

Leadership Resource for the High Holy Days

Torah for a cost of living crisis



Delighted to share this resource with you. Shanah Tova from all of us at Lead, the leadership division of the JLC

Can a Shofar blow in a city without people being scared?

אִם-יִתְקַע שׁוֹפָר בְּעִיר וְעַם לֹא יִחְרְדוּ?
Amos 3.6

What does the shofar sound mean to you?

The shofar in fact has multiple competing symbolisms in our tradition

- The sound of God being revealed on Mount Sinai (see the [Torah](#))
- A wake-up call to repent and return (see [Maimonides](#))
- Blown to mark [Rosh Chodesh](#) (the new month), on [festivals](#), to mark the shmitta year and [jubilee year](#)
- Blown to celebrate God noisily (see [Tehillim](#))
- Blown upon going to war (“and the walls came tumbling down”)
- Sounded at the end of times to announce freedom (see [Isaiah](#))

But the shofar has one other important association: justice

Lift your voice like a shofar!

כְּשׁוֹפָר הָרִם קוֹלְךָ

Ka-shofar harem kolecha!

“This is the fast I have chosen: To loose the fetters of wickedness, to untie the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to break off every yoke! It is to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor outcast home, to see someone naked and cover them, to stop hiding from your own kin.”

- [Isaiah 58](#), Haftarah of Yom Kippur morning

As we approach the 2022 High Holy Days, our community faces the same major challenge as the rest of the country - the soaring cost of living. The prospect of the hungry, the homeless and those without enough money for clothes at a bigger scale than ever before, is very real. This Rosh Hashana brings to a close the current Shmitta year, in which equality should be restored to all people, regardless of their fortunes over the past seven years. And yet in our days and in these times, poverty is set to rise exponentially. Our texts are alive to poverty and inequality. They demand that we do not look away, that when others are less fortunate, we share what we have.

MAIMONIDES DESCRIBES THE SHOFAR AS A WAKE-UP CALL. HOW WILL WE WAKE UP THIS YEAR?

The different notes we learn to sound out on the Shofar have different meanings. One calls out, “Alarm!” – “Awake!” Another evokes sobs of grief as we realize how far we have wandered off the path of a loving life, the hurt we have caused others and ourselves. Still another is a series of deep breaths as we begin to heal ourselves by healing those around us.

–Rabbi Arthur Waskow

When the shofar is blown on Rosh Hashanah, all time collapses. We revisit our master story again and again, understanding that we are part of an ancient, treasured history, one of entanglement and also of redemption. The problem is to know when we are stuck and when we are just at the beginning of a breakthrough.

—Dr Erica Brown

How can we make this moment of “entanglement” a moment of “breakthrough”?

- When everyone is in a tight spot, how can our organisations and communities pull together to make life easier for not only those with the greatest need, but for society as a whole?
- How can we as a community show resilience, and help in the best way possible?
- While hand-outs may be one way we can respond, what else could we consider?

Take a look at Maimonides ladder of giving - from least ideal at the bottom to most ideal at the top - for inspiration at this moment.

1. Giving in a way that helps someone to be self-supporting (such as a gift, loan, business partnership, education, or a job)
2. Giving so that neither nor the recipient knows who the other is
3. Giving so that the giver doesn't know who receives the money, but the recipient knows who gave the money
4. Giving so that the recipient doesn't know who gave the money but the giver knows who got it
5. Giving before being asked to do so
6. Giving when asked to do so
7. Giving less than one should, but being nice about it
8. Giving less than one should, but not being nice about it



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Discuss in your team, which of the following ideas you could use at this moment. Which do you think would fit into the higher bands of Maimonides ladder? Are there other ideas you have to meet the needs of this moment?

- Make your office / spaces as energy-efficient as possible and share information with your team on how they can do so at home.
- Make the best use of common spaces. Are the lights and heating on anyway? Can you open up a co-working space for those who would otherwise need to work from home? Can you open your space for after-school clubs?
- Whatever services you provide, make it free for those who need like this Missouri bagel shop, whose Talmud-inspired policy went viral
- Do the lowest-paid people in your organisation have enough to cover the basics? Can you offer a confidential selection of emergency groceries and toiletries?
- Of course if you can, even out the pay discrepancies between highest and lowest paid people on your payroll
- And finally... Learn this Torah in your organisations!



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Ideas for how to use this resource:

- Throw a team lunch & learn session
- Quote it at your Rosh Hashanah party
- Send out in your RH cards or gift bags...