

WE'RE COMMANDED TO HEAR THE SHOFAR, NOT BLOW IT!

One of the perks of living in the Holy City is that all year round and especially during the month of Elul, there are many inspiring Torah classes to choose from to help us prepare spiritually for the high holidays.

I have decided to go to hear my all time favorite, Rabbi Daniel Epstein, French intellectual and Talmud Chochem, who has a wonderful sense of humour and deep insights into the human condition and who has honoured me in the past by giving a weekly Parsha shiur in my home.

The auditorium at Matan (the Sadie Rennert women's institute for Torah Study) is packed as Rabbi Epstein, a waif of a man with a humble demeanor, eyes cast down on a text, sensitive hands circling a cup of tea, begins the shiur.

He opens the class on the subject of lost objects that when found must be returned to their rightful owner. But he is not giving a halacha class, and it soon becomes apparent that he is indeed speaking about mankind, lost in the world, like Adam fallen from grace, looking for ourselves and our way to get back to our owner...to God.

The rabbi, in a discourse on where we are in relation to God, explains, "The height of modern technology has produced a small object (cell phone) that enables us to ask and be asked the most important question, the very essence of our existence, 'where are you?' For a transitory moment we are , comforted by verbalizing the concrete facts of our whereabouts, at the office or at home, as it enables us to temporarily band-aid our existential loss. But what about the moment after that, " the rabbi asks, " and the one after that, where are we really then in relation to God?"

So what is the permanent answer to finding ourselves in order to stand before our Creator on the Day of Judgment? The rabbi, as many good Jews before him, answers his query with another question. "Isn't it strange that the Shofar blower recites the blessing..Blessed art thou O Lord who commands us to **listen** to the Shofar? Surely it would be more appropriate for him to bless...Blessed art thou O Lord who commands us to blow the Shofar?

Rabbi Epstein expounds, "If we want to be found, the secret lies in the listening, the hearing of the Shofar, the simple wail of the ram's horn.

For those who listen will be listened to and those who seek shall be sought out. And what is it that we really need to listen to- only to each other, to the cry of the hungry and the suffering. For if a Jew is hungry, God is hungry and if a Jew is suffering, God is suffering. The only way to bring God close to us is to get close to each other. This is a much harder exercise than laying teffillin every morning, or keeping to a kosher diet, because man, by his very nature, is individual, he lives in his own world and is not naturally in sync with anyone else, and for him, it is always easier to get on with God than deal with his fellow man.

Hearing his words, my thoughts stray to all the wonderful people that helped the citizens of the north during the war by opening their homes and their hearts to the refugees from the Ketyusha rains. I think about all the food packages that were sent to the soldiers in Lebanon, and I silently move my lips in prayer and under my breath I say, “Rebono Shel Olam, see how your people listen, see how they feed the hungry and soothe the suffering, on the merit of their chessed, open up the heavens this Rosh Hashanah and listen to our prayers.”