

THE Sound OF Silence

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

President and Rosh Yeshiva,
Yeshiva University and RIETS

One thing I was not prepared for was when I first returned to my parents' apartment after the *shiva* for my father. Walking through the door, I naturally and thoughtlessly was waiting to hear my father's joyous welcoming that always greeted me upon my arrival. But all I found was silence. Unconsciously, I began to search for him. I walked through the living room and went into the back rooms and saw the chair that he regularly inhabited in the final years of his life. But he was not there. There are times when sound awakens. But there are other times where the absence of sound is even more startling.

This Rosh Hashana we expect to hear

the guttural notes from the shofar as we would every year. But what characterizes the day of Rosh Hashana when it falls out on Shabbat is not sound, it is the absence of sound. Certainly the Rabbinic ruling of not sounding the shofar on this day reflects our profound care and concern for the spiritual and emotional life of every single individual Jew. Perhaps somebody, somewhere, at some point in history will be unaware of the laws of carrying the shofar on Shabbat and would accidentally violate this prohibition on the new year. One can, however, parse an additional layer of meaning from the fact that the midrash interprets the verse of "*zichron teruah*" (remembrance of the blast)

as applying to the circumstance when Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbat and there is only a remembrance of sound. Sometimes we need acoustic vibrations in order to communicate. Music, words, cries, laughter, are the sounds that shape our life experiences and personal relationships. But there are other times when the connection is so deep that no sound needs to be uttered to feel the presence of the other.

Music, words, cries, laughter, are the sounds that shape our life experiences and personal relationships. But there are other times when the connection is so deep that no sound needs to be uttered to feel the presence of the other.



At first, the tunes and the *tefilot* of the Rosh Hashana service move us to naturally anticipate the sound of the shofar. After all, it is the way that we are accustomed to communicate with God on this holy day. Its absence is startling and perhaps even disconcerting. But Shabbat is so holy, its spirit is so suffused with the presence of Hashem, that upon reflection, one realizes that an even higher level of connection is not through communication but by feeling surrounded and embraced by His holy presence.

In life, we need to learn how to use words and sounds to express ourselves. We need to learn how to listen to the tears, pains, and joys of those who are around us. But we also need to carry with us throughout our lives the embrace of those whom we love, even when they are not physically present.

I have not seen my father in his chair now for close to ten months. But I still see him, and I still feel him. I may not have his “*teruah*,” but I have the “*zichron teruah*,” and that fills my life with great meaning and love.

May we all feel Hashem’s presence and love on this day and throughout our lives.



See more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Berman at www.yutorah.org/teachers/Rabbi-Dr.-Ari-Berman

 <p>CORE TORAH VALUES</p> <p>Yeshiva University is a unique ecosystem of educational institutions and resources that prepares the next generation of leaders with Jewish values and market-ready skills to achieve great success in their personal and professional lives, endowing them with both the will and wherewithal to transform the Jewish world and broader society for the better.</p> <p>YU.EDU/VALUES</p>	<p>TORAT EMET</p> <p>אמת TRUTH</p> <p>We believe in truth, and humanity's ability to discover it.</p> <p>The pursuit of truth has always been the driving force behind advances in human understanding, from Socrates' wanderings through the streets of Athens to the innovations of the Industrial Revolution. People of faith, who believe in a divine author of Creation, believe that the act of discovery is sacred, whether in the realm of philosophy, physics, economics or the study of the human mind.</p> <p>The Jewish people in particular affirm that beginning with the Revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, God entrusted eternal teachings and values to us that we must cherish and study diligently above all else, for they represent the terms of the special covenant that God made with us. All people, regardless of their faith background, should value the accumulation of knowledge because it is the way to truth and a prerequisite to human growth.</p>	<p>TORAT CHAIM</p> <p>חיים LIFE</p> <p>We believe in bringing values to life.</p> <p>Jewish thought asserts that truth is made available to human beings not simply so that they can marvel at it but also so that they can use it. Students studying literature, computer science, law, psychology or anything else are expected to take what they learn and implement it within their own lives as well as apply it to the real world around them.</p> <p>When people see a problem that needs addressing, their responsibility is to draw upon the truths they uncovered during their studies in finding a solution. They must live truth in the real world, not simply study it in the classroom.</p>	<p>TORAT ADAM</p> <p>אדם INFINITE HUMAN WORTH</p> <p>We believe in the infinite worth of each and every human being.</p> <p>Judaic tradition first introduced to the world the radical proposition that each individual is created in the divine image and accordingly possesses incalculable worth and value.</p> <p>The unique talents and skills each individual possesses are a reflection of this divine image, and it is therefore a sacred task to hone and develop them. The vast expansive human diversity that results from this process is not a challenge but a blessing. Each of us has our own path to greatness.</p>	<p>TORAT CHESED</p> <p>חסד COMPASSION</p> <p>We believe in the responsibility to reach out to others in compassion.</p> <p>Even as we recognize the opportunities of human diversity, Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of common obligations. In particular, every human being is given the same responsibility to use his or her unique gifts in the service of others; to care for their fellow human beings; to reach out to them in thoughtfulness, kindness and sensitivity; and to form a connected community.</p>	<p>TORAT ZION</p> <p>ציון REDEMPTION</p> <p>We believe that humanity's purpose is to transform our world for the better and move history forward.</p> <p>In Jewish thought, the concept of redemption represents the conviction that while we live in an imperfect world, we have a responsibility to strive toward its perfection. Regardless of a person's personal convictions about whether social perfection is attainable or even definable, it is the act of working toward it that gives our lives meaning and purpose. This common striving is an endeavor that brings all of humanity together.</p> <p>The Jewish people's task to build up the land of Israel into an inspiring model society represents this effort in microcosm. But it is part of a larger project that includes all of humankind. If the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, then redemption represents our responsibility to work together in the service of God to move history forward.</p>
--	--	---	---	--	---