

Psalm 81: The Song of the Shofar

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1. Tehillim 81 (translation: JPS)

(א) למנצח על הגתית לאסף: (ב) הרנינו לאלקים עוזנו הריעו לאלקי יעקב: (ג) שאו זמרה ותנו תף כנור נעים עם נבל: (ד) תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו: (ה) כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלקי יעקב: (ו) עדות ביהוסף שמו בצאתו על ארץ מצרים שפת לא ידעתי אשמע: (ז) הסירותי מסבל שכמו כפיו מדוד תעברנה: (ח) בצרה קראת ואחלצך אענך בסתר רעם אבחנך על מי מריבה סלה: (ט) שמע עמי ואעידה בך ישראל אם תשמע לי: (י) לא יהיה בך אל זר ולא תשתחוה לאל נכר: (יא) אנכי ד' אלקיך המעלך מארץ מצרים הרחב פיך ואמלאהו: (יב) ולא שמע עמי לקולי וישראל לא אבה לי: (יג) ואשלחהו בשרירות לבם ילכו במועצותיהם: (יד) לו עמי שמע לי ישראל בדרכי יהלכו: (טו) כמעט אויביהם אכניע ועל צריהם אשיב ידי: (טז) משנאי ד' יכחשו לו ויהי עתם לעולם: (יז) ויאכילהו מחלב חטה ומצור דבש אשביעך:

Sing aloud unto G-d our strength; shout unto the G-d of Jacob. Take up the melody, and sound the timbrel, the sweet harp with the psaltery. Blow the horn at the new moon, at the full moon for our feast-day. For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the G-d of Jacob.

He appointed it in Joseph for a testimony, when He went forth against the land of Egypt. The speech of one that I knew not did I hear: 'I removed his shoulder from the burden; His hands were freed from the basket. Thou didst call in trouble, and I rescued thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder; I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah

Hear, O My people, and I will admonish thee: O Israel, if thou wouldest hearken unto Me! There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any foreign god. I am HaShem thy G-d, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt; open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

But My people hearkened not to My voice; and Israel would none of Me. So I let them go after the stubbornness of their heart, that they might walk in their own counsels. Oh that My people would hearken unto Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries. The haters of HaShem should dwindle away before Him; and their punishment should endure for ever. They should also be fed with the fat of wheat; and with honey out of the rock would I satisfy thee.'

2. Tur Orach Chaim 581

איזו אומה כאומה זו שיוודעת אופיה של אלקיה פי' מנהגיו ודיניו שמנהגו של עולם אדם שיש לו דין לובש שחורים ומתעטף שחורים ומגדל זקנו ואין חותך צפרניו לפי שאינו יודע איך יצא דינו אבל ישראל אינן כן לובשים לבנים ומתעטפים לבנים ומגלחין זקנם ומחתכין צפרניהם ואוכלין ושותין ושמחים בר"ה לפי שיוודעין שהקב"ה יעשה להם נס

What nation is like this nation, to know its Gd's ways! Normally, a person facing judgment wears black and cloaks himself in black and grows his beard and does not cut his nails, for he does not know how his judgment will emerge. The Jews are not like this, though; they wear white and cloak themselves in white and shave their beards and cut their nails and eat and drink and celebrate on Rosh haShanah, for they know Gd will perform a miracle on their behalf.

3. Malbim to Tehillim 81:2

This holiday [Rosh haShanah] is different from all of the other appointed times, in that we blow the shofar on this day. The shofar is always a sign of fright; we normally blow the shofar on fasts for rain or for any other trouble, times when we do not play musical instruments. On Rosh HaShanah, though, the Levites play music in the Beit haMikdash and we also blow the shofar, such that the shofar blast does not frighten the nation."

4. R' Samson Raphael Hirsch, Collected Writings II pg. 69

At the appearance of the new moon when it is still veiled, the solemn Shofar must be sounded... Joy is rooted in earnestness; only the Shofar leads to the harp.

5. Talmud, Sanhedrin 42a

Rabbi Acha bar Chanina said, citing Rabbi Asi, who cited Rabbi Yochanan: One who blesses the month at its earliest time is as though he greets the *Shechinah*; it is written, 'This month is...' and 'This is my Gd, and I will glorify Him.'

They taught in the Yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael: If the Jews merit to greet their Heavenly Father each month, that is enough for them. Abayye commented: Therefore it is said while standing.

6. Zohar Chadash, Sitrei Otiyot 9b

When the Moon is ascendant and it is adorned before the Sun to receive light from it... She is in the middle, and the 72 members of the Sanhedrin stand like a half-circle around the moon... And she is a dot in the middle, the dot which receives light from the sun, to shine for the entire body. This is the secret of the dot in the middle of the eye; everything exists based on that dot which is in the middle, which takes in the light for the entire eye.

7. R' Samson Raphael Hirsch, Collected Writings II pg. 71

Thus, every new moon appears as *עדות ביהוסף*, a Divine witness in the Jewish realm which is permeated by the breath of Gd. Rosh haShanah is the new moon of all new moons, the Sabbath new moon of all the preceding six new moons. Silently, the new moon carries into our daily lives a six-fold chance for reflection. But the seventh moon halts the daily life-activities, and with Shofar-might addresses the following question directly to the heart: How much attention and fulfillment did your life grant to the message of the new moon?