Shana tova to all of us. A good change for all of us. Shana means change, the passage of time is change.

Shana tova, may this be the year that we open ourselves to change.

None of us are the same as we were last year, not even as we were in the last few minutes. This is the great truth we observe when looking at the reality before us. The subtle changes are usually noted in retrospect, but it is always going on—even in this very moment.

It’s always great to have this annual meeting of our congregation. It offers all of us a way to reacquaint ourselves with each other and our mission at TBZ.

We are all in the Jewish continuity business and thanks to all of you who are here for your generous support of our efforts. You are to be lauded for standing and sitting down (our services often call for a lot of standing up and sitting down) to ensure that we at TBZ can offer so many different ways to recommit our lives to our Core-Jewish identities.

Whether it is through joyous celebration on Shabbat and holidays, weekly Torah study and all manner of Adult learning opportunities. If your entry point is building an inner life through our Nishmat Hayyim meditation/mindfulness project, our marvelous Mussar/ character develop group, or our Wise Aging explorations, we appeal to both the spirit and the mind.

Our Tikkun Olam group has expanded considerably as we tackle issues of climate change and environmental issues, immigration issues, failures of our justice system and our participation with 5 other churches and synagogues in supporting two recently arrived legal immigrant families. We also interest ourselves in how we can fit into the Sanctuary effort in Greater Boston.
Our children’s programming, Bet Rabban has over 60 children learning a holistic path to Judaism, our youth services brings children of all ages to shul at least twice a month.

Simply said, I can report to you that we’re doing well and the addition of the third floor classrooms has helped all of our programming. If you haven’t been upstairs, try to do so while you’re here.

Our investments are paying off. We are continuing to be a vibrant and creative congregation.

At TBZ we have two main goals: to create a caring and compassionate community and to offer avenues to activate our sense of wonder and mystery in order to encounter the Divine within us and all around us.

TBZ offers many ways for us to accomplish these two goals and I hope that all of us here today will join us in the coming year as we seek to bring together all the different parts of ourselves into the service of One-ness and the interdependence of all those who inhabit our planet.

Our lives are fleeting and there is much to be done. Rosh HaShana offers all of us a time to begin our efforts to put it all together; to offer balance and deeper meanings to all that we do in our lives. To be a Jew is to forever seek connection with the world and its innate Divinity and to see this Divinity in each other.

In simple terms we want our Yiddishkeyt to lead to menschlichkeyt, to work towards being sensitive, responsive and responsible Jewish human beings. Jews who take on the challenges of justice in our own community and in the world around us. As mentioned earlier, TBZ offers all of us many pathways into this awesome endeavor of repairing ourselves and the world in the realm of the Divine. Letaken olam baMalkhut Shadai.
We’re here again and we hear again: ancient words, modern commentaries, tunes both old and new and the wail of the shofar.

There is no mention of RH in the Torah. The first day of the seventh month is mentioned as yom teruah – the day of the sounding of teruah - the staccato 9 note blasts.

In the context of the Torah, as it is today, the teruah is an alarm to remind us that Yom Kippur is approaching, arriving on the 10th day of the seventh month. While the shofar was blown on the first day of every month and on many other occasions, it is the specific mitzvah of blowing the teruah on the first day of the seventh month, today.

The sound of the shofar has a totally non-intellectual quality, it aims for our kishkes, our guts. It aims at our emotions and its effect surpasses the smoothest voices of cantors.

When I see the faces of our TBZ children who gathered here during the shofar service I recall the chill up my spine upon hearing the shofar when I was a kid.

Ever since I was a small child wail of the shofar became indelible in my consciousness.

Today, as I have for over fifty years I will pronounce the blessing that is recited before act of blowing: Baruch atah Yah eloheinu melech ha-Olam asher kidshanu bamitzvotav vetzivanu lishmoa kol shofar.

A TBZ style translation would render this bracha in English as:

_Holy One of Blessing, your Presence fills creation and Yah, the Name that cannot be pronounced, who Gods us [eloheynu] and offers us the opportunity of making our lives sacred through connecting with our past, present and future by listening to the sound of the shofar._
This *bracha* is counter intuitive. I would have expected that the *ba’al(at) tekiah*, as the shofar blower is called, would say a *bracha* on the act of *tekiat* shofar, sounding the notes of the shofar. In our tradition a *beracha* usually precedes an action. This *beracha* however is less interested in the immediate action of blowing the shofar than on the listening to the shofar. If that is the case, why do we not ask all of the congregation to pronounce the blessing on hearing the shofar before it is sounded? What is the role of the *ba’al tekiah*, is he or she fulfilling a mitzvah?

It seems that the *ba’al tekiah* is seen as a vessel that permits the mitzvah of listening—*lishmo’ah* shofar to be fulfilled. In this the ba’al tokayah unites with the shofar. He or she is a conduit for the breather of life to cause the creation of sounds. This is the breath of life, the Nishmat Hayyim, which animated Adam, it is the breath that animates us each day of our lives. In order for a shofar to fit for use it must have no blockages—it must allow constant flow—so too in the shofar blower, whose *kavana*, his or her directed intentionality, is to remove all blockages and to become inseparable for the shofar he or she is blowing.

The *kavana* of the shofar blower is to remove him or herself from the process. The blower must try to extinguish his or her ego as much as possible. Reb Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, a colleague-student of the Ba’al Shem Tov, prescribed a spiritual path where we make ourselves channels for the flow of the Divine into the world, to turn the Ani, the “I”, the capital “I” into Ayin, the infinite No-thingness; to make ourselves instruments that permit the overflowing presence of the Divine Breath of life to animate our lives.

In the *u-netaneh tokef* poem—which includes the, perhaps, most remembered liturgy of the High Holidays of “who shall live and who shall die?” it says *Uveshofar gadol yitaka*, and the Great Shofar will sound and *kol demama daka yishama*, a still small voice will be heard.

The great shofar will be sounded-*shofar gadol yetaka*, its sounds reverberates within us. As the sounds fade we hear the still small voice—*kol demama daka*—both between the notes and after their reverberations subside.
The mitzvah of hearing the shofar is to hear what is audible and not audible at the same time.

So how is the loud voice of the shofar heard as a still small voice. What mediates the loud sound that assaults the ears into the whisper of the heart; that transforms the shofar alarm into a comforting whisper? What transforms our alarm of the shofar awakening us in such a visceral way into a voice that caresses us; a voice that envelopes us with compassion and delicacy.

The sounds of the shofar are abrupt and adapted from ancient sounds of the battlefield, the still small voice provides us with the internal fortitude to withstand the sounds of war and with acts of violence. The still small voice seeps into the recesses of our souls to provide a bulwark of faith and hope we need to withstand forces of darkness that lurk all around us.

What transmutes the startling sound of the shofar into the introspective stillness in these days of judgement? It is the power of teshuva, our remarkable capacity to reassess our lives.

When we blow horns at midnight on the secular New Year it is not usually a cue for the still small voice to manifest. We make noise and celebrate the passage of time. In some cases, we will make New Year’s resolutions. Teshuva is not making resolutions that will soon be forgotten. Teshuvah is the path of return to one’s core-being, to approach the new year with the confidence that my missing the mark last year will not happen again. Teshuva gemurah – complete teshuva, our Sages tell us, is only possible that when one is faced with a similar obstacle that we encountered in our lives last year, it will not trip us up in this year to come.

The sounds of the shofar inform us that we need to pay attention to the still small voice in our hearts. Like the wail of the shofar this still small voice within cries as well., it cries out for the opportunity of making teshuvah a part of our inner lives.
So many of our transgressions are not overt ones. They are committed because of our lack of judgement and our judgementalism. We transgress because of stored up resentments and feelings of discomfort with ourselves.

These transgressions pollute our hearts and the only remedy we have is to sit still and listen to our inner voice. Call it conscience, or call it the voice of the silent “aleph”, the Infinite voice whose expression in the world is made manifest through us.

So the bracha said by ba’alei tekiah precedes the mitzvah of active listening. It signifies our capacity to absorb the shofar blasts without any barriers. It asks of us to let the sounds of hearts and souls not to be ignored; to listen deeply to the still small voice within, the voice that contains within it our agonies and our aspirations.

I’d suggest that we remain silent during the intervals in the Shofar service.

Another anomaly associated with the Shofar service is a verse from the Psalms (89:15) that we recite after the sounding of the shofar is completed.

Ashrei HaAm yodeya T’ruah Adonay B’or panecha y’haleychun

Ashrei HaAm yodeya T’ruah Adonay B’or panecha y’haleychun

Happy are the people who know the blast of the shofar; Adonai, they walk in the light of your presence. (Psalm 89:15)

We have moved here from lishmoah kol shofar listening to the teruah shofar sound- as mentioned in the Torah to lada’at teruah –knowing teruah-

The verse can be read in different ways

O God, Happy is the people who know the teruah, they walk in the light of your Presence

Or, as I would suggest, it should be read Happy are the people who know the teruah of Adonai- God’s alarm.

What does it mean to know sound? What does it mean to know the sound of God? Why will this make us happy?
It has taken me a long time to understand what happiness is.

Are Jews, who have suffered so much, especially in the last century supposed to be happy? Wasn’t happiness reserved for Gentiles. Hasn’t existential angst served as a medium for Jewish creativity?

I was always afraid that happiness would lead to superficiality and vacuity. To be joyful on specific occasions in the life spiral, yes, but to be happy as an ongoing part of life seemed foreign to me. My wife, Anne, gets great credit for her modeling what happiness can be.

What is this deep secret about Teruah that we should know about? Why will knowing the teruah lead to happiness?

And also, why does the verse say Teruah rather than Tekiah? Isn’t Tekiah the main sound of the Shofar we tend to remember, the Tekiah Gedolah which sends shivers down our spine and causes us to think about Teshuva (Repentance)?

In Teruah lies the essence of Rosh Hashana. Teruah is the broken sound, the one that sounds like many bleeps in a row, it is like one long sound broken into many segments.

Rabbi Shefa Gold suggests an answer to the last question:

*What kind of “Happy” is this? Certainly not the happiness of superficial pleasure — a lifestyle of Denial that masks a terrible truth, and not the ‘la-di-da’ happiness that keeps life bland and safe. This is the kind of “happy” that is a dynamic force waiting quietly at our center, the deep joy for existence itself.*

*The blast of the shofar can break open the shell that imprisons that inner joy. When that joy is freed, it becomes a light that shines regardless of circumstance. And that joy is our power. It is the power that moves us as “we walk in the light of God’s presence,” as we walk with integrity, courage, commitment, as we walk in beauty.*

But back to the first question: What does it mean to know the teruah? To know teruah is to know our own hearts and minds.
Our listening must turn to awareness.

According to Rav Nebenzahl, the former Chief Rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem, yodei teruah – those who know the teruah are aware that we are humans broken into pieces.

Like the broken notes of the teruah we are complex creatures, for some this is a tale of woe - but to be able to put it all together is a source of joy.

The Dalai Lama tells that there is beauty in brokenness and that each individual must work on shaping their lives.

Menahem Mendel of Kotzk reminds “There is nothing as whole as a broken heart,” 1787-1859)

To be truly aware of our reality, within and without, leads to happiness.

I noticed that in many Christian translations of this verse in Psalms- teruah is translated as a “joyful sound”. This really misses the mark.

So how do we know the teruah?

In Hebrew participle “to know” lada’at connotes intimacy

Adam knew his wife Eve and she became pregnant...

So how do we know teruah intimately?

Circling back to the beginning, this intimacy is found in the still small voice. To escape the loneliness of staying within our own shell we reach outwards and extend our hand to others whose hearts are broken.

The process of teshuva can’t be done alone.

Next week as we gather together again in community on Yom Kippur, we will use the power of community to heal our broken hearts. Our intention to enter into each other’s hearts by acknowledging the frailty that we all share helps our awareness that in our Jewish tradition it is within a community that we find our bearings and shoulder our burdens.
Intimacy of course begins within one’s self. Our capacity to make friends with our
selves, to integrate our different selves in the first step. To admit to ourselves that
we have missed the mark is not easy. One’s ego (inflated or not) must step out
the way. Yes, we are not perfect.

Yes, we have hurt ourselves and others with our behavior.

This self-examination is helped by our recognition of the Divine spirit within us.

These may be the meaning of looking for a new relationship with the Divine
within the world and within us. We call that relationship beyn-adam vehaMakom,
between humans and the Makom.

Makom, the place, the spaciousness of the Divine which embraces us in times of
joy and sorrow. Makom, the space between ourselves and the Source of Life. This
the essence of Yom Kippur when we die to our old selves and are reborn again

At all other times we seek to repair our relations with others, beyn-adam
lehavero. Making space for the other place and spaciousness in our relationships
doesn’t depend on Divine intervention, it rather it demands hard work for
ourselves, and for the other as we build our human relationships.

In the word beyn, between, we find a key. Beyn, between, as Martin Buber
reminds us, the between is a fertile place to find the Divine in what he called, the
“narrow ridge” that exists between people in relationships that are not
manipulative. He called these –ich un du encounters- I and You relationships. In
distinction to I and it relationships that are reserved for our power of
manipulation of tools, of gene-splicing, of turning clay into a pot and all the
magnificent results that we enjoy when human creativity manipulates the world
in a positive way.

But not in, he warns, are people to be manipulated like raw materials.
Manipulative relationships between human beings distort the capacity of love and
friendship to lift us up.

This is not easy. Many of us make distinctions between our professional lives and
our personal ones. Manipulation in the workplace seems to be defended as
“that’s the way it is”, “it’s a dog eat dog world”
While this is difficult it can be done. People in the workplace can achieve *ich and du=I and You* relationships. Many work places would benefit greatly from our efforts to integrate our lives so we do not live in a fragmented manner. The benefit may even extend to the quarterly bottom line.

*Beyn adam lehavero*-between human beings- demands of us this make this effort before we will stand *beyn adam lemakom* next Friday evening.

I’d like to conclude with three wishes for us articulated by Rabbi Shefa Gold.

*May the blast of the shofar shatter the rigid walls that imprison our true joy.*

*May the wail of the shofar open our hearts and send us with compassion to profound forgiveness.*

*May the call of the shofar inspire each of us to respond with our unique love as we rise to the challenge that is set before us this year.*

I add my own and my family’s wishes for all of us to rediscover in the sound of the shofar the path to reawakening the still small voice that guides us to being our better selves.

May we inscribe and seal ourselves the Book of a Life well lived.
Ashrei HaAm yodeya T’ruah Adonay B’or panecha y’haleychun

Oh God, Happy are the people who know the blast of the shofar; they walk in the light of your presence. (Psalm 89:15)

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Rabbi Shefa Gold
May the wail of the shofar open our hearts and send us with compassion to profound forgiveness.

May the call of the shofar inspire each of us to respond with our unique love as we rise to the challenge that is set before us this year.

Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb gave a shiur last year at Yeshiva University, and discussed the following problem:

On Rosh Hashana, when we are thinking about all the bad things we did in the past year and how we could improve ourselves, we often notice that we are actually still thinking about the same bad thing we did last year, and the year before that, and before that too. Although we sincerely regret our bad behaviour and really don’t want to repeat it, this somehow doesn’t happen, and we don’t learn from our mistakes after all and we end up making the exact same mistakes again and again in the next year, like we did during all the years beforehand. Why is that?

Rabbi Gottlieb tried to provide some understanding of this problem:

The Midrash discusses a verse in Psalms that says “Ashrei ha'am she'yodea truah”, Praiseworthy is the [Jewish] Nation which knows Teruah. The Midrash asks, why does it make us praiseworthy, just because we know the Teruah-sound of the Shofar, surely all nations of the world could know it too, just by listening to it or even blowing a Shofar themselves?

The Midrash answers, that we are praiseworthy because we understand the deeper secret and meaning behind it, rather than just knowing how the physical sound is produced and what it sounds like.

What is this deep secret about Teruah that we should know about? And also, why does the verse say Teruah rather than Tekiah? Isn’t Tekiah the main sound of the Shofar we tend to remember, the Tekiah Gedolah which sends shivers down our spine and causes us to think about Teshuva (Repentance)?

In Teruah lies the essence of Rosh Hashana. Teruah is the broken sound, the one that sounds like many bleeps in a row, it is like one long sound broken into many segments.

When we stand in Synagogue on Rosh Hashana, thinking that we are still making the exact same mistakes as last year, we should delve deeper: Are we really still making the exact same mistakes? Maybe we have changed just a tiny little bit for the good? Maybe we have taken that big bad behaviour and have broken it up into fragments, and have tried to improve at least one of these fragments of bad behaviour? Teruah, the broken segments of sound, shows that also little improvements are valuable. We often focus on big accomplishments or failures, when actually
we should be focussing on small advances, and tiny mistakes, that happen so fast that we forget about them. Both require deep investigation - are we aware of the small accomplishments we do daily or do we lose sight of them? Do we ignore our small mistakes that might have major ramifications in the future? *Teruah* indicates the importance of little things, and of breaking things down into components. It's not all or nothing, even small progress counts.

So, why does the verse in Psalms say that we as the Jewish Nation are praiseworthy because we ‘know *Teruah’”? According to Rav Nebenzahl, the former Chief Rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem, what makes us special is that we are aware that we are humans broken into pieces, i.e. with hang-ups and imperfections, and that we know that we must grow and work on ourselves, improve our behaviour towards other people, towards Hashem, and use the time around Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to repent for past misdeeds. This is why we are praiseworthy as a People, because we acknowledge this essence of *Teruah*.  

Posted by Claire