

Derash Yehonatan
Around the Year with Rav Yehonatan Eybeshitz



Shalom Hammer

**DERASH
YEHONATAN**

AROUND THE YEAR
WITH RAV YEHONATAN EYBESHITZ

Maggid Books

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To my dear in-laws

Avi and Janet Toledano

Thank you for your support, guidance, and friendship

וְכָל-בְּנֵיךָ, לְמוֹדֵי יְהוָה; וְרַב, שְׁלוֹם בְּנֵיךָ

And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be
the peace of thy children (Isaiah 54:13)



לכבוד בת המצווה של בתנו האהובה גילה יוכבד המר עמו"ש



Mazel Tov Jacob Marc Pleeter

As the *Menora* stood 50 *amot* high, illuminating the *Beit HaMikdash*,
so you, in your 50 years, have illuminated those around you;
may you continue to do so, until 120.

Happy 50th Birthday

With all our love, Mom & Dad – Bernice & Bennett Pleeter

Lori & Sammy Pleeter, Ezra, Zahava, Nechemya,

Gedaliah & Betzalel

Leah & Geoffrey Girnun, Chava, Na'ama, Yehuda,

Devora & Yaakov

Donna & Dov Perlmutter, Yael, Marty, Kayla & Aryeh

Elaine & Marc Lowen

Merle & Frank Girnun

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Foreword

Rabbi Berel Wein

One of the great geniuses of rabbinic writing in the eighteenth century was Rabbi Yehonatan Eybeshitz. Rabbi Yehonatan was a prolific author of works on Jewish law, talmudic commentary, kabbalistic thought, and insightful homiletical gems. He was an acknowledged talmudic scholar and halakhic decisor in an age when such great scholars were abundant, yet his fabulous breadth of Torah knowledge combined with his gift of creativity and deep insight into the texts guaranteed him immortality among the students of Torah for all time. In 1711, while still a very young man, he headed the famed school of Talmud in Prague. He later served as a rabbi in Prague and was known throughout the Jewish world as Rabbi Yehonatan Prager. In 1740, he moved to Metz in the province of Alsace and then ten years later accepted the position of rabbi in the famed tri-community of AHU – Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbek – then part of the Danish kingdom. Living there at that time was Rabbi Yaakov Emden, an

eminent scholar and a fierce polemicist against the remnants of the Shabbetai Zvi sect of false messianists. Suspicious and contentious by nature, Rabbi Yaakov Emden was engaged in a zealous campaign against anyone he suspected of Shabbatean tendencies. It would not take long before he and Rabbi Yehonatan would clash.

Rabbi Yehonatan was known not only for his great intellectual accomplishments, but as an active kabbalist as well. He was especially famous for his kabbalistic amulets, which were in great demand. This practice raised the suspicion of Rabbi Yaakov Emden, who, upon studying the kabbalistic nature of one of the amulets, proclaimed it to be of Shabbatean origin and belief. Rabbi Yaakov Emden immediately called for a ban against such amulets and insisted that Rabbi Yehonatan be enjoined from issuing any further amulets. Rabbi Yehonatan stoutly defended himself, denying all of the accusations made against him and continued with his kabbalistic practices. The dispute between the two great rabbis split the community of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbek and eventually much of the European rabbinic world as well. The leaders of the community sided with their rabbi and forced Rabbi Yaakov Emden to leave the community. The dispute was so public and bitter that it came to the attention of the Danish king who sided with Rabbi Yaakov Emden and forced Rabbi Yehonatan to resign his position and leave his community. However, in 1756, the king reconsidered and restored Rabbi Yehonatan to his post and the dispute finally simmered down.

Traditional Jewry has always sided with Rabbi Yehonatan and accepted his denials of all the charges made against him. Only in the rarified atmosphere of Judaic academia does the dispute still rage in our time. In the study halls of the yeshivas and the synagogues, the issue was long ago settled, if not forgotten. Rabbi Yehonatan's great halakhic works are part of every rabbinic curriculum and his tumultuous life of controversy is completely subsumed and unrecognizable in his great works of Torah. He was not only a master of Halakha and Kabbala, but of Homiletics, Aggada, and Derash as well.

None of Rav Yehonatan's works had been translated into

English prior to *The Eybeshitz Haggadah* by Rabbi Shalom Hammer, which has received wide acclaim and much use. Now, Rabbi Hammer has collected, translated, and explained many of Rav Yehonatan's works on the Jewish holidays, providing the English-speaking community with the opportunity to benefit from Rav Yehonatan's unique brilliance throughout the Jewish year. Rabbi Hammer's skills and knowledge have gained him an international reputation and this work is a tribute to the talents of its author. It is a unique blend of Aggada, Kabbala, Halakha, and philosophy, and presents keen insights into the Jewish past and the conditions of the author's own times and locale. It is not a simple book to deal with, to understand, or to appreciate. Rabbi Hammer is to be complimented for his unusual ability to catch the flavor and nuances of the original work. This book is a treasure trove of knowledge and Torah understanding and a most necessary addition to any Jewish home and library.

Author's Preface

Rabbi Yehonatan Eybeshitz, Dayan of Prague, and later rabbi of the “Three Communities,” Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbek, was an outstanding eighteenth-century talmudist, halakhist and kabbalist. Famed not only for his Torah wisdom and greatness but also for his worldly knowledge, Rav Yehonatan, as he was affectionately known, was in contact with the Christian leaders of his day, debating religious and philosophical issues with them.

Notwithstanding his Torah greatness, Rav Yehonatan's fame also stems from his notoriety, as his pulpit was put in jeopardy after he was accused of being a secret adherent of Shabbateanism, a movement centered on the false messiah, Shabbetai Zvi. Rav Yaakov Emden, himself an influential figure and scholar in the Jewish community of Hamburg, was one of Rav Yehonatan's principal accusers. Despite Rav Yehonatan's support for the excommunication of all Shabbateans and his publication of a *sefer*, *Luhot HaEdut*, which contained approbations from many of the most distinguished rabbis of his time, defending and praising him, he was twice removed from his pulpit after sustaining these unsubstantiated accusations. While he was finally

reinstated as Rav of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbek – a position he retained for the rest of his life – the controversy spread to many major Jewish communities. The attacks by Rav Yehonatan’s opponents continued, unabated, until his death in 1764.

I mention this controversy not only because I owe it to my readers to place all the facts on the table, but also because I want my readers to appreciate the inner strength and resilience of this Torah giant. Whatever the reason for the attacks upon him, the immense amount of Torah that Rav Yehonatan taught, and the level of knowledge he attained, vitiate any accusations against him. Rav Yehonatan’s breadth of knowledge and the ease with which he handled the many diverse disciplines of Torah study are virtually unparalleled. Many of his *sefarim* remain basic staples of the Torah scholar’s library to this very day, including the *Kereiti U’Peleti on Yoreh De’ah*, *Tiferet Yisrael* on the laws of family purity, *Urim VeTumim* on *Hoshen Mishpat*, *Ye’arot Devash* – a compilation of sermons, *Bina LaIttim* on Rambam’s *Hilkhot Yom Tov*, *Tiferet Yehonatan* on the Torah, *Ahavat Yehonatan* on the weekly *haftara* portions, *Alon Bekhut* on Megilat Eikha, *Midrash Yehonatan* on Midrash Aggada and Midrash Halakha, *Shem Olam* on kabbalistic teachings, and a commentary on the poem “*Had Gadya*.” All but one of Rav Yehonatan’s works were published posthumously, testimony to his lasting influence and the timeless nature of his writing.

I discovered Rav Yehonatan’s works a few years after I began my professional career as a teacher and rebbe. Teaching a weekly *shiur* on the *haftara*, I was always on the lookout for commentaries dedicated to the *haftarot* themselves, as opposed to commentaries written on entire books of the *Nevi’im*. I came across the *Ahavat Yehonatan*, and I was mesmerized. While parts of the commentary were difficult for me to understand because of their kabbalistic nature, typical of many of Rav Yehonatan’s books, I was enthralled by its richness, linking all of the varied disciplines of the Torah. Rav Yehonatan’s brilliance and expertise in so many areas of Torah grabbed my interest and fueled my fascination with his commentaries.

I began to read *Ahavat Yehonatan*, *Tiferet Yehonatan*, and *Ye'arot Devash*. This last contains thematically based discourses, each one usually fourteen or fifteen pages long. Their content is complex and wide-ranging, containing analyses of many areas of Torah and science. Most sermons focus upon a specific area of Torah, such as Halakha, Aggada, Tanakh, Talmud, *Parshanut*, or Midrash. Rarely does a commentator integrate and weave all of these seemingly diverse fields into one discourse. Discovering Rav Yehonatan's mastery in addressing a midrash, linking it to a portion of the Talmud, connecting it to a teaching of the Zohar, and then concluding with codified laws in the *Shulhan Arukh* was an awe-inspiring experience.

As I continued studying Rav Yehonatan's Torah, I realized that his creative genius was truly extraordinary, not only in his ability to master all of the Torah and weave it together almost seamlessly, but also in his way of incorporating scientific disciplines to prove points within his discourses. For example, when he refers to the rapport between the Jewish people and Hashem, he compares it to the behaviors of animals such as the dove, deer, and hind in nature (see "The Intrinsic Connection between Shabbat, Torah and Eretz Yisrael" and "Hashem Encourages Benei Yisrael to Repent Through Trials and Tribulations"), he explains the concept of genuine *teshuva* by expounding upon the process of rainfall and the derivation of dew (see "Hashem Seeks the *Teshuva* of Am Yisrael"). Rav Yehonatan compares sinning to a physical sickness which cannot be cured without changing one's approach and behavior (see "*Teshuva*: A Long Term Goal"). Most interestingly, Rav Yehonatan even challenges certain portions of the Midrash based on his knowledge of science, primarily when he discusses genuine peace by demonstrating that water and fire can coexist and be productive when joined together, something which the Midrash never suggests (see "Authentic Peace Based on Mutual Understanding and Respect"). These inclusions of secular knowledge helped me appreciate Rav Yehonatan's relevance to us today. Rav Yehonatan was a Torah scholar genuinely interested in incorporating worldly disciplines to greater appreciate God's world.

I tried to envision this giant of the Torah addressing his community in Prague or Hamburg, speaking for hours on end, weaving together the complexities of Jewish philosophy, Jewish law, and general knowledge in front of a mesmerized crowd, many of whom, presumably, had very little understanding of what he was truly saying. When I realized that the yeshiva world was not as familiar with the teachings of Rav Yehonatan as it should be, I began teaching classes on *Ye'arot Devash*.

While over the last few years the situation has greatly improved with a new printing of *Ye'arot Devash*, the printing of Rav Yehonatan's short works on the Talmud, and a new version of *Tiferet Yehonatan*, something was still lacking, particularly within the English-speaking world, both among those with strong yeshiva backgrounds and those without. I felt that this has to be rectified. To deprive the world of Rav Yehonatan's breadth and unique style was to deprive the world of a most precious Torah treasure.

I came to believe that the best way to introduce the Torah of Rav Yehonatan to the Jewish world at large and the English-speaking world in particular was to compile a haggada based on his teachings. *The Eybeshitz Haggadah* was published in 2010 and its success encouraged me to make more of Rav Yehonatan's insights accessible. I determined that it would be best to write a book about the holidays, something people would find useful throughout the year.

This work is largely based on select discourses which appear in the *Ye'arot Devash*. This is not a translation, nor is it comprehensive. My goal, as it was with regard to the haggada, is to popularize the teachings of Rav Yehonatan and make them accessible to a broader audience. Therefore, I had to choose selections that I felt were the most pertinent and poignant, and which would enhance one's enjoyment of the holiday in an intellectually meaningful way. I also chose to contribute my own thoughts, referred to as Author's Notes, concerning issues raised by Rav Yehonatan. These suggest alternative interpretations – which are a means of accentuating his uniqueness – and relate the relevance of the concerns expressed within his commentary

from the eighteenth century to societal challenges we still experience in today's Jewish world. He explains, for example, how people have an easier time committing themselves to *mitzvot bein adam laMakom* so much so that there is a tendency to ignore *mitzvot bein adam lehavero*, an issue which haunts the Jewish community to this day. It is my hope that my ideas engender further discussion and discourse.

Conceptually, Rav Yehonatan emphasizes the importance of taking the physicalities of this world and sanctifying them for greater spiritual purpose, a concept of great urgency in our contemporary hedonistic society (see "The Reason for the Shofar" and "Test of *Teshuva* Man to Man"). He speaks about how prayer is most effective when we pray for others and for a communal cause other than our own interests, and he stresses that the only means of achieving redemption is Jewish unity, an ideal which requires reflection in today's polarized Jewish society (see "The Significance of Jewish Unity"). Rav Yehonatan refers to Jewish activism (see "The Proactive Approach is the Only Acceptable One") and to the requirement of every Jew to long to be in the Land of Israel (see "The Desire to Be in Eretz Yisrael"), both significant agendas in Jewish life today.

Rav Yehonatan also made significant halakhic contributions within his *derashot*, some of which are revealed within this work as well. For example, he addresses the need to reexamine the prohibition placed on studying Torah on Erev Tisha B'Av and Tisha B'Av. Rav Yehonatan suggests that considering the circumstances we find ourselves in today and the effects the learning of Torah will have on restoring the *Beit HaMikdash* and Jerusalem to its glory, we can immerse ourselves in Torah study on Erev Tisha B'Av and even Tisha B'Av itself, even though this is contrary to what some of the halakhic authorities decreed (see "The Loss of the *Talmid Hakham*"). This kind of suggestion demonstrates originality in halakhic thinking and the adaptation which needs to be accorded to Halakha within a particular generation.

Taking Rav Yehonatan's complex ideas and making them comprehensible and readable in a different language was a tremendous

challenge. It necessitated departing from the original sentence structure and Rav Yehonatan's poetic style. I began my work by reading each discourse a number of times. Then I would rearrange each section into questions and answers in order to increase overall clarity. There are a number of concepts referred to by Rav Yehonatan for which the editor and I did not manage to discover sources. In order to create a logical, flowing text, we either had to omit some of Rav Yehonatan's ideas or to explain them by referencing some of his other works, but we always took our best care in trying not to distort Rav Yehonatan's original intent. If I have omitted parts that should have remained, or have added anything that does not belong, I beg both Rav Yehonatan and the reader for forgiveness. However, I sincerely believe that the advantages in sharing Rav Yehonatan's brilliance far outweigh the losses incurred by editing and adapting his works into the current format.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people whose support and encouragement helped me complete this work. Traveling as often as I do takes its toll, but it also has its advantages, like allowing me the opportunity to meet new people and forge new friendships. *Barukh Hashem*, I have been blessed with many friends throughout the world who are genuinely interested in and extremely supportive of my endeavors including:

Jonathan and Jinny Steinberg and the entire Steinberg and Attias families who helped sponsor this work לעילוי נשמת ר' אליעזר בן ר' יצחק ז"ל.

Robbie, Trina, Leah, Adina, Shaul and Ben Tager who sponsored this book in memory of Solly Tager, a true giant among men in every sense. The family have expressed that they will cherish and retain the real Torah he taught them.

Jonny Tager, whose sponsorship is in honor of his dear mother, Nora – נחמה רייזא עמ"ש and in loving memory of his late Father, Solly – שאול בן אליהו זעליג הלוי ז"ל.

Marc and Tamar Lesnick and family graciously contributed to this project in my honor.

Mendy Schwartz and family made their contribution in memory of Mendy's father, דוד בן יצחק אייזיק ז"ל, and mother, שרה בת נתן מנחם ז"ל, whose lives exemplified *tzedaka*, *hesed*, and kindness to all who came in contact with them יהי זכרם ברוך.

The Black family sponsored part of the work on the occasion of the marriage of their son Eli to Ayelet (a *simha* which still holds a dear place in my heart). Warren and Marlene Sobol and family contributed in honor of אריה לייבוש ז"ל and אברהם לוי בן ציפורה בת שמואל and in memory of לאה בת שלמה ז"ל and קתריאל בן יוסף מרדכי ז"ל. David and Dina Guedalia also helped facilitate this publication by contributing in loving memory of Charles Bendheim ז"ל, the *hachbar* חיים בר משולם הכהן ז"ל, a man of enduring thoughts and few words.

This work is also in memory of two outstanding women: Dr. Vera Breuer Hornstein – חיה בת מנחם מנדל ז"ל – a woman who embodied the attributes of an "*eshet hayil*" by way of her strength עוז והדר, לבושה, her commitment and dedication ותעש בחפץ כפיה, and most of all her devotion to Hashem, אישה יראת יי הוה היא תתהלל, and Tzippy Tokayer – צפורה חנה בת ר' אברהם ע"ה – who was a loving wife, mother, daughter, sister, and friend. Her *hesed* and *maasim tovim* continue to be an inspiration to all who knew her.

This is the first time I have worked with Maggid Books, and I would like to thank both Matthew Miller, the publisher, and Gila Fine, the editor in chief, for their patience and support. Thanks are also due to Maggid's assistant editor, Tomi Mager, and to the editors Shira Koppel, Anne Gordon, and Suzanne Libenson for their diligent work. It has been a pleasure and a valuable learning experience working with them, and I look forward to working with them all on future projects.

It goes without saying, but it cannot be stated enough, that I have benefitted from having wonderful parents who continue to serve as outstanding role models for me and my family; may God grant them good health and happiness.

I would also like to thank my rebbe, Rabbi Berel Wein, *shlita*, for writing the foreword to this work, and for serving as my mentor, guide, and confidant. I sincerely cherish the closeness that we share

and welcome the opportunities to work together with him.

In order to make Rav Yehonatan's profound words and deep thoughts comprehensible and interesting, this project required a knowledgeable and experienced editor. Rabbi Avi Grossman is a former student of mine, and a true friend. Avi has enhanced my understanding of the passage in the Talmud that says, "I have learned much from my teachers, and from my friends more than from my teachers, but from my students more than from them all."

May Hashem grant my dear wife Gabi the strength to continue to tolerate me, and in the merit of this holy work, may He grant both of us the strength and wisdom to continue to guide our dear children, Bracha, Adena, Yaakov, Chamshush, Gila, and Srulie Boy, in Hashem's ways.

I pray that the merit of Rav Yehonatan's Torah will protect Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael and help bring about the final redemption, speedily and in our time.

I once read that if one learns from a particular rabbi's *sefarim*, he is entitled to call the author his rebbe, even if the author had passed from this world many years before. That being the case, I must express my deepest and sincerest gratitude to my rebbe, Rav Yehonatan Eybeshitz. I hope I have done justice to his works, and I pray that my readers will benefit and appreciate his Torah knowledge and genius as much as I have.

Bivrakha,
Shalom Hammer
Beit Shemesh, Israel
Summer 5773/2013

Chapter 1

Yamim Noraim

EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Throughout their history, the Jewish people have been exhorted to repent in order to avoid the tragic consequences of punishment from Hashem. Unfortunately, there were many times when Am Yisrael did not do so, and suffered the inevitable. *Hazal* say that one of the causes of *ḥurban habayit*, the destruction of the Temple, was *sinat ḥinam*, baseless hatred among fellow Jews. Had Am Yisrael behaved better, the destruction, the *ḥurban*, in all likelihood, could have been avoided. The consequences of our behavioral failings become even more serious if Hashem sees that, with regard to certain mitzvot, the nations are more exacting than His own people are. The Talmud,¹ for example, refers to Dama Ben Netina, a gentile who served as an outstanding example of one who respects his parents. Perhaps one of the reasons why the Talmud chose to illustrate the importance of *kibbud horim* with the story of a gentile is to emphasize for the Jewish people the gravity of the mitzva. After all, if a gentile, who has no obligation of *kibbud av va'em*, honoring one's father and mother, is so exacting in this regard, then certainly the

1. Kiddushin 31a.

Jewish people, who are obligated by a mitzva, are expected to do so, and when they do not, it reflects badly on them.

Rav Yehonatan claims that this concept applies to the mitzva of *teshuva* as well. The verse in Psalms relating to Rosh HaShana says, “Blow the horn at the new moon, at the full moon (*keseh*), for our feast-day. For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. He appointed it in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out over the land of Egypt” (Ps. 81:4–6).

The rare Hebrew word, *keseh*, from the root, *kaf-samek-heh*, to cover, is used here, and Rav Yehonatan has his own unique interpretation of these verses. Tishrei is the month when we celebrate Rosh HaShana and blow the shofar. The shofar is an instrument used for awakening Am Yisrael and reminding them of their obligation to repent and return to Hashem. Although the observance of Rosh HaShana is written explicitly in the Torah, the purpose of Rosh HaShana, *teshuva*, is not. Rosh HaShana’s purpose is “covered,” as it were, for a reason: If the nations were to be aware of Rosh HaShana and its focus on *teshuva*, they could make a concerted effort to return to God. This would then serve as a very poor reflection on Benei Yisrael if they did not themselves repent with the same measure of enthusiasm and commitment. Hashem thus designated Rosh HaShana as a day of *teshuva* for His people and not for any others. This idea is alluded to by King David in Psalms when he declares, “He has not dealt so with any nation; and as for His judgments, they have not known them. Halleluya!” (Ps. 147:20). The “judgments” refer to the Day of Judgment, Rosh HaShana, a gift given exclusively to Benei Yisrael who proclaim “Halleluya,” and praise Hashem for allowing them, and no one else, this wondrous opportunity.

This premise helps us understand the reference to Joseph, quoted above, as part of the verses that describe Rosh HaShana as the time when the moon is covered: “He appointed it in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out over the land of Egypt.” Joseph had the ability to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams when Pharaoh’s personal advisors could not. According to the Midrash, Pharaoh’s advisors offered various interpretations for Pharaoh’s dreams, yet they could

not understand the significance of the sheaves of wheat or the cows, which represented both years of plenty and years of famine.

The Mishna determines, “Divine judgment is passed on the world’s grain on Passover [in the month of Nisan].”² The Midrash adds that Joseph was summoned to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams on Rosh HaShana, the first day of Tishrei. While Pharaoh’s advisors may have understood the significance of the month of Nisan, when the grain is judged for the year, as non-Jews, they did not understand the significance of Rosh HaShana, and, therefore, could not make any connection between the wheat and the dream Pharaoh had in Tishrei. Conversely, Joseph understood that only grain in Eretz Yisrael is judged on Passover, the New Year of the grain, signaled by the *omer* offering on Ḥol HaMoed. However, the grain outside of Eretz Yisrael is judged on the first of Tishrei.³

Joseph understood that lands outside of Eretz Yisrael would be judged on Rosh HaShana, something which Pharaoh’s advisors failed to comprehend, as the purpose of Rosh HaShana was “covered” from them. But Joseph was able to interpret the dreams. Similarly, in the Musaf prayers of Rosh HaShana we declare, “And regarding the [foreign] countries, on this day is decided which will know famine and which will be satiated.” Am Yisrael is aware that on Rosh HaShana, Hashem decides the economic fate of the nations.

Now the meaning of the verse in Psalms is clear. The Jewish people blow the shofar whose purpose is revealed only to them, as “it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob,” yet “covered” from the rest of the world. The “testimony” for this was established when Joseph’s name “went forth against the land of Egypt” when he successfully interpreted Pharaoh’s dream after the royal advisors were unable to do so.

2. Rosh HaShana 1:2.

3. This might explain why many halakhic decisors conclude that the prohibition of *ḥadash* (the Torah prohibition to eat the new grain crop before the offering of the *korban omer* on the sixteenth of Nisan) applies only to the grain which grows in Eretz Yisrael and not to grain grown elsewhere.

Rosh HaShana is therefore not only a day of judgment. It is also a day of appreciation, as Am Yisrael is expected to recognize and value the wondrous gift of *teshuva* that Hashem has reserved for them.

THE ROLE OF THE SHOFAR

Hashem informed Isaiah the prophet that in reprimanding the Jewish people he is to “cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a shofar, and declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins” (Is. 58:1). After wondering why Isaiah was instructed to “cry out” and why his voice was compared to that of a shofar, Rav Yehonatan references additional verses in Isaiah:

Then said I: “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips”.... Then one of the seraphim flew toward me with a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Lo, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin expiated.” (Is. 6:5–8)

What sin did Isaiah commit, and why did he require angelic assistance in order to facilitate atonement? Rav Yehonatan compares a true prophet to a vessel in service of His creator; his prophecies are direct messages from Hashem to the Jewish people, and therefore, there is no room in the prophecy for personal expression. The prophecy must be conveyed word for word, as it were. Therefore, when a prophet criticizes Am Yisrael, he cannot be punished for hurting them, as he is merely fulfilling his duties in transmitting Hashem’s word. However, verse 6:5, above, represents Isaiah’s personal derision of Am Yisrael, as he labels them “people of unclean lips.” This was a sin, as Isaiah used his power of speech to denigrate Am Yisrael. That is why the angel was called upon to touch coals to Isaiah’s lips, purifying them, and reminding him to use them only in the service of Hashem, and certainly not to castigate Am Yisrael.

It is for this same reason that Hashem instructed Isaiah to “cry aloud from his throat and spare not,” and to “lift up [his] voice like a shofar” – a simple wind instrument that does no more than give sound to air that is forced from one end of it to the other, without changing the sound substantially. So too, the prophet was reminded that as long as he channeled his prophecy directly, he could not be criticized if he “declare[d] unto [God’s] people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins.”

The sounding of the shofar on Rosh HaShana is meant to remind us that, although we all have the freedom to express ourselves, Hashem expects us to use our capabilities to extol His greatness. The shofar reminds us that the job of a Jew, like that of the prophet, is to obey Hashem’s directives without change or challenge. This ensures that Hashem will judge us favorably, just as He wants His messengers, the prophets, to judge the Jewish people favorably.

Similarly, Rav Yehonatan explained to his community that he too would not castigate them or accuse them of wrongdoing, because as their leader, he was but Hashem’s emissary. Like the shofar, he would remain a faithful messenger, transmitting only that which was part of Hashem’s message as recorded in the Torah and *sifrei kodesh*.

Author’s Note

Rav Yehonatan explains that the sound of the *terua* evokes the loving relationship between a father and a son and represents “*yisurin shel ahava*,” afflictions out of love, whereas the sound of the *shevarim*, which means “fragments,” evokes the more distant relationship between a servant and his master, one in which the servant occasionally needs to be put in his place and reminded of his obligations. On Rosh HaShana itself, we are unsure of the quality of our relationship with Hashem, whether we are as sons or as servants, which is why, after sounding the shofar, we declare: “Today all creatures of the world stand in judgment, whether as children or as servants. If as children, be merciful with us as the mercy of a father for children. If as servants, our eyes look toward and depend upon You.”