

# Weekly Teaching

## September 20, 2017

Shmaryahu Levin tells a story in his autobiography of a transformative incident that took place in his early life.

Growing up in Eastern Europe, at around age 10, he received a gift of his very own Shofar.

As Rosh Hashanah approached, he was so excited to practice blowing the Shofar. But, try as he could, he just couldn't get any sound out of it at all.

For the month leading up to Rosh Hashanah, he would spend at least an hour holding his mouth in various positions, making various kinds of rude vibrating noises with his lips, trying to produce any sound with the Shofar.

But to no avail.

The day before Rosh Hashanah, as he was practicing outside his home, a Russian farmer came by.

"What's that?" he asked.

Young Shmaryahu responded, "It's a Shofar."

And the farmer said, "What's a Shofar?"

The boy explained, "It's a ram's horn, and we blow it in synagogue to commemorate Rosh Hashanah."

The farmer said, "Can I try?"

He took the Shofar, held it up to his lips, and out came a *Tekiah Gedolah* that would be the envy of any Shofar-blower in the world!

He handed the Shofar back to young Shmaryahu Levin, who raced back to the Shammash, the synagogue functionary who had been trying to teach him how to blow the Shofar.

Choking back tears, he said, "It's just not fair! I spend all this time, for more than a month, practicing to blow the Shofar, and this farmer, who has never even heard of a Shofar, gets a beautiful sound out of it!"

The Shammash heard the boy's anguish, and said to him reassuringly, "The mitzvah, the commandment, isn't in the blowing. The mitzvah is in the listening. The trick isn't how to blow the Shofar. The trick is how to listen."

Shmaryahu Levin would say that later in his life, he would sometimes be tempted to measure his success in terms of his output, in terms of what he said, and what he wrote, and how much. But he would remind himself the lesson he learned as a young boy: that the trick is not how to introduce more sound into a world that is already saturated with sound. The trick is how to listen.

L'Shanah Tovah — Happy, Healthy & Peaceful New Year!

Rabbi Mitch

[rabbimitch@templesholom.com](mailto:rabbimitch@templesholom.com)