

# ***NITZAVIM - THE CALL OF THE SHOFAR***

## ***Isaiah 62:4***

No longer shall “forsaken” be said of you, and “desolate” shall no longer be said of your land, for you shall be called “My desire is in her,” and your land, “inhabited,” for the Eternal desires you, and your land shall be inhabited.

לֹא-יִאָמַר לְךָ עוֹד עֲזוּבָה וּלְאֶרֶץ לֹא-יִאָמַר עוֹד  
שְׁמָמָה כִּי לְךָ יִקְרָא חֲפִצֵי-בָהּ וּלְאֶרֶץ בְּעוֹלָהּ  
כִּי-תִפֹּץ יִקְוֶה לְךָ וְאֶרֶץ תִּבְעַל:

**From *Speaking Torah, Volume 2* (by Rabbi Art Green, pp. 172-73)**

*Shemu'ah Tovah* (Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev)

Regarding the *shofar* blasts, a fine parable partly by my holy teacher R Berish [= Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezeritch]:

“There was a king who sent his only son away to a distant land, for some reason known only to him. As time passed, the son became accustomed to the ways of the villagers among whom he lived. He became a coarse fellow, forgetting the niceties of life with the king. Even his mind and his most intimate nature grew coarse. In his mind he came to think ill of the kingdom.

“One day the son heard that the king was going to visit the province where he lived. When the king arrived, the son entered the palace where he was staying and began to shout out in a strange voice. His shout was in wordless sound, since he had forgotten the king’s language. When the king heard his son’s voice and realized that he had even forgotten how to speak, his heart was filled with compassion.

“This is the meaning of sounding the *shofar*.”

But once he told it this way:

“One of the king’s servants had a family member of whom the king thought very highly. In fact he loved him so much that he had his image engraved (*toke'a*) on his throne. That way he could constantly look at his lovely form and take pleasure in remembering him. On the day when the king’s servants were to be judged, they shouted out to the king: ‘Just look at that form carved on your throne, and you will be filled with compassion because of your love for us.’

“This is the meaning of sounding (*teki'ah*) the *shofar*. ‘The image of Jacob our Father is engraved beneath the Throne of Glory’ (*Tikkuney Zohar* t. 22, 65b).”

*Or Ha-Me'ir* (Zev Wolf of Zhitomyr)

I heard from the Maggid a parable he offered before the *shofar* sounding:

A king sent his beloved children to a far-off country. They spent long years there, exiled from their father’s table. But they were constantly concerned with how to get back, how to come to dwell again in the restful home of their father’s innermost royal court. How happy they had been when sharing in their father’s joy! How much better things were then than now!

They began to send affectionate messages to their father, hoping he would take pity on them and bring them back. But once they got close enough to the royal court, they saw that their father’s countenance was not the same as it had once been. They kept calling out and begging for his mercy, but they were met with silence.

After a long period of receiving no reply, the king's children began to wonder what they might yet do to reawaken their father's former love. "Why is it that we call out and receive no answer? Surely our father has no lack of mercy! There must be some reason for this."

They decided that maybe over the course of their years in that distant land they had forgotten the king's language. "We became so mixed up with other nations that we took on their ways and started speaking their language. We have no way to communicate with the king. That's why our words are not heard in his palace!"

So they decided to stop calling out in words or language. They would just let out a simple cry to arouse his mercy, since a cry without words can be understood by anyone.

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*Levi Yitshak and Ze'ev Wolf are both recalling a parable they heard from the Maggid in their youth. Their differing versions of it show us something about the process of how oral teachings are preserved and transformed by the time they reach us in documents often written down only years later and by third parties, the disciples of those who heard them.*

*There is a truth behind this parable, however it is told. What is the heart's forgotten language? Is there a language of God, once known to us, but now forgotten? What do we do when we realize we've lost the words of our heart's most native tongue?*

### ***On the Way to an Answer: A Poem for the Shofar***

(Stacey Zisook Robinson)

Do not text me;  
I will not notice,  
And may ignore it  
anyway.  
How can one hundred and  
forty of  
anything  
compel me  
to answer,  
unless I merely seek  
distraction  
and not return?

Do not leave a message  
that I will not listen to  
I will let the sounds wash over  
me in my  
inattentive attention,  
while I wait  
for the next thing  
to move me  
to the next thing,  
so that I can wait

for something  
to move me  
again.

Do not call  
Or cry out  
Or speak the words to me  
that You spoke  
to them--  
to Abraham  
who held a knife,  
Or his son  
who let him.  
I will not answer.  
I will not hear  
from the depths of this  
wilderness  
that is choked with  
the bits and bytes  
and slings  
and arrows  
of my days.

I will answer  
the sound of the shofar  
that stayed the hand  
that meant to slaughter;  
That rang out  
and tumbled the walls  
that surrounded my heart;  
That sang  
in aching and awesome  
mystery  
to announce  
the presence of God.  
I will hear  
in this wilderness,  
I will hear  
in my longing  
and I will turn  
and turn again  
and listen,  
and I will  
answer the shofar.