

Shofar in Chodesh Elul

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The Rema¹ writes that although Ashkenazim do not begin reciting selichos from the beginning of the month of Elul, we do have the custom to sound the shofar each morning, and in some communities, they sound the shofar in the evening as well. Numerous questions arise related to this custom, and we will address them in this article.

FIRST DAY OF ROSH CHODESH OR SECOND DAY OF ROSH CHODESH?

The Mishnah Berurah² records a debate on whether we begin to sound the shofar on the first day of Rosh Chodesh or the second day of Rosh Chodesh. He appears to subscribe to the latter view as he mentions that the Siddur Derech HaChaim records the practice of beginning to sound the shofar on the second day of Rosh Chodesh.

The Magen Avrohom³ provides the rationale for each opinion. The rationale to begin on the first day of Rosh Chodesh, even though it is the thirtieth of Av, is that it is forty days before Yom Kippur. This parallels Moshe Rabbeinu's behavior when he ascended Har Sinai on the first day of Rosh Chodesh to receive the second set of luchos. The rationale for beginning on the second day of Rosh Chodesh is to have a total of thirty days of shofar blasts (twenty-eight days of Elul, since we do not blast the shofar on erev Rosh HaShanah, plus the two days of Rosh HaShanah. A second reason to begin on the second day of Rosh Chodesh is based on the Midrash Tanchuma that relates that Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai on the second day of Rosh Chodesh. Although the month of Elul usually contains only twenty-nine days, that year the month of Elul was thirty days, so Moshe Rabbeinu was on the mountain for forty days. Accordingly, concludes

the Magen Avrohom, one should not deviate from the custom of beginning to sound the shofar on the second day of Rosh Chodesh.

Rav Moshe Feinstein⁴ writes that our minhag is to begin on the second day of Rosh Chodesh. However, since the Magen Avrohom records the custom to begin on the first day of Rosh Chodesh, places that have the minhag to begin on the first day of Rosh Chodesh should continue to do so, but places that do not have that minhag should follow the more prevalent minhag and begin from the second day of Rosh Chodesh.

WHY DO WE SOUND THE SHOFAR DURING ELUL?

The Tur⁵ cites Pirkei D'Reb Eliezer, which writes that on Rosh Chodesh Elul, Hashem instructed Moshe to ascend Har Sinai to receive the second set of luchos. To mark the occasion and avoid any confusion about how to count the days he would be on the mountain, they blew the shofar. Accordingly, Chazal enacted that we blast the shofar on Rosh Chodesh Elul. Additionally, we blast the shofar for the entirety of the month as a call to do teshuvah and to confuse the Satan.

STANDING TO HEAR THE SHOFAR

Many of the requirements that apply to ensure fulfillment of the mitzvah of shofar on Rosh HaShanah do not apply when blasting the shofar during the month of Elul. For example, although on Rosh HaShanah it is necessary to stand when listening to the shofar⁶, it is not necessary to stand when listening to the shofar blast during the month of Elul⁷.

A CHILD SOUNDING THE SHOFAR

An adult doesn't need to blast the shofar. Although it is common practice for an adult to blast the shofar, if no adult is available to sound the shofar, it is acceptable for a child to sound it instead. The reason is that the one sounding the shofar is not being motzi anyone in the mitzvah, which, if that were the case, would necessitate an adult sounding the shofar. The primary intent of sounding the shofar is to remind people to do teshuvah. Since the one sounding the shofar is not a shaliach tzibbur or a ba'al tokea, technically, it can be done even by a child⁸.

NON-RELIGIOUS JEWS SOUNDING THE SHOFAR

Poskim⁹ discuss whether someone who is not religious

could sound the shofar during the month of Elul. Some write that even if we allow a child to sound the shofar, it would not be acceptable for someone who is not religious to sound the shofar. The rationale is ein kateigor na'aseh saneigor – literally, the prosecutor cannot become the defense attorney. In other words, since the purpose of sounding the shofar is to remind people of the upcoming yom hadin and to do teshuvah, how could someone who is not religious play that role?

However, upon further consideration, one could argue that it is indeed acceptable for someone who is not religious to sound the shofar during the month of Elul. Since we believe in the pintele yid, the spark of deveikus and attachment to Hashem that resides inside of each and every Jew, it is possible that sounding the shofar will inspire that non-religious person to do teshuvah. Therefore, in circumstances in which no one else is available, someone who is not religious can sound the shofar.

MAKING UP FOR A MISSED SHOFAR BLOWING

If a minyan does not sound the shofar after shacharis, either because they forgot, did not have a shofar to sound, or no one present could sound the shofar, they should sound the shofar after minchah. The reason is that the Rema¹⁰ recorded the practice observed in some communities to sound the shofar in the evening and the Chaye Adam¹¹ explains that evening means at minchah. Accordingly, since the purpose of sounding the shofar is to arouse the tzibur to do teshuvah, it makes sense that if it was not sounded following shacharis, it should be sounded at minchah¹². Other Poskim, however, disagree and write that when the shofar was not sounded following shacharis, there is no value to sounding it after minchah¹³.

If someone did not hear the shofar one morning, for example, he didn't make it to shul or had to leave shul early, there is no obligation to hear the sound of the shofar sometime later in the day. However, since the purpose of sounding the shofar is to arouse one to do teshuvah, it is preferred to try to hear the shofar sometime later that day.

SOUNDING THE SHOFAR WITHOUT A MINYAN

If at the end of davening there is no longer a minyan in shul, nevertheless, the shofar should be sounded to inspire those who are present to do teshuvah.¹⁴ Other Poskim disagree and contend that the enactment

to sound the shofar during Elul was established for the tzibbur, and even a group of individuals have no obligation to hear the sound of shofar¹⁵.

LISTENING TO THE SHOFAR DURING THE AMIDAH

If someone is in the middle of the amidah when the tzibbur is listening to the shofar, he should pause to listen to the sound of the shofar. Rav Moshe Feinstein explained that when the principle of shomea k'oneh does not apply, there is reason to pause to hear the sound of the shofar, which should not be considered as an interruption¹⁶. Therefore, since the sounding of the shofar in the month of Elul is not intended to discharge an obligation, pausing to listen is permitted.

INTERRUPTING DAVENING TO SOUND THE SHOFAR

A similar question arises regarding someone who is reciting birchos krias shema, and another minyan comes looking for someone to sound the shofar for them. Is it permitted to interrupt birchos krias shema to sound the shofar? Poskim¹⁷ write that it is permitted for one to sound the shofar between paragraphs – bein haperakim. The reason is that sounding the shofar is no worse than inquiring about a distinguished person's (adam nechbad) well-being, which technically is allowed between paragraphs. The same ruling applies to one who is asked to sound the shofar while reciting pesukei d'zimra.

1 O.C. 581:1

2 581:3.

3 581:2.

4 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:21

5 O.C. 581

6 Shulchan Aruch O.C. 585:1. The shofar blasts before mussaf are called the tekios d'meyushav and the shofar blasts during chazaras hashatz of mussaf are called the tekios d'meumad. The requirement to stand is only when fulfilling the Biblical obligation to blast the shofar during mussaf. Although it is common practice for people to stand even for the tekios d'meyushav, it is not obligatory. If the blasts on Rosh HaShanah that are part of the mitzvah do not mandate that we stand, certainly the blasts during the month of Elul do not mandate that we stand to hear them. See Kovetz Halachos: Yomim Noraim 1:[21].

7 Kovetz Halachos: Yomim Noraim 1:17.

8 Kovetz Halachos: Yomim Noraim 1:18:[22]

9 Teshuvos Mishnas Yosef 14:312

10 O.C. 581:1

11 Chaye Adam 138:1

12 Kovetz Halachos: Yomim Noraim 1:20:[25]. Igros Moshe ibid. maintains the same position and further clarifies that in such a situation, the sounding of the shofar at mincha is not tashlumin – a make up for the missing shofar from that morning, rather it is a fulfillment of the actual custom.

13 Ashrei Ha'Ish 3 13:[2]

14 Kovetz Halachos: Yomim Noraim 1:21:[26]

15 Ashrei Ha'Ish 3 13:[2]

16 Igros Moshe O.C. 1:173.

17 Teshuvos Maharam Brisk 3:26.



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