



HEARING THE SHOFAR

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As you prepare to welcome in the New Year, to listen once again to the ancient sounds of the shofar, you might want to find a few moments of quiet.

In the month of Elul, before the new moon appears, we are taught to turn inward before we turn outward. This spiritual turning inward is done to reflect on the year that has passed, to notice the ways that we have not lived up to our potential, and to be honest with ourselves about the things that we have papered over, ignored, or avoided. This turning inward is also a turning and a returning to the holy within us – to the breath of life, to the wellspring, to the eternal light– many metaphors we use to capture what it feels like to feel connected to the One, the Holy, the Source.

Why do we turn inward? Because in turning inward, we gain a sense of *shleimut*, wholeness. With that sense of wholeness, we can turn outward with *hesed*, loving-kindness, to family, friends, and others. In this season, when we repair broken relationships, we recommit to caring for others. When we join together in community, and use our power for good, we advance *tzedek*, our vision of a more just and equitable world.

Take a moment of quiet before you listen to the shofar this year to meditate on these three concepts: *shleimut*, *hesed*, and *tzedek*.

SHLEIMUT ► שלמות

May the blasts of the shofar guide us to *shleimut*.

Shleimut is personal wholeness, a sense of being spiritually connected and capable of drawing on personal strength to meet the challenges of your life at this moment. The shofar blasts begin and end with whole tones. Rabbi Yakov Yitzchak Halevi Horowitz, an 18th century mystic, taught that these whole tones reflect our inner spiritual lives. We begin whole, become broken, and then return to wholeness. The shofar reminds us that however broken we may feel – even if we feel shattered, we can become whole again.

HESED ► תדן

May the blasts of the shofar guide us to *hesed*.

Hesed is centered on caring for others. We feel *hesed* in community when others support us and when we support others. In the time of the Torah, the shofar blasts connected people and communities to one another. At Sinai, the shofar called people together to stand near the mountain. In the Book of Samuel, when the Jewish people were engaged in internal struggles and turning against one another, King David's army commander, Yoav, blasted the shofar to connect the people's hearts to one another and bring about peace.

TZEDEK ► צדק

May the blasts of the shofar guide us to *tzedek*.

Tzedek begins with the belief that those who have been victimized and oppressed can be restored to wholeness through justice. *Tzedek* also recognizes that our society and earth need a return to wholeness just as we need one on an individual level. As we prepare to hear the shofar, we recall two aspects of this sound. One is a mournful cry of mothers on hearing about the death of their children – whether our own matriarch Sarah, who believed Abraham had sacrificed Isaac, or the mother of one of our enemies, Sisera (the commander of the Canaanite Army, who was slain by Yael in the book of Deborah). The other is the call for equity and freedom, used to announce the jubilee described in the Torah – the time when slaves were freed, debts forgiven, and ancestral lands restored. May the new year bring us closer to hearing these two sounds – the cries of those who have suffered injustice and the call that inspires us to advance our vision of equity and freedom for all people.

May you be blessed this year with more *shleimut*, *hesed*, and *tzedek*.