As we prepare for the upcoming Rosh HaShanah 5775, it is essential to praise, glorify, bless, sanctify and express our gratitude to Hashem. Blessed is He that gave us life, sustained us and allowed us to reach this very day—to live one more year in Olam HaZeh, in HKB”H’s protective shadow, with His holy Torah. This notion is expressed by our blessed sages as follows (Avos 4, 17): "יפה שעה אחת בתשובה ומעשים טובים בעולם הזה מכל赖以生存—one hour of teshuvah and good deeds in Olam HaZeh is preferable to all of one’s life in Olam HaBa.

With praise and gratitude for the past year, we present our entreaty to the Almighty above that the new year, which approaches auspiciously, shall be a year of light, a year of berachah, a year of happiness, a year of salvation, a wonderful and blessed year. It should be a year in which Hashem wants us to succeed in our Torah-study and service of Hashem, to educate our children and grandchildren in the ways of the Torah and yirah. We pray that we are allowed to do so with healthy bodies and healthy minds for many good days and years to come. May the request of David HaMelech, Yisrael’s sweet psalmist, be fulfilled (Tehillim 27, 4): "אחת שאלתי מאת ה’ אותה אבקש, שבתי בבית ה’ כל ימי חיי לחזות בנועם ה’ ולבקר在他יכלו—one thing have I asked of the Hashem, only this will I seek: my peaceful sojourn in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the glory of Hashem’s ways and to seek deep understanding in His sanctuary.

In honor of the upcoming Rosh HaShanah, it is fitting that we begin the first essay of the new year, with Hashem’s berachah, by examining the unique mitzvah of blowing the shofar—“tekias shofar.” Concerning this mitzvah, the Torah states (Bamidbar 29, 1): "ברוחות השביעי מחודש לחודש מצוות היה לשבוע ולא מלאכת—In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no work of labor; it shall be a day of shofar-sounding for you. As to the reason underlying the mitzvah of “tekias shofar,” we have learned the following in the Gemara (R.H. 16a):"אמר רבה: מצוות בを通ר של איל אמרה ה’ והקב”ה: תקעו לפני בשופר של איל, כדי שאזכור لكم על ה’ בקדמה, והברך—Rabbi Abahu said: Why do we blow the shofar of a ram? Because HKB”H said, “Blow before Me the shofar of a ram, so that I will recall on your behalf the ‘akeidah’ of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham; and I will consider it as if you bound yourselves before Me.”

This poses a somewhat obvious question. Wouldn’t it have been more fitting to recall the “akeidah” by performing one of the many tasks Avraham performed in the process of binding Yitzchak, his son? As the passuk depicts, he built a mizbeiach, he arranged wood, he bound Yitzchak with rope, and he took the knife (Bereishis 22, 9):

So, in truth, why did Hashem choose to recall the ordeal of “Akeidas Yitzchak” specifically by means of the shofar fashioned from a ram’s horn? As we know from the text, Avraham sacrificed a ram in place of his son after a malach descended from the heavens and warned him (ibid. 12): "do not send forth your hand at the lad nor do anything to him. In fact, the shofar reminds us of how HKB”H prevented Avraham from sacrificing Yitzchak, not of how Avraham bound Yitzchak on top of the mizbeiach. Furthermore, if the main point of the shofar is to invoke the
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): "—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: "—from the narrow straits did I call upon G-d" (הן מקצר נפרתי לי). Here he provides a passuk which alludes to this halachah (Tehillim 118, 5): "—from the narrow strait did I call upon G-d (יה)."

This is also the source for what the Arizal writes in Shaar HaKavanos (R.H. Drush 7): "—from the narrow strait, meaning remnants."

The Beis Yosef comments: "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 the remnants of our Tefilos?"

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 Tefillos 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): "—He associates a good thought with an actual deed."

We find an incredible allusion to this fact in the teachings of the Brisk 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: "—from the narrow side to the wide end—alluding to the passuk: "—from the wide end—alluding to the passuk: "—He associates a good thought with an actual deed."

Additionally, let us endeavor to explain why the name of G-d—יה—is appears twice in this passuk. It appears once in relation to the narrow end—יה—and once in relation to the wide end—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 Keneses HaGedolah (the members of the Great Assembly) in the berachah of Yishtabach: "—He associates a good thought with an actual deed."

The Aruch (O.C. 590, 9): "—He associates a good thought with an actual deed. "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 the remnants of our Tefilos?"

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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 “ה挲חר 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 mitzvos that were performed inadequately over the Tefilos and mitzvos 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 יחידך ממני”—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—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: “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): “ויקרע משלך: ‘לא אפרת משני את ה’ אני כראת ובשמש יאמור, כי עתה ראית ששת באה לאמר את אמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרך ואת אמרך לאמרכ...”

Rashi comments, based on the Midrash (B.R. 56, 9): “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 יחידך ממני—and Avraham went and took the ram and brought it up as an offering instead of his son. By sacrificing the ram, Avraham revealed his true intentions to Hashem. 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.

We can explain the matter based on Rashi’s commentary (ibid. 12), which is based on the Midrash (B.R. 56, 7): “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 יחידך ממני—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—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.

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Once it is written: "If you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only one," 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 the actual performance of the mitzvah. HKB"H would regard their remorse and sincere, good intentions as the actual, proper performance of the mitzvos. HKB"H would correct all of the mitzvos that they had performed inadequately, and Yisrael would be inspired to perform teshuvah and long to fulfill the mitzvos.

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 was 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.

Sounding the Shofar without Speaking Represents Our Inner Thoughts

We can now better appreciate the message conveyed by the sages’ puzzling statement: "If you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only one."—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 shortcomings 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: “from the narrow straits did I call upon G-d—and from the wide end: ‘Man 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 incredible idea agrees magnificently with the declaration of Yisrael’s sweet psalmist, David HaMelech: “…and once in connection with the wide end: ‘—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 mitzvos properly; ‘—HKB”H, in His infinite mercy and kindness, regards it as if I had indeed fulfilled the mitzvos 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 ה”ן 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 ה”ן twice—once in connection with the narrow end: “—and once in connection with the wide end: ‘—In the Gemara (Berachos 6a), the passuk (Malachi 3, 16) is elucidated: ‘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 (Shabbos 5, 16) teaches us that the letters ה”ן in the holy four-letter name Havaya correspond to the thought process, whereas the letters ה”י correspond to the physical act. Seeing as Yisrael are intimately connected with the blessed name Havaya, as it is written (Devarim 4, 4): “…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.

This provides us with a very nice explanation for the Arizal’s teaching that when blowing the narrow end of the shofar produces sounds from its wide end, it is essential to have in mind the passuk: “—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 mitzvos 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 mitzvos as they were meant to be performed.
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 י”א(ו). 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—י”ד 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; “تحملת תיבתו”—the entire name is completed.

Notwithstanding, this still requires further explanation. What is the significance of the fact that the letters ה”י are included within the letters ה”ו? 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”י are included within the letters ה”ו.

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): “וכן המצא קראתי יה ענני במרחב יה”. When a person finds himself in dire circumstances, HK”B”H reveals Himself merely as ה”י, this is implied by the first half of the passuk: “וכן המצא קראתי יה”. In the merit of this person’s Tefilos in these dire circumstances: “ענני במרחב יה”—HK”B”H answers him by expanding the name ה”י to its full value—י”ד ה”א—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: “וכן המצא 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: “וכן המצא קראתי יה”—for, fulfillment of the mitzvos in thought only is represented by the letters ה”י; however, since HK”B”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—י”ד ה”א—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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