

The Call and Response of Creation
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In 1970, two groups of scientists working thousands of miles apart were looking for clues to the mystery of how the world began.

In the United States, physicists Jim Peebles and Jer Yu were studying the universe's earliest moments. Across the world in the Soviet Union, Rashid Sunyaev and Yakov Zel'dovich were independently asking similar questions about our origins.

Both teams were trying to understand an almost impossibly large question: What is this vast, mysterious reality into which we have somehow found ourselves? How did it form, and from what? I wonder if they realized what a mystical question they were asking.

These scientists were reaching toward the furthest edges of what we can know. Does the universe itself hold some trace of its own beginning? Have its earliest moments left an imprint that we might still be able to detect today?

Here's what they found:

For the first several hundred thousand years the universe was an unimaginably hot, dense fluid of matter and light. Gravity pulled matter together, pressure pushed it apart, and this push and pull created waves of compression moving through the hot plasma—not so different from the pressure waves that travel through the air when a drum is struck.

In the beginning, they discovered, there was sound.

"If it is sound...which has created this Earth," writes Indian ecologist Anisha Jaya Minocha, "then it is sound which connects us to creation. A microscopic force, as potent as it is small, [pointing us] towards that which is less visible."¹ If something unseeable like sound created the earth, what else might not be visible, but also profoundly true?

At one time, maps showed the earth to be flat because that was all we could see. We had yet to understand the Earth as the sphere it is, suspended and spinning in space. And think about how we view our very selves! We tend to perceive our body as a solid form, yet at the level of atoms and particles, matter is anything but still. It may be more accurate to say that our bodies are a temporary coherence of vibration.

¹ <https://theecologist.org/2025/may/22/world-begins-sound>

So too, the pulsing plasma that began creation has cooled and slowed, but the initial resonance that its movement caused continues still.

It seems that the mystics and scientists arrive, through different paths, at something strikingly similar.

Rav Kook taught:

הַהִתְאַמָּה הַמְאַחֶדֶת מְפַלְשֶׁת בְּכָל חֲדָרֵי הַמְצִיאוֹת וְחִגְוֵיהָ.²

A unifying resonance permeates all the chambers and crevices of reality

Resonance is what occurs when one vibration sets another in motion; one sound awakening another.

To become resonant is to hear a sound and be moved by it. Perhaps this is why his teaching feels so at home on Rosh Hashanah

The Torah calls Rosh Hashanah *zikhron teruah*, “a remembrance of sounding,” and elsewhere *yom teruah*, “a day of sounding”.³ Sound is the primary way we mark this day, the main mitzvah is to hear the sound of the shofar.

Today the shofar remains silent. Because the Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, we celebrate our holiday in the absence of its defining sound. What opportunity might this offer us to consider the shofar anew, to listen for meanings we might otherwise miss?

Traditionally the call of the shofar is explained in a few ways. For the Medieval scholar Rambam, the shofar is an alarm clock for our soul. He hears its call as, “Wake up, sleepers, from your sleep. Rouse yourselves from complacency, examine how you have been living, and return to your Creator!”⁴

In Tanakh, the shofar is a trumpet, announcing the arrival of the Sovereign. As we recite throughout the Rosh Hashanah liturgy:

בְּחִצְצֹרוֹת וְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר הָרִיעוּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה:

With trumpets and the blast of the horn raise a shout before GOD, the King!⁵
Here, the shofar here is a sound of proclamation, announcing the presence and sovereignty of the Divine.

² Abraham Isaac Kook, *Shemonah Kevatzim* (Kovetz 1:370)

³ Leviticus 23:23–25; Numbers 29:1–6

⁴ Mishneh Torah, The Laws of Repentance 3:4

⁵ Psalms 98:6

Elsewhere, the sound of the shofar is heard as a human cry.

The Talmud hears in the *teruah* the wailing of Sisera's mother, an unnamed figure from the book of Judges who was depicted as standing at the window waiting for a son who will never return. And midrash hears in the shofar the cries of Sarah. Isaac survives the *Akedah*, but Sarah, the rabbis imagine, is shattered by what has happened.⁶ We might also hear the cries of Hagar as she witnesses what seems to be Ishmael's imminent death.

The shofar is heard as giving sound to something beyond words: grief from a heart overwhelmed with suffering and pain.

Wake up. Welcome the King. Wail.

These are all powerful ways to understand the shofar's call. Yet perhaps beneath them, or alongside them, threaded through them, there is another way to hear this sounding.

Every day of this past month of Elul we have been sounding the shofar. Each morning blowing through this ancient hollowed horn, pulsing the breath of life through the remnant of a life that was, bringing together past and future, living and dead, human and more-than-human together creating vibration, resonance, sound. Rather than an alarm clock or a coronation or a cry, perhaps this sound is more like a coming home. A call that reconnects us to the awe side of fear and the fierceness of life. A sound we viscerally know. A frequency familiar to our bodies. A sound that connects us to the primordial vibration from which we came.

In the shofar's call we can hear the sounding of the early universe as it pulsed and throbbed into existence, the sound that yielded burning stars and spinning galaxies, crashing seas, the song of birds and the rush of howling wind. The primordial sound that gave rise to life courses through our body as we inhale, and as we blow, we give that sound back to the world.

The shofar not only calls something forth from us, in its sounding we enter into a call and response between Creator and creation—into a sounding and resounding that reaches back to *Beresheit*, the beginning of beginnings, and forward to this very moment, *Hayom*, today, reminding us: creation continues still. That we are the continuation of that early plasmatic reverberation. Creation did not end with the beginning of the world. It is happening in and through us now.

We hear the sound, yes, but we also feel it. Traveling in waves, passing through air and matter, moving everything it touches—vibrating in our skin and guts and bones. Dissolving resistance in our tissues, making us more receptive, alive, more able to move.

⁶ Vayikra Rabbah 20

The call of the shofar enters us into a full-bodied conversation 14 billion years long. We draw the world into our bodies as breath and give it back as vibration. Creation sounds through us, and we sound ourselves back into creation. The distinction between what is sounding and what is being sounded melts away as we come into resonance with the world.

Today we celebrate the creation of the world, the beginning of existence. But, like any Jewish holiday, we don't just commemorate.

On Passover, the Haggadah is not a recounting of our history but a guidebook for entering our own story of liberation and redemption—as if we ourselves are there, moving from narrowness to freedom. On Tisha b'Av, we don't only mourn the destruction of the Temple. We spiral in and out of time, that ancient rupture becoming an access point into experiences of communal loss and grief, past and present.

So too Rosh Hashanah. Today is not simply a day to remember the world's creation as some event long ago. Today is the day in which we return to the portal of creation, a portal which is always open.

Even here. Even now. In a world that can feel so fractured, when so much has been lost, when grief feels heavy, when the future we long for can feel impossibly far away. Even when we cannot feel the eternal resonance, even when we have lost faith that there is such a resonance to feel.

Today, Rosh Hashanah returns us to the call and response of creation. To the wellspring of creativity and renewal that makes change and transformation, *teshuva* possible. What science reveals in the physical world; teshuvah reveals in our lives: everything that seems to be solid, fixed in form, is not. Everything is always moving.

I recently came across an interview with a man named Maurice Kamins, a self-taught shofar maker who lives here in the Bay. In the process of creating shofars, he discovered something fascinating. Before it is sounded, he says, “the horn itself will start vibrating with the tone it will give once the horn is blown.”⁷

The sound is somehow already there, trembling within the shofar, encoded in the keratin and bone, before any breath passes through it.

And so today, even without the shofar blasts amplifying the universe's original sound, that resonance continues.

What began billions of years ago is not finished becoming.

“A unifying resonance permeates all the chambers and crevices of reality.”

⁷ <https://jweekly.com/2008/09/18/having-a-blast-s-f-man-masters-the-art-of-making-shofars/>

All the chambers. All the crevices.

From the furthest reaches of the cosmos.

To the chambers of the heart.

From the hollow of the horn.

To the spaces within and between us.

Still, something moves.

The resonance reverberates.

Creation continues, unending.

Ken yehi ratzon.