

Open Your Eyes - RH 5772 – Rabba Sara Hurwitz

We live in a precarious scary world-- where now, more than ever, the future seems uncertain.

Our economy has not recovered as much as we had hoped. People have stopped investing in the future, instead consumed with making ends meet.

Israel's place vis-à-vis America, at this moment seems more uncertain than ever.

And even in our own bayit, it's been a tough year, one where we have had to learn, as a community, to cope with disease that has enveloped the youngest of our members, our Neshama, and others.

A reasonable response to the ugliness in this world, one that I sometimes find myself resorting to, is to simply try to shut it all out, to literally and metaphorically cover my eyes. To simply disengage with the world. It struck me, that covering one's eyes, is plausible, even an encouraged Jewish response. Every Friday night, we shut out the world for a brief few moments as we shield our eyes from the light of the Shabbat candles. And, every day, we cover our eyes, consumed, even briefly, by darkness, as we implore God to listen, as we say Shema Yisrael. And even looking around the room today, during the shofar blasts, I noticed that many people, close their eyes. And these are important moments of deep focus and kavanah. We want to close our eyes momentarily. But we can't keep them closed forever.

And so, it is surprising when on the day when we are meditating on the sounds of the shofar, we are confronted with the verse in the shofarot section of musaf that confounds our senses entirely: *vkol ha'am ro'im et hakolot v'et hlapadim v'et kol hashofar*, as the

Jewish people are standing at Sinai, at the moment of revelation, we are told: “And the entire people saw the sounds and the flames and the sound of the shofar..”

Saw the sounds?

Perhaps the question on this strange verse should not be: how is it possible to SEE the sounds of the shofar? But rather, the question should be, if we were to open our eyes, and really look, would we be able to see that which is obvious—that which is right before our eyes—the physical shofar, as well that which we HOPE to see in the future, all that we hope the shofar sounds will achieve for us?

Sight, does not only mean seeing a physical object; and alternatively, having vision problems, does not only evoke an image of dark glasses and a seeing-eye dog. Vision is more than the eyes ability to pick up images accurately.

Having sight, the ability to really see, allows us to make sense of the world. Having vision allows us to see clearly that which is right in front of us, and it allows us to see into the future, to have a vision, and dream of what could be.

This, I believe is the challenge of Rosh Hashana, to open our eyes, and really see.

And it’s an idea that is clearly on the mind of others as well. My Drasha idea was preempted by the latest Maccabeats video, “Book of Good Life” which was actually filmed in Riverdale, where the 4 singers ask the audience, on this Rosh Hashana , to “Open your Eyes.”

Open your eyes. But Open your eyes to what?

It is no coincidence that the laining that chazal selected to read on Rosh Hashana is consumed by the imperative, to open our eyes. In both todays/tomorrow/yesterday/parshiot, the word r-a-h which means to see, and r-chet-k, which means from afar, or distant reoccur throughout the reading. And it's the interplay of these two words—ra'ah and rachak, that implore us to really see.

You see,

R-a-ah—is the hope that we will open our eyes and see that which is right before eyes. Rachak is the hope that we will be able to look into the distance and to dream of what could be.

First we read about Hagar, who at her greatest moment of adversity tragically, could not open her eyes.

Not only did she lack vision and could not dream, but she couldn't even see that which was right before her eyes.

The Torah tells us: (21:16)

וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב לָהּ מִנְּגֹד, הַרְחַק .. כִּי אָמְרָהּ, אֶל-אֶרְצָהּ בְּמוֹת הַיָּלֵד;

And she went, and sat down over against him a good way off (HARCHAYK),... 'Let me not look (EREH) upon the death of the child.

The key words here are that she sat harchayk, at a distance and refused to look, al ereh. Hagar was blinded to the future and the present. She could not see that which was far off—into the future. She could not see that her son, Yishmael, would thrive, and grow into a mighty nation. She had no vision for all that could be possible for her child. By

sitting harchayk, at a distance, she distanced herself from the possibility of achieving the impossible—she did not allow herself to dream.

But God would not let remain blinded, and so the Torah goes on and says:

וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת-עֵינֶיהָ, וַיִּתְּרָא בְּאֵר מַיִם;

And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.

The Torah is careful not to say that God miraculously caused the well to appear, rather, God opened her eyes—the implication being that the well was there the whole time. She was so consumed, so self-absorbed in her dread, in her lack of vision and hope for the future, that she did not see the well, staring her in the face.

Hagar lacked vision for the future and couldn't see that that which was right before her eyes. And, so Hagar disappears, fades into history as merely a foil for our forbearers.

And then we read about Avraham, who at first also seems as if he lacks vision, and also cannot see that which is before his eyes.

22:4

ד בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת-הַמָּקוֹם--מֵרָחֵק

On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

Avraham saw—vayar, the place, ha'makom, Merachok. Afar. The very same words that plagued Hagar.

Although the pshat, the plain sense of the verse implies that he saw something, his vision was mayrachok, distant. In fact the midrash in Bereishit Rabba (56:1) asks: commenting on vayar et hamakom asks: what did he see? The place that Avraham saw was “a cloud enveloping a mountain.”

Avraham looks up and suddenly, his vision is clouded. He cannot perceive God, as hamakom is often translated, so clearly. His vision is hazy, blurred. **He lacks clarity of what the future will bring.** The hope and dreams that he had placed in his son, in Yitzchak, is about to be taken from him. The world suddenly looks, clouded and bleak. For a moment, his dream of the future is shattered.

But then Avraham overcomes his haziness. Just as he is about to sacrifice Isaac, and the Angel stays his hand, Vayisah—avraham once again lifts up his eyes, Vyar, and looked.

ג וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה-אֵיל, אַחֲרַי

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns.

Unlike Hagar, where God had to open her eyes, Avraham looked up and opened his own eyes. His dream of the future was restored. At that moment, he saw—he saw that God-hamakom-- would forgive his decedents, over and over again, that the shofar would be the instrument through which our hopes and dreams would reach god. The ram is no longer “afar” it is right before his eyes. He can see that which is right before him, and Avraham regains his ability to dream. His hope in the future is restored. His eyes remained open.

And in our haftorah that we read today/tomorrow, Yirmiyahu, who is generally the prophet of doom and destruction has a moment of clarity, and seems to give a tikkun, try to fix Avraham’s initial lack of seeing—of vision and hope for the future. In the haftorah we read the same words of the akeida, but in the reverse—

Where as Avraham saw hamakom god from afar, clouded, and unclearly

וַיֵּרָא אֶת-הַמָּקוֹם--מֵרְחוֹק

Yirmiyahu 31:2 flips the verse and says:

מֵרַחֵק, יְיָ-הֵ נִרְאָה לִי;

'From afar—mayrachok- the LORD appeared (same root—r-a-h- saw) me.' '

The Lord is not shrouded in clouds. Even from a distance, I can see God clearly, I can see into the future, and with open eyes, says yirmiyahu, I see that the people will be blessed with God's love—

וְאֶהְבֶּתְךָ עוֹלָם אֶהְבֶּתִיךָ,

I have loved you with an everlasting love;

With love. The world is a dark place, but if you look up, and dream the impossible, and see that which is right before your eyes, then we will feel God's eternal love, we will feel God's embrace, God's closeness. We will see r-a-h-the obvious, that which is right before eyes.

And R-ch-k we will be able to look into the distance and to dream of what could be
And so Avraham names the place Hashem Yireh—God will see.. because it is the mountain where God was seen

וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא, יְיָ-הֵ נִרְאָה, אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם, בְּהַר יְיָ-הֵ נִרְאָה

14 And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-jireh; as it is said to this day: 'In the mount where the LORD is seen.'

Har Moriah—becomes the place where Avraham was able to open his eyes and see that which was right before your eyes. And it is a place of vision, where he could see into the future and dream.

Ra'ah and rachak. Seeing the obvious and having vision.

This year, we have to ask ourselves—are we Hagars--are we blinded to that which is right before us, to all that we are blessed with; do we have stilted dreams? Or are we Avrahams, can we learn to see all that is right before us, and even in times of adversity, can we see merachok, see into the future and hold on to our hopes and dreams?

My teachers, my rebbis, in moving through life with open eyes—appreciating that which is right before you, while being able to dream about all that is possible, are my good friends Rob and Lamelle Ryman. Many of us have come to know the Rymans through their posts on Caring Bridge, about their 6 year old Neshama's, battle with Stage 4 sarcoma cancer. This has been a dark year for them and for those of us who are close to them. And yet, I have never seen so much joy, so much celebration, and so much hope wrapped up in one family. They could have retreated to a dark place and given into adversity. But the Rymans opened their eyes, and gained a greater appreciation for the small things—for singing, for lost teeth, for acts of daily chesed, for dancing during kabbalat shabbat. And they have not stopped, even for a moment, to dream.

It is the Rymans, who have inspired me to try to consciously open my eyes. To see-rah and racahk, to keep dreaming. And I ask you to do the same.

On this Rosh Hashana can we really see—r-a-h:

Are we able to discern what is really important in life? Or do we get bogged down in the details?

Do we really see our children, if you are so blessed, grow up? Or do we let life rush over those small moments of joy?

Do we see our parents, despite the fact that they don't live close by? Do we see our spouse, our friends, our loved ones—really look them in the face, and see them—

perceive their joy and sadness, before they tell you what's on their minds? Or, did we close our eyes to the obvious, to that which is right before us?

And, even in times of darkness, both personally and globally, do we remain, merachok, distant and detached. Is our ability to dream muted? Despite economic turmoil, can we still try to imagine a future that is not riddled with financial burden? Despite the fact that Israel is in turmoil, can we still dream of ertetz chalav udevash? And even adversity in our own lives—the cards that we are dealt with, do we let them trample our hopes and dreams of what could be in the future?

We cannot run and hide, like hagar. We cannot retreat to the darkness, and move through life with eyes, constantly down turned to the ground. If we do so, we will suffer the consequences of feeling merachok—afar, distant—we will feel cut off from those who love us. If we cannot look people in the face, if we always turn away, then how can those who are close to us hold us up? And if we stop dreaming looking for the mountain tops, though it may be clouded, then we are destined to walk through a dark and miserable world. If we stop hoping, then life loses its meaning.

וַיִּשָׂא אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא

So, we must open our eyes and look up.

מֵרְחוֹק, יִקְוֶה נִרְאָה לִי

Like Yirmiyahu, we must choose to look up, and open our eyes and dream the impossible.

On this Rosh Hashana, as we hear the shofar, may we seize the opportunity to look up. To open our eyes. And to really dream and see.