

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

A NEW YEAR L'CHAIM TO WEXNER MEMBERS/FELLOWS/ALUMNI

September 9, 2020 | Elul 20 5780 | Rabbi B. Elka Abrahamson

Over and over during these last months, our virtual gatherings have brought light to my soul. Hundreds of you have participated in Wexner Torah calls, virtual institutes, focused dialogues, check-ins and self-care conversations, Summits, spontaneous class reunions, and leadership learning opportunities. While every zoom call delivers rich content, personally speaking, each zoom call begins and ends with the sheer joy of seeing one another, of waking up to the enduring power of being present for one another. As the new year 5781 beckons, the Foundation team wants you to know:

We see you.

Rosh Hashanah is about waking the self – the soul - to everything: to seeing...to hearing... to loving, to all that is essential to one's being.

Maimonides famously teaches that the shofar cries out to us:

עוררו ישנים מלשונתכם

Wake up you sleepers from your sleep and you slumberers from your slumber. Examine your conduct, turn in repentance." The Rambam describes the shofar blast as a communal 'wake-up call.' During these days of Elul the shofar is sounded every morning – 40 days from the first of Elul until the sunset on Yom Kippur.

Rosh Hashanah is called, among other names, Yom Truah. Truah, the most broken of the three shofar blasts. The shofar calls begin with the extended tekiah. then the three broken sounds of shvarim and conclude with the nine frantic notes of t'ruah. T'ruah has a fierce urgency about it...as if the shofar is pleading with us: pay attention!

Since just after Purim we have all been immersed in a crisis. The impact of our current reality comes in waves because most of us are thank GD, safe and managing COVID in relative comfort. Some of you have been or are sick – refuah shleima - and a few of you have known the wailing of mourning and we send you our comforting embrace.

You, my remarkable friends and colleagues, have answered the call to exercise leadership in a time and circumstance never imagined, one for which nobody was prepared. We know about your creativity, resilience, and steadfast commitments to your communities and organizations. We made a promise to you last spring to turn our energy to developing more rigorous levels of support to the thousands of Wexner

Alumni, Fellows and Members we have invested in over the last 35 years. The amazingly talented Wexner team has spent time listening to your stories, learning about your innovative work, discovering your relentless pursuit of excellence and our Wexner staff has responded to your thoughtful requests. We are paying attention and are cognizant of how exhausting and also how exhilarating your work has been in these trying times.

We hear you.

Yom Kippur morning we read from the prophet Isaiah who exhorts us to make our fast purposeful. It should prod us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and move us to pursue justice for the marginalized and the vulnerable. The haftarah also includes this exquisite invitation. Isaiah tells us:

קרא בגרון אל־תחשך כשופר הַרָם קנלך

Cry with full throat, without restraint; Raise your voice like a shofar!

The spiritual challenge of our Yamim Noraim - the days of Awe- is to hear/lishmoa the t'ruah of the ram's horn, yes, but also...also - to be a shofar, to lift up our voices with the piercing effectiveness of the ram's horn. The 9 staccato notes of t'ruah mirror a shattered world, a world full of injustices that demand the attention of effective multi-taskers. The t'ruah amplifies the ba ba bum...beating (3) of anxious hearts as we contemplate the extent to which our own actions have – or have not - lived up to the expectations we set for ourselves.

The shofar is not only an urgent call to meaningful action, it blasts out the song of our highest hopes. The confident sound of tekiah is an expression of the unbroken faith that God will have rachmanut, compassion upon us. tekiah is sounded at the arrival of the jubilee year when we are especially attuned to justice, to caring for the land itself, to the freeing of all. Yom Kippur closes with that tekiah, the dramatically long blast reminding us that we must cling ceaselessly to hope...to blessing...and to possibility. That is what you all do each day...and for that...for that you are beloved – by your communities, by those you lead and support and yes, you are beloved by us.

Our teacher Rabbi Larry Hoffman writes: the whole point of the High Holy day Days is held in the tekiah g'dolah: Life renewed beyond our wildest dreams. We hold the anguish of teruah and the faith of tekiah in one heart.

L'chaim friends, to a year filled with dreams realized, to your voices relentless calling out for justice, and to the enduring hope for what can yet be.

Tekiah Gedolah