

## Prominent Flatbush Rabbanim Provide Inspiration at Agra D'Pirka's Erev-Rosh Hashanah Gathering

RABBI CHAIM FUHRER

The Yamim Nora'im are days when *Klal Yisrael* engages in introspection and seeks spiritual growth. On Sunday September 5, Agra D'Pirka sponsored a special pre-Rosh Hashanah program at Knesses Bais Avigdor in Flatbush, featuring three renowned *Rabbanim* who spoke to a captivated audience of almost 500, including live and online attendees.

The first speaker was Harav Avrohom Schorr, *Mara d'Asra* of Khal Nezer Gedalyahu, who discussed what Rabbeinu Yona calls the "*mitzvah kolleles*" of *u'vacharta bachayim* — the directive to choose life. All other *mitzvos* represent a means toward achieving that goal.

Rav Saadya Gaon lists ten possible reasons for *mitzvas tekias shofar*; one of them is to remind us of *maamad Har Sinai*. Through the *shofar*, we are able to revert to the purity which existed before the *cheit ha'egel*, which prompted us to declare "*naaseh v'nishma*." When we implore Hashem to give us life, we say *l'maancha Elokim Chayim*. This means we must choose the manner of life which Hashem wants us to have — a life of *ruchniyus*.

In order to connect "*u'vacharta bachayim*" to *mitzvas shofar* more tangibly, Rav Schorr pointed out that the *gematria* of *shofar* is 586. By adding the 100 *kolos* we are required to hear, the total is 686 — the precise *gematria* of "*u'vacharta bachayim*."

The second speaker was Harav Lipa Geldwerth, *Mara d'Asra* of Kol Torah, who related the story told by Harav Shlomo Heiman, *zt"l*, upon his return from Radin after having heard *divrei hisorerus* from Harav Naftoli Tropp, *zt"l*. Rav Naftoli explained that when we say in *Selichos* the words, "*k'dalim u'ch'rashim dafaknu delasecha*" — we were like needy, impoverished beggars banging on Your door — we must envision ourselves exactly that way. We have nothing and we are entitled to nothing. Our possessions, our families, our health, and our very lives are all on the line every Rosh Hashanah. This past year, with the proliferation of COVID and numerous other tragedies, this message was delivered very clearly. When we live with a sense of entitlement, we may be jeopardizing those "entitlements."

Harav Aharon Kahn, *Mara d'Asra* of Knesses Bais Avigdor, completed the program with a halachic analysis regarding the custom of not sleeping on Rosh Hashanah. The earliest source for this custom is in the writings of the Mahari Ibn Shuaib, a *talmid* of the Rashba, who suggests that the reason for this custom is that the very thought that one is undergoing a judicial process in which his life hangs in the balance should not allow one to sleep. As the captain of the ship said to Yonah, "*Mah lecha nirdam* — how can you sleep when we are about to go under?" The Zohar comments that Man's sojourn through this world is analogous to a voyage on a boat that is about to capsize.

The *Darkei Moshe*, in *siman* 583, quotes the words of the *Yerushalmi*: "One who sleeps on Rosh Hashanah — his *mazel* will sleep." The Rema (there) cites the *Yerushalmi* as the source for this tradition, adding that the custom of not sleeping on Rosh Hashanah is commendable. However, from the words of the Mahari Ibn Shuaib it is clear



Harav Aharon Kahn speaks at the Yamim Noraim program.



Harav Lipa Geldwerth addressing participants at the Yamim Nora'im program.

that it is not merely a commendable custom, but the essence of what Rosh Hashanah is about. As the Rambam portrayed the message of the *shofar*: "Awaken from your sleep and emerge from your slumber!"

The Erev Rosh Hashanah event was one of many special programs sponsored by Agra D'Pirka before Yamim Tovim as well as on Legal Holidays. In addition, there are daily *shiurim* in numerous Agra D'Pirka branches throughout the country, including

Baltimore, Boca Raton, Boro Park, Flatbush, Kew Gardens Hills, Lakewood, Miami Beach, Monsey, West Palm Beach and Williamsburg. Several new Agra D'Pirka branches are being planned for the year 5782.

For further information regarding schedules of *shiurim* or branch locations, please visit [www.agradpirka.org](http://www.agradpirka.org), email [cfuhrer@agradpirka.org](mailto:cfuhrer@agradpirka.org) or call 212-661-9400.