

Remembrance of the Blast — 9/11 on Erev Rosh Hashanah 5787

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 11 September 2026

29 Elul 5786 · Friday, 11 September 2026 · Erev Rosh Hashanah 5787 · Day One tonight–Shabbat is zichron teruah · companion to silent-Day-One and horn-returns pieces

I. A Day That Already Knew How to Remember

This morning is the twenty-fifth anniversary of September 11, 2001. It is also 29 Elul — Erev Rosh Hashanah 5787. Candle-lighting tonight opens a New Year whose first day falls on Shabbat. On that first day the shofar will not sound. The Torah's other name for the day — *zichron teruah*, a remembrance of the blast — will carry the weight that the horn usually carries.

The coincidence is not a metaphor waiting to be harvested. It is a civic and liturgical fact that asks for careful speech. Two calendars land on one Friday: American public mourning for nearly three thousand murdered in New York, Washington, and a Pennsylvania field; Jewish preparation for judgment and return under a silent first day. Cheap rhyme would make the dead into props for High Holiday copy. That is forbidden here. So is revenge theater, conspiracy fog, and any sentence that treats mass murder as a sermon illustration.

What the day does permit — what it almost demands — is a harder claim: memory is public work. Not mood. Not content. Work.

II. Zichron as Public Work

Companion essays this week have already argued that when Day One falls on Shabbat, *zichron teruah* is assignment, not loss. Remembrance of the blast becomes the higher vessel. Palace and table coincide. *Ahavah* and *yirah* fly as two wings. Motzaei Shabbat restores *yom teruah*; memory prepared the ear so the returning sound can do honest public work.

Hold that pedagogy lightly beside September 11 without forcing them into one mashal.

American *zakhor* after 9/11 has always been public: names read aloud, silence kept at the hour the towers fell, first responders remembered by title and by absence at the dinner table. Jewish *zichron* before Rosh Hashanah is also public in an older sense: a people gathers under a claim none of them authored, and the books open whether the horn sounds or not. Both grammars refuse privatized grief that never becomes shared obligation.

The temptation on a double day is to collapse the two into a single emotional product. Resist it. 9/11's dead were murdered by a jihadist conspiracy that sought spectacle and domination. Rosh Hashanah's silence is a halakhic translation of coronation into memory. They rhyme only at the level of seriousness: a community that cannot remember accurately will not weigh honestly, and a community that cannot weigh honestly will not remain free.

Memory as public work means: tell what happened without embroidery; refuse to let fear become the only civic language; keep the difference between mourning and mobilization clear enough that children can still tell them apart.

III. Covenant Against an Empire of Fear

Mass murder tries to teach a lesson. The lesson is usually wrong: that ordinary life is foolish; that appearance in public is naïve; that the only rational politics is permanent emergency.

Covenantal republicanism answers differently. Non-domination is not the promise that no one will ever try to kill you. It is the claim that free persons and free peoples refuse to let the would-be dominator write the terms of their standing. After 9/11, Americans rebuilt routines of flight, work, and assembly under new security burdens — imperfectly, sometimes clumsily, sometimes at real cost to liberty. The moral question was never only “how much security?” It was whether fear would become the sovereign, or remain a steward under higher law.

Jewish life already knew that grammar. Guarding the gate so the congregation can hear the shofar — or, this year on Day One, so the congregation can remember the blast in quiet — is not the same as living as if the gate is already broken. Preparedness is covenantal. Panic is an empire of another kind.

On Erev Rosh Hashanah that distinction matters twice. First, because the Yamim Nora'im ask for *yirah* that stands upright, not for dread that flattens persons into prey. Second, because diaspora communities enter High Holy Days under real security costs — and must still refuse the flattening that treats every Jew as a proxy for a government, and every synagogue as a battlefield by default.

IV. Targets and Citizens

Jews were among the murdered on September 11, as they are among the citizens who rebuilt afterward. That dual fact is easy to lose in polemics that want Jews only as symbols.

As targets, Jews know a longer pattern: antisemitic violence travels as ideology even when each city keeps its own police and architecture. As citizens, Jews refuse the complementary error — the flattening that collapses Jewish bodies into Israeli policy, American policy, or whoever's grievance is loudest this week. Covenant does not require naïveté about enemies. It does require honest weights: name the murderers and their ideology without smearing a people; name Jewish vulnerability without turning Jews into a permanent exception to civic belonging.

A related soft note, kept separate on purpose: Pittsburgh's Tree of Life community has this week modeled memorial moving toward civic education, and Federation language of preparedness rather than panic for the High Holidays. That is a local grammar of *zakhor* and guarding. It is not 9/11. Oct. 27, 2018, and Sept. 11, 2001, are different crimes, different cities, different perpetrators. Memorial care means refusing to braid them into one content package. Tone can travel — soft ask, no gore, the dead are not copy — without making one atrocity illustrate the other.

V. Diaspora Security Without Collapsing Peoples into States

High Holy Day security is now ordinary diaspora stewardship: coordination with police, grant-funded upgrades, ushers who know which door faces which street. The cost is real. Every dollar for cameras and training is a dollar that could have gone to schools and camps. Stewardship still comes first. That is not militarizing shul. It is keeping the possibility of prayer.

What must not ride along is the political habit of treating diaspora Jews as hostages to whoever's foreign ministry is in the news. Sanctions debates, election seasons, and war fog all tempt that collapse. Opinion pages this week have described Israel's New Year as a "perfect storm" of converging pressures — elections, war, European measures, American drift, antisemitism — as analysis, not as a mood survey. Even if the storm metaphor fits Jerusalem's politics, it does not license treating a Jew in London, Pittsburgh, or Brooklyn as an embassy with a pulse.

Civic appearance after mass murder — and after years of antisemitic incident counts that communities track with weary precision — means showing up. It means refusing both amnesia and permanent emergency. It means letting children see adults who take security seriously enough to notice something odd, and lightly enough that the holiday is still return, not dread theater.

On this Erev, that discipline pairs with the silent Day One ahead. Remembrance of the blast — liturgical and civic — asks for ears trained in quiet. Motzaei Shabbat will restore sound. Neither memory nor sound is revenge. Both are forms of public standing under a King whose measures are honest.

VI. What Not to Do With the Coincidence

Practical refusals for a double day:

1. **Do not instrumentalize the dead.** No "as the towers fell, so too the shofar..." copy. No RH sermon that needs 9/11 to feel deep.
2. **Do not feed conspiracy.** The record of who attacked, and why, is not a mystery novel for the feed.
3. **Do not collapse Jews into governments.** Critique states; do not bill the bill to synagogue doors.
4. **Do not conflate memorials.** Pittsburgh's Oct. 27 and America's Sept. 11 share a moral universe of mourning and vigilance. They are not interchangeable exhibits.
5. **Do not let fear become the year's first sovereign.** *Yirah* before Heaven is not panic before men. Preparedness that still says *come gather* is the covenantal temperature.

VII. Close

Twenty-five years on, September 11 still asks for names, silence, and fidelity to what happened. Tonight the Jewish year turns under a calendar that names the first day as remembrance of a blast the horn will not make until Motzaei Shabbat. Two remembrances. One Friday. No forced mashal.

Memory as public work: tell the truth about murder; refuse the empire of fear; appear as citizens who will not be flattened; guard the door so prayer remains possible; keep *zichron* from becoming spectacle and security from becoming the whole of Jewish life.

The Field of Elul closes into palace mode. The silent day refuses the prop. The returning blast will ask whether 5787's measures are honest. Between those liturgies sits this civic anniversary — not as content, but as a demand that a free people still know how to remember without being ruled by what it remembers.

May the memories of the murdered on September 11 be for a blessing.
Shanah tova u'metukah — may 5787 be written with remembrance intact, fear refused as sovereign, and the teruah's later public work aimed at honest weights.

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