

THE FIREMAN

By Nissan Mindel

Many, many years ago, before there were any fire engines or fire brigades, or electric fire alarms, and most houses were built of wood, a fire was a terrible thing. A whole town, or a good part of it, could go up in flames and smoke. And so, when fire broke out, everyone left his business or work, and rushed to help put out the fire. There used to be a watchtower that was taller than the other buildings, where a watchman kept a lookout all the time. As soon as he saw smoke or fire, he would sound the alarm. The townspeople would then form a human chain between the fire and the nearest well, and pass on to each other pails of water with which to put out the fire.

Once it happened that a lad from a small village came to town for the first time. He stopped at an inn, on the outskirts of the town. Suddenly he heard the sound of a bugle. He asked the innkeeper what it meant.

"Whenever we have a fire," the innkeeper explained to the lad, "we sound the bugle, and the fire is quickly put out."

"How wonderful!" thought the village lad. "What a surprise and sensation I will bring to my village!"

Thereupon, the village lad went and bought himself a bugle. When he returned to his village, he was full of excitement. He called all the villagers together. "Listen, good people," he exclaimed. "No need to be afraid of fire any more. Just watch me, and see how quickly I will put out a fire!"

Saying this, he ran to the nearest hut and set fire to its straw roof. The fire began to spread very quickly.

"Don't be alarmed!" cried the lad. "Now watch me."

The lad began to blow the bugle with all his might, interrupting it only to catch his breath, and to say, "Wait, this will put out the fire in no time!" But the fire did not seem to care much for the music, and merely hopped from one roof to another, until the entire village was in flames.

The villagers now began to scold and curse the lad. "You fool," they cried. "Did you think that the mere blowing of the trumpet will put the fire out? It is only the call of an alarm, to wake up the people, if they are asleep, or to break them away from their business and work, and send them to the well to draw water and put out the fire!"

We are reminded of this story when we think of the *shofar* that is sounded many times on *Rosh Hashanah*. Some people think like that village lad, that the sound of the *shofar* itself will do everything for them. They think that they may continue to "sleep," or go about their business, there being no need to change their way of life and daily conduct; the *shofar* sounded in the synagogue will surely bring them a happy New Year.

But, like the bugle in the story, the *shofar* is but the sound of an "alarm." It has a message: "Wake up, you sleepers, think about your ways, return to G-d, put out the 'fire' that is threatening to destroy your Jewish homes. Go to the Well, the Well of Living Waters, the Torah and *mitzvot*. Hurry, before it is too late!"

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