

ROSH HASHANAH

The Silent Shofar

2002 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

This week's Torah Talk is dedicated in memory of Rebbetzin Shoshana Raizel Soloveitchik, A"H, the founder and dean emeritus of Bais Yaakov of Monsey.

Most years we get to listen to the 100 blasts of the Shofar on both days of Rosh Hashanah. But this year, on the first day, which is Shabbos, the Shofar will be silent. Our Rabbis attach a great deal of importance to the sounding of the Shofar--it is, after all, one of the 613 Biblical Commandments...and yet, the Shofar will be silent. The Shofar reminds us of G-d's coronation at Mt. Sinai as our King, certainly an appropriate concept as we accept Him as our King on this holy Day of Judgment...and yet, the Shofar will be silent. The ram's horn reminds us of the almost-Sacrifice of Isaac; when Abraham unquestioningly accepted what he thought was G-d's commandment to give up his son. Abraham and Isaac were both prepared to give up everything for G-d, and only at the last moment did G-d provide a ram to be sacrificed instead. We ask G-d to remember Abraham and Isaac's commitment to Him and reward them by forgiving their children's sins...and yet, the Shofar will be silent. The wailing sound of the Shofar awakens within the Jewish soul the trembling feelings of regret for past transgressions and the commitment to Teshuvah --repentance...and yet, the Shofar will be silent. When we stand in judgment before the Master of the World, there is an accusing angel who acts as a prosecutor and reminds G-d of our misdeeds. Our Rabbis tell us that somehow the mystical sounds of the Shofar manage to confound and confuse the Accuser and disable his prosecution against the Nation of Israel...and yet, the Shofar will be silent. ----- Why is the Shofar silent? Is it because we can't blow the Shofar on Shabbos? Yes and no. Technically, it is permitted to sound the Shofar on Shabbos. The Sages banned Shofar blowing on Shabbos because of a fear that someone might accidentally carry a Shofar in the street on Shabbos. Amazing. Rosh Hashanah is the Yom HaDin, the Day of Judgment. G-d is deciding our fates for the coming year. Everything... who will live, and who will die; who will be healthy, who will be successful. We want to awaken G-d's compassion toward us; we want to be inspired, we want to be protected by our Father in Heaven. There is so much to be gained by each and every one of us fulfilling the Biblical Mitzvah of hearing the blasts of the Shofar, and yet, we give it all up because maybe someone will do something careless?! -----

----- If we are confused by this rule, it is only because we have no real appreciation of what Shabbos is all about. Rosh Hashanah is special because it is the Haras Olam, the

"Birthday of the World" --the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve. On Shabbos we are basically celebrating the very same thing! When a Jew observes the Sabbath, he gives testimony to his belief that G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. As important as it is to hear the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, it's simply not worth the risk that someone may upset the sacred equilibrium of the holy Shabbos by carrying a Shofar in the street. But what about all of the Shofar's mystical powers to assist us in our Rosh Hashanah prayers? How will we remind G-d and ourselves of our Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and their devotion? How will we coronate the Master of the World without the regal tones of the Shofar? Who will inspire us to improve our ways, and who will silence the Accusing Angel who wants G-d to deal harshly with us in Judgment? The answer? Shabbos. By observing the Sabbath we achieve all of these goals and more. We have no idea what we are accomplishing for ourselves and for our fellow Jews when we bring Shabbos into our lives. "It is a sign between Me and the Children of Israel that in six days G-d created Heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day, He rested." (Exodus, 31:17) Shabbos is a sign of G-d's Covenant. It is a weekly Rosh Hashanah; an absolutely essential component in our relationship with Him. **SHABBOS IS INFINITELY MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVEN THE SHOFAR!** Skip the Shofar and keep the Sabbath, say our sages, and we will still be able to coronate G-d as King and silence the Accusing Angel. ----- Isn't it amazing that Jews from all walks of life are magnetically drawn to the once- or twice-a-year event of the Sounding of the Shofar celebrating G-d's Creation of the world, but at the same time forget about the significance of G-d's special day that comes every week?! It is time to make a "New Years resolution" about Shabbos. Let those of us who are not yet Shomer Shabbos (Sabbath observers) make the commitment this Rosh Hashanah to make Shabbos more of a priority in our lives. Let us take on some specific aspect of Sabbath observance. Let us recommit ourselves to Shabbos. Let those of us who already consider ourselves to be Shomer Shabbos reexamine our own commitment to Shabbos--what we read, what we discuss, how special we treat Hashem's Day of Rest. If we will commit ourselves to Shabbos, we will enrich and inspire ourselves throughout the year---long after the sounds of Sunday's Shofar have faded away. May we all be inscribed and sealed for a good, sweet, successful, inspiring, and peaceful year. Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz