

Rosh Hashanah 5778/September 21, 2017

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“Whole, Broken, Shattered, Repaired”

The most penetrating shofar blast is not *t'ki'ah*, even though that is the first sound we hear. Rather, it is *t'ruah*, the sound beyond panic, the sound of alarm, the sound not of breaking (that's *sh'varim*) but of shattering, the sound of waking up deep within and springing into action before it is too late. *T'ruah* lets us know that repair is possible, but that it is far from a given, far from guaranteed. And it lets us know that time is running out.

U'v'shofar gadol yitaka! And when the great shofar is sounded,

V'kol d'mamah daka yishama, then a still small voice can be heard.

A small, quiet voice can be heard, and the heavenly beings are thrown into fright, and, seized by a terrible dread, they declare: *hineh yom hadin!* Behold, the Day of Judgment has arrived, when even those in heaven's court are judged, for none can be exempt from justice's eyes.

Un'taneh Tokef, the central passage of today's Musaf service. The great shofar from without, and the still small voice from within.

But just for a moment, go back with me to Pesach. One of the reasons the Haggadah text of the four children is so popular is that it invites us to identify

ourselves with one or more of those children. Wise, wicked, simple, unable to ask. Eventually we realize we are all of those personalities at one time or another, perhaps several of them at once. A sort of Meyers-Briggs of Jewish identity.

Now back to Rosh Hashanah. Have you ever listened to the four blasts of the shofar in that same way? *T'ki'ah* – whole; *sh'varim* – broken; *t'ruah* – shattered, following close on the heels of *sh'varim*; *t'ki'ah g'dolah* – repaired, and perhaps more whole than ever before.

Which one are you? Or, if you're all of the blasts at one time or another, which one are you *now*? Speaking in the terms of the pre-verbal language of the shofar, where are you in your life? In the fullness? In the brokenness? In the shattered hopelessness? In the new-found wholeness of your life?

As a Jew, where are you on the Meyers-Briggs shofar scale? As a human being conscious or unconscious of your potential to call out injustice and your capacity to respond to other's calls for help, where are you on the shofar scale?

“Where are you?”, *ayeka*. That is God's first shofar call to humanity. Where are you, Adam? Hiding again? I'm calling in my still-small voice, and you keep crouching behind the bushes.

“Where aaaaaarrree you?” “Ayyyyeeeka! Ayeh, ayeh, ayeh!

Ayekkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkka! Ayeeeeeeeeeka!”

And then, twenty generations later, yet another call: “Avraham, Avraham.”

“Abraham, Abraham.” That is God’s first shofar call to *our* people, our *Jewish* people. Abraham, I’m calling out to you. I want to place my still-small voice at the center of your consciousness. I want you to obey me but more important, to obey the ethical call I’ve planted within you.

Are you still hiding, Avraham? Hiding from the identity I need you to assume?

Hiding, like old Adam in the bushes? Hiding from the difficult task I’ve set out for you?

Many of us would say that a discussion of the shofar’s effect on our consciousness is, at the core, a *spiritual* discussion. Or, maybe a discussion of our *emotional* well-being, including our *mental health*. Others of us hear talk about the call of the shofar as *political*, whether small ‘p’ or large ‘P’ political. Still others hear it as not quite political, but nonetheless *societal*.

And others hear the shofar as an outcry against our deficiencies in Jewish practice, Jewish identity, Jewish literacy, Jewish *everything*. They would contend that the shofar comes to us at Rosh Hashanah; that Rosh Hashanah is the re-boot of the *Jewish* year; and that therefore the shofar’s “use” must be restricted to what can be

categorized as *Jewish* problems and solutions, of which there are plenty of the former and precious few of the latter.

The shofar must be about *all* of these things, because all of these things are inherently Jewish. And that furthermore, ignoring any aspect of this wide spectrum of topics is like choosing one or two blips in the long staccato of *t'ru'ah* blasts, *t'ru'ah* being the most frantic and desperate of the four calls.

Look, it's fine for you or me to choose a more contented shofar call as our own "personal" shofar profile for this year, or this period of our lives. For you or me individually, right now may in fact be a time of great wholeness or happiness. It may be our year of *tekiah*, or even *tekiah gedolah*. If each of us had a personal trainer for our spiritual selves, we might all rejoice in how well *we're* doing in *our* own lives.

I can imagine that "personal Judaism trainer" coming over to our house and blowing the shofar for us – and only for us – just as a *bikkur cholim* volunteer might go to a hospital or nursing home and blow the shofar for the sick and immobile. A shofar sounding just for *me*! So personal that I can choose how I want to hear it, and how I want to use it to shape *my* goals and aspirations in the coming year. My own personal shofar, and my own personal Judaism. Just the way *I* like it, with no one to make me feel bad about my choices.

But personal practice aside, we blow the shofar *en masse*. Yes, we blow it so that each individual can hear it and resonate with it, but only in the company of a representative sample of our entire people. We are obligated to hear it *together*. Yes, we are required to hear it the way we ourselves hear it, but also, and more urgently, we are required to hear it the way everyone else hears it. We hear it together, because *we are in this together*.

T'ru'ah: We are in this *Jewish* era together. *T'ru'ah*: We are in this *general* era of human endeavor together. *T'ru'ah*: We are in this political-societal-environmental quagmire together. *T'ru'ah*: we are in this age of ugliness toward the stranger and deafness to the taunts of hatefulness - together.

T'ru'ah: We are in this age of both not doing nearly enough to stand with Israel on the world stage, *and* simultaneously not doing enough to help Israel make hard choices for its own self-preservation as Jewish democracy; especially now that Israel is rightfully enjoying a half-century of the fruits of the miraculous 1967 victory (and we would have it no other way), but also finding it less and less imaginable to employ its extraordinary power and creativity and goodness to abate the suffering of a people under its thumb who do not want to be part of the rebirth of the Jewish state, because they are not Jews.

T'ru'ah: Here at home, we live in a community filled with people for whom life is too much; for whom their mental anxieties explode into mental illness, depression, desperation; for whom the act of lifting the shofar and calling for help is simply too hard. And for those suffering in our midst, we have begun to help in an organized way, but only just begun. We must do so much more to hear their *kol d'mamah dakah*, their frightened still small voice, and to give them the help they need to return to a repaired shofar call.

T'ruah: We live in an America where old hatreds and animosities have reawakened like an angry bear in the middle of hibernation: anti-Semitism; racism; classism; xenophobia; “*truthophobia*.” We must come to realize that these are no longer wake-up calls, but calls to action. No longer *t'ki'ahs*, but *t'ru'ahs*.

Goodness, I tell you the same thing every year. Come back next year and, God willing, I will tell you again. This year it's framed in the motif of the shofar. Next year in some mind-bending midrash. But it's always more or less the same message, despite the morphing of news and events and circumstances beyond our control.

Here is the message: The shofar is calling me to be a better Jew. If I want to be a better Jew, I have to *do* more Jewish. I have to do more Shabbat, do more Torah,

do more benching when I eat, do more blessing when I awaken and when I go to bed, do more connecting to Israel and to the Jewish people around the world. Do more davening or praying or meditating to align my soul with its purpose, to repair the broken parts of my *neshamah*.

I have to do more *tikkun*, i.e., “holy repair”: more advocacy for human rights, more advocacy for the best of what Israel strives to be, more advocacy for the cause of the poor, including those made poor and sick by my own actions and my own inactions. More welcoming and sheltering of those who came here in fear, seeking sanctuary and hope. More *tzedakah*, yes to universal causes but also to *Jewish* needs. More work to save our soon-to-be floundering Planet Earth.

And, more inner work to understand that my outer work *is* my Jewish work - because I am a Jew and because I am constantly being called by an incessant shofar blast. I need to make that connection in my mind between my outer person and my inner Jew if I am ever going to be more than an afterthought in the history of our great people; and if our people are ever going to be more than a fascinating footnote in the history of our species.

We Jews have a Jewish job to do. If that language is too “chosen” for you, so be it. I don’t mean that we are supernaturally chosen. I mean that we made a covenant at Sinai at a gathering convened by the blast of a shofar. We made a promise to live

as a holy people, and to continue to do so despite the allure of political or economic power.

So when we see outrageous injustice marching down our main street or across the globe, it is still our Jewish job to say so. When our friends or our allies perpetrate evil or turn a blind eye to it, it is still our Jewish job to risk friendships or business partnerships or political alliances in order to say so. To say *hineni* when the shofar calls *ayeka*. To say “I’m here” when the shofar calls “where are you.”

Otherwise, we will always remain in a state of *sh’varim*, of brokenness, living in the illusion that we are in a state of gracious *t’kiah*, whole and fine and unscathed, until we can move ourselves to that state of emergency, of *t’ruah*, of honesty, of truth, of *tzedek*, of justice. Only then can we do the job we agreed to do at Sinai. Only then can we hope to hear the repaired sound of *t’kiah g’dolah*.

T’ki’ah – whole; *sh’varim* – broken; *t’ruah* – shattered; *t’ki’ah g’dolah* – repaired, and perhaps more whole than ever before.

Which one are you? Which one are you *now*? Where are you in your covenantal life? In the fullness, in the brokenness, in the shattered hopelessness, in the new-found wholeness of your life? Where are you on the shofar scale? And where is the person next to you? Calling silently to you for help?

I close with this story:

אמר ההוא רב:

כל פעם ששמעתי את קול השופר במשך חיי הארוכים, התעצבתי מאד כי לא יכולתי לזכור את שמיעתי הראשונה בילדותי.

A certain rabbi taught: Each time I heard the blasts of the shofar throughout my long life, I became forlorn, because I could not remember the first time I heard the shofar as a tiny child.

השופר בפעם משנולדה נכדתי, התרוממה רוחי בראותי אותה שמה לב לתקיעת הראשונה.

When my grandchild was born, my spirits were lifted as I watched her hearing the blasts for the first time.

בפתח ה"תקיעה" ראיתי אותה קופצת בתמהון.

When the initial tekiah sounded, I saw her look up in amazement.

כשיצא קול ה"שברים", פרצופה נשתנה להלם.

When the sh'varim went up, I saw her expression change to shock and bewilderment.

ביציאת ה"תרועה", נתחלף ההלם לפחד.

When the staccato of the t'ruah came forth, I saw her bewilderment turn to fright.

אבל ברגע שנכנסה ה"תקיעה גדולה" לבית התפילה וקולה הדהד בין הקירות, ראיתי את פיה מחייכת לרווחה ועיניה פוקחות כזריחת השמש.

Then, when the final great teki'ah echoed from the walls of the synagogue, I saw a broad smile come across her face, and her eyes open like the sunrise.

ברגע ההוא זכרתי כאילו את שמיעתי הראשונה של תקיעת השופר, וגם אני נשתלמתי.

And at that moment, I "remembered" my own first hearing of the shofar, and I, too, was made whole.

May we hear the shofar again as if for the first time, and may we do what we are called upon to do to make each other, and our world, whole again, for the sake of our children, and our children's children. Amen.