

INTRODUCTION TO תְּקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר 1

Rabbi Arnold P. Bloch in his book: *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, Ktav, 1980, and Professor Zev Safrai in his *משנת ארץ ישראל* עם פירוש ספראי for *מסכת ראש השנה*, Michlelet Lifschitz, 2011, provide excellent introductions to תְּקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר. This week we will review the introduction provided by Rabbi Bloch. Next week we will read a translation of Professor Safrai's introduction. Rabbi Bloch's introduction begins on page 141 of his book:

Customs of Rosh HaShanah and the Days of Penitence

INTRODUCTION

A DAY OF BLOWING

THE DEVELOPMENT OF the “day of blowing” (*yom teruah*; Num. 29:1) into the second most solemn day of the Jewish religious calendar is discussed in my book *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* (chap. 2).

The object of this chapter is to trace the evolution of numerous customs which have enhanced the significance of the period of judgment. The outstanding Rosh HaShanah ritual, the blowing of the shofar, is central to the very essence of the holiday and is featured in its biblical name. As late as the first century C.E., Philo the Alexandrian identified Rosh HaShanah by the name “The Festival of the Shofar.” A midrashic text, dating from the second century, similarly calls this holiday “The Festival of the Shofar” (*Midrash Tadshe* 6).

Considering the importance of the shofar, one may wonder why the text does not explicitly name the instrument which is used on Rosh HaShanah. The first reference to the blowing of an instrument on Rosh HaShanah (*teruah*) is found in Leviticus: “In the seventh month shall be a day of rest unto you, a memorial blast [*zichron teruah*], a holy proclamation” (23:24). In the second reference to the holiday, the designation reads “a day of blowing” (*yom teruah*; Num. 29:1). The crucial word in both references is *teruah*, a series of staccato sounds on a musical instrument. The specific nature of the instrument is not indicated.

A *teruah* may be produced on a horn (Lev. 25:9), trumpet (Num. 10:5), or cymbal (Ps. 105:5). The *teruah* of the Rosh HaShanah text is therefore ambiguous and it fails to provide a clue as to the identity of the instrument.

The term *zichron* (“memorial” or “remembrance”), which is linked to the *teruah* in Leviticus (23:24), likewise fails to shed light on the particular instrument which is ritually acceptable. The significance of *zichron* is inherent in its definition, a sound which will arouse G-d's remembrance (or judgment) of his people. The Talmud points to the historical association

between the shofar and the ram which replaced Isaac at the time of the Akedah (*Rosh HaShanah* 16a). G-d will recall the loyalty of Abraham and Isaac and temper justice with mercy. In light of this tradition, *zichron* is associated with the horn of a ram. However, the association is not implicit in the word itself. Indeed, *zikaron* is also linked to the blowing of trumpets (Num. 10:9-10).

THE TRUMPET IN ANCIENT RITUALS

To the average Jewish layman of the Temple era, the trumpet had greater religious significance than the shofar. Trumpets were much more visible because they were used in conjunction with many sacrificial rites. Their sacredness was emphasized by the fact that only kohanim were qualified to blow them. This restriction was scrupulously observed. In the procession led by Nehemiah on the occasion of the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem (5th cent. B.C.E.), a special contingent of kohanim blew the trumpets (Neh. 12:35).

The trumpet gained a position of great prominence in the Second Temple. A large band of instrumentalists was introduced in the Second Temple to provide a musical background for the Levite chorus. Temple regulations permitted the employment of 120 trumpeters (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Kelei HaMikdash* 3:4).

In addition to their ritual functions in the Tabernacle, trumpets were also used for administrative purposes. Moses summoned and dispatched the tribal encampments with blasts of the trumpets. Trumpets were likewise used in time of war to invoke God's blessing (Num. 10:8-10). According to a rabbinic tradition, Moses concealed the silver trumpets before his death. They were not used again until the reign of David (*Barnidbar Rabbah* 15:12). Thereafter they were placed on display in the Temple. The high regard for the trumpets was evidenced by their use on occasions of public joy and celebration, such as coronations (II Kings 11:14).

In the course of time, the trumpets assumed a symbolic identification with the Temple. The left-hand bas-relief of the Arch of Titus portrays the destruction of the Temple by depicting the removal of the essential holy vessels, the golden table, the menorah, and the silver trumpets. When Bar Kochba, the leader of the rebellion against Rome (132-135), sought to publicize his plan to rebuild the Temple, he engraved his coins with an image of the trumpets.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE SHOFAR

Despite the veneration of the trumpet, the Torah singled out one history-making occasion which was highlighted by the sounds of the shofar. "And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount and the sound of the shofar, exceedingly loud" (Exod. 19:16). "And the sound of the shofar waxed louder and louder" (ibid. 19:19). The shofar was also used to announce the commencement of the Jubilee Year. "Then shalt thou make proclamation with a blast

of the shofar. . . throughout all your land” (Lev. 25:9). Why was the shofar given preference on these two occasions?

The shofar was a mass-produced instrument, relatively cheap, a common household article in the homes of farmers, shepherds, and many urbanites. It was used as a means of communication in everyday life. The shofar was a less sophisticated instrument than the trumpet, and its use required little skill. Temple rituals and military strategy required only two trumpeters. However, when an occasion called for mass participation of wind instrumentalists, it was imperative to use the shofar. That was the reason for Joshua’s use of shoferot prior to the fall of Jericho (Josh. 6:4). Even if Moses’ trumpets had not been concealed, Joshua needed seven instruments, and that many trumpets were not available. The same was true of Gideon’s army, which used three hundred shoferot (Judg. 7:16).

The need for a readily available instrument may explain the use of the shofar on Mount Sinai and on the occasion of the pronouncement of the Jubilee Year. The revelation on Mount Sinai was one of the most decisive experiences of the Jewish people. Like the exodus from Egypt, it must forever be recalled by the Jewish people in order to reinforce the faith. “You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians . . . Now therefore, if you will hearken unto my voice, and you will keep the covenant, you shall be my chosen (Exod. 19:45). The celebration of Passover was to be an annual reminder of the exodus. The ritual blast of the shofar would similarly recall by association the revelation on Mount Sinai.

Ancient Jews, long before the establishment of the synagogue, engaged in prayer. Many of them accompanied their prayers with song and music. The psalmist urged the people to “praise him with the blast of the shofar” (150:5). One of the traditional purposes of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah is to recall the memory of Mount Sinai. The obligation to blow an instrument on that day devolved upon each individual Jew (*Rosh HaShanah* 33a). As a mass-participation mitzvah, the instrument, for practical reasons, had to be a shofar. It seems obvious that the shofar was used on Mount Sinai so that subsequent generations of Jews would readily recall the experience whenever they blew the shofar.

The injunction to proclaim a Jubilee Year was similarly addressed to all the Jews throughout the land. It was important that even those residing in the most remote parts of the country be immediately informed of the advent of the Jubilee (*Sifra, Behar* 16). This was accomplished by means of blasts of wind instruments. In view of the required mass participation in the blowing of the instrument, the text specifically indicated that the shofar was to be used for this purpose.

TALMUDIC INTERPRETATION

The talmudic conclusion that a shofar is to be blown on Rosh HaShanah is based on a derivation from the use of the shofar in a Jubilee Year. “How do we know that the same [shofar on the Jubilee] applies to Rosh HaShanah? The text reads: ‘And you shall make a proclamation with the blast of the shofar on the tenth day of the seventh month, on Yom Kippur.’ The phrase ‘of the seventh month’ is superfluous [the date of Yom Kippur is well

known]. The reason for the insertion of this phrase is to indicate that the blast of the 'seventh' [Rosh HaShanah] is governed by the same law as this one [Jubilee]. Just as this one requires a shofar, so does the blast of Rosh HaShannah" (*sifra, Behar* 15). This halachic deduction is in accord with our conclusion based on historical grounds.

One may still wonder why the Rosh HaShanah text failed to mention the shofar as was done in the texts on the revelation and the Jubilee. The answer may be found in the Rosh HaShanah text itself, which differs in one respect from all the other holiday texts. The norm in all the other texts is to cite the name of the holiday and follow it up with its basic function. Thus, "On the seventh day is the Sabbath . . . no manner of work shall be done" (Lev. 23:3). "On the fifteenth day of the month is the Feast of Matzot. . . seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" (Lev. 23:6). "You shall number fifty days, and you shall present a meal-offering to G-d (Lev. 3:16). "On the tenth day of the seventh month is Yom HaKippurim . . . you shall afflict your souls" (Lev. 23:27). "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month is the Feast of Sukkot. . . You shall dwell in sukkot seven days" (Lev. 23:34, 42). However, in the case of Rosh HaShanah, the text describes it as a day of "a memorial blast" (Lev. 23:24) and does not follow with an injunction mandating the blowing of the instrument, as was done in the Jubilee text (Lev. 25:9).

Names of holidays reflect in general terms the character of the occasion but do not include specific details of its rituals. The outstanding characteristic of Rosh HaShanah is the blowing of an instrument. That is reflected in the biblical name *yom teruah*, a "day of blowing." A description of the type of instrument should not be incorporated in the name of the holiday. That detail properly belongs in a follow-up injunction which mandates the performance of a function. As we have already mentioned, there is no such mandatory sentence in the case of Rosh HaShanah. This still leaves us with an unresolved question. Why was such a sentence omitted from the Rosh HaShanah text?

Halachists may suggest an answer to the question by pointing to a legal issue which was in contention among the principal medieval rabbinic scholars. Is one obligated to listen to the sounds of a shofar, or must he blow it? According to Maimonides, the former is correct. The benediction should read: ". . . who commanded us to listen to the sounds of the shofar." Rabbenu Tam, however, disagreed. The obligation is to blow the shofar and the benediction should be amended to read: ". . . who commanded us to blow the shofar" (*Zevin, Moadim BaHalachah*, p. 41). It may be argued that if the Rosh HaShanah text had included an injunction "to blow the shofar," it would have been misinterpreted as an obligation to blow rather than to listen to the shofar.

THE SHOFAR THROUGH THE AGES

The shofar was not overly venerated as a religious instrument in the early period of Jewish history. Despite the biblical injunction, it is unlikely that the shofar was blown on Rosh HaShanah outside of the Temple (Bloch, *Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days*, p. 15). The common use of the shofar in daily communications divested it of any

claim to sacredness. However, a gradually developing perception of the shofar as an instrument for communing with God had the effect of endowing it with mystical qualities.

The Bible reflects the progressive nuances of the symbolism of the shofar through the period of the Judges and the Monarchy. Except for its ritual use on Rosh HaShanah and at the outset of the Jubilee Year, the shofar was primarily a noisemaker. The principal musical instrument was the trumpet, which was used in conjunction with the sacrificial rites, on occasions of religious celebration (I Chron. 13:8, 15:24), and at the dedication of the Temple (II Chron. 5:12).

While the trumpet retained its primacy, the shofar was gradually introduced on special occasions to add volume to the sounds of the trumpets. King David (9th cent. B.C.E.) used trumpets and shoferot when he celebrated the return of the Ark (II Samuel 6:15). A psalmist urged the people to praise G-d with trumpets and the sounds of the shofar (98:6). As the importance of the shofar grew, another psalmist omitted the trumpet and urged that G-d be praised with blasts of the shofar (106:3).

A new dimension was added to the significance of the shofar in the eighth century B.C.E., when its sounds were used to invoke penitence and a return to God, a concept which was to have a profound impact on the rabbinical development of Rosh HaShanah. Thus in the religious reformation under King Asa, the proclamation of a new covenant “to seek the Lord, the G-d of their fathers, with all their heart and all their soul” (II Chron. 15:12) was confirmed by an oath and “with trumpets and shoferot” (II Chron. 15:14). The prophet Joel (8th cent. B.C.E.) also called for blasts of the shofar in Zion to signal the need for penitence (2:15).

The prophets of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. used the metaphor of the shofar as a call to attention in anticipation of news of impending war and destruction (Isa. 58:1, Zeph. 1:16, Jer. 4:5, Ezek. 33:3). Zechariah (6th cent. B.C.E.) introduced a new meaning to the sounds of the shofar, a promise of salvation (9:14). All of these nuances added significantly to the solemnity as well as the hopefulness engendered by the shofar on Rosh HaShanah.

Upon the return of the Babylonian diaspora to Jerusalem, the trumpets were restored to the Temple and their use was mainly confined to the Sanctuary. The chronicler of the Hasmonean period (2nd cent. B.C.E.) described the general desolation of the country ravaged by Syrian forces. “The sounds of the flute and harp were no longer heard in the land” (*Chashmonaim* 8:45). The trumpet was apparently not in vogue as a secular musical instrument. On the other hand, when Judah made ready to fight Gorgias, he ordered the warriors to blow shoferot, not to frighten the enemy, as in the case of Gideon, but to invoke God’s assistance (ibid. 8:54).

The establishment, in the first century, of many synagogues in Jerusalem, and the introduction of the shofar at congregational Rosh HaShanah services, gave the shofar prominent visibility as a religious article of great solemnity. Henceforth it was used for

strictly religious purposes on solemn occasions and no longer for enhancing the din of hilarity and joy. Thus the dances and rejoicing on the occasion of Simchat Bet HaShoavah (the libation of the altar) was done to the tunes of the flute (*chalil*) rather than the shofar (*Sukkah* 50a). However, the ceremonies conducted 'within the Temple grounds were paced by two trumpets. These were accompanied by orchestral music which also included trumpets (*Sukkah* 51b).

The use of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah became widespread throughout the diaspora in the second century. Yet even as late as the third century there were still some ignorant Jews who did not know whether the Rosh HaShanah ritual called for trumpets or shoferot (*Shabbat* 36a, Rashi, *l'shofar shel Rosh HaShanah*).

VARIOUS FUNCTIONS OF THE SHOFAR

In addition to its principal function on Rosh HaShanah, the shofar was also used in rituals ordained for public welfare, the administration of justice, and sundry religious occasions.

In the public welfare ordinances, the shofar was blown when a communal fast was declared by the rabbis in the event of drought, failure of crops, a plague, the collapse of a building, a threat of mildew or locust or cricket or wild beasts, the siege of a city, and a ship in danger of sinking (*Taanit* 19a-22b).

The custom of fasting in times of stress dates back to biblical times. The blowing of a shofar in conjunction with the fast, in order to inspire penitence, was introduced in the second century, when the shofar had reached a state of eminence as a religious instrument. The talmudic sages who discussed the shofar ritual on fast days were all of the second century. On the other hand, two recorded fasts on occasions of drought in the first century (*Taanit* 19a, 20a) do not mention the use of a shofar.

Rabbinic courts ordered the blowing of a shofar when a person was placed under a ban (*Moed Katan* 16a, 3rd cent.) and when a ruling was handed down regarding food whose kashrut had been questioned (*Avodah Zara* 40a, 4th cent.). The purpose of the shofar was to publicize the court's decision.

It was customary in some localities to blow the shofar to announce a death in the community and to summon the citizens to attend the funeral (*Moed Katan* 27b, 3rd cent.).

The shofar was also blown on festive occasions. It was used to signal the coming of the Sabbath (*Shabbat* 35b, 1st cent.). It was also used in conjunction with the proclamation of Rosh Chodesh (*Niddah* 38a, Rashi, *Shipura*), at the morning service of Rosh Chodesh Elul (*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 46; subsequently extended to the entire month of Elul), and after the *aravot* were placed upon the altar on Sukkot (*Sukkah* 45a). It is blown at the end of the Neilah service on Yom Kippur (*Machzor Vitry*, 12 cent.).