

AWAKE YOU SLUMBERERS . . .

Shanah Tovah –May it be a good year! It is good to see so many of you this morning as we enter the New Year, 5771, together. Notice I did not say “Happy New Year.” We Jews wish for each other health, life, prosperity, but not, at this time “happy” joyful greetings. Our observance this morning, and throughout these 10 days of Tshuvah, of repentance, is one of seriousness, reflection, atonement. There’s plenty of time for “Simchah” – happy times at the end of this holy day season, during Sukkot, known as HeHag, THE Holiday, and for rejoicing a week later during Simchat Torah when we conclude and then and begin anew the reading of the Torah.

Rather this a far more serious time, a time filled with Awe. After all, we call these days “Yamim HaNoraim,” the days of awe, not holidays. In a few moments, as part of our Shofar service, we will read the ancient words: “Awake from your sleep. Rouse yourselves you slumberers, out of your lethargy. Examine your souls, mend your actions and return to God in repentance.”

The call is to each and every one of us. Awake from your slumber! Prepare yourselves for the new year. The old year has passed; it is over and must be put to rest. Time to turn away from the old, toward the new. Time to turn inward to an accounting of yourself, outward to an accounting with your families, with our community, our world. Time to put the past year into perspective, consign it to your personal memory bank, all the bad memories as well as the good; press delete and then click open a new folder, mark it 5771 and begin to write in it, enter new data. Tradition tells us all will be clean

on our new slate – or should we say our computer screen. We can begin anew this morning, if we are ready, if we are prepared.

Awake you slumberers, let the shofar sounds we are about to hear awaken us, truly awaken us to the new year. But how is this possible? How do we prepare for those stirring calls of the shofar? Try as we might, we can't really let go of the past year, with its tumult, its difficulties, its tragedies as well as its triumphs and happiness. So perhaps we should return together for a few moments to the year that has just ended, recall it and place it in perspective, ask how it has affected us as a people, a nation, a community, and as individual Jews.

Our Shofar calls us in 3 differing ways: T'kiah, Sh'varim, Truah. Each sound is very different. Perhaps in paying attention to their sounds we can find a way to awaken and understand, to come to grips with our past and begin to work towards our new year, our future. The T'kiah, that long, familiar note, we will leave til later. Rather, let's begin with those short, staccato notes, the Truah. Unlike the long T'kiah, or even the mid-length 3 notes of Sh'varim, the Truah are short and seem broken, each unfinished. As we reflect back on the past year, those broken notes represent for us the brokenness in life: broken dreams, challenges faced and sometimes not mastered, tragedies both personal and those in the larger world around us.

And what a difficult year it has been, filled with so many broken notes! Still in the grip of a recession, our nation's economy has not yet recovered. Some of us have been affected more than others – lost jobs, lost health insurance, homes foreclosed – but all of us felt the effects, whether in our pocketbooks, our professions or our savings and pensions.

And any recent hope that we might be headed toward a new era, one of kindness and understanding, has been shattered, with the shrill sound of its broken notes constantly surrounding us. We thought we finally were beyond racial hatred, beyond vilification, but we keep hearing the broken sounds. The vitriol and anger expressed through the internet, by media commentators, religious and extreme groups hurling insults at others, accusations and falsehoods, death threats, loss of civility even among our elected officials – will it ever end? Will our nation be even more torn apart than before? How can we help repair the wounds? No, It has not been a good year for civility, tolerance, understanding.

In the larger world, too, the sounds of Truah remind us that in this past year, much remains broken. Though our combat soldiers have finally left Iraq, our soldiers in Afganistan face constant danger in a never-ending war, though one that is increasingly buried on the inside pages of our papers and our lives, where we can conveniently ignore it. Only months after the devastation of the earthquake in Haiti the cameras are gone, volunteers have left, and most of us have forgotten the desperate poverty only miles from our own shores.

In Israel, our fellow Jews are still locked in a stalemate with the Palestinians. The hatred and fury unleashed toward Israelis and all Jews after the flotilla incident in Gaza reminded us all that we are far from real peace. Though negotiations have begun once more between Israel and the Palestinians, there have been so many previous false starts and hopes, so many broken notes, that few hold out much hope today for success. We live in a broken world; one must search far and near to find any improvement since we last heard the sounds of the Shofar.

When we hear those notes of Truah tomorrow, we will also hear the brokenness within our own hearts. Illnesses, loss of a loved one, failed friendships, family difficulties all weigh heavily upon us. Some of these problems we share with each other but there are some we cannot speak of—these too we reflect upon as we close the old year and attempt to begin anew. We know we cannot really wipe the slate clean, but we can attempt to start over, to make amends, to be less broken, more whole.

Awake you slumberers – look around you – and hear the voice of the Shofar. Now we hear the sounds of Sh'varim, those three clear repeated notes. They sound imperative; they have an urgency to them. Following upon the broken sounds of Truah, the Sh'varim call us to come out of ourselves, our complacency, to leave the past year behind, to face the future and act. They shout: be bold. They shout: take a stand. They shout: Now! Don't let the brokenness of the Truah, the brokenness of your lives or the brokenness in the world around you be the cause of your inaction, your paralysis. Hear the sounds of Sh'varim as a call to action as you head into the new year, this 5771 -- beginning this morning, beginning right now, with a will to act, a commitment to change.

Reach out to those around you to create a community that is strong. Here in Cheyenne, throughout our country and world. So much is waiting for you, even for one person – you – to become involved. In broken families, one voice of compassion can help. In a nation gone mad with anger, with wild accusations and destructive behavior, one voice of rationality can change the tone of debate. In a world still reeling from financial crisis, globally and in each and every home, one hand reaching out to others, in soup kitchens, at

home with concern for superfluous consumer spending, with contributions to causes elsewhere, whether Haiti, Jewish communities throughout the world, in your own home town or within your own 4 walls, hear the sounds of Sh'varim – the calls of urgency.

Hear the sounds of Sh'varim to stand up for what is right, for what you believe. Speak out, in a voice as clear as the Sh'varim sounds themselves for the rights of others and the dignity of all. Help others reach the place where they can hear the sounds as clearly as you can. The Shofar calls are calls for us, on this new year, to act as boldly, as strongly as the sounds themselves. The call is urgent. One year fades to the next and what have we achieved? What can we achieve in this next year to make the year ahead of us a better one for all?

“Awake you slumberers, from your sleep. Rouse yourselves out of your lethargy, examine the deeds of the past and return to God in repentance, so that we may help turn our lives and our world.”

And finally, when we hear the sound of the shofar in a few minutes, we will hear, first and last, the clarion call of T'kiah. Tk'iah, the strong call that takes us through moments of hesitancy then ends with a long, uplifting finish – especially that always-awaited final T'kiah G'dolah – T'kiah is a note of hope, but more than that it calls to us as did the prophets of old, a call to Shalom, Peace.

When we can acknowledge the broken sounds, the Truah in our hearts and our world, when we can then move beyond them to hear the sounds of Sh'varim and act with urgency to better ourselves and the situations in which

we find ourselves on this eve of 5771, when we can do that, we are, finally ready to hear the call of T'kiah.

The opening sound of the Shofar service, the first T'kiah prepares us for the shofar sounds to follow. Then, when we have absorbed all the other sounds of the shofar, then, finally, we can hear the T'kiah G'dolah, the loud, long, plaintive yet strong call for Peace.

How many times we have heard this call, yet where is the peace we all desire? How many generations of Jews have heard the call, yet still live without real Shalom with their neighbors? How long will we have to fight wars and endure hatreds between peoples before we can all respond to the T'kiah Gdolah?

It is easy, almost fun, to listen to T'kiah Gdolah, to rejoice at the long, loud sound and then continue on with our lives with nothing changed. It is easy to ignore the message of the Shofar, the message of tshuvah, tfilah, tzedakah – repentance, prayer and justice – forgetting it until the next year, the next high holy days. But what if we could truly respond to the shofar, all the sounds and all the calls, and begin the year anew, determined to act upon the calls, to live our lives so that we and others may, at the time of the next new year, find ourselves in a better, more prosperous, kinder, more peaceful world? That is our challenge during these Yamim HaNora'im, these 10 days we begin today, to reflect, to pray, to act – to ask for forgiveness, and then to do something about it.

And when, at the conclusion of our services on Yom Kippur, we hear T'kiah Gdolah once more, that final T'kiah G'dolah which completes these

days of Awe, may we then have resolved to live our lives in such a way that our new year, 5771, will truly bring us closer to peace, prosperity and contentment for us, for all Israel and all humanity. Amen