

The service being over we prepare to leave the little house of worship
a converted basement
its founder a Mr. Weil from Germany
who had transplanted his "Yekkish" customs and centuries of memory
to the fashionable Rechavia neighborhood of Jerusalem in the 30's.

Being across the street from my parents
it has become home for them
now that they prefer to walk less.
and my father in his 90's,
attends regularly and punctually,
especially on this High Holy Day
of Rosh Hashana 2011
where the blowing of 100 blasts (*Tekiyos*) is the key element of the
morning service.

People gather to leave climbing the steps to the street level
but Dad saunters over to the Bima-the lectern where the young man
still holds the shofar,
and asks permission "to give a few blows".
My sister and mother had already climbed the steps
when they heard more shofar blasts
and, wondering what the commotion was,
ran back down.

My father was blowing again
after all these years
floods of memories poured in...
to the days of Finchley Central Synagogue
in the 60' and 70's...
the annual pilgrimage to the long services
of the High Holidays...
but for our family, more than others,
the anxiety of Dad's Shofar.

His was not an easy one,
we never realized until many years later
how the short ones are so easy to blow.
No, his Shofar was shiny and long
with a narrow "mouthpiece"
that puckered his lips
then swelled them.

We watched him blow
year after year,
his face reddening for the needed pressure
and his facial discomfort increased as he fatigued.
Sometimes he would falter
usually towards the end of the hundred *tekiyos*
those last few...
we would sweat bullets
and we children, looking at each other
from the Ladies Gallery down and back up
sweated alongside.

I would sweat in sympathy
and out of embarrassment
as he tried and sometimes failed to emit a tone.
Those last few...
“come Dad, you can do it”
meeting the resistance of that Shofar
as if it alone determined the very social standing of our father
for the next year,
and the comments of the congregants as they would emerge
from the services.

Now fast forwarded to 2011
in his 91st year
he challenges the Shofar
once again,
but now
I worry about his blood pressure
and his anticoagulation
and bleeding from such exertion.

My sister arrives to watch him blow successfully
and we sigh as we see his face shine
in accomplishment.
Yes he was always a “*Baal Tekeya*” a master of the blowing
and probably felt more pleasure from that than his *Gabo'os*
his being warden then president
then Life President for so many years.

No it was these moments of challenge
when the entire community was silent
and upstanding
as he performed
alone
on the sacred stage the Bima.

These few moments in the year at its religious high point
that marked his life's journey
his character
his challenges
and his standing in the community.

As for me?

I swore never to subject myself to such public challenges
the sweat of those moments
etched into my consciousness forever
even though I tried at home to master that recalcitrant shofar!
It seems she was special
and reserved herself
and submitted only to those she chose
like my father
who remained willing to the risk
of her petulance
annually.

That ability to risk
in public,
the humiliation as well as the glory
he carries to this day
I believe it is called character.