

## Stories about Shofar

### The Call of the Shofar

Once upon a time, many years ago, in the faraway country of Russia, there lived a poor boy called Moshe. He had neither father nor mother. When he was small, everybody called him Moshele, which means little Moshe.

He went to Cheder with all the other children in his little town. He liked to learn Chumash and Gemara. When he became a bit older, he had to go to work. Poor Moshele had no parents to take care of him. He wanted to stay in Yeshiva to study, and maybe someday become a big scholar. But Moshele had no choice. He was a poor orphan. He had to get a job and take care of himself.

Moshele decided to become a peddler. In those days there weren't many stores. Peddlers traveled all over the country with suitcases full of things to sell. Moshele got a suitcase and filled it with all kinds of odds and ends. He had needles and thread, scissors, thimbles, pieces of material, all sorts of buttons and many other things.

It was not easy to be a peddler. In the summertime it was hot, and Moshele became tired and thirsty walking on the dusty roads with his heavy suitcase. In the wintertime, Moshele shivered and froze because his clothes were not warm enough to protect him from the icy winds.

And so his life went on until one day poor Moshele was caught in a very big snow storm. It was a real blizzard. Snow was falling and falling from the gray skies.

Everything was covered with a thick blanket of snow. Moshele tried to be brave and cheerful. He kept his

spirits up by reciting by heart all the Tehillim he knew. With each step it was getting more and more difficult to walk. His suitcase felt heavier and heavier. The snow was up to his ankles. Soon the snow was almost up to his knees.

Moshele could hardly move with his big heavy suitcase. Snow was everywhere. It was difficult to follow the road because the snow covered everything. Without knowing it, Moshele walked off the road and into the woods. He was very, very tired. When he found a tree-stump, he decided to sit down and rest for a while.

Moshele knew that it was very dangerous to fall asleep. He tried very hard to stay awake. He kept saying to himself over and over again: "Do not fall asleep. You must stay awake. If you fall asleep you might freeze to death." But Moshele was so very tired and he thought a short rest would be good for him. He was shivering in his thin old clothes, and he felt very sleepy. He stretched out his arms and legs and drifted off into oblivion...

It was beginning to become dark outside. Soon it would become light. The peasant on the road with his horse and sled was happy he would be home soon. But wait! What was that? Away from the road, somewhat into the woods, he noticed something odd. What was it? It looked like a human being lying in the snow.

Could he be alive? He stopped his horse, and ran over to take a better look. He could hardly believe his eyes. There was no sign of life. The body was almost frozen stiff.

There was not a moment to be wasted. Maybe he could still save the

## Stories about Shofar

life of the young boy. Quickly, the peasant pulled out his knife and began to cut the frozen clothing off of the still body. Then he started to rub the boy's body with some snow. As soon as the snow melted from rubbing, he picked up another handful and continued his work. He looked at the boy to see if there was any sign of life; but nothing changed. The peasant was afraid to stop even though he was getting tired from rubbing the boy's body with snow. All of a sudden, the boy stirred. He moved only slightly, but the peasant felt happy. He knew the blood had begun to flow again in the boy's young body and the worst danger was over. The peasant carried the boy to his sled and covered him with some warm blankets. Then he drove his horse and sled as fast as he could to his farm in a village nearby. The peasant brought the boy into the house. He put him down on some blankets near the fireplace. He rubbed the boy's body again with some snow until he saw the skin begin to glow and look healthy. The peasant warmed up some milk and fed the boy slowly with a spoon. Moshele opened his eyes for a moment. Then he closed them again and went to sleep. He slept peacefully all night. In the morning, the crow of the rooster woke him up. Moshele opened his eyes and looked around. Everything seemed strange, he could not understand where he was. He tried to remember what happened, but Moshele had forgotten everything. He could not remember his home. He could not remember his travels as a peddler. But he was too tired to think. All he wanted now was to

sleep.

When Moshele woke up, he felt as if someone was sticking pins and needles into him. That is how you feel after you have been frostbitten. The peasant's wife came to greet Moshele. "How do you feel?" she asked.

"I guess I feel all right, thank you," answered Moshele. He was still wondering what had happened to him and how he had come to the peasant's home.

The woman prepared some hot cereal for Moshele and fed him slowly with a spoon. "What is your name?" she asked him. Moshele became frightened. He could not remember his own name! He tried to think as hard as he could, but he just could not remember. Moshele had been very sick. He had almost frozen to death. Now he was beginning to feel stronger, but he remembered nothing.

"I don't know. I can't remember my name." he said sadly.

"Never mind," said the peasant woman. "Don't worry about that. You can stay with us in our home. We'll call you Peter. How about that?" She gave him a kind smile. Moshele smiled back at her. "Yes," he said, "that would be fine."

Moshele, or Peter as he was called now, lived in the home of the peasant and his wife and became a part of their family. He did not remember that he was Jewish and instead became very much like the farmer and his wife.

All summer long, Peter helped with the work on the farm. He plowed the fields and made nice, even rows. He sowed the seeds. He watched everything grow. Peter was not a

## Stories about Shofar

lazy boy. He worked hard, and the farmer was very pleased with him. Peter was a capable boy and a good worker.

When fall came, it was time to reap the harvest. One autumn day, the farmer said to Peter, "Tomorrow we will drive into town. We will take some of our products to the market to sell." Peter was very excited. The work on the farm was hard and Peter had been very busy. It would be great fun to go into town.

Peter was so happy, he could hardly sleep that night.

The trip to town was not very long, but to Peter it seemed like hours.

When they got into town, they were very surprised. There were no people on the streets. The little town looked deserted.

When they passed by the little Shul in the town, they saw it was filled with people. Everyone had come to Shul to pray because it was Rosh Hashanah. The peasant decided that they should drive back to the farm because it was not a good time for business. Peter kept looking at the Shul. He did not want to return to the farm. He could not tear himself away from the Shul. He begged the peasant to stay in town for a while longer. The peasant saw how excited Peter was. He said Peter could spend the afternoon by himself looking around town. It would be a treat for his hard work on the farm.

Peter felt as if someone were pulling him toward the Shul. He felt as if he were sleepwalking. Without knowing that he had walked there, he suddenly found himself at the entrance to the Shul. The men were wrapped in their prayer shawls. Everyone was praying and some

were weeping. No one even noticed Peter standing near the door. No one paid any attention to him.

Peter looked all around. Somehow it all seemed familiar to him. Had he ever been here before? His heart began to beat faster. The tune and melodies of the cantor were familiar to him. The scrolls of the Torah that were being carried out of the Ark were familiar. And he was beginning to hear the words in the prayers and they sounded familiar too. Slowly his memory was returning to him and everything in the Shul brought back more and more memories. As if glued to the spot, Peter stood motionless and stared...

Peter did not know how long he had been standing there when he began to notice a feeling of excitement among the worshippers in the Shul. Everyone was becoming very quiet. There was finally complete silence in the crowd. All the people stood still in their places. Peter hardly dared to breathe. It seemed as if the air was filled with Holiness. Peter closed his eyes for a moment. He felt as if angels were all around him.

Suddenly the silence was shattered by the loud blast of the Shofar. The sound of the Shofar made Peter feel very strange. As each note was blown and moved upward, Peter felt as if he had wings and was flying upward with it.

Peter's eyes filled with tears. The tears began rolling down his cheeks. But inside, in his heart, Peter was smiling. Everything was now clear to him. "Moshele, you are a Jew," the Shofar called.

And Moshele said quietly, "Thank you, Shofar. Oh thank you, thank you. Thank you for reminding me

## Stories about Shofar

that I am a Jew.”

### Finding The Right Key

“Remember, when you blow shofar, that each note is full of holy meaning...”

One year, before Rosh Hashana, Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov called one of his foremost chassidim, Reb Wolff Kitzis, and told him that he wanted him to blow the shofar that year on Yom Tov.

“When you sound the notes on the shofar,” the Baal Shem Tov said, “you must remember that each blast is full of holy meaning. I want you to learn them carefully. It will require much study on your part, and great concentration to keep these things in your mind as you blow.”

Reb Wolff studied as hard as he could, finding out as much as possible about the Divine Names connected with each sound of the shofar.

It was not an easy task, and Reb Wolff was very nervous about it. Surely the Baal Shem Tov had a special reason for asking him to do this.

It weighed heavily on his mind. Was there some terrible decree that hung over the Jewish people? Was the Rebbe appealing to him for help? He prayed to Hashem that he should be able to do it right.

He was so afraid of making some mistake, that he wrote down notes of all the key points that he would have to keep in mind. He planned to take out the notes and read them while blowing the shofar.

Finally, the holy day of Rosh Hashana arrived.

Reb Wolff prayed with great feeling, as he prepared for the mission that

awaited him.

When the Torah was being read, he listened carefully to the story of Avraham and Sarah, and how Hashem answered their prayers and blessed them with a son in their old age.

The story of the how the wicked child, Yishmael, cried out to Hashem when he was dying, and how Hashem saved his life, also made a deep impression on Reb Wolff. “May Hashem save us too,” he thought. After the Torah reading, Reb Wolff took his place on the bimah and prepared for the shofar blowing. Two chassidim stood beside him holding the two Sifrei Torah in their hands. Reb Wolff opened his siddur, and pulled his tallis carefully over his head. Then he took the ram’s horn in his hands.

Then he reached in his pocket for the notes he had made. To his horror, he felt nothing there. His pocket was empty. Could it be that the notes were missing? He checked his other pockets. The notes were gone! He burst into a cold sweat. What was he to do? All eyes were upon him. He had to blow the shofar. But how could he? The Baal Shem Tov had told him to have these special thoughts in mind....

His felt hot and cold. He prayed to Hashem to save him. He searched his pockets again... to no avail... the notes were gone.

With a wretched, sinking feeling in his heart, he realized that he had failed. He would just have to blow the shofar with no special thoughts in mind at all.

He wished he could find some hole in the ground where he could crawl in and hide his shame.

## Stories about Shofar

After the prayers were over, the Baal Shem Tov called Reb Wolff to his room.

"His face flushed hot and cold. He prayed to Hashem to save him. Finally, with a wretched feeling in his heart, he raised the shofar to his lips..."

He entered with fear and anxiety.

"Good Yom Tov, Reb Wolff," the Baal Shem Tov said with a broad smile. "Thank you for blowing the shofar for us today."

"B-but Rebbe," Reb Wolff protested, "I didn't..." The words died on his lips. He looked at the Baal Shem with confusion and a broken heart.

"As you guessed, Reb Wolff, I asked you to prepare carefully for blowing the shofar today because of a serious decree against our people," the Baal Shem Tov explained.

"In a king's palace there are many rooms. Each room has its own door and its own key. The secret meanings from the kabala which you studied are like keys to all the different doors and gates in Heaven. You have to know which key opens which lock.

"But there is one thing that can burst through all the doors and all the locks, like an ax, and that is a broken heart. Today that is how you blew the shofar, with a broken and a humble heart. It did the trick. It was worth more than all the keys, more than knowing all the secret Names and meanings. Yes, Reb Wolff. Your broken heart annulled the decree. It is no more.

"A good Yom Tov to you, and to all our people, and a good year."

Berditchev spent a long time in search of a man who would be worthy of blowing the *shofar* in his *shul*. Rosh Hashana was fast approaching and though many righteous folk sought the privilege, vying with each other in demonstrating their expertise in the abstruse Kabalistic secrets associated with the *shofar*, none of them were to his taste.

One day a new applicant came along, and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak asked him on what mysteries he meditated while he was performing the awesome *mitzva*.

"Rebbe," said the newcomer, "I'm only a simple fellow; I don't understand too much about the hidden things in the Torah. But I have four daughters of marriageable age, and when I blow the *shofar*, this is what I have in mind: 'Master of the Universe! Right now I am carrying out Your will. I'm doing Your *mitzva* and blowing the *shofar*. Now supposing You too do what I want, and help me marry off my daughters?' "

"My friend," said Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, "you will blow the *shofar* for us!"

### The Deal

One year Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of