

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

During *Elul* the *shofar* is sounded at the end of *shacharis*. If a person *davens* without a *minyan*, should he also make an effort to blow or listen to the *shofar*?

The issues:

A) The *shofar* during *Elul*

B) Analyzing the reasons

C) Should there be a distinction between an individual, a *minyan*, or a *shul*?

A) *The shofar during Elul*

Though it is called a Rabbinic institution, this practice seems to have the status of a *minhag*, custom. No *brocha* is recited on this blowing, and there is no exacting attention to perfection as there is for *Rosh Hashanah*. Nonetheless, as an institution, it is ancient. According to the simple reading of the sources, at least part of this institution dates to *Moshe Rabeinu* himself. As we shall see, the format of the institution has undergone some changes over the years. It is actually called, in one context, *tekios direshus*, roughly translated as 'voluntary blasts.' Thus, we can understand how variations could have occurred, as well as why no *brocha* was ever instituted on these blasts. One would wonder what kind of *brocha* could have been instituted, especially if there is a need to distinguish between these *tekios* and those of *Rosh Hashanah* itself.

The account in *Pirke dRabi Eliezer Hagadol*, the earliest known recorded version of the Oral Torah, is as follows: Moshe had ascended *Har Sinai* on *Shavuot*. The people expected his return a day earlier than when he actually came back. This was a clear mistake in their calculations. When he did not show up, they built the golden calf and started worshipping it. On the Seventeenth of *Tamuz*, Moshe descended from Mt. Sinai with the first *Luchos*. Upon seeing the golden calf, he smashed the *Luchos*. He spent the next forty days burning and destroying all remnants of the golden calf, putting the violators to death, and organizing the order of the tribes and their encampments. On *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, Hashem told Moshe to ascend the mountain again. On that day, they blasted the *shofar* in the camp 'for Moshe has ascended the mountain, and the people should not stray after the idols again.' Hashem was 'raised aloft' through that *shofar*, as it is said 'Hashem rose up with the *teruah* blast, Hashem, through the sound of the *shofar*' [*Tehilim* 47:6]. Therefore, the Sages instituted that they should sound the *shofar* on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* every year. The commentaries explain the reference to the *passuk*: Hashem is exalted on *Rosh Hashanah* with the *teruah* blast, and through the sound of the *shofar* of *Elul*.

This account does not give a clear reason for the institution. It commemorates the original blasts, but it might be a reminder of the events of that day, the events that led to those blasts, the reason for the blasts, or to commemorate the resulting exaltation of

Hashem through the blasts. It seems that the blasts served one purpose for the times, but produced a timeless result of exaltation of Hashem.

Furthermore, the version cited refers to blowing the *shofar* **on** *Rosh Chodesh Elul* alone. The prevailing *Ashkenazic* practice is to blow for the whole month. Furthermore, it is hard to understand how their blowing on *Rosh Chodesh*, to inform the people when Moshe ascended, would prevent further idolatry. Other versions indicate that they blasted the *shofar* every day that Moshe was still up on the mountain. [Rather than 'on' *Rosh Chodesh*, it says 'from' *Rosh Chodesh*.] This way, they would know that the time had not yet come for his return. He descended on *Yom Kippur*, when they did not blow *shofar* initially. They did so later, for a different reason. This explains our practice, partially. We do not blow for the entire forty days, but for the month of *Elul* alone. A third version ends with the words 'every year and for the entire month.' This does not explain why they would stop before *Yom Kippur*, if the purpose was to prevent a second mistake.

In reality, various different practices are recorded by the poskim. In some countries they would blow all forty days, through *Yom Kippur*. They would not blow on *Shabbos*, or during the day of *Yom Kippur*, but at the end of the day. Some countries blow until *Rosh Hashanah*. Within both practices, some start on the first day of *Rosh Chodesh*, though *Elul* has not yet begun. If they started on the second day, the first version would not have a total of forty days. Nowadays, *Elul* is always only twenty-nine days. The poskim say that one should not blow on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* itself. Some had the practice not to blow three days before *Rosh Hashanah*. Most communities blow in the mornings at the end of *shacharis* services. Some communities also blow at the end of *mincha*, or if they *daven* an early *maariv*, at the end of *maariv*. Oriental communities who recite *selichos* during the entire month blow it during or after the *selichos*. Most of them then blow a second time toward the end of *shacharis*. Some Spanish-Portuguese communities only blow it during the Ten Days of Penitence. Some Turkish and Syrian communities do not have the *minhag* at all.

To explain the practices and their sources, the commentaries and poskim point out that there must be more to the institution. The Israelites had miscalculated and made a mistake the first time. They had learned a bitter lesson. Why would they make the same mistake again? Furthermore, what does the mistake of idolatry have to do with Hashem being exalted through these blasts? The biggest question is, why the *shofar*?

Additional reasons are added for the initial institution. The *shofar* sound arouses repentance. This is based on a *passuk*: Could a *shofar* be sounded in the city and the people would not tremble? [*Amos 3:6*] There is also a principle of *kedai le'arbaiv hasatan*, to confound the Satan, the prosecuting forces. The prosecuting force accuses us of sinning. We want to divert him from confronting us on *Rosh Hashanah*. He knows that on *Rosh Hashanah* the *shofar* is sounded. This way, he will not know the true date, and perhaps he will give up. Alternatively, his case against us is weakened when we show such love for the *shofar*. These seem to be separate reasons, that have little to do with preventing mistaken calculations or exalting Hashem. However, the way the reasons are worded indicates a connection. Some say that the penitence refers to the Israelites after the golden calf. This was a period, while Moshe was on the mountain with Hashem, during which

the people repented. The Satan was the cause for their previous downfall. He had conjured an image of Moshe dying, so that the people thought they needed a replacement. The *shofar* was to confound him then as well, for he always tries again. When the people took such measures to prevent future idolatry, Hashem was exalted. This *shofar* drew the people after Hashem. The *shofar* was used due to its connection to penitence and to kingship. It serves as a rallying call to penitence and to come to follow the King. It was also a reminder of the original revelation that led to the first *Luchos*. This time the *shofar* was initiated by the Israelites, or perhaps Moshe. One version implies that Hashem told Moshe to blow the *shofar*. All of this only accounts for the blasts on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*. Nonetheless, the people might have continued it based on Moshe's instructions.

Another *passuk* indicates that the *shofar* should be blown for a month [*Tehilim* 81:4]. To fulfill this verse, those who blow it for the first twenty-eight days of *Elul*, skip *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, and blow two days of *Rosh Hashanah*, have blown it for a complete month of thirty days. [This works with a calendar that always has twenty-nine days of *Elul* and two days of *Rosh Hashanah*. When *Elul* could be thirty days, and *Rosh Hashanah* one day, the numbers would be adjusted slightly. If *Elul* was twenty-nine days, and *Rosh Hashanah* one day, this would not work.] The break before *Rosh Hashanah* is also to confound the Satan. It is also a way to remind us that these blasts are not an actual fulfillment of the real *mitzvah* of *shofar*. That is only on *Rosh Hashanah*. Once *Rosh Hashanah* has passed, there is no longer a need to confound the Satan. [See PdRE 46, RDL 17-20. Tur BY Darkei Moshe Bach Sh Ar OC 581:1, commentaries.]

B) Analyzing the reasons

We now have six basic reasons for the institution, that may or may not be connected. It is to commemorate the original blasts of *Rosh Chodesh Elul* when Moshe went up to get the second *Luchos*. That blast was also to prevent a repeat of the miscalculation of the forty days. Hashem was exalted with that blast. The *shofar* arouses people to repent. It also draws people away from idolatry and to follow Hashem. It confounds the Satan.

To commemorate the original blast, we would only do it on *Rosh Chodesh*. If they also blew it for forty days to prevent mistakes, we would blow it through *Yom Kippur*. If its purpose is to arouse repentance, it could be for *Elul* or through *Yom Kippur*. If it is to confound the Satan, we understand why it is not blown after *Rosh Hashanah*. However, for this reason alone it need not be blown for the entire month. Furthermore, many communities do not blow the full set of blasts. Those who do so, do not cover all combinations. Therefore, the *poskim* maintain that these reasons all overlap. They are all needed to explain different parts of the institution. Thus, the institution was made for all of these reasons, and different parts of it satisfy different reasons. Nonetheless, the prevailing practices do not necessarily satisfy all reasons.

An interesting note is made by some commentaries. The Talmud says that Moshe always ascended in the early morning. This would have been the time when the *shofar* was sounded. Therefore, the *minhag* is to blow in the morning. This does not explain those who blow it at *mincha* or *maariv*, which was apparently the original *minhag*. Confounding the Satan also seems to be at odds with this *minhag*. [If the Satan is confounded by our repeated attachment to the *shofar*, this would fit well.] It seems that the *minhag* to

blow at *mincha* as well is connected to arousing repentance.

[It is interesting to note that there is no discussion on whether women should hear this sound of *shofar* during *Elul*. While the institution is time-bound, it is unusual that there is no widespread effort made by women to hear it. Perhaps the reason is to show the men that the women, who did not worship the golden calf, are on a higher level, and that the institution was not necessary for them.] [See Refs to section A.]

C) *Minyan, shul, or individual?*

There are various reasons to require a *minyan* for a part of the service. A *davar she-bikedusha*, sanctifying Hashem's Name, requires a quorum of ten. Ten brings with it the presence of the *Shechina*, divine Presence. For *pirsum*, publicity, or to commemorate a miraculous event, a *minyan* is sometimes required. For example, when performing *chalitza*, the ceremony to release a widow whose husband left no children, a *minyan* is required for publicity. Some details of the *mitzvah* of *mikra megilah* require a *minyan*. Some parts of the service were only instituted to be done with a *minyan*. Some things by their nature involve a leader and a congregational response or audience.

The question is whether any of these ideas could apply to the *shofar* of *Elul*. Part of the answer probably lies in the nature of the practices. Based on the reasons we have discussed, there could be some connection to a *minyan*, or to *shul*.

If the purpose is to commemorate the publicizing of Moshe's ascent, or the exaltation of Hashem [*Shechina*], a *minyan* would make sense. If the goal is to confound the Satan, this blowing is meant to replicate that of *Rosh Hashanah*. No *minyan* is required for that. The same is true if the object is to arouse penitence. Some point to the ruling that a private individual may practice on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, in private. This implies that the *minhag* is otherwise performed in public. Others suggest that the very fact that a special dispensation is needed for the private blowing implies that for the rest of the month private blowing would be normal. Some also point to the verses used by the Midrash and Poskim. "They blew in the camp" sounds like a public performance. A similar idea seems to be intended in the verse "Could a *shofar* sound in a city ..?" However, the verse "Blow a *shofar* in the month .." implies that every individual should do it. [See refs as above. Tzitz Eliezer XII:48. Nitei Gavriel, Yamim Noraim 2:9 (20).]

Accordingly, while the poskim debate whether an individual is required to hear the *shofar*, it is highly recommended. We have shown that the *minhag* is observed for many overlapping reasons. Some of them certainly apply to an individual as well.

On the parsha ve'al tachpezu, do not feel humiliated [Onkelos] or become disoriented and hurry to flee [Ibn Ezra].. [20:3] From the sound of the horns [Rashi] Why does this verb specifically apply to fear of the sounds of the *shofar*? Perhaps the purpose of the *shofar* blasts of the enemy is to divide and conquer. It attacks morale and solidarity. *Chipazon* could mean disarray in battle. Perhaps this is also what is meant by confounding the Satan. He is in disarray.

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yahrzeit is on the 11th of Elul. ׀

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