



**TORAH ACADEMY**  
of Bergen County

# קול תורה

**Parashat Ki Tavo**

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## WHAT'S THE SHOFAR ALL ABOUT?

by *Rabbi Nosson Rich*

It's doubtful that any of us have ever attended a wedding procession without the accompanying music. As much as we might wish otherwise, it's hard to imagine a ballgame without the standard cacophony of sounds in the background. In truth, virtually all of life's significant (and many of the less significant) events have their own theme song or soundtrack. And certainly, our emotional and meaningful journey through the month of Elul and the process of Teshuvah is no exception. Whether it is our efforts in prayer, good deeds, or any of the more general manifestations of repentance, it is the Shofar blast that provides the backdrop.

While the sound itself is strikingly simple and pure, the thoughts and motivations behind it are famously complex. Beyond the many suggestions as to how we are to properly focus on the Mitzvah of Shofar, the very purpose of these sounds is subject to debate. On the one hand, the Shofar is designed to serve as the original and ultimate alarm clock. Its jarring sound exhorts us to awaken from our spiritual slumber and hearken to the call of the Almighty. But far removed from any connection to religious self-improvement, the Shofar also serves to remind us of the awesome event of Akeidat Yitzchak. Each blow of the Shofar serves as a commemoration of the ultimate example of sacrifice in the service of God.

What are we to make of these two disparate motivations? Is it just a convenient coincidence that the Shofar evokes a response on two entirely distinct levels? Is it a testimony to rabbinic ingenuity and creativity that the simple sound can be used in completely dissimilar contexts?

Rav Shlomo Kluger, zt"l, suggests not. In his view, these two motifs are very much connected and, in fact, intertwined. Together, they comprise a complete approach to repentance and reconciliation with God.

The Akeidah is the supreme example of Zechut Avot (merits of our ancestors). In making a reference to it, we acknowledge our own shortcomings and the very real possibility that if we are judged purely on the basis of own actions and inactions, we may be found wanting. It is for that reason that we submit ourselves for judgment as part of a broader context. We are not merely

individual entities, but members of an illustrious nation, worthy of all kinds of special consideration. In a similar sense, we submit ourselves for judgment not only as singular personalities, but as fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, members of a community as bearers of a unique tradition. This is no slick trick to avoid justice. Rather, the more we associate with these contexts and the more we connect to this history, the more worthy of favorable judgment we become.

But the Shofar stridently insists that our responsibilities do not end there. As the Shofar "awakens us," it reminds us that our spiritual genes and our heritage alone are not sufficient. We must awaken in ourselves the energy to achieve our own personal potential. We must make every effort, despite previous failures, to earn our positive verdict on our own. We must use every moment of the month of Elul and the days between and including Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur to live up to the highest standards we can imagine for ourselves.

The relationship between these two ideas is perhaps best understood in the example of family. The fully developed child will reach a point where he or she takes pride in his/her ancestry. The child will recognize the sacrifices and accomplishments of the earlier generation, and will delight in the opportunity to share such a lineage. Without this, the child will lack role models and very likely will lack in self-esteem as well. Unquestionably, however, this is not the final step in the child's development. It is at this point that the child must commit not only to having pride in his family, but to becoming a source of pride to his parents and grandparents as well. This recognition and commitment are not separate steps, but rather parts of an integrated process of growth and development.

Throughout this month of preparation, the Shofar signals to us the need to stand tall and view our associations to family, community, and God with enormous pride. And it is with that realization that the Shofar heralds a recommitment to a path that will bring honor to those associations, and to all who will follow in the future.

## OPTIMAL MITZVAH PERFORMANCE

by *Shmuel Bak* ('18)

In this week's Parashah, Parashat Ki Tavo, the Pasuk relates, "Et Hashem He'emarta HaYom, Lihyot Lecha LEilokim VeLalechet BiDrachav VeLishmor Chukav UMitzvotav UMishpatav VeLishmo'a BeKolo," "You have distinguished Hashem today to be a God for you, and to walk in his ways, and to observe His decrees, His commandments, and His statutes, and to listen to His voice" (Devarim 26:17). Why does the Torah need to list all of these ways in which one could properly serve Hashem? Certainly a few,

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maybe even just one, of the characteristics would be found in someone who is a full believer and follower of Hashem?

The reason is that Mitzvot must be done in an exciting way that would also please Hashem. Mitzvot should not be done in a manner in which one feels forced to do them, for that would be like someone paying a debt while being under pressure, not with love and joy, as Hashem wants. Chazal explain this in the Gemara (Berachot 28b), which states regarding one who prays habitually and without joy, that his Tefillah is not complete. As mentioned above, the difference between doing Mitzvot with joy and doing them mundanely is compared to the difference between giving money that is owed to a lender and giving a gift to someone who did one a favor. Someone who gives money back to the lender lacks joy and always feels pressured to pay back the lender. However, when someone gives a gift, he gives it because he feels gratitude toward someone and feels happy to repay the person that did an act of kindness for him. In the case of the gift, the receiver is also happy because he feels that his hard work has been recognized.

Hashem, by putting several different phrases for how to serve Him in this Pasuk, tries to show Bnei Yisrael that worshipping Him should not come from a feeling of obligation, but rather from a feeling of recognition of the special acts and favors that He does for Bnei Yisrael on a daily basis. Worshipping Hashem, doing Mitzvot, and listening to His decrees should feel more like a gift to Hashem than a burden. With this attitude in mind, one feels happy to do every act of kindness, for doing so is essentially repaying Hashem.

Rav Moshe Feinstein explains why each term was specifically used in our Pasuk. First, the term "Lishmo'a BeKolo," "listen to His voice," is specifically used because the term means to act out of love so that He will find your actions pleasing. Second, the phrase "Lihyot Lecha LEilokim," "to be a God for you," refers to being faithful. Third, the phrase "Lalechet BiDrachav," "to walk in His ways," means to endeavor and to emulate His traits. Fourth, the expression "Lihmor Chukav UMitzvotav UMishpatav," "to observe His decrees, His commandments, and His statutes," means that Bnei Yisrael should perform meritorious acts just as they were commanded. These four expressions correspond to four phrases in the following Pasuk: "*Ki Am Kadosh Atah LaShem Elokecha Becha Bachar Hashem Elokecha Lihyot Lo LeAm Segulah MiKol HaAmim Asher Al Penei HaAdamah,*" "For you are a holy people to Hashem your God, Hashem your God has chosen you to be a special people to Himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of earth" (Devarim 7:6). We see from these two Pesukim that it is imperative to perform Mitzvot with the proper intentions and for the proper purposes.

## The Ultimate Supplier

by David Pearlman ('19)

Parashat Ki Tavo begins with the Mitzvah of Bikkurim. The farmer is told to take his first-ripened fruits to the Beit HaMikdash, present them to the Kohein, and recite a short prayer (Devarim 26:15). As Rav Elchanan Samet has pointed out, Bikkurim appear to be an extension of the Mitzvot of "Reishit," which include Mitzvot such as Reishit HaGez (the first of the wool of a flock), Pidyon HaBein and Bechor Beheimah (giving the first-born of a Kosher animal to the Kohein). Indeed, Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:39) lists Bikkurim in his list of Mitzvot of "Reishit" that he contends were commanded to Bnei Yisrael in order to cement the attribute of generosity within them. Interestingly, BeReishit Rabbah (1:4) teaches us that it was in the merit of the bringing of the Bikkurim that the world was created. Why is the Mitzvah of Bikkurim, as opposed to all other Mitzvot of "Reishit," so significant that it made the world worth being created?

Rav Eli Scheller answers that man was placed in this world with the mission of recognizing that Hashem is our creator as well as the creator of the universe. However, it is difficult for us to always be aware of this, since we are constantly caught up in the pressures of daily life. Amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life, we can erroneously conclude that our creative force makes us equals of God, complete masters of our universe.

The purpose of Bikkurim is to humble us and teach us that although we may invest hours of hard work in any of our pursuits, our creative capacity cannot even be compared to that of God. One may devote his time planting and caring for his field (unlike the other Mitzvot of "Reishit," which deal with newly-born livestock that do not require months of hard work to produce) and feel that he himself created his fruit, so it is important that he take those first fruits and acknowledge that they come from God.

Just last week, my Zaidy, Chaim Baruch ben Zavel, unfortunately passed away unexpectedly. Looking back at his life, I realize that he exemplified this positive attribute that we can learn from the Bikkurim. While being very successful in business, he still realized that everything comes from Hashem, and he had a very close relationship with Him. I hope that I will one day be as successful as he was while also maintaining a strong connection with Hashem.

## ISRAELI GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CHILLUL SHABBAT – AN UPDATED PERSPECTIVE OF AN AMERICAN RABBI AND A CALL TO ACTION TO AMERICAN JEWS<sup>1</sup> – PART ONE

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Israel's enemies have long sought to wage a war of words against the Jewish State with attempts to delegitimize the Jewish

<sup>1</sup> A special thank you to Keshet Israel of Washington, D.C., where I delivered a Shiur on this topic on Parashat Pinechas 5776. The many insights of the participants in the Shiur, many of whom hold

responsible positions in government and political think tanks, have greatly enriched our discussion.

State. The Israeli leadership takes these verbal attacks quite seriously as damage to Israel's image and regards them as threats to the vitality and even survival of the Jewish State. In fact, Tzahal (the Israeli Defense Forces) routinely sends a videographer into combat situations to record the events to defend Israel from its determined detractors. The fact that Tzahal risks the lives of the videographers by sending them into a combat zone demonstrates how seriously Tzahal takes these threats. Moreover, important IDF missions are sometimes postponed or even canceled if a videographer is not available to record Tzahal's activities.

The Israeli army spokesman is responsible for defending the moral legitimacy of Tzahal's activities against Israel's many detractors. The internet and handheld cameras used by those who are eager to defame the Jewish State make the job of the Israeli army spokesman that much more challenging. The world of news has become extremely fast-paced and news agencies demand immediate responses from the Israeli army spokesman to anti-Tzahal/Israel claims. If the Tzahal spokesman does not respond immediately<sup>2</sup>, then the anti-Israel claim is broadcasted worldwide, causing considerable damage to Israel's image.

#### *The Halachic Issue*

Religious soldiers serving in the office of the Tzahal spokesman have raised the following Halachic question to the Israeli army rabbinate: Are they permitted to violate Shabbat or Yom Tov for the purpose of public relations? Tzahal is undoubtedly permitted to wage war on Shabbat if no reasonable alternative exists, since the military activities are waged with the goal of directly save lives.

The question is whether the waging of the war of public relations qualifies as a war that directly saves lives and therefore justifies Chillul Shabbat. Avihud Schwartz, a young man who worked in the Beit Midrash (think tank) of Israel's army rabbinate, discusses this issue in an essay printed in volume 30 (published in 2010) of the Israeli Torah journal "Techumin." While the "Techumin" essay is an excellent essay and it is well worth sharing its main points, an updated perspective from an American rabbi can contribute significantly to the analysis and diagnosis of the issue as well as in shaping a policy for the Israeli army.

Perhaps one could argue that the media is to be regarded as a world of falsehoods where truth is not a sacred value and thus

waging the media war is fundamentally an exercise in futility<sup>3</sup>. The critical question is, what is the actual damage incurred by the State of Israel when it loses a public relations battle? Are the consequences simply economic? Is Israel's security impacted? The answer may very well vary from case to case. A specific focus in this essay is the impact of Israel's image upon the American government's relationship with the State of Israel.

The "Techumin" essay addresses the following four examples of situations that might be regarded as "borderline Pikuach Nefesh" (although some of these situations lean more to Pikuach Nefesh than others). One such situation is where Palestinian media claim that Tzahal deliberately destroyed a mosque and Israeli soldiers in the area vehemently deny the charge. Is the Tzahal spokesman permitted to broadcast a response to counter the Palestinian charge? Israel's failure to promptly respond will not be interpreted by outsiders as emerging from respect for Shabbat or Yom Tov but rather as a concession that the anti-Israel accusation is true. Such an unanswered accusation is quite dangerous as it may spark rioting by some from the Arab community.

A common tactic of some of Israel's enemies is to fire at Israelis from a crowded civilian area. If Israel captures on film, for example, Arab terrorists firing at Israel from the top of a civilian apartment building, may the Tzahal spokesman broadcast this event on Shabbat in order to justify a Tzahal military response that may unavoidably cause the loss of civilian life<sup>4</sup>? The broadcasting of such a film will mitigate the severity of the world reaction to Israel's accidentally causing Arab civilian injuries and/or deaths. Does the protection of Israel's image in this situation justify Chillul Shabbat or Yom Tov? Similarly, if an Israeli drone films Palestinians placing explosives in an ambulance, may Israel's spokesman broadcast this event on Shabbat in order to discourage such Palestinian behavior<sup>5</sup>? The last example was posed by a religious Israeli soldier working in the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. If the American government demands on Shabbat or Yom Tov an immediate

<sup>2</sup> Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, in his celebrated essay "Kol Dodi Dofeik" (written in 1956) mentions the pride he experiences when he reads in a newspaper that the response of the Israeli government is not yet known since its offices are closed on Shabbat. Journalists at the time had the integrity to note that the Israeli response will be forthcoming. Today, if the Israeli government does not offer an immediate response, Israel defamation can "go viral" with all the attendant damage to Israel. Few journalists will have the patience and/or integrity to note that the Israeli response will be forthcoming after the Jewish Sabbath or holiday. The notion of not receiving an immediate response is an alien concept in the current environment. The culture of an immediate response is even more pronounced in the contemporary media culture.

<sup>3</sup> A cynic might also claim that the media is incurably biased against Israel and that attempts to preserve a positive image for Israel is futile. While there is some basis for this approach, this approach ignores the fact that polls consistently demonstrate that a

large majority of Americans remain supportive for the Jewish State. Preserving this majority support is critical to maintaining American military and political support of Israel. In addition, Israel's Foreign Ministry has recently scored many successes in drawing a wide variety of countries closer to Israel. As reported by Wikipedia, Israel has diplomatic ties with 157 of the 192 member states of the United Nations as well as with Vatican City and the European Union. It seems that Israel's public relations effort have borne significant fruit.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion as to why Halachah permits such military activity if no reasonable alternative exists, see *Gray Matter 3* (pages 211-223).

<sup>5</sup> This case is difficult to justify Chillul Shabbat. One would have to argue that, if not broadcast immediately, it would be disregarded as "antiquated," since the contemporary shelf life of news is exceedingly short.



justification/explanation of an activity conducted by Tzahal, does this warrant Chillul Shabbat or Yom Tov<sup>6</sup>?

*The Responses of Four Leading Religious Zionist Posekim*

Rav Nachum Rabinovitch, the Rosh Yeshivah of the Yeshivat Hesder<sup>7</sup> of Ma'alei Adumim, appropriately responds that "the Halachic response to this issue is not at all simple and clear." He concludes that each case must be judged upon its own merit as to whether it qualifies as Pikuach Nefesh and that it is impossible to present an all-encompassing answer of permissible or forbidden regarding this topic.

Rav Rabinovitch correctly fears unwarranted and wholesale violation of Shabbat on the one hand, but he also fears for inadequate preservation of Israel's safety. If our enemies knew that Israel's public relations office does not function on Shabbat, they would easily manipulate the situation to their advantage and our loss. On the other hand, not every situation, as is clear from the examples we presented, warrants Chillul Shabbat. Thus, each case must be evaluated separately as to its potential impact on Israel's security.

Rav Dov Lior, the Rav of Kiryat Arba/Chevron and Rosh Yeshivah of its Yeshivat Hesder, permits activities that are forbidden only rabbinically on Shabbat or Yom Tov but forbids violating Biblical level prohibitions for the purposes of public relations. Rav Lior defines telephone calls and writing on the computer as forbidden only on a rabbinic level. Rav Lior regards public relations as "indirect Pikuach Nefesh" that is analogous to manufacturing ammunition which is usually not produced even in war time.

Rav Lior suggests that Biblically forbidden activities, such as driving a motor vehicle, should be performed by a Nochri in case of legitimate need. He suggests that a trustworthy Nochri be designated to drive items such as a disc from a battlefield to military headquarters in Tel Aviv<sup>8</sup>.

Rav Shlomo Levy, the Rosh Kollel of Yeshivat Har Etzion, responds similarly that in general only rabbinic level prohibitions may be violated for the sake of Israel's public relations and that arrangements should be made in advance wherever possible to have Nochrin perform forbidden tasks on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Rav Levy compares this situation to Chazal's concern for "Eivah" (hatred or enmity), for which they consider permitting violation of rabbinic prohibitions (see the many sources addressing this issue, cited in *Nishmat Avraham* Volume 1 to Orach Chaim 330:2). Rav Levy wisely suggests that experts should be consulted to help formulate guidelines<sup>9</sup> as to which public relations situations

require immediate attention on Shabbat and which may be delayed until after Shabbat.

Rav Yisrael Rosen of Machon Tzomet, an Israeli institute dedicated to utilizing technology to solve Halachic challenges, argues for utilizing Machon Tzomet equipment in the office of the Tzahal spokesman. He notes that the necessary equipment has already been developed by Machon Tzomet. These include telephones which operate on the "Gerama" principle (accomplishing a task in an indirect manner) and computer keyboards which operate by changing electric current rather than by completing electric circuits. Rav Rosen writes that this type of equipment was developed specifically for these types of "gray areas" so prevalent in the area of security and medicine, which may be defined as essential but not life threatening.

*Conclusion*

We will, God willing, complete our discussion of this topic next week by highlighting an enlightening and surprising interaction between religious Israeli diplomat Yehuda Avner and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

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<sup>6</sup> With Sabbath observant Jews holding very high offices in the United States government (such as Senator Joseph Lieberman and Jack Lew, who served as the President's Chief of Staff from 2012-2013), some have suggested that these high placed officials can explain the reason for delay to United States government officials. However, a Torah Academy of Academy of Bergen County graduate who has worked with the government for many years noted that the idea of a twenty-four hour delay due to Sabbath observance is completely foreign and unfathomable to many and would not be received well by government officials.

<sup>7</sup> Students who study at Yeshivot Hesder serve in the Israeli army, usually in combat units. Each of the four Posekim cited in this essay are Religious

Zionists who are deeply committed to the continued thriving of Medinat Yisrael.

<sup>8</sup> The utilization of Nochrin, as well as the use of telephone and computer, appears to provide adequate public relations responses.

<sup>9</sup> Formal guidelines are a must in these scenarios to avoid hesitation and delay when a timely response is sorely needed. The Yerushalmi (Yoma 8:5; cited by the Mishnah Berurah 328:6) condemns Torah scholars who are posed with the question as to whether danger to life warrants the desecration of Shabbat. The Mishnah Berurah explains that a Torah scholar should publicize the fact that one must desecrate the Shabbat in case of Pikuach Nefesh, in order that if an emergency arises people respond expeditiously and without delay.