



## The shofar's call

RABBI ARIEL SHOSHAN

Rosh Hashana I: Genesis 21:1-21:34, Numbers 29:1-29:6  
Rosh Hashana II: Genesis 22:1-22:24, Numbers 29:1-29:6

Throughout the writings of the generations and in communities all over the world, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and the eight days between them are known as the Ten Days of Repentance. While Yom Kippur and the days leading up to it evoke thoughts of asking forgiveness and committing ourselves to living life more thoughtfully, the liturgy and spirit of Rosh Hashana contain no discussion of our mistakes and faults. How then can it be called the first Day of Repentance?

The themes and prayers of Rosh Hashana are based on the Talmudic passage (Rosh Hashana 16a), "The Holy One, blessed is He, said, 'Pronounce in front of Me verses of Kingship - so that you will crown Me upon you.'" In fact the machzor (holiday prayer book) is replete with verses that recall our Father's role as the true King of kings. We spend the first day of the Jewish year at a celebration in honor of Hashem.

We are commanded to join in this annual celebration on the birthday of mankind - the sixth day of creation. During the first five days of history, no being was capable of accepting the Master of the Universe as King, and none was capable of rebelling against Him. Only through the creation of people did Hashem avail the world of the potential to rise above our innate drives and programmed functions, whether physical or spiritual. Only mankind has the privilege to fuse the physical drives with spiritual purpose. On the anniversary of the Almighty first being crowned by this most spectacular of creatures, we again commit ourselves to living up to that potential.

With these crowning proclamations come the sounds of the shofar. They are the sublime echoes of the coronation festival. Rambam (Maimonides, Laws of Teshuvah 3:4) writes, "Although the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashana is a divine decree, it contains a hint, saying, 'Wake up! Wake up sleepy ones from your sleep and arise slumbering ones from your slumber. Investigate your actions, and return with repentance, and remember your Creator.' These are the ones who forget the truth as a result of excessive involvement in the frivolities of each era."

Rosh Hashana is indeed the first Day of Repentance. The shofar calls us to action with the message that this relationship with the King is serious and contemplative. "Remember your Creator," it declares, as we gather together for the first days of our year.

As Jews we must ask ourselves deep and penetrating questions. We must grapple with the essential Jewish idea that life was not gifted to us for the purpose of "involvement in the frivolities of each era." We are here with a purpose and we ought to use our uniquely human potential to reach higher and live up to what the King requests of us and commands us.

Regardless of affiliation or nonaffiliation, we must ask questions like: Does the shofar's wake-up call ask me to be more honest in business? Does it ask me to be more loving to my spouse? Does it ask me to celebrate Shabbat every week? Does the Almighty ask me to set aside significant time to learn Torah?

May this year be one of profound growth and happiness for our entire community.

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