



ROSH HASHANAH MORNING 5780

**WILL THIS BE THE LAST NEW MACHZOR EVER USED BY OUR  
MOVEMENT?**

Suddenly an eerie wailing could be heard. The visitors were concerned. Then it seemed to echo from another direction, and, as their concern turned to panic and fear, the siren started sounding from every corner of Jerusalem. Were they under attack. What should they do - where should they turn - what was the hebrew word for shelter? There seemed to be no-one on the streets on this late Friday afternoon, no-one to ask or follow.

Then they remembered that someone had mentioned the siren that goes off each week at 18 minutes before shabbat starts. Their panic ebbed away. They had had a Jerusalem moment which they could retell over the years - but which, in truth, had changed them, just a little bit, for ever.

So it is with the shofar. Shortly we will bring the children back as we all listen in eager anticipation to hear the various tekiah, shevarim, teruah calls, and wonder how long the Tekiah gadolah, that visceral and powerful sound, will reverberate through the shul, will resonate through our bodies, and indeed through this New Year. Indeed , we have been blowing the shofar through the last month, the month of Elul, as we prepare ourselves for this day, this new year, this new start and hope and opportunity.

But, though it has long been associated with Rosh Hashanah, and indeed also Yom Kippur, when the one long blow indicates that the fast, and the penitential period, is over, the origin of the shofar is much older than this, and its use more widespread. As a predecessor to the siren, it has been used to make public pronouncements - it was blown throughout the land to declare the Jubilee year - actually on the tenth day of the seventh month - which is of course Yom Kippur, and perhaps the real reason why we still use it on this day. Because the shofar is so loud and pervasive, and can't be missed, it was also used to sound the alarm. When the Ancient Israelites were under attack, in their 40 years in the desert and after they entered the land of Canaan, that is the sound you'd hear.

So the sound of alarm and the sound of announcing - whether Shabbat in Jerusalem or New Year in Melbourne, are closely connected. Indeed, we use the word alarm in English across both meanings - when we say we set the alarm-clock, it is not for an unexpected event, even though when the burglar or fire alarm goes off, it is! And of course, blowing through the month of Elul is like the former - not unexpected, but still meant to wake us up - to prepare to change ourselves - to change the future of the world.

Rosh Hashanah is supposed to mark not only the start of the ten days of penitence, but also the birthday of the world, even though of course we understand that the world is somewhat more than 5780 years old. But each year, as this period approaches, I ask myself if I should talk, yet again, about the most serious challenge facing us and our world. Some years, it may surprise you to hear, I have chosen not to, or to mention it only in passing. But this year, as the crisis deepens, and our response, as

individuals, as Australia and as a world, is still pitifully inadequate, I will do so. About ten days ago, I took the shofar to church, when I participated in an interfaith service prior to the massive climate strike, which mobilised some 150,000 people in Melbourne alone. At the service, I blew the shofar, explaining that it was traditional to blow it during Elul, and also as an alarm.

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As we know, this day sees the very first use of our new Machzor. Renewal of prayer books is a feature of our Progressive movement, as we seek to keep the words and concepts relevant and meaningful to current times, issues and concerns. The point, after all, is to put prayer into practice. There is precious little point in coming in, reading the words, whether on Shabbat or New Year, and then returning to life unchanged and unchallenged. It is now nine years since we first introduced our new Siddur, and at last we welcome its companions for this powerful New Year period.

We expect a book to last between one and two generations. Gates of Repentance, which we used until last year, was published in 1978, forty one years ago. If this one lasts forty-one years, that will take us up to 2060.

Now, shabbat acts for me as a short-term time machine, or bridge in time. On shabbat, I think back to where I was, who I was with, a week ago.

Rosh Hashanah fulfills the same role on a medium term basis. Where was I, not only physically, which is a relatively easy question, but existentially, spiritually and psychologically. What has changed in me, around me, this year, and what do I want to or need to change in the coming year?

So we could say that the production of a new prayer book can be used in the same way, for longer term review. In 1978, the first test tube baby was born. John Paul 2nd became the Pope. Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin signed the Israeli Egyptian peace agreement and were given the Nobel peace prize, and Golda Meir died.

My question today is: will anyone have the time to worry about a new prayer book in another 30 years time, if we haven't successfully addressed the very serious threats to our world which we continue to largely ignore?

In January 2019, the World Economic Forum announced that global leaders consider climate change to be the biggest risk the world faces over the next decade. Just this week, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has announced that the latest statistics on polar ice melt and Sea level rise are at the top end of the prediction range.

We are still on track for a 4 degree average temperature rise by the end of the century. Even if we only concern ourselves with temperatures up to 2100, 80 years off - so some of our children, like the one whose brit we celebrated on Friday, should still be alive by then - we need to be aware of the seriousness of the predictions. The world's rapidly rising population is now approaching 8 billion. But as the temperature rises and the demand for food grows, food production will fall - and I haven't mentioned water, or medicines.

We'll need more medicines, because rising temperatures certainly increase sickness, stress and pandemics. Mosquitos are moving south - and diseases transmitted in Australia include Dengue fever, Australian encephalitis, Ross River and Barmah Forest virus diseases. Dengue is the most important viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes afflicting humans in a world context.

Roberto Lucchini, a professor at Mount Sinai Hospital in the US, says that a new and fatal kidney disease, CKDu, is the first epidemic that's directly attributable to climate change.

With these worrying developments, we should not be surprised that on 3rd September, just over three weeks ago, the Australian Medical Association declared Climate Change to be both a physical and mental Health Emergency

Countering this threat, according to David Spratt and Ian Dunlop, formerly Chair of the Australian Coal Association, in the Guardian, requires unprecedented global co-operation to initiate emergency action... Nowhere is this more necessary, they say, than in Australia, the continent most exposed to climate change.

Our Prime Minister claimed last week that we are doing all we can, and that we are also insignificant in the global picture. But according to Spratt and Dunlop, Australia is already the fifth largest carbon polluter globally when our exports are included – about 5% of global emissions, and by 2030 we will be responsible for a massive 13% of global emissions. Each of us here,

if we pay any taxes, are subsidizing this destruction of the world to the tune of about Au\$43 billion. As we gather today to celebrate the birthday of the world, our only home, we should hear the inherent contradiction in this. And before I am accused of being party political, let me say that the Labor party position looks hardly better! They are all too scared by the power of the influential lobby groups, when my naive belief used to be that governments were elected to look after all the population and provide a secure and better future for those that come after us!

This is why, during the past year, I've been blowing the shofar to sound the alarm, and not only through Elul. The younger generation are waking up to the crisis, even if some older people still seem to be deaf to its strident call.

Occasionally a young person is thrust into the limelight, as Melala Yousafzai was after being shot in the head by the Taliban for her bravery in speaking out on equality.

Not much more than a year ago, Greta Thunberg sat alone on the steps of the Swedish Parliament with a sign saying 'School strike for the climate'. Less than two weeks ago, literally millions of young people and older ones gathered around the world to reinforce her message - that we will not stand idly by - as we are commanded in Leviticus 19, which we will read again on Yom Kippur.

This driven sixteen year old spoke passionately and directly to the Climate Action Summit in America - to which, incidentally, she travelled by solar-electric boosted sailing boat. She has drawn admiration and appreciation

but also bitter vitriol and opprobrium and cruel comments in similar measure, which probably means she is touching a nerve because she is speaking the truth - and the truth will have economic consequences, especially for the fossil fuel industries and their host countries. I hope she is thick-skinned enough and well-enough supported not to take it personally, though many much more experienced personalities would be distraught at the personal criticism.

Of course she is not mentally ill - but she does have aspergers syndrome, as many inspired thinkers have done. As soon as I heard this, I was reminded of the story of the Emperor's New clothes. The child who loudly called out the truth - but he's not wearing any clothes - was immune to or unaware of the peer pressure, the social norms... Greta has that same quality - to say it as she sees it because it has to be said - or, using the title of Al Gore's sequel to an Inconvenient Truth: 'To talk truth to power.' And she didn't mince her words. People are suffering, she said. People are dying - we are at the beginning of a mass extinction.

It is not only the youth who have been giving these warnings - in the week I was listening to Terry Pratchett, who wrote eleven years ago that 'The dinosaurs were as thick as concrete, but survived for 150 million years, and it took a great asteroid to knock them out. I wonder now if intelligence comes with its own, built-in asteroid. We might be capable of thinking - it must be worth it as we've tried everything else!' But if young people are now mobilised, and led by brave, loud voices like Greta, thank goodness!

The theme for our New Year and through 5780 is Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof - Justice, justice shall you pursue.

When we think of the injustice and inequity in our world, we must - at this season of the year, and always, stop, and take stock. As the climate warms, because of our expectations and lifestyles and belief in our entitlements, those inequalities will be magnified many times. As the seas rise, as flood and drought and fires burn, we'll probably be OK. But it is not just. We must act, we must demand action. We can't ignore the pleas of Greta Thunberg and the voices of our youth. We have left it late, but in this New Year, let us commit to learn and to do - nishmah v'na'aseh - to try to bring climate justice into our everyday awareness and actions. We blow the shofar to sound the alarm. Let us be inspired to respond - to give our world a new chance, a new direction - let us heed its call!