

# The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Parashat Hashavua  
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This parasha series is dedicated  
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PARASHAT BEHA'ALOTEKHA

## **The Trumpets** **By Rav Yehuda Rock**

Rambam comments (*Taanit* 1:1) as follows on the commandment concerning the trumpets as set forth in this week's *parasha*:

It is a positive commandment from the Torah to cry out and to sound the trumpets for any calamity that befalls the community, as it is written: "By an enemy that oppresses you, you shall sound the trumpets." In other words, for whatever distresses you – such as drought, pestilence, locusts etc. – you should cry out over them, and sound the trumpets.

Thus, there is a biblically ordained obligation to sound the trumpets at a time of communal distress, and its source is in our *parasha*. It would seem that the halakhic perception of this commandment is molded largely around the above words of the Rambam. In this *shiur*, our examination of the relevant verses from the Torah will show that the Rambam's interpretation is not the only possible one – neither on the level of the literal meaning, nor in terms of halakhic ruling.

Our *parasha* states as follows (10:1-10):

- (1) God spoke to Moshe, saying:
- (2) Make for yourself two trumpets of silver; of a solid piece you shall make them, that they shall be for you for calling the assembly and for the journeying of the camps.
- (3) And when they sound them, the entire assembly will gather at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.
- (4) And if they sound only one [of them], then [only] the princes – the heads of the thousands of Israel – will gather to you.
- (5) When you sound the alarm, the camps that lie on the eastern side will move on.
- (6) And when you sound the alarm a second time, the camps on the southern side will follow; they will sound an alarm for their journeys.
- (7) For gathering the congregation you shall sound a blast, but not an alarm.

- (8) And the children of Aharon, the *kohanim*, shall sound the trumpets, and they will be for you for an eternal statute, for all your generations.
- (9) And if war comes upon you in your land by an enemy that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets and be remembered before the Lord your God, and be saved from your enemies.
- (10) And on your festive days, and your days of solemn assembly, and the beginnings of your months, you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings, that they may be a memorial for you before your God; I am the Lord your God.

In terms of structure, this unit resembles other halakhic units (the commandment concerning the first month; the unit detailing the order of the Yom Kippur service; the commandment concerning the red heifer) in that the first part represents a commandment directed specifically to that generation, while the second part is a commandment for all generations. All of these halakhic units are introduced with a statement pertaining to the commandment for all generations, as in our case: "And they will be for you for an eternal statute, for all your generations." Likewise, in all of these units (except for the commandment of the first month) the command directed towards that particular generation concludes with one or more halakhic points, related to the main halakhic subject but representing a sort of parenthetical comment in terms of the flow of the text. In our case, this refers to the phrase, "The children of Aharon, the *kohanim*, shall sound the trumpets." This is not an additional act that is being commanded, but rather a detail pertaining to that which has already been stated.

In terms of content, this unit commands the fashioning of trumpets and the sounding of them in the desert in two ways:

1. To assemble the entire nation with a blast on both trumpets, or to gather just the princes by means of a blast on one trumpet.
2. To serve as a sign to the tribes encamped around the *Mishkan*, indicating that they should begin journeying.

The Torah emphasizes that the sign for the camps to journey on is a "*teru'a*" blast (translated here as an "alarm"), while to call the congregation together a "*teki'a*" ("blast") is sounded.

For future generations, too, the trumpets serve a dual purpose: they are meant for sounding a "*teru'a*" in a situation of war, or a "*teki'a*" to be sounded over the sacrifices on special days.

A fundamental question that arises here is, to what extent is the commandment as directed to the generation of the desert connected to the commandment as directed to future generations?

In the other halakhic units that we mentioned above, with a similar structure to our text, the relationship between the two parts is clear: the second part is built upon and relates directly to the first part. Thus, the festival of Pesach for all generations is to serve as a memorial to the Pesach in Egypt, as stated explicitly in the verse that connects them (*Shemot* 12:14): "And this day shall be for you as a remembrance, and you shall commemorate it as a festival to God for your generations; you shall commemorate it as an eternal statute." In the *parasha* detailing the order of the Yom Kippur service, as explained by the Vilna Gaon (end of *Sefer Chokhmat Adam*), the first part – with its detailed description of the order of the service – is a personal commandment directed to Aharon himself, while the second part, starting with the words, "It shall be for you an eternal statute" (*Vayikra* 16:29), is a command for future generations, such that the Kohen Gadol should repeat, every year, the actions that Aharon was commanded to perform. In the case of the red heifer, the first part is a command to Elazar to prepare the ashes of the heifer – with no indication, at this stage, of when and how these ashes are to be used. The second part, starting with the words, "It shall be for Bnei Yisrael, and for the stranger who dwells in their midst, as an eternal statute" (*Bamidbar* 19:10), deals with the laws of impurity associated with a corpse, and the manner of purification from such impurity. It is in the context of that process that the ashes of the red heifer are to be used.

In our case, however, the connection between the two parts seems to be far hazier. The situations in which "blasts" and "alarms" are to be sounded in future generations are completely different from the situations requiring trumpet blasts in the desert.

Ibn Ezra attempts to bridge the gap between the two parts:

"And they shall be for you as an eternal statute<sup>1</sup> – for the camps are journeying in order to wage war, as we see from Moshe's words as the Ark moves. Hence what the statute means is – You shall do thus, that the *kohanim* should sound the trumpets when they go off to war, to fight, to the land of their enemies, and likewise when an enemy comes to your land and you gather to wage war against him."

In other words, the journeying of the camps is meant to proceed (were it not for Israel's sins) straight to *Eretz Yisrael*, to wage war in order to conquer the land. This we see from Moshe's words further on in the *parasha* (10:35): "And it was, when the Ark journeyed, that Moshe said: Arise, Lord, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee from before You." The camps are camps of war, organized around the *Mishkan* under their military banners, following the military census of *Parashat Bamidbar*. In view of this, suggests Ibn Ezra, we may say that the "alarm" to be sounded for the journeying of the camps is required owing to the military character of the journey. For this reason, the command for future generations to sound the trumpets at a time of war is a direct continuation of the command to the generation of the desert to sound the trumpets for the journeying of the camps.

What, then, is the nature of the "alarm" to be sounded on the trumpets at a time of war? Ibn Ezra explains (in his second explanation of the verse):

"The alarm is a reminder to people to cry out to God."

In other words, the danger and distress of war necessitate a call and cry to God, and the trumpet alarm is the sign reminding Bnei Yisrael to do so. The result is that "you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and be saved from your enemies." The trumpets remind the nation to cry out, and the cry "reminds" God of Israel, as it were; He answers their prayer and delivers them.

As we saw above, Rambam too regards the obligation of sounding the trumpets at a time of war as being related to the need to cry out to God in a situation of distress and danger. However, to Rambam's view, it is not the trumpet blast that reminds the nation to cry out; rather, the blast itself is the "cry": "It is a positive commandment from the Torah to cry out and to sound the trumpets for any distress that comes upon the community... for whatever distresses you – such as drought, pestilence, locusts etc. – you should cry out over them, and sound the trumpets."

This exegetical approach, connecting the obligation of sounding the trumpets with the danger and anguish of war – and even broadening the obligation to include other types of danger – has its source in the words of *Chazal*, in the *Sifri* (*Beha'alotekha, piska 76*):

"Rabbi Akiva said: The Torah mentions only war; from where do I deduce (that the obligation applies also in the event of) blight, plague...(etc.)? We learn this from the words, 'By an enemy that oppresses you.' (This means,) for any distress or anguish that may befall the community."

What is missing from this exegetical approach is the connection to the other parts of the *mitzva* – the blast for the purposes of assembling the congregation and the blast sounded over the sacrifices. Ibn Ezra's explanation makes no connection between these two parts of the *mitzva*. His interpretation implies that the words, "They shall be for you an eternal statute for your generations" – which links the commandment for that specific generation and the commandment for all future generations – are relevant principally with regard to the "alarm" sounded for war.

Attention should be paid to the fact that there is an element that is common to the two future uses of the trumpets: the matter of "memory" or "commemoration."

Both in the context of sounding the trumpets for war, and in the context of sounding them over the sacrifices, the Torah notes that the trumpets recall Israel before God. With regard to the situation of war, we read: "You shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and be delivered from your enemies"; concerning the sacrifices we are told: "They shall be for you as a remembrance before your God."

It is difficult to imagine that this common element is coincidental. What this means is that the crux of the commandment for generations is the use of the trumpets as a remembrance before God.

We have already noted that from the structure of the unit it arises that there must be some fundamental connection between the first part – the commandment for that generation – and the second part – the commandment for future generations. Hence we may come to think that the commandment for the generation of the desert, too, essentially involved using the trumpets for a remembrance before God.

However, at this point we encounter a difficulty: while the second part of the *parasha* emphasizes – twice – the matter of remembrance before God, the first part makes no mention of this concept at all. We conclude, then, that the *mitzva* of the trumpets, as directed to the generation of the desert, was not meant for remembrance at all. But then we are once again left with no apparent connection between the trumpets of the desert generation and the *mitzva* for future generations. Why, then, does the Torah bind these two different *mitzvot* together in the same unit, within a literary structure that would appear to connect them?

As usual, we will try to understand the unit in question against the background of its literary context.

Immediately prior to the matter of the trumpets, in preparation for the journeying of the camps, the Torah describes the procedure for the journey. It is signaled in accordance with the cloud of the Divine Presence, and our unit emphasizes the fact that the journeying and encamping are decided by God's word (9:15-23):

"By God's word Bnei Yisrael would journey, and by God's word they would encamp... and when the cloud stayed... then Bnei Yisrael would keep the Lord's watch and would not journey... By God's word they would encamp, and by God's word they would journey... by God's word they would encamp and by God's word they would journey; they kept God's watch according to God's word through Moshe."

The expression "by God's word" is repeated no less than seven times, and this is unquestionably the main message of the *parasha* – an expression of God's absolute authority and control, and Bnei Yisrael's observance of His rules. It seems that the use of the trumpets in the desert should be understood in the same way: the gathering of the nation, and the journeying of their camps, are in accordance with the signal of the trumpets, expressing God's command. The subjugation of all public activity to God's command expresses God's Kingship and His absolute leadership of the nation in the desert.

The above provides a reasonable explanation for the use of the trumpets in the desert. However, we have already seen that the verses specify that the use of the trumpets for future generation would be for a remembrance before God. The question remains how to connect the two contexts, as the structure of the unit demands.

Attention should be paid to another important point in the *parasha*: the use of the word "*ve-hayu* – they shall be," i.e., the plural. This word first appears in the transition from the fashioning of the trumpets to their use by the generation of the desert: "They shall be for you for

calling the assembly and for the journeying of the camps" (verse 2). It appears again in the transition between the commandment for the generation of the desert and the commandment for future generations: "They shall be for you for an eternal statute for your generations" (verse 8); and then a third time in the conclusion, in the description of the result of this remembrance before God (verse 10).

Thus, the text emphasizes that what binds the different parts of the unit together are the trumpets themselves. In other words, the very trumpets that were used by the generation of the desert should be sounded in future generations. Admittedly, the halakha sets down that the trumpets for future generations were not the same ones that Moshe used (*Menachot* 28a-b). Nevertheless (and perhaps specifically for that reason) the fact that the text speaks as though they were the same, teaches us that from an existential perspective there is continuity between the use of the trumpets in the desert and their use in future generations.

Hence we may explain that the "remembrance before God" that is referred to here means not only that the actions of Bnei Yisrael, in sounding the trumpet blasts and alarms, arouse God's attention, but also that the use of the trumpets in future generations recalls to God the use of the trumpets by the generation of the desert.

God tells Israel, "I remember in your favor the kindness of your youth, how you walked after Me in the wilderness, in an unsown land. Israel is holy to God, the first of His produce; all who devour him shall be held guilty; evil will come upon them" (*Yirmiyahu* 2:2-3). Israel's journey through the desert, following God's command and in accordance with His instructions, are described in our *parasha*: "By God's word they would encamp and by God's word they would journey; they kept God's watch according to God's word through Moshe." It is the remembrance of this youthful kindness and devotion that brings God to deliver *Am Yisrael* from their enemies, as described in our text: "And you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies."

Now we understand why the concept of remembrance appears only in connection with the commandment for future generations: the connection between the two parts of the *parasha* is not one of continuity between two identical forms of fulfillment of the command, in the wilderness and for future generations (as is the case in the unit prescribing the Yom Kippur service). Rather, the connection takes the form of an historical event that is remembered for all generations. In this sense, our *parasha* resembles the unit that speaks of the first month. The only difference concerns who does the remembering. In the case of *parashat ha-chodesh*, it is *Am Yisrael* who must remember, in every generation, the Pesach in Egypt. In our case, *Am Yisrael* must recall to God, in every generation, the youthful devotion of the generation of the desert.

Obviously, it is not a technical remembrance, an external symbolism devoid of inner significance. All acts of remembrance in the Torah are built around some significant object or event that is part of the process being remembered. In order to remember the Exodus from Egypt, we do not chance upon some technical symbol to recall the event; rather, we recreate the *matza*

as our bread of affliction, also expressing the haste of the departure with faith in God, as well as the Pesach sacrifice, expressing rejection of Egyptian culture and acceptance of the yoke of God's Kingship. Likewise in our case we may say that the trumpets are selected to recall to God the generation of the desert because they expressed - for that generation and for future generations - the nation's response and subjugation to God's Providence and His leadership. Thus, the blasts and alarms sounded on the trumpets in the future will be "trumpet blasts of the king" (*Bamidbar* 23:21); they express the acceptance of God's Kingship and recall to God the generation in which His Kingship was accepted absolutely.

Thus, the blasts and alarms sounded on the trumpets also express God's Kingship in another way: they represent royal ceremoniousness.

It should be emphasized that we do not mean to suggest that the substance of the "remembrance" is merely the kindness of youth of Israel's history. The verse states explicitly, "And you will be remembered": God will remember and redeem Israel, and by virtue of this He will also deliver them from their enemies. We mean merely to point out that the recollection of Israel's youthful devotion adds a further dimension to their remembrance before God, intensifying God's loving and merciful response to their call.

We can now understand what *Chazal* are telling us in the *Sifri* (*Beha'alotekha, piska 72*):

"God spoke to Moshe, saying: Make for yourself two trumpets of silver' - Why is this unit set down?

Because the Torah says: 'By God's word they would encamp and by God's word they would journey.' What I understand from this is that since they journeyed at God's command and encamped at God's command, there was no apparent need for the trumpets. Therefore God says: 'Make for yourself two trumpets of silver.' The text is telling us that even though they journeyed by God's command and encamped at God's command, they needed the trumpets."

The commentators are perplexed by this Beraita. Do the words, "By God's word they would encamp," not clearly indicate that there was no need for the trumpets? What is the Beraita telling us?

According to our analysis above, the message is clear: the trumpets expressed, for the generation of the desert, the acceptance of God's authority and leadership in the desert. However, this acceptance is expressed by the very fact of journeying on or staying put on the basis of the cloud's movements and God's commands to Moshe. This would indeed suggest that the trumpets were superfluous.

Why, then, did God nevertheless insist on having the generation of the desert fashion trumpets, not relying on the very fact of the stops and starts of the journey following exactly the signals of the Divine cloud?

The trumpets are described only in the context of this halakhic unit, which – as we noted on the basis of its literary structure – binds the commandment for that generation with the commandment for future generations. This suggests that their main importance, for the generation of the desert, was indeed to serve as the basis for the remembrance in future generations. The journeying and encamping at God's command was something that could not be replicated in future generations, but the blasts and alarms sounded on the trumpets could be reenacted.

It remains for us to explain the situations in which the Torah requires that the remembrance of the trumpets be performed in future generations. The second situation – sounding them over the sacrifices of holy days – is clear: the most appropriate context in which to proclaim God's coronation is in the Sanctuary, and especially at those times when Bnei Yisrael are gathered there ("your holy convocations"). The gathering of the nation (or the princes) likewise takes place at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The blast sounded over the festive sacrifices also recalls the gathering of the people at the Tent of Meeting in terms of the specific sound: a "blast" (*teki'a*) rather than an "alarm" (*teru'a*).

The first situation – sounding the alarm at a time of war – is more difficult to explain, since according to our interpretation the blast is neither an expression of prayer or crying out in the face of danger (as Rambam maintains), nor a reminder to Bnei Yisrael to cry out to God (as Ibn Ezra suggests). How, then, are we to connect an expression of acceptance of God's Kingship, and a recollection of our actual acceptance, with a situation of war?

One possibility is that since the recalling of the devotion of the nation's youth brings God to protect *Am Yisrael* and deliver them from their enemies, the danger and distress of war require the use of the ceremonious memorial in order to be saved. According to this explanation, the Torah commands the sounding of the trumpets in a situation of war because in such a situation there is a need for "you shall be delivered from your enemies," and the means of affecting this is the recalling of the youthful devotion of Israel before God. This may be the assumption underlying Rabbi Akiva's opinion in the *Sifri*, which extends the commandment of sounding the trumpets to include other situations of danger.

However, there is also another possibility. As noted, the "alarm" (*teru'a*) – rather than the *teki'a* – blast – served the generation of the desert as a sign for the camps to journey, and future generations in a situation of war. The journeying of the camps, as Ibn Ezra explains, had the character of going out to war. Contrary to Ibn Ezra's opinion, however, it would seem that the feeling accompanying the journey would not be one of distress and danger, but rather a sense of absolute faith in God's victory over the enemies of Israel – who are the enemies of God. "And it was, when the Ark moved on, that Moshe said: Arise, God, let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee from before You" (10:35). It is this atmosphere that would seem to render it appropriate to sound the *teru'a* on the trumpets: it is the trumpet blast of the King Who goes out to conquer His enemies. A situation of war therefore represents an appropriate occasion to express God's continuous Kingship over the nation, from its earliest history until the present.

Above, we quoted Rabbi Akiva's opinion in the *Sifri*, extending the obligation of the *teru'a* at a time of war to other situations of danger. This is recorded as a minority opinion against the author of the *Sifri*. The Beraita in its entirety reads as follows:

"'By an enemy that oppresses you' – the text is speaking about the war of Gog and Magog. Do we conclude that the text is speaking of the war of Gog and Magog [alone], or about all the wars in the Torah? [In order to clarify this question,] the text says, 'And you will be delivered from your enemies.' But which war is there, where Israel is delivered from it and there is no subjugation that follows? The only such instance is the war of Gog and Magog. Indeed, the prophet says (*Zekharya* 14:3), 'God will go out and wage war against those nations.' What is the meaning of the words, 'And God will be King over all the earth' (ibid. 9)? Rabbi Akiva says: I include [in this command] only [such situations as] war, blight, illness, and a woman experiencing a difficult childbirth. How do we conclude [that is applies] also to a ship being thrown about at sea? The Torah states, 'By an enemy that oppresses you': i.e., for any type of distress that may come upon the community."

We can understand Rabbi Akiva's position: either he agrees with Ibn Ezra and Rambam, that the purpose of the trumpets at a time of war is to cry out to God and to be delivered (where according to Rambam's view the blast is itself the cry, and according to Ibn Ezra the trumpet blast is meant to arouse our cry); or he agrees with what we have said above – that the trumpet blast recalls the nation's youthful devotion in following God in the desert and accepting His Kingship and – in accordance with the first possibility that we noted above – that the most appropriate situation for recalling this memory is in a time of war, because of the danger and distress, requiring that Israel's merit be recalled before God in order for them to be delivered.

The opinion of the author of the Beraita, however, is not clear. What do Gog and Magog have to do with our *parasha*? How does he arrive at the conclusion that the rather unspecific description – "And if war comes upon you in your land by an enemy that oppresses you" – refers specifically to this unique war?

The Tanna appears to interpret the *parasha* in the same way that we have done: the *teru'a* recalls the nation's youthful devotion in following God and accepting His Kingship – but along the lines of the second possibility noted above, i.e., that the blast expresses faith in God's victory over His enemies; thus it is an appropriate opportunity to give expression to God's Kingship over the nation from its beginnings until the present time. This commandment assumes that in every war that Israel will fight in its land, Israel's victory will be assured. Indeed, this is as it should be: the nation was meant to undertake one single journey, signaled by the moving of the Ark, proceeding to conquer the land and live a life of Divine service in peace and security, with God watching over them and protecting them from every adversary. However, immediately after the verses of, "And it was when the Ark journeyed...", the Torah records a series of sins committed by the nation of Israel. The state of redemption was thereby violated, allowing the concept of exile to be reinvented, along with the possibility that God's salvation would not necessarily always be absolute and assured. Therefore, the *Sifri* concludes, the commandment is relevant only to a war

in which victory is assured – and that will happen only at the end of days, when Israel will be worthy, in the war of Gog and Magog.

The practical halakha is codified by Rambam in accordance with Rabbi Akiva. Other Rishonim maintain that a public fast day involves no requirement to sound the trumpets (see Rashi *Rosh Ha-shana* 26b; Ramban *Ta'anit* 14a). Perhaps their opinions are based on that of the Tanna Kama in the *Sifri*.

Obviously, our discussion here concerning the trumpets opens the door to an understanding of the sounding of the *shofar* on Rosh Ha-shana. According to one opinion in the Gemara, at the end of *Rosh Ha-shana* (34a), the unit discussing the trumpets serves as the model from which we deduce the laws of sounding the *shofar* on Rosh Ha-shana. We shall not undertake a comprehensive analysis of the significance of the *shofar* blasts on Rosh Ha-shana, but it is worth raising one point that sheds some light on the issue.

The Gemara in *Rosh Ha-shana* 34b cites Rabba's famous words:

"Rabba said: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Declare before Me, on Rosh Ha-shana, the *malkhuyot*, *zikhronot*, and *shofarot*.

*Malkhuyot* – that you may coronate Me over you;

*Zikhronot* – that the memory of you may come before Me for favor;

And how? Through the *shofar*."

The structure of this teaching seems strange. Rabba starts by establishing that there are three special blessings that dominate the Rosh Ha-shana prayer service: they are known as "*malkhuyot*," "*zikhronot*," and "*shofrot*." Thereafter Rabba goes on to define the subject of each of them. But when he comes to "*shofrot*," instead of defining the subject and purpose of the blessing, he simply notes that the blessings are uttered in the context of the *shofar* blasts!

It would seem, therefore, that the concept and significance of the *shofar* on Rosh Ha-shana parallels – precisely – the concept and significance of the trumpets in our *parasha*. In both cases we are talking about an expression of God's Kingship, where this acknowledgment recalls the nation's favor before God. And in both cases there is an extra dimension to this recollection, insofar as the instrument used for sounding the blast recalls to God an event from Israel's history; an event whose invocation amplifies and intensifies the connection between God and Israel. In our *parasha*, the event that is recalled is Israel's journeying at God's command in the generation of the desert. On Rosh Ha-shana we sound the *shofar* to recall the event described in the blessing of "*shofrot*" – the revelation at Sinai, where "the sound of the *shofar* grew exceedingly loud."

Translated by Kaeren Fish