

# SHOFAR: UMAN 2009

written by Yossi Katz

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Amidst the silence of 15,000 men breathing in expectation,  
the Halachic anxiety reigns- until now.

The central core of Rush Hashanah- this year only one day on  
Sunday- will shortly be fulfilled,  
the obligation to blow and hear the shofar and its shrill  
sounds.

The text reads: lishmoah kol shofar  
to listen to the Kol of the shofar- the sound of the shofar  
it is not music; it is a sound, a piercing note that cuts to  
the soul of the listener.

But wait! It is more complex than that.

The voice or sound is broken, punctuated by the very rests-the  
absence of sound- into rhythms; a syncopation.

So sound and rhythm but no music?

No sequence of varying tones? No.

It is not a trumpet, it is not a musical instrument,  
it can only convey the product of one of pitch.

So what is the message of this strange hybrid of sound,  
syncopation, rhythm but no variation in pitch?

The midrash teaches us this is designed to awaken the divine.

In one poignant text we are told He gets up from His seat of  
justice and moves over to the seat of mercy.

The question however remains who is doing the blowing?

Of course literally it is the Baal Tekiyah-our representative  
down here among us in the congregation.

and who is doing the listening?

the midrash would have us think of the Almighty!

And who is meant to hear Israel's sounds?

The penitent doing his Teshuva, yes again at the literal  
level.

On the plane level the mitzvah-the commandments to blow,  
and for us who must listen, for this is the hallmark unique to  
Rosh Hashanah rituals  
to hear the hundred sounds of the shofar but,  
clearly it is not only us.

Rather than the moralistic-pietistic version of "awaken ye  
slumberers"  
the shofar of this clarion call to awaken from spiritual  
slumber to activity  
it is that but much more;  
maybe we are also being exposed,  
allowed to listen in on the divine.  
And not just the mechanics of His moving from one cathedra to  
the other, from justice to mercy  
although that too.

The Piacetzne Rebbe told us during the destruction of the  
Warsaw ghetto-  
that if we are sufficiently empathetic,  
if we suffer alongside the divine sufficiently,  
for Her pain and exile-  
then we too can somehow be admitted into God's private chamber  
of weeping and participate in the divine Bechi.

So it dawned on me standing in the silence before the shrill  
among these men  
in this Ukranian village  
on this clear cool autumn day  
in the 60th year of my life  
that the sound of the shofar  
is the cry itself  
the Schechinah Herself  
weeping for us  
for mankind  
for the brokenness of our lives  
for her separation and exile from the divine her consort.

If so, our task is clear-  
not only to be moved by He sound  
but to be present to her pain as well  
as we gather here in the year 5770  
in the ongoing long persistent exile of the Galut  
literally and mythically we too participate in the divine  
weeping  
for mankind who remains alienated from man, from family and  
from self.

At this moment I feel the unique fellowship of these 15,000  
pilgrims  
men from all backgrounds gathered here in emunah  
to listen together and be by th Rebbe  
who taught us how to listen,  
to the Schechina weeping.

These men have taken leave of family, children, wives, friends  
and congregation  
to gather here for this moment of eerie silence before the  
blowing of the shofar,  
the ram's horn  
echoing Isaac's and all son's perennial question to their  
fathers "where is the ram?"  
Where is the very sacrifice we continually make one generation  
after the next,  
the repetitive cyclic or akeda through history,  
for the sake of the fathers and the sake of the Father  
the mythic repetition of suffering and affliction  
our Rebbe demands we continually as "ayeh haseh laola"

Here some 15,000 sons ask where"?"  
"Where are you Lord; in my life?"  
"why are you so concealed?"  
"How can i see You in my suffering?"

I need to fly 16 hours to a tiny Ukrainian village to feel  
Your presence for a few moments,

a few cherished fleeting moments through the agency of this  
shofar and my Rebbe.

At that moment-in the silence before the blowing  
I feel Her Presence

Then She weeps piercing shrill notes of one pitch, no  
variation, no melody, no counterpoint,  
just one pitch that shatters the silent Ukrainian countryside.

And for a moment

We are privy to a piercing of the iron curtain that separates  
us from the divine.

Poem by Dr. Jay Ungar