

A Symbol of Freedom

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One of the great symbols of freedom in the United States of America is the Liberty Bell.

Adopted as a symbol of emancipation by abolitionists in the 19th century, it became a quintessential American icon of liberty, with a verse from Sefer Vayikra etched on its side:

Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof

Vayikra 25:10

וקראתם דרור בארץ לכל ישביה
ויקרא כה:י

This passage, from the Torah's description of Yovel, announces the freedom of slaves and the return of land to their original owners during the jubilee year. This liberation is heralded by the blowing of the shofar on Yom Kippur of Yovel. We could suggest, then, that the shofar of Yovel is also a symbol of freedom, the original symbol of freedom of the slaves and the land. Is there any connection between this shofar of freedom and the shofar of Rosh Hashana? Seemingly, the two have very different purposes. The Rambam describes:

Although the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashana is a mandate of the Torah, there is a hint in it. As if to say, "wake up sleepy ones from your slumber and the dozing ones arise from your sleep and examine your deeds and return with Teshuva and recall your Creator, those people who forget the truth with the silliness of the times and waste all their years on foolishness and emptiness that will not help and not save. Look to your souls and improve your ways and mistakes and abandon each one of you his mistaken path and his intention that is not good."

Rambam Hilchot Teshuva 3:4

אע"פ שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה
גזירת הכתוב רמז יש בו כלומר עורר
ישינים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו
מתרדמתכם וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו
בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם, אלו
השוכחים את האמת בהבלי הזמן
ושוגים כל שנתם בהבל וריק אשר לא
יועיל ולא יציל הביטו לנפשותיכם
והטיבו דרכיכם ומעלליכם ויעזוב כל
אחד מכם דרכו הרעה ומחשבתו אשר
לא טובה

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ג:ד

Clearly, the Rambam understands that the shofar of Rosh Hashana is a symbol of teshuva, repentance. The purpose of the shofar is to motivate us to change, a far cry from the sound of liberation. However, despite this fundamental difference, we find several connections and parallels between the shofar of Yovel and that of Rosh Hashana. The Gemara underscores this link in the following passage:

Our Rabbis taught: Whence do we know [that the blowing on New Year must be] with a shofar? Because it says, Thou, shalt make proclamation, with a shofar of teru'ah. I know this so far only of the Jubilee; how do I know it of New Year? The text says significantly, In

תנו רבנן: מנין שבשופר - תלמוד
לומר (ויקרא כה) והעברת שופר
תרועה, אין לי אלא ביובל, בראש
השנה מנין? תלמוד לומר בחדש

the seventh month, when there is no real occasion for the expression, in the seventh month. Why then does it say, in the seventh month? To show that all the teru'ahs of the seventh month should be of the same character. How do we know that there must be a plain blast before it? Because it says, Thou, shalt make proclamation with a shofar of teru'ah. How do we know that there must be a plain blast after it? Because it says, Ye shall make proclamation with the shofar. I know this only of the Jubilee; how do I learn it of New Year also? It says significantly, in the seventh month.

Rosh Hashana 33b

השביעי, שאין תלמוד לומר
 בחדש השביעי, ומה תלמוד לומר
 בחדש השביעי - שיהיו כל
 תרועות של חדש שביעי זה כזה.
 ומנין שפשוטה לפני - תלמוד
 לומר והעברת שופר תרועה. ומנין
 שפשוטה לאחריה - תלמוד לומר
 תעבירו שופר. ואין לי אלא
 ביובל, בראש השנה מנין - תלמוד
 לומר בחדש השביעי,
ראש השנה לג:

The only explicit Torah reference to a shofar is found in the context of Yovel. Hence, the Gemara derives that both the type of instrument as well as the structure of the sounds of the Rosh Hashana shofar are derived from the shofar of Yovel. In addition, the Mishna in Rosh Hashana (26b) records that according to the majority opinion, the shofar of Rosh Hashana and its Yovel counterpart are the same shape and require the same berachot. Rashi (26b s.v. Shaveh) notes that although the blowing on Yovel is “not for tefillah and not for zikaron but as a sign for the emancipation of the slaves and annulment of the sale of land, nonetheless they must be like practiced like Rosh Hashana because we learn a connection of a gzeirah shavah (a Talmudic means of comparison).”

What is the meaning of this gzeirah shavah, this correlation between these two shofarot?

Perhaps with an exploration of a key theme of Rosh Hashana we can appreciate this connection. In our Mussaf service on Rosh Hashana we proclaim, היום הרת עולם - Today is the conception (or birth) of the world. However, the Ran (Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven, 14th c.) in his commentary on the Rif in Massechet Rosh Hashana (3a s.v. Brosh) cites earlier sources that Rosh Hashana is not the anniversary of the beginning of the world. The beginning of the world was five days earlier. Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of the creation of man, the sixth day of creation. The roots of our experience of Rosh Hashana on the first of Tishrei this year stem from that original Rosh Hashana, with the creation of Adam, and the initial story of creation contains elements which define Rosh Hashana.

Commentaries have noted that the creation of man was a complex one, involving two stages.

*26. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.
 27. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female He created them.*

Breishit 1:26-27

4. These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth

(כו) ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם בצלמנו
 כדמותנו וירדו בדגת הים ובעוף
 השמים ובבהמה ובכל הארץ ובכל
 הרמש הרמש על הארץ: (כז) ויברא
 אלהים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלהים
 ברא אתו זכר ונקבה ברא אתם:
בראשית א:כו-כז

(ד) אלה תולדות השמים והארץ
 בהבראם ביום עשות ה' אלהים ארץ
 ושמים: (ה) וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה

and the heavens, 5. And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. 6. And a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. 7. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Breishit 2:4-7

בארץ וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא המטיר ה' אלהים על הארץ ואדם אין לעבד את האדמה: (ו) ואד יעלה מן הארץ והשקה את כל פני האדמה: (ז) וייצר יקוק אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה:

בראשית ב:ד-ז

The first portrayal of the creation of Adam is natural, biological. The culmination of the creation is described as male and female, descriptions which also fit all members of the animal kingdom. In contrast, the second portrayal reflects the creation of a spiritual being, a living soul endowed with a spirit. This two-tiered creation reflects the dual nature of man; we are at once natural creatures and also spiritual beings.

These two aspects also reflect two different realms of experience: *din* (justice) and *rachamim* (compassion). The natural biological world is one of justice. Nature is unforgiving in its constant struggle of survival of the fittest. Imagine if a sickly wildebeest would plead for mercy from an advancing lion. Would the stalking predator consider mercy? This is the realm of nature. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes once described life in the state of nature (the realm of *din*) as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” In contrast, the realm of the spiritual, which transcends the natural order, is graced with the phenomena of *rachamim*. Human beings, endowed with a Divine spirit, *Nishmat Chayim* are capable of and the beneficiaries of compassion, a higher level of existence.

Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of the creation of Adam in general and these two tiers in particular. Man was first (either chronologically or conceptually) created as a biological organism, shackled by the limits of the natural world. Then, Hashem emancipated Adam from the natural world by endowing him with a living soul. Hence, Rosh Hashana is a day of freedom in the most profound sense. As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points out regarding death and *Tumah*, the natural world is one of confinement, and death is the ultimate submission to the natural order. The existence of nature is limited and chained. In contrast, the realm of the spirit is free. The soul of a person lives on eternally, not bound by the shackles of physicality or the limits of death. The ability to be proactive, creative, imaginative beings that transcend our surroundings is the product of our freedom, our spirituality, our realm of *rachamim*. Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of our freedom from the realm of nature, the world of *din* to the realm of the spirit, the world of *rachamim*.

Perhaps now we can appreciate how the shofar of Rosh Hashana is also a symbol of freedom in light of the following Midrash:

Yehuda the son of Nachman began, “Elokim went up with a blast, Hashem, with the sound of the Shofar. At the time that the Holy One Blessed be He sits and goes up onto the throne of

ג יהודה ברבי נחמן פתח (תהלים מז)
עלה אלהים בתרועה ה' בקול
שופר בשעה שהקב"ה יושב ועולה
על כסא דין בדין הוא עולה מאי

judgment, he goes up in judgement. Why? "Elokim went up with a blast. And at the time when the Jewish people take their shofars and blast before the Holy One Blessed be He, He stands from the throne of judgment and sits on the throne of compassion, as it says: Hashem, with the sound of the shofar, and he is filled with mercy for them and has compassion on them and switches for them the element of justice to mercy. When? In the seventh month.

Midrash Rabbah Vayikra 29:3

טעם עלה אלהים בתרועה ובשעה
שישראל נוטלין את שופריהן
ותוקעין לפני הקב"ה עומד מכסא
הדין ויושב בכסא רחמים דכתיב ה'
בקול שופר ומתמלא עליהם רחמים
ומרחם עליהם והופך עליהם מדת
הדין לרחמים אימתי בחדש השביעי:
מדרש רבה ויקרא פרשה כט סימן
ג

In his classic chassidic work, Bnei Yissaschar, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov (19th c.) explains this Midrash. The origins of Rosh Hashana are in the realm of *din*. It is a time of justice before Hashem. However, through the sounding of the shofar, we shift from *din* to *rachamim*. This is derived from the shift in the verse from the name *Elokim* to *Hashem*. Initially, the verse speaks in the name *Elokim*, which signifies justice. However, through our blowing of the shofar, we are freed from the clutches of *din* and granted *rachamim*, signified by the concluding name *Hashem*. This development parallels the initial creation of Adam. Much like the process of the creation of Adam himself involved a transformation from the realm of justice to mercy, the sounding of the shofar engenders this same shift.² We learn that the shofar of Rosh Hashana reenacts the original creation of Adam and his emancipation from the limits of justice to the openness of mercy. The key difference between the first Rosh Hashana of Adam, and our Rosh Hashana today is that in the initial creation, Hashem evolved the process of change alone. Man was passive in his transition from the natural existence to the freed, spiritual one. On our Rosh Hashana, with the blowing of shofar, the capacity for transformation is in our hands. The Rambam's description of renewal and return to Hashem is a process of freedom. We are empowered to emancipate ourselves with the shofar. Hashem has given us the tools to free ourselves from the natural, limited existence we may have been living during the past year and tap into the spiritual freedom of Teshuva. By returning to Hashem we shift ourselves from lives of *din* to lives of *rachamim*. We now understand that while the Liberty bell and the shofar of Yovel symbolize freedom, the shofar of Rosh Hashana shares and surpasses this theme of emancipation. For while the shofar of Yovel proclaims freedom of our physical world, the shofar of Rosh Hashana provides a freedom of transcendence, a spiritual emancipation.

² We now understand why in the first description of creation the name *Elokim* is employed, as it is the creation in the realm of justice, whereas in the second story it includes and begins with the name *Hashem*, the name of compassion.

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