

The Blast of the Shofar

I have always enjoyed the blast of the shofar. As a child, I used to watch in awe of the baal tekiyah (shofar sounder) at my synagogue. I would go home after services and walk around the house with my plastic shofar doing my own version of tefiyah, shevarim and teruah. As I grew up, I never thought of myself as one that would participate in blowing shofar at the synagogue. There were always better qualified people who really knew what they were doing. Finally, one year I asked my brother-in-law to bring me back a shofar from one of his trips to Israel. I didn't know what I wanted or needed, but I put my shofar blowing future in his capable hands. The next time we visited him, I was presented with this giant Yemenite shofar. It was beautiful and I was excited at the idea of learning to participate in this mitzvah that is originally prescribed in the Torah. I spent several months in frustration, trying and trying, to get something that resembled an appropriate note out of my shofar. After many tries and a lot of help from several different colleagues and friends, I gained enough confidence to blow the shofar. The first time I blew shofar in public was in Junior Congregation during Rosh Hashanah. It was a thrilling day for me and I was overjoyed to have accomplished my goal.

Why do I tell this story? Well, the obvious reason is how close we are to Rosh Hashanah. In the month of Elul, the shofar is blown after morning services every weekday. Rambam explained the custom of blowing shofar as a wake-up call to sleepers, designed to rouse us from our complacency. I also tell this story to encourage everyone to take the first step to trying something new in the New Year. Rosh Hashanah is a great time to look for new opportunities to grow and stretch our personal Judaism. This year I'll be starting the the Daf Shevui (page of Talmud a week) online program through the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Every week, a page of Talmud is divided up into six sections of learning and sent directly to your inbox. Dr. Joshua Kulp from the Yeshiva does an amazing job putting together the Hebrew text along with English translation and explanation/commentary. It only takes a few minutes a day and is such a wonderful study opportunity. You can find more information about this learning opportunity, and many others from the Conservative Yeshiva, here: <https://goo.gl/7hPxrA>.

Every year, we conclude the shofar service with a hopeful look toward the future, as the blowing of the shofar is followed by the reading of a verse from Psalm 89: Happy is the people who know the teruah, O Lord, they walk in the light of Your presence (89:16). I hope the sound of the shofar this year wakes your soul to some new Jewish opportunities!

Jason