

5779 Introduction to Shofar Service

Where does the Shofar GO??? If we listen correctly, it goes straight to the heart.

In some ways, the shofar is the OPPOSITE of our world today. The shofar can help us CORRECT our multitasking, distracted lives. The Shofar offers us a way BACK into one of our most ESSENTIAL human skills: a way to PRACTICE the ART of LISTENING.

The shofar is a correction. You might remember that famous line we said when we got the Torah. "Naaseh v'Nishma." We will do and we will listen!!

It sounds great when you tell it.. .wow we were willing to live the Torah before we had even heard what it asked of us!!

Well, the Sfat Emet: Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, 19th century Gerer rebbe, says, YEAH.. that didn't really work out so well. *Kilkaltem Naaseh hizharu b'nishma*. You messed up the *Naaseh*, You messed up the We WILL DO, now be careful with the *Nishma*, with the WE WILL LISTEN. In most of our tradition, we were complimented on committing to the commandments before hearing all the details, but in this midrash, the rabbis are honest. We weren't so good at the ACTION part. Maybe we should have listened FIRST.

So LISTENING to the SHOFAR, then, is a *TIKKUN*, it is a REDO of the time when we messed up as a people, and it works for us as individuals too... by LISTENING, we get to fix the things we have done wrong.

And there are a lot of ways to LISTEN DEEPLY.

Have you ever watched the deaf community "listen" to the sound of the shofar? They gather around the shofar and they HOLD it... so they can feel the vibration of the shofar.

Jewish law teaches that the deaf ARE obligated in the mitzvah of Shofar, with one very important condition. If a person is a MEDABER he is obligated in the mitzvah of shofar... even if he cannot hear.

As long as you can SPEAK. As long as you can communicate, you are OBLIGATED in the mitzvah of shofar. If you <https://www.kindspring.org/story/view.php?sid=7929> can TALK, if you can communicate your own thoughts, the *halacha* teaches, then you can listen. Remember the line: We have two ears and only one mouth? Why? We have to STOP talking and LISTEN twice as much as we talk. We EARN the right to share what WE have to say by LISTENING to others, by Taking IN another's words, being open to what the other has to offer.

It's like we are all students in a seminar with our hands up. We're not actually LISTENING to what anyone else is saying, just WAITING our turn to say our own opinion. The Shofar asks us to LISTEN FIRST and THEN speak.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (Covenant and Conversation about Ekev) suggests a main difference between the ancient Greek culture in which rabbinic Judaism was developed.

Ancient Greece was a profoundly visual culture. Its greatest achievements had to do with the eye, with seeing: art, sculpture and architecture, theatrical performances. Plato thought of knowledge as a kind of depth vision, seeing beneath the surface to the true form of things.

This idea – that knowing is seeing – remains the dominant metaphor in the West even today. We speak of insight, foresight and hindsight. We offer an observation. We adopt a perspective. We shed light on an issue. When we understand something, we say, “I see.”

But in Jewish life, we try to connect to a God we cannot see, a God who cannot be represented visually.

Rabbi David Cohen (1887–1972), known as the Nazir, pointed out that in the Babylonian Talmud all the metaphors of understanding are based not on seeing but on hearing. Ta shema, “come and hear.” Shema mina, “Infer from this.”

For us, today, it is intuitive that HEARING is a sign of a deeper level of understanding, a deeper level of connection. When we say “I hear you,” means empathy.

Look at the Torah reading. We see the root “RE’EH” many times... But it's GOD who showed us EMPATHY, by HEARING the cry of the child... *Ki SHAMA Adonai et kol hana'ar.*

LISTENING is the thing that gives us EMPATHY...

No coincidence that our most central affirmation of faith begins with the word SHEMA: HEAR, LISTEN. For it is by LISTENING that we can TRULY begin to connect to one another and to what is most important.

If you can speak, you can listen. If you can act, you can STOP acting and hear the message of the shofar.

That's WHERE THE SHOFAR GOES...

So it's time for us listen and then instead of applauding (which we might want to do...), we're going to have a minute of silent meditation. Let's allow the shofar to penetrate our heart and help us to listen better in the coming year.