



It is enough that a person makes a tiny opening of teshuvah in his heart “like the point of a needle,” on condition that he feels it piercing his heart like living flesh burning – not like a needle in dead flesh. (Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk)

# This Year’s Shofar Is Top Banana

This Rosh Hashanah, even the most secular kibbutzim will be having synagogue services. And after a course in halachic shofar blowing, each of these communities will have its own resident *baal tokeia*. May this phenomenon be a good omen for rapprochement and unity among our factionalized family

I’d like to share some good news from Eretz Yisrael. But first let me fill in some background, because it will put that good news out in sharper relief.

More than 50 years ago, when Yad L’Achim consisted of a group of *yeshivah bochurim* known as Chever HaP’eylim, the fledgling organization held a protest demonstration near a missionary school in Yafo. Jewish children were studying in this Christian school whose staff fervently hoped to convert them to a foreign faith. The activists expressed their protest by reciting Tehillim and blowing shofars. But they hadn’t obtained a police permit for the demonstration, and so several of the protestors were arrested. Chever HaP’eylim gave a press conference to explain the purpose of the protest to the general public, and to show that the demonstration had been peaceful – contrary to police allegations that the protestors had been violent – the P’eylim representatives displayed photographs from the demonstration, showing the *bochurim* blowing shofars.

A leftist journalist took the pictures and studied them, challenging the P’eylim spokesmen: “Don’t tell me these pictures were taken this week! Bananas aren’t in season now!”

This fellow, the pride of Israel’s cultural elite, grew up so sheltered on his kibbutz that he’d never seen a shofar. To him, it looked like those *bochurim* were holding bananas up to their mouths.

That was in the late 1950s; and today, in 2015? Quietly, throughout those strongholds of militant atheism, the banana is turning into a shofar. In fact, chances are good that this Rosh Hashanah, there won’t be a kibbutz – not even one far-left kibbutz – that

won’t have a minyan for the Yamim Noraim, where the shofar won’t be sounded. Some of these minyanim will be completed by volunteers from Ayelet Hashachar, who are willing to give up their *yeshivishe* davening in order to give their fellow Jews the *zechus of tefillah*.

Under the initiative of Ayelet Hashachar head Rabbi Shlomo Raanan, shuls have been established on kibbutzim all over Israel. And this year, the *kiruv* organization is giving a course in halachic shofar blowing, so that each kibbutz will have its own resident *baal tokeia*. It’s uplifting to see kibbutznikim, factory workers and farmers – ignorant of anything Jewish until recently – willingly coming to learn how to blow a shofar.

Having *baalei tokeia* for every community will prevent the unfortunate scenarios of the past, when the one man who knew how to blow a shofar would go around the Jezreel Valley from one *beit kneset* to the next... in his car.

When I heard that there will be an active shul on Kibbutz Yad Chana this Rosh Hashanah, I was amazed. Yad Chana was always considered left of the far left, a *yishuv* of avowed communists. I needn’t explain what this meant about their attitude toward Torah and mitzvos. Now, I won’t go so far as to say the entire kibbutz membership will be there; but they’ve certainly mellowed regarding their opposition to Judaism, and the kibbutz administration gave their consent for prayer to anyone who’s interested. The *baal tokeia* this year will be Yoav, a native of the kibbutz who became Torah-observant. As Yoav put it, “For me, this is a realization of my personal Vision of the Dry Bones.”

While the shofar-blowing courses are nearing completion, Rabbi Raanan has been taking Chief Rabbi David Lau on tours of “his” kibbutzim in order to effect a rapprochement between the



Rabbinat and the kibbutzniks, who’ve traditionally been hostile to Yiddishkeit. It rings back to the circuit tour of the kibbutzim by Rav Kook and Rav Sonnenfeld a hundred years ago, when the people of some of those settlements displayed scorn and antipathy toward Judaism and those who came bearing its message.

But all that has changed. Chief Rabbi Lau was received with great respect everywhere. In fact, it went beyond respect.

On a kibbutz that earned notoriety for its *davar acher* processing plant, the rabbinic visitors were not only received with honor, but the elders of the kibbutz asked them, “How come for 92 years, no rabbi has set foot here? Didn’t you realize we were waiting for you?”

Nearly everywhere they went, they heard the same complaint. At Kibbutz Beit HaShittah, one of the spearheads of the war against Yiddishkeit a few decades ago, not only is there a shul with a regular minyan several times over, but they need an *eiruv* so that the young married couples of the kibbutz who have become *baalei teshuvah* can visit their parents on Shabbos. This secular kibbutz is home to a former deputy minister of education who was never outstanding in his love for chareidi *chinuch*. Today, this man is a *gabbai* in the shul of the kibbutz. In a letter he wrote to the Chief Rabbi thanking him for his visit, he spoke of the urgent need for open dialogue and offered his services toward that end in the hope that the Rav’s visit “might be the first spark that brings the great light.”

Dear readers, can you feel, along with me, the footsteps of Mashiach reverberating?

This is the new atmosphere that prevailed in most of the kibbutzim on the rabbis’ itinerary. Everywhere, they met the same openness. If the people weren’t exactly ready to accept the Word of Hashem, they were at least interested in reopening the debate. And this after a century of estrangement.

This is heartwarming news on the eve of the days of judgment, *rachamim*, and *teshuvah*. True, the voices of secularism grow bolder, with calls for public transportation on Shabbos throughout the country. Yerushalayim is in the hands of a secular mayor who intends to expand the city’s entertainment industry, causing mass *chillul Shabbos*. But even as our hearts ache to see the Land fighting to retain the majesty of Shabbos, away from the spotlight and far from the political arena and the media that are controlled by a small minority who set themselves against Hashem’s Torah, the *teshuvah* movement quietly proceeds, even in communities that don’t look it on the outside. Based on the hostilities of the last decades, who would ever have thought that dialogue – let alone rapprochement – was even possible?

Perhaps we had better recalculate. Perhaps, after the top priority of keeping our own institutions on a firm basis, our next priority should be to encourage this trend and fulfill this spreading desire for a bit of Yiddishkeit, taking it slow and easy. We may not turn the whole population into *baalei teshuvah*, but at the very least, if our secular brothers drop their hostility and begin to feel some empathy with the religious communities, it will help to halt the trend of secularization driven by people interested only in turning it to their own profit.

When the Days of Awe arrive, finding all of us in shul praying that our *tekios* be pleasing before the Throne of Glory, let us remember the many Jews in all parts of Eretz Yisrael who will be joining us in the *mitzvah* this year. Let us pray that in the merit of the new *baalei tokeia* and those who come to hear them, “It shall come to pass on that day that a great shofar shall be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those exiled in the land of Egypt shall come and prostrate themselves before Hashem on the holy mount in Jerusalem.”

*Kesivah v’chasimah tovah.*