Jewish Tribune – Rosh Hashana/YK

**A Breath of Fresh Air**

Bechira – free will – is an axiom of our faith. As Isaac Bashevis Singer put it: “We must believe in free will. We have no choice in the matter.”

But our parsha tells us we do have a choice:

רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַטּוֹב וְאֶת הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת הָרָע ... וּבָחַרְתָּ בַּחַיִּים

See, I have set before you today, life and good, death and evil … choose life!

And perhaps it is this very choice which is at the root of the primary mitzva of Rosh Hashana – the shofar. And perhaps that is why we conclude Yom Kippur with the blow of the Shofar ringing in our ears as we set out for life, post Yom Kippur.

Let me explain.

Every human being is made up of a guf and a neshomo – a body and soul. There is a constant clash between the two. Our bodies pull us towards physicality and earthliness whereas our neshomo craves meaning and spirituality. Unlike angels, who just have souls and animals who just have a body, human beings must exercise bechira to make the right choices in life.

When did we first get bechira? At what point exactly could man first exercise this freewill?

The answer is recorded in the second perek of Bereishis - when Hashem gave us our neshomos, when he blew spiritual life into אדם הראשון.

וַיִּיצֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים, וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.

Then Hashem formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils

the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Bereishis 2;7)

There is a well known idea of the Vilna Gaon who explains the difference between a מושל and a מלך. A ruler rules regardless of the wishes of the people. A king, on the other hand, can only reign if his subjects recognise his sovereignty.

HKBH only became a מלך when man recognised Him as such. Prior to creation of man, myriads of angels may well sing sublime songs of praise to Hashem, but He was still only a מושל.

At what point exactly did Hashem become a King? At the moment of וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו, when HKBH blew spiritual life into אדם הראשון and gave him a neshomo allowing man to exercise bechira.

That is what tekias shofar commemorates - the moment HKBH became a מלך. To remind us of that momentous juncture in history, we proclaim Hashem’s Kingship, we re-live that moment when Hashem “became” King, when He blew into us and gave us the ability to recognise and coronate Him.

That is why tekias shofar is so important. It is not only a mitzva min HaTorah, it goes to the very core of our existence in this world – it is our raison d'être. It commemorates the moment human beings received their neshomo and the ability to choose to listen to HKBH.

And perhaps that is why we conclude Yom Kippur with the blow of the Shofar. Having worked through Ellul and the Aseres Yemei Teshuva and having experienced an uplifting Yom Kippur, we emerge from the potency of Neilah with the message of the shofar ringing in our ears. We are reminded that at the end of the day, that is what it is all about. We are a composed of a guf and a neshomo and our charge is to ensure that our neshomo leads the way and guides the guf to follow the will of Hashem.

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