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Shoftim

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CONTENTS: Letter to the Editor (Page 1); Oser (Page 2); Freeman (Page 8)

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Letter to the Editor: On Rav Melamed's Approach to Conversion

I found Rabbi Avi Baumol's recent review of Rav Eliezer Melamed's new *sefer* on *giyyur* (conversion) comprehensive and enlightening. However, I found his conclusions fundamentally misguided. While Rabbi Baumol's main polemical driver in favor of the book has to do with flaws and pitfalls within the current system, the heart of the debate is, as he admits, ultimately about what counts as *kabbalat ol mitzvot* (acceptance of the yoke of *mitzvot*). While Rabbi Baumol offers a brief overview of this debate and of why he feels Rav Melamed's view is worth considering, only a rigorous halakhic analysis proving that responsible *posekim* have clearly overlooked Rav Melamed's arguments is capable of attacking the normatively accepted Halakhah. If Rav Melamed argued that the mainstream view is based on a misreading or misunderstanding of classical sources or that key perspectives failed to occur to them, then that would obligate a responsible *posek* to revisit the evidence. However, if his arguments are merely that there *is* another perspective and that he personally believes it should be followed, that does not put the views of other *posekim* into question in the slightest. Today's *posekim* have every right to feel that the Halakhah should follow those *posekim* of the past who were stringent and to make their own calculations about what is the soundest approach through the Gemara, *rishonim*, and *posekim*. While Rav Melamed, as a qualified *posek* in his own right, is entitled to follow his own views, we cannot and should not expect or pressure other *posekim* to follow suit. Nor should we be quick to assume that other *posekim* have adopted their views out of ignorance.

As for the central driver of Rabbi Baumol's endorsement—the problems with the current system—Rabbi Baumol overlooks the fact that many of these problems are not due to the current standards for conversion, but their implementation. Rabbi Baumol disturbingly mischaracterizes the RCA's adaptation of standardized guidelines for conversion as caving to pressures from the Chief Rabbinate to adopt stricter standards. While one goal of the standardization was to obtain the Rabbinate's recognition, a more basic reason for their guidelines was to solve the very problems Rabbi Baumol describes: inconsistencies, unprofessionalism, and a lack of transparency around the conversion process. The standards were designed to (1) help ensure that the *giyyur* process is neither too lenient nor too strict and that the *ger* has a clear understanding of expectations, and (2) professionalize the *giyyur* process in an age where *giyyur* was in a far worse state than it is now. While there is no doubt still work to be done even within this system, most of the problems *gerim* face today are from *batei din* outside of the RCA's network, where such policies do not exist in the same way. Following in the RCA's footsteps, a more effective solution to the problems with *giyyur* today is not to fight the system but to improve it.

Yehuda Dov Reiss

Disclaimer: The author is the son of the chairman of the RCA's Geirus Protocols and Standards (GPS) Network.

Review of Rabbi Michael J. Broyde, Splitting Hairs: The History, Law, and Future of Jewish Laws of Modesty and Women's Head Covering ***(Ben Yehuda Press, 2026)***

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In contemporary Orthodox life, modesty has become one of the most visible markers of religious observance. For married women, and to a lesser extent for men, hair covering—and even the style of that covering—serves as an index of religious commitment. The communal logic, if somewhat crude, is that the more comprehensive the covering, the greater the piety. Other dimensions of religious life, such as what one eats and how one spends leisure time, can remain largely private, even invisible. Modesty, by contrast, is broadcast.

Splitting Hairs is a bold, well-researched, and paradoxical book. It is bold because it argues, against the grain of much contemporary Orthodox practice, that the laws of modesty are not fixed but contingent on time and place. It is learned because it marshals an impressive array of sources—biblical, Talmudic, medieval, and modern—in support of that argument. And it is paradoxical because, after hundreds of pages of sustained halakhic argument, the author concludes that his own analysis should not be adopted in practice. The result is a work that rewards careful reading while leaving the reader with reservations about its textual methodology

and the extraordinary gap between its theoretical conclusions and its practical advice.

Several recent works on modesty cautiously acknowledge that not all of a married woman's hair must be covered—even as they are quick to pronounce that this view is not universally understood or accepted—and that regardless of one's position, the subject calls for great sensitivity. Rabbi Manning, in the book on *tzniut* he coauthored with Bracha Poliakoff, writes:

> I have been asked many times concerning women in different communities who clearly uncover more than a square *tefach* of hair, whether there is any basis for this. First, head/hair covering is a complex halachic topic, and men or women who are in doubt as to the halachic boundaries must be prepared to ask a *sh'eilah* to their *rav* or *posek*, just as they should on any other halachic issue. What people wear on their heads is very visible, but whether a *sh'eilah* has indeed been asked is much less obvious. It goes without saying that no one may ever judge a woman negatively if she appears to be uncovering more hair than permitted, neither can we assume that person asked a *she'eilah* and is acting halachically correctly, having asked a *sh'eilah*.[1]

Compared to other treatments of this topic, Rabbi Manning's formulation is subdued. Other writers tend to present the obligation as fixed and unambiguous, only allowing debate over technicalities such as which coverings suffice and whether the requirement extends into the home.[2] Against this backdrop, Rabbi Broyde's thesis introduces a destabilizing question: If Halakhah is, in principle, immutable, and if the categories of prohibited labor on Shabbat, for example, remain constant across time, why should the laws of modesty prove sensitive to shifting social norms?

Rabbi Broyde approaches the problem with the authority of a legal scholar and a seasoned halakhist. A professor of law at Emory University and former *dayan* on the Beth Din of America, he writes with both analytical rigor and pastoral awareness, qualities that lend the book its

[1] Bracha Poliakoff and Rabbi Anthony Manning, *Reclaiming Dignity: A Guide to Tzniut for Men and Women* (Mosaica Press, 2023), 491–492. In his careful presentation of the laws of hair covering, Rabbi Manning implicitly pushes back against Rabbi Broyde's thesis, without mentioning him by name, even in a footnote. Nevertheless, he includes Rabbi Broyde's work on this topic in his bibliography. See *Reclaiming Dignity*, 572.

[2] For an example of this approach, see Rabbi Doniel Neustadt, "Married Women With Uncovered Hair, *Weekly Halacha*, *Parshas Naso* 5756, *Torah.org*, https://torah.org/torah-portion/weekly-halacha-5756-naso/.

distinctive tone. *Splitting Hairs*, which he describes as both "new, yet old," gathers years of prior scholarship into a single, sustained argument.[3] It is a broad survey of material, from biblical texts through contemporary responsa, and also advances a distinctive conceptual account of how the laws of modesty operate. At the same time, the historical record will show that Rabbi Broyde's later career has been shadowed by controversy; his decision to address the topic of hair covering has neither lessened that controversy nor benefited from it.[4]

Rabbi Broyde's central claim is not that unrelenting societal pressure has abrogated the laws of modesty. Rather, he argues that from the outset, these laws are designed to be flexible. Prevailing norms and lived practices form the very fabric of these laws. This is not a reluctant concession to modernity but a reclassification of the category: modesty, in this account, operates according to a distinct jurisprudence.

The idea that these laws are formed around existing social norms is not new. In one place, Rabbi Broyde turns for support to the eighteenth-century Galician authority Rabbi Yehoshua Heschel Babad (the grandfather of the author of the *Minhat Hinukh*), who observes that Tur, in his discussion of modesty, repeatedly uses the term *darkah/darkan*, meaning the way women actually conduct themselves. Whereas Halakhah usually lays out an abstract route that must be taken, the laws of modesty are an evolving path that unfolds through the lived practices of Jewish women and men. In that sense, modesty is not imposed on its practitioners but defined through them.[5]

What Rabbi Broyde does not address, and does not seem to want to address, is this: If, in practice, the conduct of Jewish women and men were to become so egregious that any meaningful sense of modesty effectively disappeared, would the halakhic obligations of modesty fall by the wayside? In his opening overview, Rabbi Broyde sidesteps this question:

> ...the basic thrust of this book is the argument that if one defines modesty in a non-circular way (modest people are people who are committed to confining sexuality to marriage), then many,

[3] In Fall 2009, Rabbi Michael J. Broyde's monograph, "Hair Covering and Jewish Law: Biblical and Objective (Dat Moshe) or Rabbinic and Subjective (Dat Yehudit)?," was published as a special supplement to the Rabbinical Council of America's journal *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, vol. 42, no. 3. This was followed by an exchange between Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman and Rabbi Broyde in the Summer 2010 issue of *Tradition* (vol. 43, no. 2), in which Broyde's article was described as containing a "rather startling thesis."

[4] This review avoids the unfortunate episode that erupted some years ago and was closely tied to Rabbi Broyde and his interpretation of this topic. For those who are interested, the internet has a long memory.

[5] *Splitting Hairs*, 361.

> many Jewish law authorities—Talmudic, Geonic, medieval, and even modern—are inclined to rule that one needs to look at the community that seeks to confine sexuality to marriage and dress that way without a need to provide detailed and objective descriptions of rules of modesty.[6]

This question is not merely theoretical. The corollary of Rabbi Broyde's definition is that a community where people do not confine sexual activity to marriage is precisely one that stands in need of "detailed and objective descriptions of rules of modesty." That the book does not immediately grapple with this question is enough to put the critical reader on guard.

A classical source for the requirement that a married woman cover her hair is the ritual of the *sotah*, the suspected adulteress. In that ceremony, a woman whose husband questioned her fidelity was brought before the priest in the Temple, and he carried out a set sequence meant to test his suspicions. Among these acts was the command that the priest uncover the woman's head. Rashi cites this as evidence that Jewish women have long regarded an uncovered head as degrading. [7] Rabbi Broyde, however, draws attention to the following *baraita*:

> [The *sotah]* covered her hair with beautiful ribbons; therefore, the priest removes the covering from her hair… She coiffed her hair [for her illicit lover]; therefore, the [priest] undoes her hair.[8]

The *baraita* portrays the priest's actions as a measure of poetic justice. According to Rabbi Broyde's reading, the spotlight falls on the woman's adorned and carefully styled appearance, not on the exposure of her hair. If, as Rashi suggests, uncovering her hair was degrading in itself, one would expect the *baraita* to highlight the fact that the woman had previously exposed her hair. The *baraita*'s focus on ribbons and coiffure indicates instead that uncovered hair is unremarkable, implying that it is not, in and of itself, problematic.

A flaw in this reading is that the phrase "beautiful ribbons" can just as easily be taken to describe an ornate head covering rather than exposed hair decorated with ribbons, and "she coiffed her hair for him" can likewise be understood as referring to grooming done in private. On this understanding, the *baraita* accords neatly with stricter standards: the problem lies in cultivating a seductive appearance even while the hair remains covered. Indeed, proponents of more exacting norms invoke this passage to argue that a head covering

[6] Ibid., xxxiii.

[7] Rashi to Numbers 5:18.

[8] *Sotah* 8b–9a.

on its own does not suffice; its style must also be restrained, and any eye-catching display, even when the hair is covered, is to be avoided. Rabbi Broyde's interpretation is defensible, but it is by no means the only tenable one.[9]

In other places, Rabbi Broyde's readings are more difficult to sustain. Tur rules: "Jewish women may not go out with uncovered hair in the marketplace, whether unmarried (*penuyah*) or married" (*Even Ha-Ezer* 21:2). This formulation is straightforward, yet in practice the Orthodox community observes only part of it: married women cover their hair, while women who have never been married do not. The issue becomes more complex when we consider Tur's treatment of hair covering in the context of reciting *Shema*:

> …The hair of a woman which it is her way to cover—it is forbidden to recite [the *Shema*] before it. However, for virgins whose way it is to go with their hair undone, it is permitted. (*Orah Hayyim* 75:2)

Here Tur explicitly permits reciting *Shema* in the presence of never-married women (*betulot*) with uncovered hair, since it is "their way" to leave it loose. This sits uneasily alongside his ruling in *Even Ha-Ezer*, which categorically forbids unmarried women (*penuyot*) from appearing in the marketplace with uncovered hair. Rabbi Broyde resolves this tension by suggesting that Tur is addressing different communities in different sections—Sephardic custom in *Even Ha-Ezer* and Ashkenazic custom in the laws of *Shema*—with later codifiers (*Shulhan Arukh*, Rema, Levush) preserving the same pattern. This supports his thesis that the norms of modesty are shaped by local practice. On what basis, however, should one assume that Tur is silently shifting between communities across two sections of his code without any indication that he is doing so?

The two main commentators on *Even Ha-Ezer*, Beit Shmuel and Helkat Mehokek, offer a more plausible reading. They suggest that in *Even Ha-Ezer* the term *penuyah* does not mean "every unmarried woman" but specifically a woman who is currently single but was previously married—a widow or divorcee. On this reading, Tur's two rulings are entirely consistent: the stricter prohibition applies to any woman who is or has been married, while the passage in *Orah Hayyim* permits uncovered hair only for those who have never been married at all.

Rabbi Broyde concedes that his reading runs against the standard commentators, yet he defends it on the grounds that Tur's very next line (*Even Ha-Ezer* 21:3) uses *penuyah* to include women who have never married. To read the same term in two different ways within such a brief passage, he argues, "seems very unlikely."

This argument, however, cuts both ways. Precisely because *penuyot* carries a narrower meaning in the first clause, Tur is compelled to explicitly

[9] Y. Zaidner, *Tevorah Mi-Nashim* (5779), 102.

broaden it in the second. If *penuyot* in the first clause already included every unmarried woman, no such clarification would be needed in the second clause. The fact that the explicit expansion appears only in the second clause strongly suggests that the definition in the first clause is the narrower one. The traditional commentators' reading is at least as coherent as Rabbi Broyde's and has the additional advantage of not requiring us to posit that Tur silently shifts between communities without notice.

It is hard to know whether Rabbi Broyde is consciously laboring to reach lenient conclusions or whether his readings, taken on their own terms, simply lead him there. In his 2010 exchange with Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman, he describes the arguments he advances as a *limmud zekhut* for the many married Orthodox women who do not cover their hair.[10] When a *posek* offers a *limmud zekhut*, he will, almost by definition, lean on more lenient readings and opinions. How much leeway he allows himself is ultimately a matter of personal discretion, and here, one senses that the leeway is generous.

In one responsum, Hatam Sofer contends that the prohibition against committing the Oral Law to writing is suspended only when one is acting purely for the sake of Heaven and not when other motives intrude.[11] In his conclusion, Rabbi Broyde states candidly that he has three reasons for writing this work, and one of them amounts to a *limmud zekhut*. Hatam Sofer's standard is therefore worth bearing in mind. To be sure, a *limmud zekhut* can be an act of religious devotion; but when it shapes the methodology of an entire work, a reader is entitled to ask whether the book's conclusions would look different had the author not defined his goal as finding merit for existing lenient practice.

Readers hoping to find that one of his motives is to "turn back the clock" and reverse practices now widespread in many Orthodox communities will be disappointed. As the book draws to a close, a more nuanced position emerges: while he believes that communities adopting more lenient standards have a basis in Halakhah, he nevertheless maintains that embracing such leniencies is ill-advised.

The book's afterword, titled "A Concluding Letter [to My Daughters] About This Book," may be its most powerful section. In it, Rabbi Broyde addresses his daughters directly and explains why he counsels questioners not to act on his conclusions. He argues that a shared dress code for men and women serves as an anchor in a rudderless world. Earlier generations of observant Jews, he suggests, could still look outward and discern an ethic of modest restraint in the broader culture; such an aspiration is no longer realistic:

> ...with the onset of the sexual revolution, Modern Orthodoxy

[10] R. Shulman and R. Broyde, "Exchange: Hair Covering and Jewish Law: A Response," 73.

[11] Hatam Sofer, *Orah Hayyim* 208.

> began to drift. This deprived the Modern Orthodox community of one of the pillars to validate its conduct on matters of modesty... if you define modesty in a non-circular way—modest people are people who are committed to confining sexuality to marriage—then halakha can easily say, "Look at the community that seeks to confine sexuality to marriage and dress that way." Sadly enough, that community hardly exists in our modern American world, leaving us with little secular anchoring to validate our conduct...[12]

After hundreds of pages, and many years of labor, Rabbi Broyde ultimately concedes that, however confident he is in the correctness of his analysis, it fails pedagogically and should not be adopted. Despite telling his daughters that "nearly all of the rules related to *tzniut* that you both were taught in day school and yeshiva are wrong," [13] he nevertheless insists that abandoning this framework would be unwise; on the contrary, "it is wiser to have some uniform rather than none."[14]

This unexpected conclusion makes the book one of the more remarkable works of Halakhah to appear in recent years. Its framing as a letter to one's daughters, published as an afterword, aligns with the longstanding tradition of responsa written *le-halakhah ve-lo le-ma'aseh*, intended for study rather than practical reliance. A reader may still ask whether a work of such originality might have been better served by following the example of Rabbi Shimon Sofer's *Hitorerut Teshuvah*, which not only cautions readers in its introduction about the theoretical nature of its rulings but reiterates that warning on every page.

Even if one is dissatisfied with the book's inconclusive afterword or takes issue with some of its readings, it remains a commendable and significant achievement. The sources are carefully assembled in one place, presented in historical sequence, and provided in the original Hebrew alongside an excellent English translation. For anyone who wishes to engage seriously with this area of Halakhah, it is an indispensable point of departure.

My Fifty-Year Soul Journey with the Shofar

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As a teenager, I was once suddenly and inextricably brought to tears by the sounding of the shofar during the Days of Awe. None of the words in the service explained to me why the

[12] *Splitting Hairs*, 447–48.

[13] Ibid., 445.

[14] Ibid., 448.

sound caused this burst of emotions. As a young adult, I intuited that I needed to both sound the shofar myself and undertake intensive study to understand why this happened. Interrupted only by a short-lived career as a professional French horn player, I began what has become a fifty-year soul journey.

My first synagogue was quite small. As the only person who could even get a note out of a ram's horn, I was left to create the shofar service. Even though the "notes" were correct, the sounds of French horn–inspired hunting calls were not. I needed knowledge as well as skill to understand the true, soulful meaning of the shofar.

I learned dozens of interpretations about the meaning of the shofar. It proclaims the sovereignty of G-d; connects Jewish history to the present; provides hope for a future messianic age; and reminds us to be present in this moment, faithful to the teachings of Torah, and to reflect upon judgment, repentance, and redemption—to name just a few.

Prophetic symbolic meanings have been inspired by the shofar's physical properties. It is made from a natural material rather than metal to reflect the natural order of the universe. As an empty vessel, it produces sound and conveys meaning only when we breathe our own breath of life into it, just as we have received G-d's breath of life that animates us.

According to Jewish teaching, the Jewish calendar provides us only forty days to examine ourselves, seek forgiveness for misdeeds, and return to our better selves before the final startling blast of the shofar. Even with this urgency, the shofar's message registered solely in my thoughts. I was still left without that heartfelt experience of awe that I felt as a teenager.

I wanted to experience the shofar again with my heart rather than my brain. The shofar has the power to break through into deeper spiritual levels within our bodies in ways that images and words cannot. Its sound is pure energetic transmission. It is the battle-axe that opens our internal spiritual doors, including those inner protective gates that we often have locked shut. For me, an understanding of this energetic transmission that I had felt earlier in life was still missing. Only one *midrash*, the story of 101 tears, helped me reconnect with the source of *my* tears.

The Canaanite general, Sisera, was the reviled enemy of the Israelites. But his mother was considered the cruelest of all Canaanites. When her son did not return with his troops after a battle, she was comforted by the belief that her son must be killing soldiers, abducting women, and pillaging "cities" (Judges 5:28–30). This has been interpreted to mean that Sisera's mother had an impenetrable heart. However, when the news confirming Sisera's death finally reached her, even *she* cried 101 tears in grief. From this we

learn that the love of a mother for her child is the most powerful love on earth and that even those with a heart of stone can have their hearts ripped open by the loss of their child.

One High Holiday tradition is to sound 100 notes representing these maternal tears of grief, leaving one blast unsounded for all the members of the congregation to experience for themselves. As we hear the last sound of the shofar on Yom Kippur, we recall the open-hearted loss of the most powerful love—between a parent and child. From this point of open-heartedness, we can then access our unconditional love for family, community, country, the world, the universe, and G-d. Only with such an open heart can we experience unconditional love for all, *including even our enemies*.

For all these years, I could only hold the thought of losing a child for a short while before the discomfort became too great. Reminded by the *midrash* of the 101 tears, I would open my heart every year during the High Holidays with the best of intentions, yet I could not bear its real message. How could a reminder of such suffering and grief be transformative? I would not allow myself to experience such deep grief, even if it were to unlock my heart. I imagined that the grief would cut so deep that it would permanently seal my heart shut.

I still had far to travel on my soul journey.

On January 21, 2024, my wife and I were packing boxes to move from Tampa to Asheville, where two of our three adult children were living. The very last box of sentimental things that we packed that day was filled with all our photographs from our son Astral's life. We knew that we would be living close to him soon. We spent the entire day reviewing the photos, laughing, and crying. We celebrated the journeys of his life, our lives together, and the blessing of being his parents. We then sealed the box, labeled it "Astral's life treasures," and ate dinner.

As we were finishing, there was a knock at the door. I opened it for two police officers. I knew without words why and for whom they were there. When Susan and I were informed about Astral's fatal car accident, her scream was shockingly powerful, and we were both brought to our knees. We were overcome with grief, despair, denial, disorientation, and dissociation. Healing for my body, mind, heart, and spirit seemed impossible from that dark hole.

When the death certificate arrived three days later, we learned that his time of passing was 4:30 p.m. We finished celebrating the soul journey of his life just as he transitioned.

The period after Astral's passing was a blur. The logistical complexities of life—the funeral, retirement, packing, moving, renovating, unpacking, and relaunching life in a new community—all provided distractions that only numbed me to my grief.

But grief cannot be outrun or ignored. It is not a problem to be solved. The greatest mind cannot

heal a broken heart or comfort a broken soul. I tried to numb myself so that I could compartmentalize or move *past* my grief. But I found it impossible to numb myself to grief selectively without also deadening the rest of my emotional life. I had to trust in the ability of my body and spirit to process my raw and visceral feelings. Grief patiently waited for me to feel, digest, and integrate. I allowed myself to move *forward* with life, carrying the pain with me. Only then could I once again begin to feel not only the grief but also the abundance of heartfelt joys that were waiting for me. Those whom I loved allowed me to lean on them when my emotional world collapsed. The love of everyone in my family and community helped me know that there was a world to which I would return. They held up their own lights as beacons to guide me back from the darkness.

It has been said that "there is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in." With time, love, self-compassion, compassion from others, allowing, and acceptance, the passage *through* my mountains of grief to the other side became possible. I was no longer drowning in grief's well. Although grief did not leave me untouched, it *has* left me transformed. It is only through love that my deepest wounds are healing.

After the funeral, one of Astral's friends wisely told us: "Grief will break open your heart, and so much love will pour out that it will transform your life forever." Little did I know at the funeral that from that moment on, I would begin a spiritual exodus—the pillars of which were the foundation of Astral's beliefs and life all along. When I had children, I believed in the abundance of the future, and believed that parenthood would weave me into the infinite fabric of immortal life—woven at one end and unraveled at the other.

That was not how Astral held things. He believed only in the present moment. He believed, as I do now, that when we truly live in the present moment, we are immediately connected with divinity. Love, in its most embodied form, only happens in *this* moment. Astral's passing ripped away every vestige of belief that my children were my connection to immortality. It brought me into the presence of universal and unconditional love *in this* as well as *every* moment. This was how Astral lived.

Previously, my life was filled with moments of awe followed by the inevitable distractions that came from the incessant barrage of secular life. I repeatedly forgot what matters most and then—through sheer inertia but without bad intention—would turn away again. However, once my heart was so broken that nothing but love poured out, I could no longer return to my unconscious habits. I now feel both the oceans of grief *and* love as I fully return to living. Astral taught me that when I felt grief, love would guide me back home. I found that love lives at the bottom of the well of grief. Grief is simply love with no place to go.

The grief from Astral's death was not the end of my soul's journey, but the beginning. Even though grief will be with me for the rest of my life and at times resurge as if fresh, the grip of it slowly

loosens. I no longer feel a need to force grief out as if it were cancer. I have learned that it is my most compelling teacher.

I now hold life with precious tenderness. Love and bliss coexist fully beside grief and despair. Neither eclipse the other. Healing, strength, peace, and wholeness live in the fragile space between them.

Listen now to each individual wailing call of the shofar. The 101st tear goes without sounding. It can only be completed in *your own* heart. My hope is that this year you experience the deepest meaning of the shofar for yourself. Hear the *tekiah* blast that reminds you to wake up spiritually from your slumber. It invites you to be present now, without numbing in any way. Forgive yourself for any mental or emotional blockages that prevent you from feeling all that is present in this moment. Hear the broken sounds of *shevarim*, the Hebrew word that literally and figuratively translates to "broken." It is the wailing of a broken-hearted parent who has lost their child. Let this grief be your teacher to fully experience and accept both grief and joy. Hear the call to arms of the *teruah*. This is the call to spiritual action with compassion. And finally, the *tekiah gedolah* is held for as long as there is breath. Experience of the breath of life itself—unconditional love.

This energetic transmission from the shofar is what made me cry fifty years ago. It is the sound that has called me for a lifetime to return to my soul's birthright. I now live life with my heart wide open, in this moment and in the next.

I invite you to also let these sounds break your heart wide open so that nothing but love pours out. This is *your* birthright. Now, in the next now, and always. When the Gates of Repentance are closing and even after they have closed. When we *all* do this together as a community, our hearts become woven together into the infinite tapestry of whole-heartedness that is unconditional love.

My soul journey concludes with what my son, my life, and the shofar have taught me. The sound of the shofar is the battle-axe that breaks our hearts wide open, as does grief when we can allow it. When we trust this, we experience that there is nothing more whole than a broken heart.

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