**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

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In commemoration of the yahrzeit of Elke bat Binyamin Tzvi z"l

whose yahrzeit falls on 28 Elul, 16/17 September.

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Shofar II: Blowing Shofar

Who blows for whom?

# Men Blowing for Women

Many synagogues hold additional shofar blowings after services or at other points during the day for those who cannot make it to services, and even arrange for shofar blowers to come to the homes of those who are ill or otherwise housebound.

When these blowings include men who have not yet discharged their obligation, or boys of a certain age to whom the rabbinic mitzva of *chinuch le-mitzvot* (mitzva education) applies, they are clearly permissible. However, when the attendees are all women, a few halachic issues arise:

**I. Uvdin De-chol** Blowing a shofar is considered an *uvdin de-chol*, a weekday activity that should not be freely performed on Shabbat or Yom Tov outside of the mitzva context.

Ran on the Rif *Shabbat* 2a

For removing bread from the oven and blowing shofar are not rabbinic prohibitions, but merely *uvdin de-chol*, and where one is not violating a prohibition, and there is a need on that day, the [rabbis] permitted.

Adults may blow shofar on Rosh Ha-shana only when necessary. Is it necessary to blow shofar for women, who are not obligated in the mitzva?

**II. Areivut** When a person has already discharged a halachic obligation, he or she may perform it again to discharge another's obligation. This is because of the principle of *areivut*, guarantorship.

Ritva *Rosh Ha-shana* 29a

The explanation is that for all *berachot* on *mitzvot*, even though he has discharged [his obligation], he can discharge [another's obligation]. For even though the *mitzvot* are incumbent upon each person, all of Israel are *areivim* for each other, and all of them are like one body, and like a guarantor paying off the debt of his fellow.

Can *areivut* work when the person for whom a mitzva-facilitating act is being repeated is not directly obligated from the Torah?

**III. Hotza'a On Yom Tov** We are not supposed to carry items in the public domain without an *eiruv* unless they are carried *le-tzorech* Yom Tov, for the purpose of Yom Tov.

*Bi’ur Halacha* 518:1

For according to Tosafot and Rosh, carrying that is not at all *le-tzorech*, such as taking out stones and so forth, is forbidden on a Torah level, and they permitted only when there is some slight *tzorech*.

Can bringing the shofar to a woman so that she can hear it be considered *tzorech* Yom Tov?

Solutions

How are these difficulties addressed in practice? Early halachic authorities take different approaches.

Ra'avan expresses concern about the permissibility of men blowing for women, and about the fact that common practice is to override such concerns.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Ra’avan Rosh Ha-shana

… But it seems that it would be prohibited for a man who is obligated in *mitzvot* to blow for them (women), unless he is blowing for a man who is obligated and they also happen to hear. And I wondered how earlier generations would blow for new mothers or for a sick woman. And it seems to me that this is what they would do: the *toke’a* (blower) would intend to fulfill his own obligation [with these blasts] and this is how they permitted this, since he fulfills his own obligation with his blowing. But if he has already fulfilled his obligation, I wonder how he is allowed to blow the shofar, unless I say that shofar blowing and removing bread are skills and not *melacha*, and since one is allowed to blow shofar [on Rosh Ha-shana] when necessary, it is also permitted when it’s not necessary.

Ra'avan minimizes the issue of *uvdin de-chol* in order to justify prevalent practice in his day, but suggests that the best way to address it and concerns about *areivut* is for the blower not to fulfill his mitzva of shofar prior to blowing for women.[[2]](#footnote-2) For example, the blower might blow at the same time as the synagogue's blowing, or might even deliberately intend during services not to discharge his own obligation with the synagogue blasts![[3]](#footnote-3)

Ra'aviyah, however, disagrees. He maintains that all three concerns may be overridden to allow for special shofar blowing for women:

Ra’aviyah II *Rosh Ha-shana* 534

The law is that one may blow [shofar] for them, for it is a skill and not a Torah-prohibited *melacha*. And a man may blow for them even if he has already fulfilled his obligation. And since there is a mitzva, for women may [blow] for themselves if they want… it is also permitted to carry a shofar for them in the public domain… and even one who is not commanded still has a small part in the commandment.

According to Ra'aviyah, women's mitzva fulfillment is of sufficient halachic value to override the concern of *uvdin de-chol*, to have the law of *areivut* apply, and even to consider the blowing *tzorech yom tov*. This ruling is a halachic expression of recognition of the value of women's shofar observance, and is widely followed.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Beracha

Two blessings precede shofar blowing, and it is customary for the blower to recite both for the congregation.

*Shulchan Aruch* OC 585:2

Before he blows, he recites the blessings “to hear the sound of the shofar” and “*shehechiyanu*.” Rema: And there is no difference [in the blessings] whether he is blowing for himself, or whether he already fulfilled his obligation and is blowing to discharge others’ obligation, even so, the *tok’ea* recites the two blessings mentioned [above].

Rema explains that even if a man has already fulfilled his obligation, he still recites the blessings if he blows shofar to discharge others' obligations. Is this also the case if he is blowing only for women, who are exempt from the Torah-level obligation? Or would a *beracha* recited by a man over women's voluntary performance be considered a *beracha le-vatala*, in vain?

Rashi's teacher Rabbi Yitzchak ben Yehuda does permit men to recite the *beracha* in this case:

*Moshav Zekeinim Vayikra* 23:24

And even though women are exempt from shofar blowing, they acted and accepted the mitzva upon themselves. This means that men blow for women alone and recite the blessings for them; and this is the explanation of Rabbi Yitzchak ben Yehudah – that it is permissible to blow for women and recite the blessings. He brings as proof that if someone who is exempt accepted something upon himself, he may recite a blessing and this is not a blessing in vain.

His view is not widely accepted. Shulchan Aruch rules in general that a woman should not recite a *beracha* over a mitzva from which she is exempt, like shofar. It follows from that position that a man does not recite one for her.

Rema rules that a woman does recite a *beracha* over her voluntary mitzva performance, of which hearing shofar is a prime example. He adds, though, that she should recite the *beracha* over shofar herself. *Areivut* can extend to having a man facilitate voluntary mitzva performance, but not to reciting a *beracha* on her behalf.

*Shulchan Aruch* OC 589:6

Even though women are exempt, they may blow [shofar] … but they should not recite the *berachot*…Rema: And the custom is that women recite *berachot* on positive time-bound commandments, therefore they make the *berachot* for themselves. But others should not recite the *berachot* for them if they already discharged their obligation and are blowing only for women.

Common practice is to follow Rema's ruling.

A Group of Women

If a group of women gathers to hear shofar, there is disagreement whether one woman may recite the *beracha* for all the women present, since they all have the same level of binding custom, or each should recite a *beracha* on her own. In general, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach reportedly permitted one woman to recite *berachot* for a group of women:

Rav David Auerbach, *Halichot Beitah*, p. 71

For I heard from my uncle, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, that it is explained in *Shulchan Aruch* 199 that women "recite *zimmun* for themselves."…One woman recites the *berachot* for everyone. Just as they recite *zimmun* for themselves, so too one recites a *beracha* for everyone in other *berachot*…

# Women Blowing

May a woman blow shofar for herself?

When a woman misses shofar blowing in synagogue, a man typically blows for her. Is this a matter of convenience or halacha?

Given the constraints on blowing shofar on Yom Tov beyond the obligatory and customary blasts, we could construct an argument, as Sha'agat Aryeh does, that a woman should not blow shofar for herself:

*Sha’agat Aryeh* 104

The main reason [a women should not blow shofar on behalf of a woman] is because of the rabbinic prohibition against blowing shofar on Yom Tov. Therefore a man should blow shofar for a woman, and not a woman for a woman… for the mitzva of blowing shofar is not prohibited for a woman…except because of the rabbinic prohibition of blowing itself. And this rabbinic prohibition does not apply to a man on this Yom Tov of Rosh Hashana, as we say “*ho’il*” (since) [since he is allowed to blow to fulfill the mitzva, he is allowed to blow in general].

Sha'agat Aryeh contends that the constraint on blowing does not apply to men on Rosh Hashana. Since (*ho'il)* the prohibition is suspended for men so that they may fulfill their own obligation, they are generally allowed to blow shofar. As women are not commanded to hear the shofar, the argument of “*ho’il*” does not apply to them and the prohibition stands.

However, Sha'agat Aryeh's opinion on this matter is an outlier. The Talmud already tells us that women should not be prevented from blowing:

*Rosh Ha-shana* 33a

We do not prevent women or children from blowing the shofar on Yom Tov.

It would seem to follow that a woman who is not able to hear the shofar blasts with the congregation is permitted to blow shofar for herself. Indeed, Ha-itur suggest that a woman blowing for herself "makes sense."

*Sefer Ha-itur Aseret Ha-dibrot – Hilchot Shofar* 99:4

The blasts of the shofar are optional [for women], and they are permitted to recite *berachot* over the *mitzvot*, and it makes sense that another person does not blow shofar for them, but they themselves blow. One may practice blowing [*mit’askin*] with them in order that they should learn.

Similar permissive rulings can be found in a number of *Rishonim*, and this is the simple reading of Shulchan Aruch.[[5]](#footnote-5)

*Shulchan Aruch* OC 589: 6

Even though women are exempt they may blow [the shofar] …

When a woman blows for herself, she should ideally do so prior to reciting *mussaf*, and timed close to the congregation’s timing.[[6]](#footnote-6) If this is not possible she may blow or hear shofar at any point during the day – as the commandment to blow shofar is not relegated to specific hours of the day. One praying alone should not blow shofar during the silent recitation of *mussaf*.[[7]](#footnote-7)

# Women Blowing for Others

The question of whether a woman may blow shofar for others depends on how we define the mitzva of shofar. Is the mitzva to blow the shofar? To hear the shofar? Both? There are two main approaches:

**I. Hearing and Blowing** We can try to understand the nature of a mitzva by examining the beracha recited over its performance. Rabbeinu Tam reportedly maintained that the *beracha* over shofar refers to blowing:

Rosh Rosh Ha-shana 4

Rabbeinu Tam wrote that one should recite the *beracha* "on blowing the shofar."

Given that the Talmud repeatedly discusses what one must hear to discharge the obligation, Rabbeinu Tam presumably maintains that the mitzva is a combination of blowing and hearing shofar, though the *beracha* relates to the more physical act of blowing. Rav Moshe ibn Chabib (18th century Yerushalayim) formulates this position clearly, with an emphasis on hearing:

*Yom Terua Rosh Ha-shana* 29a

For the mitzva of Rosh Ha-shana is the blowing and the hearing, both of them together, but the essence of the mitzva is the hearing.

**II. Hearing** In practice, we do not recite the *beracha* over shofar as formulated by Rabbeinu Tam. Instead, we recite “… Who commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar.” Rambam explains accordingly that the commandment is to **hear** the shofar, not to blow it.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Rambam Hilchot Shofar 1:1

It is a positive commandment from the Torah to hear the *terua* of the shofar on Rosh Ha-shana.

The Blower

How do these perspectives on the mitzva relate to questions about who may blow the shofar? In the context of discussing shofar, the mishna teaches us that one must have the same or greater level of obligation as another person in order to discharge their obligation in a mitzva.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Mishna *Rosh Ha-shana* 3:8

A person who is deaf, a person who is mentally incompetent, and a minor cannot discharge the obligation of the masses. This is the general principle: one who is not himself obligated in the matter cannot discharge the obligation of the masses.

According to the first view, that the mitzva is both hearing and blowing, it makes sense that **who** blows the shofar is a significant matter. For this reason, a woman, who is not obligated in the mitzva on a Torah level, may not blow for a man, though she should be able to blow for another woman, whose binding custom is just like hers.

If, however, we maintain that the mitzva is exclusively to hear the shofar, then it is unclear why who is blowing the shofar should matter. If a woman were to blow for a man, would he not still hear what he needs to hear and fulfill his obligation?

We can answer that a stipulation for fulfilling the mitzva of hearing is that the blower be one who is obligated in the mitzva. Levush writes this:

*Levush* OC 589:1

Even though we already said that the Torah made hearing the shofar [the fulfillment of the obligation], nevertheless one does not fulfill his obligation by hearing just anyone blow. Rather our sages z”l said: Anyone who is obligated in blowing the shofar can also fulfill the obligation for others, but someone who is not obligated cannot fulfill it for others.

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank elaborates on this idea, explaining that the halachic definition of "*kol shofar*," a sound of a shofar, goes beyond the need for the blast to emanate from a physical shofar:

Responsa *Har Tzvi* OC 2:85

One of the conditions of the mitzva is that the sound of the shofar be made by someone who is obligated … for [the sound produced by] someone who is not obligated is not hearing the sound of a shofar [blown for the purpose] of the mitzva, and such a sound is invalid.

For a blast to be defined as a shofar blast according to halacha, it must be blown by a person who is fully obligated. Therefore, a woman may not blow shofar for a man, as she does not have the same level of obligation. This view also helps us understand why the blower's intention is considered a critical part of the mitzvah

Based on the above logic, we could also argue that a woman should not blow shofar for another woman, since a woman fulfilling the obligation voluntarily would naturally want to hear a shofar sound that meets all criteria for fulfilling the mitzva. [[10]](#footnote-10)

However, we have already seen that a woman is permitted to blow shofar for herself. That must mean that a woman may fulfill the mitzva of shofar by hearing a shofar sound blown by someone else with at least her level of obligation, not necessarily by someone obligated on a Torah level.

Concluding Note

Centuries after the binding custom of women fulfilling the mitzva of shofar was adopted, women today take it as a matter of course that the community will make every effort to enable every woman to hear shofar. The link between a woman's cry and the cry of the shofar is complemented by our communities' embrace of women's urge to hear it in fulfillment of the mitzva. This, too, is part of the universal message of Rosh Ha-shana.

1. Similarly, *Yere'im* allows women to blow for themselves but does not allow a man who has already fulfilled his obligation to blow for an exclusively female audience:

   *Yere'im* 419

   For themselves we permit for gratification but not for another. For we do not tell a person to sin [just] because of women's gratification.

   *Yere’im* refers here to the concept of *nachat ruach shel nashim*, providing women with gratification, which he claims would suspend the rabbinic prohibition against her blowing the shofar, but is not strong enough to suspend that of a man. Therefore, he rules that a man who had fulfilled his obligation may not blow for a woman. Since she is exempt, this is considered blowing for no reason.

   *Yere'im* 419

   If he has fulfilled the mitzva, he should not blow for women and children, since women are exempt because it is a positive time-bound mitzva – and therefore he is blowing for no reason. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is interesting to note that Ra’avan speaks of sick women and new mothers, and not of a separate blowing for women after services. This makes is seem as though the overwhelming majority of women were present at (or at least within earshot of) services, and that private shofar blowing was arranged for those who were unable to attend for medical reasons. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Magen Avraham* 589:4

   So it seems to me that if he has another shofar, he should blow for them at the same time as the blasts in the synagogue... And if not, then he should intend not to fulfill his obligation through the blasts in synagogue, and then he can make the blessing for them. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Shulchan Aruch* OC 589:6

   Similarly, another who already fulfilled his obligation may blow to fulfill their [women’s] obligation

   This is permitted, even though blowing shofar beyond the required sounds is normally prohibited, as Rema states:

   Rema OC 596:1

   After [the congregation] have discharged their obligation [of shofar] they should not blow more for no reason.

   Mordechai *Rosh Ha-shana* 719

   And even someone who has already fulfilled their obligation may blow for them (women), since there is a mitzva, for women may blow for themselves if they want as it says in the last chapter (of Tractate *Rosh Ha-shana*). And similarly, it is permitted to take a shofar out into the public domain for women, as Beit Hillel allowed one to take a lulav out to fulfill the mitzva in the first chapter of [Tractate] *Beitza*.

   *Tur* 589

   Even though women and minors are exempt, they may blow and recite *berachot* and we do not rebuke them, and there is no problem of a prohibition on blowing shofar on Yom Tov nor of a *beracha* in vain. The Ba’al Ha-itur wrote that another who already discharged his obligation may not blow to discharge [women’s] obligation unless he did not yet discharge his own obligation – in which case he ends up blowing to discharge his own obligation. Thus is the practice in Ashkenaz, to blow for women who have given birth before they blow in synagogue in order that the blower will also discharge his own obligation. Ra’aviyah wrote that even another who already discharged his obligation can blow for them, and may carry the shofar for them even through a public domain, and my master and father agreed with this. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For example:

   Ra'aviyah Part 2, Rosh Ha-shana 534

   For women [may blow] for themselves if they want

   *Hagahot Maimoniyot* Laws of *Tzitzit* Chapter 3

   And so says Rabbeinu Simcha concerning shofar blowing – that if a woman is blowing for herself she should recite a blessing, and we do not protest.

   Tur OC 589

   Even though women and children are exempt, they may blow and make the blessing for themselves and we do not protest, and there is no prohibition against sounding the shofar on Yom Tov or a blessing in vain.

   *Yere'im* 419

   They [women] blow for themselves since there is no [biblical] prohibition against blowing. It was taught in the *beit midrash* of Shemuel (29b) “You shall not do any laborious work” – this excludes the shofar blasts and removing bread from the oven, which is a skill and not a labor. Therefore since [it provides] gratification to women and children we allow them until they learn. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Additionally, if one is praying *mussaf* without a minyan it is preferable to wait until after the third halachic hour of the day, based on a discussion in the gemara that this is a time of Divine judgment and an individual should refrain from bringing scrutiny on themselves.

   *Shulchan Aruch* OC 591:8

   One should not pray *mussaf* of Rosh Ha-shana alone until after the third [halachic] hour. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Shulchan Aruch* OC 592:2

   A person praying alone should not blow the shofar in the midst of the silent *Shemoneh Esrai* even if he has someone to blow for him. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Teshuvot Ha-Rambam 142

   Question 24: What is the difference between [reciting the blessing] “to hear the sound of the shofar” versus “on blowing the shofar?” Answer: The difference between them is very great. The obligatory mitzva is not the blowing, but hearing the blast. This means that if the obligatory mitzva were blowing, then every single man would be obligated to blow, just as every man is obligated to sit in the sukka and take the lulav [i.e., the four species]. And one who heard but did not blow would not have fulfilled his obligation. Similarly, one who blew but did not hear would fulfill his obligation, like if he completely plugged his ears and blew, he would fulfill [his obligation] since he blew. And this is not the case, rather the mitzva is the hearing, not the blowing, and we only blow so that we can hear it. Like the mitzva is to sit in the sukka and not to make it, and we only make it so we can sit in it. Therefore we recite the blessing “to sit [in the sukka]” and we do not recite a blessing “to make [the sukka],” and we recite a blessing “to hear the sound of the shofar,” and we do not make a blessing “on blowing the shofar.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It is unclear if the *cheresh* – person who is deaf – refers to someone who is deaf and mute or someone who is deaf and can still communicate. The difference is rather important in this case. Halachically, a person who is deaf and mute cannot communicate (otherwise they are not really considered mute even if they don’t use their voice to speak); this makes it impossible to know if they possess all their faculties. This person is in the same halachic category as someone who is mentally incompetent – neither one can be considered to have intent to do an action or commandment. Similarly, minors are not considered capable of intent at a level comparable to an adult. Therefore, one can explain this whole list as someone who is not mentally cognizant enough to have intent. Yet, if the *cheresh* here is a person who is deaf but not mute, than the issue is not lack of intent but rather that he cannot fully perform the commandment – for he cannot hear. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Yad Ha-melech* on Rambam

    But if the woman is blowing for herself, than the sound of the shofar is not a sound of obligation that is specified in the Torah at all, and it is like a blast that comes from a horn that is not a kosher shofar – the sound itself is invalid… [↑](#footnote-ref-10)