in order to arouse the neshamah of Rabbi Akiva, who determined that the halachah follows the opinion of Rabbi Meir. Even when Yisrael's actions do not accord with the will of HKB"H, nevertheless, we maintain the status of His children. As such, HKB"H can forego His "kavod," show us mercy and compassion--אם כבנים רחמנו כרחם--and accept our teshuvah.

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