

# DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

## “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Pinchas  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Pinchas – It was the best of times, it was the worst of times<sup>1</sup>

This week's Parasha of Pinchas includes a summary of the Chagim, with a focus on the special services in the Bet Hamikdash. When Rosh Hashana is discussed, reference is made to the mitzva of the day – the Shofar.

*And in the seventh month, on the first day, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall not perform any mundane work. **It shall be a day of shofar sounding for you.*** (Bamidbar 29:1)

Much has been written about the power of the shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah. The shofar is meant to awaken all of us to heartfelt teshuva. It also recalls Akeidat Yitzchak, whereby Avraham was willing to offer Yitzchak as a korban to Hashem (and Yitzchak was willing to be offered). Ultimately, a ram was offered instead of Yitzchak, and we blow the shofar to recall this great merit of Avraham and Yitzchak.<sup>2</sup> Chazal also explain that the blasts of the shofar confuse the Satan who has come to accuse us.<sup>3</sup> The blowing of the shofar affords great protection to the Jewish people on this Day of Judgement.

But there is another pasuk which refers to the shofar blowing on Rosh Hashana, in Parashat Emor:

*Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first of the month, it shall be a Sabbath for you, **a remembrance of the shofar blast**, a holy occasion.*  
(Vayikra 23:24)

Note that this pasuk in Vayikra refers to a 'remembrance of the shofar blast'. What does this mean? There are some years where we do not actually blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana, rather we just 'remember the shofar', when we recite the special pasukim during the Amidah which mention the theme of shofar. The Mishnah<sup>4</sup> teaches us that we do not blow the shofar when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat. The Gemara<sup>5</sup> teaches that this is a Rabbinic decree because we are concerned that someone may come to carry the shofar in a public domain on Shabbat, and thereby breach a Torah prohibition.<sup>6</sup> So in such years, we seem to be doomed to miss out on hearing the shofar and the protection that it provides us. Admittedly, we celebrate two days of Rosh Hashanah, even in Israel, so we still get the benefit of the shofar blasts for one of the days of Rosh Hashanah. But we only get half the usual number of shofar blasts compared to other years.

The Aruch LaNer<sup>7</sup> conducted a historical study into the Jewish calendar and he noticed a very interesting, although somewhat contradictory, phenomenon. The years in which Rosh Hashanah fell out on Shabbat were either unusually wonderful, or years of great tragedy for the Jewish people. For example, both times that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed occurred in such a year when the shofar was not blown due to Shabbat. Indeed, the Gemara<sup>8</sup> teaches us that a year in which the shofar is not blown on Rosh Hashanah has the potential to be a year of tragedy because we do not have the protection that the shofar affords. However, on the other hand, we see fantastic years on which Rosh Hashanah fell on Shabbat, for example, the year in which Bnei Yisrael were forgiven for the Chet HaEgel, received the second luchot and built the Mishkan. In addition, it was in such a year that Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael in a miraculous fashion, under the leadership of Yehoshua. How can we understand this phenomenon? Is it positive or negative when Rosh Hashanah falls out on Shabbat?

The Aruch LaNer explains with the help of a brilliant mashal. It's a bit complicated, but it's worth following it through to the end, because the message is very powerful, and relevant to all of us.

<sup>1</sup> The opening line of "A Tale of Two Cities", by Charles Dickens.

<sup>2</sup> See Rashi to Vayikra 23:24.

<sup>3</sup> Gemara, Rosh Hashanah 16b. This is a deep concept which is difficult to understand, and beyond the scope of this discussion.

<sup>4</sup> Rosh Hashanah 29b.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> There is an opinion brought in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashanah 4:1) that the prohibition of blowing the shofar on Shabbat is actually a Torah prohibition, based on the pasukim that we quoted above.

<sup>7</sup> Rav Yaakov Ettlinger (1798–1871).

<sup>8</sup> Rosh Hashanah 16b.

*There was once an officer who was suspected of a terrible crime against the king. The king was fair and would not convict the officer without a proper trial. However, the officer had a problem. No lawyer was willing to defend him, since he was accused of a crime against the king himself. In desperation, the officer's wife offered to defend him, even though she had no legal training. She stood before the court and offered a heart-felt plea to the judge and jury. She described her husband in glowing terms. He was the perfect husband and he cared deeply for his family. The court was moved. A person with such a sterling character could not be guilty of such a crime. The officer was acquitted! Some time later, another officer had a similar problem. He was also convicted of a crime against the king, and he too could not find a lawyer to defend him. He also turned to his wife for help. However, this time, the wife did not meet with much success. She could not describe her husband so positively. The judge and jury noticed that she had a black eye and some bruising. They realised that this officer did not treat his wife well at all.<sup>9</sup> Such a despicable person could certainly be expected to commit such a crime against the king. The second officer was thrown into the dudgeon.*

Let us now unwrap this mashal. The officers represent the Jewish People, who stand before Hashem in judgement. The lawyer who can defend the officer, represents the shofar which recalls the merits of our forefathers and defends the Jewish People. The wives represent Shabbat, for as the Midrash teaches, Shabbat is the bride of Bnei Yisrael.<sup>10</sup> Now let us apply this mashal to our question – why is the lack of shofar blowing sometimes associated with a year of simcha, but at other times it is associated with a year of tragedy?

When Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, we do not have the benefit of the shofar to defend us. Rather, we are so concerned for Shabbat's honour, lest someone carry a shofar in a public domain, that we agree to do without this defending lawyer. What an act of self-sacrifice for the sake of Shabbat! And in return, Shabbat jumps to our defence in front of the Heavenly Court. If Bnei Yisrael is so loyal, and cares so deeply for Shabbat, then how can we possibly be guilty of terrible crimes? The case is thrown out of court, and we are blessed with a wonderful year ahead. As Achad Ha-am famously said, "More than the Jewish people kept Shabbat, Shabbat kept the Jewish people".

But what happens if, G-d forbid, Bnei Yisrael does not treat Shabbat the way it should during the rest of the year? Shabbat stands before the Heavenly Court, as 'a beaten, battered wife, with tears in her eyes'. In such times, Shabbat cannot honestly testify in our favour. Bnei Yisrael is left bereft. We don't have the shofar to protect us, and we are also left without Shabbat to testify on our behalf. This does not bode well for the year ahead.

How is this relevant to us? Last Simchat Torah our world turned upside down. The victims, the hostages, the broken and displaced families, the soldiers, all of the residents of Israel, and Jewish People all over the world. It's almost hard to remember what life was like before October 7. But try to think back to three weeks before October 7. It was Rosh Hashanah. Do you remember on what day Rosh Hashanah fell last year? Yes, that's right, it fell out on Shabbat. That means that this year was likely going to be an intense and memorable year – either a wonderful year, or the opposite. It could have been the best of times or the worst of times. Unfortunately, so far, it has been an annus horribilis.<sup>11</sup>

What can we do to turn things around? Even before last Rosh Hashanah, Rav Moshe Sternbuch cited the mashal of the Aruch la-Ner, and called on Jewish people to strengthen themselves in honouring Shabbat. Now is the time to take on a resolution to increase our honour for Shabbat. Whether it's bringing in Shabbat a bit earlier, making an effort to have a proper seudah with bread at each of the three meals, singing extra zemirot, or having a proper melave malka meal to farewell Shabbat. And of course we must remember the Chofetz Chaim's introduction to the laws of Shabbat in the Mishnah Berurah – one who does not learn the laws of Shabbat is doomed to transgress them. You can't keep Shabbat properly if you don't know how to!

Let's try something this week

1. Take on a kabbala (resolution) to increase the honour of Shabbat. It should be 'bli neder' (without a vow) but it should be serious, and it should demonstrate a love for Shabbat. Do it now!
2. Try to increase your knowledge of Hilchot Shabbat. If anyone would like some suggestions or guidance as to how to do this, please send an email to [darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com).

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

\* To subscribe please email [darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com)

<sup>9</sup> As the matchmaker said in Fiddler on the Roof: "You heard he has a temper. He'll beat you every night. But only when he's sober, So you're alright."

<sup>10</sup> Breishit Rabbah 11:8. That is why we sing 'Lecha Dodi' on Friday night – "Come my beloved, let us greet the bride".

<sup>11</sup> For those who under the age of 45 and/or don't live in a Commonwealth country, this is a reference to the Queen's famous speech in 1992, which was a disastrous year for the royal family.