

I was asked to speak about anything from Tehilim, chapters 47 to 60. I opened a Tehilim and the first thing that struck me upon reading literally the first few words was that this Lamnatzeyach Livnei Korach Mizmor is said on Rosh Hahshana seven times before blowing the Shofar.

Everyone familiar with the Shofar from Ellul-Tishrei period, but the Shofar comes in many other times and settings in Judaism.

Explore what the roles of the Shofar are and understand how the Shofar is suited to what it does.

Out of my sure others, I thought of 8 functions of the Shofar, and these range from explicit mitzvos pertaining to it, to stories in Nach, and even a future sounding of the Shofar.

These 8 roles of the Shofar are:

1 the most famous one: Rosh Hahshana

Rh Gemara: since Meen Kateigor = aim of Shofar is to invoke mercy

2 Har Sinai Sinai = invoke fear

Psukim

3 announcements and warnings in later biblical times

4 fast days

Kitzur

5 in the Beis Hamikdash as an instrument of some sort

6 famously used to crumble the walls of Jericho

Psukim

7 blown at the coronation of a Jewish monarch and the freeing of slaves

Psukim

8 marking the beginning of the redemption.

Vhaya Bayom Hahu Yitoka Bshofar Gadol

These sources are all talking about different contexts and situations in which the Shofar is blown. They all seem fairly unrelated. I think that we can understand the Shofar in each of these cases by first appreciating the fundamentals of what Shofar is.

I would like to focus on three sources about what the Shofar aims to achieve. The first is the Rambam in Hilchos Shofar Sukkah Vlulav who quotes Amos 3:6 in asking: ?

אם יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו

secondly, Yehsiuah in chapter 27 verse 13 prophesies that when Moshiach comes,

והיה ביום ההוא שופר גדול יתקע

the third source is in the 47th chapter of Tehilim which I mentioned above and which reads:

עלה אלוקים בתרועה. ה' בקול שופר

These sources present us with three aspects of the Shofar.

The first, that the Rambam brings down is that it causes trepidation and, as he says later on, the sound of the Shofar calls out to a person and says 'wake up, wake up, [you] sleepers from your sleep, and awake [you] slumberers from your slumber. Search your deeds, repent, and remember your Creator.' I would like to characterise this function as 'the sound of awakening and (here: internal) revelation'.

The second source represents the concept of 'unified realisation and transformation', the idea that a group of people can go through a new state of awareness which leads to a new way of thinking and living – this is essentially the idea of spiritual and physical redemption.

The last source shows how the Shofar also acts as a symbol of Hashem's strength, also seen through the verse in Zechariah 9:14: "Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign LORD will sound the shofar". This last aspect of the Shofar can be summarised to be 'the sound of superhuman power'.

In fact these three facets of the Shofar ('the sound of awakening and revelation', 'unified realisation and transformation' and 'the sound of superhuman power') can be derived from the first time it is mentioned, at Har Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19):

'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 voice of a horn exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled** ('the sound of awakening and revelation' the sound shakes the people up...). And Moses brought forth the **people** ('unified realisation and transformation' - term used for people implies unity – see also famous Rashi on Vayichan; and understand how the people have become unified and only then can they receive the Torah) out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. Now Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. **And when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice.** (the sound of superhuman power' seems to imply that the Shofar is part the continued list of the representation of Hashem's awesomeness...)

Now, having explained what the Shofar resembles and found primary and later sources for this understanding, let's try to fit this in with the 8 aforementioned roles of Shofar. Some may relate to all, others to more than one theme and purpose, but generally there will be an obviously preferred understanding.

‘the sound of awakening and revelation’
‘unified realisation and transformation’
‘the sound of superhuman power’

1 the most famous one: rosh hashannah

gemora in rosh hashannah says that a cow's Shofar can't be used as it is counterproductive in invoking divine mercy as it hints to our grave sin of the golden calf. This implies that the Shofar is used on rosh hashannah to, as the rambam says, awake us from our slumber, encourage repentance, and encourage Hashem's acceptance of our repentance. It is interesting however, that the main purpose of the Shofar blown on 'yom teruah', actually requires an understanding of all three aspects of the shofar's 'personality' (fairly self-workout-able) and this assists us in understanding why the gemara in rosh hashannah also says that malchuyos ('the sound of superhuman power') and zichronos ('the sound of awakening and revelation' and 'unified realisation and transformation') are done through shofros.

2 har Sinai: to invoke fear

have shown already how all aspects of Shofar are actually relevant here.

3 announcements and warnings in later biblical times

signaling and alerting: revelation (Ehud and Nehemiah use it to summon their men (Judges 3:27; Nehemiah 4:12-14). Weapon for frightening the enemy (Judges 7:22) Announcing victory (Samuel A 13:3) Announcing rebellion (Samuel B 20:1) Cease fighting (Samuel B 20:22) Warning sign about approaching enemy (Jeremiah 4:21; Hosea 5:8; and other)) and likened to voice of prophet (Ezekiel 33:1-6). – realisation, awakening, and relation to superhuman god.

4 fast days

kitzur + other halachic source

connects to concept of forgiveness and awakening (pray for forgiveness on fast in selichos)

5 in the beis hamikdash as a musical instrument of some sort

bringing up the Holy Ark (2 Samuel 6:15) and in the repentance of Asa and The People (Chronicles B 15:14).

idea that in celebrating together, we can develop together (ach somayach must include gercha and levi and long list found there)

6 famously used to crumble the walls of Jericho

when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the horn, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat (Joshua 6:5) clear superhuman strength portrayed through sonic destructive power.

7 blown at the coronation of a Jewish monarch and the freeing of slaves yovel (vayikra 25:9) occurred every fifty years and meant that Jewish people were granted forgiveness, indentured Israelites were set free and the fields became the property of the priests. This also relates to the newly instated power and freedom of a king (Absalom (2 Samuel 15:10) and of Jehu (2 Kings 9:13), as well as upon the coronation of God on the entire universe (Psalms 47:6; 68:6)) and newly-freed slave. These relate to the idea of social unity and transformation – the building of a community and the development of the individuals within it.

8 marking the beginning of the redemption.

v'haya bayom hahu yitoka bshofar gadol (Joshua 27:13) and tka bshofar gado l'cheruseinu vsa neis lkabetz (siddur)...

both show unified awakening and transformation through the Shofar

So we have seen three aspects of Shofar, sources for their derivation, and how they each help us understand how different roles of the Shofar are merely practical applications of those powers that the Shofar has.

lastly, I would like to suggest that the three notes famously attributed to the Shofar, tekiah shevarim and teruah, represent these three ideas:

the tekiah is a long strong sound, relating to the eternal superhuman strength of Hashem and having the root ט-ק-ע meaning to powerfully force something.

the shevarim is a series of short struggles, relating to transformation and possibly stemming from the same root as the word ashbir, א-ש-ב, which (in Isaiah 66:9) means to bring to life something new.

lastly, the teruah possibly having its root as ר-ו-ע which means to breakup morals or thoughts – refers to the awakening and revelation of the shofar's sound and the resulting change which it should evoke within us.

Shkoyach.