



ShalomAZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption

"Prep for Awe: The Shofar that Wakes Us Up"

Rabbi Cosmo Panzetta

Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Passages: **Isaiah 58:1-7**; *Lev. 16:30-31; Is. 55:1-2, 7-9; Is. 56:1-3; Is. 57:15, 17-18; Is. 1:16-17; Matt. 23:23-26; James/Jacob 4:2-4; Eph. 5:1*

In the 6th month, Elul, the month of preparation before the 7th month of Tishri's "Days of Awe," God's mercy sounds like a shofar. *Yom Teruah* (Feast of Trumpets) is heaven's alarm to awaken our ears so we can *shema*—hear, internalize, and do—what ADONAI is saying as we approach Yom Kippur. Torah frames Yom Kippur as the day God cleanses His people: *"For on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you... From all your sins you will be clean before ADONAI"* (Lev 16:30). The point isn't theatrics; it's transformation. The High and Exalted One "dwells... with a contrite and humble spirit—to revive the spirit of the humble" (Isa 57:15). If that's where He dwells, that's where He wants us.

But our hearts drift. We can turn shofar blasts, fast days, and Shabbat observance into external routines that never reach the inside of the cup. Isaiah 55–56 invites *all who are thirsty* to come, to abandon our own ways and thoughts for His (Isa 55:1–2, 7–9), to *preserve justice* and *do righteousness* (Isa 56:1–2). Isaiah 58 is God's kind intervention—His preparatory shofar—so our devotion doesn't become empty religion. It exposes self-deception, unmasks transactional worship, and redirects us into a fast that looks like His heart: mercy, justice, and freedom for the crushed.

1. A SHOFAR AGAINST RELIGIOUS SELF-DECEPTION (Isaiah 58:1–2)

ADONAI tells Isaiah, *"Cry aloud... raise your voice like a shofar. Tell My people their transgression"* (Isa 58:1). The shock is who He addresses: not the disinterested, but the devout—people who *"seek Me day to day... delight to know My ways... ask Me for righteous judgments"* (Isa 58:2). They look like (*k'goi asher*) a nation doing righteousness, yet they've quietly abandoned *mishpat* (justice). Yeshua says it like this: *"You... tithe mint and dill and cumin, yet you have neglected the weightier matters of Torah—justice and mercy and faithfulness"* (Matt 23:23). When we only tidy the outside of the cup, we mistake activity for alignment.

Elul's shofar is mercy, not mockery. God shouts because the sleepy don't wake to whispers. He unmasks self-congratulating devotion that delights in His nearness while ignoring what He delights in—lifting burdens, defending the orphan, pleading for the widow (Isa 1:17). Even if we've been backsliding, He still says, *"I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him"* (Isa 57:18). The call is not to quit praying or worshiping or fasting, but to let the inside be cleansed so our practices carry His heart to the crushed.

2. A SHOFAR AGAINST TRANSACTIONAL WORSHIP (Isaiah 58:3–5)

The people's hidden script surfaces: *"Why have we fasted... and You do not see? Why have we afflicted our souls, yet You take no notice?"* (Isa 58:3). That's not surrender; that's leverage. It is Canaanite religion in a tallit—using sacred practice to pressure God. The LORD replies, *"In the day of your fast, you find your pleasure... you fast for strife and contention... You should not fast as you do today to make your voice heard on high"* (Isa 58:3–4). Fasting isn't a megaphone for my will; it's the quieting of my will so I can hear His. James/Jacob agrees: *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives"* (Jas 4:3).

God isn't anti-fast; He's anti-transaction. He's saving us from wasting holy practices on self-advancement. He asks, *"Is this the fast I have chosen...? Is it to bow one's head like a reed... will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to ADONAI?"* (Isa 58:5). The day acceptable to the LORD is the day my agenda is laid down. Prayer, giving, and service become beautiful again when they're expressions of love, not bargaining chips—when they pry my fingers off the steering wheel and place my hands in His.

3. A SHOFAR FOR MERCY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (Isaiah 58:6-7)

Here is the fast He chooses: *"to release the bonds of wickedness, to untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to tear off every yoke"* (Isa 58:6). That's Jubilee language. Shabbat-heart living. Not self-denial for show, but self-giving for freedom. It's imitation: *"Therefore be imitators of God, as dearly loved children"* (Eph 5:1). The One who said, *"Come... you who have no money"* (Isa 55:1) now says, *"Do what I do for others."* When fasting makes us more like the Father, the crushed meet His compassion through our hands.

He continues, *"Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked, to cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh and blood?"* (Isa 58:7). Fasting reframes empathy: one day of hunger awakens gratitude and opens our tables. This is not a one-day mood but a covenant life. We keep loosening, sheltering, sharing, and covering—even when it costs. That's how atonement-shaped mercy fills a year, not just a day.

CONCLUSION

Elul is preparation and the shofar is mercy. Isaiah 58 keeps us from performing our way through Yom Kippur and invites us to be transformed by God's heart. If my "fast" preserves *my* way while I'm appearing devout, I've missed Him. He wants *me*—and when He has me, He'll have my bread, my table, my cloak, my time, and my voice for the voiceless. Plan a fast that loosens, feeds, shelters, and covers. Answer His call with *Hineni*—"Here I am." Not my will, but Yours. Shape my fast to look like Your heart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Isaiah 58 begins with a shofar blast calling God's people to wake up. Where in your own spiritual life do you feel the Spirit sounding an "alarm" right now—something He wants you to notice, repent of, or realign before the Days of Awe?
2. Which "weightier matter" (justice, mercy, faithfulness) do you most tend to neglect while keeping religious forms?
3. How can you reshape your next fast from "to make my voice heard on high" to "to hear His voice"?
4. Who near you is currently under a "yoke," and what is one concrete step you can take to help loosen it this week?
5. Which of the four mercy actions (loosen, feed, shelter, cover) is most challenging for you? What would obedience look like anyway?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Avinu Malkenu, Our Father, Our King, blow the shofar in our souls. Wake us from self-deception and free us from transactional worship. Cleanse the inside of the cup. Give us Your heart for the crushed. Teach us to fast by loosening yokes, sharing bread, opening our doors, and covering the exposed. We say *Hineni*—here we are. Not our will, but Yours. Guide us in the way everlasting, and let our devotion delight Your heart.

B'Shem Yeshua, In Yeshua's Name, Amen.