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Over the past couple of years, when Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur rolled around, I have written a bit about Teshuvah, Tefillah and Tzedakah. (Reconciliation with people and God, self-understanding in terms of how next to improve oneself, rent for breathing (which is the example of God's non-judgmental compassion towards everybody) paid by giving money to those who have less.)

This year we will delve a bit deeper into the liturgy and discuss the Shofar (animal horn, usually a ram) through the lenses of fact, feeling, interpretation and deeper meaning.

Just the facts: The shofar is blown at several points during a Rosh HaShanah service, and to mark the very end of the final Yom Kippur service. The blast variations consists of a normally longish one (Tekiah), a blast which divides the Tekiah into three (Shevarim) and a blast which divides those three blasts into three more (Teruah). All these blast variations take about the same amount of time. There is a final variation which is a very much longer blast, called the great Tekiah.

Feelings: The shofar feels like a spiritual alarm clock, reminding us that it is long past time to do what is required so that we can feel that our lives are filled with, and based on, integrity.

Interpretation: The three main variations echo the types of cry a person will give upon enduring suffering. The long wail, the broken moan and the staccato sob are all sounds which we remember hearing at least, even when we have been fortunate enough not to produce them. That feeling of sadness and despair underlies our efforts to become whole again, since we do completely understand our part in causing the damage inflicted on others by gossip and rumor, and we know we can never fix what our words have caused.

Deeper meaning: Blowing the shofar is a cue to God. God is the entity which can perceive and comprehend multiple moments at once, even when those moments are changeable. There is one future when we do not work on becoming better, and a different future when we do. So we cue God to perceive Abraham and Isaac in the particularly God-like, incomprehensible fashion during the annual moment when God is considering the progress we have made towards becoming humane creatures. It is our hope that God will filter our progress so far through the lens of the progress Abraham and Isaac made during their lives, and therefore grant us more time to live up to our capacity. The same thing often happens in our own lives, when we look at the child who hit the baseball through our window, and remember when we were that child, and act accordingly (which could mean letting the kid off the hook, or it could mean creating a situation where the child will acquire the concept of responsibility) depending upon what happened to us and what it meant for us at the time.

May this next year be better than the last.

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