

SHOFAR RITUAL FOR TZELEM LAUNCH

Intro

Traditionally, our biblical text offers us a method of communicating a significant message - through sounding the ram's horn - the shofar - sometimes even from one valley to the next.

Today, the blowing of the shofar has become a ritual in the Jewish community, encouraging its listeners to stir, to wake up, to pay attention, to change their ways. So, today, we use the ram's horn in order to call each other to attention as we reflect on the ways this call to action was used in our text:

VOICE 1

We used the shofar at Mount Sinai, before Moses brought down the Ten Commandments, etched on stone - we read in Exodus:

“On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the shofar; and all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain... And the sound of the shofar grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.”

(Ex 19:16-17, 19)

As the shofar signals God's presence among the people at the moment of revelation, so do we hope to partner with God in this holy work, prioritizing social and economic justice.

“TEKIA!”

(Shofar is sounded from the front left of the room)

VOICE 2

The shofar is used to gather our community, as we are advised by the prophet Jeremiah:

“Proclaim in Judah, and announce in Jerusalem; and say, ‘Blow the shofar in the land!’.

Shout aloud, gather together, and say, ‘Assemble yourselves’...”

(Jeremiah 4:5)

As the shofar in Jeremiah calls our community together, may we find strength in this partnership between clergy from our Liberal, Reform, Masorti, Orthodox, and Sephardi communities as together, we call out in one voice for social and economic justice.

“TEKIA!”

(Shofar is sounded from the middle left of the room)

VOICE 3

Our biblical tradition demonstrates a passion for social justice, as indicated in the book of Leviticus, which instructs us to:

“Count for yourselves seven sabbatical cycles –seven times seven years - equally forty nine years in total. Then proclaim with the blast of the shofar on the tenth day of the seventh month...throughout your land. Sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you”

(Leviticus 25:8-10)

As the shofar heralds the Jubilee, we yearn for a time capable of breaking down the greatest of barriers - when all people shall be equal, and social and economic justice shall be accomplished. May we sound this shofar to herald freedom - physical and emotional - for more people in our time.

“TEKIA!”

(Shofar is sounded from the back left of the room)

VOICE 4

Traditionally, the shofar was also used to alert us and to call us to battle against our enemies, as we read in the words of the prophet Ezekiel:

“If he sees the sword coming upon the land, he blows on the shofar, and warns the people...”

(Ezekiel 33:3)

As the shofar prepares us to face our enemies and commands us to protect one another, we remember that we all need protection and support. It is our job to alert each other and our leaders to the need to protect ourselves and our wider community. If not us, who?

“TEKIA!”

(Shofar is sounded from the back right of the room)

VOICE 5

Perhaps the role for which the shofar is best known in Judaism is as a call to return and repent, as we’re taught by the prophet Isaiah:

*“Cry aloud, without restraint, raise your voice like a shofar!
Declare to My people their transgression, and tell the house of Jacob their sins.”*

(Isaiah 58:1)

Judaism teaches that if we save one life it is as if we have saved the entire world. As we stand here today, few among us are blameless. May our renewed efforts to stand together and hear the call to social justice help bring forth the day when we can truly say we helped repair the world.

“TEKIA!”

(Shofar is sounded from the middle right of the room)

VOICE 6

The shofar is sounded at a time of coronation, and as a way of praising God in the temple. So often, our text tells us of the use of a shofar to bring forth joy in the community. Psalm 89 tells us;

*“Happy are the people who know the joyful call of the shofar!
O God, may they walk in the light of Your presence*

(Psalm 89:16)

Whether we chose to identify with examples of the shofar being blown at a time of crisis or celebration, the call to pay attention and to act is strong and powerful, and has had a huge impact on the imagination of our people through the ages.

Our Sages teach us that the sound made by the shofar is the sound of the human soul; a sound without corruption. As we join together to prioritize the work of Tzelem; may we do so with one voice, and may it herald the strength, the joy, and the purity of the shofar as together we call...

“TEKIA!”

(Shofar is sounded from the front right of the room)