



new london
synagogue



Creating Space for the Shofar

This Saturday night is the most perfect introduction to the Rosh Hashanah season now so close upon us.

Our Slichot service is a time to settle into the space that these days offers. The music will be beautiful and the commitment of all involved, led by Yoav, is hugely appreciated. Very highly recommended. 9pm at the Synagogue. There's a moment of Yoav in Rosh Hashanah voice here -

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DAUchOtIYMq/>, if you need any further encouragement (go on, click through, it's worth it!).

This question of a space in which to settle has been on mind, particularly in the context of the ongoing challenges of the world. There are three unique sections to the Rosh Hashanah Musaf Amidah, two of which make immediate sense in the context of the season, the third while absolutely characteristic of Rosh Hashanah is less immediately obvious.

First there are ten verses which recount the Sovereignty of God – Malchuyot. It's a common trope; as Maimonides suggests, "the basis of all bases and the pillar of wisdom." We are acknowledging our limitations before the infinite.

Next are ten verses which recount promises made by God to the patriarchs to stand by us – Zichronot; again common. We are trying to persuade God to show us grace.

Finally come ten verses which recount moments when the Shofar is sounded. I know it's a central command, but what, exactly are we supposed to be considering or awakening in ourselves? Saadia Gaon, in the classic articulation, lists ten different and to some extent mutually exclusive explanations. I think the point is that the Shofar means different things, its sounded differently, and heard differently. It will sometimes lift our spirits, sometimes remind us of our limitations, sometimes one thing and sometimes another. It's the aural equivalent of a tabula rasa. It is a sound of potential. I think that's why we need to create a space in which to hear it, a space devoid of the pressures of our external distractions and, even, a space we prepare in the days leading up to Rosh Hashanah, Walking in cold to the services next week, having checked the emails in the morning, before planning to rush back to whatever afternoon callings we have, means we lose the chance to hear that hidden voice that lurks behind the blasts. Perhaps the more extraordinary articulation comes in the Unataneh Tokef prayer which juxtaposes the Tekiyah of the Shofar with the Kol Demamah Dakah – the still small voice once whispered towards Elijah. It's the goal, and a goal only possible if we create the space in which to hear it, to listen to the sound of the Shofar in order to hear the still small voice that can follow.

I'm away this Shabbat at a family Simchah – mazal tov to my niece on her Bat Mitzvah – and warmly looking forward to Slichot on Saturday night. I hope to see you there.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Jeremy