

EXOTIC SHOFAROT

BY NATAN SLIFKIN

Most *shofarot* are made from a ram's horn. However, an increasing number of exotic *shofarot* are available from species such as the kudu, the gemsbok and the ibex. While some of these "alternative" *shofarot* are quite popular, there are serious halachic concerns regarding their acceptability.

The most well-known "alternative shofar" is made from the horn of a kudu antelope. Instantly recognizable by their great length (they are usually thirty- to forty-inches long but are occasionally over fifty inches) and their three twists, these *shofarot* originated with the Yemenite community, and are therefore commonly called "Yemenite *shofarot*." Due to their magnificent appearance, they are available from almost every shofar supplier.

One might think that using such a spectacular-looking shofar would be a *hiddur mitzvah*, performing a mitzvah in the most beautiful way. However, this is not the case. According to Chazal, the best way to perform the mitzvah is to use a ram's horn, which is reminiscent of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, when

Avraham sacrificed a ram in place of his son, Yitzchak.

The gemsbok shofar is made from the horn of the southern African oryx, a type of antelope that is often referred to by its Afrikaans name: gemsbok. Its horns are about two and a half feet long, straight, ridged along half their length and deep brown or black in color. They make for novel and striking *shofarot*.

Yet gemsbok *shofarot* are halachically problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it is preferable to have a bent shofar in order to symbolize that one should be bent in contrition on the Yamim Noraim, the Days of Awe. While this requirement is not mandatory (were one to blow with a straight shofar, he would have fulfilled the mitzvah), if one has a choice between using a straight or a curved shofar, one is obligated to use the latter.

Secondly, according to Rabbi Sa'adiah Gaon and others, the oryx, from which the gemsbok shofar is made, is the "*re'eim*" mentioned in the Torah. This relates to a discussion in the Talmud in which several reasons are given as to why a cow's horn may not be used as a shofar. The most famous of these is that it is reminiscent of the Golden Calf. But the primary reason

given is that a cow's horn is termed a *keren*, which literally means "horn," but which designates it in a different category than a shofar. In the same verse where the Torah refers to a cow's horn as a *keren*, it compares it to the *keren* of a *re'eim*. We learn from this that just as the horn of a cow does not qualify as a shofar, neither does that of a *re'eim*. It follows then that if the oryx is the *re'eim*, as many propose, its horn cannot be used as a shofar. While we cannot determine the identity of the *re'eim* with any certainty—some propose that the *re'eim* is the extinct ancestor of cattle known as the aurochs—the possibility that it is the oryx is enough of a reason not to use a gemsbok shofar.

Even a shofar made of a ram's horn is no simple matter. An animal's horn is made of a bony core covered by a keratin sheath. To make it into a shofar, the bony core is removed, the tip of the sheath is sawn off and a hole is drilled into the hollow interior of the sheath. But from the sawn-off tip to the hollow interior is usually a fair distance, which, in a curved horn, raises a problem; it is physically impossible to drill a curved hole. Shofar manufacturers solve this problem by heating the horn so that it can be partially straightened and thereby easier to drill a hole.

Rabbi Slifkin is the author of numerous books on the interface between Torah and the natural world.



Photo: www.sassontiram.com

1. Cattle horn shofar (nonkosher)
2. Kudu shofar
3. Ibex shofar
4. Aoudad sheep shofar
5. Water buffalo shofar (questionable if kosher)
6. Partially-straightened ram's horn shofar
7. Fully-twisted ram's horn shofar

8. Blackbuck shofar
9. Pronghorn shofar. Most animal horns are hollow and can theoretically be made into shofarot. (Although some are pasul, disqualified, such as that of a cow.) Horns that are not hollow may not be used as shofarot, even if they are drilled through. Antlers, the branched horns of deer, may therefore not be used as shofarot since they

are not hollow. Although the horns of pronghorns superficially resemble deer antlers, they are, in fact, hollow and therefore kosher. However, it is preferable not to use the pronghorn shofar because it is not curved.

10. Gemsbok shofar

However, the late Yemenite authority Rabbi Yosef Kapach writes that partially straightening the horn in this way is a problem halachically. The Mishnah states that one should use the bent horn of a ram rather than the “straight” horn of an ibex. But the horn of the ibex—the wild goat found in Ein Gedi—is far from straight. Many therefore explain that what the Mishnah means is that the ibex horn is *relatively* straight; merely curved along one axis, rather than twisted in a corkscrew shape

like a ram’s horn. Yet by the time a ram’s horn has been partially straightened for drilling, it is often no more bent than the horn of an ibex.

Rabbi Kapach therefore rules that one should use a ram’s horn shofar that has not been straightened at all. Such a shofar can only be made out of a very large horn, in which one can saw off a generous amount from the tip in order to minimize the length of the hole to be drilled. Such *shofarot* command extremely high prices. While not all

halachic authorities agree with Rabbi Kapach’s arguments, they concur that it is desirable to use such a shofar, if possible. Others maintain that using such a large ram’s horn is not necessary since most *shofarot* made of ram’s horns are sufficiently twisted and are easily differentiated from an ibex horn.

A lengthier version of this article, including references and additional illustrations, is available at www.zootorah.com.

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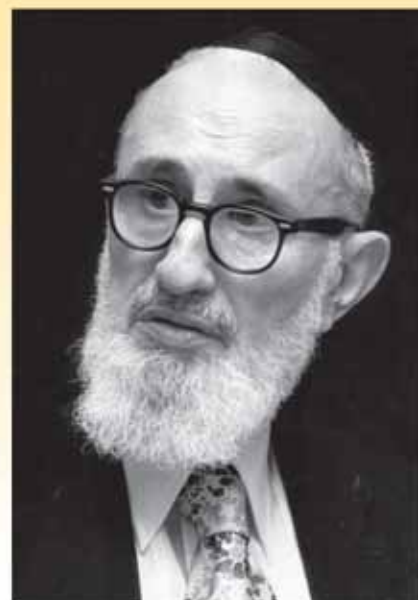


Photo by Rabbi's name Albert 176, a devoted student of the Rav

Congregation and chazzan:
And so, the Kedushah prayer shall ascend
for You, our God, are King

Congregation and chazzan:

Let us now relate the power of this day — awesome and frightening.* On it Your King's throne will be firm with kindness and in truth. It is true that You alone are the One who knows, and bears witness; Who writes and calculates; Who remembers all that will open the Book of Chronicles — it will be one's signature is in it. The great shofar will still, thin sound will be heard. Angels will and terror will seize them* — and they will be for the Day of Judgment, to muster the heavenly host for they can not be vindicated in Your eyes as mankind will pass before You* like men

relentlessly shattered. This intense experience results in a sense of awe that overwhelms and paralyzes the individual, an experience that is the purpose of this part of our prayer service (Before Hashem, p. 10).

וְכָל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבֹדוּ לְפָנֶיךָ — [And] all mankind will pass before You to be judged, and God evaluates whether one deserves to carry His image. God ascertains whether or not one has kept the covenant of Israel and maintained his human dignity, Mitzvos, introspection. He must be strong, seek to improve himself, acknowledge his failures and shortcomings. Man must engage in honest introspection (Noraot HaRav, Volume 1, p. 10).

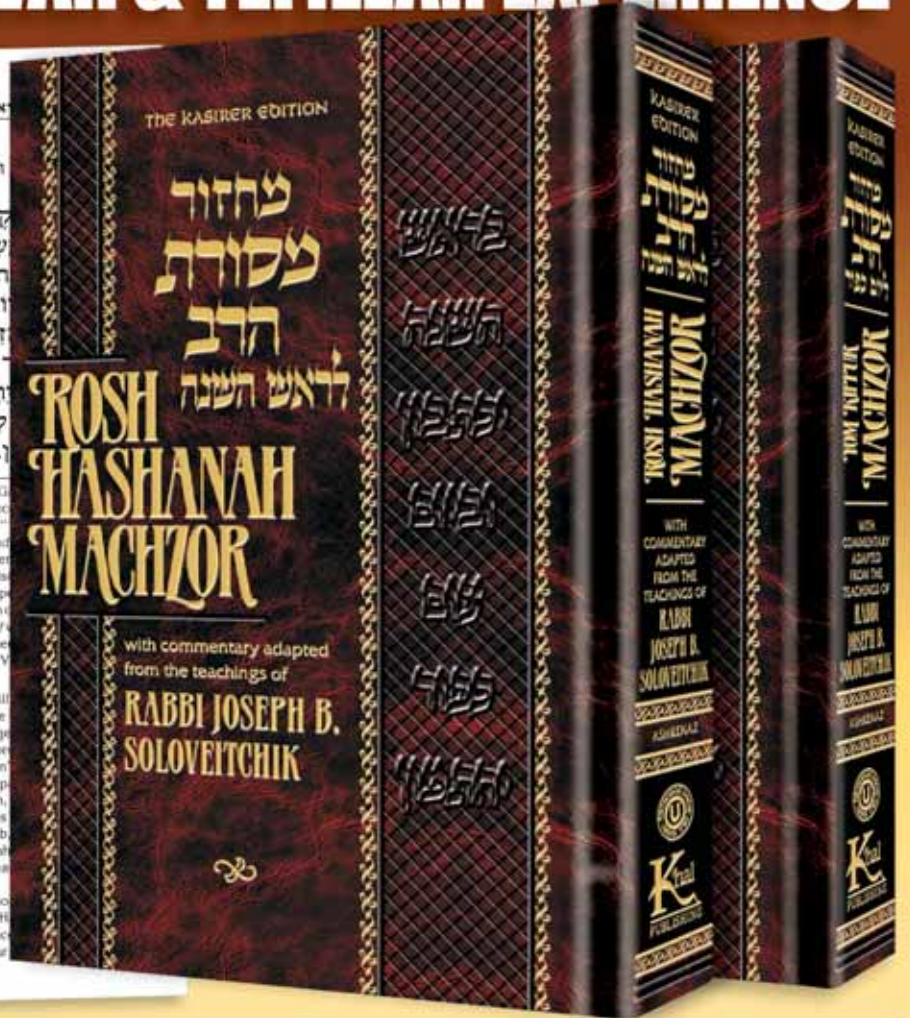
בְּכֵן קָרוּב — Like members of the flock. In the Gemara in Sukkah, the Gemara explains these words to refer to a narrow entry to the flock can enter at a time. The Rambam (Mitzvos Teshuvah) explains the path to teshuvah starts with increased performance of mitzvot, culminating in actual repentance. The sinner enters into this narrow pass, and he gains self-confidence, and his yearning for holiness become strengthened so when Yom Kippur arrives naturally (Before Hashem, pp. 93-94).

A second interpretation of this term is בְּכֵן יִקְרָאנוּ, unworthy of salvation, God looks upon us as sheep, as if we are sheep, and can thus pardon us. One symbolism of inarticulate shriek of the animal (see introduction to the Machzor) is an understanding of these words, presented by Shmuel, David's soldiers. God looks upon us not as individuals but as a whole, because of the sublime vision of the future (see introduction to Zichronos, p. 10). Judge us as individuals, but as a whole, because as a whole we are dedicated to a great vision (Noraot HaRav, Volume 1, p. 10).

MEANINGFUL TSHUVAH & TEFILLAH EXPERIENCE

...PETITION / FIRST DAY
 ...end to You,
 ...s holiness, for it is
 ...ship will be exalted;
 ...d You will sit upon it
 ...Who judges, proves,
 ...d seals (and counts
 ...was forgotten. You
 ...ad itself, and every-
 ...ll be sounded* and a
 ...hasten, a trembling
 ...ay, "Behold, it is the
 ...ost for judgment!" —
 ...yes in judgment. All
 ...bers of the flock.*
 ...in terror, an emotion which
 ...e which is a central theme
 ...as before You. Every person
 ...whether or not that person
 ...not he has complied with the
 ...an must therefore engage in
 ...il-confident, and willing to
 ...st reverse his posturing and
 ...e 13, pp. 90-91).
 ...Rosh Hashanah (18a). Reish
 ...through which only one of the
 ...yah (3:4, 2:7) suggests that
 ...e of mitzvot as the Ten Days
 ...entance as Yom Kippur ap-
 ...s he observes more mitzvot,
 ...grows. His character and will
 ...s, teshuvah comes almost
 ...like sheep. Although we are
 ...animals, bereft of intelligence
 ...the shofar is that it reflects the
 ...יציאת מצרים (p. 440). A third
 ...is כְּסוּיֵי לֵיבָיּוֹת מִיַּד ה' as King
 ...as an army committed to a
 ...turnos, p. 542). He does not
 ...whole, the Jewish people are
 ...pp. 161-163).

אש השנה — חרות השי"י / יום ראשון
 Congregation and chazzan:
 וְלֵךְ תְּעַלֶּה קְדוֹשׁ, כִּי אַתָּה הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ.
 Congregation and chazzan:
 הָיָה קְדוֹשֵׁת הַיּוֹם, כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאִים. וְבוֹ
 שָׂא מַלְכוּתוֹ, וַיִּכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד כְּסָאָה, וַתִּשָּׁב עָלָיו
 ת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא דָן וּמוֹכִיחַ, וַיּוֹדַע נֶעַד, וְכוֹתֵב
 וּפָר וּמוֹנֵה, וְתוֹכַח כָּל הַנִּשְׁכָּחֹת. וְתַפְתַּח
 זְכוּרוֹת, וּמֵאֲלֵיו יִקְרָא, וְחוֹתֵם יָד כָּל אִדָּם
 גְּדוֹל יִתְקַע, * וְקוֹל דְּמִקְוֵה דְקָהָ יִשְׁמַע.
 חֲפִצּוֹן, וְחֵיל וְרִעְדָה יֵאָחֲזוּ, * וַיֵּאֱמְרוּ הִנֵּה
 לִפְקֹד עַל צְבָא מְרוֹם בְּדִין, כִּי לֹא יִזְכוּ
 וְכֵל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבְרוּן לִפְנֵיךְ * בְּבֵנוּ מְרוּן.*
 ... For it is awesome and frightening. The Vilna G.
 (207) held that it is improper to cry on Rosh Hashanah, in ac-
 statement of Nehemiah to the Jewish people on Rosh Hashanah, "Do
 Hashem your God, do not mourn and do not weep... Do not be afraid
 Hashem is your strength!" (Nehemiah 8:9-10). On the other
 because it is a day on which man is judged, Rosh Hashanah is also
 weeping and crying therefore seems appropriate. It would appear
 Gaon's prohibition applies only during the course of the day when
 in prayer. But during the prayers, and especially during Mussaf
 blown, evocative of God's shattering punishment (see commentaries
 קְדוּשָׁתָא, p. 292), it is indeed appropriate to cry (Hareveni Nivdim, V
 315).
 ... The great shofar will
 trembling and terror will seize them. In the Book of Judges, the
 decisive military defeat and the humiliating death of the pagan
 hand of the Israelites. In a song of praise for this victory, the
 portrayed the mother of Sisera waiting at her window for her son
 the battle, as had indeed happened so many times in the past.
 Yet, although overtly anticipating her son's triumphant return,
 her heart Sisera's mother tragically sensed that this time he was
 come home. According to Tosafos in Rosh Hashanah (33b),
 customary to hear a total of 100 shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah,
 cries of Sisera's mother, mentioned in the Midrash, as she was
 window.
 Why does the story of a pagan mother awaiting her barbaric son
 basis for the number of shofar sounds that are blown on Rosh H
 upon hearing the piercing tones of the shofar, we must experience
 as we awaken from spiritual complacency, we must witness our



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