**S.A.L.T. – ROSH HASHANA 5781**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Mishna in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah (27b) addresses the case of somebody who sounded the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah in a cavern, giving rise to the question of whether this satisfies the obligation of hearing the sounding of the *shofar*. The answer to this question, the Mishna establishes, depends on whether one heard the actual sound of the *shofar*, or “*kol havara*” – the sound of the echo. The Gemara clarifies that this refers only to those standing outside the cavern, whereas those who are inside fulfill their obligation.

Rashi understands the Gemara’s remark to mean that those situated inside the cavern fulfill the obligation under all circumstances, whereas those situated outside the cavern fulfill the obligation only if they hear the actual sound of the *shofar*, and not an echo. This is the ruling of the Rambam, in *Hilkhot Shofar* (1:8). The Rosh, however, disagrees. He questions why sometimes those standing outside the cavern would hear the actual sound, and at other times, they would hear the echo sound. And, he adds, if this depends on the factors such as the depth of the cavern and the people’s distance from the cavern, then *Chazal* should have established specific guidelines, rather than leave it to people to determine whether or not they heard the actual *shofar* sound. Therefore, the Rosh understood the Gemara to mean that in such a case, when a *shofar* is sounded inside the cavern, those standing outside do not fulfill their obligation, even if they feel that they heard the actual sound of the *shofar*. The Rosh explains that when the *shofar* is blown inside a cavern, the sound heard outside is the combination of the actual sound and the echo sound produced by the walls, and so anyone who hears the sound outside the cavern does not fulfill the *mitzva*.

The *Tur* (O.C. 586) follows the view of his father, the Rosh, whereas the *Shulchan Arukh* (586:1) accepts the Rambam’s position, that those standing outside the cavern fulfill the *mitzva* if they determine that they heard the actual *shofar* sound.

The *Taz* (587:1) expands the *Shulchan Aruch*’s ruling beyond the specific case of a cavern. He writes that even if a *shofar* is sounded in a synagogue, and people are standing outside, at a distance from the synagogue, they might not necessarily fulfill their obligation by hearing the *shofar* blasts. In this instance, too, according to the *Taz*, a determination will need to be made that the actual sound of the *shofar* was heard, and not an echo reverberating off the walls of the building.

Interestingly, the *Taz* further asserts that although the *Shulchan Arukh* rules that those who stand outside the cavern fulfill their obligation if they determine that they heard the actual *shofar* sound, we should not rely on such a determination. The *Taz* notes that there are numerous areas in *Halakha* regarding which we do not presume expertise to definitively identify certain conditions, and thus in this case, too, those who stand outside a cavern in which the *shofar* is sounded should hear the *shofar* blowing again. [Rav Asher Weiss](http://www.torahbase.org/%d7%aa%d7%a7%d7%99%d7%a2%d7%aa-%d7%a9%d7%95%d7%a4%d7%a8-%d7%91%d7%a2%d7%99%d7%93%d7%9f-%d7%94%d7%a7%d7%95%d7%a8%d7%95%d7%a0%d7%94-%d7%aa%d7%a9%d7%a4/) questions the Rosh’s claim, noting that although there are, indeed, ten different areas in *Halakha* regarding which we do not presume expertise, nevertheless, when it comes to the *shofar* sound, this does not require expertise. There is no skill needed to distinguish between the actual *shofar* sound and the sound of the echo, and so a person standing outside the cavern may rely on his assessment that he heard the actual sound of the *shofar*.

Curiously, the *Taz* does not combine his two claims vis-à-vis this *halakha*. We would have assumed that according to the *Taz*, those who stand outside the synagogue and hear the sounding of the *shofar* do not fulfill their obligation, since, in his view, this is akin to the situation of a *shofar* sounded in a cavern, such that one cannot rely on his own assessment. However, the *Taz* stops short of this conclusion. He writes that in the case of people standing outside the synagogue, they can rely on their assessment that they heard the actual *shofar* sound, even though such an assessment cannot be trusted when hearing the sound of the *shofar* blown in a cavern.

As Rav Weiss notes, this discussion is particularly relevant to *shofar* blowing this year (Rosh Hashanah, 5781), when, due to the coronavirus pandemic, many will be listening to the *shofar* blowing outside synagogues, or in different “capsules” within the same building. Even according to the stringent view of the *Taz*, one fulfills the *mitzva* in this fashion if he assesses that he heard the actual *shofar* sound. (Rav Weiss adds that in any event, this year, the *shofar* is not sounded on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, because it falls on Shabbat, and *shofar* blowing on the second day is required only by force of Rabbinic enactment, allowing greater room for leniency.)

Sunday

The Gemara in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah (27b) addresses the status of a *shofar* that was plated with metal, such as gold, and establishes that if the interior of the *shofar* is plated, then the *shofar* is invalid for the *mitzva* on Rosh Hashanah. If, however, the plating is along the *shofar*’s exterior, the Gemara rules, then the *shofar* is invalid only if the plating has the effect of altering the *shofar*’s sound. Despite the fact that, as the Gemara there notes, the *shofar* sound is valid regardless of its quality, this applies only if the sound is natural. If the sound was manipulated in any way, such as by a substance attached to the *shofar*’s exterior surface, the sound does not fulfill the *mitzva*.

The Ritva understands the Gemara’s ruling to mean that if a *shofar* has plating or any sort of decoration on its exterior, then it is presumed invalid for use for the *mitzva* unless experts have determined that the metal or decoration does not change the *shofar*’s sound. Intuitively, one might have reasoned that if the foreign substance is on the *shofar*’s exterior, the *shofar* retains its presumed status of validity unless it is determined that the sound has been altered. But the Ritva argues that since we deal here with a Torah obligation, such a *shofar* may not be used until it has first been conclusively determined that the sound is not altered by the presence of the foreign substance.

[Rav Asher Weiss](http://www.torahbase.org/%d7%aa%d7%a7%d7%99%d7%a2%d7%aa-%d7%a9%d7%95%d7%a4%d7%a8-%d7%91%d7%a2%d7%99%d7%93%d7%9f-%d7%94%d7%a7%d7%95%d7%a8%d7%95%d7%a0%d7%94-%d7%aa%d7%a9%d7%a4/) cites the Ritva’s discussion in reference to the question that arises this year (Rosh Hashanah, 5781) as to whether the opening the *shofar* may be covered by material to obstruct the germs of the one blowing the *shofar*. As part of the efforts to avoid the risk of spreading coronavirus, some have recommended wrapping material around the end of the *shofar* in order to prevent the germs from exiting through the *shofar* and scattering throughout the room. Would this be allowed, or does this affect the *shofar* sound, thus invalidating the blowing?

Rav Weiss notes that the Gemara speaks of material that alters, rather than muffles, the sound. The disqualification discussed here is a change in the nature of the sound, but not a reduction in the volume. Indeed, as mentioned, the Gemara states explicitly that there is no required quality of sound, and even a low, muffled sound fulfills the *mitzva*. Necessarily, then, it is only when the foreign material transforms the sound that it disqualifies the blowing, and not when it has merely a muffling effect.

Moreover, Rav Weiss adds, the Ritva writes that a *shofar* with a foreign substance on its exterior must be presumed invalid because we deal with a Biblical obligation, regarding which we must apply strict standards of certainty. This year, when the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, the *shofar* is sounded only on the second day, when blowing the *shofar* is required only by force of rabbinic enactment. Certainly, then, there is room to allow sounding the *shofar* this year with material covering the *shofar*’s opening if one feels this is necessary as a safety precaution.

Monday

The Gemara in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah (33b) famously establishes that the basic obligation of *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah requires sounding a series of “*teru’a*” sounds, each preceded and followed by a straight *teki’a*. However, as the Gemara notes, different views exist as to the precise definition of the word “*teru’a*.” All agree that the “*teru’a*” must resemble a weeping sound, but there are different opinions as to which specific weeping sound is commemorated. One view understands “*teru’a*” as referring to “*genuchi ganach*” – a groaning sound, what we commonly call “*shevarim*.” According to another view, the term “*teru’a*” refers to what we commonly call a “*teru’a*” – a series of very short sounds, which resembles “*yelulei yelil*” – frantic crying. Yet a third view is that the *teru’a* is both these sounds combined. This is why, as the Gemara concludes, we cover all possibilities by sounding the *shevarim*, *teru’a*, and *shevarim-teru’a*, with a *teki’a* before and after each.

The *Shela*, in *Shenei Luchot Ha-berit* (Masekhet Rosh Hashanah, *Torah Or*, 3), suggests a symbolic explanation of this sequence – a “weeping” sound preceded and followed by two straight sounds. The first *teki’a*, the *Shela* writes, represents the state of perfection with which the human soul enters this world. As King Shlomo famously pronounces in Kohelet (7:29), “…that God made mankind straight, but they then sought many considerations.” We begin life pure and pristine, but our pursuit of “many considerations” – wrongful joys and pleasures – taints our natural state of purity. And thus after the first *teki’a*, the *Shela* explains, we sound a *teru’a*, which, as the Gemara discusses, has two connotations. First, it signifies a “groan,” like a person suffering pain and discomfort, representing our angst over having lost our “*teki’a*,” the pristine condition with which we began life. Second, the *teru’a* expresses wailing, like a mourner weeping over the loss of a loved one. The *teru’a* sound is a sound of not just pain, but of lamentation, mourning the loss of our true selves, the loss of the people we were capable of being and we were meant to be. This is then followed by another *teki’a* – symbolizing the process of recovery, our ability to restore our initial “straightness.” As we groan and lament our loss of innocence and purity, we are to trust in our ability to regain that quality and in God’s compassion and forgiveness. We must believe in our capacity to rebuild ourselves, and this is the meaning of the second *teki’a* – the renewed purity which follows, and results from, our anguish and regret.

The *Shela*’s understanding of the *teki’a-teru’a-teki’a* sequence reflects the conflicting emotions that characterize the experience of Rosh Hashanah, and of repentance generally. The process of *teshuva* is, on the one hand, fraught with painful feelings of remorse, shame and guilt, the anguish of lost opportunities and of failure. But at the same time, growth is – and should be – exciting and invigorating. *Teshuva* is not only about the *teru’a* – the angst of regret – but about the transition from the *teru’a* to the *teki’a*, the remarkable ability and privilege we are given to rebuild and revive ourselves, to transform into somebody far greater than we are now. This accounts for the aura of joy and festivity that accompanies the solemnity of this day. Even as we stand in fear of judgment, reflecting upon our failures and lost opportunities of the previous year, we also excitedly embrace and celebrate the new opportunities that present themselves during the coming year, enthusiastically committing ourselves to seize them and use the new year as a time for positive change.

Tuesday

The Mishna in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah (26b) writes that the *shofar* sounded on Rosh Hashanah has “its mouth plated with gold.” Rashi explains that this refers to the *shofar* sounded in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on Rosh Hashanah, which was especially adorned with a gold plating. The Gemara (27a) clarifies that plating is forbidden in the area where the mouth is placed on the *shofar* to blow. As Rashi writes, plating in this area would constitute an obstruction, such that one effectively blows the metal plating, and not the *shofar* itself. Plating is allowed on other parts of the *shofar*, but not where the mouth is placed. Later (27b), the Gemara adds that plating anywhere on the *shofar* disqualifies it if the plating alters the sound produced by the *shofar*.

Rav Moshe Ibn Chabiv, in his *Yom Terua* commentary to Masekhet Rosh Hashanah, raises the question of why the Sages did not forbid gold on the *shofar* due to the rule of “*ein kateigor na’asa saneigor*” – “a prosecutor cannot become a defender.” The Gemara earlier invokes this principle to explain the Mishna’s ruling that the horn of a cow is not valid for the *mitzva*, as it brings to mind the sin of the golden calf. A cow’s horn is a “prosecutor” – evoking the memory of our nation’s gravest blunder – and thus cannot be used as we seek to arouse God’s compassion on our day of judgment. The Gemara notes that this is the same reason why the *kohen gadol* wore plain, white garments, without any gold, while entering the inner sanctum of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on Yom Kippur, as gold would inauspiciously evoke the memory of the golden calf. Seemingly, then, it would be improper to plate the *shofar* with gold, as well, for this same reason.

Rav Moshe Ibn Chabiv answers that since gold plating is allowed only if it does not impact the sound of the *shofar* blast, it is not subject to the rule of “*ein kateigor na’asa saneigor*.” The gold is an external decoration which has no bearing at all on the sound of the *shofar*, and therefore, since the *mitzva* is fulfilled through the production of the sound, and not through the *shofar* itself, the gold is halakhically inconsequential. It is not the “defender,” insofar as it is not integral to the *shofar*.This answer was offered by later writers, as well, including the *Tiferet Yisrael* commentary to the Mishna and the *Sefat Emet*.

Rav Moshe Ibn Chabiv also suggests a second, particularly bold, answer, postulating that indeed, the Mishna’s ruling permitting gold on the *shofar* follows the minority view of Rabbi Yossi, who allows using a cow’s horn for the *shofar* blowing (Mishna, 26a). Rabbi Yossi clearly did not subscribe to the rule of “*ein kateigor na’asa saneigor*” (or at least not to its application to the *mitzva* of *shofar*), and thus in his view, there is no reason to disallow the use of a *shofar* with gold plating. It is only according to Rabbi Yossi’s view, Rav Moshe Ibn Chabiv suggests, that the Mishna allows fulfilling the *mitzva* with a *shofar* plated with gold.

On this basis, Rav Moshe Ibn Chabiv offers an explanation for why the Rambam makes no mention of the Mishna’s comment that the *shofar* sounded in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* was plated with gold. Since gold plating is allowed only according to the minority view of Rabbi Yossi, which is not accepted as *halakha*, the Rambam disregarded this ruling.

Chida, in *Machazik Berakha* (O.C. 585), questions this theory, noting that it does not seem reasonable that different views existed regarding the practice observed in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The fact that the *shofar* in the Temple was plated with gold, the Chida argues, is a piece of historical information which cannot be subject to dispute.

As for why the Rambam made no mention of the plating on the *shofar* in the *Mikdash*, a number of *Acharonim*, including *Sefat Emet* (Megilla 27a), suggest, very simply, that this was omitted because it was a non-binding custom. There was no halakhic requirement to plate the *shofar* with gold; this was simply a custom that emerged as an expression of special respect for the *mitzva* of *shofar* and for the *Mikdash*. Therefore, the Rambam did not find it necessary to include this practice in his discussion of the *halakhot* of *shofar* blowing, where he presents the actual requirements of this *mitzva*.

Wednesday

Yesterday, we noted the Gemara’s ruling that if the *shofar* is plated with gold on the area where one’s mouth is placed for blowing, the *shofar* is disqualified for use for the *mitzva*. If the gold plating is done somewhere else on the *shofar*, then the *shofar* is valid (as long as the plating does not alter the sound of the *shofar* blast).

Meiri explains that gold plating on the part where the mouth is placed disqualifies the *shofar* “because this is not the sound of the *shofar*, but rather the sound of the gold, since the sound passes by way of [the gold].” According to Meiri, when somebody blows such a *shofar*, the sound is produced by the gold plating, and not by the *shofar* itself, and therefore, the *mitzva* is not fulfilled. The Ritva, however, seems to explain this *halakha* differently. He writes that such a *shofar* is invalid because the plating constitutes a *chatzitza* – “obstruction” – between the person’s mouth and the *shofar*, and the person’s mouth must directly touch the surface of the *shofar*.

[Rav Asher Weiss](https://www.torahbase.org/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%97%D7%95%D7%A7%D7%AA-%D7%90%D7%99%D7%9F-%D7%A7%D7%98%D7%99%D7%92%D7%95%D7%A8-%D7%A0%D7%A2%D7%A9%D7%94-%D7%A1%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%92%D7%95%D7%A8/) posits that the Ritva and Meiri apparently had different understandings of the case addressed here by the Gemara. According to Meiri, it stands to reason that the Gemara deals with gold plating inside the mouthpiece of the *shofar*, such that the sound is produced by the gold. The Ritva, by contrast, likely understood the Gemara as referring to a gold plating around the exterior of the mouthpiece, such that it constitutes a *chatzitza* between the person’s mouth and the *shofar*.

Rav Weiss proceeds to suggest that there might also be a third possible explanation of the Gemara. The Maharil (*Hilkhot Shofar*, 4), surprisingly, wrote that no gold should be placed on the *shofar*, as this violates the principle of “*ein kateigor na’asa saneigor*” (“a prosecutor cannot become a defender”). As we saw yesterday, the Gemara in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah (26a) comments that the *kohen gadol* does not wear his usual gold garments when ministering in the inner sanctum of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, because gold brings to mind the sin of the golden calf. As the *kohen gadol* endeavors to earn atonement on behalf of the people, it would be inappropriate to evoke the inauspicious memory of this grave national failure. By the same token, the Gemara explains why, according to the majority view among the *Tanna’im*, a cow’s horn may not be used for the *mitzva* of *shofar* – because this, too, brings to mind the golden calf. The Maharil asserts that likewise, no gold plating should be present on the *shofar*. Many *Acharonim* noted that the Maharil’s ruling directly contradicts the Gemara, which states explicitly that gold plating is allowed anywhere on the *shofar* except the area where the mouth blows.

Rav Weiss boldly suggests that the Maharil indeed refers only to the area where the mouth blows the *shofar*, and that the Maharil explains why the Gemara forbids gold on that area – because gold brings to mind the memory of the golden calf. The Maharil perhaps understood that gold plating on areas other than the mouthpiece does not violate the rule of “*ein kateigor na’asa saneigor*,” because it has no connection at all to the *shofar* blowing. It is only when gold is placed either inside or on the mouthpiece that it “participates” in the sounding of the *shofar*, such that we view the gold as serving as our “defender,” which is inappropriate. If so, Rav Weiss asserts, then the Maharil would disqualify the *shofar* regardless of whether the gold is inside the mouthpiece or on top of the mouthpiece – because either way, it is involved in the *shofar* blowing process, in violation of the principle of “*ein kateigor na’asa saneigor*.”

Thursday

Yesterday, we examined the Gemara’s ruling in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah (27a) that a gold plating on a *shofar* does not disqualify it for the *mitzva* of *shofar* blowing unless the plating is situated in the area where one places his mouth when blowing.

*Chatam Sofer* suggested that beyond the practical halakhic implications of this ruling, it might also symbolically convey a meaningful lesson about religious life. The act of blowing the *shofar*, *Chatam Sofer* writes, might represent the importance of Torah learning, which is done, generally, through speech. The *halakha* established by the Gemara might instruct that we cannot “plate” the value of Torah study with “gold” – with generosity and kindness. Learning and charity are both vitally important foundations of religious life, and neither can substitute for the other. Generously giving charity is, of course, a precious *mitzva*, but it does not absolve one of the obligation to “blow” the *shofar*, to use his mouth in the service of God through devoted Torah learning. This is represented by the law disqualifying a *shofar* with gold plating around the mouthpiece – showing that gold cannot substitute for the process of Torah learning.

More broadly, perhaps, we might suggest that gold in this context represents our valuable accomplishments. As we come before God for judgment on Rosh Hashanah, we all bring with us our “gold” – precious and worthwhile achievements of which we can and should feel proud. However, the *shofar* blast, as the Gemara famously teaches (Rosh Hashanah 33b), simulates a weeping sound, a cry of humility, a cry for compassion and mercy. As we crown God anew as King over the world, we express our humble submission to His rule and our helpless dependence upon His grace and kindness. This cry must be expressed without our “gold,” without priding ourselves over our achievements. Legitimate pride certainly has its place in our mindset generally, and in the *teshuva* process particularly, but as we sound the *shofar*, our “cry” must be expressed with humility and a sense of unworthiness. And so although gold plating is acceptable on the *shofar* – representing the validity of feeling pride over our accomplishments – it must not be situated near the mouthpiece, because our cry must be sounded not with pride, but with a sense of desperation, as we recognize the extent to which we rely on the Almighty’s mercy and kindness.

Friday

The Gemara, in a famous passage (Rosh Hashanah 11a), teaches that Rosh Hashanah was the day when Yosef was brought out of prison and stood before Pharaoh to interpret his peculiar dreams. Yosef had languished in prison for twelve years after he was falsely accused of assaulting the wife of his master, Potifar, following her repeated attempts to lure him into an adulterous relationship. During his time in prison, Yosef successfully interpreted the dreams of two fellow inmates – servants of Pharaoh – one of whom, the cupbearer, was released and reinstated, just as Yosef had predicted. When Pharaoh consulted with his advisors after his unusual dreams, the cupbearer advised that Yosef be brought before the king to decipher the dreams’ meaning. The Gemara tells that this occurred on Rosh Hashanah.

Many have explained that the Gemara here points to one of the important functions of the Rosh Hashanah observance – to leave our own, self-imposed states of confinement. We are all guilty of “imprisoning” ourselves in some way, of underachieving, of viewing ourselves as incapable of accomplishing more than we have. The occasion of Rosh Hashanah calls upon us to leave our “prison” as the new year begins, to commit ourselves to break habits and routines which restrict us and prevent us from achieving more.

Developing this point one step further, the Gemara’s teaching is perhaps intended to reshape our perspective on our current condition. One of the most common impediments to change is the comfort we feel in our familiar routines. We are reluctant to change because change is difficult and unnerving. We are comfortable with what we already know and are accustomed to, and we do not want to go through the trouble of accustoming ourselves to something new. The Gemara therefore urges us to see our familiar routine the way Yosef saw his condition. We cannot even imagine the sense of relief and joy Yosef experienced the moment he was brought out of the dreary dungeon where he spent the previous twelve years. In an instant, he left the filth and gloom of the dungeon and entered a magnificent, luxurious palace. This was a transformation that Yosef longed for, that he relished, that he celebrated. It certainly was not a change which he found intimidating, or that caused him uneasiness. *Chazal* perhaps want us to approach the process of change as we begin the new year with this same mindset. Rather than feel comfortable where we are and fear the prospect of change, we are to see ourselves like Yosef in the Egyptian dungeon. We are to feel dissatisfied with our current condition, and to desperately seek to leave. We are to trust in our ability to enter a “palace,” to create for ourselves a far more beautiful and more fulfilling life than we have now. We are to approach the new year with ambition, with a restless yearning to leave the “prison” of our present state and build for ourselves something much greater.

Rosh Hashanah is the time for us to leave our “prison” – but the first step is to recognize that we are in “prison.” Rather than remain in our so-called “comfort zone,” we should feel uncomfortable in our “zone,” and firmly believe that we will experience the comfort and fulfillment we desire in a different “zone,” by making the positive changes which we should be making.

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