

Dvar Torah for Elul/Teshuvah-Time (2)

written by Ozer Bergman

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Based on *Likutey Halakhot P'ru u'R'vu* 3:10

One of the *minhagim* (customs) of the month of Elul is that we blow the shofar every morning after Shacharit (aka Shacharis aka the Morning Prayer). Now, like [last week](#), let's try to get another perspective on something we do so regularly that we're in danger of doing it mechanically, unthinkingly.

Also continuing with last week's idea that *teshuvah* (returning to God) can consist of *simcha* (joy, cheer), let's re-think the shofar. Sure, you're saying, I know what a shofar is. It's a ram's horn that's a Jewish ritual object. In the old days it was the warning signal people used, like an ambulance or air-raid siren. It would send a shiver up the spine and people got shook up. So Jews still sound it on Rosh HaShanah to get themselves "shook up" and "all fearful" of the Lord. (See Amos 3:6.) It helps a fair number of them to straighten up their act.

If that works for you, OK. I just want to offer a musical alternative. A ram's horn is a horn, as in a musical instrument horn. The sounds that come out of it aren't just an alarm saying, "Be scared! Be real scared!" Those sounds are musical notes. And the sets of sounds* that accompany each of the Rosh HaShanah Musaf blessings are songs. In fact, they are primary, archetypical songs, which Rebbe Nachman refers as The Ten Types of Song (see *Likutey Moharan* II, #92).

Observe, says Reb Noson. King David concludes the Book of Psalms, which is built from each of the the types of song, with a psalm that contains ten expressions of praise. The tenth and final expression is, "Praise [God] with the stirring

teruah" (Psalms 150:5), an allusion to the Rosh HaShanah shofar-blowing. OK. So why the connection between music and song and *teshuvah*?

You know who does *teshuvah*? Not someone who thinks he's OK, or OK with God. The potential *teshuvah*-doer is the one who suffers upset at the thought of how distant he (or she) is from God. Such a person surveys his Jewishly-wrong choices and hears them as a requiem, a funereally sad song. He hears that he is far from God—perhaps true—and that he must suffer being buried on the wrong side of the chasm between him and God.

Such a song results neither in *teshuvah* nor in God's glory. Praise God with the *teruah*! The *teshuvah*-doer's shofar-music is the song of what she's done right! "Look at that! I did a kindness here and resisted a temptation there. The distance is not as great as it could have been!" This is the song of compassion we can hear when the shofar is sounded. This is the song we will hear when we exercise true and sacred compassion toward ourselves and choose to better our eternal destiny.

And when you think about it more deeply, you'll realize that the fear and joy the shofar induces are not so far apart. As the sweet singer of Israel says, "Rejoice with trembling" (Psalms 2:11).

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*These are the famed *TaSHRaT*, *TaSHaT*, *TaRaT*. They are mnemonics for: *Tekiah*, *Shevarim*, *teRuah*, *Tekiah*; *Tekiah*, *Shevarim*, *Tekiah*; *Tekiah*, *teRuah*, *Tekiah*.