Limmud

SHANA TOVA FROM LIMMUD FESTIVAL

LIMMUD FESTIVAL 2019
22–26 DECEMBER

LIMMUD SHABBAT
20–21 DECEMBER

DISCOVER SOMETHING NEW

FROM THE FESTIVAL CHAIRS

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur present us with an opportunity to reflect on our actions in the past year and consider what we want to do, and who we want to be, in the year to come.

Through doing *teshuvah*, we ask ourselves some important questions. Did we grow in the past year? Or did we stand still? What did we learn? Did we live fully? Did we contribute to our community? Through this process we are able to reconcile our actions with who we want to be and return to or rediscover the best version of ourselves.

It's all too easy to become distracted, to lose sight of the impact our actions can have. Rosh Hashanah is our annual reminder, but the obligation we have for learning and growing is one we have to carry through the whole year. We must take every opportunity to grow as individuals and Limmud Festival is a great place to discover new things, take action, make an impact and create meaningful connections.

The Limmud community is based on the idea that every contribution matters greatly, that every person can make a difference. It is an organisation built by volunteers at every level, and is a testament to the fact that every person can have a part to play, a contribution to make.

We're proud to share this booklet with you, containing the insights of just a few of the hundreds of presenters joining us in Birmingham this December for Limmud Festival 2019.

Come to Limmud Festival this December and discover something new at one of the biggest celebrations of Jewish learning and culture in the world. Discover a new topic, skill, volunteering opportunity, community, friend, philosopher, teacher or something you don't expect at all.

Limmud is a truly global community which started here in the UK 40 years ago, inviting everyone to be a student and anyone to be a teacher. We hope you'll join us at Festival and Limmuds around the UK and beyond to teach and learn from each other, and rediscover the best parts of yourself and our community.

To find out more and join us, you can visit www.limmud.org/festival.

We wish you a *shanah tova u'metukah* – a happy and sweet new year.

HANNAH BRADY, DANIEL HELLER AND BEN LEWIS
Chairs, Limmud Festival 2019

SOUND THE SHOFAR

HELENA MILLER

Last September, the New York Times on-line ran an article about Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, blowing his own ram's horn in the comfort of his home in Palo Alto, California. "Mark Zuckerberg is celebrating Rosh Hashanah," we read, and to help us contextualise, there was an accompanying photo of him with a huge, splendid, curly *shofar*.

To me, hearing the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is less about the comfort of my home, and more about standing in my community. The *shofar* itself, a musical horn typically made from a ram's horn, is blown towards the end of the synagogue services on Rosh Hashanah morning and at the very end of Yom Kippur. It is also blown every weekday morning in the month of Elul running up to Rosh Hashanah.

The notes of the *shofar* are prescribed: *Tekiah* – one long blast, *Shevarim* – three medium blasts, *Teruah* – nine short blasts, and *Tekiah Gedolah* – the final longest blast. These blasts are our spiritual wake-up call, our reminder to seek *teshuva*, repentance. A reminder not to get lost in the rush of the everyday and to remember the important things in our lives.

According to Maimonides, during the ten days of repentance, every person has the ability to influence his or her own personal balance of sins and merits. Our *teshuva*, we are told, carries significantly more weight during the ten days of repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur than at any other time of the year. The word *shofar*, which in Hebrew is spelled "שופר", contains the same root letters as the word "שופו", which can be translated as "*improve yourself*" – a very appropriate phrase for the Limmud community!

The *shofar* blast also reminds us of our relationship to G-d. It was first heard when the Jewish people received the Torah on Mount Sinai. The shofar reminds us to examine our deeds – good and bad – and to return to study, and to our Judaism.

I hear the shofar on Rosh Hashanah as a hopeful sound, heralding a New Year in which we can become better people. At the end of Yom Kippur, the *Tekiah Gedolah* has a thrilling finality about it, and at the same time it suggests a new beginning – after ten days of *teshuvah*, we are renewed for the year ahead, ready for whatever it may bring.

This year, some of us will blow the *shofar* at home. Many of us will hear the *shofar* in a synagogue, in whichever corner of the world we live. Wherever and however we hear it, the sound of the *shofar* pierces our senses, and it calls us to account. May the coming year be a good one for all of us.

HELENA MILLER *is the senior lecturer in Jewish Education Studies at the London School of Jewish Studies.*

THE ROSH HASHANAH PARADOX

BEN CROWNE

How are we supposed to feel on Rosh Hashanah? It's a day which contains an intense mixture of emotions – sadness, celebration, trepidation, nostalgia and hope – all of which are captured at different stages in the day's prayers and rituals.

This tension appears in the earliest account of a Rosh Hashanah service, recorded in the book of Nehemiah after the return from the Babylonian exile. Ezra and Nehemiah lead an extended reading of the Torah, "from dawn until noon" (apart from the shofar, long services seem to be the oldest-established Rosh Hashanah custom of them all!), which reduces the assembled Jerusalemites to tears. Following the reading, Ezra sends them back to their houses to feast and celebrate, "*Do not mourn or weep*", he tells them, "*for joy is your strength*".

The Hassidic master Rav Tzadok of Lublin notes a similar paradox in understanding the blowing of the *shofar*. The *shofar* is often associated with mourning or fear – when the Talmud, for example, explains the different notes which should be sounded, it likens them to different types of wailing and sobbing. But the Torah itself describes the *shofar* as a gesture of rejoicing, "'*With trumpets and the sound of the shofar make a joyful call*" (Psalms 98:6).

Part of this is doubtless due to the way that Rosh Hashanah has developed over time, accreting new meanings and symbolic importance. Each generation has added its own customs and practices, from the apple and honey or the tradition to give to charity the day before Rosh Hashanah, to more esoteric rituals like *kaparot* or the *tashlich* ceremony of casting bread onto running water.

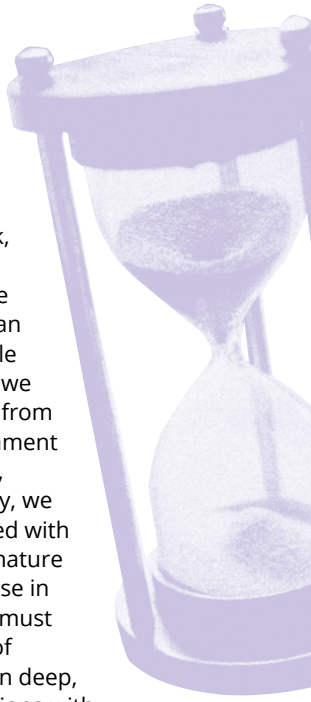
And this isn't a recent development – as the varying names of Rosh Hashanah (a term which does not appear until the Talmud in the third century CE) make clear. Originally called "*Yom Teruah*" after the sound of the *shofar*, it's also referred to in biblical and rabbinic texts as "*Yom HaZicharon*" (Day of Remembrance) and "*Shabbat Shabbaton*" (the Sabbath of Sabbaths). In our liturgy, it's also described as "*Hayom Harat Olam*" –"the day of the creation of the world", or more simply "the Birthday of the World".

And perhaps that's what lies at the heart of the mixed messages of Rosh Hashanah. Birthdays can be simple celebrations, but they can also be tricky things, freighted with emotion and memories. The birthday of the world is necessarily a birthday for everyone, with all the different meanings that brings with it. So rather than trying to make all parts of Rosh Hashanah work for everyone, we should focus on what resonates with us in the moment – in the knowledge that in another year, that might well be something else. Shavua tov and many happy returns.

BEN CROWNE *lives, writes about and serially volunteers for London's Jewish community. He chaired Limmud Conference 2016.*

REPENTANCE: FROM THE PERSONAL TO THE COLLECTIVE

HAMUTAL GOURI



Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance, which start when the moon's shy face is still hidden and conclude at sunset on Yom Kippur.

During these ten days, atonement and reflection – which should be our daily bread – are more readily accepted. As the Rambam writes, "Although *teshuva* and pleading are always effective, during the ten days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur they are especially potent and are immediately accepted, as it says, 'Search for Hashem when He is present…'"

I am not an observant woman. Yet, I fast and pray on Yom Kippur. I love praying in my community and feel the sounds of prayer and song as they make their way into my heart. I deeply appreciate the ritual that beckons towards contemplation and new resolutions for the year that is upon us.

My father, the poet Haim Gouri *z"l*, has passed on to me the notion that Yom Kippur is both a deeply personal and a powerfully collective experience; a ritual that calls for individual and collective reflection and healing. For Yom Kippur to maintain its deepest meaning, we must engage not only in personal prayer, but also in collective soul searching and promise ourselves to do more and better in the year to come.

There are so many wrongs to correct; our world needs constant healing, and it is too easy to succumb to despair, apathy or complacency. But, if I was to paraphrase on Pirkei Avot, Chapter 2, verse 16: It is not our duty to finish the work, but neither are we at liberty to neglect it. We must all do what we can to heal the world. While each of us has causes we are passionate about, from protecting the environment to eliminating poverty, peace or gender equity, we should all be concerned with the toxic and divisive nature of the political discourse in our communities. We must all embrace diversity of opinions and engage in deep, courageous conversations with those holding different views or leading different lifestyles.

This Yom Kippur, let us make a collective pledge; to care deeply, to engage in Tikkun Olam and mend the delicate fabric of our communities and societies. In the new year that is upon us, we should strive to be impeccable with our words and demand of our elected officials to do the same.

HAMUTAL GOURI *is Founding Director of Impact Storytelling, a consulting firm specialising in transformative learning opportunities for individuals, organisations and movements.*

Limmud

LIMMUD FESTIVAL is a place for community, learning, discovery, empowerment, diversity, debate, laughing, dancing, families, volunteering and so much more.

With hundreds of sessions and thousands of participants from around the UK and across the world, follow your passions or do something totally new, as you create connections and long lasting memories.

Plus, we've held our least-expensive places at last year's prices, helping to keep Limmud Festival 2019 more affordable.

BRING A FRIEND TO FESTIVAL

To celebrate Limmud's 40th year, **we'll give you £40 for every person you refer** who joins for the whole of Limmud Festival and has not been before*.

*The offer is available if you and the friend are both coming for full Festival. There are a limited number of discounts available which cannot be used in conjunction with all other discounts. Your friend must not have attended since the end of 2014. See limmud.org/festival/pricing/refer-a-friend for full terms and conditions.

When?

Sunday 22 – Thursday 26 December 2019

Limmud Shabbat 20–21 December

Where?

Pendigo Lake, Birmingham, UK

Price?

Places for the entire festival are now available from just £448 and from £201 for participants who join our volunteering schemes

How to book?

limmud.org/festival

Any questions?

Email the Limmud office at office@limmud.org or call 020 3115 1620

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