

SERVICE OF BLOWING THE SHOFAR

Listening

The ten days of returning are meant to reawaken our inner understanding, for it has fallen asleep and needs to be aroused. It is roused through the sound of the shofar. True understanding derives from hearing, for its source is the listening that is accomplished with our inner ear.

—THE NAZIR, DAVID HACOHEN

¶ The Shofar

The voice of the shofar calls, rises up from the straits. It rises from among the hats, the murmurs, the lockets, the children's wide eyes, the rickety air conditioner. Hastily, snack bags pass from a large hand to a little one, the rustle of cellophane, to quiet the infants.

T'ki-ah, Sh'varim, T'ru-ah
Sing ye praises in a skillful song

Sing praises to our Sovereign
sing praises,
with the groans of the wounded beast
whose voice is inscrutable:
A naked voice, parched,
insistent.
May its blow
break the locks of my heart.

—ESTHER ETTINGER

True Hearing

On Rosh Hashanah before he blew the shofar, the Rabbi of Kobryn would call out: "Little brothers, do not depend upon me! Everyone had better take their own part!" —A HASIDIC TALE

א

¶ May the cry of the shofar shatter our complacency.

May the cry of the shofar penetrate our souls.

May the cry of the shofar break the bonds of all that enslaves us.

May the cry of the shofar destroy the idols we have placed at the forefront of our lives.

May the cry of the shofar awaken us to how we have sinned.

May the cry of the shofar summon us to a life of responsibility.

May the cry of the shofar elicit the response, "Here I am."

May the cry of the shofar remind us that we can be instruments of redemption.

May the cry of the shofar penetrate our hearts.

May the cry of the shofar bring blessing to us, the people who hear its call.

ט

¶ In Your great mercy, ADONAI, bring us near to Your Presence.

Help us to break down the barriers that keep us far from You:

falsehood and faithlessness,
callousness and selfishness,
injustice and hard-heartedness.

Our hope is in You,
for You respond in mercy
when we sound the shofar.

סדר תקיעת שופר

THE SHOFAR IS TRADITIONALLY NOT BLOWN ON SHABBAT.

Meditations before Shofar Blowing

א

Soundless, no outward signs or tokens: this, indeed, is how time passes, often escaping notice altogether. Unaware of time passing, we are part of nature; aware of time passing, we are apart from nature.

Discovering that time is short, the task long, and the Task-Assigner demanding (Avot 2:15), small wonder that we arrange a blare of trumpets, a blast of the shofar, to awaken us to the passage of that precious, finite, irreversible measure of our lives.

According to Maimonides, the message of the shofar is precisely this:

"Awake, O you sleepers, awake from your sleep!

O you slumberers, awake from your slumber!"

Hence only we mortals, aware of our perishing, proclaim the passage of time; only we mortals, ringing bells and sounding alarms, startle ourselves awake.

Happy, indeed, are those who comprehend in wakefulness the shofar's sound!

ב

The shofar exclaims: Wake up from your slumber!

Examine your deeds and turn in repentance, remembering your Creator. You sleepers who forget the truth while caught up in the fads and follies of the time, frittering away your years in vanity and emptiness which cannot help: take a good look at yourselves. Improve your ways. Let everyone abandon their bad deeds and their wicked thoughts.

When the Holy One, on judgment day, begins to judge, God ascends the throne of strict judgment, as it is written, "The God of judgment has ascended with acclamation." But when the people Israel, standing in judgment, sound the shofar, the Holy One is filled with mercy, and moves to the throne of compassion.

BLOWING THE SHOFAR. The Torah describes Rosh Hashanah as the day on which the shofar is to be sounded (Numbers 29:1). In the Bible, the sounding of the shofar is associated with a call to war, the cessation of war, and the assembly of the people. Quintessentially, God's descent on Sinai was accompanied by shofar blasts.

Later Jewish tradition saw the call of the shofar as God's call for us to return in *t'shuvah* (repentance).

SOUNDLESS. This passage was written by Everett Gendler, a contemporary rabbi.

THE SHOFAR EXCLAIMS. The first paragraphs of this reading are a translation of Maimonides' interpretation of the meaning of the blowing of the shofar (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 3:4). The final paragraph is from Leviticus Rabbah 29:3.

MAY THE CRY. Adapted from a prayer written by Hershel J. Matt (*Mahzor Hadash*).

IN YOUR GREAT MERCY. Written by Jules Harlow.

The Blowing of the Shofar

The Service of Blowing the Shofar offers us a glimpse of the high drama and sounds of the ancient Temple service. In many places, the shofar blower appears out of the congregation, often hiding the shofar out of sight, to give voice to the three blasts: *t'k-iah, sh'varim, t'ru-ah*, while the congregation stands in rapt attention. However, the *b'rakhah* reminds us that our focus should be on ourselves and our fellow congregants, not on the shofar blower. We recite the words *tzivvanu lishmo-a kol shofar*—we are instructed to heed the call of the shofar. The blasts might be strong and sustained or weak and hesitant, but they still have the potential to evoke a response in us. This year, what will our inner ear hear?

One expression of the transformative potential of the shofar service is the tradition that negative forces (named Satan) may disrupt the effectiveness of the shofar's call. Although there are many forces at work within us, resisting any change of direction, the call of the shofar asks us to face the variety of forces at work within us and to choose those that accord to the true calling of our soul.

God has ascended with acclamation,
ADONAI ascends with the shofar blast.

Sing to our God, sing!

Sing to our sovereign, sing!

For God is sovereign of all the earth.

Sing with all your skill.

God is sovereign over all nations.

God reigns upon a holy throne.

We rise. Some congregations repeat each poetic line after the leader.

Out of narrow straits, I've called out to God;

God answered me with abundance.

Hear my voice! Do not close Your ear to my cry, my plea.

Truth is the essence of Your speech; Your just laws are eternal.

Surround Your servant with good;

do not let evildoers oppress me.

I rejoice in Your word, as one who has found great treasure.

Grant me discernment and wisdom;

I have faith in Your commandments.

May the words I utter be acceptable;

ADONAI, instruct me in Your just laws.

Min ha-meitzar karati Yah anani va-merhav Yah.

Koli shamata al taleim ozn'kha l'ravhati l'shavati.

Rosh d'var'kha emet u-l'olam kol mishpat tzidkekha.

Arov avd'kha l'tov al ya-ashkuni zeidim.

Sas anokhi al imratekha k'motzei shalal rav.

Tuv ta-am va-da-at lam'deini ki v'mitzvotekha he-emanti.

Nidvot pi r'tzeih na Adonai u-mishpatekha lam'deini.

The ba'al t'ki-ah (the person blowing the shofar) recites the following b'rakhot.

Barukh atah ADONAI, our God, ruler of time and space, who has made us holy through mitzvot and instructed us to hear the sound of the shofar. Amen.

Barukh atah ADONAI, our God, ruler of time and space, for granting us life, for sustaining us, and for bringing us to this moment. Amen.

T'ki-ah sh'varim-t'ru-ah t'ki-ah T'ki-ah sh'varim t'ki-ah
T'ki-ah sh'varim-t'ru-ah t'ki-ah T'ki-ah sh'varim t'ki-ah
T'ki-ah sh'varim-t'ru-ah t'ki-ah T'ki-ah sh'varim t'ki-ah

T'ki-ah t'ru-ah t'ki-ah
T'ki-ah t'ru-ah t'ki-ah
T'ki-ah t'ru-ah t'ki-ah g'dolah

עָלָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתִרוּעָה,
יְהוָה בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר.
זָמְרוּ אֱלֹהִים זָמְרוּ,
זָמְרוּ לְמַלְכֵנוּ זָמְרוּ.
כִּי מֶלֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֱלֹהִים,
זָמְרוּ מִשְׁכִּיל.
מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהִים עַל גּוֹיִם,
אֱלֹהִים יֵשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא קִדְשׁוֹ.

We rise. Some congregations repeat each poetic line after the leader.

מִן הַמִּצַּר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה, עֲנֵנִי בַמְּרֻחָב יְהוָה.
קוֹלִי שָׁמַעְתָּ, אֵל תַּעֲלֵם אֶזְנֶךָ לְרוּחֹתַי לְשׁוֹעֲתַי.
רֹאשׁ דְּבָרְךָ אֱמֶת, וּלְעוֹלָם כָּל־מִשְׁפָּט צְדָקָךָ.
עֲרֹב עֲבֹדְךָ לְטוֹב, אֵל יַעֲשֶׂקֵנִי זְדִים.
שֵׁשׁ אֲנֹכִי עַל אִמְרֹתֶיךָ, כְּמוֹצֵא שָׁלָל רָב.
טוֹב טַעַם וְדַעַת לְמַדְנִי, כִּי בְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ הָאֲמַנְתִּי.
נְדָבוֹת פִּי רִצָּה נָא יְהוָה, וּמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לְמַדְנִי.

The ba'al t'ki-ah (the person blowing the shofar) recites the following b'rakhot.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְשַׁמְּוֵעַ קוֹל שׁוֹפָר. אָמֵן.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהַחֵינּוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעֵנוּ לְזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה. אָמֵן.

תְּקִיעָה שְׁבָרִים-תִּרוּעָה תְּקִיעָה
תְּקִיעָה שְׁבָרִים-תִּרוּעָה תְּקִיעָה
תְּקִיעָה שְׁבָרִים-תִּרוּעָה תְּקִיעָה

תְּקִיעָה שְׁבָרִים תְּקִיעָה
תְּקִיעָה שְׁבָרִים תְּקִיעָה
תְּקִיעָה שְׁבָרִים תְּקִיעָה

תְּקִיעָה תִּרוּעָה תְּקִיעָה
תְּקִיעָה תִּרוּעָה תְּקִיעָה
תְּקִיעָה תִּרוּעָה תְּקִיעָה גְדוּלָה

GOD HAS ASCENDED . . .
עָלָה אֱלֹהִים . . .
עַל כִּסֵּא קִדְשׁוֹ . . .
עַל אֱלֹהִים . . .
Psalm 47:6–9. In the courts of the ancient world, the judge rose to announce the verdict and pronounce the sentence. Reading these verses here may lead us to imagine God as rising to pronounce judgment for our sins and then, upon hearing the cries of the people rising up, moving to the throne of compassion.

MY VOICE קולי. The initial letter of the last six lines of this passage spell out the acrostic קרע שטן קדשׁוֹ, “tear out Satan.” It is a plea that our cries—symbolized by the cry of the shofar—be heard and that nothing interfere with our plea, as well as a prayer that any evil impulse within us be torn away.

TO HEAR THE SOUND OF THE SHOFAR . . . לשְׁמוֹעַ קוֹל . . . שׁוֹפָר. Though the Torah commands us to blow the shofar, later Jewish tradition understood the essential mitzvah as hearing the shofar. What is important is how the shofar affects us, how it penetrates us.

MEDITATION AFTER THE BLOWING OF THE SHOFAR

May it be Your will, our God, and God of our ancestors, that the cries of this shofar rise up to Your throne, and that they serve as atonement for all our sins. *Barukh atah, Master of mercy.*

Joyous are the people who experience the calling of the shofar; ADONAI, they walk by the light of Your presence. They continuously rejoice in Your name, and are exalted through Your righteousness.

We are seated.

ASHREI

Joyous are they who dwell in Your house; they shall praise You forever. *Joyous the people who are so favored; joyous the people whose God is ADONAI.*

PSALM 145

A PSALM OF DAVID.

I exalt You, my God, my sovereign; I praise Your name, always. *Every day I praise You, glorifying Your name, always.* Great is ADONAI, greatly to be praised, though God's greatness is unfathomable. *One generation praises Your works to another, telling of Your mighty deeds.*

I would speak of Your majestic glory and of Your wondrous acts. *People speak of Your awe-inspiring deeds; I, too, shall recount Your greatness.*

They recount Your great goodness, and sing of Your righteousness. *ADONAI is merciful and compassionate, patient, and abounding in love.*

ADONAI is good to all, and God's mercy embraces all of creation. *All of creation acknowledges You, and the faithful bless You.*

They speak of the glory of Your sovereignty; and tell of Your might, *proclaiming to humanity Your mighty deeds, and the glory of Your majestic sovereignty.*

Your sovereignty is eternal; Your dominion endures through each generation. *ADONAI supports all who falter, and lifts up all who are bent down.*

The eyes of all look hopefully to You, and You provide them nourishment in due time. *You open Your hand, satisfying all the living with contentment.*

ADONAI is righteous in all that is done, faithful to all creation. *ADONAI is near to all who call, to all who sincerely call.*

God fulfills the desire of those who are faithful, listening to their cries, rescuing them. *ADONAI watches over all those who love the Holy One, but will destroy all the wicked.*

My mouth shall utter praise of ADONAI. May all that is mortal praise God's name forever and ever. *We shall praise ADONAI now and always. Halleluyah!*

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ [וְאַמְוָתָנוּ], שֶׁהִתְקִיעוֹת וְהַקּוֹלוֹת הַיּוֹצְאִים מִן הַשּׁוֹפָר שָׁאֲנוּ תוֹקְעִים, יַעֲלוּ לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ, וַיְכַפְּרוּ עַל כָּל־חַטָּאתֵינוּ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, בְּעַל הַרְחָמִים.

אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעָם יִדְעֵי תְרוּעָה, יְהוָה בְּאוֹר־פְּנֵיךָ יִהְלְכוּן. בְּשִׂמְךָ יִגִּילוּן כָּל־הַיּוֹם, וּבְצִדְקָתְךָ יִרְוּמוּ.

We are seated.

אֲשֶׁרֵי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתְךָ, עוֹד יִהְלְלוּךָ סֵלָה. אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעָם שְׂכָכָה לוֹ, אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעָם שִׁיהוּהוּ אֱלֹהָיו. תְּהִלָּה לְדוֹד.

אֲרוֹמַמְךָ אֱלֹהֵי הַמַּלְךְ, וְאַבְרַכָּה שִׁמְךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. בְּכָל־יוֹם אֲבָרְכֶךָ, וְאַהֲלִלָה שִׁמְךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. גְּדוֹל יְהוָה וּמְהִלָּל מְאֹד, וְלִגְדֹלְתוֹ אֵין חֶקֶר. דוֹר לְדוֹר יִשְׁבַּח מַעֲשֶׂיךָ, וּגְבוּרָתֶיךָ יִגִּידוּ. הֵדָר כְּבוֹד הוֹדְךָ, וְדַבְּרֵי נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה. וְעִזּוֹ נוֹרְאוֹתֶיךָ יֹאמְרוּ, וּגְדֹלְתְךָ אֲסַפְּרָנָה. זָכַר רַב־טוֹבְךָ יִבְיַעוּ, וְצִדְקָתְךָ יִרְנְנוּ. חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם יְהוָה, אַרְךָ אַפִּים וּגְדֹל־חֶסֶד. טוֹב־יְהוָה לְכֹל, וְרַחֲמָיו עַל־כָּל־מַעֲשָׂיו. יוֹדוּךָ יְהוָה כָּל־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ, וְחִסְדֶיךָ יִבְרַכּוּכָה. כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתְךָ יֹאמְרוּ, וּגְבוּרָתְךָ יִדְבְּרוּ. לְהוֹדִיעַ לְבַנְי הָאָדָם גְּבוּרָתֵנוּ, וּכְבוֹד הֵדָר מַלְכוּתוֹ. מַלְכוּתְךָ מַלְכוּת כָּל־עוֹלָמִים, וּמִמְשַׁלְתְּךָ בְּכָל־דוֹר וָדוֹר. סוֹמֵךְ יְהוָה לְכָל־הַנְּפֹלִים, וְזוֹקֵף לְכָל־הַכְּפוּפִים. עֵינַי־כֹּל אֵלֶיךָ יִשְׁבְּרוּ, וְאַתָּה נוֹתֵן לָהֶם אֶת־אֲכָלָם בְּעֵתוֹ. פּוֹתֵחַ אֶת־יַדְךָ, וּמִשְׁבִּיעַ לְכָל־חַי רְצוֹן. צִדִּיק יְהוָה בְּכָל־דְּרָכָיו, וְחִסִּיד בְּכָל־מַעֲשָׂיו. קָרוֹב יְהוָה לְכָל־קֹרְאָיו, לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאֵהוּ בְּאֵמֶת. רְצוֹן־יִרְאוּ יַעֲשֶׂה, וְאֶת־שׁוֹעֲתָם יִשְׁמַע וַיּוֹשִׁיעֵם. שׁוֹמֵר יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־אֲהָבָיו, וְאֶת כָּל־הַרְשָׁעִים יִשְׁמִיד. < תְּהִלָּת יְהוָה יִדְבַר־פִּי,

וַיְבָרֶךְ כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר שֵׁם קְדֹשׁוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. תְּהִלִּים קְמָה וְאַנְחָנוּ נְבָרֶךְ יְהוָה, מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם. הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה.

JOYOUS ARE THE PEOPLE אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעָם. Psalm 89:16-17. Though we may have entered this moment with trepidation, once awakened by the call of the shofar to God's presence, we can emerge joyful.

ASHREI. According to Rabbi Elazar (Babylonia, 3rd century) speaking in the name of Rabbi Abina, the thrice-daily recitation of Psalm 145 (which, with the addition of three other verses from psalms, is known as the Ashrei) opens a pathway to eternity. The Talmud explains that Ashrei is an alphabetical acrostic that symbolically encompasses the variety of praises of God, and that it contains an especially appropriate description of the thankfulness with which we are to approach God: "You open Your hand, satisfying all the living with contentment" (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 4b).

For synagogue use, two verses were added to the opening, both of which begin with the word ashrei, "joyous" (Psalms 84:5 and 144:15). Additionally, Psalm 115:18 was appended to the end, referring to those assembled in prayer.