

THE PENETRATING CALL

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אשרי העם יודעי תרועה . . .

Happy are the people who know the
sound of the Shofar . . . (Psalm 89)

This holy day, as we assembled in our synagogue to offer our prayers and benedictions, we all feel enveloped in a spirit of holiness. As the hours of the day progress, the feelings grow more serene, the thoughts become more concerted, the prayers more humble and the mood more meditative. The culminating point is reached when amidst the grave stillness, the penetrating call of the Shofar is heard. Its electrifying effect is inescapable.

Where, my dear friends, lies this mysterious power of the Shofar with its awakening call? Is it the inherent strength of the musical quality of the Shofar or its tonal value? No, it is rather the perception of the listener and his receptive mood which makes him attuned to receive the message of the Shofar and allows this message to strike a resonant cord in his spiritual makeup. Thus, the Psalmist of our text speaks of "the people who know (that is receive and perceive) the sound of the Shofar."

So far we have spoken about the emotional qualities of the Shofar: the stimulating effect, its awakening power, and its soul-stirring sound. These emotions are experienced by every Jew in a Rosh Hashono spirit.

In addition to the purely emotional experience, the Shofar also conveys a rational message — a message which

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will be conveyed to us once we ponder and understand some of the laws pertaining to Shofar.

Of these let us discuss one law in particular. This law concerns a rather unusual kind of Shofar arrangement, namely, a Shofar within another Shofar.

הכנים שופר בתוך שופר אם קול פנימי שמע יצא ואם קול חיצון שמע
לא יצא

The code states that only if the sound of the inside Shofar is the one to reach our ears, then the commandment of Shofar is fulfilled. If it be, however, the outside Shofar that predominates, then the Mitzvah is not properly executed.

My friends, beware of the sounds of the outer Shofar — noises which are artificial and superficial. Listen and heed to that inner voice which is sincere and reflects the true yearnings of the heart.

It is one of the misfortunes of twentieth-century life that the trumpetings of the outer Shofar have become the order of the day. Propaganda, publicity, sensationalism, the big-lie techniques, etc., all these are the noises of the outer Shofar.

It is unfortunate that we Jews have also followed the trend. We loudly proclaim our Jewishness, yet refuse to make true Jewish ideals an integral part of our life and existence. Thus, the proclamation is at best only superficial and lacking in depth and sincerity.

There is of late a mushrooming of modern million dollar temples. Their main virtue is the condition of that outer shell of brick and the glitter of the architectual trimming.

TORAH & SERMON MANUAL

However, the inner spirit, the very soul, the נשמה and essence of a house of worship is almost non-existent.

A story is told of a father and his little boy who went to an art museum. Hand in hand they walked down the corridors and paused in front of the great paintings which they admired delightfully. After a while they stopped before a painting hanging in a corner of the hall near an open window. It was the portrait of a peasant in a vineyard. In his hand the peasant held a bunch of freshly plucked grapes which looked luscious, plump and tempting. Suddenly the air was filled with the fluttering of wings. A bird flew in through the window. Soon its flight was halted, and with flapping wings it hovered over the canvas. Then, as the man and the boy gazed in wonder, the bird began to peck at the bunch of grapes.

After they left the building the boy whose mind was till attracted to this wondrous scene, exclaimed joyfully, "Oh father! What a beautiful painting that was! Did you see how the bird pecked at the fruit? What a great artist that painter must have been! The grapes seemed so real that even the bird was fooled!"

"No my son," the father replied, "it is the bird that proved that he is not a great artist. For if he were as wonderful, then the picture of the man should have frightened the bird away from the grapes.

My dear friends, this story aptly illustrates the nature of the yardstick which we ought to apply in measuring the degree of holiness of a house of worship. It is the presence or absence of the awe inspiring quality which differentiates between a true Synagogue and a reform temple which is only a poor imitation of a מקום מקדש.

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If upon entering a house of worship, we are imbued with a fear of the Lord, then we can exclaim, as did our father Jacob, *מה נורא המקום הזה*, "How fearful is this place" *אין זה כי אם בית אלקים* "this is none other but the house of G-d." If, however, the worshipper is not inspired to fear G-d Almighty, then the million dollar outer structure is without intrinsic value and an utter failure in its purported mission. It is only a mouthpiece for the trumpering of the *קול היצון*, the outer Shofar.

It is only the inner Shofar of which the prophet exclaims: *אם יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו* "Is it possible that the Shofar is blown in the town and the people shall not tremble?"

A people who is accustomed to recognize the *קול פנימי*, the inner Shofar, of such a people the prophet is certain that they will respond tremblingly to its call.

Let us resolve at the beginning of the new year to make a heroic effort to heed the *קול פנימי*, the inner and genuine voice of Torah-true Judaism and G-d Almighty will answer our prayers pouring forth from the depth of our hearts, and bless us with a full, rich and meaningful profoundly Jewish life.