

Deaf And Blind Professor Finds Way To "Listen" To Shofar

How can one who is deaf and blind possibly listen to the sound of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah. The novel approach of Prof. Ira Cochon, blind, and later turning deaf, is described in the current (September) issue of OLOMEINU, the monthly magazine of Torah Umesorah, the national network of Yeshiva/Day Schools.

The story, "When Jewish hands are Smiling," is the heroic struggle for acceptance and participation in his Fair Lawn, New Jersey Synagogue, Shomrei Torah, by Professor Cochon. Affectionately known as "Doc," he is a professor of mechanical engineering at The New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark.

To overcome his blindness, he studied and mastered Braille. All his books, including the Siddur and Megillos, are in Braille. When he became deaf, he studied at the Helen Keller Center for the Deaf-Blind. Doc has a special card with the Braille alphabet and the letter printed next to each symbol. In that way, everyone in the Synagogue could "talk" to him and he could be part of the Congregation.

But how does Doc know when to respond?

The article tells of the clever approach: "His shoes have thin leather soles. He can feel the movement of people's feet. During the 'Shemoneh Esrei' prayer, he can feel the people stepping back and forth. He feels the three bounces on people's heels for 'Kodosh' in the 'Kedushah.' For the Kaddish and 'Shema' prayers, Doc devised a system of feeling and differentiating jaw movements.

Doc rapidly became part of the Synagogue, gaining acceptance and making 'contact through people's hands.' But the hearing of the Shofar seemed an impossible fulfillment, beyond Braille cards or 'telling' Doc about it.

However, a novel approach was devised and approved by the Rabbi of the Synagogue. Doc would touch the Shofar and feel the vibrations.

As Doc's hand was guided to the Shofar, the story relates, his touch was as delicate as a butterfly. The people held their breaths as their pulses started to race. This had never been done before.

The Gabbai (synagogue official) sounded 'Tekiyah'; Goose pimples appeared on Doc's arm where his sleeve had slid up. When the Gabbai

sounded 'Shevarim-Teruah,' Doc raised his head and his mouth opened. All the people knew he was feeling something wonderful. When the Gabbai completed the sounding of the Shofar, all the people had shared the experience with the Doc.

After the services, Doc tried to address the Congregants, but he got choked up. Finally, wiping away his tears, he said, "My dear friends, through you, I have had the most thrilling experience of my life. It would have been enough, if you just helped me become part of the Synagogue. It would have been enough if you just helped me answer the Kaddish. But you arranged for me to 'hear the blowing of the Shofar.'"

It is some three years that Doc has been 'hearing' the Shofar. He has become fully involved with the Synagogue, with every phase of the services. Doc likes to cite words of Helen Keller in relating to his own experiences: 'The most beautiful things in the world must be felt with the heart.'

NEW YORK (WNS) — A \$1 postage stamp honoring Dr. Bernard Revel, the first president of the institution that later became Yeshiva University, was issued by the U.S. Postal Service. The stamp honoring Dr. Revel is in the "Great American Series" and is the first in the series to cite a Talmudic scholar.

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