

THE CALL TO SANITY

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The meaning of the blowing of the Shofar was long ago explained by the great Maimonides in the famous passage URU YESHEINIM MI'SHNASSCHEM - "You who are asleep, wake up! You who are in a trance, arise! Search your doings and repent. And remember your Creator, you who forget the truth BE'HAVLEI HA'ZMAN, in the vanities of the times..." What Shofar means to us, therefore, is the reminder that not all is well with us, that we are in danger of falling in line with the HAVLEI HA'ZMAN, with the pettiness and vanities of our world, our society, our times.

That term HAVLEI HA'ZMAN, which tells us that there is something amiss with our society and our times, can be translated in many ways. Some will say, "the vanities" of the times; another may prefer "emptiness", or perhaps "pettiness", or "foolishness". Today, however, we are able to give a brand new and quite radical interpretation to that phrase. We can translate HAVLEI HA'ZMAN as - "the insanity of our times". For only recently, one of the outstanding psychiatrists and clearest thinkers in this country has made a remarkable judgment on modern life. Erich Fromm has written a book giving us his considered opinion that our society is - insane! And just as an individual can be insane without realizing it, so can it be with a whole society or culture or civilization. So, then, that is what Shofar means in 1957: "Wake up, slumberer, and remember your Creator you who forget the truth in the insanity and madness of the times." The call of the Shofar is the call to sanity.

*attributed to
Fromm's
book
by
Norman Lamm*

And Dr. Fromm does not lack sufficient proof for his clinical diagnosis of the Western World as largely insane. In the last 100 years we have had an unparalleled prosperity - and yet killed off millions in this insane arrangement called "war". One enterprising scholar estimated that from 1500 BCE to 1860 CE - before any of our major wars, hot or cold - there were signed 8,000 peace treaties, each supposed to secure permanent peace, and each lasting, on the average - less than ~~two~~ years!! HAVLEI HAZMAN, what madness!

We live in an economic system where we restrict productivity to "stabilize the market" and where a very good crop is often regarded as a disaster - while millions are starving. HAVLEI HAZMAN, how insane are our times!

"Love" is the most popular word in our vocabulary. Singers constantly croon it, teenagers spend their best years daydreaming of it. Yet our divorce rate is unbelievable - one of three. We have reduced our working hours to $\frac{1}{2}$ of what they were 100 years ago. And having more free time than ever, we don't know what to do with it. We try to kill the time we saved. We become restless - and bored to insanity. We have a 90% literacy and movies and television. But instead of giving us the best in past and present literature and music, our minds are filled with the cheapest trash and sadistic fantasies which any half-cultured person should be embarrassed to entertain even once in a while. We live in a society where the heroes of our youth are those exposed in the filthy scandal magazines, where in the year 1957 racial bigotry is still a political issue, strong enough to make a political hack who is governor defy the federal government, at the same time this country is trying to "export" democracy to others. Ours is a world where Jews are killed and persecuted because of a belief that their great great grandfathers were implicated in the death of a single individual. One need not be a psychiatrist to translate Maimonides' HAVLEI HAZMAN as our "insane times"! What an urgent challenge Shofar becomes when we regard it as a Call to Sanity!

*Excerpt from
book well-
known
by
Norman Lamm*

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And if, then, we are to accept this disturbing verdict of ~~Dr. Fromm~~ insanity, then I fear that the most disappointed people will be a very great number of our fellow American Jews. For so many of us have staked our lives on the premise that this Western Christian society is superior and admirable and worthy - otherwise why have we gone so far in the process of assimilating to it? We have reshaped our very religion to produce a whole series of different kinds of "Judaisms" to conform to Christian tastes and standards. I believe it is Maurice Samuel who spoke of Reform and the like as "amateur Christianity". We have Christianized our homes, Protestantized our services and paganized our temples. In conflict between Jewish ways and the so-called modern life, it is Judaism which must surrender. We speak warmly of "integration" and "adjustment" and "acculturation" - all meaning assimilation. And after having relinquished our Jewish heritage in order to gain acceptance into this Western society, after having struggled with such nervous anxiety to be recognized as part of this civilization, to be told that we have given up a meaningful and lifesaving Torah way-of-life for a lot of madness and insanity - what a tragedy! And if we American Jews have indeed, by and large, been caught in this web of the HAVLEI HA'ZMAN, the insane society, then the Shaofar calls to us today and tells us to remember our Creator and not to forget the truth - to disentangle ourselves from the web of madness, to disencumber ourselves of this insanity - and become sane again.

Many centuries ago, when our forefathers stood at the threshold of the Holy Land, Moses gave them a long speech about the sort of society they were entering. He told them that they must not learn to accept the ways of the Canaanites who were stargazers and voodoo magicians and crystal-gazers and snake-charmers and ghost-worshippers. Our grandparents must have smiled at his advice. Surely they were not going to succumb to this sort of monstrous insanity surely they were not going to be that degraded where they would become this mad to talk to ghosts and gaze in crystals and try to communicate with the dead... Yet Moses sternly repeats his warnings. For he knows that after they will have settled in that land, and seen how people live this way of life normally, that one can prosper and be happy though practicing these abominations, that this was the way of high society and regarded as modern and the thing to do - that Israel would be tempted to be "modern" too, that Jews would no longer regard these mad things as insane. And so he exhorts them against it, and adds: TAMIM TIHYEH IM HA'SHEM ELOKECHA - which we usually translate, "Thou shalt be wholehearted with the Lord thy G-d". To be TAMIM means to be sane, to keep away from these mad ways. TAMIM, according to the Aramaic translator Onkelos, means SHLIM TEHEI, to be perfect or whole, to be balanced and harmonious - in other words: sane! And this TAMIM, this sanity, can come only IM HASHEM ELOKECHA - only when a man is with the Lord his G-d. Sanity derives from Sanctity. Spiritual health is a prerequisite for mental health. No wonder the sage Bachya ibn Asher explains TAMIM TIHYEH as TOCHO KVARO... V'LO YACHALOK ALAV B'SHUM INYAN, that it means that one's character should not be split, that a man must say what he means, that there be no breach in his life. Just as mental illness generally means a split between a man's mind and reality, so spiritual illness is a split between a man and his soul, between a Jew and his G-d. Mental disease usually refers to a split personality; spiritual disease - to a split character. And TAMIM reminds us to be whole, to retain both sanity and sanctity, and that this sanity can be achieved only IM HASHEM ELOKECHA - only by returning to our Jewish origins and coming back to G-d and His Torah. No wonder Maimonides regarded TAMIM TIHYEH as too important a statement to count as an individual commandment - it is, he said, fundamental to the whole of Torah! This then is the challenge to us American Jews: leave the HAVLEI HAZMAN, the insanity of our times, and TAMIM TIHYEH, become sane once again - through G-d and Torah!

Of course, I do not mean to say that each and every aspect of our modern life and society is insane; certainly not. The positive and creative aspects of scientific and medical progress - that is TAMIM. Cleaning up slums and building housing developments - that is sanity. Helping the unemployed, aiding the sick and aged and widowed - that is a sacred kind of sanctity. These are the positive, sane, lucid aspects of modern

No wonder the famous psychiatrist Karl Jung can say that the unconscious of patients he has treated, then has not been in a body, difficulty with not be bound to the body to religion or spirituality

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life, and they are the ones we must try to develop and enhance. But unfortunately they are not the sole characteristics of our society. Generally speaking, Fromm is right: this is an insane society, and these aspects of madness are the HAVLEI HAZMAN which we must resolve to avoid.

And lest there be anyone here today still unconvinced of the psychotic nature of our times, let me take you back just 15 years. Do you remember the world condition then? Do you recall that in this period of nuclear physics and jet planes and electron microscopes, the most civilized nation of this our civilization butchered and tortured 1/3 of our people? Is not the blood-soaked soil of that accursed European continent not sufficient evidence of the madness of our society? What more proof do we need - here are 6 million proofs of the HAVLEI HAZMAN, of the utter insanity of our times!

And if some here think that the world has changed in 15 years, let me draw your attention to the newspaper reports of just 12 weeks ago, when it was revealed that the man chosen to head the land forces of Europe as Chief of NATO, ~~is none~~ the forces of modern democracy - is none other than Gen. Hans Speidel, who was personally responsible for annihilating hundreds of Jews and Frenchmen in early 1942. We have photostats of his signature on the murder documents - and now this coldblooded gauleiter will be the commander of our soldiers to fight for the glories of civilization and democracy! Criminal insanity!!

And knowing that this the world in which we live, friends, tell me: is it really right for us to conform blindly to this society? Must Judaism change to fit this kind of world? - or must we insist that the world change and keep up with Torah? Shall we succumb to the HAVLEI HAZMAN and become inmates along with all others in a cosmic asylum where universal madness is the norm - or shall we become the doctors and healers of the world - the old Jewish mission - and teach it the elements of sanctity, so that it learn sanity. We have the choice of setting the world aright by adhering to the command of TAMIM TIHYEH IN HASHEM ELOKECHA - or of losing ourselves in the HAVLEI HAZMAN. The way of worthiness and dignity and self-respect, is also the way of sanity and sanctity. And that is the meaning of Shofar - a call to sanity thru sanctity.

Somehow, I feel, a conversation between father and son spoken many centuries ago, is particularly relevant today. The Talmud tells us that R. Joseph was very sick and fell into a coma, with his father R. Joshua at his bedside. Suddenly R. Joseph was revived and recovered. What did you see or experience, my son? - asked the father. He answered, I saw the Upper worlds, the worlds of spirit and purity. And what did they look like? And he replied: OLAM HAFUCH RAISSI, TACHTONIM LMAALAH V'ELYONIM LMATAH - a topsy turvy world, a world standing on its head! Ah no, answered the father, you're mistaken; OLAM BARUR RAISSA - you saw the right world, you saw the clear and lucid and sane world, it is this world of dishonesty and impurity and unprincipled opportunism that is the OLAM HAFUCH, the upside-down world! The spiritual world, the world of sanctity - is sane. The materialistic world - that is perverted and inverted and insane. That is what the Shofar calls out to us: get out of the HAVLEI HAZMAN, and turn this insane world upside down so that you will set it aright - TAMIM TIHYEH, make of this world an OLAM BARUR, a clear and sane world once again. Shofar challenges to set the world aright, and not docilely accept its perversions.

This is an OLAM HAFUCH indeed! This Western civilization which we have judged, both by the standards of Religion and Psychiatry, as insane, has from the very beginning thought the Jew to be queer, different, strange, undesirable - in fact, insane! In an OLAM HAFUCH, those who insist upon standing upright are thought to be standing on their heads. Just look at what the originators of our civilization - the greats of Greece & Rome - had to say about us: the Greek historians in Egypt said that we were expelled from Egypt because we were lepers. In the first century, the Stoic Molon wrote that Jews were so mad that they worshipped the head of an ass in Jerusalem. Cicero called our religious ceremonies "barbarian superstitions" and the historian Tacitus wrote that Jews are a race "to whom everything pure is impure and everything impure is pure".

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He continues by attributing the Jewish Shabbos to laziness, and calling all our observances "depraved" - i.e. insane. And if that is not enough, he accuses Jews of these insane ways: "they esteem it unlawful to kill any of their children" and "they have no notion of more than one Divine Being, who is only grasped by the mind". Take this accusation against the Jews and Judaism down to modern times, and add the nonsensical rantings of some moderns - including Jews - and you have a picture of the insane society calling the Jews, the besetters of TAMIM TIHYEH - depraved and barbarian and mad! What the blast of the Shofar tells us is to continue this way, to reject the HAVLEI HAZMAN, to remain TAMIM, sane, in an OLAM HFUCH, to try to heal the world instead of succumbing ourselves.

You who have ~~become~~ come to shul this day, you who have come thirsty for the word of G-d, anxious to hear the trill of the Shofar, desirous of a touch of holiness, seeking the warmth of Torah and looking for some hope emanating from this House of G-d into your daily lives - - you have come here because here you recognize the OLAM BARUR, the sane world, the world where sanctity gives rise to sanity.

And do you know what kind of sanity Torah preaches? In a world in which savagery and war is normal, Torah teaches that SHALOM is the highest function of priesthood, that even G-d Himself is a peacemaker, an OSEH SHALOM, that SHALOM is one of the names of G-d; that not only is it forbidden to kill a human and cause pain to an animal, but even unnecessary vandalism on a fruit tree is forbidden. That is Sanity.

In a world of weird economic ideology where surplus spells disaster, Torah teaches the laws of LEKET, SHIKCHA and PEIAH, that we are to create surpluses and leave part of our produce alone specifically for the hungry and stranger and orphan and widow. That is Sanity.

In a world where love has been cheapened and degraded, Torah teaches the value of TZNI'US, of modesty, and tells us that a home is wholesome only when it is holy, that where there is true love and devotion the very table becomes an altar. That is Sanity.

In a society which madly saves time in order to kill it, Judaism teaches BYADCHA ITOSAI, that our time is in G-d's hands, and hence is not ours to kill; that every spare minute should be taken up with MITZVOS - with good deeds, with charity, with study, with help to the less fortunate. That is Sanity.

In a world of Christianity which has persecuted Jews for centuries because they supposedly killed the Christian God, Torah teaches ISH BE'CHETO YOOMAS, that every man is responsible only for his own sins, and LO YUMSOO BANIM AL AVOS, that children must not be punished for the sins of their fathers. That is Sanity.

In a world where despite all its so-called progress racial equality is still a problem, Judaism unequivocally reaffirms that HALO AV ECHAD LEKULANU, that all men are children of one father, that we are all descended from Adam, that not color but character is what counts. That is Sanity. This is what makes of the Jewish world a sane world. This is a world infinitely superior to the HAVLEI HA'ZMAN, to the pretty and glistening lunacies of our modern world. Shofar is a call to this kind of sanity.

It is the Yiddish writer Peretz, I believe, who tells the story of a child who was orphaned in a small town in Europe. All he had in the world was a toy wooden fiddle, which squeaked badly. Whenever there was a party or Simchah in town, the little orphan would come and play his little fiddle. And even when the discordant sounds were disturbing, no one would say a word, for he was a little orphan, a YASSOM. One day, the cruel and greedy GVIR, the wealthiest man in town made a big wedding party for his daughter and invited a well known band from the Big City. And suddenly the little Orphan came and started to fiddle away on his wooden toy. The rich man ran over to him in anger and lifted his hand about to strike the little orphan.

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And as he was about to hit him, the Heavens opened up -- and as all the wedding guests looked upwards they saw all the angels gathered together as an orchestra, and lo and behold, they were playing in tune with the little orphan, and not with the professional Big City musician.

My dear friends, on this sacred day as we are about to rise for the blowing of the Shofar, we must resolve to recapture the Jewish teaching of TAMIJ TIHYEH, of sanity thru sanctity, we must reject the HAVLEI HAZMAN. On this day we must resolve that though we are, as Philo taught, the orphans of the nations, persecuted, rejected and unwanted, we will keep in tune with the angels, For the Shofar is the instrument of the Angels, and it is for us to determine to remain in tune with that Shofar which now will sound its eternal call, V'ZICHRU BORACHEM EILU HA'SHOKCHIM ES HA'EMESS BEHAVLEI HAZMAN, remember your Creator, you who forget the truth in the insanities of the times HABITU LNAFSHOSEICHEM VEHEITIVU DARKEICHEM, look deeply into your own souls, and mend your ways and deeds.

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 explain that
 our 18th sound is
 dissonant with
 in the symphony of
 contemporary life. Yet it
 is us & not they who
 are in tune with the
 voice of God.