



**The shofar has no reason.
But it contains a sign: Wake up! (Maimonides)**

If you want a livable society there has to be legislation. Because without rules the theory of people living together in peace is not going to work. Ideally this would not have to be necessary, but our society is far from ideal. And so, we see that in every country, in every city and in every group in which people live together rules are made to make the society livable. Because if we wouldn't...

But it is not as simple as that. Because laws made by people are subject to change and can lead to quite the opposite of livability. Over the years laws are adapted, changed. What is criminal and unacceptable in country A, is ridiculous and exaggerated in country B.

Some time ago we received a journalist from Moscow as a guest. We were debating during the shabbat meal and since he sounded pretty pro-Russian, I asked him how he feels about the oligarchs who because of their large financial strength more or less define the law. In my point of view rather corrupt. But it is accepted and these multimillionaires are treated with a chronic respect. I find that difficult to accept! The journalist looked at me a bit sheepishly and instead of answering he asked a counter-question, which is a good Jewish custom. When I got off the train at the Central Station in Amsterdam, he began talking, I saw men selling drugs under the police's condoning eyes. Drugs that can only come onto the market through exploitation and degrading trade. How can your Dutch people, was his question, accept this just like that?

The journalist was right: what is acceptable in society A, even instinctively, is corrupt in society B. And so, it is a good thing that societies make laws to create a livable climate, but there is also a risk attached to this man-made legislation. Because when man starts to determine what is right and what is wrong, we have a problem. Are extramarital relations acceptable? Years ago, that was not done, but nowadays in our so-called modern civilized society ... We stand up for women's rights and rightly so! But we use these same women as inducement to focus attention to a certain product. And we accept the exploitation of imported women who have nowhere left to go, female slaves!

Judaism knows three kinds of laws: (1) Laws we obey to commemorate certain events. During the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth) we live in a sukkah to commemorate the forty years in which our ancestors lived in sukkot after the Exodus from Egypt. (2) Laws that make sense, like the ban on stealing. This kind of legislation must exist to avoid chaos.

But Judaism has a third kind of law: Chukim (decrees). Laws that transcend rational reason. These laws are obeyed exclusively because God expects this from us.

“This is a requirement of the law that the Lord has commanded” (Numbers 19:2). And then the text continues and presents the completely incomprehensible legislation of the red heifer. With the ashes of the red heifer the unclean is cleansed and the priest performing the ceremony becomes unclean because of the action!?! It doesn't make sense.

But apart from this inconceivable legislation: why does the text say *“This is the law of the Torah?”* It should have said *“This is the law of the red heifer!”* But because this incomprehensible law is called the law of the Torah, the Torah declares that reason cannot be the basis of any law. Every law, also the law we do understand, has to be obeyed because G'd desires that of us and not because we understand it. And then such a law is independent of the trend that dominates society at that particular moment. Because it may be that we find some laws rational and comprehensible, but with regard to standards and values there is no logic.

What was completely unacceptable yesterday is one hundred per cent normal tomorrow!

The Halacha is the collective body of Jewish religious laws which is full of logic, taking into account circumstances and situations, it is absolutely not black or white, and constantly moving. But at the same time, it is plain that man is too small to determine the law himself. Standards and values are fluctuating all the time. What was totally unacceptable fifty years ago, is normal today. And what we find normal today, our grandchildren will experience as primitive and incomprehensible.

But why looking at ancestors and grandchildren? My Russian journalist cannot comprehend the policy on drugs in our country and it is beyond my comprehension that in Russia oligarchs are hoisted up into the air, while we live in the same age.

And that is precisely the message of the shofar.

A message reaching far beyond legislation.

Maimonides teaches a vital lesson for life at the beginning of the New Year:

1. There is no logical reason why we should sound the shofar on Rosh Hashana
2. But there is a sign hidden in the shofar: wake up, repent.

Primarily we have to realize that life is incomprehensible, we need to accept!

And when we are thoroughly aware of that, only then we start to try and understand as much as possible!

With this thought we start the New Year.

A Shanah Tovah, a good and healthy 5780

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