

Lev Mi Lo Yechevad

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Elul, the month of introspection and preparation for the Days of Judgment—Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—is always a serious period. As the Days of Judgment approach, people become increasingly fearful of what will transpire with them during the coming year. They seek to rectify their actions and draw closer to Hashem, His Torah, and mitzvos.

This year, an extra jolt was delivered with the sudden passing of Rav Avrohom Ausband zt”l, the great gaon, rosh yeshiva, and rebbi, beloved and admired by many thousands in the Torah community. He was seen as a vibrant and energetic talmid chochom who devoted himself to learning Torah, living Torah, teaching Torah, and advancing its causes.

American-born and raised, he was a member of the post-Holocaust generation of roshei yeshiva. He opened his yeshiva over forty years ago and had been raising and developing exceptional talmidim ever since. His brilliance, erudition, and oratory were legendary, contributing to his highly respected standing in the Torah world.

News of his petirah spread quickly around the world, as those who appreciate Torah and gedolei Torah were overcome with grief and sadness at the loss of such an outstanding and unique gadol in the prime of his life.

Every morning, at the conclusion of Shacharis during Elul, the shofar is blown to awaken us to do teshuvah, as the posuk (Amos 3:6) states, “Im yitoka shofar ba’ir v’am lo yechevodu – When the shofar is blown in the city, [can] the people not become afraid?”

This is rooted in the Tur (Hilchos Rosh Hashanah 581), who writes that Chazal established the custom of blowing the shofar during Elul so that people will be alerted to perform teshuvah, as the posuk we previously quoted states. The question in the posuk demonstrates that the sound of the shofar causes people to fear.

Rav Dovid Cohen, rosh yeshiva of Yeshivas Chevron, who is currently in the United States on behalf of the Keren Olam Torah, points out in his sefer that the posuk, which is widely repeated and mentioned as the source of the custom to blow the shofar during Elul, does not directly refer to teshuvah or Rosh Hashanah. The posuk mentions the shofar and its ability to evoke fear as a tool of war. In times of war, people panic when they hear the shofar because they know that a battle will soon be near.

How, then, is this posuk, which refers to war, a source for the shofar we sound during Elul, which is a call for people to do teshuvah?

The Zohar sees this message in the opening of this week’s parsha, “Ki seitzei lamilchamah al oyvecha,” where the Torah ostensibly discusses the Jewish people going to battle against their enemies and the capture of an aishes yefas toar. The Zohar, as well as commentators such as

the Arizal and later the Ohr Hachaim, teach that these pesukim guide us in battling our eternal enemy, the yeitzer hara.

The posuk states that the woman cries for her parents for a period of one month. The Zohar and the Arizal explain that this is an indication of the month of Elul, which is a time for teshuvah.

Doing teshuvah is like going to battle against our enemy, the yeitzer hara, who seeks to distance us from Hashem and proper observance of mitzvos. Therefore, just as in a time of war leisurely pursuits are limited, so too, during Elul, that same serious mindset must prevail. Activities acceptable throughout the year have no place now.

Elul and the blowing of the shofar infuse us with a sense of urgency and desperation. Every action we undertake should be weighed to determine whether it will bring us closer to Hashem's embrace or, chas v'shalom, distance us further.

Those in sync with the ratzon Hashem are alert to the kol shofar. They are engaged in the milchemes hayeitzer that defines human existence. Thus, when they hear the sound of the shofar, they tremble with the knowledge of "hinei yom hadin."

In normal times, when tzaddikim are taken from us, it is a message for us to do teshuvah and draw closer to Hashem. When two tzaddikim are taken at the beginning of Elul, the message is compounded, and it is as if a thousand shofros were blown, admonishing us to quickly do teshuvah and improve our actions and lives.