

Erev Rosh Hashanah 5780  
My Beloved Knocks  
Rabbi Betsy Forester

The town of Nosidam in southern Nisnoctsiw had a famous shofar blower, a trained trumpet player who each year would bring his most gorgeous, long, wavy shofar up to the bimah and stand proudly to sound the notes. Someone once joked that they should sell tickets to the Concert of the Detached Ram's Horn, to which a fellow congregant quipped, "I don't know about you, but I paid a lot of dues to hear this guy. He's so good, I don't even need to be in the room to hear the notes." The shofar blower's virtuosity was known far and wide, and he was proud of it. But after many years, the shofar blower retired and moved away to Eladsttocs. He hadn't been much of a shul-goer, and it was already a week before Rosh HaShanah when the Ritual Committee realized he was gone and they didn't have a shofar blower. What were they to do? No one else in the community knew how to blow a shofar, not even the Rabbi, to her embarrassment. And the only shofar to be found was a short, bent one, hardly magnificent, on a closet shelf in the small sanctuary.

Messages were dispatched to all the Jews of Nosidam. "We need your help. Come and learn to blow the shofar! We'll meet after morning minyan and practice until someone can get a sound out of it. That person will receive a new kittel and the honor of being our new *ba'al tekiah*."

The next day nobody new showed up at minyan, and nobody new arrived afterwards, when the regulars were eating their bagels. The rabbi went and got the shofar from the minyan closet and said, "friends, it's gotta be one of you. Let's give it a go." They passed the shofar around. Some people wouldn't even try it. A few got a brief gasp or whimper out of it but nothing more. This went on for days and the Rabbi became quite exasperated. She, herself, kept trying to blow it throughout each day but no sound would come. What would they do?

The day before Rosh HaShanah, the rabbi rode her bike--oops, I mean her horse--to the east side of Nosidam to visit an ailing congregant. She hitched her, um, horse to a post and walked up a long lane to the congregant's home where the woman, whose name was Uriella, stood waiting for her on a front porch that looked like it had seen better days. The two sipped tea and ate fresh apples from a tree in Uriella's yard.

“I can’t pick many any more,” said Uriella. When the kids come, they gather what they can and I make applesauce. But I can only pick the low ones, and I don’t have it in me to gather many. For you, Rabbi, it was a treat to pick these.”

“Uriella, has the past year been harder for you than before?”

Uriella nodded. She paused and searched the Rabbi’s face. The rabbi looked at Uriella and waited.

“Rabbi, it’s been a hard year. I miss the love of my life. I haven’t been the friend I want to be and I haven’t been the mother I want to be. I feel like there is still life in me, like I have energy for something important, but I don’t know what it is. My solitude has grown its own personality and it wants to accompany me everywhere. I feel restless. I go to the market where I used to sell my knitting and weaving, and I have nothing bright. People want bright things, flashy things. They want to look quickly. They scan the booths and tables, and they are preoccupied and in a hurry. My weavings require time. One must touch them to understand their texture. One must hold them up to the light to see the variegated colors. One must touch them to the face to appreciate their softness. Look, I have one here, you’ll see.”

Uriella pulled what looked like half a scarf out of a quilted bag next to her chair and gave it to the rabbi with two hands. “I started knitting this when my love was failing. I knit and knit into the night and reminisced about the good days. I must say there are tears woven in, and laughter, too. And regret. And still hope. I can’t seem to finish this one. I am afraid to hope too much...I am afraid my heart may break.”

The Rabbi listened and nodded. She took the wool and held it to her cheek. It was baby wool, lovingly sheared and combed and gently dyed in grey-blue and indigo. “Uriella,” she asked, “when did your love last visit?”

“Sometimes I don’t know where my dreams leave off and what is real, Uriella replied, “last night, last night my love came to me and knocked. My love was breathless, full of energy, full of night and the hint of sunrise. But I was afraid of what might be.”

“You were afraid?” the Rabbi said. Uriella took back her half-made work--it was actually the beginning of a shawl--and held it to her face as she said, slowly, “Sometimes I am so afraid to trust the love in my heart. I am afraid that what is already broken might not be strong enough, might not be good enough for such beauty.” She sighed.

The Rabbi nodded and they sat together as the sun dipped behind a light cloud. The Rabbi wondered about the love of Uriella’s life. Was it someone who had left, or died?

Or, was it something else, something about Uriella's own essence, something that ignited her passion? She didn't want to ask, feeling moved by the possibilities that Uriella had awakened in her. "What is the love of *my* life? What is *my* passion?" she asked herself for a brief second.

The air shifted and it felt like their visit was coming to an end. The Rabbi started to stand up when Uriella asked, "So, Rabbi, are you all set for Rosh HaShanah?" The Rabbi said, "Oy, Uriella, we have a terrible problem. We have no shofar blower." "What happened to that master concerto maestro shofar blower?" "Uriella asked, surprised. "He moved away," the Rabbi said with a sigh. "At this point I'm hoping for a miracle."

There was a pause. Uriella seemed to be holding back from saying something. "Do you have an idea?" asked the Rabbi. "Well," said Uriella, "you know I haven't been to shul in a long time, and I don't even know if I have the strength anymore, but at one time I could blow a shofar." The rabbi's heart skipped a beat. She reached into her backpack, pulled out the little, bent shofar she had been fighting with all week, and extended her hand to to Uriella. Uriella took the shofar and stood, slowly, as the Rabbi chanted:

אָנִי יִשְׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֹר.

I am asleep, But my heart is awake (*Song of Songs 5:2*).

Uriella put the shofar to her lips.

"Tekiah." Out came a sound that matched the shape of the shofar. It was bent and it was pure.

קוֹל דּוֹדִי דּוֹפֵק

My beloved knocks (*Ibid*).

Uriella sounded three blasts from her trembling heart.

פְּתַח־לִי אֲחֹתִי רַעֲיָתִי יוֹנֵתִי תַמְתִּי

Open to me, my own, My darling, my dove, for you are sweet and unspoiled to me as a young lamb (*Ibid*).

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Out poured staccato blasts--three for love and three for pain and three for the wish to be known.

“Uriella, do you think you have *T'kiah G'dolah* in you?”

[What do *you* think?]

The redemption of being seen and heard flowed through the little, bent shofar like the purest truth.

And so it was.

And you know the rest of the story, almost.

When the people assembled at shul the next day to hear the shofar, there was something in the presence of the frail woman who ascended the bimah with a small, bent shofar that called them to attention, and for the first time in decades, or for the first time in the younger people's lives, they really *heard* the sound of the shofar.

For they recognized the voice of a bent and wounded soul calling out its redemption, calling out to be seen and heard, known and loved and wanted despite everything, in fear and in hope and mostly in love, calling out, like a hand on a lock opening to the possibility of renewal.

May we all know that feeling this Rosh HaShanah.

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And may we all be inscribed for a year of personal growth, good work, good deeds, good health, and good love.

*L'shanah tovah tikateivu.*