



MENTAL HEALTH HIGH HOLIDAY SHOFAR BLASTS

We believe Jewish prayers and rituals can help to strengthen our mental well-being, resilience and recovery in the same way middot, or Jewish values, can promote them. Faith is an important part of healing for many, and Jewish thinkers and leaders historically have brought the two together.



Prayer is thus a curative act, and it makes sense that it is part of our prescription for healing. When we pray, we do not change God, but we do change ourselves. In doing so, we affect an actual spiritual and physical change in the situation before us.

- Rabbi Moshe Fine, rabbi and clinically trained chaplain

The shofar blasts of the High Holidays can be seen as a powerful tool in symbolizing our need for change when it comes to issues of mental health. The shofar is supposed to be shocking, awe-inspiring, and a call to action to look internally and grow in those areas of our lives we feel we can improve on. It can also be a rallying cry for the need for change in our communities surrounding issues of the utmost significance. They can be a tool for recognizing our communal and individual need to break the silence around mental illness and addiction. Consider meditating on what you can do to make your relationships safe and open. You can make a neder (vow) to normalize conversations around mental illness and addiction in the new year.





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Liturgical Selection #1: The Shofar

Speak to the Israelite people thus: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts. (Leviticus 23:24)

דְּבַר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר
בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד
לַחֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן
זְכוֹרֹן תְּרוּעָה מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ

The texts of Jewish tradition have indicated that the sound of the shofar is intended to rouse us from our sleep, to jolt us awake and into action. On the High Holidays, as we dedicate this sacred moment to considering the year that has passed and the year still to be, we do so with hearts made heavy by missed opportunities. The liturgy calls us to reflect upon those moments where we fell short, where we could have done more, and the shofar challenges us to dedicate ourselves anew to those important tasks.

We have done important work in responding to the needs of others. But as we engage in these final calls of the shofar, with the final blast of **Tekiah Gedolah** as the clarion call to action, may we find ourselves attuned to the deafening cries of mental illness and addiction that have been obstructed; while some have been screaming, many of us have heard nothing but silence. The shofar calls us to offer renewed attention to those struggling in our midst; the shofar calls us to answer their cries with “hineni” – here I am.

For the sake of uniting the holy, blessed One and the shekhinah, of bringing closer the world as it is and the world as it could be, I bring my fear and my love, as I come for all of Israel and for all beings in the world, I stand here to offer myself in the practice of blowing shofar, to give voice to the cry that rises within. May this shofar be a channel to focus and clarify our power to break free of tyranny and to find our way out of the pit of darkness. May the echoes of my own shadow not cover the pure sound of the shofar itself, as it carves a path into the depths of the heart, where we will find a way out into freedom. And let us say, amen. - Pre-shofar Prayer of Intention by Rabbi Ebn Leader, Hebrew College



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Liturgical Selection #2: Mi Chamocha - Who is Like You

Mi Chamocha, the text we will encounter as a community on Rosh Hashanah morning, can be found in the Book of Shemot, recited just as the people emerged from slavery to freedom.

Who is like You, oh God, among everything which is worshipped; who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, working wonders! (Exodus 15:11)

מִי־כַמּוֹכָה בְּאֵלִים יְהוָה מִי
כַּמּוֹכָה נֶאֱדָר בִּקְדוֹשׁ נוֹרָא
תְּהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פִּלְא

Indeed, God is awesome in power and splendor, and those miracles that were performed in the days of our ancestors remain the legends we commemorate today. We know slavery can come in many forms, and we encounter far too many in our friendships and family circles who have been, or are presently, enslaved by habit and addiction. May we dedicate ourselves to being as God’s hands to work miracles in those lives as well, offering support and encouragement as they move through the journey of recovery.

According to the Midrash, the rabbinic compilation of legends and traditions, right before the sea split, an individual by the name of Nachshon dove into the sea before anyone else. He took the proactive step toward the freedom he trusted God would provide. Just as Nachshon displayed bravery in taking that first step into the sea, may we celebrate the courage of first steps our friends and family members take toward recovery. And to those whose journey to recovery has not yet begun, may you embark during this year to come on the trek through the wilderness of healing and wholeness, and may you never feel as if you are walking alone.

