

SOUND THE SHOFAR – The Voting Rights Act
Speech at the VRA Rally in Raleigh
September 3, 2015 – Rabbi Fred Guttman

At this time of the year, Jewish people throughout the world hear the sounds of the rams horn or what we call the shofar. In ancient times, the shofar was used to announce the coming of the Sabbath and the beginning of a new lunar month. It was also used by guards on city walls to announce that the city was under attack.

The most famous story in the Bible of a ram's horn or a shofar occurs in the battle of Jericho wherein, on the seventh day, they marched around seven times and then blew the shofar. According to the text, the walls came tumbling down.

At this time of the year, Jews hear the sounds of the shofar to encourage us to examine our deeds and to work on our relationships to ourselves, to others and to God.

Today, however, the verse that I think is most important concerning the usage of this wonderfully ancient instrument in Jewish tradition is the one from Leviticus 25

⁹ Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. ¹⁰ Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

These immortal words, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land" are written on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

First the Shofar was sounded, and then liberty and freedom were proclaimed!

So fifty years after Selma, we are sounding the shofar to call for liberty throughout our land. We are sounding the shofar to call for a permanent fix to the Voting Rights Act and to make sure that states such as Alabama Georgia and North Carolina are covered by the Voting rights Act.

Fifty years ago, Martin Luther King and people of all faiths marched across the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma Alabama demanding voting rights for all Americans. One of those who marched with him was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. When he came home from Selma in 1965, Rabbi Hechel wrote: For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer/ Legs are not utters songs. Even without words, our march was warship. I felt my legs were praying."

Today our legs have been praying in this state, a state which plagued by the most extreme anti-voting rights act in the nation. Today, we are here to proclaim at this time, North Carolina is our Selma.

Fifty years ago in Selma, we march because we were in pursuit of justice. Fifty years later in Raleigh North Carolina we march because we are in pursuit of justice, and we will be in pursuit of justice until liberty is proclaimed throughout the land!

Yes today, we are sounding the Rams Horn. We are sounding the shofar for liberty. Our legs have marched and prayed from Selma Alabama to this place, and we will continue to march to the gateways of power in Washington DC.

And there we will proclaim liberty, and we will do so because we believe that every single one of us counts. We will proclaim liberty because we believe that every single one of us is created in God's image. We will do so because it does not matter if one is tall or short, whether one has lots of hair or, like me, is follically challenged and wears a yarmulke to cover a bald spot.

We will do so because when it comes to voting rights, it does not matter if one is Atheist, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or Jew.

We will do so because when it comes to voting rights, it does not matter if one is straight or gay or black or white or whether one is rich or poor, an elderly person or a student.

We will proclaim liberty in this land because we believe that every person, being created in God's image, counts. We will proclaim liberty because we acknowledge that every single person who is a citizen of the United States of America deserves to be able to vote and to have their vote count.

Turn to your neighbor now and say the following.

Neighbor -- We call upon the Congress and the President -- Fix the Voting Rights Act -- Now!

Proclaiming liberty throughout the land! - SOUND THE SHOFAR