

"THE REVELATION OF MAN"

One of the most popular and beloved phrases in all the Maḥzor is: ha-yom harat olam, which we recite in response to the three times the shofar is sounded during the Cantor's repetition of the Musaf. All the congregation joins in unison in reciting it warmly, lovingly, and reverently.

Yet there is something puzzling about it. For these words mean, "Today is the birthday of the world." But what does the doctrine of the creation of the world have to do with Shofar? In what way is ha-yom harat olam a reaction to the message of the Shofar?

Perhaps we can understand it by referring to the only time that the words harat olam appear in the Bible -- and that, in a radically different context.

The Prophet Jeremiah had warned his people against engaging in treacherous power politics, and summoned them to a noble and decent ethical life lest their land be utterly destroyed. His reward for acting as a voice of conscience was that he was imprisoned, beaten, and tortured. Upon his release, he again warns of the impending doom of the nation and, broken in body and in spirit, he utters a lament of despair which rivals in power and eloquence the greatest passages of Job. Arur ha-yom asher yuladeti bo, he cries out: "cursed be the day wherein I was born." If this must be my fate, if all my dedication and sacrifice must be so futile, then why was I ever brought into the world? Why did not G-d slay me before I was born; or ve'rahmah harat olam --- why was not my mother's pregnancy an eternal one so that I would never have seen the light of day!

This, then, is the meaning of harat olam in the 20th Chapter of Jeremiah -- for harat means not only birth but, more often, the conception and carrying of the child before birth; and olam means not only "world" but "ever," eternity. Harat olam in Jeremiah, means the exact opposite of what it does in the Maḥzor. For the Prophet it means never being born, eternal waiting, an unending potentiality that never culminates in the creative act of birth and reality. For the Prayerbook,

on the contrary, it means: ha-yom harat olam, today is the birth of the world, today a new world comes into being, today we make a new, creative, dynamic beginning.

This, my friends, is the choice that is given us as individuals, as Jews, as human beings on this birthday of the world. Each of us possesses wonderful native abilities and marvelous inner resources. Either we can opt for Jeremiah's harat olam, remaining forever with our greatest human treasures locked up within our hearts and never brought to fruition, like a child prodigy for whom a brilliant future is foretold but who never manages to translate his genius into real achievement; or we can joyously proclaim ha-yom harat olam, that today we shall express those capacities into reality, for today we shall fulfill ourselves by giving birth to a new and fascinating world.

¶ And it is this in truth which is the response^{ce} to the challenge of the Shofar.

For the Shofar was once also a call for the liberation of the slaves. The Rabbis considered the words shofar teruah to be related to the word tero'em, and ^yth's meaning "the shofar's call to break the chains and release the slaves" (Mekhilta di-R. Shimon b. Yohai, Emor). The shofar summons to us to break the bonds of habit and indifference that keep our vast treasures locked up and our repositories of goodness and faith impounded within us, to transform the eternal waiting of Jeremiah's harat olam into the living immediacy of the Mahzor's ha-yom harat olam. It is the call to release and emancipate our talents, our abilities, our greatness.

¶ This year has been a historic one for the Negroes of our country. They have heard and responded to their Shofar-call. They have taken the decisive step from unrealized potential to a new and exhilarating reality. For the past 100 years, since the Emancipation Proclamation, all the vast talents of this great community have gone to waste. Who knows how many potential Einstein's and Oppenheimer's, or George Washington Carver's or ^{yet}Alph Bunches may have been born, lived, and died unexpressed and undeveloped during this long and dark period of harat olam, of frustrated gestation of genius, of immense human riches always in the state of possibility and always coming to naught. This year the Negroes

of America have decided to transform that possibility into actuality. They have announced to America: ha-yom harat olam, today we create a new society of dignity and honor, and even if we must lose lives of our innocent children, we shall break out of our stupor and enable our people to make thier contributions to this land as freemen and the equals of all others.

¶ I submit to you that what the Negroes have done politically, we Jews must this year do religiously. As the Divine Judge scrutinizes the records of each of us, I surmise that He will not find too many overtly evil acts that we have committed. For the major part we shall have to answer for sins of omission: le'vothen levavot be'yom din, le'goleh am^uokot ba-din. On this Judgment Day, G-d uncovers the depths of our hearts and souls and castigates us for the inner goodness of which we were capable but never brought ourselves to express; the holiness that we could have brought to our society but somehow did not; the Word of G-d that struggled for release from within us but which we allowed to be silenced in the Jeremian harat olam.

¶ For indeed, it is a fundamental teaching of Judaism that religion and faith are not something that need to be superimposed upon man from without, but already exist in the Jew as part of his nature and native character. The author of the Tanya spoke not only for Hasidism but for all of Judaism when he declared that each of us possesses an ahavah tivit u-mesuteret, a natural and concealed love of G-d that strives for liberation and release. The greatest talent of the Jew is -- his religion, his Torah.

¶ It is an article of faith with us: in the deepest levels of the self there is a core of purity, of goodness. Beneath the cynicism lies an uncorrupted idealism; beneath the layer of envy, gems of generosity; beneath the crude will for power, the noble desire to serve; beyond the doubt and confusion, certitude and faith; within the disillusioned adult, a precious, hopeful, bright-eyed child; within the hard-boiled shell beats a soft and warm human heart.

Psychoanalysis has taught us that we hardly know what is going on in our minds. Judaism teaches us that we are usually unaware of the treasures we

possess in the soul and the heart. Psychotherapy attempts to make us reveal to ourselves the sub-conscious. The Shofar tries to make us reveal the sub-conscience. Ha-yom harat olam, today, Rosh Hashanah, we must give birth to that wonderful world of Jewishness within us.

¶ Is not all of education, in its deepest sense, the attempt to bring out inner talents rather than just putting in external information? Do we not, as parents, constantly observe our children, looking for any creative abilities that we can help them develop? We notice a daughter who shows a slight flair for music -- so we rush to give her piano lessons, voice lessons, ballet lessons. A son demonstrates a knack for science; we buy books for him, enroll him in an electronics club, have him tested, purchase all kinds of equipment. And that is as it should be. Now Judaism teaches us that each and every child has an enormous gift for ahavat ha-Shem, a genius for loving Torah, for devotion to his people, for Jewish honor and dignity, a faculty for Jewish steadfastness --- shall we allow these rich endowments of their Jewish hearts to be abused by neglect, to die of malnutrition, to remain harat olam, eternally pregnant with the possibilities of Jewish greatness but never realized in real life? Or shall we assist them in expressing these magnificent creative abilities of the spirit? Or shall we assist them in expressing these magnificent creative abilities of the spirit? Ha-yom harat olam. Let us give them a Rosh Hashanah of a new life: maaleh ani alekhem k'ilu nivretem beriah hadashah -- "I consider as if you were reborn" (J.T., R.H.59c).

¶ There is something remarkable about the third of the three major sections of the Musaf, that of Shofarot. It begins by relating how G-d, as it were, blew the Shofar: the call of the ram's horn came from heaven. And it concludes on a quite different note: barukh ata ha-Shem shomeia kol teruat amo Yisrael be'rahmim -- blessed art Thou, O Lord, who heareth the sound of the shofar by His people Israel in love. Why the change?

¶ It is, I suggest, because Shofar always accompanies revelation, for revelation too is liberation -- from concealment and hiding. In the beginning, the Mahzor tells us that the Shofar recalls the revelation of G-d at Mt. Sinai, when He gave

us the Torah, and that that event was accompanied by the sound of the Shofar. Ata nigleta ba'anan kevodekha, "Thou didst reveal Thyself in a cloud of glory"; hence u-ve'kol shofar alehem hofata, "amidst the blasting of the Shofar didst Thou appear to them." When G-d emerged from within Himself, from His mysterious concealment which man could never penetrate, when He revealed His glory to Israel through the Torah, the Shofar sounded. And therefore it was not man who blew the Shofar, but G-d Himself, who, as it were, was the baal tokeia.

But now, on Rosh Hashanah, it is we humans who sound the shofar; He is merely shomeia kol teruat amo Yisrael, He listens to our Shofar. And when we sound the Shofar, then it is we who must reveal ourselves. That is what G-d tells us: just as I revealed Myself, to the sound of the shofar; so, now that you blow the shofar, it is up to you, O Man, to reveal yourself! Let the call of Shofar awaken your real, inner self, and reveal it for all the world to see. Let Shofar inspire you to tremble and shake off the skin of sloth and cynicism and of apathy which imprisons your idealism and spirituality, and let them emerge and stand revealed before your own unbelieving eyes! O Jew, Ata nigleta, now you reveal your real self!

¶ Never underestimate the Jewish heart. It is filled to the brim with sacred idealism. Never discount the pintele Yid -- it is as alive as ever. We have all experienced at one time or another the wish that we could burst out in fervent, heartfelt prayer with karvanah and hitlahavut and passion. Well, we can do it! According to Rav Kook, the soul is always in a state of prayer -- tefillah hamatmedet shel ha-neshamah. Shofar tells you to reveal that golden ability -- ha-yom, today! -- and offer your very heart as a gift to G-d.

¶ What Jew does not possess the marvelous quality of hessed, of kindness and generosity and pity. You see a poor man stretching out his hand, and your heart instinctively moves you to help him. But then the other, external self intervenes, and you rationalize: he's probably insincere, he may be secretly wealthier than I. And so we silence our inner hessed and keep it in never-ending waitfulness: Jeremiah's harat olam. But shofar says: ha-yom harat olam, today

determine that you will be reborn, you will give expression to those talents for goodness, and never, never turn down any request for help, for charity!

We each possess the precious quality of ahavat Yisrael, the love for our fellow-Jews. During the difficult years of the founding of the State of Israel and its early struggle for survival, even the most alienated Jews showed the intensity of their ahavat Yisrael. Yet today, we are in danger of keeping it locked up within us. If there is anything that Shofar demands of us ^{this} day, it is to wake up to our responsibilities to our fellow Jews in Russia. We dare not repeat the tragic error of our ^{relative} passivity during the Nazi destruction of our people. Why can we not assemble 200,000 people in a march on Washington?

Why should we not storm the capital of every Western country in protesting the oppression of Russian Jews, so many of whom this day risk person and reputation and ~~their~~ livelihoods to go to shul? Let us reveal our ahavat Yisrael by resolving that we shall not rest until we have secured their civil and religious rights.

There is so much good in us that remains concealed, unborn within us, that Shofar calls upon us to release. We are capable of deeper love for husband and wife, instead of the superficial sentiments that characterize domestic life today. We have a sense of loyalty, a knowledge that we should do more for and in the synagogue throughout the year instead of remaining strangers, alienated except for High Holidays. We have quick, alert minds, curious intellects that we could and should use for studying Torah, attending a lecture, thinking of more serious matters. We each of us have a whole spiritual dimension that strives for birth into the real world of our personalities.

¶ When the Shofar sounds, let it become the prelude to a dramatic, momentous occasion in our lives. Let it challenge us to reveal ourselves, to break the chains of indifference and release the powers of holiness, of kedushah, that strain for emergence and birth. Ha-yom harat olam. Let us recreate ourselves, let us assist at the birth of a new spirit in the family, a new Jewish community, a new world!

Alah Elohim be'teruah, ha-Shem be'kol shofar. With the sounding of the shofar, let the G-dly and the Divine within us emerge to new life, to new hope, to new heights.

Additions to "Revelation of Man" Sermon

1) by Sefat Emet: How can Ahavat ha-Shem (v'ahavta etc.) be counted as one of 613 Mitzvot by Maimonides, others, since it is an emotion, hence not subject to command?

Answer: preexists; command is - to remove outer obstacles.

2) R. Leibele Eger, grandson R. Akiva Eger: one of 3 things I learned in Kotzk was: Bereshit bara... (G-d created only bereshit, the beginning; all else He left to man.

3) Talmud: 2 contradictory verses: be'mistarim tivkeh nafshi, and: oz ve'bedvah bi'mekomo? Answer: one is: batei gavai, one batei barai. What does that mean? Suggest: if love of G-d remains batei gavai, locked up within, never expressed, then - cry. But if brought out into open, batei barai -- then oz ve'bedvah.