



**“Sound a ram’s horn for Me so that I will remember Akeidas Yitzchak for you”**

## **By Confessing with the Sound of the Shofar for Behaving Like Animals We Receive the Atonement of the Ram Avraham Sacrificed in Place of Yitzchak**

We are approaching the auspicious Rosh HaShanah of 5785. We are all hopeful and pray that HKB”H will grant all of our hearts’ desires for the good. We pray that the words of the divine poet will become a reality: **“May the past year end along with its curses; may the new year begin along with its Berachos.”** It is fitting that we begin the first essay of the new year—with the favor and kindness of Hashem—by examining the special mitzvah of “tekias shofar,” which occupies a central role in the Rosh HaShanah service. As it is written in parshas Pinchas (Bamidbar 29, 1): **“ובחודש השביעי באחד לחודש מקרא: “in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no laborious work, it shall be a day of shofar-blowing (“teruah”) for you.**

We are familiar with the ten reasons given by Rabeinu Sa’adiah Gaon for the mitzvah of “tekias shofar” presented by the Avudraham. Let us summarize them briefly:

1) To commemorate the creation of the world, it is fitting to coronate HKB”H as King and Master of the universe. In the words of David HaMelech (Tehillim 98, 6): **“בחצוצרות וקול שופר הריעו לפני המלך ה’” —with trumpets and the sound of the shofar, call out before the King, Hashem.**

2) To announce and remind Jews: **Anyone who wants to repent should perform teshuvah; and if not, he has no one to blame but himself.**

3) To commemorate the revelation of Har Sinai, of which it says (Shemos 19, 16): **“וקול שופר חזק מאד, ונקבל על: “עצמינו מזה שקיבלו אבותינו על עצמם נעשה ונשמע” —and there was a very loud sound of the shofar.** So that we will accept upon ourselves what our forefathers accepted upon themselves with the declaration “na’aseh v’nishma.”

4) So that we will recall the rebuke of the prophets which are analogous to the blowing of the shofar, as it is written (Yechezkel 33, 4): **“את קול השופר שמע ולא נזהר תבוא: “חרב ותקחהו דמו בראשו יהיה, את קול השופר שמע... והוא נזהר נפשו מל” —And a listener hears the sound of the shofar but does not take heed, and the sword comes and takes him, his blood will be upon his head. He heard the sound of the shofar . . . had he taken heed, he would have saved his soul.**

5) To remind us of the churban Beis HaMikdash and the sound of the enemies’ battle trumpets, as it is written (Yirmiyah 4, 19): **“כי קול שופר שמעת נפשי תרועת: “מלחמה” —for you have heard the sound of the shofar, O my soul, the shofar blast of war.**

6) To remind us of the Binding of Yitzchak, who offered his soul to Heaven; similarly, we should offer our souls for the sanctity of His name, and we should be remembered favorably by Him.

7) When we hear the sound of the shofar, we should fear, tremble, and subjugate ourselves before the Creator. Such is the nature of the shofar, it causes one to tremble and is terrifying, as it says (Amos 3, 6): **“אם יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו”—is the shofar ever sounded in a city and the people do not tremble?!**

8) To remember the awesome Day of Judgment and fear it, of which it says (Tzefaniah 1, 16): **“קרוֹב—the great day of Hashem is near and hastens greatly . . . a day of shofar and battle cries.**

9) To have in mind the ingathering of the exiles of Yisrael and to desire it, of which it says (Yeshayah 27, 13): **“וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְקַע בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל וּבָאוּ הָאוֹבְדִים בְּאֶרֶץ אַשּׁוּר—it shall be on that day that a great shofar will be blown, and those who are lost in the land of Assyria will come together.**

10) To remind us of “Techiyas HaMeisim” and to believe in it, of which it says (ibid. 18, 3): **“כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל וְשׁוֹכְנֵי אֶרֶץ כְּנַשּׂוּא נֹס הָרִים תִּרְאוּ וְכִתְּקוּעַ שׁוֹפָר תִּשְׁמְעוּ—all the inhabitants of the world and those who reside in the ground, you will see when the banner is hoisted up on the mountains, and when the shofar sounds you will hear!**

### Blowing a Ram’s Horn Reminds HKB”H of Akeidas Yitzchak

It is worthwhile noting something intriguing. Of all the aforementioned ten reasons for the mitzvah of “tekias shofar,” Chazal only mention the reason related to Akeidas Yitzchak (R.H. 16a):

“אמר רבי אבהו, למה תוקעין בשופר של איל, אמר הקב”ה, תקעו לפני בשופר של איל, כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק בן אברהם, ומעלה אני עליכם כאילו עקדתם עצמכם לפני.”

**Rabbi Abahu said: Why do we blow shofar with a ram’s horn? 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 suggests that the reason related to Akeidas Yitzchak is the key to all of the ten reasons. This is especially true of the first reason given—to coronate HKB”H as King of the entire universe. After all, what demonstrates the acceptance of the sovereignty of HKB”H more so than Akeidas Yitzchak?! Furthermore, Akeidas Yitzchak is the source for sounding the shofar at Matan Torah and at the time of the future geulah. This is explained beautifully in the Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer (end of chapter 31):

“רבי חנינא בן דוסא אומר, אותו האיל לא יצא ממנו דבר לבטלה... שתי קרניו של איל, של שמאל נשמע קולו על הר סיני, שנאמר ויהי קול השופר, וקרן של ימין הוא גדול מן השמאל, ועתיד לתקוע בו לעתיד לבוא בקיבוץ של גלויות, שנאמר והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול.”

**Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa says: Nothing from that ram went to waste . . . Pertaining to the two horns of the ram, the sound of the left horn was heard at Har Sinai, as it says (Shemos 19, 19): “The sound of the shofar.” The right horn is greater than the left. It is destined to be sounded le’asid la’vo for the gathering of the exiles, as it says (Yeshayah 27, 13): “It shall be on that day that a great shofar will be blown.”**

That being the case, let’s delve deeper in an attempt to achieve a better understanding of Rabbi Abahu’s claim that HKB”H requests of us: **“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.”** Now, if the purpose of the shofar is to recall Akeidas Yitzchak, it would have made more sense to recall one of the tasks Avraham Avinu actually performed. For instance, the following are enumerated in the passuk (Bereishis 22, 9): **“ויבן שם אברהם את המזבח, ויערוך את העצים, ויעקוד את יצחק בנו, וישם אותו על המזבח ממעל לעצים, וישלח אברהם את ידו ויקח את המאכלת. Avraham built the mizbeiach there, and arranged the wood; he bound Yitzchak, his son, and he placed him on the mizbeiach atop the wood. Avraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.**

Surprisingly, HKB"H chose to remember Akeidas Yitzchak by means of a shofar fashioned from a ram's horn instead of by means of one of the actions mentioned in this passuk. As Avraham was preparing to complete the task given him by HKB"H, a malach descended from the heavens and admonished him (ibid. 12): "אל תשלח ידך אל הנער ואל תעש לו מאומה"—**do not send forth your hand at the lad nor do anything to him.** Instead, Avraham sacrificed a ram in place of Yitzchak. Thus, the shofar of a ram's horn reminds us of how HKB"H prevented Avraham from sacrificing Yitzchak, not of how Avraham bound Yitzchak on top of the mizbeiach.

### Blowing the Horn of an Animal It Is as if We Are Crying Like an Animal before Hashem

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing the sacred words of the Shem MiShmuel (Rosh HaShanah 5674). He teaches us a novel reason for the mitzvah of blowing shofar on Rosh HaShanah. He relies on a teaching in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Ta'anis 2, 1) related to the blowing of the shofar when fasting on account of the absence of rain: "ולמה תוקעין בקרנות, לומר חשבינו כאילו גועים כבהמה לפניך"—**and why do we blow horns? To say, we are considered as if bellowing like animals before You.** The Korban HaEidah comments that it is as if we are screaming like an animal with horns, so that You will have mercy on us.

From this, the Shem MiShmuel deduces a fundamental principle, which he repeats in several places: We were commanded by HKB"H to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah for this reason given by the Yerushalmi—so that we will be viewed like animals bellowing before Him. He cites the passuk (Tehillim 36, 7): "אדם ובהמה תושיע ה'"—**You save both man and animal, O Hashem**—and its exposition in Maseches Chullin (5b) that **these are people who are clever in knowledge yet conduct themselves as though they were animals.** He says that the essence of submission is to do something even if its rationale is unknown. This is especially true of people who are wise and comprehend very well the nature and

source of every mitzvah, and why it must be so and not otherwise. Nevertheless, despite their wisdom and comprehension, they view themselves as mere animals and perform the mitzvos solely because Hashem commanded them to do so; it makes no difference to them whether they comprehend it or not. In the words of Chazal (Kiddushin 22b): "בהמה" אדעתא דמרה אזלא"—an animal does what its master wants it to do instinctively without any conscious thought of its own. In similar fashion, we should abide by the precepts of Hashem without philosophizing or contemplating. This is what the shofar illustrates. As the Gemara asks (R.H. 16a): "**Why do we blow? Because the Merciful One said to blow.**" In truth, there is no better reason; it is akin to an animal whose meals and sustenance depend on its master.

### A Wonderful Insight from the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: An Animal Sacrifice Atones for a Sinner Who Behaved Like an Animal

It is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways. This is especially true of the mitzvah of "tekias shofar" on Rosh HaShanah, which is derived from the passuk: "יום תרועה יהיה לכם"—**it shall be a day of "teruah" for you.** They expounded in the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 21): The word "תרועה" is an anagram for "תורה ע". This alludes to the fact that the Torah is interpreted from seventy (the numerical value of "ayin") various aspects. Hence, I would like to propose a very interesting explanation for the statement in the Gemara that when we blow the shofar, "**we are considered as if bellowing like animals before You.**"

We will begin by introducing an insight from the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh (Vayikra 9, 8). He provides a wonderful rationale for bringing an animal as a korban to receive atonement from HKB"H. The passuk states (Vayikra 1, 2): "אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה' מן הבהמה מן הבקר ומן הצאן"—**אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה' מן הבהמה מן הבקר ומן הצאן**: "אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה' מן הבהמה מן הבקר ומן הצאן"—**when a man among you brings an offering to Hashem, from the animals—from the cattle and from the flocks, you shall bring your korban.** The Almighty did not command a person to actually sacrifice himself for his transgression.



In his own sacred, inimitable way, he explains that when a person commits a sin, he is behaving like an animal. Thus, he drops from the status of an "אדם" to the status of a "בהמה". When he awakens and realizes the error of his ways, he makes amends by performing teshuvah and returns to the status of an "אדם". Therefore, it is not necessary for him to bring himself as a korban, since he is already back to being an "adam." Notwithstanding, he brings a sacrificial animal to atone for the sin he committed when he resembled a "בהמה".

This explains beautifully the elucidation in the Gemara (ibid. 5a): **אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה' מן הבהמה, להביא בני אדם שדומים לבהמה, מכאן אמרו מקבלין קרבנות מבושעי ישראל כדי שיחזרו בהן בתשובה.** **"When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem, from the animals . . .": The passuk comes to include people who are similar in their actions to animals among those who are eligible to bring korbanos; from here the sages derived that we accept korbanos from the sinners of Yisrael; so that they should return to the fold by means of teshuvah.**

In other words, the reason we accept korbanos from sinners is implicit in the passuk. Because when they committed their sin, they possessed the status of an animal—a "beheimah." Yet, when they perform teshuvah and return to the status of "adam," it is appropriate to accept an animal offering from them in lieu of a human offering.

### **Sacrificing the Ram in Place of Yitzchak Is the Source for the Sacrificial Service in the Beis HaMikdash**

With this introduction, we will now proceed to explain why HKB"H requests of us: **"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."** Let us begin with an important principle from the impeccable teachings of the Yismach Moshe (Vayeira) related to the passuk in the passage of the Akeidah (Bereishis 22, 8): **ויאמר אברהם אלקים יראה לו השם לעולה: "בני—Avraham said, "G-d will provide the lamb for**

**Himself for the offering, my son."** He refers to what they expounded in the Midrash Tanchuma (Tzav 13) on the passuk (Vayikra 6, 2): **"זאת תורת העולה—this is the law of the "olah."** Here is a condensed version of the passage in the Midrash:

**What is a korban "olah"? It ascends ("oleh") to HKB"H and atones for the iniquities of Yisrael. When HKB"H saw that Avraham was ready to sacrifice his son Yitzchak sincerely and wholeheartedly, He sent him the ram. The sages teach that the ram was created during the six days of creation to be offered as an "olah" in place of Yitzchak. Then and there, HKB"H promised him that when his offspring offer "olahs," He would accept them immediately.**

Accordingly, the Yismach Moshe asserts that at the momentous incident of Akeidas Yitzchak, HKB"H deliberately said to Avraham Avinu initially (ibid. 2): **קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק ולך לך אל ארץ המזרח והעלהו שם לעולה על אחד ההרים אשר אומר אליך—please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him up there as an olah-offering on one of the mountains, which I shall tell you.** Then, afterwards, HKB"H sent a malach from the heavens to instruct Avraham sternly (ibid. 12): **"אל תשלח ירך אל הנער ואל תעש לו מאומה—do not send forth your hand at the lad nor do anything to him.** By arranging for a ram to be sacrificed in place of Yitzchak, a symbolic gesture was performed to prepare for the avodah of the korbanos in the Beis HaMikdash on that exact location—on Har HaMoriah. There, Yisrael would offer korbanos from animals in place of human beings.

This coincides with the following Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 17, 2) expounding on the passuk (ibid. 13): **"ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעולה תחת בני—he took the ram, and he and offered it up as an "olah" in place of his son. What does it mean "in place of his son"? Avraham said, "Master of the Universe, view it as if the blood of Yitzchak is being sprinkled before You." He took it the ram and flayed it and said, "Thus should You view it, as if it was the skin**

**of Yitzchak that I flayed before You.” He took it and absorbed its blood (with salt). He said, “Thus should You view it, as if it is Yitzchak’s blood that is absorbed before You.” He burned it and said, “Thus should You view it, as if Yitzchak’s ashes are piled atop the mizbeiach.” Alternatively: What does “in place of his son” mean? HKB”H said to him, “By your life, your son was sacrificed first, and this ram is in his place.”**

### **Recall Akeidas Yitzchak for the Sake of His Children**

We will now introduce the interpretation of the great Rabbi Meir Yechiel of Ostrovtza, ztz”l, in the sefer Ohr Torah (Vayeira 56), of the formula we recite in our tefilos on Rosh HaShanah (the conclusion of the pesukim of Zichronos): **”ועקידת יצחק לזרעו היום ברחמים—תזכור—You shall recall the binding of Yitzchak mercifully for the sake of his children, today.** We must try to understand why the Akeidah is ascribed to Yitzchak and not to Avraham. To answer this question, he refers to the formula we recite in the “vidui”: **”אבל—אנחנו ואבותינו חטאנו—but indeed we and our fathers have sinned.** But who appointed us to confess for the sins of our fathers? Now, in truth, it is written (Vayikra 26, 40): **”והתוודו את עוונם ואת עוון אבותם”—then they will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers.** This, too, however, requires further explanation. Why is it necessary for us to confess for the sins of our forefathers?

He explains the matter based on the concept that every person contains within him the neshamos of all his future progeny. It is like the root of a tree that contains within it all the branches and fruit that will grow from it. With this understanding, we can suggest that sometimes a person himself is righteous and pious and is not likely to sin of his own accord; however, he contains within his being descendants that are destined to sin; they may cause him to sin. Therefore, we must utter the confession: **”But indeed we and our fathers have sinned.”** In other words, not only have we sinned, but we even caused our forefathers to sin when we were still within them.

It is worth noting that this fascinating concept was already taught by the Agra D’Kallah (Bechukosai) in the name of his mentor and Rav, the distinguished Rabbi of Rimanov, zy”a:

**I once heard from the honorable Admor, the holy Rav Menachem Mendel of Rimanov of blessed memory, regarding the passuk: “Then they will confess their sins and the sins of their forefathers”—that it is necessary to confess the sins of our fathers, as we say “but we and our fathers have sinned.” Since we sin in actuality, if so, when we existed only as potentials in our fathers, we caused them to sin. For, at that time, our sinning spirit was with them within the potential of their brain. Hence, we are obliged to confess the sins of our fathers, since we caused this to our fathers when we were yet a potential in their brain; we caused them to sin with actual deeds.**

Based on this, the great Rabbi of Ostrovtza, zy”a, says that prior to the birth of Yitzchak, all of the neshamos of Yisrael were part of Avraham. After he fathered Yitzchak, all of those neshamos were transferred to Yitzchak. This explains the formula we recite in our tefilah: **”ועקידת יצחק לזרעו היום ברחמים תזכור”.** At the time of the Akeidah, all of the neshamos of Yisrael were contained within Yitzchak and not Avraham. Hence, it was as if all of Yisrael were bound on the mizbeiach together with Yitzchak. This is the gist of his sacred insight.

### **Blowing the Shofar Reminds Us that Akeidas Yitzchak Involved All of Us**

With elation, we can now shed some light on the profound teaching of Rabbi Abahu regarding the mitzvah of “tekias shofar” on Rosh HaShanah: **Why do we blow shofar with a ram’s horn? 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.”** We learned from the Yerushalmi that when we blow the

shofar taken from an animal, we are requesting to be viewed as animals bellowing before HKB”H. On the Day of Awe, the Day of Judgment, we confess to Him that when we sinned, we were behaving like animals. Then, we learned from the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh that for this reason, HKB”H mercifully allowed Yisrael to bring a “**beheimah**” as a korban instead of the “**adam**” who actually sinned.

According to the Yismach Moshe, at the time of Akeidas Yitzchak, which took place on the future site of the Beis HaMikdash, HKB”H established this precedent for all future generations. He agreed to accept an animal sacrifice as an “olah” in lieu of a human being just like He accepted the ram Avraham offered as an “olah” in lieu of Yitzchak. Furthermore, we learned from the esteemed Rabbi of Ostrovtsa, zy”a, that at the time of the Akeidah, when Avraham Avinu placed Yitzchak on the mizbeiach as an “olah,” he contained all of the neshamos of Yisrael within him. Then, when HKB”H accepted the ram in exchange of Yitzchak, He performed a symbolic gesture for all future generations; Yisrael were afforded atonement by the ram that Avraham offered in place of Yitzchak, his son, since Yitzchak harbored all of the neshamos of Yisrael within him.

This then is the message conveyed by Rabbi Abahu: **HKB”H said, “Blow before Me the shofar of a ram—to demonstrate that you are bellowing like an animal, because you behaved like an animal by sinning—so that I will recall on your behalf the ‘akeidah’ of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham—when all the neshamos of Yisrael were housed within him, and HKB”H exchanged the “olah” of Yitzchak for the “olah” of a ram; and I will consider it as if you bound yourselves before Me—because, in reality, all Jews were part of Yitzchak when he was bound.”**

We can now better appreciate why we were commanded: “**יום תרועה יהיה לכם**”—**it shall be a day of “teruah” for you.** We were commanded to blow the shofar of a ram on Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment, to express our remorse and ask HKB”H **to view us as if we are bellowing before Him like animals.** For, on this consequential day, we confess all of our sins committed during the past year, when we were no better than animals. As a result, HKB”H will keep His promise: **“I will consider it as if you bound yourselves before Me.”** Thus, we will be granted atonement from the ram Avraham Avinu sacrificed in place of Yitzchak, and we will merit a “kesivah va’chasimah tovah,” and a year of geulah and salvation—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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