Shofar So Good--Thoughts for Rosh Hashana

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By
Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Thoughts on the Shofar

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The Shofar plays a central role in the Rosh Hashana liturgy and invariably is one of the highlights of the synagogue service. Its primordial sounds are meant to awaken us from spiritual slumber; and to evoke thoughts and emotions relating to the Akeida story, the Revelation at Sinai, and the Messianic Redemption.

The laws relating to the ritual propriety of a shofar can be understood to convey moral lessons. A shofar must be fashioned from one horn; a shofar that is patched together using different pieces of ram's horn is not kasher for use. The moral: we need to be "whole" human beings, true to ourselves, strong with personal integrity. If we are merely a patchwork of other people's ideas and values, we are not fulfilling our responsibility as autonomous human beings.

The shofar is not to be plated with gold in such a way as to alter its authentic sound. The moral: we are not to allow material prosperity to falsify our authentic voices. Nor are we to be impressed by wealthy individuals whose "voices" have been altered by their riches e.g. who arrogate to themselves rights and privileges simply because of their wealth. A person's human worth is not to be determined by how much or how little "gold" he/she has.

If the sound of the shofar is the result of an echo i.e. the person blew the shofar in a cave or through a michrophone, then this does not satisfy the religious requirement of hearing the shofar. The moral: we need to concentrate on the real thing, not on echoes or artificial magnifications. The shofar serves its role not by how loud a noise it can make, but by how natural and authentic a sound it emits.

The shofar is supposed to be bent over into a curve. The moral: we are to be contrite when we come before the Lord, bowing in humility and with honest recognition of our weaknesses.

Thus, the shofar is imbued with important symbolic messages to help us be better human beings and more devoted Jews. May we all be sensitive to the messages of the shofar. May we all be blessed with a meaningful holiday season. May the Almighty bless us and our loved ones with a year of good health and happiness, peace for America, Israel, and the world.

Angel for Shabbat