

Shofar, So Good: **Having A Blast On the High Holy Days**

SHOFAR PROGRAM GOALS:

1. RE-INTRODUCING THE SHOFAR CORPS

Rosh HaShana is called “Yom Teru'ah”ⁱ (Num. 29:1) - “Day of Sounding the Shofar” – and it is a mitzvah to hear the Shofar on Rosh HaShanahⁱⁱ which is why it occurs in the center of the liturgy.

In every congregation and community there are shut-ins or congregants who have relatives in your community who are home-bound who can not attend Rosh HaShanah worship services.. There are Jews in community nursing homes, assisted living facilities and hospitals who will not be in synagogue for Rosh HaShanah; they often miss the opportunity to hear the Shofar, which is for most Jews the highlight of the High Holy Day service.

Then let the synagogue come to them! Train volunteers – adults and youth, men and women who wish to learn – to blow Shofar. It is best to begin in the Spring, possibly at Shavuot because the experience at describes the giving of the Torah accompanied by the sounding of the Shofar.

Students can practice privately and then blow for the congregational minyan each morning for the month of Elul, fulfilling the ancient custom while gaining experience in blowing the Shofar publicly. Each Rabbi should decide whether a minor can blow Shofar for the Elul minyan, even for the sake of education, and for those who cannot attend Rosh HaShanah services.

The synagogue can provide Shofarot and individuals should be encouraged to purchase their own Shofar through the synagogue Gift Shop. Every home's ritual collection should have at least one shofar – joining their library, their Hanukiyot, Shabbat candlesticks, havdalah set, etc.

I have always suggested that each congregant visiting to purchase at least one Shofar for their family – if not one for each individual in the family – and one Shofar as a gift to the synagogue. It has worked in various communities very well over the years.

2. SHOFAR BLOWING COMPETITION

Offer to instruct students in the school – or Day School – of whatever age. Provide the opportunity to purchase Shofarot and share those owned by the synagogue or school as much as possible.

One can have a competition by classes and grades culminating with a school competition. Standards for judging would be clarity of notes, distinct notes, correct sequencing of notes, and also the sense of “spirituality” that each “baal tokeah” brings to the mitzvah. You can offer certificates (I am a big fan of each participant having a wall “collection” of awards from the school.)

You may use the winners to blow Shofar at the Pre-School and classes before the holidays, or they can also sound the Shofar at

each of your High Holy Day service.

Lastly, some of them will be ecstatic to be selected as representatives of the congregation, day school or agency in the community for the Shofar Corps as described above.

3. BRASS INSTRUMENT SPECIALISTS

The brass musicians in the congregation need to be in a special division for any competition or opportunity to blow Shofar for the congregation and community. They have a special advantage because of the similarity of the Shofar mouthpiece to the trumpet or coronet mouthpiece.

4. “ECHO SHOFAR PROGRAM” FOR ROSH HaSHANAH

An old brass technique for trumpet/coronet is to have a primary musical sequence repeated thereafter from a distance as if it were an echo. This is especially useful for the relatively short sequences of shofar blasts.

Plan to have the mitzvah blasts from the bimah called by the makri and then blown first by the tokiah. After each blast sequence, another Shofar repeats the blast at the back of the congregation, or from various corners of the sanctuary as “echoes.” While it is a bit dramatic, it won’t be forgotten; moreover it enables more people to be involved in the services. Since the tokiah blows the mitzvah sequence, then the “echoes” could be blown by minors or women where otherwise they may be permitted to do so.

Consider using different Shofarot “voices” such that there will be sounds in “soprano,” “tenor,” “alto,” and “baritone” keys, based upon the type of shofar: its length and the quality of the baal tokiah (sheep, goat, ram, kudu, ayal, etc.)

THE SHOFAR SERVICEⁱⁱⁱ

1. The Shofar is sounded immediately after the Haftarah from the bimah,^{iv} the same place from which the Torah is read.^v
2. The Shofar service begins with Psalm 47^{vi} because the Midrash refers to the sounding of the Shofar.^{vii}
3. The Psalm is followed by seven verses, the first six forming an acrostic which spell the phrase “destroy Satan.”
4. The Shofar is covered until it is time to sound it.^{viii} Before sounding the Shofar before the *Musaf*, the congregation may sit before they rise to hear it, and hence it is called *teki'ot meyushav* ("sitting" + “teki'ot”) to distinguish it from the second series, which is heard during the *Musaf Amidah*, for which the congregation has been standing all the time). The tokeah recites two berakhot: (a) "Blessed be Thou O Lord our God King of the universe, who has sanctified us by Thy commandments and has instructed us to hear the call of the Shofar;" and (b) "Blessed be Thou... who has kept us in life, has sustained us and privileged us to reach this season of the year."^{ix}
5. Some communities – it is my custom – that we sound 100 blasts of the Shofar:^x [1] that we sound 30 blasts during the Shofar

Service immediately after the Torah Service; [2] 30 blasts by the Rabbi during the Silent Amidah; [3] 30 blasts during the repetition of the Amidah concluding each of the three major portions; [4] 10 final blasts before the last line of the Reader's Kaddish concluding the Rosh HaShana liturgy.

6. Sequence of soundings:

A. *Shofar Service* After Torah

Tekiah, Shevarim-Teruah, Tekiah (3x)

Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah (3x)

Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah (3x)

7. Congregation and Hazzan then recite four verses responsively beginning with Ashrei.

8. If the tokeah is unable to complete the prescribed sounds, another person may take over provided s/he was present when the benedictions were recited.

9. Additional Soundings of Shofar To Complete 100 Blasts

A. *Sounding during Silent Amidah*

Tekiah, Shevarim-Teruah, Tekiah (3x)

Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah (3x)

Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah (3x)

B. *Malkhuyot in Musaf Repetition*

Tekiah, Shevarim-Teruah, Tekiah (3x)

C. *Zikhronot in Musaf Repetition*

Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah (3x)

D. *Shofarot in Musaf Repetition*

Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah (3x)

E. *Before last line of Reader's Kaddish concluding Musaf*

1. Ashkenazim: Add 30 after Kaddish

Titqbel Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah (3x)

Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah (3x)

Tekiah, Shevarim-Teruah, Tekiah (3x)

2. Ashkenazim: Add 10 after Kaddish Yatom

Titqbel Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah

Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah

Tekiah, Shevarim-Teruah, Tekiah G'dolah^{xi}

3. Sefardim only require 10 at Kaddish Titqabel

Titqbel Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah

Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah

Tekiah, Shevarim-Teruah, Tekiah G'dolah

BACKGROUND ON THE SHOFAR AND THE HIGH HOLY DAYS

1. THE DAYS OF AWE

The term “Yamim Nora'im” was first used for the High Holy Days by the Rabbi Jacob HaLevi Moellin (1365-1427,) which is relatively late in the evolution of this holiday period. The sounding of the Shofar is the call to our individual repentance (Moellin).^{xii}

“Man's sin is his clinging to the lower rather than the higher self. His sin may express itself in deeds done and in deeds not done. . . . every step forward in his quest for perfection is a return to God.” (Bokser, Judaism, p.236)

What had once been a time of sacrifices and sounding the shofar in the Biblical period evolved into a “Yom HaDin” (Day of Judgment) by the time of the Talmud (Mishna Rosh HaShana 1:2). The month of Ellul was added as a time to begin preparation for the Yamim Nora'im, and then they were extended to include Sukkot and Hoshana Rabba. Thereafter, it was natural to become a period of reflection, meditation, worship and repentance to earn God's gracious judgment.

2. THE SHOFAR AND THE HIGH HOLY DAYS

During the year, the synagogue “Shofar” - most often a ram's horn^{xiii} – is put away in the Some synagogues have more than one shofar (pl. shofarot) and more often today they use a long twisted gazelle horn known popularly as a “Yemenite” shofar. Today, we are also busy collecting different shofarot from kosher animals: goat, sheep, kudu, oryx, gazelle – and my own research shows that we ought to consider creating new shofarot from bison and buffalo horns.

Of course, we may not use cow horns or horns from an animal in the cow species biologically. The horn of a cow or bull is called in Hebrew “keren” and not “Shofar.” In addition, the cow/bull horn is forbidden because of sin of the Golden Calf committed by the Israelites coming out of .

When the month of Ellul arrives, the shofar is taken out, cleaned and blown each day preceding the High Holy Days. In some communities, one person blows each morning – except the morning before Rosh HaShana - to regain his/her expertise, and in other communities different people blow shofar to practice their skill.

On Rosh HaShana – except on Shabbat^{xiv} – the Shofar Service occurs

after the Torah Service for a total of 30 blasts. During the Silent Musaf Amidah (“Additional”) Service it is blown customarily 30 times and then during the repetition of the Amidah it is blown again for 30 blasts. At the end of the Reader's Kaddish, the last ten blasts of the Shofar are sounded for a total of 100 blasts. The next time the Shofar is heard is when it is blown to signal the end of Yom Kippur.

3. WHAT IS THE SEQUENCE OF BLASTS IN BLOWING SHOFAR

(a) On Rosh Ha-Shanah, Psalm 47 is recited seven times before the sounding of the *shofar*. This is symbolic of the seven circuits that the Israelites made around before the wall fell down at the blasts of the *shofar*, and of the seven heavens through which prayers must penetrate in order to reach the throne of God.

(b) The Bible refers to two kinds trumpet sounds: *teki'ah* and *teru'ah* (Num. 10:5–8). The Mishnah (RH 4:9) describes the *teki'ah* as a long blast and the *teru'ah* as three *yevavot*, a wavering crying blast. It prescribes three sets of *shofar* sounds since the word *teru'ah* is mentioned in the Bible three times (Lev. , 25:9 and Num. 29:1), each set to consist of a *teki'ah*, a *teru'ah* and *teki'ah* thrice repeated (RH 33bf.).

In the talmudic period, doubt arose as to the exact nature of the *teru'ah*. Some held that it was a moaning sound (*genuhei genah*) and others that it was an outcry (*yelulei yelal*). According to the first opinion the sound was *shevarim* (broken sounds), while in the second view it was *teru'ah*—a tremolo of nine staccato notes.

(c) Rabbi Abbahu reconciled the difference by deciding that the first set of sounds should include both *shevarim* and *teru'ah*, i.e., *teki'ah, shevarim—teru'ah tekihah*, while the other two sets were to be composed as follows: *teki'ah, shevarim, teki'ah*; and *teki'ah, teru'ah, teki'ah* (*ibid.*). The *teki'ah* (blowing) is a glissando which begins on a lower note and swells into a higher. The *teru'ah* (alarm) is a series of staccato blasts upon the lower note. The *shevarim* (tremolo) is an alternation of higher and lower notes. The concluding note of each of the two series is a *teki'ah gedolah* (great blast); this is a long drawn-out note explained as a sign of the removal of the Divine Presence, hermeneutically deduced from Exodus 19:13: "When the ram's horn sounds long, they shall come up to the mount."

(d) The second series, the *teki'ot me'ummad* ("standing teki'ot") is heard three times during the reader's repetition of the Musaf (in the Sephardi rite also in the silent Amidah) at the conclusion of each one of its major sections (Malkhuyot—the kingship of God; Zikhronot—the remembrance of the merit of our ancestors; and Shofarot—hope for the coming of the Messianic Era to be ushered in by the sound of the shofar). In some communities it is also customary to sound up to a total of one hundred sounds at the conclusion of the service (see Rosh Ha-Shanah).

4. WHAT KINDS OF ANIMAL HORNS MAY BECOME A SHOFAR – AND WHY

Normally the Shofar must be a ram's horn. Theoretically the horn (not antler) of any kosher animal except that of a cow or a domestic ox in the cow family may be used, but the ram's horn is used because of its association with the binding of Akedah.

We know of the so-called Yeminite shofar which is a kudu horn, and we now have small quantities of the previously extinct "ayal" (oryx gazelle) which are being replenished in from South African species. (For other kinds of kosher Shofarot which haven't yet been made popular see my website www.jewishfreeware.org).

The shofar by custom should be bent or curved to symbolize a humble spirit appropriate on Rosh HaShanah. There are also Shofarot in some communities that are bent but at the same time are somewhat flattened rather than round.

The Shofar may not be painted or even covered according to some, but others hold that it may be decorated with carved designs. The essential rule is that the natural sound of the Shofar is not changed and the mouthpiece cannot be covered with gold.^{xx}

The Shofar cannot be used if it is cracked unless it has a minimum of six inches between the crack and the mouthpiece. Similarly, it cannot be used if the crack is more than half its width.

5. MODERN USES FOR THE SHOFAR

In about 400 C.E. in , the Shofar was sounded to announce a death (MK 27b). During the Middle Ages also, it was blown on fasts (see Ta'an. 1:6), at excommunications (see Sanh. 76 and MK 16a), and at funerals. On Friday afternoon, six blasts were sounded at various intervals. At the first *teki'ah*, the laborers in the fields ceased their work. At the second, shops were closed and city laborers ceased to work. The third signaled that it was time to kindle the Sabbath lights. And the fourth, fifth, and sixth were a *teki'ah*, *teru'ah* and *teki'ah* formally ushering in the Sabbath (Shab. 35b).

In modern times the Shofar is used at the inauguration of a new president of . During the Six-Day War in June 1967, the chief rabbi of the army blew it at the Western Wall after its liberation by the Israel Defense Forces, using the same *shofar* which he had sounded on in 1956. More and more in modern the Shofar has been used to mark various solemn occasions, especially by the oriental communities.

6. OTHER USES

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7. MEANINGS OF THE SHOFAR

Most Jewish philosophers attempted to explain the significance of the Shofar.

A. R. Saadiah Gaon offered ten reasons for sounding it:

- (1) to proclaim the sovereignty of God, since it was the custom to sound the *shofar* at a coronation;
- (2) to herald the beginning of the ten days of repentance;
- (3) as a reminder to be faithful to the teachings of the Torah, since the *shofar* was heard at the giving of the Torah;
- (4) as a reminder of the prophets, the teachers of righteousness, who raised their voices like the *shofar* to touch our consciences;
- (5) to the sound of trumpets the fell, and to the sound of trumpets it will be restored;
- (6) as a reminder of the *Akedah*, since the ram which was substituted for Isaac was caught in the thicket by its horns;
- (7) to inspire awe ("Shall the *shofar* be blown in the city and the people not be afraid?");
- (8) as a summons to the on the Day of Judgment to be judged;
- (9) as a reminder that the *shofar* will call together 's scattered remnants to return to the ; and

10. as a reminder of the day of resurrection, the return to life (quoted by Abudarham (Jerusalem, 1959 ed.), 269f.).

B. Moses Maimonides gives a moving interpretation of the sounding of the Shofar often included in the prayer book: "Awake O sleepers from your sleep, O slumberers arouse ye from your slumbers, and examine your deeds, return in repentance and remember your Creator" (Yad, Teshuvah 3:4).

7. VOCABULARY

1. tokeah – the one who blows the Shofar.
2. Shofar – the ram's horn or “horn” from a kosher animal blown during the service on Rosh HaShana and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur.

3. makri – the one who “calls” and indicates what particular notes are to be blown by the tokeah

- iTeruah means both the sound of the ram's horn or a silver trumpet (ruah=vibrating sound) which possibly meant that the teruah was sounded during Biblical and periods not necessarily only with the Shofar.
- iiOne must hear the actual sound of the Shofar and not an echo of the Shofar. This law meaningful to Jews at the time of the Inquisition in when the so-called “Marranos” would go out into caves to sound the Shofar; the echo from the cave did not fulfill the mitzvah. Jews in Arab lands were equally careful because the Muslims were frightened by the Shofar knowing that the Messiah would return with the sound of the Shofar.
- iiiIt is customary to leave the Torah scrolls on the bimah when blowing the Shofar and to return them to the Aron HaKodesh after the first set of blasts known as “tekiyot d'meyushav” (the blasts while seated).
- ivIt is customary that the tokeah stands on the bimah where the Torah is read because the bimah is compared to the altar in the ancient and the Torah compared to the sacrifices (Magen Avraham).
- vBy calling the makri and the tokeah up to the bima - and in some communities the tokeah is called up to the Torah - they are put into a spiritual and joyful frame of mind, as the TaNaKH teaches “God's commandments are righteous, gladdening the heart” (Psalms 19:9).
- viKorach was the arch rebel against God and His anointed leaders in the desert, and he was punished by being swallowed up alive into the earth; but, his sons disassociated themselves from their father's wickedness. Thus this is an appropriate Psalm to recite.
- viiIn some communities there is a slight intermission to provide time for the tokeah, makri and the shaliach tzibbur to immerse themselves in a mikveh. This would signal to them and to the congregation the greater sanctity of the sounding of the Shofar. There is another reason for the intermission: some have taught that no one should pray for more than three hours straight which would be the case if there were no intermission between the Torah reading and the Shofar service and Musaf.
- viiiSince the ram was concealed from Abraham while building the altar on which to bind Isaac, we conceal the Shofar when reciting the berakha. We also cover the Shofar let it be “shamed” when we recite the berakha on hearing the actual sound of the Shofar and not on blowing the Shofar.
- ixGenerally, when a Rabbi is present the Rabbi would be the makri. If there is any doubt about a particular Shofar sound was valid, a Rabbi would know if the tokeah must blow that particular sound again.
- xThe custom of 100 blasts of the Shofar corresponds to the “hundred cries of the mother of Sisera” waiting for her son to return from battle with Debora and Barak (Judges -9).
- xiIt is customary to elongate the final Shofar sounded called tekiah g'dolah, the “great” tekiah. This is similar to the drawing out of the Jubilee horn that signaled the departure of the Divine presence from (Maharil).
- xiiWe want God to be merciful to us and forgive us no matter what our record of actions has been. Therefore we appear before God in the way we appeared before Him on that great day at Sinai, when the sound of the Shofar was heard - “growing stronger and stronger” Ex.). Then God will remember that day as well and regard us mercifully and with love for us, insuring that we will be inscribed for a New Year of health, joy and a world at peace.
- xiiiThe Shofar is made out of the ram's horn in memory of the ram which was offered instead of Isaac who allowed himself to be bound and placed on the altar as Abraham's sacrifice. Rabbi Abuhu said: why do we use a Shofar made of ram's horn? . . . God said: sound the tekiot to Me through a Shofar made of a ram's horn, and I will remember the binding of Isaac and think of you as though you also were ready to offer your lives to me.
- xiv There are two references to Rosh HaShana: Leviticus 23:24 which speaks of “a remembrance of the blast of the teruah...” which the Rabbis taught referred to Rosh HaShana occurring on Shabbat. When Rosh HaShana occurs on weekdays the phrase “a day of sounding the horn – yom teruah – for you” Numbers 29:1.
- xvMishnah Rosh HaShana 3:3-4 does describe that the Shofar for Rosh HaShana was from a wild goat, straight and with a gold-covered mouthpiece.

This HADASH #46 was prepared for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. It is the second HADASH sent in September 2005. (See HADASH #45 "Tashlikh-Brachot-Al Het- Al Ha Tov".)

Consider introducing "Shofar, So Good" this year... or save it for Rosh Hashana 2006.
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