

## Sounding the Shofar

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I was not born a Ba'al Tekiah, although shortly after my birth I was given the name Chaim Leib, after my grandmother's and great uncle's father. Only recently, I had the honor of observing Chaim Leib's name on both my grandmother's tombstone and that of my great uncle, who is buried in the Holy City of Tzfat, Israel.

My career as a Ba'al Tekiah started as a simple trumpet player in the fourth grade growing up in Great Neck, New York. I loved the trumpet, especially since we had so many musicians in the family. My Uncle Bill, who was a music teacher at Bayside High School, Queens, New York, secured for me an Olds Ambassador trumpet, which I was always told was the favorite of Louis Armstrong. Like many in my generation, who did not know anything about Armstrong's moral lapses, he was definitely a hero.

My talent as a Ba'al Tekiah, who sounds the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, did not come to the floor until the last trip to Israel taken by my parents before my father's passing. They brought back for me a magnificent Shofar, that I always referred to as a "bull horn." It is not one of those tiny little things that a wimpy ram had on the top of his head, but rather it was a several-foot-long instrument worn by a proud desert animal. I am not sure where in Israel they purchased it, but it has been an important memento in my life. Aside from the fact that my parents brought it home for me, I have had the pleasure of sounding this magnificent instrument in Synagogue over many years.

The trick to sounding the Shofar, notice we do not say "playing" the Shofar, or "blowing" the Shofar, is the mouthpiece. The mouthpiece is just a little bit smaller than the one that I used on my Olds Ambassador to play *When the Saints Go Marching In*, and many other pieces of music. How well I remember the years that I marched in the parades in Great Neck and football games throughout Long Island. Marching and trying to play music at the same time is not something that anybody does very well, but it was sure loads of fun for me.

The sounding of the Shofar is unique in that it has a great religious significance. There are those who say it heralds the arrival of the Messiah. Others note that it is emblematic of the New Year. Calling the people together to remind them of T'shuvah, Tzedakah and Zichronot, charity, forgiveness and remembrance are the call of the Shofar.

Essentially, three "notes" are sounded. The Tekiah, the Teruah and the Shevarim play in different sequence. The notes have to be sounded in a way that may convey a sharp call to spiritual arms as opposed to a wailing or a moaning. Use of the lips and the lungs are essential to get the right sounds in the right way.

For those who observe Rosh Hashanah, hearing the sound of the Shofar is mandatory, and is without question the highlight of the service. That is when the kids are brought in, and people who may not go to Synagogue all year, will want to hear the rallying cry of spiritual enlightenment that comes with the Days of Awe, which is the period of time between Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, and Yom Kippur, only a few days later.

For me, the highlight of sounding the Shofar came a few years ago when a Chabad Rabbi in Main Line Philadelphia asked me to take my Shofar, along with my son, Joshua, to assisted living centers in the Haverford, Pennsylvania area. It was a remarkable and memorable experience. We went to one group of residents, who were fully cognizant. They enjoyed Joshua's excellent Hebrew rendition of the appropriate prayers and his English explanations. They treated him like he was the Rabbi, and I was the mere, lowly assistant who made the Shofar sound good. The next group of people were perhaps not fully comprehensive of what was going on or why, but yet we noted the smiles and even the cheers when we finished our "act."

I told the Rabbi that I was honored to be serving the Chabad and to be considered by the people who ran the facility as a true Lubavitcher. After all, my mother's family were **Bolvair** and later followers of the Lubavitcher Hasidic movement. This year, we have been invited to once again "perform" at the assisted living centers along the Main Line, Philadelphia. Whether those residents are Jewish or non-Jewish, and perhaps most are not of the Jewish faith, there seems to be a great deal of joy among folks who would not get out to hear, or participate in, the holiness of this important holiday.

Somewhere along the line, Uncle Bill, the music teacher, "Uncle Warren" – who was a cousin and not really an uncle, but played first trumpet in the pit orchestra of several Broadway shows – had a great idea when they suggested that I learn how to play the trumpet. "With his set of lungs, the kid is sure to be a great trumpet player and a future lawyer." Well, both "Uncles" were on the right track. What they probably never did think of is that I would use that skill and talent to ring in the New Year for those who are not in a position to travel to Synagogue during this important time of the year.

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