

## Elul WhatsApp / Telegram Messages

19<sup>th</sup> Elul – 19<sup>th</sup> September

There's an old and totally apocryphal story about the nineteenth century French Jewish aristocrat Baron de Rothschild, whose wife was in her bedroom with a nurse, in the last stages of delivery while he was sitting downstairs playing a game of cards with his friends.

Suddenly they heard her cry, 'Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu.' 'Baron,' said his friends, 'go up to your wife. She needs you.' 'Not yet.' said the baron and continued playing cards. Five minutes later they heard a cry, 'My God, My God.' 'Go up,' said the Baron's friends. 'Not yet,' said the Baron and returned to his cards. Finally they heard his wife cry, '*Gevalt*'. The Baron immediately rose and ran upstairs, saying, 'Now is the time.'

The story is, of course, about how Jews in the nineteenth century had to hide their identities and become more French than the French, more English than the English, and yet remained Jewish in their hearts. The Jewish mind spoke French but the Jewish soul still spoke Yiddish. But there's another and simpler message, which is that when we cry from the heart, someone listens. That's the message of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah.

We are a hyper-verbal people. We talk, we argue, we pontificate, we deliver witty repartee and clever put downs. Jews may not always be great listeners but we are among the world's great talkers. Accuse us of anything and we'll come up with a dozen reasons why we're right and you are wrong.

But there comes a moment when we summon the courage to be honest with ourselves. And if we really are honest with ourselves, then we know in our heart that we're not perfect, we don't always get it right, not as individuals and not as a people.

That's the moment when all we can say is *gevalt*. All we can do is cry out. That's what the shofar is. The sound of our tears. *Shevarim*, three sighs. *Teruah*, a series of sobs. And surrounding them the *tekiah*, the call without words. The sound of a heart breaking. No more excuses. No more rationalisations and justifications. *Ribbono shel olam*, forgive us.

Truth is, these are the most important moments in life. We can carry on for years deceiving ourselves, blaming others for what goes wrong. We are our own infallible counsel for the defence. But there has to be a time when we allow ourselves simply to weep for the things we know we could have handled better. That is what the shofar is: the cry that starts when words end.

That's when God reaches out to us, as parent to child, and holds us close while we weep together, then He comforts us and gives us the strength to begin again. There's nothing closer to God than a broken heart and nothing stronger than a heart that's been healed by God's forgiveness.