

ANTICIPATION AND CONSUMMATION: A PERSPECTIVE ON THE *SHOFAR*¹

By Mois Navon

Many and profound are the layers of meaning which reverberate within the wail of the *shofar*, making it the most powerful of vehicles for drawing, not only upon our attention, but also upon our emotions and psyche, reaching into our very souls. Rambam (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 3:4) explains the blowing of the *shofar* as a call to action: “Awake, sleepers from your sleep, and slumberers arise from your slumber!” This call to action is one that can be seen as addressing the tension between two powerful dynamics: anticipation and consummation.

Anticipation

Anticipation is a dynamic that by definition begs for consummation. It is a power that endows both individual and nation alike with the strength, the vision, and the marvel to advance toward its fulfillment – even at great cost. Furthermore, its power ends not with those who possess it, but rather serves as the fire for transmitting an ideal over generations.

As an example, the anticipation of the return to Zion kept Jewry hopeful for generations that the conditions of their long and arduous exile

¹ I would like to dedicate this article to my cousin, Marko Issever, who represents to me the successful combination of the dynamics of anticipation and consummation.

would eventually end in the happy return to national existence.² They anticipated not just a nationalistic existence based solely on land, but a purposeful national existence, complete with the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem and the revelation of the Messiah.

This anticipation was not something ephemeral in the minds of the few, but was objectified³ into law and custom in a myriad of ways, touching upon every aspect of life. The *Shulchan Arukh* (OC 1:3) writes that one must remember the *Mikdash* in daily prayer and the *Mishna Berura* (*ibid.*) adds that one must recite psalms concerning the return to the land of Israel (*Shir Ha-maalot, Al Neharot Bavel*) before every grace after meals. Furthermore, numerous enactments were instituted to recall Israel in its grandeur and inspire hope for its return. There are two types of such enactments: those which serve to recall activities done in the *Mikdash* – referred to as “*zekher la-Mikdash*,” and those which serve to imbue a sense of sorrow due to the absence of the *Mikdash* – which could be called “*zekher la-Mikdash be-churbanah*.”⁴

The *zekher la-Mikdash* enactments include things like waving the *lulav* all seven days of Sukkot in remembrance of the practice done in the *Mikdash*,⁵ or encircling the *bima* in the synagogue in a manner similar to the circling of the altar in the Temple.⁶ The Pesach Seder has multiple remembrances, from the egg eaten in commemoration of the *chagiga* sacrifice to the *afikoman* eaten in remembrance of the Pesach sacrifice.

Regarding the *zekher la-churban* perspective, the *Shulchan Arukh*

² “What is it that enables Israel to endure their exile for so long? It is the promises which the Holy One has given them, as we have pointed out; so that when they go to the synagogues and houses of study and see [written in the Bible] all those consolations, all those comforting and sure hopes, they rejoice in their hearts and are able to endure all that comes upon them; otherwise they would not be able” (Zohar, *Ki Tisa* 188b).

³ R. Soloveitchik (*Halakhic Man*, pp. 57-59) speaks of the great importance of making dreams and aspirations concrete; indeed, any ideal that religion might offer must ultimately be given form lest it “prove sterile” in the lack thereof.

⁴ See R. David Shapiro, *R. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat Ha-omer and Shavu’ot*, (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 135-139.

⁵ *Mishna Sukka* 41a.

⁶ Rambam, *Hil. Lulav* 7:23.

(OC 560:1) instructs that at the entrance to one's home a significant portion of the wall is to be left unfinished in remembrance that God's house in Jerusalem is also unfinished.⁷ The groom under the wedding canopy is to have ashes placed on his head as a sign of mourning over the Temple.⁸ And every wedding ceremony is to include a breaking of a glass with the recital of the words, "If I forget you Jerusalem, May I forget my right hand; May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I ever don't think of you, if I don't raise up Jerusalem above my highest joy" (*Tehillim* 137:5,6).⁹

So powerful is the ethic of remembrance-in-anticipation that the story is told of Napoleon who, upon passing a synagogue on Tisha Be-Av, asked as to why the people were sobbing. Upon hearing that they were mourning their Temple, destroyed over a thousand years prior, he commented that surely they would merit seeing it rebuilt. And indeed, so explains the Gemara (*Ta'anit* 30b): He who mourns over the destruction will merit seeing it rebuilt.

However, anticipation has a negative side. If not maintained within perspective, it can turn into fulfillment in and of itself. This phenomenon, where anticipation takes on the aura of fulfillment, essentially neuters the life force that animated it. This dynamic of avoiding reality in anticipation of a better one at some distant time makes up the very real thought which plagues the modern Jew to this day. The proclamation of "Next year in Jerusalem" at the conclusion of the Pesach Seder and the Yom Kippur service has been transformed from a prayer charged with fervent desire into nostalgic song filled with an air of relief that there is a place and time, not here and not now, in which all our problems will be solved.

Consummation

At the other end of anticipation lies consummation. Consummation is appropriately attended by euphoria whose measure is in

⁷ See *Shulchan Arukh* (OC 560) for a list of enactments.

⁸ *Shulchan Arukh* (EH 65:3).

⁹ Rema (OC 560:2; EH 65:3).

direct proportion to the anticipation that preceded it. Its power lies in its affirmation of anticipation; and it is this power which should fire man's will, bringing him to further anticipation-consummation pairs.

R. Eliyahu Dessler analogized the life-long development of the Jew to a man climbing a ladder of self-actualization through *mitzvot*. "He fashioned His service like a ladder firmly planted on the ground with its head reaching up to heaven. Rung by rung the person must work to combat his *yetzer ha-ra*. He cannot jump any part of the way; all his life he has to progress laboriously from step to step."¹⁰ Thus, each new rung brings with it both consummation as well as anticipation of the next rung.¹¹

This is the ideal model for a life of self-actualization, or more accurately, self-transcendence. There is a subtle yet critical difference between self-actualization and self-transcendence. Viktor E. Frankl explains:

[M]an is responsible and must actualize the potential meaning of his life. ... The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or a person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is only possible as a side effect of self-

¹⁰ *Strive for Truth*, (Jerusalem, 1985), pp. 98-99. It should be noted that the rungs are not necessarily composed of independent *mitzvot*, but rather each rung represents new challenges in, or greater perfection of, performing *mitzvot* in general. R. Dessler speaks of the effort to refine one's performance from that of "*lo lishmah*" to that of "*lishmah*." R. Bulka explains that "Torah becomes a vehicle for meaning. ... [However,] do not make Torah, the transcendent value system, a crown, a vehicle for self-actualization. Meaning must be pursued for its own sake, *lishmah*; the self-realization follows naturally" ("Logotherapy and Judaism – Some Philosophical Comparisons," *Tradition* 12:3-4 [Winter-Spring 1972], p. 82).

¹¹ "[T]he full worth of reality is found not in its actual, but in its potential value" (R. E. Berkovits, *God, Man and History*, p. 81).

transcendence.¹²

The point here is that to truly actualize oneself one must seek to fulfill purpose beyond the confines of the self and through the very endeavor of striving one thus actualizes his potential. R. Reuven Bulka¹³ explains that Man oscillates between the subjective “I am” [consummated being] and the objective “I ought” [anticipated being], and insofar as he strives for the ought he transcends his self and actualizes his responsibilities. In Frankl’s view, “Existence falters unless it is lived in terms of transcendence toward something beyond itself.”

Similarly R. Soloveitchik explains that for an occupation to be purposive it must ever reach toward a transcendental absolute which is ultimately unattainable.¹⁴ This notion is encapsulated in God’s name “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*” (I will be that which I will be), which is understood to represent God’s nature as ever actualizing potential, and thus man must continuously seek to actualize potential in his effort to reach the Divine through *imatio Dei*.¹⁵ That is to say, the ultimate self-transcendence is in the *devekut*, cleaving, as it were, with the transcendent Divine. This idea is reflected in the Talmud as, “the righteous have no rest, neither in this world, nor in the World to Come; as it is written, ‘They shall go from strength to strength, and appear before God in Zion’”(Berakhot 64a). The movement “from strength to strength” leads to the transcendent – i.e., God – in this world – i.e., Zion.

Referring back to our example of the dream to return to Zion, R. Soloveitchik, in addressing the Mizrachi movement in 1966, explained this phenomenon as it relates to Modern Zionism: “When those that wait for the Lord run... [t]he satisfaction and enthusiasm resulting from their achievements will not prevent them from continuing with their efforts to realize their mission, which is endless. They will realize that the more

¹² *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York, 1985), p.133.

¹³ “Logotherapy and Judaism,” p. 83.

¹⁴ R. Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart* (Jersey City, 2003), p. 52.

¹⁵ David Birnbaum, *God and Evil* (Hoboken, 1989), pp. 64-5, 72. See also Zohar (*Achrei Mot* 65), which explains the name to represent creation as God’s actualization of potential.

they have achieved and created, the more they are obliged to continue on this way; to do even more, to work harder.”¹⁶

R. Soloveitchik notes that achievement – consummation – has the power, if one is so disposed, to spur new effort; implicitly, however, the opposite can result. If one is lacking in spirit, consummation can be a source of “intoxication”¹⁷ that results in inaction. And just as the euphoria attendant with consummation is proportional to the preceding anticipation, there is a tendency – in proportion to the preceding anticipation – to view consummation as an absolute endpoint. This is the pitfall of consummation.

So, like the Jew in the Diaspora who sits comfortably at his Pesach Seder, his belly satisfied from his sumptuous meal and his soul contented at having discharged his religious obligations, exclaims joyously, “Next year in Jerusalem;” so too sits the Jew in the land of Israel, merely adding the word “rebuilt” to fit with his circumstances. Both are paralyzed. While the Diaspora Jew, for his inaction, can be accused of wallowing in “anticipation,” the Israeli Jew can be accused of being “intoxicated” by the consummation of the 2000-year-old anticipation.¹⁸ And while he has set the next goal of “rebuilt Jerusalem,” he must ask himself what efforts are really being made towards it.

The vacuum left by anticipation-met is one that is not easily filled; it is an existential vacuum of meaninglessness. Such a situation can lead to lethargy, depression and a state of being directionless attendant when purpose in life is lacking.¹⁹ For the individual, this leaves one bereft of the very will that anticipation had animated. For the nation, the words of King Solomon are appropriate: “Without a vision the people

¹⁶ R. Soloveitchik, *The Rav Speaks* (NY, 2002), p. 205.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.207.

¹⁸ I do not mean here to point accusing fingers at people who are caught in circumstances beyond their control. I do mean to point out that we must all be ever aware of the complacency which results from the rote of life as it is.

¹⁹ Frankl (p. 128-130) discusses the phenomenon of the “existential vacuum” which plagues man in modern society due, in part, to the leisure afforded him with which he knows not what to do (i.e., “Sunday neurosis”).

are lost” (*Mishlei* 29:18).

The most evident example of this unfortunate phenomenon is to be found in modern day Israel in what has been labeled “post-Zionism.” This term comes to describe precisely the malady of consummation without renewed anticipation. Whereas Zionism was the embodiment of actualizing 2000 years of anticipation, it left in the wake of its consummation a trough so deep that those who came after are at a loss to stay the course.

The answer to this modern dilemma is encrypted in the very verse which decries the difficulty. King Solomon warned that, “Without a vision the people are lost,” but he did not stop without providing a solution. The verse ends, “and happy is he who keeps the Torah.” Interestingly, the beginning of the verse addresses a national problem, yet the end of the verse speaks of the individual. Perhaps the message is that the national problem is to be solved on the individual level. That is, only by individuals dedicating themselves to a life directed by the mores of the Torah can the nation become unified and purposive. Indeed, God Himself (*Devarim* 11:18-21) alludes to this by stating, “Put these My words in your heart and in your soul ... and teach them to your children,” that is, charging each individual, “in order that your days and the days of your children will be prolonged in the land,” by maintaining a healthy and purposive society.²⁰

Shofar

Returning to the *shofar*, the Gemara (*Rosh Hashana* 16a) teaches:

R. Abbahu said: Why do we blow a ram’s horn? The Holy One, blessed be He said: Sound before Me a ram’s horn so that I remember on your behalf the binding of

²⁰ See Ramban (*Devarim* 11:18) on the need to teach Torah as a condition to dwelling in the land. Interestingly, secular Israeli Nobel Prize winner Professor Aharon Ciechnover made this argument stating in no uncertain terms that the degeneration of the state is directly connected to the degeneration of Judaic Studies (*Haaretz*, Oct. 26, 2006).

Yitzchak, the son of Avraham, and to account it to you as if you had bound yourselves before me.²¹

God's reference to Yitzchak as "the son of Avraham" hints to the fact that the *shofar*, indeed the *Akeida* itself, is meaningful from both the perspective of Yitzchak as well as that of Avraham. Avraham and Yitzchak are not one-dimensional characters, nor is their relationship limited as such; nevertheless, at a fundamental level, their relationship can be described as father and son, founder and heir, predecessor and successor – which links them conceptually to potential and actual, anticipation and consummation. And though both personalities had moments of anticipation as well as consummation, until the *Akeida*, in relation to each other, Avraham could be said to be paradigmatic of anticipation and Yitzchak paradigmatic of consummation.

Until that momentous turning point, Avraham was focused on having an heir, someone to carry on after him. God comes to Avraham in a vision promising him great rewards (*Bereishit* 15:1), to which Avraham responds, "What can you give me seeing that I am childless ..." (*Bereishit* 15:2). Rashi (*Bereishit* 15:3) explains Avraham's lament to mean, "Of what good is anything you give me if I have no seed [inheritor]." In this regard he lived in anticipation: anticipation of fathering an heir, anticipation of seeing his dreams carried on by an heir (witness the great party made upon Yitzchak's being weaned [*Bereishit* 21:8], ready to carry out his destiny as heir).

However, this is not to say that Avraham was suspended in anticipation due to indolence. Rather, after having climbed numerous anticipation-consummation rungs, he had reached a point wherein

²¹ *Shulchan Arukh* (OC 586:1) maintains that a bent ram's horn is the ideal *shofar*; horns of other animals being acceptable only in concession. *Mishna Berura* (OC 586:1:5) explains that a ram's horn is a custom and an exemplary way to perform the mitzva (i.e., *mitzva min ha-muvchar*); however, a bent horn of another animal is preferable to a straight horn of a ram – the symbol of bending before God being more critical than the allusion to the *Akeida*. I would add that, indeed, the whole allusion to the *Akeida* is to impress the importance of bending one's will before God, and so a "bent" horn more immediately demonstrates this ethic than the ram horn which indirectly references the bent wills of Avraham and Isaac at the *Akeida*.

actualization could only occur by total self-transcendence. The *Akeida* was the consummation of that ultimate rung. The event of the *Akeida* provided the means by which Avraham could effect his transcendence, his actualization. As Frankl explained, by giving oneself altruistically to a cause or ideal one transcends the self and, as a by-product, attains self-actualization. It was the condition of Avraham's very submission against all self-interest – and this condition alone – that made possible total self-transcendence and thus self-actualization. By sacrificing the very thing that he anticipated would bring him actualization was he able to rise above an agenda of actualization and effectuate his transcendence, which paradoxically brought his actualization.

On the other hand, Yitzchak inherited a spiritual and physical world where everything was readied, prepared and lay waiting for him. He was the very consummation that Avraham had anticipated, and as such he lived a life in consummation. Indeed, from his birth until the *Akeida* at the age of thirty-seven,²² not a word of his is mentioned, nor an act of his recorded.²³ His was a life of merely living but not changing and as such there was nothing novel to make note of.

Yitzchak, born into a made world, was not “intoxicated” with consummation per se, but rather required initiation in to the covenant of transcendence. The fire that spurred Avraham the pioneer needed to be kindled in his offspring. He had to be made aware of the power and urgency of fulfilling purpose, of striving for actualization, and of achieving transcendence. The *Akeida* provided the means by which his father transmitted the unshakable faith needed to achieve this. Perhaps this is why it is called a “test” for Avraham and not for Yitzchak – for Avraham it served as a test, a challenge, a means to transcendence; for Yitzchak it was an object lesson, a means to assimilate an ethic.

Though the term “test” cannot be applied to Yitzchak, nevertheless, by his passive yet elective²⁴ submission he took full part in

²² *Pirke DeRebbi Eliezer*, ch. 31.

²³ *See Bereishit* 21.

²⁴ Yitzchak's willing submission is made clear in his acquiescence to continue the journey when he realized that it was he who was to be the lamb in this act of faith, as

the act and was thereby transformed by its didactic nature. Through his role in the *Akeida* Yitzchak learned experientially the faith of his father. He witnessed first hand the power of *devekut*, of transcendence. He cognized in a most immediate way the verse, “You shall keep My statutes (*chukkim*) and My ordinances (*mishpatim*) and you shall live through them” (*Vayikra* 18:5). That is, by performing the commandments, and more importantly accepting them as *chukkim*, wherein their only reason is Divine imperative,²⁵ can one then transcend the self and thereby actualize the self and thus give meaning to ones life. Only by giving oneself wholly to a will outside oneself, to the will of God, can one truly live. And thus the Gemara (*Berakhot* 18b) teaches: the wicked [i.e., those who chose not the path of self-actualization through *mitzvot*] are as if dead though being alive.

The *Akeida* was the moment of truth. The man of anticipation would have to take everything he so dearly waited for, all his hopes and dreams, and sacrifice them on the altar of his own stalled personal growth. Conversely, the man of consummation, bereft of personal initiative, would now by his own volition have to *allow* himself to be slaughtered on that same altar of inaction. Only if they could both awaken to the object lesson of the *Akeida* could their demise be stopped. If not, the *Akeida* would only expedite that end toward which their lives were ultimately headed, were they to continue in their respective paths of inaction.

By wholly submitting to the will of God, Avraham and Yitzchak, each in their own way, participated in a dynamic whose message was that life is only as valuable as the growth invested in it, that potential must be made actual, that anticipation must be consummated, and that once done, new vistas of anticipation and potential must be sought in a never-ending quest to reach the transcendent.

Rashi (*Ber. 22:8*) explains, “and they went both of them together” – “with one heart.” *Pirke DeRebbi Eliezer* (31) has Avraham telling Yitzhak explicitly that he is to be the “lamb.”

²⁵ See R. A. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav*, Vol. 1, p. 105 – even the *mishpatim* must be accepted as being *chok*-like.

The *Akeida* is a profound multi-faceted event with many layers of meaning. One aspect is its power to precipitate positive change in differing personalities coming from differing perspectives. This is true for both the present actors as well as the future spectators. For though a spectator cannot be impacted like one within the experience itself, one can internalize the lesson, and upon hearing the sounds from the very animal that replaced Yitzchak ben Avraham on the altar, one's imagination can bring him to that holy place where Avraham and Yitzchak stood – and triumphed. Indeed the Gemara (*Rosh Hashana* 26a) explains that since the *shofar* is to awaken remembrance, it is as if it were being blown within the holy of holies – situated on the very spot that the *Akeida* took place.²⁶

Conclusion

Thus, the *shofar* is to bring the listener to the place of the *Akeida*, where in some small way, he can participate and experience its message. In a sense, it is saying to the man of anticipation: wake up, transcend yourself and consummate your potential, lest you bring it to an end like a sacrificial lamb that has no future. At the same time it is saying to the man of consummation: wake up, be driven by the power of anticipation, by the will to transcend, lest you stagnate and become immobile, tied to an altar like a sacrificial lamb whose purpose has met its end.

Though God explains, as brought by R. Abbahu, that in blowing the *shofar* He counts it as if we have bound ourselves to the altar, this does not mean we have killed ourselves, but just the opposite – we have come alive in transcendence. When we come to blow the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, the day of accepting the absolute dominion of God,²⁷ it is as if we are taking part in the *Akeida*. We bring ourselves to the threshold of self-sacrifice, recognizing our potential for action by resolving to fulfill

²⁶ *Berakhot* 62b.

²⁷ God said, “On Rosh Hashana recite before me [verses on] Sovereignty... so that you should make Me your King...” (*Rosh Hashana* 16a, 34b). Accepting God's Sovereignty is the first of R. Sa'adia Gaon's reasons for blowing the *shofar* - (quoted in R. E. Kitov, *Sefer Toda'ah*, Tishrei).

God's every command – transcendent, in *chok*-like submission. As such, we are then able to offer the ram, or in our case, the ram's horn, in our flesh's stead; analogous to the *Akeida* in which the ram was substituted for Yitzchak.²⁸

The covenant of transcendence is one that can only be entered into by climbing the ladder of actualization till one reaches a point where he “forgets himself.” It is to this level of being, wherein one does things without any personal agenda, but rather *lishmah* (for their own sake), that the sages maintained was the goal of man's efforts. The Mishna (*Avot* 6:1) spares no words in lauding the greatness of one who performs the Torah “*lishmah*,” explaining that it was worth creating the entire world just for him. Of course they acknowledged that one must begin by doing things *lo lishmah* in order to ultimately make the leap to doing them *lishmah*.²⁹ The *Akeida* provided the means for this leap then; selfless “*chok*-like” commitment to the Torah provides the means for this now.³⁰ Indeed, *Pirke DeRebbi Eliezer* (31) alludes to the fact that submission to the Torah provides the vehicle for transcendence akin to the *Akeida* in explaining that the very ram's horn from the *Akeida* was used at Sinai for the sounding of the *shofar* at the giving of the Torah!³¹

Our purpose in this world is to take the power of anticipation, what could be called “potential,” and consummate it; in other words “actualize” it. To completely actualize ourselves we must repeat this process countless times until we have transcended our very selves. R. Soloveitchik (*Halakhic Man*, p.132) explains:

Creation finds its expression in man's fulfilling all of his tasks, causing all of the potentiality implanted in him to

²⁸ Zohar, *Vayera* 120b. Also *Pirke DeRebbi Eliezer* 31.

²⁹ *Pesachim* 52b.

³⁰ Today it could be said that the enterprise of establishing Jewish Sovereignty in the land of Israel based on the Torah provides the means. At no small cost has the Jewish people returned to its land and at no small cost does the Jewish people continue to fight to maintain its existence on the promised land. Could this not be the meaning reverberating in the great *shofar* that God blows to designate our national freedom?

³¹ Also Rashi (*Shemot* 19:13).

emerge into actuality utilizing all of his manifold possibilities, and fully bringing to fruition his own noble personality. The power stored up within man is exceedingly great, is all-encompassing, but all too often slumbers within and does not bestir itself from its deep sleep. The command of creation, beating deep with the consciousness of Judaism, proclaims: Awake slumberers from your sleep. Realize, actualize yourselves, your own potentialities and possibilities, and go forth to meet you God. The unfolding of man's spirit that soars to the very heavens, that is the meaning of creation.

To this lofty goal comes the simple *shofar*. This humble yet awe-inspiring instrument offers its cry to remind those caught up in a religion of anticipation that they must act to consummate, and for those bogged down in a consummation devoid of anticipation, that they must renew the power of their original anticipation and define again new goals to anticipate and work toward. Inaction, be it due to anticipation or consummation, is tantamount to sleeping through life. To this comes the cry of the *shofar*:

“Awake, sleepers from your sleep, and slumberers arise from your slumber!”