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The Sounds of the Shofar

This article is based on a talk given by Eliza Tizabgar at the Chabad of Northern Palm Beach Island Jewish Women's Circle annual dinner on February 12, 2012.

In 1952, my parents, Ebrahim Tizabgar and Miriam Tizabgar nee Derakhshan, got married in Israel while still in their mid-teens. My oldest sister was born in Israel. However, their families were back in Iran, and my parents were having trouble acclimating to the lifestyle in Israel. So they moved back to Iran, to the capital city, Tehran, when my mother was pregnant with me and my twin brother, Nasser. She did not know she was having twins. By then she was 18 and my father was 19.

I grew up in Tehran under the Shah regime. The Shah supported Israel and allowed us freedom of religion. We had our temple and freedom of speech. On Friday nights, my parents would have 50-60 people, family and friends, over for the meal. My mother cooked for everyone.

In Iran, Friday was the official day off and Saturday was like Sunday here, so Friday and Saturday was their weekend. This worked very well for us, as on Friday nobody was expected to work so we could help my mother prepare for Shabbat. We loved that.

I grew up celebrating all the Jewish holidays and going to a Jewish school. We had teachers from Israel who taught us to read and write Hebrew. We prayed to G-d every morning before class.

Even single girls covered their heads for prayer. (See photo of us covering our heads for prayer.)

The Muslims didn't want the Shah to stay in power because he was modern and supportive of freedom of religion, and that's when the revolution happened. On January 16, 1979, the Shah was exiled and left Iran.

I was a teenager then. I left Iran and went to Israel to visit my mother's father, and I knew I never wanted to go back to Iran. I extended my ticket and then extended it again… and never went back.

My parents stayed in Iran. I moved to Paris.

I had a desire to learn French and to work in the fashion industry. I did all that, but I did not feel that Jews were very welcome in France. I had heard that in the USA you can be free and be yourself, unafraid of anti-Semitism, so I moved to New York. Things were very bad in Iran, so I worked with a Jewish organization to bring my family to New York. We succeeded, thank G-d, and they came to this country in 1988 and started a new life in this country. They settled in Great Neck and practice the same Judaism that we always had practiced.

Because of my career (business management), I was transferred from New York to Palm Beach, Florida, and

suddenly I found myself without my family and the support to keep Jewish practice in my life. But my love for Judaism always remained alive within me. I tried many different synagogues but didn't feel at home in any of them, and the values and practices that I grew up with were missing.

Then one Rosh Hashanah afternoon, on the holiday, just before sundown, I was closing my store on Worth Avenue and a rabbi and his two tiny daughters stopped on the street, asked me if I was Jewish, and offered to blow the shofar for me.

I accepted their kind offer, and the rabbi took out his shofar right there and then and began blowing it. Listening to the sounds of the shofar reminded me of the Judaism that I used to know, that I missed so much.

They invited me for Shabbat services and dinner and I knew then that G-d was giving me all the blessings and direction I was looking for to practice my Judaism again. Who would have thought that on a sidewalk in front of my store, in middle of Palm Beach, I could reconnect with G-d and His Torah, His gift to the Jewish people?



Ebrahim and Miriam, at their wedding in 1952.

The rabbi who I met was Rabbi Zalman Levitin. His wife, Hindel, has become one of my dearest friends. And about their four daughters, I warn you, *don't ask,* or I'll start showing you some of the thousands of pictures I took of them because they are just so sweet and beautiful.

When my twin brother and I were born, my grandmother always said to my mother, "You already have a girl, who needed another girl? Give me the boy to hold." So, my mom would dress me up like a boy so my grandmother would hold me and love me a little, too. I grew up feeling that women were inferior.

Today, I understand, through the many programs of the Jewish Women's Circle, and all the Torah classes and events that I attend, that a Jewish woman has much value and importance in Judaism. I understand now that women are not just precious human beings, as precious as men, but that as keepers of the home they have even a more important job than men, because the woman is the source of Judaism for her family and her friends. She teaches everyone around her and creates the entire atmosphere in the home, which extends to the street, the school, the job. Her influence is the most effective and is therefore primary.

Being part of Chabad has been life-changing for me. It strengthened my belief in Hashem, my confidence in myself as a Jewish woman and my outlook on life. I now have mezuzot on all my doors, I study Torah with passion, I light Shabbat candles every Friday before sundown, I celebrate Shabbat at Chabad and I celebrate all the holidays, I give tzedakah the way the Torah teaches which is to give not just when I have extra money, but even when things are tight. I try to get other women to join Chabad programs also because I want to share the blessings I have found.



Eliza (L) and her twin brother Nasser.

Eating kosher is a big mitzvah; so is keeping Shabbat, all 25 hours. Am I doing all this perfectly? No, not yet, I am still on my own journey as we all are and I am learning more and more.

I am always planning and trying to take on more and more Torah and mitzvot. I tell my friends and all Jewish women I meet, "You are welcome to join me in all these beautiful mitzvot and make G-d proud of you by celebrating who you really are."

No matter where you come from, you should be proud to be a Jewish woman. Wherever you go you will have the power to influence other people to become closer to G-d. Remember to nourish your neshamah,
your

soul, by doing more and more mitzvot… bringing light into your life, your home, and into the whole wide world. ■



Rabbi Zalman Levitin affixing a mezuzah on Eliza's store on Worth Avenue



Eliza, with her biggest fans, the Levitin children.



Eliza receiving shmurah matzah at her store.



Eliza Tizabgar and Rivka Levitin dressed in the Hawaiin spirit at the Purim in Hawaii seudah.



L-R: Eliza,Hindel and Lila at Chanukah party.



Eliza, fourth from left, at the Caffeine for the Soul women's Chassidus class held weekly at Starbucks.

Simple Sounds, Powerful Message

Rabbi Michoel Gourarie

Very soon, on Rosh Hashanah, we will hear the sounds of the shofar once again. Our sages teach us that shofar blowing is what Rosh Hashanah is all about. What is so special about these seemingly simple sounds?

The shofar is blown throughout the service in various different ways. But it always follows the same pattern: We always begin by blowing a tekiah - a long straight sound. This is followed by a teruah (or shevarim) - short, broken up, sob-like sounds. These sounds are followed by yet another long tekiah.

This is the formula: Tekiah - Teruah - Tekiah.

A great Chassidic rabbi, the Sfas Emes, explained that this pattern tells the story of our life journey, and expresses the power of Rosh Hashanah.

The long, smooth tekiah is a symbol of purity, innocence and perfection. On the other hand the broken teruah sounds are the challenges of life. They represent darkness, confusion, complication and frustration.

Our life begins with a tekiah. We are born with a natural purity, with an untainted soul that is perfect and unchallenged. The innocence of a newborn baby reflects the purity and holiness of the soul.

But inevitably, sooner or later, the long and beautiful tekiah is replaced by the broken sounds of the teruah. We begin to experience confusion, face difficulties, and are suddenly thrown into the ups and downs of a complicated and sometimes challenging existence.

But this is the power of Rosh Hashanah. When we begin a fresh new year, the past is not always so positive. Not everything in the last year might have been a tekiah. But on this special day we can turn it all around. We can learn from last year's experiences and make the future more positive. We can turn challenge into opportunity; transform the bad into good and darkness into light, using difficulty and confusion as growth tools to emerge as stronger and deeper human beings.

And so we conclude with a tekiah again. Out of the teruah emerges a greater, stronger and deeper tekiah than the one we began with. Light that comes from darkness is brighter than natural light. Smoothness and purity that emerges from challenge is deeper and stronger that the natural innocence that we experience at birth.

Hence the shofar pattern: Tekiah - Teruah - Tekiah.

Rabbi Michoel Gourarie is the director of BINA, a Sydney-based organization that provides Jewish inspiration and learning for all ages and backgrounds. BINA's programs include weekly classes, educational emails and videos, a Jewish lending library, and one-on-one learning.