

**טעמי מצות שופר לרב סעדיא גאון** (אוצר הגאונים, ראש השנה, חלק הפירושים, סימן קעג)

מה שצונו הבורא ית' לתקוע בשופר בראש השנה יש בזה עשרה ענינים:

א. מפני שהיום היתה תחלת הבריאה, שבו ברא הקב"ה את העולם ומלך עליו,

וכן עושים המלכים בתחלת מלכותם, שתוקעין לפניהן בחצוצרות ובקרנות להודיע ולהשמיע בכל מקום התחלת מלכותם,

וכן אנו ממליכין עלינו את הבורא יתברך ביום הזה,

וכך אמר דוד: "בחצוצרות וקול שופר הריעו לפני המלך ה'".

ב. כי יום ר"ה הוא ראשון לעשרת ימי תשובה, ותוקעים בו בשופר להכריז על ראשנו,

כמי שמזהיר ואומר: 'כל הרוצה לשוב, ישוב; ואם לאו, אל יקרא תגר על עצמו!'

וכן עושים המלכים, מזהירין את העולם תחלה בגזרותם, וכל העובר אחר האזהרה אין שומעין לו טענה

ג. להזכירנו מעמד הר סיני,

שנאמר "וקול שופר חזק מאד",

ונקבל על עצמנו מה שקבלו אבותינו על עצמם נעשה ונשמע.

ד. להזכירנו דברי הנביאים, שנמשלו כתקיעת שופר,

שנאמר "ושמע השומע את קול השופר ולא נזהר ותבא חרב ותקחהו – דמו בראשו יהיה, והוא נזהר - את נפשו מלט"

ה. להזכירנו חרבן בית המקדש וקול תרועת מלחמות האויבים,

כמו שנאמר "כיקול שופר שמעת ינפשי תרועת מלחמה",

וכשאנו שומעים קול השופר נבקש מאת ה' על בנין בית המקדש.

ו. להזכירנו עקידת יצחק, שמסר נפשו לשמים,

וכן אנחנו נמסור נפשנו על קדושת שמו, ויעלה זכרוננו לפניו לטובה.

ז. שכשנשמע תקיעת שופר נירא ונחרד ונשבר עצמנו לפני הבורא,

כי כך הוא טבע השופר, מרעיד ומחריד,

כמו שנאמר "אם יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו".

ח. להזכיר את יום הדין הגדול ולירא ממנו,

שנאמר "כי קרוב יום ה' הגדול, קרוב ומהר מאד, יום שופר ותרועה".

ט. להזכירנו קבוץ נדחי ישראל ולהתאוות אליו.

י. להזכירנו תחית המתים ולהאמין בה,

שנאמר "כל יושבי תבל ושוכני ארץ כנשוא נס הרים תראו וכשמוע שופר תשמעו".

## Rav Saadia Gaon's Rationales for the Mitzvah of Shofar

That which the Creator may He be blessed commanded us to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShannah contains 10 topics:

1. Because that day was the beginning of the Creation, on which The Holy One Who is Blessed created the world and reigned over it,  
and thus behave human kings at the beginning of their reigns, they cause trumpets and horns to be blown before them, so as to inform and publicize everywhere the beginning of their reign,  
and thus we coronate the Creator may He be blessed over us on this day,  
and thus wrote David: "With trumpets and the sound of a shofar *hariu* before the king Hashem".
2. Because the day of Rosh HaShannah is the first of the Ten Days of Repentance, and we blow shofar on it in order to serve notice on ourselves,  
like someone who serves notice and says: 'All who wish to repent, repent; and if not, let them not declare themselves wronged!',  
and thus kings behave - they first caution the world about their decrees,  
and (therefore) anyone who violates after the caution, we pay no heed to his explanations.
3. To remind us of the Standing Up at Mount Sinai,  
as Scripture says "and the voice of a shofar, very powerful",  
and (thereby) we will accept upon ourselves what our ancestors accepted upon themselves (in the form) "*naaseh v'nishma*"
4. To remind us of the words of the prophets, which are compared to the blast of a shofar,  
as Scripture says: "and the hearer heard the sound of the shofar but did not take caution, and the sword came and took him – his blood is on his own head, whereas he who did take caution – he rescued his life"
5. To remind us of the destruction of the Holy Temple, and the sound of the enemies' battle *teruah*,  
as Scripture says: "for the sound of a shofar my soul hears, the *teruah* of war",  
and when we hear the sound of the shofar, we will plead to G-d about the Building of the Holy Temple,
6. To remind us of the Binding of Isaac, who gave his life over to Heaven,  
and so too we should give our lives over for the sake of the Holiness of His name, and (thereby) our remembrance will arise before him to good result
7. Because when we hear the blast of the shofar we will fear and tremble and shatter ourselves before the Creator,  
because such is the nature of the shofar, that it causes terror and trembling,  
as Scripture says: "Can it be that a shofar will blow in the city, and the populace not tremble!?"
8. To mention the great Day of Judgment and be in awe of it,  
as Scripture says: "Because the great day of Hashem is neat, near and hurrying, a day of shofar and *teruah*"
9. To remind us of the collection of the scattered of Israel and to yearn for it,  
about which Scripture says: "it will be on that day – He will blow a great Shofar, and those lost in the Land of Ashur will arrive etc."
10. To remind us of the resurrection of the dead and to put faith in it,  
as Scripture says: "All dwellers on Earth and inhabitants of the land will see as the banner is raised on the mountain, and when the shofar is audible they will hear".

Rambam writes that there are two ways of being unjust to religious metaphors:

- a. taking them literally and mocking them, and
- b. taking them literally and accepting them.

Thus, for example, it is wrong to use “His legs will be standing on that day on the Mount of Olives” as evidence that G-d has legs, and wrong to use it as evidence that Tanakh has a primitive corporeal notion of G-d.

The question this leaves open is what purpose metaphor serves, if one is required to understand that it is mere metaphor. One possibility is that it serves as a temporary bridge that enables us to arrive at truth – after we understand the *nimshal*, the symbolized, there is indeed no further use for the *mashal*, the symbol. The midrashic metaphor of King Solomon “chaining metaphor to metaphor until we could pull the waterjug up from the well” may support this idea.

But it would be truer to my experience to say that the best symbols have enduring worth. This may be simply a function of beauty – even after we have concluded, say, that “the fog comes in on little cat’s feet” means that it comes in silently and unhurriedly, the description can still bring a smile. Or it may be a function of residual meaning – surely “silent and unhurried” does not exhaust the qualities of a (little) cat’s tread. The metaphor of Divine legs, as well, endures, and Tanakh remains worthwhile for those who understand that G-d is incorporeal.

For vigorous anticorporealists such as Rambam, however, it seems critical that one never be lost in the metaphor, that there not be even a momentary suspension of disbelief in the literal meaning, at least after the initial understanding. This is not quite the same thing as the midrashic “k’beyakhol”, “as if it were possible”, which seems to encourage a twilight state in which one believes the literal meaning while affirming its impossibility.

It seems to me that another example of this unwillingness to function on the k’beyakhol level is found in this week’s text. Rav Saadia Gaon goes out of his way to ensure that every reason for shofar makes clear that the shofar has no effect on Hashem, that Hashem does not listen for or hear the shofar, but rather that He pays attention only to us. Thus the shofar reminds us to act self-sacrificingly like Yitzchak, not to remind G-d of Yitzchak’s willingness to self-sacrifice.

RaSaG was certainly aware that the Torah describes G-d as “hearing”. What, then, made him unwilling to give rationales for the mitzvah of shofar that assumed that metaphor? Perhaps it was a reaction to a contemporary context in which many took that metaphor with absolute literalness. Perhaps the words of Tanakh are immutable, and therefore one must fight for their meaning, whereas rationales for mitzvot can be cast aside when their cost becomes too great.

It is perhaps worth thinking about the “makhnisei rakhamim” controversy in this light. (On that, see SBM alumnus Rabbi Shlomo Brody at <http://text.rcarabbis.org/?p=265>.) Perhaps communities that don’t see belief in personified angels as at all plausible can sing songs about intercessory angels with impunity.

Bivrahah leshanah tovah. May we all be inscribed in the Book of Life (and all parallel metaphors).

Aryeh Klapper