

OzTorah

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A selection of Rabbi Raymond Apple's Rosh HaShanah insights from
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Blowing our own trumpet

The Shofar is the unique Jewish musical instrument. Its sound ricochets through the synagogue. It pierces the heart of the most blasé. It awakens thoughts and emotions we thought we never had. It gives Rosh HaShanah an electrifying power. It is Judaism's means of calling Jews back to their past, probing their present, and passionately yearning for their future.

The Shofar must come from a kosher animal, such as the sheep, goat or gazelle, but not from the cow, because of its association with the sin of the golden calf. The preferred animal is the sheep because the curved shape of the ram's horn symbolises bending the will to the word of God. In addition, the ram recalls the binding of Isaac, the story read on the second day of the festival, with its lesson of eager obedience to and trust in God.

A Shofar must be at least four inches long and without holes. It must not be painted so as to change its colour, but it can be decorated with designs and Hebrew words; in some places the custom is to engrave the name of the individual or the community whose Shofar it is.

Blowing the Shofar is *chochmah v'einah m'lachah* – "skill but not work". It requires a special knack, because there is no mouthpiece to assist the production of the sound.

HISTORY

In ancient times the Shofar was sounded on many occasions other than Rosh HaShanah. It was used at

coronations ("They blew the ram's horn, and all the people said, 'Long live King Solomon!"). It was sounded as an alarm ("Shall the horn be blown in a city and the people not tremble?"). At the end of the 49-year cycle, it ushered in the jubilee year ("On the day of atonement shall you make proclamation with the horn throughout your land"). These were amongst the national occasions when its call was heard. In addition, it was part of the musical

component of worship ("With trumpets and the sound of the horn, shout ye before the King, the Lord"). It ushered in the Revelation at Sinai ("All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning and the sound of the horn"). When the Messiah comes, the great Shofar will sound; the dead will arise, the Divine presence will be manifest and the Temple will stand again on its hallowed site.

The Shofar was often used when an announcement needed to be made, something like the town crier with

his bell, it would announce a death. It would proclaim an excommunication. It would announce the arrival of Shabbat. But only on Rosh HaShanah is the Shofar a mitzvah, an indispensable religious obligation. Hence the festival is called in the Torah *Yom T'ruah* – "the Day of Blowing the Horn").

All the critics in a congregation automatically pretend to be great experts and pass judgment on how well – or badly – the *Ba'al T'kiah* has performed. It is like the folk saying that every Jew can sing better than the *Chazan*... except that today he has a cold! But to be a *Ba'al T'kiah*, whose sacred task it is to blow the Shofar, is a grave responsibility. It is not



only that his skill may make all the difference in arousing the penitence, prayer and charity of the congregation. The task requires unblemished piety, unquestioned integrity, and the deep learning to understand the mitzvah and its rules. No *Baal T'kiah* will ever boast of his expertise, because this Rosh HaShanah may be the one when nerves overtake him, or the Shofar simply does not co-operate, or the spiritual ambience is just not right.

Learning, integrity and piety are also required of the *Makri*, who prompts the *Ba'al T'kiah* by calling the Shofar notes. This is also not a responsibility to be undertaken lightly. In Chassidism, it is often the greatest rabbis who act as *Ba'al T'kiah* or *Makri*, and much soul-searching takes place to ensure one has the correct *kavvanot* (intentions).

Most traditional Jewish occupations have produced characteristic Jewish surnames, e.g. Rabbinowitz (from Rabbi), Chazan or Cantor, Shochet, Dayyan, etc. There is also a theory that Shapiro or Shapira derives from Shofar; the alternative view derives it from the town of Spiers or Speyer in the Rhineland.

TIMES AND TONES

The sounding of the Shofar, like every other *mitzvah*, should be carried out as early as possible; the sages say, "When a mitzvah comes into your hand, let it not become stale," and "Those who are eager, perform *mitzvot* early". Why, then, do we not blow the Shofar during *Shacharit* but only after the Torah reading and during *Musaf*? The Talmud states that *Shacharit* was, in fact, originally the time for the Shofar, but the Romans posted sentries in the synagogues to ensure that the Shofar would not be sounded. Not until the sentries had left, apparently satisfied that their watching brief had been carried out, could congregations begin – rather clandestinely – their Shofar-blowing.

The Jerusalem Talmud reports that during the Roman persecutions, the occupation troops suddenly heard trumpet blasts emanating from the synagogues, thought it was a Jewish call to arms, and invaded the synagogues and attacked the worshippers. Learning from this lesson, the Jews subsequently moved the Shofar blowing to later in the service when it was obvious that an innocent act

of worship was in progress and sounding the Shofar was not meant as a military signal of any kind.

The Shofar is sounded on both days of Rosh HaShanah, but is omitted on the first day if it happens to be Shabbat – not because the sounding of the Shofar is hard work, but because one might be tempted to carry it through the streets. Carrying objects from place to place is not permitted on Shabbat, and this rule illustrates the immense respect given to the Sabbath as a mark of faith in the Almighty who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

What is the mitzvah of Shofar? Not to blow it, but to hear it (*lishmo'a kol Shofar*). Hence everyone has to be attentive to the sounds of the Shofar and not to engage in conversation from the first *b'rachah* of the Shofar until the final notes have been sounded at almost the end of the whole service.

Interesting *halachic* questions surround the hearing of the Shofar. Are women, who are generally exempt

from time-bound positive *mitzvot*, obligated to hear the Shofar? (Yes; they long ago accepted the obligation upon themselves). Can the mitzvah be fulfilled by hearing the Shofar through a microphone or over the radio? (No, because what you hear is considered an echo and not the original sound

itself.)

What notes are blown on the Shofar? Their names are *t'kiah*, *sh'varim* and *t'ruah*. The most important note is *t'ruah* (the Biblical command calls the day *yom t'ruah*). Hence, what one should hear is the *t'ruah* preceded and followed by the drawn-out *t'kiah* ("blast"). But the definition of a *t'ruah* is a matter of scholarly dispute. Is it like our *t'ruah*, a series of sharp, staccato sounds, or our *sh'varim*, three sighing notes – or a combination of both? To cover all views we offer all three versions.

Many fascinating lessons have been read into the sequence of notes as they finally developed. One is that *t'kiah* rouses us from our lethargy; *sh'varim* sees us sighing when we realise our foolishness; with *t'ruah* we burst out sobbing with remorse; and finally, God assures us in the final *t'kiah* that He has

forgiven and we can march confidently into the future.

A total of a hundred notes should, it is suggested, be sounded. This is said to reflect the hundred weeping sounds of Sisera's mother, though a view has been advanced that the original wording referred to "our mother Sarah". Since, however, the Talmud tries to elucidate the meaning of the *t'ruah* by reference to Sisera's mother either weeping or sighing, it would appear that the Sisera theory is correct.

MEANING

1. Philo

The Alexandrian philosopher, Philo, remarked that the Shofar was a reminder of the giving of the Torah and also the battlefield signal to advance or retreat. The blowing of the Shofar is thus a call of thanksgiving to God, who halts the wars between nations and between the elements of nature, and thereby brings harmony and peace to the world.

2. Maimonides

The great Maimonides declared, "Although the blowing of the Shofar is a command of the Law, there is in it this further meaning: 'Awake, you slumberers, from your sleep, and rouse yourselves from your lethargy. Search your deeds and return in repentance. Remember your Creator, you who forget truth in the vanities of the moment, who go astray all your years after vain illusions which neither profit nor save. Look to your souls, mend your ways and actions; leave your evil path and unworthy purposes, and seek the way of God'."

3. The Zohar

"When human beings repent of their sins, they blow the Shofar on earth. Its sound ascends on high and awakens the heavenly Shofar, and so mercy is aroused and judgment is removed."

4. Rav Kook

Rav Kook, the mystic, poet and philosopher, noted that the Shofar, the oldest-known musical instrument, is ready to hand. With very little preparation it can produce penetrating notes, unlike normal trumpets which need much more attention to manufacture and mouthpiece. The Shofar represents the natural resources which God has made available

to human beings, and it represents man's direct access to the Almighty. Today, the Shofar stands for the direct call of the Divine, the call to a life of less complication and complexity but greater depth and spirituality, emphasising values and virtues over status, success and possessions.

SUMMING UP THE SHOFAR

Rosh HaShanah is a mosaic of moments. It is greeting cards, flowers and fruit, meals after the services, cherished family and friends. It is colourful symbolism – white vestments, piercing Shofar blasts, hallowed melodies, heirloom *Machzorim*, historic prayers... even the sheer size of the milling Yom-tov crowds.

Above all, it is spiritual exaltation, crystal-clear perception of God and insight into ourselves, the full-throated chorus of faith, the snatches of silence when we are oblivious of the service and hear our own heart-beat. All belong to the uncanny fascination of the day.

Rosh HaShanah is also major themes for thinking. In particular, the Shofar.

God calls with the Shofar. The voice of the Lord takes many forms – the sun and stars; the

winds and rushing waters; the love and laughter of human beings; the capacity of mind, heart and hand; the work of man in art, music and poetry; the wonder of life itself.

God calls with the Shofar. People are sometimes deaf to His call in other forms. But none can pretend that they do not hear the piercing blast of the Shofar.

God calls with the Shofar. From Sinai, to proclaim the commandments. Through the prophets, to speak forth the dictates of truth and justice. To announce the Sabbath and the serenity which is a foretaste of the world to come.

Man calls with the Shofar. It is our answering response to God. With the Shofar we proclaim our alertness to moral duty, our love of God's law, our loyalty to our tradition.

Man calls with the Shofar. We assure God that it is frailty and foolishness that enmesh us in the

frivolities of the moment, but once aroused by conscience we seek His forgiveness and forbearance.

Man speaks with the Shofar. We pray that God may recall His promise, "In every place where I cause My name to be remembered, there will I come to you and bless you."

God calls with the Shofar. He answers man's call. He blesses His creatures more than they deserve. He

renews His promise that He will send the Messiah, and final redemption will dawn.

O God, who calls with the Shofar, help us to hear the sound of Thy call. May we respond to Thee with love and loyalty, and merit Thy revelation and redemption when Mashiach will come to mankind and all the world will come to serve Thee and call upon Thy name.

Akedah – the sacrifice that never was

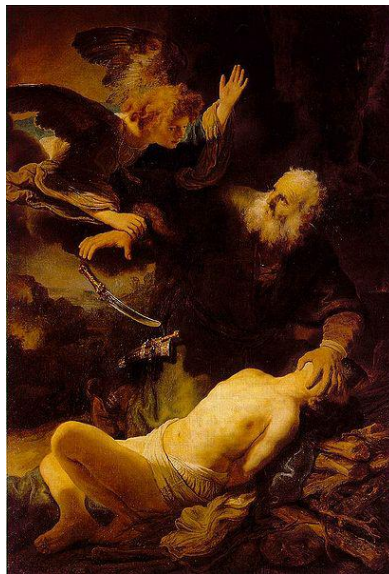
Central to the Rosh HaShanah liturgy is the *Akedah*, the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22). It is one of the great classics of literature: a short but highly effective fifteen verses of unparalleled artistry. In Judaism it forms the culmination of the Abraham saga: its theme, God's call to Abraham for a great task and the patriarch's demonstration of his fitness. In Christianity it symbolises a claim that God's "son" gave his life for the sake of humanity. (In the Koran it was Ishmael who was bound on the altar, happy at being martyred.)

But it is not only non-Jews who read too much into the story and speak of the Sacrifice of Isaac. Within Judaism, some regard Isaac as the paradigm of the historical Jew, often sacrificed on the altar of God and His Torah (some aggadic interpretations say that Isaac was sacrificed and reduced to ashes and later resurrected to enable him to marry Rebekah). Yet the story in the Torah text denies that there was a sacrifice. Isaac survived, though not unscathed; Abraham survived, though probably subdued and changed. The story relates a test, not a murder; a willingness for martyrdom, not martyrdom itself.

When the text says, "God tested Abraham", rabbinic commentary cited by Rashi puts into God's mouth the words, "I implore you, stand by Me in this trial so that people will not say the earlier trials had no substance". Tradition speaks of ten trials which tested the patriarch. As enumerated in Avot D'Rabbi Natan, chapter 33, the earlier trials were: Abraham's move from Ur (Gen. 12:1), his move to Egypt in time

of famine (12:10), his casting out of Ishmael (21:10), his statement that Sarai was his sister (12:11), his casting out of Hagar (21:10), his war with the kings (14:13), the covenant "between the pieces" (chapter 15), the events in Ur (15:7) and the covenant of circumcision (chapter 17).

Why was it necessary to try Abraham again and again? The rabbis said that as a potter tests not his worst but his best products, so God tests the righteous, because from them He expects the most (Psalm 11:5; B'reshit Rabba 54). But it seems to push all normal ethics aside when Abraham is asked even to contemplate child murder: in academic jargon, the teleological suspension of the ethical. From God's point of view there is a plot, a rhythm, but no plan to cause an actual killing. But from Abraham's, and from Isaac's? Maybe they recognised that God was pushing them hard but would hold back from requiring a death. Since tradition believes that the patriarchs kept the whole Torah even before it was given, they were already aware that Lev. 20:1-5 forbids child sacrifice.



Rembrandt's Abraham and Isaac, 1634

The rabbis were highly exercised about the problem. According to Pir'kei D'Rabbi Eliezer, Abraham's two "lads", whom the Midrash names as Ishmael and the servant Eliezer, were discussing who would inherit the patriarch's estate when Abraham came back from sacrificing Isaac. A voice from above said, "Neither of you will inherit: the heir will be the rightful owner of the inheritance" – a prophecy that Isaac would not lose his life but would return from the mountain with

his father. One should also note Avot 5:9, which states that from Creation the ram offered in Isaac's place was always in existence, suggesting that the Almighty never intended the sacrifice to take place.

But our generation cannot look at any part of Scripture, any rabbinic text, any historical model, without relating it to the Holocaust. How can we go along with the arguments in the previous paragraph? Does not the destruction of the six million shatter the symbolism of the story and disprove the claim that no sacrifice took place? We dare not minimise the six million, but can we refuse to recognise that the Jewish people as a whole survived and Judaism continues to live? The generation of the Sho'ah were severely tested, we are all still severely shaken, but Isaac has survived. We weep, but we rejoice.

Another subject of debate is why God needed to test Abraham. An all-knowing God must by definition be fully aware of the nature of His creatures. One view is that it is the nations of the world who needed to know Abraham's merits; they would not be convinced by God praising the patriarch's virtues unless Abraham publicly demonstrated his own determination and quality (Yalkut Shim'oni, Lech L'cha 62). This view interprets the word *nissah* (God "tested" Abraham) as if it were *ness* – God made him into a banner to unfurl before the nations.

Others say that it was Abraham who needed the test: unless subjected to a serious trial he would not realise his own spiritual and personal strength. There is also a line of thinking that Abraham had let God down by making a covenant with Avimelech that would have given away some of the promised land, and so God threatened him by saying, as it were, "If you give away land promised to your children, you may end up without children".

Some criticise Abraham for going along blindly with what God commanded. What should he have done? As the one who pioneered the tradition of confrontation with God when he said, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not act justly?" (Gen. 18:25), he should have argued with God and insisted on a rational explanation of the Divine will.

The text says that Abraham was tested, but did Isaac have no say? The reiterated words, "And the two of them went together", is a hint that Isaac realised he was part of some heavenly test of his father. The son did not object, because for him the test was whether he was sufficiently loyal and obedient to his father (N'tziv, "Ha'amek Davar" 22:1). Hence while God tested Abraham, Abraham tested Isaac.

Apart from being the Torah reading for the second day of Rosh HaShanah, the *Akedah* is linked with the blowing of the shofar. Rabbi Abbahu said, "Why do we blow the horn of a ram? Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'Blow the horn of a ram before Me, in order that I shall remember for you the binding of Isaac the son of Abraham'" (Talmud RH 16a). There are a number of "*Akedah*" *S'lichot* (penitential poems). The *Akedah* is mentioned in the *Zichronot* section of *Mussaf*. The Midrash associates *Tashlich* with the *Akedah*, suggesting that Satan, wishing to obstruct Abraham, changed into a river and barred his way, but Abraham jumped into the water and went on.

Other *Akedah* practices include the S'fardi and Chassidic customs of reading the *Akedah* daily (among Ashkenazim it is optional), mention of the *Akedah* in the *Tachanun* supplications on Monday and Thursday, and, in the Egyptian rite, lying on the ground during *Tachanun* like a lamb about to be slaughtered. The story is complex, with many layers; its infinite variety remains an inspiration.

***Un'tanneh Tokef* – the prayer that tears the heart**

Maybe it is the words that tear the heart: they speak of the littleness of being human, the brevity and uncertainty of human life. Maybe it is the story of the prayer, said to have been uttered with the last breath of a medieval martyr. Maybe it is the musical rendition, composed amidst almost unbearable emotion. Whatever the reasons, *Un'tanneh Tokef* towers above all other prayers on these days of awe. No wonder that in times when people would cry as

they prayed, this was the prayer over which they wept most.

The author is said to be Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, who, like many medieval Jews, was repeatedly pressured by the local bishop or governor to abandon Judaism and enter the dominant faith. Finally exasperated, he said he would give an answer in three days. He immediately regretted his

words with their implication that there was a possibility that he would succumb. Three days later when asked what he had to say he said the answer was no and they should cut out his tongue because it had transgressed. The bishop decided instead that Amnon should be cruelly tortured.

Dying from the effect of his wounds, a few days later on Rosh HaShanah the rabbi asked to be carried into the synagogue, and as the cantor reached the *K'dushah*, he said, "Pause that I may sanctify the Name of God!" He there and then uttered the words we know as *Un'tanneh Tokef*: "Let us declare the mighty holiness of this day, for it is solemn and awesome..." As he reached the culminating words his soul expired. Later he appeared in a dream to Kalonymos ben Meshullam and taught him the words of the prayer, which subsequently entered the liturgy of almost every Jewish community.

The scholars are not all agreed that this is the true story. Some argue that in style, language and theme *Un'tanneh Tokef* may reflect a period three centuries earlier. Some see parallels with non-Jewish hymnology (e.g. a Middle-Latin poem, "What a tremble will be there/The book will be opened/All hidden things will appear/The awesome trumpet will sound/Over all the graves"). But the fact is that in the history of the liturgy a theme can grip a number of authors before reaching a final form. And though it is not only Jewish poets that deal with God's judgment of human beings, the non-Jewish writers tend to write about the judgment of the dead whilst *Un'tanneh Tokef* deals with the judgment of the living.

What does the prayer say?

1. This is a solemn day of judgment.
2. God opens the records; we have each signed our own entry.
3. The shofar is sounded, a small voice is heard; even the angels are on trial.
4. Like sheep before the shepherd, every living soul comes for scrutiny.
5. On Rosh HaShanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: who will live and who will die, who will have rest and who will wander, who will be humbled and who exalted.

6. But penitence, prayer and charity avert the evil of the decree.

The hymn does not end there but continues:

7. God does not wish the death of the sinner but desires his repentance.

8. God our Maker knows that we are flesh and blood.

9. We come from dust and end in dust; we are transitory like a potsherd, like grass, like a flower, a shadow, a cloud, the wind, the dust, a dream.

10. God Himself is eternal; we praise Him on earth as the angels do in heaven.

KEY PHRASES

- "Every person's entry is signed with his name" – The Midrash says that when Adam sinned, he was distressed that his deed would affect his descendants. God assured him that every person would see their own entry in the records, and their own deeds would decide their fate.
- "Even the angels are not pure in God's sight" – The sages say that when the angels accuse the Jewish people, the Almighty rises to the defence of His children.
- "A still, small voice" – This phrase, from the story of Elijah (I Kings 19), indicates when the trumpet is sounded in the heavenly court, the whole of creation is hushed into silence.
- "Like a flock of sheep" – The shepherd checks each of his sheep; God scrutinises every one of His creatures. Instead of *kiv'nei maron* – "like a flock of sheep", some think the original phrase was *kiv'numeron* – like a troop of soldiers", since an inspecting officer looks at every one of his troops.
- "On Rosh HaShanah it is written and on Yom Kippur sealed..." – The Talmud says the righteous are at once written down for life, and the wicked for death; it is the fate of the intermediate category, i.e. the average person, that is suspended until Yom Kippur.
- "Man's origin is dust and his end is dust" – Noting that this phrase evoked deep sobs amongst his congregation, a Chassidic teacher said that the only reason to weep would be if we came from gold and ended as dust.



□ “Man is like a potsherd, like grass, like a shadow, like a dream” – This is not a devaluation of man; it is part of the contrast between us and God, who as our Maker knows we are limited and finite, but within our limits we can achieve great things.

WHY DID PEOPLE CRY?

During the Russo-Japanese War, wounded Jewish soldiers assembled for a Rosh HaShanah service. Many who came were without limbs, emaciated, blind or otherwise incapacitated. As the prayers began, a sigh filled the room and everyone burst into tears. During *Un'tanneh Tokef*, “No words at all were heard in the House of Prayer; only tear-choked voices filled the atmosphere of the little house. The cantor’s voice became stronger and stronger and struck sparks in the air: ‘... Who will live and who will die, who in his time and who before his time.’ Those were terrible and awful moments” (Agnon, “Days of Awe”, p.103).

In a thousand different situations the frailty and unpredictability of human life has evoked almost uncontrollable weeping at this moment. No wonder *Un'tanneh Tokef* has an uncanny fascination and shakes even the least emotional person.

IS EVERYTHING BESCHERRT?

There are critics who accuse *Un'tanneh Tokef* of echoing a rather un-Jewish strain of fatalism. Is the prayer implying, *Alles is bescherrt*, “What will be, will be?” Is it saying with Omar Khayyam, “The moving finger writes; and, having writ/moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit/Shall lure it back to cancel half a line/Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it”, and is this Judaism? Yes, we are being told that decrees are made on Rosh HaShanah and sealed on Yom Kippur, but the crucial message is in the climactic line, “But penitence, prayer and charity avert the evil of the decree”. In other words, there is room for human free will in moulding the future. But there is the external event and the internal event. The external event is what happens to us; the internal event is how we respond.

The quantity of our life is not always up to us, though with sensible precautions we can stave off a number of things. But the moral quality of our life is in our hands. Maimonides wrote, “Free will is granted to every man. If he desires to incline towards the good way and be righteous he has power to do so; and if he desires to incline towards the

unrighteous way and be a wicked man, he also has power to do so”. J. H. Hertz commented, “We are free agents as far as our choice between good and evil is concerned. This is an undeniable fact of human nature; but it is an equally undeniable fact that the sphere in which that choice is exercised is limited for us by heredity and environment”.

PENITENCE – T'SHUVAH

T'shuvah makes atonement for all transgressions; even if a person has transgressed all the days of his life, if he does *T'shuvah* at the end, nothing of his wickedness is remembered unto him.

What is *T'shuvah*? It is when the sinner forsakes his sin and removes it from his thoughts, and concludes in his heart not to do it again. And let the sinner call to Him who knows all hidden things to witness that he will never return to perform that sin again. Do not say that one does *T'shuvah* only for transgressions that involve an act, like adultery, theft and robbery. But just as a person must turn in *T'shuvah* from these, so he must search out his evil thoughts and turn from anger, hostility, jealousy, quarrelling, pursuing money or honour, and the greed for food and such matters.

The sages said, “Where repentant sinners stand, the completely righteous cannot stand” (Ber. 34b); that is to say, the rung they stand on is higher than those who have never sinned, for they have had to labour harder to conquer their passions (Maimonides).

PRAYER – T'FILLAH

The Tzanzer Rebbe was asked, “What does the rabbi do before praying?”. “I pray,” was the reply, “that I may be able to pray properly”.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev saw a wagon driver greasing his wheels while wearing *tallit* and *t'fillin*. “Lord of the Universe,” the rabbi remarked, “What a holy people is Israel. Even while they grease their wheels they think of You!”

Said the Medzibozer Rebbe, “We read, ‘And as for me, may my prayer unto You, O Lord, be in an acceptable time’. As for me, who am I? As for my prayer, what significance is there in it before You, O Lord? But may it be in an acceptable time, when even an insignificant prayer by an unworthy person is accepted”.

CHARITY – TZ'DAKAH

It is said in the Talmud, "Every charity and deed of kindness does much to make peace and is an important intercessor between Israel and their Father in Heaven" (Bava Batra 10a). Our charity also makes peace between the poor man and his Father in heaven, because the poor man may be annoyed with God by reason of his lot (Agnon).

Charity is performed with money when that is what is needed. But Maimonides teaches in his 8 Rungs of

Charity that the greatest *tz'dakah* is quietly and anonymously ensuring that a person will never reach the point of needing to find help. Charity comes from a root which means "love"; true charity is a loving, respectful, tolerant attitude to every other human being. Charity is an approach, not just an action. According to many Siddurim, one should start the day by affirming the duty to love your neighbour as yourself before you speak of loving God with heart, soul and might; if you want God's blessing, first you must be a blessing to God's creatures.

Looking for God



There once was a man who lit a lamp at noonday and went through the market place, looking in every corner. People said, "You must be mad! What are you doing?" "Doing?" he said; "I'm looking for God!" (Nietzsche)

On Rosh HaShanah we too look for God. Not in the market place but in the synagogue

and siddur.

Many complain, "It's an empty exercise.

God ought to be there in the synagogue, but we don't find Him."

The Talmud can't believe this is possible. It says, "If anyone states, 'I have looked and did not find what I was looking for', Don't believe him."

Nietzsche looked for God in the market place.

When he did not find Him, he said, "God is dead. We have killed Him!"

Nietzsche asked the right question but found the wrong answer.

Isaiah says,

"Seek the Lord where He may be found".

God is not dead. He can be found.

But where?

There are two Talmudic answers, implicit if not explicit.

One says,

"Abraham found God on a mountain.

Isaac found God in a field.

Jacob found God in a house."

God is on a mountain – when our vision soars upward.

God is in a field – when we look at the face of the Creation.

God is in a house – when we acknowledge our fellow members of the human family.

The other text says,

"There are three keys to God - In childbirth, in the rains, in resurrection."

God is there in childbirth – in the miracle of bright childish joy and innocence.

God is there in the rains – in the indestructible resurgence of nature.

God is there in resurrection – in the eternity of the soul and the Divine Presence.

God is in the synagogue too.

In the building – a sanctuary in space and time.

In the congregation – human beings who rise above the mundane for a spiritual moment.

In religion – in sacred events, sacred memories, sacred deeds.

Nietzsche misunderstood the potential of the market place.

God really is in market places.

The market place of ideas, where human minds seek the truth.

The market place of trade, where human beings struggle for honesty, integrity and decency.

The Talmud is wiser than Nietzsche.

Nietzsche thought God was absent or dead.

The Talmud says,

Find God's witnesses, and through them you find God.

Evidence of God is everywhere.

"Man can not see My face and live," He says:

"But you can see Me passing by."

You want God to march in with trumpets blazing and banners flying?

Elijah can tell you the answer:

God is not the whirlwind or the thunder.

God is the still, small voice

That speaks quietly and says,

"I am the Lord your God!"

