

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
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THE GREAT SHOFAR

THE ROSH HASHANA LITURGY INCLUDES THE VERSE² 'ON THAT DAY (CLOSE TO THE REDEMPTION) THE GREAT SHOFAR will be sounded and those who are lost in the land of Assyria (*Ashur*) will come, and those who stray in the land of Egypt'. Chassidic teachings ask why specifically is this a 'great' Shofar? Also, why does it say it will sound - without saying who will blow it?

There are several levels of Shofar, as we see from the Chassidic discussions of Rosh Hashana which falls on Shabbat, when the Shofar is not sounded in ordinary communities, outside the Temple³. The explanation for this in Chassidic teachings is that the Shofar achieves a form of supernal 'delight', and so does Shabbat. Hence when Rosh Hashana falls on Shabbat, the Shofar does not need to be sounded – outside the Temple. However it *is* sounded within the Temple, because the sounding of the Shofar inside the Temple reaches a more exalted level of delight, higher even than that of Shabbat.

This is true for the second Temple, and even more so for the First Temple. The Shofar that was sounded there, reached an even higher level of supernal delight.

But even this was surpassed by the Shofar which was sounded at the Giving of the Torah. This was on an even higher level of spirituality. However, even this event mentions only the Shofar, not the *Great* Shofar. And even though at the Giving of the Torah the sound of the Shofar is described as getting stronger and stronger - this was only the sound, not the Shofar itself.

¹ Maamar Vehaya Bayom Hahu, Rosh Hashana 5728 (1967), published in 1991 as *Kuntres Rosh Hashana*, edited by the Rebbe. Republished in Dvar Malchus Rosh Hashana (Ha'azinu) 5775.

² Isaiah 27:13.

³ The Sages state this is in case a person might come to carry the Shofar (Maimonides, Laws of Shofar, Succah and Lulav, 2:6).

To understand this, let us consider the nature of the Shofar. The effect of the Shofar, in general, is to arouse the person. The Shofar at the Giving of the Torah achieved the indwelling of the Tetragrammaton within the Jewish people for all time. However, the purpose of the Great Shofar, which is higher than all of these, is to reach those who are lost in the land of Assyria and Egypt. The ordinary Shofar can only reach those who are in some way involved in Jewish life, as of course, was the case for everyone present at Sinai at the Giving of the Torah. This is also the case with the blowing of the Shofar we have today, on Rosh Hashanah. A person usually has to be in the Synagogue or have some kind of contact with Jews in order to hear the Shofar⁴. To reach those who are really remote, there has to be the Great Shofar.

Assyria, Ashur in Hebrew, means pleasure⁵, and those who are lost in Ashur are lost in inappropriate pleasures. Egypt, Mitzrayim, means ‘narrowness’ (*metzar* means ‘straits’) and straying there means the challenge of poverty and deprivation. Poverty might mean physical poverty, or it might also mean a narrow and limited state of mind⁶, in which the person is not sensitive to the holy.

For such challenges there has to be the Great Shofar, which elicits a flow of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which shine in the days of Elul and even more in the Ten Days of Teshuvah, including Rosh Hshana and Yom Kippur.

This is why it does not say who will blow the Shofar. The word *yitaka* means ‘it will be sounded’, of itself, from a level which comes from higher than the Tetragrammaton. In the same way, it says about Yom Kippur ‘on this day you will be atoned’⁷, without saying who will atone for you, because this atonement comes from that exalted level beyond the Tetragrammaton, beyond any Name.

Since the Shofar comes from such an exalted level, it has an effect on those who are lost as described above – through no fault of their own. Because G-d Himself regrets that He created the Evil Desire (Yoma 85b). And the effect is that they come and bow at the Holy Mountain, with utter selflessness (*bitul*), in Jerusalem. The word Jerusalem itself means the ‘wholeness’ (*shalem*) of ‘awe’ (*yeru*)⁸ of the Divine.

But we can ask a further question: why there should be this process of being lost and then finally coming back? The answer is given in a discourse by the Rebbe Maharash⁹, which speaks of the idea in the Talmud that ‘a year which is poor at

⁴ There are people who walk on Rosh Hashanah for hours to blow the Shofar for those in hospitals or in other non-communal situations. But the person has to be within walking distance.

⁵ Ashur relates to the words *ashrei*, ‘happy’.

⁶ As in the phrase ‘poor means poverty of mind’ (Nedarim 41a).

⁷ Aharei Mot, Lev., 16:30

⁸ Normally the Hebrew word for ‘fear’ has an alef: אָרָא. Here the letters יָרָא are taken to mean ‘fear/awe’.

⁹ The fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel d.1882.

the beginning is rich at the end'¹⁰. This is like the Shofar itself, which is narrow at one end and broad at the other.

This implies that the very fact of being 'lost' in any way, is itself the key to achieving the exalted heights of the revelation of the Great Shofar. This relates to the theme of the Prayer of the Poor Man (Psalm 92) which achieves exalted spiritual heights.

Thus we now see¹¹ many people who are returning to Judaism [following the Six Day War, which was earlier that year, June 1967]. This is the effect of the 'Great Shofar'¹².

And there are also people who struggle with great self-sacrifice [in the USSR] to keep Judaism. These are unique individuals who have been chosen by Hashem for a great task. They are in a state of great deprivation, and in the challenges of their lives they express the 'Prayer of the Poor Man' (Psalm 92).

But this will lead to the immense revelation of the Great Shofar which will also reach those who are more literally lost in the lands of Assyria and Egypt, lost in the realms of inappropriate pleasure and assimilation. And through this the Shechinah will be redeemed from Exile with the coming of Moshiach....

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

¹⁰ Rosh Hashana 16b.

¹¹ This discourse was taught in October 1967.

¹² According to many Chassidim, the Six Day War was seen by the Rebbe as 'the Great Shofar'.