

## THE SILENT SHOFAR

The Shofar will be silent today. The Mishnah (R.H.4:1) teaches that יום טוב של ראש השנה שחל להיות בשבת, if Rosh Hashanah falls on a Saturday, the shofar is not sounded. Now, this is not because the sounding of the shofar is in itself a form of work or labor which constitutes a violation of the Sabbath. The Rabbis said that תקיעת שופר חכמה היא ואינה מלאכה, the blowing of the shofar is an "art" and not a form of "work."

Why then does the Halakhah teach that one ought not to blow shofar on Shabbat? The Talmud (R.H. 29b) tells us that the man designated to blow the shofar may be inexperienced, and גזירה שמא יטלנו בידו וינך אצל הבקי  
למיד ויעבירו ד' אמות ברשות הרבים

He may carry the shofar to the home of one who is an expert in order to learn from him, and in the process of so doing discover that he had carried the shofar over four cubits in a public domain, which is a violation of the law of Shabbat.

How strange! Consider how significant is the sounding of the shofar -- this majestic symbol, filled with mystical meanings and sacred overtones and historical dimensions, so that anyone who is the least bit sensitive feels a shiver and tremor in his own soul. And yet, today we will dispense with this shofar. Why? -- because of the remote possibility that if the congregation was sufficiently careless to designate an incompetent to sound the shofar; and if he was so indolent as not to have practiced before the holidays; and if he lived in a community where there is a public thoroughfare; and if there is no eruv; and if there was an expert at shofar-sounding in the vicinity, and our incompetent shofar-blower forgot himself and carried his shofar to the expert, and in the process of so doing transported a shofar more than four cubits in a public thoroughfare... because of this, the Sages decided to cancel shofar at other times and places as well, and therefore we do without this beautiful and magnificent mitzvah!

Why so? Other than the technical Halakhah, what deeper message can we uncover in the "silent shofar?"

In proposing a solution, permit me to refer to a tension between two values that cuts across all human thought, and is found, of course, in Judaism as well: the tension between the individual and society, between yahid and tzibbur, between the single man and the collectivity. The problem is a universal one. How do we identify ourselves: as primarily autonomous individuals, who thereafter make up various communities and societies and other aggregates; or as differentiated members of such nations or ethnic groups; in other words, which is the authentic focus of our identity: the yahid or tzibbur? Is our acceptance of communal and societal duties merely one of a list of responsibilities amongst others, or is it our primary relationship and the most fundamental source of our responsibilities?

Judaism affirms the values of both individual and society (in the sense of the Jewish people). It teaches respect for individual differences of opinion and personality: כשם שאין פרצופיהם של בני אדם דומים  
-- זה צה, כך אין דעותיהם שוות "even as people's faces differ from each other, so do their opinions (or: personalities, characters, orientations) differ from each other." The Torah teaches that man was created in the "Image of God," which asserts implicitly the uniqueness and differentness of every single human being. All of Judaism maintains the individual's

holiness and the holiness of individuality.

At the same time, the community is exceedingly important in Jewish thought. <sup>כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה</sup>, "all Israelites are coresponsible for each other." Prayer can, of course, be uttered in the singular, but formal prayer, the kind that most classically expresses Jewish devoutness, is in and for the community. No individual may celebrate a personal joy on the national days of mourning, or mourn in personal bereavement on the national days of festivity.

The individual is confirmed in his value. So is the collectivity. And the greatest expression of this collectivity, of the tzibbur, of Israel's significance as a community, is the berit, or the covenant between God and Israel. For the covenant between God and Israel, as recorded in the Torah and expressed by means of the Torah, is what gives the Jewish collectivity its stamp of uniqueness.

In this manner we may understand the "silent shofar." For shofar is primarily a commandment concerning the individual. Each individual Jew is required to listen to the shofar, and it is not necessary for this mitzvah to be performed in public, with a minyan. It is addressed to individuals, not to the community. In the well known interpretation of the meaning of shofar by Maimonides, we are told that it is a kind of spiritual alarm clock, which urges the slumbering to arouse themselves; it is a call to teshuvah that penetrates the individual heart of every Jew. Whereas Shabbat, while observed by individuals, is fundamentally a communal celebration, a mitzvah that devolves on Kelal Yisrael. More, Shabbat is a covenantal obligation! It is an <sup>אית ברית</sup>, a sign of the covenant. Do we not say every Friday night -- <sup>ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת</sup>

<sup>לעשות את השבת לדורותם ברית עולם</sup>, "the Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath for their generations as an eternal covenant." As such, the Shabbat is an exclusively Jewish expression. So do we read later in the same passage: <sup>בני ובין בני ישראל אית היא לעולם</sup>, "It is an eternal sign between Me and the Children of Israel." There is nothing wrong with a non-Jew who sounds the shofar, or who attends the full Rosh Hashanah service. But for a non-Jew to observe the Shabbat in exactly the Jewish manner is considered wrong, for Shabbat is meant exclusively for <sup>בני ברית</sup>, for those who are committed to and bound by the covenant. Therefore do we say in our Shabbat prayers: <sup>ובמנוחתנו לא ישכנו צרנים</sup>, that the particular rest of Shabbat is not meant for non-Jews. Similarly, <sup>לוי ששבת חייב מיתה</sup>, Hence, shofar represents the spiritual ambitions of the individual, while Shabbat is the symbol of the covenantal obligations of the community or people of Israel.

That is why the Sages and the Tradition went to such extravagant lengths to make shofar subordinate to Shabbat, even such a comparatively simple violation of Shabbat as carrying (<sup>מצאכה גרוצה</sup>) based upon the remote possibility of an inept functionary who will carry the shofar four cubits in a public thoroughfare.

The Tradition is telling us: the welfare of Kelal Yisrael takes precedence over our individual ambitions, desires, and gratifications. The individual is holy, his significance is transcendent. But when the two values are in conflict, his individual autonomy must give way to the greater and more historic and sacred claims of Kelal Yisrael.

I do not mean to say that these two values, of individual and people, are always in conflict. Certainly they are not. Usually their interests converge. But they are in tension. And when they do conflict, it is usually Kelal Yisrael

that must prevail. For it is that which gives each of us his peculiar, special significance.

Thus did we read this morning in the special piyyut that is reserved for a Shabbat-Rosh Hashanah, the one that begins " שְׁמַח וְצַדִּיקִים ," that: שְׁמַח , "Mend your ways (the word for "mend" is שָׁפַר , which is etymologically related to שִׁפּוּר ) and let not the covenant be annulled." Keep the shofar silent, but practice the consequences of the shofar-sounding, for in this manner we will preserve the covenant -- the covenant of Shabbat.

I recognize full well that this thesis largely goes against the grain of most of us, immersed as we are in American culture. In our society, we are heir to the principles of capitalistic individualism; the Protestant ethic and its focus on the individual; a liberalism which nobly cherishes individual rights; and a social philosophy which emphasizes the importance of the self, such as self-expression and self-fulfillment, almost to the point of narcissism. It is precisely because of this that the silent shofar and its teaching of the Jew's responsibility to his people is so important, in order to redress the balance. Were we living in a collectivist society, I would probably emphasize the other side of the equation -- Judaism's affirmation of the yahid, the individual. For certainly Judaism does emphasize the importance of the individual. But, in our society -- and in truth, when the two values are in ultimate conflict -- shofar must give way to Shabbat, and the individual Jew must yield to the more transcendent and inclusive demands of the Congregation of Israel.

This emphasis on Jewishness as a communal and covenantal obligation is more important today than ever before. The "modern era" began with the Emancipation, and at the beginning of this period of Jewish history, one of Napoleon's ministers said to the Jews: "To the Jews as individuals -- everything; to the Jews as a people -- nothing." We were granted our civil rights only as individuals, but were told that our existence as a community must come to an end.

To this we answer with a resounding "No." Each Jew is a unique, different individual, as is every human being on the face of the earth. Each Jew has a perfect right to express himself in ways that are not necessarily related to his fundamental religious commitment. Each Jew and Jewess may have interests that are artistic or scientific, esthetic or professional, political or idiosyncratic. But we are a people too -- a people who covenanted with the Creator and whose peoplehood is therefore holy and unimpeachable.

Even after 3500 years in history, and 27 years of the State of Israel, the Christian world still does not understand this. In various conferences, here and abroad, I often come across the same lack of comprehension on the part of many distinguished Christian figures and often sympathetic personalities. They appreciate that Judaism is attuned to history. But they ask: Why are you so interested in geography? What does religion have to do with a political entity like the State of Israel? Why are you concerned with real estate? I often wonder why it is so difficult for the so-called people of the "New Covenant" to appreciate what the so-called "Old Covenant" means to us Jews.

But Christians are often forgiveable. After all, it is not unexpected for them to view Judaism through Christian lenses. What is unpardonable, however, is the new Left and the Third World people. It is they who believe and state quite openly that every people can and should be nationalistic -- except Jews. Every people has the right to its own self-determination -- except Israel. Every group struggling for self-expression is to be accorded full recognition -- except Jews in Israel. And how exasperating that so many American and European

fellow-travellers of this group are -- Jewish. They are the kind of Jews who could forgive Judaism the shofar, but are indignant and infuriated by the concept of berit as expressed by Shabbat.

This principle, implied in the "silent shofar," has relevance to each and every one of us. It influences, for instance, the extent to which we give and devote and act on behalf of the Jewish community. Let me cite a specific example of the relation of individuals to the community. This past Summer, I was aghast and revolted upon reading in the New York Times about a national gathering of Jewish leaders who invited a lady speaker who turned the conference into a platform for the advocacy of the position of Jewish Womens' Lib. She maintained that women ought not to volunteer for community work unless paid, and that the present situation is one of sexist exploitation. I was doubly chagrined when I recognized the name of the lady, and remembered that this person had been a student of mine many years ago. My reaction was that this is a statement of unmitigated chutzpah compounded by irremediable stupidity. "Sexist exploitation" indeed! The community demands and needs the help of all of us -- men and women, old and young, sick and healthy. Self-fulfillment and self-expression are virtues, yes. But the "self" is also a part of the tzibbur, part of the community. Moreover, true Jewishness is such that the self must be subordinate to duty to the Holy One, in our capacity as members of a people covenanted by Him. Were all volunteers to demand payment, the community would cease to exist.

Another example: the birthrate. It is something about which I have spoken and written before, but deserves repetition. Young couples must recognize that if they are to be fully committed Jews, it is not sufficient for them to satisfy the halakhic requirements on family size. One of the very greatest threats to our future, to our very existence and our survival, is our decreasing population. It means that young people must make up their minds that they are going to sacrifice personal convenience for the purpose of the survival of the people as a whole; that even as shofar bows before Shabbat, so must our own wills and desires become secondary to the survival of the people of the covenant.

It is in place to mention as well what can often become a painful dilemma for many of us. I refer to mixed marriages. Of course, I am not speaking about the problem per se; if I had to discuss the substantive question with this kind of audience, it would be a sad situation indeed. Rather, I refer to a question that is often put to me: "I have been invited to attend the wedding ceremony of a Jew and a non-Jew. Shall I attend?" My answer is a clear "no," given with what I believe is uncharacteristic rigidity. Personal friendship and affection and loyalties and business interests are important. There is no doubt about that. But to attend a mixed marriage is to condone by one's presence what is a grievous blow against the future of our people. Make no mistake about it: What you say hardly counts at all, what you do counts much more. Young people do not listen to what you say, they do pay attention to the signals of your conduct. Parents can talk themselves out against marrying out, but if they show by their conduct that they are not really that committed to the proposition that one ought to marry Jewish; if they allow themselves to be softened by familial sentiment; if they will attend the ceremonies of such marriages because they do not want to hurt a brother or a father or an uncle or a cousin; then they are in effect telling their children, their grandchildren, their nephews and nieces and neighbors and friends and relatives, that we talk a great deal against intermarriage, but we do not really mean it! This is a serious flaunting of the covenant, an easing of vital standards, a crime against the survival of Kelal Yisrael. Nothing that Judaism stands for that is expressed by shofar -- not repentance, not spiritual elevation, not love of God or love of man, not faith and not loyalty, not redemption and not a vision of a better society and a better world -- nothing

will mean anything if, Heaven forbid, this covenanted people disappears from the face of earth. If we do not learn today the lesson of the "silent shofar," then, Heaven forbid, in four generations it will be silent in this country forever for want of anyone to listen to it!

It is, then, the covenantal aspect of Shabbat that accounts for the "silent shofar" when Rosh Hashanah falls on a Saturday. Perhaps the best proof is this: The Talmud teaches us that the same principle that applies to the shofar applies to the lulav on Sukkot, and the reading of the Megillah on Purim. Yet there is one commandment to which the reasoning of שֹׁמֵר יְעִבְדֵנוּ, the fear of carrying on Shabbat, ought to apply, and yet does not. I refer to the observance of milah, circumcision. If we do not sound the shofar on Shabbat because we may carry it, by the same token one ought not to permit a circumcision to take place on Shabbat because the knife may be carried, and yet we certainly do permit circumcisions on Shabbat. The reason? -- because circumcision, like Shabbat, is an אוֹת בְּרִית, a sign of the covenant...

So, the conflict between shofar and Shabbat sharpens the basic question of our identity: Who am I? And the answer must come: I am a Jew, a "son of the covenant." The "silent shofar" reminds us of the tasks we must accept; the pleasures we must forego; the pains we must embrace; the duties we must assume -- however reluctantly -- because the welfare of the community requires it, because Kelal Yisrael needs it, because the future of the covenant depends upon it.

If we bear this in mind, the silence of the shofar this Shabbat will speak louder and more meaningfully than ever before.

May the memory of this shofar, this זְכוֹר / תְּרוּעָה, be our silent prayer for all mankind, for all of us as individuals, and above all -- for all Kelal Yisrael, the community of the covenant, for a year of peace and complete redemption.