

**SCRIPT Shara Morris and Jen Rice for KCRW's Independent Producer Project
October 3, 2014**

HOST INTRO: THIS EVENING MARKS THE START OF YOM KIPPUR, THE HOLIEST DAY OF THE YEAR FOR JEWS. IT'S THE CULMINATION OF A WEEK OF INTENSE SOUL-SEARCHING CALLED THE DAYS OF AWE, WHICH BEGAN ON ROSH HASHANAH, THE JEWISH NEW YEAR. JEWS MARK THE OCCASION WITH THE CEREMONIAL SOUNDING OF THE SHOFAR, A RAM'S HORN, TO WAKE THEMSELVES TO THE HOPES AND POSSIBILITIES OF THE NEW YEAR. BUT WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU CAN'T *HEAR* ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TRADITIONS OF THE HOLIDAY? FROM KCRW'S INDEPENDENT PRODUCER PROJECT, JEN RICE HAS THE STORY.

Story:

ON A TYPICAL FRIDAY NIGHT IN NORTHRIDGE, TEMPLE AHAVAT SHALOM IS FILLED WITH MUSIC, SINGING, AND FAMILIES SCHMOOZING IN THE HALL. IN A SMALL CHAPEL NEXT DOOR, A QUIETER GROUP PRAYS. AMAZINGLY, THEY ARE TOTALLY UNDISTURBED BY ALL THE OUTSIDE NOISE. THAT'S BECAUSE THIS CONGREGATION IS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF.

Deborah Goldman: "I can imagine that it's a foreign thing to talk to god in sign, but it's also super natural and that's just the language."

DEBORAH GOLDMANN IS THE RABBI OF TEMPLE BETH SOLOMON OF THE DEAF. SHE AND INTERPRETER JAN SEELEY SHARE THE JOB OF TAKING AN ANCIENT TRADITION AND TRANSLATING IT FOR THE DEAF WORLD. DEBORAH GREW UP VERY HARD OF HEARING IN BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA AND SHE ONLY GOT HEARING AIDS ONCE SHE MOVED TO CALIFORNIA. NOW SHE CAN LEAD SERVICES IN FIVE LANGUAGES.

Deborah Goldman: "Spanish, Portuguese, English, Hebrew and sign language."

BUT THIS WEEK, DURING THE DAYS OF AWE, DEBORAH FINDS HERSELF AT THE *LIMITS* OF LANGUAGE. IT'S THE HIGH HOLIDAYS, A PERIOD OF SPIRITUAL WRESTLING THAT'S AT THE HEART OF THE JEWISH CALENDAR. JEWISH COMMUNITIES GATHER TO HEAR THE *SHOFAR'S* HAUNTING BLAST.

[SHOFAR SOUND HERE]

Deborah Goldman: "We don't know what the shofar blast should sound like. And in order to make sure we are doing the right thing, we blow the shofar in various combinations."

FOR JEWS, THE SHOFAR IS SIMULTANEOUSLY A VERY FAMILIAR AND FOREIGN SOUND. AN ANCIENT WAKE UP CALL FROM THE WORLD'S OLDEST ALARM CLOCK. FOR DEBORAH, IT'S MAINLY...A REALLY COMPLICATED QUESTION MARK.

Deborah Goldman: “How does a deaf person hear the shofar?”

MAKING AN UNHEARABLE SOUND RESONATE IS A SCIENCE.

Deborah Goldman: “That’s really thinking about how does sound move through the room and how do you get that sound to the person who wants to be aware of that sound.”

AT BETH SOLOMON, DEBORAH TRIES TO BREAK THE SOUND BARRIER BY FOCUSING ON THE SHOFAR’S VIBRATIONS. SHE ENCOURAGES EVERYONE TO PUT THEIR HANDS ON THE WOODEN PODIUM, OR BALLOONS, OR EVEN THE SHOFAR ITSELF.

Deborah Goldman: “We’re not commanded to blow the shofar, we’re commanded to hear the shofar. For most of in this room, that’s the challenge. I’m going to invite you to place yourselves where you hear the shofar’s vibrations the best.”

BEING DEAF MEANS A LOT OF DIFFERENT THINGS. AT BETH SOLOMON, YOU’VE GOT PEOPLE WITH COCHLEAR IMPLANTS, PEOPLE WHO ARE HARD OF HEARING, AND OTHERS WHO SIMPLY CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT SOUND IS. JOE SLOTNICK IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE SYNAGOGUE. HE SPEAKS AND SIGNS, WHILE JAN SEELEY INTERPRETS.

Joe Slotnick: “I’m stone deaf.”

JOE LOST HIS HEARING TO MENINGITIS WHEN HE WAS THREE. HIS PARENTS USED EVERY MEANS POSSIBLE TO KEEP HIM FROM FEELING ISOLATED IN THE WORLD. LOOKING BACK, JOE’S STILL ASTONISHED AT EVERYTHING HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED.

Joe Slotnick: “I’m amazed that I went to Harvard. I’m amazed. I don’t know how I did it.”

AFTER HARVARD, HE WORKED FOR DECADES IN COMPUTER PROGRAMMING. IT’S ALMOST AS IF NO ONE EVER TOLD HIM THAT HE’S DEAF. HE’S JUST LIVED *AROUND* IT. BUT THEN THIS TIME OF YEAR COMES AROUND. THE JEWISH SCHOLAR MAIMONIDES SAID THAT JEWS ARE OBLIGATED TO HEAR THE SOUND OF THE SHOFAR - WHICH IS SOMETHING THAT’S NOT PART OF HIS WORLD AT ALL.

Joe Slotnick: “I know some people love it and they’re very moved by it, but for me, no. I’m not- I have no concept of sound at all.”

IF ANYONE COULD STUDY AND READ HIS WAY INTO UNDERSTANDING, IT’S JOE. BUT HE CAN’T.

Joe Slotnick: “I can feel them but what does it mean? To me, it’s meaningless.”

OTHERS SAY THE SHOFAR TRULY SPEAKS TO THEM. FLORENCE HABERMAN IS A BETH SOLOMON MEMBER IN HER FIFTIES WITH A TONGUE PIERCING AND A HUGE SMILE. SHE WEARS HEARING AIDS, BUT EVEN STILL, SHE CAN ONLY HEAR LOUD SOUNDS. BUT FLORENCE DIDN'T ALWAYS LOVE SERVICES. HERE'S JAN SEELEY AGAIN -- SHE INTERPRETS FOR FLORENCE, WHO IS SIGNING.

Florence Haberman: "When I was a child during the high holidays I would sit and just fidget and cry. And they kept telling me to be quiet and sit still. Be quiet. And then they would blow the shofar..."

[Sound of the tekiyah gedolah shofar at Beth Solomon]

"And I immediately would hear that sound. Like it was coming right to me and pulling me. It's almost like the vibrations paint a picture. So it's very, it's chilling."

THE DAYS OF AWE ARE ABOUT WHAT JEWS CALL *TESHUVAH*, OR *RETURN*. IT MEANS RETURNING TO YOURSELF, APOLOGIZING FOR MISSTEPS, AND REMEMBERING WHAT REALLY MATTERS.. FLORENCE EXPERIENCES THE DAYS OF AWE AS AN *INCREDIBLY PERSONAL* FEELING OF RETURN.

Florence Haberman: "You know, even before my accident, I remember the music and when I come to temple or any time there's music I do remember it."

THE SHOFAR CAN MEAN MANY THINGS TO MANY PEOPLE. WHETHER IT'S THE PHYSICAL BLAST IN YOUR EAR OR AN INTERNAL CALLING, THE CONGREGANTS AT BETH SOLOMON FIND A WAY TO RETURN TO THEMSELVES WHILE LOOKING FORWARD TO THE YEAR AHEAD. FOR KCRW, I'M JEN RICE.