

## HORN O' PLENTY

GREG WALL

"Blow the great shofar,  
TEKIYA, TRUA, SHVARIM  
blasts, wails, broken cries,  
stamp your feet  
and the tombs will quake.

And the mingling sounds will rise  
to the roots of the souls,  
and the wheel of destiny will turn  
to rebuild all that is desolate..."

—HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook

**G**rowing up a secular suburban Jew I had a polite connection with ritual, dabbling in dreidles, matza, gefilte fish. Twice yearly we endured the forced pilgrimage to our local reform temple, where I would hear the organist and choir accompany the cantor in the seemingly endless annual show, with a large supporting cast. On Rosh HaShana we would know it was close to liberation when we would hear the cantor, or some other big lunged designate attempt to emit a few blasts on the shofar. Like the factory whistle, the sound turned our hearts and minds to something much more substantial than the religious service we were suffering through, to the tables of cakes, fruits and confections that awaited. Off with the yarmulkes, bring on the boiler makers of petit fours and Coca-Cola. In later teen years a cynical anticipation emerged. Would he or wouldn't he? A few well intentioned splats,blats or other ill sounding emissions from the shofar would instantly bring a smile to the face. Perhaps the human element was in conflict with the divine tribunal...

Years later, as a jazz saxophonist doubling as a reluctant congregant at a traditional urban synagogue struggling to stay on its feet after 100 years,

I was pressed into service to try my hand at the shofar. The Ba'al Tokeiah had passed on, and there was no one left who could get a sound out of the holy horn. This shouldn't be so hard, I thought. After all, I am a wind player! Keep the air moving, relax, visualize...

A few days before Rosh Hashanah I gave a try...TEKIYA... nothing... TEKIYA...splat...

Hmmm...

I consulted with the Rabbi, who said that I might have luck with another shofar, and showed me a drawer containing several others. I had better luck, but still was not able to consistently produce a steady tone. I then saw one wrapped up underneath some other articles, and held it up. "Don't bother", he said. Nobody can get a sound out of that one. I held it to my lips and blew. TEKIYA! A huge sound filled the room... SHVARIM... The blasts bounced off the walls, and danced along the rafters. I ran up the stairs to try out my new ax in the huge main sanctuary upstairs.

TRUA!... The shorter tones rang out in counterpoint to their still reverberating predecessors. I was psyched, and I was ready.

Rosh HaShana came and went, both days, and the notices were in... The new Ba'al Tokeiah was a hit.

"The best I ever heard!..." "Strong enough to set the walls a tumbling..." It felt great to be a Jewish musician, playing the original instrument...

But, was there more to it than that?

After a few years I found myself being more and more drawn to the synagogue and, feeling woefully inadequate due to my almost complete dirth of Jewish knowledge, I started a casual study of classic Jewish texts. It wasn't long before study became a regular part of first my weekly, then my daily schedule. I started to learn Hebrew, and began to study the meaning of the ancient verses that we chanted in the synagogue every Saturday morning. I became a father a few times over, and it was time to move on. My wife and I decided we would raise our children within a Jewish community, and provide them with the education to gain the literacy that was required to navigate within. My new rabbi, upon hearing of my predisposition to hornblowing, asked if I was a Ba'al Tokeiah, a shofar blower. Yes, I proudly responded. "Would you like to blow shofar for our community?" he asked. Sure, I replied. "Have you studied about the laws and customs of

the shofar?” he asked. No—not really...not ever. That would be the prerequisite before taking on the role in this new synagogue.

Laws? Customs? Why can't you just open up and blow...?

First things first... Jewish tradition teaches that it is a mitzvah—divine commandment—to hear the sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. The shofar is mentioned in several other contexts elsewhere in the bible, but it is the Rosh Hashanah ritual that most people are familiar with. The commandment in the book of *Leviticus* (23:24) mentions a “Zichron TRUA”, a remembrance of the shofar, and in the *Book of Numbers*, (29:11) it says concerning the holiday, “It shall be a day of sounding the shofar.”

Why the shofar?

The sound of the shofar emanating from the heavens was heard at Mt. Sinai. It was blown to mark the end of the “Jubilee” year, after seven-year agricultural cycles, and was blown in the orchestra at the holy temple in Jerusalem. Tradition teaches us that the Akeidat Yitzchak, the binding of Isaac by his father Abraham, took place on Rosh Hashanah, and the ram's horn is symbolic of the ram Abraham sacrificed, instead of his son.

According to the tradition, the shofar must not be made from the horn of a cow (keren), as that would make a connection with the Golden Calf, a major spiritual challenge for the Jewish people, who's negative energy is still in the world.

The mystical tradition teaches that there is a parallel shofar in the heavens that is activated by the shofar on earth... Says the Zohar:

“Rabbi Abba, who was sitting before Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, said to him: Look here, I have asked many times about the meaning of the shofar, but so far I have not had a satisfying answer.

He [Rabbi Shimon] replied: This is the true explanation. Why does Israel require the ram's horn (shofar) on this day, but not another type of horn (keren)? For it is known where the other type of horn comes from, and we do not wish to adhere to judgment (din). However we have learned that in word and deed we should perceive and deal with secret things.

Come and see! When the supernal shofar, in which all universal lights are included, departs and does not illumine its children, then judgment is awakened, and thrones are set up for a court. And this shofar is called 'Isaac's ram', i.e. Isaac's power, the praise of the 'fathers'. When that great shofar departs, and does not suckle its children, then Isaac is strengthened and prepares himself for judgment in the world.

When that shofar is awakened, and when people repent of their sins, they should draw the sound of the shofar from below, and that sound ascends, and there awakens another, supernal shofar, so that mercy (rachamim) is awakened and judgment departs. We must perform a physical act with the shofar, in order to awaken the other shofar, and to produce those sounds with that shofar below that will produce all those sounds from above which are included in that supernal shofar, so that it be awakened to go out.

And with those sounds from below Israel is given strength above, and therefore we must blow the shofar at its proper time, on this day, and with the sounds in their proper series, intending by this to arouse the other shofar above, which contains all the sounds.” —Zohar, 'Emor, III, 99a–100a

That's quite a mouthful.

The Zohar mentions three conditions necessary for “arousal”—proper time, proper series of blasts, and proper condition.

The time was the easy part—during the day. The series of blasts required was another story. Due to some talmudic confusion over the order and actual performance of the notes the nine biblically mandated blasts would now be 100! Ouch!

The condition—one blowing the shofar must have the proper mindfulness, the intention, or kavana. According to the tradition, one must have in mind that he is blowing for everyone present, and that every sound is for the singular purpose of directing the congregation's spiritual energy upwards to the heavens. A lapse in concentration could cause a disconnect between the lower and upper worlds.

I told my rabbi, “Thanks, but no thanks... I'm not up for this!”. He replied that my response was the one he was looking for, that an eagerness would have indicated I was indeed the wrong person for the job. I would have to see it through.

The morning of the Day of Judgment came. I went to the synagogue early, and practiced a few blasts. Nice...smooth. The youth director asked me to blow for the children's service. Thirty blasts, feeling fine. Someone asked me to go around the corner and blow shofar for someone too ill to come to the synagogue. Thirty blasts later I was back, still plenty of time until the main congregation reached the shofar service. I put on my white kittel, the ceremonial frock symbolizing purity, and stepped up to the bima. The cantor called out—TEKIYA!

I put the shofar to my lips...nothing.  
 I tried again...nada, gornisht...  
 Once more...zilch.

Silence filled the room. "Take a minute" I was told. A stand in shofar blower ascended, and I went out to the garage and cried like I never had.

"R. Eleazar also said: From the day on which the Temple was destroyed the gates of prayer have been closed, as it says, Yea, when I cry and call for help He shutteth out my prayer. (*Lamentations 3:8*) But though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of weeping are not closed, as it says, Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; keep not silence at my tears (*Psalms 39: 12-13*)..." —Babylonian Talmud-Tractate Brachot, 32B

## THE PERSPECTIVAL LUTE

PETER LAMBORN WILSON

The painter Arcimboldo (1526–1593) worked for Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, where he met some of the greatest Renaissance "Magi": Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelley, Glordano Bruno, Rabbi Loewe (creator of the *Golem*), Count Michael Maier and other Rosicrucians, not to mention the alchemymad emperor himself and all the inhabitants of Prague's famous Street of Alchemists. Rudolf loved Arcimboldo's caricature of his Imperial self as the god Vertumnus, a "composite portrait" in fruit and vegetables; and also the wonderful "Flora", a goddess made out of flowers, like a Welsh fairy, for which the ruler bestowed on the artist the title of Count Palatine.

Like Leonardo da Vinci and other Renaissance painters, Arcimboldo mastered many skills and dabbled in inventions. He studied botany, architecture and metallurgy, and designed floats and tableaux for Imperial tournaments and Processions, which were like movable operas complete with plot and characters, elaborate scenes and music, and allegories based on Classical mythology and Hermetic cosmology.

The greatest of all alchemists Philippus Aureolus Bombastus von Hohenhelm, a.k.a. Paracelsus (1493–1541), whose life overlapped with Arcimboldo's, had passed on to Rudolfine Prague an obsession with the Four Elements, including the Seasons and Humours associated with them and the Nature Elementals that rule them: Earth/Gnomes, Air/Sylphs, Fire/Salamanders and Water/Undines—characters who appear in Arcimboldo's paintings. The Seven Planets also offered categories of "correspondences" or "Signatures" linking visible and invisible worlds, as did the Zodiac and the stars in general. (Even Kepler and Brahe, the Court Astronomers, no doubt contributed to the Emperor's horoscope.)

From Hermeticists such as Cornelius Agrippa and Marsilio Ficino we know that each Element or Planet can be linked magically with certain angelic rituals designed almost synaesthetically to involve all the senses