"Israel's *Shofar* Master at Work" (PAGES 18–19)

LESSON PLAN BY ERICA MARKOWITZ

This article discusses the Bar-Sheshet family's *shofar*-making tradition, explaining to students the methods used in the *shofar's* production. In this lesson, students will explore the themes of Rosh Hashanah and how they are reflected in the *shofar* and its sound. Through a textual study, students will see how Zvika's *shofar* production reflects concepts discussed in the traditional texts.

CONCEPTS AND OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about how *shofarot* are made as well as about the relationship of the *shofar* to the High Holy Days.
- Students will come to an understanding of the importance of tradition through the model of the Bar Sheshet's *shofar*-making tradition.

KEY QUOTES AND QUESTIONS

"'Every father recognizes his children,'" he laughs. 'There are many identifying characteristics; for example, the type of decoration on the *shofar*, and evidence of the homemade tools that I used to make the *shofar*. I can tell you when each *shofar* was made and where the horn came from.'"

With your students, discuss the basic facts about the *shofar*—what is a *shofar* made from, when do we blow *shofar*, what are the different shapes of a *shofar*?

What type of animal's horn is used to make a *shofar*? [Traditionally, the horn of a ram is used.]

How is a *shofar* different from an animal's horn, both physically and symbolically?

In what way is Zvika Bar-Sheshet a "father" to his *shofarot*?

Have each student relate this quotation to a personal example of something to which they are a "father."

"Once the horns are straightened, they're ready for the messy process of separating the animal cartilage from inside the horn. Zvika is tight lipped about how he completes this stage without puncturing the horn; it's one of the secrets handed down from parent to child in the Bar-Sheshet family."

Why do you think it is important for Zvika to keep his *shofar*-making tradition secretive?

Do you have any traditions passed down through the generations in your family?

MOTIVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

1. In preparation for the lesson, ask that those students who own a *shofar* bring it to class. Begin the following class by presenting a *shofar* to the class and blowing the three different sounds that are traditionally blown—*tekiah, teruah, shevarim*. Have the class discuss the audible differences between the various sounds. Allow the students the opportunity to try blowing their own *shofar*.

2. In response to the above activity, have each student write down the emotions that come to mind upon hearing the sound (startle, fear, sadness, excitement). Discuss as a class the different emotions that the sounds elicited. Ask students whether the different sounds evoke different emotions. Relate the personal experiences when hearing the sounds to the related texts regarding the symbolic significance of the sounds and the importance of *shofar* blowing as a reminder to begin the *teshuvah* process. Additional texts are available online at www.babaganewz.com/teachers if you would like to expand your discussion further.

3. Present the traditional blessing recited before the shofar is blown. *"Blessed are you, God, our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has sanctified us with God's commandments and has commanded us to hear the sound of the* shofar."

NOTE

An in-depth enrichment activity inviting students to consider the *halachic* ramifications of this *berakhah* on the performance of the mitzvah of hearing the *shofar* appears online at www.babaganewz.com/teachers.

According to this *berakhah*, is the mitzvah to hear the *shofar* blown or to actually blow the *shofar* oneself?

What sounds does the *shofar* make?

Why is it important for us to hear the sound of a *shofar*?

What is the connection between hearing the sound of the *shofar* and the Rosh Hashanah holiday? [Some interpretations include: The *shofar*'s blow, sounding like a cry, reminds us to do *teshuvah*; the *shofar* reminds us of *Akeidat Yitzḥak* (the binding of Yitzḥak) and the dedication of our ancestors; the *shofar's* sound is similar to trumpets sounded for royalty—we too affirm our acceptance of God as our Ruler on Rosh Hashanah.]

Ask students to look at the *shofar*. Make a list of what they note about the *shofar*'s appearance. Be sure to point out that a *shofar* is not a straight instrument and that traditionally, its opening at the end must curve upwards.

How might the appearance of a *shofar* be symbolic? How might a *shofar*'s appearance reinforce its role in the *teshuvah* process? [The *shofar* is curved to symbolize that *teshuvah* is a process and journey that is long and curved, not necessarily simple and straightforward; the *shofar* curves upwards to signify that the sounds of the *shofar*—along with the community's prayers—should travel upwards to God.]

4. Distribute a copy of Rabbi Saadia Gaon's ten reasons for the sounding of the *shofar*. This handout is available to print at www.babaganewz.com/teachers. After reading through the list, instruct students to choose which two messages they think are the most important for the continuity of the Jewish people. In small groups, ask the students to discuss their choices. In these same groups, students will then select one idea to present visually on a poster. The poster should include a brief statement explaining the reason they have chosen and a graphic representation of the reason. They may choose to use drawing, collage, abstraction, or any other medium to convey their reason. Use the completed posters to decorate your school's prayer space during the Ten Days of Repentance.

JEWISH TEXTS

Bemidbar 29:1

And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy gathering; you shall do no servile work; it shall be a day of sounding for you.

According to the Torah, what is the seventh month on the Jewish calendar? [Remind students that the Torah refers to Nisan as the first month, which makes Tishrei the seventh.]

What is the day to which the verse is referring?

What are some ways to sanctify Rosh Hashanah?

How was Rosh Hashanah a day of holy gathering in the time of the Temple? [Jews went up to Jerusalem, to the *Beit Hamikdash*.] **What are some ways that Rosh Hashanah is a holy gathering now?**

What does "a day of sounding" mean? (The Hebrew uses the word *teruah*, a noun.) How does that differ from "a day of blowing?"

Maimonides, Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4

Although the sounding of the shofar *on the New Year is a decree of the Torah, still it has a deep meaning, as if saying, "Wake up, you sleeping ones, from your sleep, and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator"* (Midrash Rabbah, Emor).

What is the connection between sleeping and the need to do *teshuvah*?

Why might the text use two different ways of describing one who sleeps: "sleeping ones" and "you who slumber"? [Perhaps this is referring to different degrees of sinning and how deeply embedded the negative behaviors are.]

How might this text be connected to blowing the *shofar*?

What are some similarities and some differences between the three aspects: "Inspect your deeds," "repent," and "remember your Creator?"

Through this verse, discuss the relationship between the mitzvah to hear the sounding of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah and the *teshuvah* process which begins in Elul and continues until Yom Kippur. It is the sound of the *shofar* that should "awaken" a person to do *teshuvah*. The sound of the *shofar* should actually resemble a cry. This sound will arouse individuals to reflect upon their actions and character.

FOLLOW-UP AND ENRICHMENT

1. Instruct students to read the brief article on page 17 of BabagaNewz, "The Secret *Shofar*." Ask them to consider which of Rabbi Saadia Gaon's reasons for the sounding of the *shofar* would the inmates in the labor camp have considered most important.

How do you think the listeners to the *shofar* in the article perceived the sounds? What did the sounds of the *shofar* symbolize for them?

2. Share another inspiring story about the sounding of the *shofar* with your students, available online at www.babaganewz.com/teachers. Ask your students to discuss their responses to the story from the Kotzker Rebbe.

3. Begin each class of the Ten Days of Repentance with the *shofar* blowing. Rotate around the room and allow each student a day to blow the *shofar* for the class. After the *shofar*-blowing, allow five minutes for the students to write the following in a special Rosh Hashanah diary: their reflections on the *shofar*, how they feel about the coming Yom Kippur, and things they would like to improve for the coming year.

4. Pass around pictures of various horned animals and have the class identify similarities and differences of each. Which horns look most like the horns traditionally used for *shofarot?* Which horns look like the straight *shofarot* which, as Zvika mentioned, are preferred by many Sephardim? Identify which horns can actually be used to make a valid *shofar* and which cannot? (e.g., the bull's horn).

RELATED WEB SITES/ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Samples of Zvika's shofarot
www.shofarot.co.il/index.html

The significance and symbolic importance of the shofar
http://myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Rosh_Hashana/Overview_Rosh_Hashanah_Community/Sounding_Shofar/Decodingshofar.htm

VOCABULARY FOR YOUR STUDENTS

מַסוֹרָה	tradition
קוֹל	voice, sound
כָּפוּף	curved