

Rosh Hashanah 5779

Shuls around the world today overflow with women and men hoping to find meaning in these Days of Awe and children, in particular, waiting to hear the sounds of the shofar and the long blast of Teki'ah Gedolah, in particular.

My thoughts ,as with so many in our community today ,are of Peter Gold and his family-for so many years he organized the ushers for HH for the shul he volunteered in, the shul he prayed in and the shul he prayed for.

He always brought his shofar at the close of Neilah and eagerly blew Teki'ah Gedolah- he will be sorely sorely missed .Peter would often come to shul by bike. The secret about riding a bike is Balance rather than having a firm grip of the handlebars. So it is with life.

Rosh Hashonah is about restoring that balance-you cannot hold onto life with too tight a grip. The prayers speak of a fragility of life-who shall live and who shall die.

It is not all in our hands- it is not all in our control

The message is clear –Enjoy the ride-fill your hearts with gratitude

However, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are festivals that ask us how we have lived thus far. Does the way we live give us a sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment? Judaism according to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is the satellite navigation system of the soul, and Rosh Hashanah is the day we stop and see whether we need to change direction.

According to the Rambam, Maimonides, The shofar, is God's wake-up call. Without it, we can sleepwalk through life, wasting time on things that are urgent but not important, or that promise happiness but fail to deliver it.

The Torah states, “And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month... it is a day of terua [blowing the horn].

This is the Torah’s commandment describing the act of worship unique to Rosh Hashana. Jews have observed this since the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

The root letters of the word Shofar are Shin Peh Rash meaning to Improve להשתפר

Lehishtopear

To improve -not just to fix it but to go forward-

When the Shofar is blown on Rosh Hashanah, three different types of noises are sounded. The first is a “teki’ah.” This sound is one long continuous rising burst. The second sound is called shevarim ” It consists of three shorter blasts. The third sound is the “teruah.” The teruah is a set of nine short bursts of sound, a staccato blast. The Gemora in Rosh Hashanah tells us that these later two sounds are meant to sound like crying: “. . . drawing a long sigh. . . uttering short piercing cries.” The Ben Ish Chai a C19th Baghdadi Kabbalist writes that these sounds are meant to contrast with the tekiah. The tekiah, he explains, is a sound of triumph and joy, while the shevarim and teruah are sounds of pain and suffering.

Why do we have both sounds of joy and sounds of sorrow emitted from the Shofar? The Ben Ish Chai explains by means of a story. A man had a ring specially made for him. Upon this ring, he had engraved the words “This, too, will pass.” If he were troubled and in pain, he would look at his ring and remember that the suffering would eventually end. This thought comforted him. During times of happiness and comfort, he would gaze at the ring as well. He would realize that his wealth and good fortune could change for the worst in an instant. Good times are not forever. This ring reminded the man that all in his life had to be put in perspective, and that one should live his life neither complacent nor despondent

Here is a true story of a couple who were neither complacent or despondent Jenna and Gil Lewinsky lived on a small farm in British Columbia., raising around 130

Jacob sheep, which they took on their Aliyah to Israel in 2016 on 10 separate flights .All the sheep were given Hebrew names!

This breed of sheep received its name based on Bereshit Chapter 30 verse 32 where Jacob leaves his father-in-law Laban's home and takes part of the flock as his payment for years of service. "I will pass through all thy flock today, removing from thence every speckled and spotted one, and every dark one among the sheep,"

Some claim the sheep followed the Israelites down to Egypt and then spread out across the world to Spain and Britain

This summer Lesley and I visited Charlcote Park, which is near Stratford in the UK to see the Jacobs sheep. They have been there since 1756. The ram's horns were exquisite and some of the Jacobs sheep have 2, 4 or 6 horns.

The breed is ideally suited for the manufacture of the shofar with exquisite shofar sounds

Five died on the journey and Israel gave special permission for the sheep to come even though there was no livestock agreement between Canada and Israel. These sheep were an exception and were kept in quarantine for some time.

Even so 40 sheep subsequently died of blue tongue disease and at their burial several rabbis came as they were viewed as Holy sheep

The horns were taken off and made into shofars. I spoke to the shofar maker, from Israel, who blew the Jacobs sheep shofar for me, over what's App.

Turning her flock's horns into shofars is part of God's plan, says Lewinsky, who calls herself a "traditional and God-fearing Jew."

“The Jacob Sheep horns can probably be processed anywhere in the world but what makes the horns special is that we are processing them in Israel, which gives them a holiness,” she said

Whether any of us feel shofars made in Israel from the biblical sheep make them holy what we can agree on is that the shofar sound can be a wakeup call to what is going on around us.

The sages say the mitzvah is not in blowing the shofar but in listening to the shofar.

What does this say about listening in our polarized, shrill political climate and how does that affect our everyday relationships?

We are living in complicated times and there is such a need for honesty, decency, compassion and justice.

We are bombarded with falsehoods-this RH, let us listen to the wisdom of our ancestors, to remember from where we came, in order to know where we are going.

The shofar sound represents prayer beyond words. Each series of shofar blasts begins with Teki'ah, a whole sound.

It is followed by a staccato series of blasts-“I started off whole” says the Shofar and “I became broken”. But each series of sounds ends with a new Teki'ah promising wholeness again.

As we recite the verses on Malchuyot, Zichronot and Shofarot, I would like to invite us to hear the t'ruah- the call of the shofar, as a wakeup call to that promise of wholeness. A wake up call for so much that is broken in this world and needs tikkun, repair.

The Shofar offers hope and inspiration. Let us as a shul continue to go forward knowing what a strong foundation Peter Gold helped to establish and inspire.

I wish you all a Shana tova u'metuka. May this year be a sweet meaningful one for us all with a constant hearing of the sounds of the shofar that will awaken in us not only the troubled and joyous times but also the sense of moving forward, renewal and self-improvement.

Chag Sameach