

Rosh Hashanah 2nd day – 5762

I once read about an Orthodox fellow who found himself, through circumstances the details of which I don't recall, in a reform temple, being shown around by the rabbi. The temple was, indeed, magnificent, and the piece de résistance was the electric revolving aron kodesh. And in the aron kodesh was a compartment from which the rabbi proudly withdrew a shofar, which he offered the visitor to try out. Now this fellow was not exactly an expert baal tokeah; the most he had ever been able to get out of a shofar was a feeble squeak or two. But the rabbi seemed anxious that he should try, so he put the shofar to his mouth and, to his surprise, it emitted a beautiful, sonorous blast. Well, he couldn't understand it, until he took a closer look and saw that there was something inside. The rabbi proudly explained to him that this was a foolproof shofar, because inside it was a horn – a kind of small foghorn – that ensured a beautiful *tekiah*, first time, every time.

Now we may smile at the idea of such a “shofar”; but this story might lead us also to ask: What, in fact, is wrong with using a foghorn for a shofar? If the shofar – as the Rambam writes – is a summons to teshuvah, then why shouldn't any horn, or siren, or trumpet, do as well? Why do we insist that the sound that we hear on Rosh Hashanah be the blast of a ram's horn, and only a ram's horn?

The answer, as we mentioned yesterday, is given by the Gemara in Rosh Hashanah:

למה תוקעים בשופר של איל? אמר הקב"ה תקעו לפני בשופר של איל כדי להזכיר עקידת יצחק

Why did the Torah insist that we blow a shofar made from a ram's horn? In order to remember the *akeidah* of *Yitzchak*, and the ram that Avraham offered at its culmination.

But this answer leads, in turn, to another question: Why is it specifically on Rosh Hashanah, more than on any other Yom Tov, that we need to remember *akeidas Yitzchak*? Of course, *akeidas Yitzchak* is a *zechus*, and we are looking for *zechusim* on Rosh Hashanah; but the fact is that we could use *zechusim* the whole year round, and yet we don't blow shofar then, but only on Rosh Hashanah. Apparently there is something about Rosh Hashanah that requires that we connect ourselves – more than on any other day – with the *akeidas yitzchak*.

I would like to explore this morning one way of understanding this connection.

Rosh Hashanah of course, as we all know, is the day of creation:
זה היום תחילת מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון

Specifically, it is the day on which man, who was the culmination of *maaseh bereshis*, was created.

Now we know that man was created in two stages: First, his *guf*, the physical body, was made from the dust of the earth. And then, into that body, was breathed the *neshama*, that fills it and gives it life.

Now *Chazal* – in a very striking midrash – teach that what was true of man was true of the universe as a whole. It, too, has a *guf* and a *neshama*. Its *guf* is the inert matter of which it is built; and its *neshama* is the spiritual force of *hakadosh baruch hu's* word that fills it and gives it life and purpose.

And the universe could no more exist as a *guf*, without a *neshama*, then a human being could live as a body without a soul.

And so just as *hakadosh baruch hu* breathed a soul into man, he infused *neshamah*, spiritual animating energy, into the universe as a whole.

And *Chazal* also taught that that infusion of spirit into the world had a specific focal point; a specific locus in space where the spiritual force of creation was infused into the inert matter of the world. *Chazal* called that place the *Even Shesiayah*, the foundation stone, and said that it was the stone on which the aron rested in the Beis Hamikdash in Jerusalem. The whole spiritual force of creation entered the world at that point, and from there it radiated out to the rest of creation.

And that is why the oldest name of Jerusalem is Shalem – as we read in Parshas Lech Lecha, when Malkizedek, the king of Shalem – otherwise known as Shem ben Noach – went out to greet Avraham Avinu. Because the *shleimus* of the world, the entire force of creation, was focused on that one spot.

But Jerusalem later acquired another name. Because it was in Jerusalem, at the *makom hamikdash*, that Avraham and Yitzchak reached the highest pinnacle of *avodas Hashem* that was ever achieved by man, at the *akeidas Yitzchak*. It was after the *akeidah* that G-d said to Avraham: *Atah yadati ki yerei elokim atah*; know I know that you have achieved the totality of *yiras shamayim*, of fear of G-d which is the foundation of *avodah*.

And so after the *akeidah* Avraham Avinu gave that place a different name: *Vayikra Avraham es shem hamakom hahu Hashem yireh asher yeamer hayom behar Hashem yereah* – Avraham called the place the mountain of *yireh*, of *yiras shamayim*.

And from that moment on Jerusalem became the focal point of *avodas Hashem*; the *makom hamikdash*, the place where the *korbanos* were brought; and the *tel*