

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's portion *Mattos* the Torah tells us how the Bnai Yisroel used horn blasts in their battles against Midian. In this vein, the Midrash discusses some of the other uses of horn blasts in Jewish communal life.

The Midrash tells us that in earlier times, the custom on erev Shabbos (Friday afternoon) was to blow three horn blasts to inform the public that the Holy Shabbos was approaching. The attendant of the shul would go up onto the highest roof of the city and there he would blow the horn. The first set of horn blasts was blown earliest in the day, in order to give notice of Shabbos to those workers in the fields who were the farthest away from the city. The second set of blasts was later in the day and was directed at those working even closer to the city. The third set of blasts began as the final moments of Shabbos approached. By the end of the third set of blasts, all of the residents of the city were to cease from all the creative labors which are forbidden on Shabbos.

It is interesting to note that to this very day, many Jewish communities in cities such as Jerusalem and Monsey, New York, use horns to announce the arrival of Shabbos.

Besides the interesting historical value of this discussion in the Midrash, what spiritual lesson can we take out of the fact that Shabbos is announced with horn blasts? The commentators teach us a beautiful and inspirational lesson based on this section of the Midrash.

This world is compared to the six days of the week, while the World to Come is compared to Shabbos. (See Sanhedrin 97a) As we approach the World to Come, which is a time of the eternal Shabbos, horn blasts are being blown to call Jews home to Torah and mitzvahs. The first set of blasts is now being blown. As we mentioned above, in earlier times, this first blast was to call those workers home who were furthest away, in order to give them enough time to come home. So too, as we approach the redemption and the World to Come, the world of the eternal Shabbos, the first horn blast has been blown for those Jews furthest away to come home to Torah observance.

We should recognize certain events in our lives as the horn blast calling us home. The further we are away from Hashem, Torah and mitzvahs, the sooner we must begin coming home, in order to be ready for the days of the eternal Shabbos. The following amazing and even humorous true story illustrates how one Jew heard the horn blast and made his way home.

Rabbi Eliezer Sandler was fortunate; in 1973, he became the first full-time Chief Jewish chaplain in the South African army since World War II. As part of his duties, Rabbi Sandler would visit bases throughout South Africa and Namibia. At that time, the army was fighting terrorist elements who were trying to destroy the fabric of South African society.

On his first visit to a certain base, Rabbi Sandler was told that there were three injured Jewish servicemen in the infirmary. "I will go there at once," said Rabbi Sandler. The first two patients were clearly ill, their faces were gaunt and pale. One wore a cast from the hip down. The other was recovering from malaria. But the third patient surprised Rabbi Sandler. This third patient was a tall healthy-looking soldier who did not seem to be hurting in any way.

"Why are you here?" Asked Rabbi Sandler in puzzlement. "I am recovering from shock." The young soldier explained. "You see, I was trampled by an elephant."

"An elephant!" Said Rabbi Sandler in astonishment. The soldier nodded and said: "Let me tell you my story: I was part of a reconnaissance patrol. We were roaming through the jungle, looking for the enemy. Now remember, this is a wild jungle. Besides the human enemy, we also have to contend with the danger of wild animals such as lions and tigers. And when you see those animals close up in the African jungle, they look a lot larger than when you see them in a zoo!"

"As the radio man, I always carry radio equipment on my back. The radio gear is a big heavy package. If we spot the enemy, it is my job to call it in on the radio.

"Well, one day we happened to bump into a huge elephant. By buddies were bored and they decided to have some fun by teasing the elephant, pulling at its ears and tail. Nothing much happened at first. But eventually the elephant got angry. He raised his tusks in the air, he blasted his horn and trumpeted his war march, and started coming for us.

"We got the message, and we started running away as fast as we could. But my radio pack was heavy; it slowed me down. I tripped over a root on the jungle floor and fell flat on my face. Seconds later, the elephant ran right over me!"

"Now, elephants are pretty heavy. (An adult male African elephant can be up to 11 feet tall and weigh up to 6 metric tons!) The radio pack on my back was squashed to the size of a penny. So why am I still alive? That is just it. It was an absolute miracle. The ground happened to be soft sand, and when the elephant ran over me I sank right into the ground. I ended up completely unhurt. I am here just to recover from the shock."

Rabbi Sandler was in shock himself when the soldier completed his amazing story. "I have never heard a story like that," Rabbi Sandler began to say. "You know, you have to bench gomer (the thanksgiving blessing) and offer thanks to G-d for saving you."

"I have never heard of that," said the soldier with interest. "How does it work?"

"You have to go to a shul and make the blessing with a minyan." Rabbi Sandler explained.

The soldier raised up hands and said "I am afraid that I still do not know what you are talking about."

Rabbi Sandler explained to the under-affiliated soldier some of the basics of Jewish ritual, including the idea of praying together in minyan (a quorum of ten men) in a shul. The young man listened intently. Unfortunately, he had grown up without any real Jewish education. After hearing what Rabbi Sandler had to say, the soldier was even more interested in giving thanks to G-d, but there was no synagogue or minyan in the African jungle.

After his recovery, the soldier returned home to Johannesburg, South Africa, where he finally had the opportunity to "bench gomer" in a shul on a day when the community read from the Torah. However, the soldier did not stop at just "benching gomer." He was determined to find out more about his heritage, the heritage which he was deprived of while growing up. Little by little, the young man learned more and more about Torah and mitzvahs. Today, the young soldier has come home and is totally Torah observant. All of his Torah is because of the foot of an elephant! (Visions of Greatness Vol. 5, Rabbi Y. Weiss, p.90)

In our story, the soldier heard the horn blast from an elephant. We should recognize the horn blasts in our own lives. These blasts are sounded to bring us home to Torah observance; so that we will be prepared for the the times of the eternal Shabbos, the World to Come. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**