

# Fun and Games . . . PART I

By Morris Speizman

Be they Protestants, Catholics, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists,—even Jews—all congregations have memories of lighter moments in their group lives.

The synagogue in which I have worshipped and worked for over three decades is no exception. While some of the incidents portrayed were enacted in a spirit of severe earnestness at the time—in retrospect they were, shall we say—humorous. You can be the judge.

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First of all, I recall the "Great Organ Mystery." In the early 1930's or late 1920's, I don't recall which, the "Left Wing" elements of our congregation, then known as the Hebrew United Brotherhood (a typical misnomer) decided that an organ would enhance the services. After much acrimonious discussion at the Board and Congregational meetings, the organ was voted on, duly paid for, and delivered. That normally would have been the end of it, but not in those hectic days.

By some mysterious means, engineered by, I am told, one of our red-haired "Right Wing" members with the aid of others of a similar doctrinal mind, the organ was quietly removed in the dead of night and has never been heard of or been seen since. No one has admitted participation in this affair, but I do know that contributions from certain members were radically increased shortly thereafter, perhaps as thank offerings, or conscience money.

After we lived here for several years, we ran into the great "Shofar Crisis." The gentleman who acted as our reader for the High Holy Services, along with several other year-round functions, such as Shochet, Mohel, and other assorted duties, was faced with an increasing budget due to the growth of his family and his basic needs.

When he was first engaged, the congregation bought all of the fixtures for his little butcher shop, and our bright young lawyers at the time may or may not have retained title in the equipment. At any rate, over a period of years, it gradually disappeared into thin air and we had no further equity in it. (But that's another story.)

His original salary as our reader for the High Holy Days, etc. was set at about \$1000 or \$1200. Each June, he would approach the Board with a request for an increase in his salary. This would be tabled to the July meeting and held over to the August meeting. In August, the decision was usually a negative one. "We couldn't afford it." By the time the High Holy Days arrived, the situation had reached a crisis.

In addition to conducting the services himself, he was required to blow the Shofar. Even with the aid of an assist-

ant reader for the Shachrit services, etc., the task proved very hard on him. He barely got through the Rosh Hashanah services when the annual ultimatum was issued. Unless he could get a raise, he would not be able to officiate at the Yom Kippur services.

A hurried meeting of the Board was held and he got his raise. His strength returned and he was there in his full glory for Yom Kippur. This went on for several years until his stipend was increased to \$1800, at which point there was an adamant refusal on the part of the Board for further increases.

The same yearly routine was followed, but this time our good friend decided that he simply had had it. Without an increase, he would not complete the Yom Kippur services. So, after the Mussaf services on Yom Kippur, he disappeared.

The Ritual Committee checked on the situation, and was advised that he was just

too weak to continue for the Mincha and Ne'elah services, and had quietly walked home. His assistant (who happened to be his brother-in-law), a learned and gentle soul, in his later years, carried on for these services, but our problem was—who would blow the Shofar at the end of the Yom Kippur Day so that we could all go home properly inspired, refreshed and rededicated to Judaism.

Many, many years ago, I was a youngster in a small town in Canada. On Thursdays, when our Melamud was busy with his duties as a ritual slaughterer, we made it a practice to slip upstairs from the basement Cheder into the sanctuary where we would drink some of the wine and blow the Shofar, as children are wont to do. Being a member of the Bugle Band in the local high school, I quickly learned how to blow the Shofar. I usually received the major punishment when the humble teacher rushed back in.

Many, many years later when this Shofar crisis developed, it occurred to me that perhaps I could still blow. So, during the summer I quietly came into the Temple and did a little practicing.

To get back to Yom Kippur. The crisis was in full flower as the Ne'elah service approached its conclusion. We anxiously looked back at the door to see if our good friend would finally show up, and low and behold, it was already 5:12 p.m.-5:15 p.m. and no sign of him. Everybody stood up dur-

ing the Ne'elah services in those days and at the last moment our good Rabbi looked down at the expanse of faces and crooked his finger to motion me forward.

I walked to the Bimah with due deliberation, took hold of the Shofar, and the Good Lord must have been with me, because the Tekiah Gedolah was, if I say it myself, a classic one. Since then, I was known for many years as the "Harry James" of Seventh Street.

(Editor's Note: Part II will be in April's issue.)



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