**Shofar: The Quintessential Ritual**

**Shofar – Is it coronating God, does it represent revelation, crying, an alarm, a reminder of the potential sacrifice of akedat Yitzchak, a call to arms, a call of rejoicing? All of this symbolism can be seen throughout Jewish thought.**

**Shofar – What is it? We add our own text to it, but shofar itself has no words.**

**And it is precisely these attributes of the shofar – its multiplicity of meanings and ambiguity that makes shofar the quintessential/perfect/exemplary ritual.**

**Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennet Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 7-9**

…ritual creates a subjunctive, an “as if” or “could be,” universe. It is this very creative act that makes our shared social world possible. Creating a shared subjunctive…recognizes the inherent ambiguity built into social life and its relationships…The formality, reiteration, and constraint of ritual are, we argue, all necessary aspects of this shared creation…

Ritual is not restricted to the realm we moderns define as “religious”…Ritual and ritualistic behavior are not so much events as ways of negotiating our very existence in the world…we can…find them in public performances, at concerts, in the theater, and, crucially, in more quotidian enactments of civility and politeness among strangers and even intimates. Whenever the expressions “please” and “thank you” are used, when we ask a casual acquaintance, “How are you?” both knowing in advance that we do not really expect an honest answer (which could be disastrous), we are enacting a crucial ritual for the maintenance of our shared social world…

ritual modes of behavior can be usefully contrasted to what we term sincere forms of approaching the world. Sincere views are focused not on the creation of an “as if” or a shared subjunctive universe of human being in the world. Instead, they project an “as is” vision of what often becomes a totalistic, unambiguous vision of reality “as it *really* is.” The tropes of sincerity are pervasively with us, in both our personal and our shared social world.

They appear in the arrogances of what are termed fundamentalist religious beliefs. They are present in our overwhelming concern with “authenticity,” with individual choice, with the believe that if we can only get at the core, the fount, the unalterable and inimitable heart of what we “really” feel, or “really” think, then all will be well – if not with the world, then at least with ourselves…

The tension between ritual and sincerity is not new, but pervasive in human cultures.

1. **Rosh HaShanah 28a-b**

שלחו ליה לאבוה דשמואל: כפאו ואכל מצה – יצא. כפאו מאן? אילימא כפאו שד, והתניא עתים חלים עתים שוטה כשהוא חלים הרי הוא כפקח לכל דבריו כשהוא שוטה הרי הוא כשוטה לכל דבריו! אמר רב אשי שכפאוהו פרסיים.

They sent to Samuel’s father: A person who was forced to eat *matzah* has fulfilled their obligation. Forced by whom? If you suggest that a demon forced him, do we not learn in a *baraita* that one who is sometimes ranting and sometimes lucid, is considered fit when he is lucid by unfit when he is not? Rav Ashi said: The *parsim* forced them to eat.

אמר רבא זאת אומרת התוקע לשיר יצא. פשיטא היינו הך. מהו דתימא? התם אכול מצה אמר רחמנא והא אכל אבל הכא "זכרון תרועה" כתיב, והאי מתעסק בעלמא הוא! קמ"ל.

Rava extrapolated: this means that one who blows a *shofar* for musical purposes fulfills the obligation to hear *shofar*. Of course! They are the same. What might you have said? There, the Torah simply says eat *matzah*, and one has eaten, but here it is written, “a *remembrance blast*,” and this person is just fiddling around with the *shofar*. Thus, we learn.

אלמא קסבר רבא מצות אין צריכות כוונה. איתיביה: היה קורא בתורה והגיע זמן המקרא אם כוון לבו יצא ואם לאו לא יצא. מאי לאו כוון לבו לצאת? לא, לקרות. לקרות!? והא קא קרי!? בקורא להגיה.

Clearly, Rava believes that fulfilling commandments does not require intention! There is a contradictory source: “If one was reading the section of the Torah which includes the *shema*, and it is time to recite *shema,* if one intends, one fulfills the commandment of reciting the *shema*, and if one does not intend, one does not fulfill. Does this not refer to intention to fulfill a *mitzvah*? No, the source refers to intention to read. Intention to read? But the person is already reading! No, the person was reading as a scribe to make corrections to the Torah scroll.

תא שמע: היה עובר אחורי בית הכנסת או שהיה ביתו סמוך לבית הכנסת ושמע קול שופר או קול מגילה אם כוון לבו יצא ואם לאו לא יצא. מאי לאו אם כוון לבו לצאת? לא, לשמוע. לשמוע? והא שמע? סבור חמור בעלמא הוא...

Come and hear the answer based on another source: If one was walking behind the synagogue or lived near the synagogue and heard the sound of the *shofar* or of the *megillah,* if one intended, one fulfilled the obligation, and if one did not intend, one did not fulfill the obligation. Does this not refer to intention to fulfill a *mitzvah*? No, it refers to intention to hear. Intention to hear? But one heard the sounds automatically? One might have thought it was merely the sound of a braying donkey…