YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**War in Halakha**

**Rav Yishai Jeselsohn**

**Shiur #20: The Trumpets in Our Time**

Having seen in the previous *shiur* the foundations of the obligation to sound the trumpets in times of war and distress, we will now discuss a practical question: Does this mitzva apply today? Examining this question will help us clarify the fundamental points raised in the previous *shiur*, and with God's help, add to them as well.

At first glance, there is no reason this mitzva should not be observed today, yet we can plainly see that it has not been the customary practice. The *Magen Avraham* raised this issue in regard to the obligation to sound the trumpets in a time of distress for which we would fast:

I am puzzled as to why it is not our practice to blow the trumpets in a time of trouble. Even though there are no communal fasts in Babylonia,[[1]](#footnote-1) nevertheless, by Torah law there is a mitzvato blow the trumpets [even] without a fast. (*Magen Avraham* sec. 576, beginning)

This seems like a strong question indeed; how can we ignore a positive Torah commandment without any justification? When Rabbi Eliezer Waldenburg was asked about renewing the law of trumpet blasts by blowing the shofar at the Kotel,[[2]](#footnote-2) he objected to the idea of innovating something that was not brought in the *Shulchan Arukh* or by the Rema.[[3]](#footnote-3) But we must understand why it is that these classical halakhic authorities do not mention this law.

**The Land of Israel and the People of Israel**

One approach to resolving the *Magen Avraham's* difficulty touches on several points we saw in the previous *shiur*. We saw that the Ramban (*Ta'anit* 15a) infers from a precise reading of the verse, "And when you go to war in your land" (*Bamidbar* 10:9), that the obligation to sound the alarm applies only with regard to a war waged in the Land of Israel, but not in the context of a war conducted abroad.[[4]](#footnote-4) To this we added the Ritva’s opinion (*Ta'anit* 14a) that the obligation to sound the trumpets applies only when the war is being waged by the entire nation of Israel: “The law of trumpets applies only to a gathering of all of Israel.”

I then suggested that according to them, the sounding of the trumpets represents the presence of the *Shekhina* when going out to war, which is manifest only in the Land of Israel and in relation to the entire nation of Israel. In any case, regardless of the explanation, their position resolves the *Magen Avraham's* question – for in his time, the troubles and wars that befell Israel were neither those of the entire nation nor in the Land of Israel. Thus, there was no obligation at all to sound the trumpet blasts, and so the question has no basis.

In our day, however, we are blessed that this solution is no longer valid – for we are in the Land of Israel, and, alas, the troubles that befall our country are often the troubles of the entire Jewish people. Hence, the question returns, and we must consider why we do not blow the trumpets.

**Blasts Alongside Blessings**

The *Arukh ha-Shulchan* addresses the *Magen Avraham's* question and offers the following resolution:

It seems to me that there is no difficulty at all, for we hold like Rashi and the *Tur* that the trumpet blasts are sounded at the end of each of the six additional blessings, as will be explained in sec. 579. Since there are no communal fasts outside the Land of Israel, these six additional blessings are not recited, and there is no place for sounding the trumpets. (*Arukh ha-Shulchan* 576:3)

According to Rashi and the *Tur* (cited in sec. 579), the trumpet blasts were specifically instituted alongside the special blessings added to the prayer service on a fast day. Since the Gemara established that communal fasts are not observed outside the Land of Israel (which has ramifications, among other things, regarding the addition of the aforementioned blessings), there is also no obligation to blow the trumpets. The *Arukh ha-Shulchan*’s explanation is surprising, as the obligation to sound the alarm is by Torah law (as the *Magen Avraham* noted), while the blessings were instituted only by Rabbinic authority. How could it be that a Rabbinic ordinance would impede the performance of a Torah commandment? The *Arukh ha-Shulchan* answers:

Even though the blessings are certainly of Rabbinic origin and the sounding of the trumpets is of Torah origin, nevertheless, since the Rabbis instituted where the trumpets are to be sounded, it follows that when that place does not exist, it is impossible to blow – for the Rabbis are authorized to issue directives to sit back and refrain from action (*shev ve-al ta’aseh*).

Amazingly, the *Arukh ha-Shulchan* answers that indeed, the Sages have the authority to abrogate a Torah law, and their ordinance to sound the trumpets *together* with the blessings totally changed the nature of the obligation, so that it is henceforth inapplicable without the blessings.

As noted, the *Arukh ha-Shulchan's* solution is quite innovative and surprising. Moreover, even if it answers the *Magen Avraham's* question regarding the blowing of the trumpets on a communal fast day, it does not explain the abrogation of the trumpet blasts when going out to war – when the issue of the blessings presumably does not exist, and the obligation to sound the trumpets should still be in force.

**The Trumpet Blasts in the Temple**

A third way to reconcile the practice of not blowing trumpets is based on the idea that this mitzvais connected to the Temple. We can find evidence for this approach in several places in the words of *Chazal*. The *Sefer ha-Chinukh* writes about the blowing of the trumpets in the Temple and in war as follows:

This commandment applies when the Temple is standing, to the priests, for the mitzva to blow the trumpets is upon them. (*Sefer ha-Chinukh*, *mitzva* 384)

The *Chinukh* introduces two novel *halakhot* here, both of which reflect the same principle: the mitzvaapplies exclusively to priests, and it applies only in the time of the Temple. The common denominator of these two *halakhot* is that the mitzva of the trumpets, both in a time of war and in a time of distress, draws upon the Temple service.

The *Arukh ha-Shulchan* (*Orach Chaim*, ibid.) sides with the *Chinukh* and adds support from the Jerusalem Talmud that the mitzvaof sounding the trumpets applies only in the Temple:

They were blowing before Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi on a fast day [with a shofar]. Rabbi Yose asked: Let them blow before him with trumpets! He had not heard that which was taught: "Trumpets are [blown] in the Temple; trumpets are not [blown] in the outlying areas." (*Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana* 3:4)[[5]](#footnote-5)

Thus, the Torah's commandment of "you shall sound blasts with the trumpets" (*Bamidbar* 10:9) applies only in the presence of the *Shekhina*,in the Temple, and it is carried out by the priests who serve there. Based on this, the *Mor u-Ketzia[[6]](#footnote-6)* (on the *Magen Avraham*) explains that we do not blow trumpets today because it would require priests of established lineage (as does the Temple service):

The mitzvais only with priests and with trumpets, and nowadays there are no priests of established lineage and no trumpets of the Torah. Therefore, it stands to reason that there is no mitzva nowadays even in the Land of Israel, and we have not heard that they do so in the Land of Israel in our time. (*Mor u-Ketzia* sec. 576, end)

Thus, we find that the connection between the trumpets and the Temple precludes the performance of this mitzva in our day. The Ritva, in the course of discussing whether the blowing should be with a shofar or with trumpets, brings the following:

The *Tosafot* explain that the wording here is not precise, and trumpets are referred to as shofars*…* Based on this, it is the customary practice in France never to blow on a communal fast, because we do not have trumpets. (Ritva, *Ta'anit* 14a)

Based on the opinion that the blast on a fast day must be sounded with trumpets, the Ritva explains that they do not sound the blast in France because they do not have trumpets. This is somewhat puzzling; why not make trumpets, if that is the issue? Rabbi Moshe Feinstein *z"l* took this reasoning a step further and explained:

In my humble opinion, it seems that according to those who hold that the blasts are sounded with trumpets, it is necessary to use specifically those trumpets that were made to be sounded in the Temple. (*Iggerot Moshe*, *Orach Chaim* I, no. 169)

It is clear that we are not in a position to create such trumpets. The *Iggerot* *Moshe* explains further that this is based on categorizing the two occasions for blowing trumpets in the Temple – over the sacrifices and in times of distress – as one mitzva, which specifies the laws that must be observed with the Temple trumpets:

Therefore it is understandable that the Rambam included the blasts at the time of the sacrifices and the blasts in times of distress in one commandment in his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* (positive commandment 59) and in the enumeration of the commandments at the beginning of his *Yad Ha-Chazaka*, and the *Maggid Mishneh* at the beginning of *Hilkhot Ta'aniyot* raised an objection against him; see there. But it is because what is needed is specifically the trumpets of the Temple; therefore, he explains that the mitzva is [about] what to do with the trumpets that the Torah commanded us to make – for all the different blasts blown with them are a single mitzva*.* This may be what the *Maggid Mishneh* means in his answer that the mitzva is one general obligation to blow trumpets in the Temple at the time of the sacrifices and in times of distress, both in the Temple and in the outlying areas, and it is improper to count them as two *mitzvot*; see there. This applies only if it is necessary to blow specifically with the trumpets of the Temple. But if the law were with any trumpet, and the mitzvawere not what to do with the trumpets, but rather related to the act of blowing, then he should certainly have counted them as two separate *mitzvot*, as he counts the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashana and the blowing of the shofar on the Yom Kippur of the Jubilee year as two separate *mitzvot*, mitzva137 and mitzva170. This is the opinion of the Ritva, according to the custom of France, who hold that the blasts on fast days are with trumpets, in accordance with the Rambam. Thus, it is specifically with the trumpets of the Temple. Therefore, it was never the practice to blow, for we do not have the trumpets of the Temple.

According to this, the difficulty that confronts us today is not a technical difficulty in manufacturing the trumpets, but a substantive one. The mitzva is to sound the same trumpets that are sounded before God in the Temple, and in their absence, we are unable to fulfill it.

**“Before God”**

With this foundation, it is possible to expand and reach a more comprehensive question – what is the essence of the mitzva of the trumpets? Is it to assist the individual in praying and directing his heart to Heaven, such that its primary function is in the human realm? Or does it cause the individual's prayer to be heard in Heaven, influencing, as it were, God's acceptance of his request? The blasts that are sounded over the sacrifices are part of the Temple service, and therefore there is room to discuss their nature; but we perceive the blasts that are sounded in times of trouble, at first glance, as blasts that accompany man's prayer. However, Torah’s wording indicates otherwise. The purpose of the mitzva of the trumpets, specifically and especially in war, is to bring man's remembrance before God:

And when you go to war in your land, against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound blasts with the trumpets; and you shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies. And on the day of your gladness, and in your appointed seasons, and at your new moons, you shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt-offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings; and they shall be to you for a remembrance before your God: I am the Lord your God. (*Bamidbar* 10:9-10)

As such, it is reasonable to assume that the mitzva of sounding the blasts in times of distress should be similarly limited; we do not blow whenever we cry out to God, but specifically at the place where He rests His *Shekhina*,where we seek to have our remembrance rise up before Him.

Similarly, the words "before the Lord" indicate a connection between the Temple and the blasts. The expression "before the Lord" in other places raises a very interesting discussion. In the laws governing the “confession” recited over tithes, the Rambam rules that the declaration may be recited even outside the Temple:

Whether the Temple is standing or not, one is obligated to remove [all the agricultural gifts from his possession] and make the declaration. (*Hilkhot Ma'aser Sheni* 11:4)

The Ra'avad disagrees, based on the Torah's commandment: "And you shall say *before the Lord your God*" (*Devarim* 26:13).

Avraham said: This is a corruption, for the declaration must be recited before the Lord, and there is no "before the Lord" other than in the Temple. (Ra'avad, ad loc.)

The Ra'avad understands the words "before the Lord" as a reference to the Temple, where the person must stand physically before the Lord at the time of his declaration. The Rambam apparently understands the words "before the Lord" as referring to the addressee of the declaration: the declaration must be directed towards Heaven, but the physical location of the declaration is irrelevant.

We may also view our discussion in this light: is the idea of remembrance "before the Lord" intended to bring our remembrance before Him, so that it may be done at any time and in any place, or is "before the Lord" a locative description, defining the context in which the trumpets must be sounded?

The previous *shiur* cited the *Netziv* (*Ha’amek Davar*, *Bamidbar* 10:9), who understood the words "before the Lord" in a similar manner. According to him, the sounding of the trumpets applies only when the ark of the Lord is in the camp of Israel. His words are quite innovative, but it may be possible to take them even a step further.

If we are precise in our reading of the aforementioned passage in the Jerusalem Talmud, it would seem that not only is the mitzva of the trumpets restricted to the time when the Temple stands, but it also only applies within the Temple itself. Even when the Temple stood, the trumpets were not blown outside it, perhaps because of the idea expressed by the Ra'avad – that the words "before the Lord" describe the place in which the mitzvamust be performed. According to this, it may be suggested that the sounding of the trumpets in a time of war took place not on the battlefield, but in the Temple. Just as the mitzvaof blasting the trumpets over the sacrifices is perceived as part of the mitzvaof the sacrifices, so too in a time of war, the service of the blasts is to be performed in the Temple.

According to this understanding it is clear and why, alas, this mitzva is not practiced today – for, like many other *mitzvot* connected to the Temple, it cannot be performed when the Temple is not standing.

**The Blast of Prayer**

A different approach may also be suggested, according to which a certain aspect of the mitzva of sounding the alarm is fulfilled even in our own day. The *Netziv* interprets the words, "and you shall sound blasts with the trumpets," as referring to the prayer that accompanies the sounding of the trumpets, rather than to the sounding of the trumpets itself:

"And you shall sound (*ve-harei'otem*) with the trumpets."[[7]](#footnote-7) This is [apparently the same as] "and you shall blow (*u-tekatem*)" in the next verse, for there is no *teki'a* without a *teru'a* and no *teru'a* without a *teki'a.* Rather, "*ve-harei'otem*" refers to *prayer*, that they should cry out and be stirred up in prayer with the trumpets. Thus explained the Rambam at the beginning of *Hilkhot Ta'anit*.

This is also how the mitzvais enumerated by the *Sefer Chareidim*:

It is a positive commandment from the Torah to cry out and sound the blast before the Lord in a large assemblage for any calamity that may befall the community, such as pestilence or the sword or the withholding of rain or locusts or earthquake or the like, so that all the people may bring to mind that this is not a chance occurrence but the decree of the King of the Universe on account of their sins, and that each should return from his evil way and repent and return the stolen goods and weep before the Lord and not continue to sin. As it is stated: "against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound" – this is sounding *with the mouth*, that is, with prayer and crying out…. (*Sefer Chareidim*, positive commandment, chap. 4, no. 19)

We have already seen the Ramban's similar understanding, that the verses concerning the obligation to sound the trumpets are the source of a Torah obligation to pray in a time of distress:

And that which is expounded in the *Sifrei*: "'And to serve Him' – this is Torah study; another explanation: this is prayer" – this is an *asmakhta* [a Biblical verse used to support a Rabbinic law], or else it teaches that as part our service [of God], we should study Torah and pray in times of distress, and that our eyes and hearts should be directed toward Him alone, as the eyes of slaves to the hands of their masters. This is like what is written: "And when you go to war in your land, against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound with the trumpets; and you shall be remembered before the Lord your God." This is a mitzva about every time of trouble that comes over the community, to cry out before Him with prayer and with *teru'a*. (*Hasagot ha-Ramban le-Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, positive precept no. 5)

We learn from these various sources that apart from the mitzva of blowing the trumpets, there is also a unique mitzva of prayer in times of distress, and it is very possible that this mitzva constitutes a fulfillment of the mitzva of sounding the trumpets. At first glance, this is difficult, for the Torah requires a specific act of blowing the trumpets; why should we be able to substitute prayer or any other action? For this reason, it is important to be precise and say that this does not mean the entire mitzvacan be fulfilled in this way, but only that a certain aspect of the mitzva is fulfilled even in the absence of the trumpet blast.

**The Sounding of the Shofar**

It may also be suggested, in accordance with this view that prayer in a time of distress is part of the mitzva of the trumpet blasts, that a distinction can be drawn between the blowing of the shofar and the blowing of the trumpets. The shofar blast is closer to the world of prayer, as an act that accompanies man’s cries to Heaven (as we see on Rosh Hashana); the trumpet blast, in contrast, has an aspect that relates more to the enthronement of God and the resting of the *Shekhina*, which connects to the Temple.

Based on the above passage in the Jerusalem Talmud, which says: "The trumpets are not blown in the outlying areas," we might suggest that the mitzvaof sounding blasts in a time of distress has two levels: first, there is a mitzva of blowing trumpets in the Temple as part of the mitzva of blowing the trumpets, which is performed specifically with a trumpet and in the Temple; and another aspect of the mitzva involves prayer and crying out, which are performed in the outlying areas as well and with a shofar. Perhaps this is how we can explain the *Shulchan Arukh's* ruling that the blast should be sounded with a shofar and not with a trumpet:

If a city has one of these afflictions, that city fasts, cries out in prayer, supplicates, and blasts the shofar until the affliction passes. (*Shulchan Arukh*, *Orach Chaim* 576:12)

Apart from the fact that the *Shulchan Arukh* rules that the blast is sounded with a shofar, he also rules in accordance with Rashi and the *Tur*, who were cited above, that the blasts are sounded together with the blessings. The foundation for both rulings is understanding the blasts as part of the prayer. It is possible that this is true only in our time when the Temple is not standing. May we speedily merit the full restoration of the Temple, and once again sound the trumpets even in the Temple.

**Summary**

We discussed in this *shiur* the *Magen Avraham's* question as to why we do not blow the trumpets today, and we saw that answers can be offered in several directions. One explanation connects the blowing to the Land of Israel and the people of Israel – but, *baruch Hashem*, this does not account for the practice in our day. A second approach sees the blasts as part of the Temple service, which, alas, we have not yet merited; we cannot blow today because we do not have priests of established lineage, a Temple in which to blow, or trumpets to blow over the sacrifices. Finally, we saw at the end of the *shiur* that the mitzva to “sound” can also be seen as a matterof prayer, and that perhaps there are two aspects to the mitzva *–* the trumpets, which allude to God's enthronement, and the blasting of the shofar, which expresses prayer. According to this understanding, it is certainly appropriate (but not obligatory) to blow the shofar when going out to war, in order to stir the people’s hearts to prayer and supplication to the Creator of the Universe that He will deliver us from our troubles.

(Translated by David Strauss; edited by Sarah Rudolph)

1. [*Ta’anit* 11b]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We will leave aside, for our purposes, the question of whether such blasts should be sounded with trumpets or a shofar. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer*, vol. 11, no. 16; see there for his resolution of the *Magen Avraham's* question. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The *Mishna Berura* (576, no. 1) adds in the name of the *Peri Megadim*: "Some have written that it is possible that even in the Land of Israel, it was only when the land was under our authority, and it is further possible that it is only when the decree is against the majority of Israel – then there is a positive commandment to sound the trumpets – but otherwise not." [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Perhaps there is a possibility of blowing with a shofar in the outlying areas. We will deal with this possibility below. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The comments of Rabbi Yaakov Emden on the *Tur* and *Shulchan Arukh.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Editor’s note: In both this and the previous *shiur*, *ve-harei'otem* has so far been translated as “you shall sound blasts”; as the author is now focusing on different understandings of the term, the word “blasts” is omitted. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)