

Dear Chavraya,

There is something palpable in the air, the turning of seasons, the turning within our selves manifest outward; the power of the Days of Awe/Days of Turning touching us as surely as the weather, even to our surprise at first. The heightened sense of awareness that comes with the inchoate sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashannah is given expression in words on *Shabbat Shuvah*, this Shabbos to which we have come for pause on the journey to Yom Kippur. Filled with potential and possibility, the primal call of the shofar is our own voice waiting to be formed.

*Shuvah* means return. It is the first word in the *haftarah*, formed of three prophets this week, from which comes the name *Shabbat Shuvah* / *Shabbat of Return: Shuvah Yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha* / *Return Israel, all the way to God, your God*. The way of return is with words, *k'chu imachem d'varim v'shuvu el Hashem* / *bring with you words and return to God*. The Torah portion for this week, *Parashat Vayelech*, also begins with the use of words to join, this time of people to people, of Moses telling the people of his coming death, the calling for his soul to return home: *vayelech Moshe va'yidaber et ha'davarim ha'eyleh* / *And Moses went and spoke these words. T'shuvah/turning* is the way of return, turning to reconnect with ourselves, with others, with God. *Bring with you words*, but first we have to find our own voice. On Rosh Hashannah we hear our own unformed voice in the voice of the shofar. On *Shabbat Shuvah* we find the words through which to express our yearning and turning toward the wholeness that is the gift of Yom Kippur.

Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev taught: *Everything that exists in the spiritual realm has its corresponding expression in the physical realm. In the physical realm there is voice and speech. Voice is expansive, while speech is the shaping of the voice through letters of speech. So on Rosh Hashannah, the voice of the shofar, which is expansive, is the bounteous emanation from the Blessed Creator. All that we say through words of prayer is the shaping through letters of the emanation from the Blessed Creator, each one (giving shape to sound) according to her or his own desire.*

In the one primal voice of the shofar, each of us can hear our own voice. As real as leaves on the wind, letters are carried to consciousness, ready to be shaped. May the words we take with us toward Yom Kippur, be the healing words of turning toward each other.

Shabbat shalom / *G'mar Chatimah Tovah* - May we be sealed for a good year,  
Rabbi Victor