

Areshet S'fateinu: To be Needed by God

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inspired by the new Rabbinical Assembly Mahzor, Lev Shalem

Who is this "Sovereign" (*Melekh*) who "listens, discerns, considers, and attends to the sound of our shofar blast"? A Ruler who needs us, listens to us, and loves us. God is not content to be Alone. The very title *Melekh*, however problematic for Modern Jews, implies relationship. For what is a ruler without subjects? We wish it to be this way, which is why we plead Areshet S'fateinu (literally: "May the desires of our hearts be pleasing to You"). As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: "Judaism shows it to be a need to be needed by God."¹

The shofar is a clarion call, jolting the soul, but it is also a piercing cry to God, who "attends" and "lovingly accepts" that which we offer. With every verb in *Areshet S'fateinu* a unique quality of relationship is introduced, texturing the covenantal relationship between us and God.

מְבִין/Discerns/Mevin

The Hebrew *Mevin* might also point to the notion of *Understanding*, the ability to relate to someone else. By beginning with *Mevin*, perhaps the authors of *Areshet S'fateinu* meant that God's first response to being summoned by the shofar is, as Stephen Covey has put it, to seek "first to understand."² We, through this formula, are seeking, above all, to be understood.

מְאֲזִין/Listens/Ma·azin

The English translation of the new *Lev Shalem Mahzor* has subtly shifted the meaning of the prayer by switching the order of the words! We might learn from this that whereas the original authors of *Areshet S'fateinu* believed that *Discernment* precedes *Listening*, the translators felt that *Listening* must come first, and idea Heschel hinted at when he wrote: "There is a Divine light in every soul, it is dormant and eclipsed by the follies of this world. We must first awaken this light, then the upper light will come upon us."³

מְבַיֵּט/Considers/Mabbitt

To *Consider* is to compare. We have, through the guidance of this new translation, moved from *hearing* to *discernment* to *consideration*. In legal theory, *Consideration* implies the search for a reason to enforce a promise or an obligation. The shofar's blast rouses the listener, human or Divine, to respond.

מְקַשֵּׁב/Attends/Makshiv

After having heard, understood, and considered, God and we are finally prepared to attend to the matter at hand - affirming our precious relationship whose necessity and interdependence been amplified by the primal sounds of the shofar.

אַרְשֵׁת שְׁפָתֵינוּ יַעֲרַב לְפָנֶיךָ, אֵל רָם וְנִשְׂא,
מְבִין וּמְאֲזִין, מְבַיֵּט וּמְקַשֵּׁב לְקוֹל תְּקִיעָתֵנוּ:
וּתְקַבֵּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרָצוֹן סֵדֶר מַלְכוּתֵנוּ.

May the words of our lips be pleasing to You, exalted God, who listens, discerns, considers, and attends to the sound of our shofar blast. Lovingly accept our offering of verses proclaiming Your Sovereignty. (Translation, *Mahzor Lev Shalem*)

*Areshet s'fateinu ye-erav l'fanekha, el ram v'nissa,
mevin u-ma-azin, mabbitt u-makshiv l'kol t'ki-atenu.
U-t'kabbel b'rah.amim u-v'ratzon seder
malkhuyyotenu.* (Transliteration, *Mahzor Lev Shalem*)

1. *Between God and Man* (ed. Rothschild, Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 142

2. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 235

3. *God in Search of Man* (Macmillan, 1976), p. 143. (Heschel is here quoting and interpreting Rabbi Aaron of Karlin.)