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Voice and Prayer

שמע קולינו - "Hear our voice." We ask Hashem to hear our "voice". There is a big difference between a voice (*kol*) and a prayer (*tefillah*). A prayer is when we move our lips in prayer and we express ourselves through words. But a voice has no words to it.

The sound of the *shofar* is a sound that we hear, and it does not come wrapped in any words. When there are no words or letters, it is a voice, a *kol*.

In every word, there are the words as well as a sound\voice in it. During the rest of the year, we *daven* through *tefillah*; our voice is wrapped in the words we express through our power of speech. But during Elul and through Rosh HaShanah, there is not just *tefillah* - there is *shofar*, a sound\voice with no words to it. These days are about the inner essence of speech - which is the voice behind them.

Hearing Shofar In Elul: The Sound of Prayer

During Elul, when we blow *shofar* after *davening*, it's not merely that we have a *mitzvah* to hear *shofar*, and that the rest of our prayers are as usual. Rather, *because* we hear the *shofar* during these days, our prayers as well are given greater meaning.

The essence of these days of *Yomim Noraim* is that our prayers during these days are not mainly verbal. Our prayers during these days are mainly about the voice behind them, which is the essence of prayer.

We will explain the difference between verbal prayer and non-verbal prayer.

Tefillah (Verbal Prayer) Stems From Da'as (Understanding)

There are three aspects to *tefillah*\prayer: **1)** *Tefillah* is called "avodah of the heart", because in *tefillah*, our desires of our heart are expressed. **2)** The second aspect of *tefillah* is that our voice is heard when we pray. In Shemoneh Esrei, though, our voice cannot be heard, and it is only our lips which are heard. **3)** The third aspect of *tefillah* is the words of prayer that we express; man is defined as a social creature.

Tefillah is normally stemming from our power of *daas* (mind\awareness). A child cannot express himself properly, and the reason behind this is, because he has no *daas* yet. “*Daas* is hidden in the lips” – when one has *daas*, he can express himself properly, through the words of his mouth. So our power of speech is affected to the degree that we utilize our power of *daas*. The words we speak are a combination of letters, and *daas* is known as the connecting force.

A child cannot speak properly, because he has no *daas*. Yet, he still has a voice which he can express himself with and cry. It is written, “*Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.*” It is also written, “*Hear my voice, see the tears of my eyes.*” Even when a person has no *daas*, his voice can be heard. A child often cries, because all he has is his voice; he cannot express himself in any other way.

Shofar and Crying: A Sound of Prayer Without Words

During these days of Elul, in which we hear *shofar*, it is mainly a time to use our voice, the essence behind our prayers. It is to realize that our cries can be heard even if we cannot express ourselves properly, like a child who cries to his father because he has no other way to express himself.

Hearing the *shofar* is to hear a sound of a cry. The Rambam says that *shofar* is a hint to us that we need to be awakened. What is its message? The superficial understanding is that it means for us to “beautify our actions”, for *Shofar* is an allusion to the words “*Shapru maaseichem*”, “beautify [improve] your deeds”. This is true, but the inner aspect of hearing *shofar* is to hear the sound behind it – to realize that we need to use our voice and cry to Hashem.

Rosh HaShanah is the beginning of the year – it is like when we are a child, who is at the beginning of his life, who can only express himself through his voice and crying. During these days of Elul, we can be like a young child in how we relate to Hashem as our Father, and cry to Him, even if we don’t know how to express ourselves properly.

Our Rabbis wrote that if a person can’t get himself to cry easily during Elul, he should try to do things that get him to cry. The point of this is not to act mechanically. The point is to try to enter inward into ourselves, to the part in us that is like a child which calls innocently to Hashem as a child calls to its mother.

The sound of the *shofar* during Elul adds to our voice of crying. On Rosh HaShanah all voices are nullified to one sound, the sound of the *shofar*.

Using Your ‘Inner Child’ To Cry To Hashem

We all had a time in which we were a child. Our soul has gone through much since we were children, until today. Deep down there is a “child” still in us; it is just covered over. Each of us was once pure at the beginning, and we had the power to cry to our source. We may have forgotten that we can do that, but we still have that power.

‘Day of Remembrance’: Remembering Your Beginning

Rosh HaShanah is called *Yom HaZikaron*, “Day of Remembrance”, and the simple meaning of this is because Hashem remembers the act of Creation on Rosh HaShanah. But the deeper meaning is because on Rosh HaShanah we can remember ourselves, all our actions, so that we can repent. We can remove all the concealment on us by remembering our beginning point.

Rosh HaShanah can make us remember who we truly are and thus cause us to do true *teshuvah*. But even more so, it is the day to remember our “first day” of Creation – the original state of our soul, when we a child, when we were pure and we could cry innocently.

That remembrance is not merely an intellectual awareness. It is a power in the soul to remember its beginning. When we remind ourselves of it, our soul is connected to what *shofar* is.

Connecting To The Sound of the Shofar

Even without having this awareness, we are still obligated in *shofar* of course, but the essence of *shofar* will be lost. The essence of Rosh HaShanah is *Yom Teruah*, "Day of Sound", that there is no other sound on that day except the sound of *shofar*, the sound of that beginning cry, which we remind ourselves of.

This is how our soul can connect to the *shofar* and hear it in an inner way. Without hearing *shofar* in this way, a person is being spiritually deaf.

The Power of Crying

שמע קולינו, "Hear our voice" – we are asking that our voice not only be heard in prayer, but that the essence of our prayers should be "avodah of the heart", from how we would cry as a child.

Tefillah is usually with *daas* – our awareness that can be expressed with our power of speech. But it begins with avodah of the heart, with the will of a person, the yearnings from the depths of the heart.

Our power to cry (*bechi*) is a deeper power that we have than the power of *daas*; whether it is to cry out of joy, or pain.

In the month of Av, when cried from sadness. In Elul, we do not cry from sadness, but because crying is a form of prayer. In a deeper sense, we cry in Elul because of the yearning for closeness with Hashem during these days.

During the rest of the year, there is also *tefillah*, but during these days of Elul, the *tefillah* is not just from our mouth; it is rather with the sound of the *shofar* – it is from the "avodah of the heart". It begins in the heart, and it is not just from inspiration and emotion, but from crying – the innermost depths of the heart.

Sometimes we cry from missing something; that is also part of why we cry in Elul. We are indeed missing certain spiritual levels, and we need to be in pain from this and cry about it. But the deeper aspect of why we cry in Elul in our prayers is because of the closeness with Hashem, "**Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li**", ("I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me"), like a child who cries for its mother – as it is written, "Like an infant on its mother's lap."

Perhaps that's why Hashem made it that *yeshiva bochurim* return to yeshiva in Elul and they become homesick – to remind ourselves of how much we should miss our Father and cry for Him.

During these days of Elul we can cry in prayer just as the *yefas toar* (captive woman) is given 30 days to cry and mourn her father. Our soul came down onto this world and yearns to return to her Father in heaven.

The crying during these days is the yearning of the soul to return to our Father. The *tefillos* we *daven* these days are not just verbal and with *daas*. They are from our actual voice itself, from the deep crying of our heart, from our yearnings – not the crying of pain we cried last month in Av, and not to merely cry over what we are afraid about, but to cry out of yearning for Hashem.

Revealing The Soul's Yearning For Hashem

The more we remove the layers from ourselves, the more we reveal our soul's yearning for Hashem. It is written, *"My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living Almighty."* That describes Elul very well - to cry tears of yearning, for Hashem.

This is the meaning if the possuk, *"Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet."* The "sweetness" of our voice is when we cry out of yearning for Hashem.

This is the essence of our *avodah* during these days. The *tefillos* in Elul we express are the outer part of our *avodah*, and the inner layer of our *avodah* in Elul is to yearn, to truly yearn - for Him, the Blessed One.

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