

Shafarot

The Shofar is sounded to awaken us, but what does that mean? Are we so tired from preparing our Rosh Hashanah Seders that we are sitting here drowsing in our seats? Well, maybe we are, after all aren't the prayers beautiful and soothing, the perfect thing to give us lovely dreams as we nap. There has got to be more to the shofar than just being a glorified alarm clock. Heck, the thing is a tool of war; just blowing on a bunch of them at Jericho brought the walls down. But the shofar as a weapon? Can that make any sense at all? Well, what the heck is a shofar after all? A "achem" musical instrument made from one of the hard bony projections from the head of a ram. Well if you are going to go back to the weapon theory, Rams do use their horns in territorial disputes, So you could say that a shofar as a weapon does makes sense. But the shofar is so much more than "just" a weapon.

Long before Rosh Hashanah was part of the high holy days as we know them today, there was a festival for the sounding of the shofar. It has had a place in our heritage as a call to worship, and obviously is still important today or why would we even be bothering to talk about it now. Our lives as modern Jews seem far away from what our ancestors lived centered around ceremony and the Temple. We talk about the once a year Jews, people who only come for the High Holidays. And who can blame them, our world moves so fast; it seems hard sometimes to find time to stop for Shabbat and rest, let alone actual make it to services. I know, when I was up at school I would say every year, "This time I'm actually going to go to Shabbat services during the year" of course it never happened. We live in a time, that if you buy a computer and wait 6 months it's obsolete. But a shofar, a shofar is never obsolete. The shofar has existed with little change since the time of the torah. What we hold in our hands today is just the same as what our ancestors held.

The shofar is a tool of awakening, of becoming aware, aware of our rich history, aware of ourselves and the world for the present and for the future. The sound of the shofar calls to us to listen. The first blast, Tekiyah is the alarm clock, the clarion call that shocks us into awareness. The call of Shevarim is next and is reminiscent of weeping or wailing, reminding us to listen to the sorrow still left in the world. The final blast is

Teruah, a rallying call, a beckoning to battle, saying we can not simply sit back and be aware of the problems but we must step up and take action. As Jews, we learn all about Tikkun Olam, healing the world, the shofar's call is a reminder so that we don't drowse off into our own busy lives.

The Shofar has great personal importance for me as well, a significant symbol of my Judaism. I have sounded the shofar for the High Holidays for many years, yet, I still remember the first time I blew the shofar for the services. I believe I was 13 or 14 years old at the time, at the point just past my Bat Mitzvah where I had already become a Jewish adult ready to take part in the service and confident that I was as grownup as everyone else taking part in the services. Of course I was terrified to get up in front of the crowd to play. The sanctuary was full of people; it seemed as if every seat filled was with people all waiting to hear the Ram's horn sound. I was to play in tandem with my father as each of the calls was announced. Tekiyah! I was so nervous I flubbed the early calls, no sound at all emerging from the smooth hollow curve of the shofar in my hand as I held it to my lips. My heart pounded in my chest causing my breath to feel hard in my throat. I struggled through each of the calls till at last the final call. Tekiyah Gadola! One final chance. I paused and breathed in deeply, willing my heart to slow down. Then I blew, my breath a steady wind through the curved horn, cool in my sweaty hands. Low and mournful the call carried over the large room echoing back as it reached the walls and bounced off them. There was no stopping for more breath now, I could only use what was already in my lungs. My father's call stuttered out, but still the clear moan of my shofar played on, dancing through my ears. I blew until at last my lungs felt as though they would implode and my brain pop from lack of oxygen. Only then did the sound die gently till at last it was but a whisper of a memory in the silent air. I never learned just how long that final blast lasted, but in my mind it plays on forever when I think about the joy of my Judaism. It has become a metaphor for life that I will always strive to live up to. The metaphor is simply this: Sometimes in life we will be afraid, we will stumble and will even fail, but as long as we keep reaching we will sound out a glorious Tekiyah Gadola!