

## Blowing the Shofar

The highlight of Rosh Hashana is Shofar. What is the significance of this Mitzva? Numerous reasons are mentioned in Seforim. Let's study some of them.

1. **The King's Coronation.** This day corresponds to the first day of Adam's creation. Thus, it was the first day that a human being recognized Hashem as the King of the universe. When kings were still a thing, there would be an annual celebration with horns and trumpets on the anniversary of the inauguration. When we blow Shofar on Rosh Hashana, we acknowledge Hashem as our King and our Master.

A question still remains. Who is inaugurating Hashem? Are we a ragtag group of losers, or a strong, pure and holy nation? When the people that enthrone Hashem are a **מְמַלְכֵת פְּהַנִּים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ**, a Nation of Kings and a Holy People, how much more beautiful it is.

2. **Alarm Bells Ringing.** The Shofar symbolizes the siren, the early-warning alarm signal that missiles are on the way. Today is the day of judgment, a day in which our actions, thoughts and even our very motives are weighed. This reminds us that we are important, and that we must manage ourselves properly. By taking responsibility for

ourselves, we avert the missiles. Any remaining punishment is expiated by Fear of Hashem.

3. **Gathering Together.** "וַתִּקְעוּ בָהֶן, וְנוֹעְדוּ אֵלַיְךָ כָּל הָעֵדָה" We use the Shofar as a call for solidarity. How much stronger we are when we have the power of unity. All Jews, all types, in all places, blow the shofar together to remind us that we are one people, joined by our common identity and beliefs.
4. **Wake-up Call.** As Rambam writes, the Shofar serves to wake us up from our slumber. People become complacent and fall asleep at the wheel. All of a sudden, someone honks their horn and you awake with a start. So too, the Shofar reminds us of our commitments and responsibilities. We wake up and thank Hashem that nobody was hurt during our unauthorized nap. If we take this thought to heart, our New Year's resolution will be so much more meaningful.

## 4 sets of Shofar blasts

We are really only required to blow one set of blasts [Ideally, this is done during Shemona Esrei, while we are standing before the King.] However, the Minhag is to blow the Shofar numerous times. The Gemara explains that we do this in order to confuse the שטן, the prosecuting angel.

How is this accomplished?

With each set of blasts, we reach another level of Teshuva. When

the שטן sees this level of intensity, he is forced to declare defeat.

Although various communities have slightly different Minhagim, the prevalent custom is to blow 100 shofar blasts. These are split into four sets, while some communities omit a set and include it with the last set after davening.

The Arizal delineates the four sets as follows:

1. The first set of 30 sounds, which we blow before Mussaf, is to eliminate the urge of idolatry, **עבודה זרה**.
2. The second 30, during the Mussaf Tefilla, is to remove the desire for harlotry, **גילוי עריות**.
3. The third set of 30, blown during the Chazzan's repetition of the Tefilla, is to wipe out the impulse to kill, **שפיכת דמים**.
4. The last set is short. The remaining ten that are blown by Kaddish are to get rid of the Yetzer Hara of evil speech, **לשון הרע**.

## A Deeper Understanding

Perhaps, we can correlate the Arizal's four sets to the four reasons for the Mitzva mentioned above.

1. **עבודה זרה** is a general term that includes all Aveiros between us and Hashem. Most of us have no urge to serve Avoda Zara, however Kashrus, Shabbos, Tefilla, etc. may be a bit of a challenge. By coronating Hashem as the King, we accept Him as our Supreme Ruler, and repent these types of sins.
2. **גילוי עריות** occurs when a person allows himself to be led astray by his desires. This type of Aveira really hurts oneself more than

anyone else. At the moment it may seem exciting, but no good ever comes of it.

As the Sefer HaChinuch explains, a Jew is required to perform six “constant” commandments. These Mitzvos are at the core of Yiddishkeit, and include Belief in Hashem, as well as Loving Him and Fearing Him at all times. Also included is the requirement to maintain a constant vigil to master our desires.

When we hear the Shofar during the silent Mussaf, we can use this opportunity to repent for all the hurt we have caused our own soul, and commit to being vigilant in the future.

3. **שפיכת דמים** refers to hurting others. When Hillel was asked to teach the entire Torah on one foot, he famously declared, “Never do to your friend what you wouldn’t want done to you! This is the entire Torah. To understand this better, start studying!” Thus, we see that the essence of the Torah is respecting others. During the repetition of the Tefilla, all of the congregants are united, and the Shofar blasts at this time symbolize our commitment to solidarity and unity.

4. **לשון הרע** – last but not least. Chazal say that this egregious sin is in some ways worse than the others. Perhaps this is because “talk is cheap”. It seems like nothing, but it turns one into a bitter, hurtful person.

We need to realize that our actions, even trivial ones, have consequences. These last few blasts of the Shofar remind us to repent our trivial actions. “Wake up and stay awake!”.

**כתיבה וחתימה טובה, שנה טובה ומתוקה, שנה של בריאות, פרנסה, נחת ושמחה, שנה שבה ימלא ה' כל משאלות ליבכם לטובה.**