
SHABBOS NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH
23RD DAY OF ELUL, 5749

1. This Shabbos is the Shabbos on which the month of Tishrei is blessed. Indeed, there is an added dimension to that blessing this year when Rosh HaShanah falls on a Shabbos. The Baal Shem Tov taught that although the blessing of the month is not recited by the Jewish people, the month is blessed by G-d, Himself. That blessing is expressed by the Torah reading which begins, "You are all standing today." "Today," refers to Rosh HaShanah, the day of judgment. The Jews are all "standing," victorious in judgment.

Blessing the month in this manner has a unique connection to the celebration of Rosh HaShanah this year because it falls on a Shabbos. In regard to such a Rosh HaShanah, the *Mishnah* relates that "the *shofar* was sounded in the *Beis HaMikdash*, but not throughout the country."

The *mitzvah* of blowing the *shofar* is one of the fundamental aspects of Rosh HaShanah — "the *mitzvah* of the day is [performed] with the *shofar*." Rav Sa'adia Gaon explains this concept, associating the blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh HaShanah with the sounding of the *shofar* at the coronation of a king. Rosh HaShanah represents the acceptance of G-d as King of the world as our Sages declared: "The Holy One, Blessed be He, states: 'Recite before Me verses of Kingship... to make Me king over you.'" The blowing of the *shofar* plays an important role in this process of crowning G-d as King as our Sages continue "With what [is this brought about]? With the *shofar*." If so, why did the Sages nullify the performance of the *mitzvah* of blowing the *shofar* when Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbos? How can our acceptance of G-d as King be complete without this *mitzvah*?

These questions are the subject of several *Chassidic* discourses which explain that when Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbos, the influence of Shabbos compensates for that of the *shofar*. The acceptance of G-d as King involves the arousal of His will to rule by revealing the quality of pleasure. Generally, this is brought about through the blowing of the *shofar*. When, however, Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbos, there is a dimension of pleasure which is drawn down by the Shabbos itself which is constant and not dependent on the service of the Jewish people.' Hence, the efforts of the Jews to arouse Divine pleasure through blowing the *shofar* are unnecessary.

There are, however, several levels in Divine pleasure. Therefore, in the *Beis HaMikdash*, where a higher level of Divine pleasure could be drawn down, the *shofar* was sounded on the Shabbos as well. Throughout *Eretz Yisrael*, however, it was not possible to draw down this level and, therefore, the *shofar* was not sounded when Rosh HaShanah fell on the Shabbos.

This explanation, however, appears to require amplification. One of the fundamental aspects of the acceptance of G-d as King is that it is effected through the service of the Jewish people. They are the ones who "Recite... to make Me king over you;" it is their service which brings about His Kingship.

1. In contrast, the festivals (including Rosh HaShanah) are dependent on the service of the Jewish people as emphasized by the blessings, "Blessed are You L-rd, who sanctifies Israel and the festivals," and "...who sanctifies Israel and the Day of Remembrance." Our Sages explain that this text indicates that it is the Jews "who sanctify the festivals."

2. The Sages' established this decree in the period of the Second *Beis HaMikdash* when the spiritual level of the Jewish people had declined. During the time of the First *Beis HaMikdash*, the people were on a higher level and were able to draw down the higher dimension of pleasure throughout *Eretz Yisrael*, not only in the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The latter is associated with the idea that Rosh HaShanah is celebrated on the anniversary of the sixth day of creation, the day of the creation of man and not on the anniversary of the creation of the world at large (the 25th of Elul). At the beginning, G-d created the world as an expression of His kindness. Afterwards, everything depends on an arousal from below through service on the part of man.

An example of this service can be seen in Adam's actions directly after his creation. Adam caused G-d's kingship to be proclaimed throughout the totality of existence when he approached all the creations and told them, "Come let us bow down and prostrate ourselves before the L-rd, our Maker." Similarly, each year, Rosh HaShanah is celebrated on the anniversary of the creation of man for it is the service of man – and more particularly, the Jewish people' – which expresses G-d's kingship over the world at large.

Accordingly, the nullification of the *mitzvah* of blowing the *shofar* when Rosh HaShanah falls on the Shabbos appears problematic. Although the aspect of Divine pleasure is drawn down by the Shabbos irrespective of the service of the Jewish people, the fact that this service is lacking would appear to detract from the acceptance of G-d as King which is dependent on the Jews' service as explained above.

This difficulty can be resolved by explaining that not blowing *shofar* is – like the actual sounding of the *shofar* – an act of service with symbolic connotations.⁴ It does not represent the failure to perform a *mitzvah*, but rather an act of service, indeed a higher act of service than the actual sounding of the *shofar* when Rosh HaShanah falls during the week (for surely, the influence of Shabbos is not intended to lead to a reduction in our service to G-d).

To explain: Blowing the *shofar* expresses the quality of *bittul* (self-nullification). As we accept G-d as King, we nullify ourselves before Him in an act of homage, giving ourselves over to His service. This *bittul* arouses G-d's desire to accept our homage and desire Kingship.

Shabbos is also connected with the concept of *bittul*. On Shabbos, a Jew ceases his personal activities and stands before G-d in an attitude of *bittul*. During the week, G-dly light is not in open revelation. Hence, there is no difficulty in man expressing his own identity through his service. Shabbos, however, is a day of holiness conveyed by G-d. Each Jew is "standing before the King," as it were. In such a situation, any service is inappropriate. Our Sages relate that, in the king's presence, making even the slightest gesture is considered equivalent to an act of rebellion.

To apply these concepts in regard to the blowing of the *shofar*: The coronation of G-d as King on Rosh HaShanah represents a higher level of *bittul* than Shabbos. The combination of the two factors, Shabbos and Rosh HaShanah, however, produces even a deeper dimension of *bittul*.

To explain this concept in terms of the service of Adam, the first king, it is clear that

performing this act of self-negation. In contrast, on Shabbos, a person does nothing to express his homage. Instead, he stands before G-d in complete and total *bittul*.

Thus, we see two levels of *bittul*:

a) One in which a person negates himself to G-d totally. As a servant who gives himself over totally to his master, he gives over his will and his soul to G-d. Nevertheless, the person's identity is still felt. The process of giving oneself over is a service.

b) One in which a person loses all consciousness of his individual identity. It would be improper to say that there is a person who negates himself to G-d. The person's identity is not felt at all, all that is felt is G-d.⁵

On this basis, we can explain the difference between the *bittul* brought about by the blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh HaShanah and the *bittul* that exists on Rosh HaShanah which falls on a Shabbos. The blowing of the *shofar* represents an active expression of *bittul*, paralleling Adam's proclamation, "Come let us bow down..." It describes a level where a person gives himself over to the coronation of G-d as King. There is, nevertheless, a consciousness of one's own identity as the one who performs this act of coronation.

When, however, one proceeds in the service of *bittul* to the point where one's existence is not felt at all, i.e., not that one consciously negates one's existence, but that one has no sense of self whatsoever, it is not appropriate to blow the *shofar* to crown G-d as King or to call others to pay homage to Him. There is no need for such activities for one does not feel any existence apart from Him. One is standing before the King, Himself. Therefore, it would be improper to bow down or sound the *shofar* for such activities have no place — and indeed are out of place — in His presence. Thus, not blowing the *shofar* on Shabbos represents a higher and more complete level of *bittul* than the sounding of the *shofar*.

A parallel to these two levels of *bittul* can be found in the two expressions of G-dly light within our world. There is one level of G-dly light which enclothes itself within the world to bring it into being and grant it life. Though a person (and the world at large) must negate himself to this G-dly light, this level of G-dly light recognizes the existence of the world and views it as an entity. There is, however, a higher level of G-dly light which transcends the world. From the standpoint of this level of light, there is no existence apart from Him and the existence of the world is, in essence, negated.

The difference between Shabbos and the days of the week parallels the differences between these two levels of G-dly light. The G-dly light revealed during the week represents the level of light which recognizes the existence of the world and undergoes the *tzimtzumim* necessary to enclothe itself within such a world. On Shabbos, however, the G-dly light rises to its source and a level of complete *bittul*, "only He exists and there is nothing apart from Him," is revealed.⁶

Accordingly, when Rosh HaShanah falls during the week, the *bittul* which our service expresses relates to the G-dly light that is enclothed within the world. Therefore, it is expressed through an activity, blowing *shofar*, which emphasizes man's identity while it negates it. In contrast, when Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbos the *bittul* relates to the level of Divine light

⁵ This *bittul* emanates from a point in the soul which transcends the level of *Yechiduth*. In regard to *Yechiduth*, it is stated, "Yechiduth affirming Your oneness," i.e., implying that an act of affirmation is necessary and that a certain measure of importance is conveyed upon the one who affirms. On a deeper level, there is the essence of the soul which cannot be described with any name. This level of soul is united with G-d on a level where there is no concept of separation.

⁶ In *Kabbalistic* terminology, Shabbos represents the elevation of the Worlds of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah* into the World of *Atzilus*, the world of oneness.

which transcends the world. Therefore, this *bittul* is complete, nullifying man's existence entirely and is expressed by our not blowing the *shofar* and standing in total nullification before Him.'

The above explanation raises a problem. As mentioned above, even when Rosh HaShanah fell on Shabbos, the *shofar* was blown in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Surely, in the place where G-d's presence is openly revealed, the fullest state of *bittul* would be reached. If, as explained above, the blowing of the *shofar* reflects a lower level of *bittul* and a consciousness of self, why was the *shofar* sounded there?

This difficulty can be resolved as follows: Even the complete negation of one's existence, which characterizes the service of Rosh HaShanah which falls on Shabbos, still has a certain connection to one's individual existence. The very fact that one's individual identity has to be negated, even though that negation is complete and total, reveals a trace of personal existence. If an entity had no concept of individual existence whatsoever, there would be no need to mention its negation. To borrow a concept, in *Tanya*, the Alter Rebbe states that it is ludicrous to describe the sophistication of an intellectual concept by saying that "it is so uplifted, you can't touch it." The two subjects, intellectual concepts and physical sensation, exist in two totally different frames of references and it is improper to use them together. Similarly, when a person operates within a framework of utter negation, the concept of an individual identity, even when mentioned in the context of negating that identity, is entirely foreign.

To illustrate the concept in terms of the example mentioned above: When a person stands still in complete self-nullification before the king, unable to move a limb because he negates his authority over his entire being, there remains a concept of self. Thus the concept of self is negated (in a complete and total manner), rather than expressed, but the person has not transcended this entire frame of reference.

When, however, a person is concerned with the king and has no sense of self whatsoever, there is no necessity that he remain still. When the king desires that a particular activity be performed, he will not hesitate to perform it. Since he is not concerned with his own identity – even the negation of that identity – and his only desire is to fulfill the king's will, he will perform these acts naturally, without the necessity for a conscious decision.'

This is the level of *bittul* which was expressed in the *Beis HaMikdash* when the *shofar* was sounded on Rosh Hashanah which fell on Shabbos. As long as a person has any conception of self (even the negation of self), it is impossible for him to perform the activity of blowing the *shofar* amidst the revelation of G-dliness. The performance of any activity runs contrary to the *bittul* which he has achieved. In the *Beis HaMikdash*, however, the place where the absolute unity of G-d and the Jewish people is revealed, the blowing of the *shofar* does not present a difficulty. Since the blowing of the *shofar* is a *mitzvah* of the Torah, the performance of this

G-dly light which transcends our existence. The very fact, however, that the revelation of this light necessitates the negation and the cessation of worldly activity (work is forbidden) reveals that it still shares a connection to our frame of reference (as the person who stands motionless in complete self-nullification before the king still has a connection to self).

In contrast, in the *Beis HaMikdash*, G-d's essence, a level that stands entirely above our frame of reference – so much so that describing it as transcending our existence is inadequate – is revealed.⁹ Therefore, the *shofar* was sounded in the *Beis HaMikdash* even when Rosh HaShanah fell on Shabbos. This level of G-dliness does not require the negation of one's existence. On the contrary, this is the level which is the source for G-d's desire to create the world. Thus, at this level, man's actions in coronating G-d by blowing the *shofar* find favor.

This concept can be further illustrated – and explained on a deeper level – through the comparison between Torah and *mitzvos*. *Mitzvos* represent G-d's commands to man, instructing him how to behave within the context of our world. Thus, they give place for the identity of man and for the world. In contrast, the Torah stands above the world and from the standpoint of Torah, man and the world do not exist as entities with an independent identity. They exist only to allow for the fulfillment of the Torah's directives on the level of deed.

To explain this contrast within the context of the *mitzvah* of blowing *shofar*: From the perspective of *mitzvah*, both the world and man possess an identity and the *mitzvah* of blowing the *shofar* represents the subjugation of these identities and the coronation of G-d as King over both man and the world.

From the perspective of Torah, however, the only concern is the coronation of G-d. Nevertheless, G-d desired that His coronation come about through man's efforts in blowing *shofar*. This does not endow man with any importance. On the contrary, man and the world exist only as intermediaries through which G-d's will is carried out.

Therefore, in the *Beis HaMikdash* which is identified with the Torah – for the ark, the essential element of the *Beis HaMikdash*, contained the tablets of the law and a Torah scroll – man's blowing of the *shofar* does not represent a contradiction to the concept of *bittul*. On the contrary, from the perspective of Torah, man's efforts are not important in their own right. The essential thing is the coronation of G-d.

A parallel to this concept also exists at present, the recitation of the verses of *Shofaros* in our *Mussaf* prayer. These verses are recited on the Shabbos as well. Since this reflects the Torah's conception of the blowing of the *shofar* – and are recited by man in a manner of "My tongue will repeat Your statements," i.e., they are "Your statements" and we only repeat them – these verses are recited on Shabbos as well.

As mentioned above, this concept is related to the blessing of the month of Tishrei which, in contrast to all the other months of the year is blessed by G-d and not by the Jewish people. The fixation of the calendar is related to the service of the Jewish people. The *Midrash* relates that:

The angels come before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and ask Him: "When is Rosh HaShanah?..." The Holy One, Blessed be He, answers them: "Why are you asking Me? Let us go and enquire of the earthly court."

Nevertheless, when it comes to blessing the month of Tishrei which was instituted in place of the sanctification of the month, we do not bless the month ourselves. Instead, this

⁹. This concept can be illustrated by a positive interpretation of King Shlomo's rhetorical question in *1 Kings* 8:27, rendering that verse: "The heavens and the celestial realms cannot contain You, but this house can."

blessing is performed by G-d. This implies, as explained above, that the Jews stand in a state of complete *bittul* to the extent that they are not able to bless the month themselves and leave the blessing to G-d. G-d's blessing, however, is expressed through the Torah reading which is recited by the Jews, emphasizing how, in a manner similar to the blowing of the *shofar* in the *Beis HaMikdash*, the *bittul* of the Jews does not prevent them from performing an activity. Rather, their unity^o with G-d is so complete that they act, not as independent entities, but as mediums to express and reveal G-d's blessing^o within the world. This state of utter *bittul* is the proper preparation for the coronation of G-d as King on Rosh HaShanah in the following week.