

Rosh Hashanah 5771
Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills
Rabbi Jonathan Aaron

Wake up!! Hey, sleepers! Wake up. I'm not talking about all of you who have begun napping – although the sermon just began and you might be reclining a little to get some winks in. Wake up! Be present! Stop thinking about lunch, or what someone is wearing, or what you've got to do at work. Wake up!

I'm going to start with that question. The one Rabbi Geller began to talk about last night. The one that has been sent to you on email, and snail mail, and face booked and no doubt tweeted all across the nation... *What are you doing here?*

I'm sure that all of us could find a *reason* for being **here**. Maybe you are here to pray and reflect and appreciate and give thanks. Maybe you're here because your mother or father or son or daughter or brother or sister in law or friend dragged you here. Maybe you are here because you feel obligated. Maybe you would just feel too guilty if you weren't here, that you're going to disappoint someone if you're not here, or disappoint all Jews. Or maybe it's because of what a child in the service said last night: It's Rosh Hashanah! I don't know your reason.

But I want you to clear yourself of whatever "reason" you are here. I want you to let go of that, if you can, and open yourself up to what you are **DOING** here, today, what we're all going to do together in a moment.

First of all, we've already done something by simply walking in here today... *we left our regular world behind*. Here, you're away from your messages, your emails, your calendar, your life. I mean, even me...contrary to popular belief, I don't go grocery shopping wearing this robe – I wear it like three days a year – and I'm here almost every day – this isn't my regular world either.

And even for those of you who frequent synagogue throughout the year, who regularly come here to take yourselves outside of your lives for the poetry and peace of Shabbat...this is something else. We're in the Sanctuary, it's the middle of the week, and you're not working.

The world is outside of these walls. All monikers and titles and roles, have no currency here. Out *there* you are moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas, sons, daughters, CEO's, Lawyers, Doctors, Accountants, Dentists, Engineers, Therapists, Rabbis – alright, Cantors too, Singers, Actors, Bankers, Financial Advisors, Educators, Vice Presidents, Presidents, Rocket Scientists, Judges, Professors, Movie producers, directors, writers, artists, all of it. But in *here*, we are all just...human...beings. You are, I am, the person next to us is...Take a

look around you, we're all just people, sharing this specific time together outside of our regular world, doing this together.

There's that doing again. *What are you DOING here?* I think we have arrived! Let's do what we came here to do! Because everything we've done so far was a warm up for this moment. The singing, the prayers, the inspirational Torah reading was all meant to spiritually prepare us for one moment today, one moment

The one moment we are all here for. What is it: Listening to this (pull out Shofar). This is what we're doing here, preparing for when we hear the wail of this horn. This strange, raw, bent, humble and natural part of a kosher animal (except a cow, the Golden Calf took care of that). The Torah in Numbers refers to this day as "Yom Teru'ah," the day of sounding, not *Rosh Hashanah*, in Leviticus it's "Zikaron Teru'ah," a day of mentioning the sounding," not *Rosh Hashanah*. The shofar is mentioned 69 nine times in the bible. It was sounded when Moses received the Torah from God on Mount Sinai, and it was sounded every day for 40 days when Moses went back up to get the second set of tablets after the Golden Calf, for the people to remember what they had done.

Soon we're going to hear it, and there will be that anticipation, all standing and waiting...will he mess it up? No, the anticipation will be to hear a sound we rarely, if ever, hear in our regular world, the world out there that we've left behind. When do you hear this sound? I guess it is possible that you've been hearing to the shofar every morning this entire month of Elul, as per Jewish tradition, but I'm willing to guess that the percentage of people in this room who heard it every day is less than 1%. It is a rare occurrence to hear it, reserved for this day, this place, during this time.

It wasn't always that way. In biblical times, the shofar was used to announce: the new moon, danger, floods and the like. In the 5th century, the shofar was used to announce a death in the community. During the Middle Ages it was used for funerals as well, and to announce fasts, and of course, excommunications. On Friday afternoon, six blasts were sounded at various intervals; The first, stop working in the fields; second; shut up shops and stop working in the city; third, light the Shabbat candles; the last three, teki'ah, teru'ah, teki'ah, formally marked the beginning of Shabbat.

But for us it's special. Once a year we get to hear it. And that hearing is really the only commandment that is unique for today (there are others, but they are repeated on other holidays), to hear the sound of the shofar. Not to sound it, but to hear it. And you've got to really hear it. In the Talmud, there is an example of someone sounding the shofar into a well or cellar – and the echo is heard back. That echo does not fulfill the commandment...you've got to hear it directly from the horn. You could have skipped synagogue, hung out in the alley, heard the shofar blast, and you would have fulfilled your obligation for the holiday.

So, what do you usually do when you hear it? Do you kind of wake up? Do you reflect? Do you just listen? Do you keep your eyes open? Closed? Do you giggle? Cover your ears? What do you do? What do you think about?

I want us to simplify things this year. Here's what Maimonides, the Medieval religious, philosophical, and medical genius said the shofar is supposed to make us do: *WAKE UP. WAKE UP YOU SLEEPERS FROM YOUR SLEEP. Hey, wake yourself up. Look how you've been acting. Reflect upon who you've been, and realize you are just a human being. You may feel that you've left behind the truth, and life brought you places this year, and you did things that, in the end, didn't really give you any benefit and made you feel empty. Look deeply into yourself, into your core, and try to improve for the future. Commit yourself to abandon any negative elements of your life and start to think positively.*

Listen to this part again: *You may feel that you've left behind the truth, and life brought you places this year, and you did things that, in the end, didn't really give you any benefit and made you feel empty. Look deeply into yourself, into your core, and try to improve for the future.* Simple, no? No. But this year, I want us to use this ram's horn, this ancient instrument, to do just that. With each of the times we hear the Shofar, I want to offer you three meditations, so that maybe this year, we can wake up together. Wake up to tackle the year ahead. Because wherever we are right now, tomorrow there's hope, tomorrow there's a new day and a new year, and maybe next year we'll return with a whole new set of problems and issues that have come from the places where life will bring us, and then we'll have to wake up to that...but that's next year. This year I want us to hear it with one mind, together, a thousand people, as one, in a thousand different ways.

In our machzor, there are three themes when sounding the shofar. Our meditations are based upon those themes. I'm going to introduce the idea for the meditation, we will hear the shofar together, and then take two minutes in silence to reflect. This is what we're here to do: Hear the Shofar, wake up, and think.

I. MALCHUYOT

This is about a Kingdom...sovereignty. Last night Rabbi Geller talked about this moment of your life, where you are at this particular time, what's going on. Hear the shofar, dig down, and discover. It may be something beautiful about yourself, it may be something grotesque, but it is your reality, it is your moment, it is your predicament right now, it is where you reign, your personal Kingdom. How do you describe that to yourself? How old are you? Are you single, married, looking to get married, looking to get out of one? Kids, how old? No kids? Want them? Not sure? Are you out of a job, in a great job, looking for a job, looking forward to not working? Do you have hobbies? How do you spend your time? What is your relationship to those parts of you, how do you feel about them? That's what I'd like us all to think about. **This shofar sound asks, what are you doing in your**

life and how do you feel about it? What is your place? Where are you in your journey? What's your life situation?

SOUND SHOFAR

silence

II. ZICHRONOT

This is about memory: mentioning, remembering. What we are remembering together? The places where you, bringing in Maimonides again, *did things that, in the end, didn't really give you any benefit and made you feel empty*. I'm sure that all of us were thinking about parts of our lives that were doing well, and also parts of our existence that weren't in perfect order. Let these shofar sounds remind us of what we are doing, despite ourselves, which caused us, and those around us, pain. Those things that we thought would make our lives better, but in fact have done the opposite; we gained nothing and are left with a kind of emptiness. It's going to take honesty, with yourself. This whole month I've been reading the Elul reflections, and almost every person who wrote had difficulty with prayer – and those were the one's who took the time to write. The Hebrew word for prayer, *Mitpaley*, is a reflexive word that comes from the root meaning "judgment." In other words, Jewish prayer is "judging yourself." Now is the time for Jewish prayer at its root. That is what I'd like us all to think about. **This shofar sound is for you to think about what you've done, that upon review and reflection, hasn't benefited you, in fact, may have hurt you, and makes you feel emptiness.**

SOUND SHOFAR

Silence

III. SHOFAROT

This section is for listening. Listen to yourself. Listen to what's inside of you. We've just spent about six minutes reflecting about where we are in our lives, and then what we've done to kind of sabotage ourselves. Now is the time to let it all sink in and see what comes out. Where are your thoughts now? What has that led you to see in your mind's eye and feel in your heart? And, at last, what are you willing to do about it? I have no guidance for the direction on this meditation. That part is up to you. **This shofar sound is for you to listen and allow it to enter you. What happens to you and where your mind goes, it's up to you. And as that last moment of Teki'ah G'dolah fills the room – let the echo of silence drift over you, and place you here, now...**

SOUND SHOFAR

silence