

## It Takes a Village

Long ago, there was a young man, a jeweler who traveled from village to village selling precious stones. He came from a village known far and wide as a place filled with those who often acted foolishly. This was a time before cars, before sirens and flashing lights. This was a time when they built homes out of sturdy wood and left the roads unpaved. One day, the young man arrived in a particular village, not far from his own.

In those days, communities had few worries except for those brought on by natural disasters or accidents. For example, When a fire broke out in a village, one could only imagine the worst. With wooden structures all around, the fires posed a great danger. To guard the village from these dangers, the community installed a watchtower high up above the other structures. They selected a watchman who sat and waited from the top of the tower, looking near and far at all times.

If the watchman ever saw smoke or a fire, he would immediately sound the alarm by blowing into his horn. From the top of the watchtower, the horn's call traveled throughout the village for all of the people to hear.

As the young jeweler approached this particular village, he made his way to check-in for the evening at the local inn. Just as he stepped up to the innkeeper, the jeweler suddenly heard the sound of the horn.

He asked the innkeeper what the sound was, and the innkeeper told the jeweler that whenever there is a fire, the tower watchman sounds the horn, and the fire is extinguished. The jeweler was blown away, what a great solution, he was going to bring this back to his village!

Two days later, the jeweler had finished his business, and he journeyed home to his own village, having purchased a horn just like the one the watchman used.

When he arrived, he called all of his fellow villagers together and told them to fear no longer the chance of fires destroying their community, for he had a solution. The jeweler demonstrated by setting fire to a small hut near the crowd. As the fire spread, he told the people not to be alarmed. He raised his horn and sounded it with all his might. To his surprise, the fire did not cease, and in fact, the fire began to spread. He yelled to the others, “Wait, wait, the fire will be out soon,” and he sounded his horn once more with every breath of his being.

The villagers began to curse him, calling him a fool! They cried to him, “Did you expect that sounding a horn would put out a fire? The horn is only the alarm to wake the people, to tell them to stop whatever they are doing, to call them together to extinguish the fire! The horn is only the wake-up call!” “Everyone!” shouted another villager, “Quick, grab your water pails, and together, let us put out this fire before it spreads!”

And so it was that the jeweler's fire did not spread throughout the village. The sound of the horn did not stop the fire, but the attention drawn from the horn was enough to awaken at least one person to take the lead, to call out to the others in the village, and for everyone to come together to put out the fire.

Much like the watchman's horn, the Jewish people have our own tradition of a wake-up call through the sounding of a horn—that is our shofar. The shofar is sounded throughout the entire month of Elul leading up to Rosh HaShanah, and then we hear it again in these early days of the Jewish New Year. We even have an entire section of the service dedicated to the sounding of the shofar. Though it is a mitzvah to hear the sounding of the shofar, just like the story of our traveling jeweler, simply hearing the sound does not cause the fires of our life to go out -- its sound doesn't change anything. The purpose of sounding the shofar is to awaken our soul. The shofar is our wake-up call to act.

Our sacred stories tell us that our ancient ancestors heard the long blast of the *t'kiah g'dolah* at the moment of Revelation at Mount Sinai. This was their wake-up call. God and Moses guided them to that historic point, and then, as the lightning danced, the thunder roared, and the fire blazed, Moses descended the mountain and shared the Ten Commandments with the Israelites. All of the pyrotechnics and the piercing sound of the shofar were used to ensure that the Israelites were awake and paying attention to all the details they were about to receive.

For us today, the sound of the shofar should mark an intense spiritual awakening. In what will be remembered throughout our lifetime as the year of the pandemic, at times, we may feel down and unmotivated. We may ask ourselves: What's the point? When will this end? How can I stay safe and still make an impact on the world? And yet, as the shofar sounds, it is a reminder to wake back up from those tough questions. We are called to rise up and to ask or re-ask ourselves: To what is the shofar calling me awake this year? With racial injustice and antisemitism, housing inequality and growing debt, a broken immigration system and women still fighting for the right to control their bodies, growing rates of depression, loneliness, and the fact that children and adults still go to bed hungry every day...just to name a few, there is plenty to awaken us in these Corona days.

As many of you know, Rabbi Max and I received the wake-up call of parenthood when we welcomed our beautiful and sweet little girl, Zohara Aviva, into the world this past May. And let me tell you, this girl can make sounds that put the wake-up call of a shofar to shame; and boy does she know how to make just the right sound to call us to attention — to quite literally stir awake the depths of our souls.

In her earliest weeks, we were especially sensitive to any sound of distress that she made. This was because, a few weeks after her birth, we received an unexpected diagnosis about a rare defect with her heart and lungs. With every cry she made we rushed to settle her with even more urgency, for fear that she would overexert herself.

In addition to the typical new-parent routine of sleepless nights and long days, we were called to monitor her closely, with frequent visits to doctors complicated by COVID protocols.

This new, tiny, beautiful shofar in our life has called us to attention.

Although sometimes babies cry for no reason at all, usually they cry out because they are in need. Their shofar of a cry says, “Hello there! Help me, I’m in need! Pay attention to me!” We know that a parent’s job is to do our very best to provide for those needs, even when the moment seems overwhelming and insurmountable. All we want to do is to tell our children, of any age, that we hear the cries of their inner shofar, and yet, oftentimes, it feels like there is nothing we can do to help. Perhaps we feel this way about the issues that plague our world today as well -- that the world, like a small, beautiful infant, is crying out and we might not know where to begin to help them stop. But there is a lesson in helping our world found in the steps we take to care for children.

**When we soothe babies, we start by giving them a consistent bounce.** We try to put them in a comfortable position, even if we are a little uncomfortable.

And then we get moving, slowly at first, and then picking up the speed if they need to feel a little more wind under their bums.

**For our world,** We pick a cause that we care about, one that has stirred our soul with its cry to the world, and we stick with helping that cause. We adjust our thinking and our engagement, even if it makes us a little uncomfortable. Like soothing a baby, oftentimes, change only occurs *when* we make ourselves uncomfortable. That is how we produce something to help our world.

**We know to speak kindly to children, soothing them with our voice, and listening for a change in their cries.** We say, “it’s okay, it’s okay, I hear you are hurting now, but I’m here for you. I won’t leave until you start to feel better.”

**For our world, we recognize and acknowledge the calls of protests that stir up all kinds of noise.** Like the child who cries because no one is paying attention, protests often begin because people weren't listening to the issue at hand. And so the protests stir up the noise so that the leaders will open up the lines of communication and extend the invitation to sit at the negotiating table. It's at the negotiating table that we pray civil discourse will occur, the soothing sounds of civic engagement at which time both sides can speak and both sides commit to listen to one another for the betterment of the world.

**When we soothe babies and things aren't going as planned, we hold them a little tighter, we squeeze them in a little closer.** The bouncing wasn't enough, the baby isn't responding to our soothing words, the child continues to wail, and so we bring that child in and hold them just a touch tighter. We try a new position until we find just the right hold to calm their cries. We can't give up, because they are counting on us.

**For our world, if at first our efforts toward a cause do not succeed, we try again, and again, and again.** We change our strategies until we find an approach that works. We can't give up because the world is counting on us.

**Finally, in the lessons of soothing children that teach us how to make change in the world, there is one final step: Sounding the horn to our village, calling out for help when it feels like the weight of the world has come crashing down on us and we don't know what else to do.** This is when the classic parenthood saying, "it takes a village," really kicks in. And a village under Corona doesn't quite look like a village in the before times.

The villagers that would have normally been over every day holding our baby so we could take a nap had to stand 10 feet from the door and give a wave and an air hug. But you did. The villagers that would have quite literally plopped themselves in our

kitchen to make us meals turned into porch drop-offs with notes that said, “we disinfected the outside of everything, enjoy!” And you dropped off that food on the days where we couldn’t even imagine lifting a spatula in the kitchen. When it was 3:00 in the morning and I just needed a listening ear, my village of first and second-time moms, who were also up for late-night feedings, were there to answer my questions and tell me I was doing my best and that I was enough. Everyone adjusted their strategies to fit the circumstances of the present day, but they still showed up.

They heard the sounding of the horn for help and they showed up. I’ve just shared with you my village, but everyone has a village. From grandparents to friends, the congregation and neighbors, we all have some kind of a village to call upon.

**For our world,** even in these Corona days, when we recognize a problem in our society, but can’t figure out what direction to go to be a part of making a change, we turn to those who have been there before for guidance: our parents, our grandparents, our congregants, our friends, our community, our fellow villagers. We turn to those who care about us enough to pause what they are doing to also help our cause. We sound the horn and we call out to our village for help. Whether the village is made up of family, friends, or your Temple Emanu-El community, we each have a village. When you are in need and think that no one is there to hear your horn, I ask that you sound it. Call out to us. Call out to your community. And let me tell you, if you are sounding that horn to your Temple Emanu-El village, they’ll show up, we’ll show up.

In these Corona days, Temple Emanu-El board member Mickey Rosner heard your calls as the clergy and others reported on how many of our older congregants expressed feelings of loneliness when we reached out by phone. Although not everyone in that 65 and above crowd considers themselves at risk, many have been isolated from friends and grandchildren.

And in the best of Mickey Rosner fashion, she said, “I hear the call, and I’m going to do something as a member of this Temple Emanu-El community, FOR my Temple Emanu-

El community, and you're going to help me, because this is important." Mickey then sounded her shofar and got together a team of TE members and staff to put together beautiful "we're thinking of you" gift bags and those bags were then hand-delivered to over 250 members in that 65 and better crew.

The horn was sounded, the village assembled, and the spirits of many in our community were lifted.

At first, when the traveling jeweler heard the sound of the horn and watched the village fire go out, he missed the fact that the sounding of the horn was only the beginning. The result of that cry for help was an awakening. All across the village, people stopped what they were doing, grabbed their pails, grabbed their buckets, and came together to put out the fire. **It takes a village.**

When the Israelites first heard the call of the shofar at the foot of Mount Sinai, they were awakened to the start of one of, if not the most important event of our people. The sound grew louder and louder to make sure that ALL of the people would be listening and could prepare themselves to hear, for the very first-time, the Ten Commandments. Everyone in the community needed to hear those words for the sake of the collective and their journey to the Promised Land. **It takes a village.**

When Max and I were overwhelmed by being first-time parents, Zohara's diagnosis, and the trauma of doing all of this through a pandemic, our village heard our call and extended love, food, and gifts to which we are eternally grateful. **It takes a village.**

When Mickey heard the cry and call of loneliness circulating through our community, she rallied the Temple Emanu-El village.

In order for our world to go from where it is to where it needs to be....it takes a village. Even in these Corona days, we have adapted to find new ways to support those

around us. The village might not look like it did back in early March, but the village is still here. Your Temple Emanu-El community is here.

Max and I could not be standing before you, even on a screen, with strength under our feet, if it were not for our Temple Emanu-El village, and for that we are thankful beyond words.

In the year 5781, how will you hear the call of the shofar? What will your soul awaken to? What cause in your village will you awaken to? What cause in the world will you awaken to? Be open to the sound of the shofar this year. Hear the shofar's piercing sound cutting through the silence that precedes it.

May you hear the call of your soul, your village, and the world. Through your response ,may there be happiness, may there be safety, and may you go from strength to strength.

*T'kiyah [Shofar sounds]*

Shana Tova.