

L'Dovid: Psalm 27

1. Trusting the Lord

<p>1. Of David. The LORD is my light and my help; whom should I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life, whom should I dread?</p> <p>2. When evil men assail me to devour my flesh— it is they, my foes and my enemies, who stumble and fall.</p> <p>3. Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war beset me, still would I be confident.</p> <p>4. One thing I ask of the LORD, only that do I seek: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD, to frequent His temple</p> <p>5. He will shelter me in His sukkah on an evil day, grant me the protection of His tent, raise me high upon a rock.</p> <p>6. Now is my head high over my enemies roundabout; I sacrifice in His tent with shouts of joy, singing and chanting a hymn to the LORD.</p>	<p>לְדָוִד יְהוָה אֹרֵי וְיִשְׁעֵי מִמֶּי אִירָא יְהוָה מְעוֹז־חַיִּי מִמֶּי אֶפְחָד:</p> <p>בְּקֹרֶב עָלַי מְרַעִים לֹאֲכַל אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי צָרִי וְאֹיְבֵי לִי הֵמָּה כָּשְׁלוּ וְנָפְלוּ:</p> <p>אִם־תַּחֲנֶנּוּ עָלַי מַחֲנֶה לֹא־יִרְא לְבִי אִם־תִּקְוִים עָלַי מִלְחָמָה בְּזֹאת אֲנִי בּוֹטָח:</p> <p>אֶחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְהוָה אֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה כְּלַיְמֵי חַיִּי לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם־יְהוָה וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ:</p> <p>כִּי יִצְפְּנֵנִי בְּסֹפֵה בַיּוֹם רְעָה יִסְתַּרְנִי בְּסֹתֵר אֱהָלוּ בְּצֹר יְרוּמֵמֵנִי:</p> <p>וְעַתָּה יְרוֹם רֵאשִׁי עַל אֹיְבֵי סְבִיבוֹתַי וְאֲזַבְחָה בְּאֱהָלוֹ זִבְחֵי תְרוּעָה אֲשִׁירָה וְאֲזַמְּרָה לַיהוָה:</p>
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(Psalm 27)

2. Searching for God

<p>7. Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; have mercy on me, answer me.</p> <p>8. In Your behalf my heart says: "Seek My face!" O LORD, I seek Your face.</p> <p>9. Do not hide Your face from me; do not thrust aside Your servant in anger; You have ever been my help. Do not forsake me, do not abandon me, O God, my deliverer.</p> <p>10. Though my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will take me in.</p> <p>11. Show me Your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my watchful foes.</p> <p>12. Do not subject me to the will of my foes, for false witnesses and unjust accusers have appeared against me.</p>	<p>שְׁמַע־יְהוָה קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחַנּוּנִי וְעֲנֵנִי:</p> <p>לָךְ אֲמַר לְבִי בִקְשׁוּ פָנַי אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֲבַקֵּשׁ:</p> <p>אֶל־תִּסְתֹּר פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי אֶל־תִּטְּבֵאֵף עַבְדְּךָ עֲזַרְתִּי הֵייתָ אֶל־תִּטְּשֵׁנִי וְאֶל־תִּעַזְבֵּנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵי:</p> <p>כִּי־אֲבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזַבוּנִי וַיהוָה יִאֲסֹפֵנִי:</p> <p>הוֹרֵנִי יְהוָה דְּרָכְךָ וְנַחֲנִי בְּאֶרֶח מִישׁוֹר לְמַעַן שׁוֹרְרֵי:</p> <p>אֶל־תִּתְּנֵנִי בְּנַפְשׁ צָרִי כִּי קְמוּבֵי עַד־יִשְׁקֹר וַיִּפְחֵ חֶמְס:</p>
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3. Resolution

<p>13. Had I not the assurance that I would enjoy the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living...</p>	<p>לֹא־הָאֲמַנְתִּי לְרֹאֲתָא בְטוֹבֵי־הָאָרֶץ חַיִּים:</p>
<p>14. Look to the LORD; be strong and of good courage! O look to the LORD!</p>	<p>קִוְּהָ אֱלֹהֵי־הַחַיָּה חֹזֶק וַיֵּאֱמַן לְבָבָהּ וְקִוְּהָ אֱלֹהֵי־הָהָה:</p>

LIFE'S JOURNEY

4.

a.

<p>It seems to me that David composed this Psalm towards the end of his life, when his advisors asked him to take an oath saying, "You shall not go out to war with us anymore." (II Samuel 21:17)</p>	<p>נִרְאָה לִי כִי זֶה הַמְזִמּוֹר חִבְרוּ דוֹד בְּאַחֲרֵית יָמָיו כְּאִשֶּׁר נִשְׁבְּעוּ אֲנָשָׁיו: לֹא תִבָּא עִמָּנוּ לְמִלְחָמָה</p>
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(Ibn Ezra, Psalms 27:4)

b.

<p>Again war broke out between the Philistines and Israel, and David and the men with him went down and fought the Philistines; David grew weary,</p> <p>...It was then that David's men declared to him on oath, "You shall not go with us into battle any more, lest you extinguish the lamp of Israel!"</p> <p>Again there was fighting with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan son of Jaareoregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite...</p>	<p>וַתִּהְיֶה־עוֹד מִלְחָמָה לְפִלְשְׁתִּים אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּרֶד דָּוִד וַעֲבָדָיו עִמּוֹ וַיִּלָּחֲמוּ אֶת־פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיַּעַף דָּוִד:</p> <p>...אִז נִשְׁבְּעוּ אֲנָשֵׁי־דָוִד לוֹ לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִצָּא עוֹד אֶתְּנוֹ לְמִלְחָמָה וְלֹא תִכְבֶּה אֶת־נֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל: (פ)</p> <p>וַתִּהְיֶה־עוֹד הַמִּלְחָמָה בְּגוֹב עִם־פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּךְ אֶלְחָנָן בְּנֵי־עֵרִי אֲרָגִים בֵּית הַלְחָמִי אֶת גִּלְיָת הַגִּתִּית...</p>
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(II Samuel, 21:15, 17, 19)

5.

a.

<p>A man doesn't have time in his life to have time for everything. He doesn't have seasons enough to have a season for every person. Ecclesiastes was wrong about that.</p> <p>A man needs to love and hate at the same moment, To laugh and cry with the same eyes. With the same hands to throw stones And gather them,</p>	<p>אָדָם בַּחַיָּו אֵין לוֹ זְמַן שִׁיחִיה לֹא זְמַן לְכָל. וְאֵין לוֹ עֵת שִׁתְּחִיה לֹא עֵת לְכָל חֶפֶץ. קִהְלַת לֹא צַדִּיק כְּשֹׂאֵמֵר כֵּךְ.</p> <p>אָדָם צָרִיךְ לִשְׂנֹא וּלְאַהֵב בְּבֵת אַחַת בְּאוֹתָן עֵינָיִם לְבַכּוֹת וּבְאוֹתָן עֵינָיִם לְצַחֹק בְּאוֹתָן יָדַיִם לְזָרוֹק אֲבָנִים וּבְאוֹתָן יָדַיִם לְאַסּוֹף אוֹתָן,</p>
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<p>To make love in war and war in love, And to hate and forgive, and remember and forget, To arrange and confuse, to eat and digest, What history takes years and years to do.</p> <p>A man doesn't have time. When he loses he seeks, When he finds he forgets, When he forgets he loves, When he loves he begins to forget.</p>	<p>לעשות אהבה במלחמה ומלחמה באהבה. ולשנוא ולסלוח ולזכור ולשכוח ולסדר ולבלבל ולאכל ולעכל את מה שהסטוריה ארכה עושה בשנים רבות מאד.</p> <p>אדם בחייו אין לו זמן. כשהוא מאבד הוא מחפש כשהוא מוצא הוא שוכח, כשהוא שוכח הוא אוהב וכשהוא אוהב הוא מתחיל לשכוח.</p>
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(Yehuda Amichai, "A Man in His Life")

b.

They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy.	הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדַמְעָה בְּרִנָּה יִקְצְרוּ: (Psalms 126:5)
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EITZAH TOVAH

6. לולֵאִ

a.

<p>If I had not believed in the Holy One, blessed is He, those false witnesses would have already risen against me and destroyed me.</p> <p>The word "Lulei" has dots on it to expound that which our Rabbis expounded: I know that You give reward to righteous in the world to come, but I don't know if I have a portion with them or not.</p>	<p>לולֵאִ האמנתי וגו'. אם לא שהאמנתי בהקב"ה כבר קמו בי אותם עדי שקר וכלוני.</p> <p>לולֵאִ נקוד עליו למדרש שדרשו רבותינו יודע אני שאתה נותן שכר לצדיקים לעולם הבא אבל איני יודע אם יש לי חלק עמהם אם לאו:</p>
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(Rashi, Psalms 27:13)

b.

I also encounter the Almighty up close and personally at the starting line of an arduous race when I confidently "entrust my spirit...as long as my soul is with my body. The Lord is with me, I am not afraid." A staunchly religious Christian colleague has chided me for failing to immediately thank God, with equal prayerful reverence, when the race is over and I am swept up in the euphoria of meeting a personal challenge. It is a weakness of character and of faith that I have to work on.

(Dr. Jeffrey Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter with American Sports*)

c.

There are two types of thank yous. There is a perfunctory thank you, one we say when someone, for example, opens the door for us or gives us their seat.

And then there is a deeper thank you. A thank you where the word “todah” interfaces with the word “lehodot,” literally, to make an admission. This is a thank you where one says to the other, in deep gratitude – I could not have done it without you.

The latter thank you is more difficult to offer, as the “thanker” is indicating limitation – a limitation that for some is difficult to admit as it reflects vulnerability.

Notwithstanding, it is important to offer these words to others and to God, not only in the bad times, but in the good times.

7. קִּוָּה (P-T-W)

a.

<i>Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He will strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord (Ps. 27:14). R Hiyya bar Abba said: When you pray and pray again, know that your prayer is heard, and that there will come a time when God will do what you ask. And the proof? Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He will strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.</i>	קוה אל ה'. אמר ר' חייא בר אבא אם נתפללת וחזרת ונתפללת תהא מבושר שנשמעת תפלתך והוא עתיד לעשות רצונך. ומה טעם קוה אל ה' חזק ויאמץ לבך וקוה אל ה'.
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(Midrash Tehillim 27:14)

b.

- קִּוָּה קִּוָּה – Patience
- קִּוָּה אֶל־הוָּה – Trust
- חֲזַק וַיֶּאֱמַץ לִבְךָ – Will

REFLECTING ON “TRUSTING THE LORD”

8.

a.

<p>“And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.” (Genesis 1:4) Rabbi Judah bar Rabbi Simon maintains that God divided the light for His own use.</p> <p>Just like a king who, upon seeing a good portion come, says: “This portion shall be mine;” even so, when the Holy One blessed be He, created His universe and created the great light, He said: “Except for Me, no creature shall be free to make use of the light.” And thus Scripture says: “The light dwells with Him.” (Daniel 2:22)</p>	וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב. רבי יהודה ברבי סימון אמר הבדילו את האור לעצמו. משל למלך שראה מנה יפה ואמר זה שלי. כך כשברא הקב"ה את עולמו אמר אין כל בריה יכולה להשתמש בה אלא אני. וכן הוא אומר (דניאל ב כב) ונהורא עמיה שרי.
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(Midrash Tehillim 27:1)

b.

Rabbi Abin the Levite said that the Holy One blessed be He, took the light, and covered Himself with it as though it were a garment, and illumined His universe with it. Hence, it is said, "He covers Himself with light as with a garment [radiating out]." (Psalms 104:2)

אמר רבי אבין נטלו הקב"ה ונתעטף בו כטלית והבריק את העולם מזיוו. הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים קד ב) עוטה אור כשלמה.

(Midrash Tehillim, ibid)

c.

אור ה'

By Your light do we see light.

בְּאוֹרְךָ נִרְאָה אֹר:

(Psalms 36:10)

אור תורה

And enlighten our eyes in Your Torah

והאר עינינו בתורתך

(Liturgy)

אור ישראל וציון

Shine a new light upon Zion

אור חדש על ציון תאיר

(Liturgy)

For the Jews there was light

ליהודים הייתה אורה

(Esther, 8:16)

אהבת עולם כולו

A light for the nations

לאור גויים

(Isaiah 42:6)

אור אהבה

Former of lights. [With] unbounded love You have loved us.

יוצר המאורות. אהבה רבה אהבתנו

(Liturgy)

9.

The word hatzala refers to an act of salvation during which the party being saved remains completely passive. Yeshua, however, implies a salvation in which the party being saved actively participates.

(Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, *The Warmth and the Light*)

10.

A very eminent psychiatrist once said to me: Had I the authority to do so, I would eliminate the prayer recited on the High Holy Day that begins with the words, "Cast Thy fear," as fear is the major cause of the mental illnesses that beset mankind. In order to preserve one's mental health one should be free of fears, and so there is certainly no reason why one should ever pray for fear.

Though I am not a psychiatrist, what he said helped me to understand the true nature of that prayer which was ordained by the Sages of Israel. And that is what I told that psychiatrist:

Everyone seems to be beset with fears of all kinds. Some are afraid that they will not be able to succeed in their careers, others fear losing their wealth or status or that they will fail to attain sufficient prominence. Many people are afraid of sickness and bodily weakness. In generations past, fear of leprosy engulfed the world; today people live in fear of cancerous growth. Many people do not go to see a doctor even when they have pains lest he diagnose "the disease." Man is plagued constantly by all sorts of lesser fears.

I am not a psychiatrist, but I do know that one major source of fear can wipe out all of these lesser fears. What fear can overtake man, thereby uprooting all other fears, such as that of failure, of poverty, of old age, of rejection or of disease? Only the fear of the Lord! That is the reason behind the expression in the High Holy Day prayer, "Cast Thy fear, O Lord our God, upon all Thy handiwork and Thine awe upon all that Thou hast created." We pray that this great fear will free us from those other ones which lurk everywhere, upsetting our lives.

(Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *On Repentance*)

11.

a.

The activist grounded exclusively in physical defense – demonstrations, rallies, protests, political lobbying – doesn't understand the true nature, essence, and higher purpose of activism. If I am a Jew only to fight anti-Semitism, that is negative Judaism, if, however, I am a Jew because I appreciate the Sabbath, I treasure the Jewish laws of business ethics and all the laws and rituals that ennoble the life of the Jew, and I devote time to reading Jewish books, and Torah study – that is positive Judaism. Negative, reactive Judaism will not endure. Only positive, proactive Judaism will.

b.

When Edgar Bronfman Jr. became president of the World Jewish Congress, whose main function is to protect Jews worldwide, he visited Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. He asked him for words of advice. Rabbi Soloveitchik turned to Bronfman and said: "Remember, you were not born a Jew just to fight anti-Semitism."

(Spiritual Activism)

12.

a.

Acceptance of prayer is a hope, a vision, a wish, a petition, but not a principle or a premise. The foundation of prayer is not the conviction of its effectiveness, but the belief that, through it, we approach God intimately, and the miraculous community embracing finite man and his Creator is born. The basic function of prayer is not its practical consequences but the metaphysical formation of a fellowship consisting of God and man.

(Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart*)

b.

Activists, consumed by a cause, often forget the human factor in their endeavor. This is particularly ironic because the activist is ultimately motivated by concerns for human well-being. A major objective of activism is to struggle against the "I-it" tendency by always keeping in mind activism's "I-Thou (thou)."

(Spiritual Activism)

REFLECTIONS ON "SEARCHING FOR GOD"

13.

a.

<p>שְׁמַע־יְהוָה קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחַנּוּנִי וְעֲנֵנִי:</p> <p>לֵךְ אָמַר לְבִי בִקְשׁוּ פָנַי אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֲבַקֵּשׁ:</p> <p>אֶל־תִּסְתֵּר פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי אֶל־תִּטְבֹּאֵף עַבְדְּךָ עֲזַרְתִּי הִיִּית אֶל־תִּטְשֵׁנִי וְאֶל־תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p> <p>כִּי־אֲבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזָבוּנִי וְיְהוָה יֶאֱסָפֵנִי:</p>	<p>שמע קולנו ה' אלוּקינו, חוס ורחם עלינו, וקבל ברחמים וברצון את תפלתנו:</p> <p>השיבנו ה' אליך ונשובה, חדש ימינו כקדם:</p> <p>אל תשליכנו מלפניך, ורוח קדשך אל תקח ממנו:</p> <p>אל תשליכנו לעת זקנה ככלות כחנו אל תעזבנו</p>
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<p>7. Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; have mercy on me, answer me.</p> <p>8. In Your behalf my heart says: "Seek My face!" O LORD, I seek Your face.</p> <p>9. Do not hide Your face from me; do not thrust aside Your servant in anger; You have ever been my help. Do not forsake me, do not abandon me, O God, my deliverer.</p> <p>10. Though my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will take me in.</p>	<p>Listen to our voice, Lord our God, spare us and have compassion on us, and in compassion and favor accept our prayer.</p> <p>Turn us back, O Lord, to You, and we will return. Renew our days as of old.</p> <p>Do not cast us away from You, and do not take Your holy spirit from us.</p> <p>Do not cast us away in our old age; when our strength is gone, do not desert us.</p>
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14.

<p>In Your behalf my heart says: "Seek My face!" O LORD, I seek Your face.</p>	<p>לֵךְ אָמַר לְבִי בִקְשׁוּ פָנַי אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֲבַקֵּשׁ:</p>
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a.

<p>To you my heart said, "Seek my face"; your countenance, O LORD, I will seek.</p>	<p>לֵךְ אָמַר לְבִי בְעִי אִפִּי יִת סְבִר־אִפְךָ יְהוָה אֲתַבַּע:</p>
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(Targum, Psalm 27:8)

b.

<p>I have sought Your nearness, With all my heart have I called You, And going out to meet You I found You coming toward me.</p>	<p>דְּרַשְׁתִּי קִרְבְּתְךָ בְּכָל לִבִּי קִרְאתִיךָ וּבְצִאתִי לְקִרְאתִיךָ לְקִרְאתִי מִצִּאתִיךָ</p>
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(Rabbi Yehuda Ha'Levi)

15.

Though my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will take me in.	כִּי־אָבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזָבוּנִי וַיהוָה יֹאסֶפְנִי:
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a.

The time of intercourse for their pleasure is intended; since they completed their pleasure, he turned his face to Y/you and (s)he turn her/his his face to Y/you. The Holy Blessed One protected the drop and created the embryo.	כי אבי ואמי עזבוני. בשעת תשמיש להנאתן נתכוונו כיון שגמרו הנאתן זה הופך פניו אילך וזה הופך פניו אילך: וה' יאספני. הקב"ה שומר את הטיפה וצר את העובר:
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(Rashi, Psalms 27:10)

b.

In their death they left me, and You always take me in.	עזבוני במותם, ואתה אספתני תמיד.
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(Ibn Ezra, Psalms 27:10)

c. The adult orphan

For years, I looked into the eyes of seniors as they emotionally recited the sentence in the Shema Koleinu on Yom Kippur Eve – “Do not cast us away in our old age.” As I grow older, I, too, shed a tear when reciting this verse. COVID-19 has given aging new meaning. The key is the verb “cast us away (*tashlicheinu*)” connoting a sudden casting, an almost abnormal way of looking at time. Today’s 70 is not yesterday’s 50, but, sadly, it’s 90. Abruptly, we’re moving up in years – and pray that in our vulnerability we not be “cast away,” living and dying alone without loved ones at our side.

(Shema Koleinu – Do Not Cast Us Away)

16. לְמַעַן שׁוֹרְרִי

- שׁוֹר – שׁוֹרְרִי from shur

[To respond to] the enemy who look at me with an evil eye.	הָאוֹיְבִים הַמְּבִיטִים עָלַי בְּעֵין רָעָה
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(Metzudat Tzion, Psalms 27:11)

- שִׁיר – שׁוֹרְרִי from shir

L'DOVID – ROSH HASHANA AND YOM KIPPUR

17.

a.

The Rabbi interpreted the entire Psalm as referring to the New Year's Day and to the Day of Atonement. <i>The Lord is my light</i> on New Year's Day... <i>The Lord is my salvation</i> on the Day of Atonement [when He forgives us all our sins.]	רבנן פתרי קראי בראש השנה ויום הכפורים. אורי בראש השנה...וישעי ביום הכפורים.
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(Midrash Tehillim)

b.

“The superscription for this song is L’David (by David), not Mizmor L’David (a Psalm of David) or L’David Mizmor (By David. A Psalm).

Here, we do not see David gaining inspiration on the wings of song, nor do we have here the outpourings of divine rapture coming from a full heart. In this psalm, David simply states the emotion and thoughts that fill his soul.”

(Commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch to Psalms)

c.

Violent breath	ויפח חַמָּס – וממללי חטופא
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(Targum, Psalms 27:12)

d.

“and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” and He blew into his nostrils a living soul, and it was for a speaking spirit in man.	ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ונפח באפוהי נשמתא דחיי והות באדם לרוח ממלא:
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(Targum, Genesis 2:7)

e.

The mitzva of shofar [is the following]...through teshuva we can stir the inner voice found in the souls of the Jewish people.	מִצְוַת שׁוֹפָר ... ועל ידי תשובה יכולין לעורר הקול הפנימי שנמצא בנפשות בני ישראל.
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(Sefat Emet, Rosh Hashana 5651, s.v. *Mitzvat Shofar*)