

# *One* SHOFAR, *Many* VOICES

***It's all about listening***  
*to the many voices which flow  
out of a single instrument and our  
ability to appreciate them all.  
In an increasingly divided world  
it's not a bad practice for the other  
363 days of the year as well.*



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**T**HE SHOFAR is the most widely recognized symbol of Rosh Hashanah, and has been synonymous with Judaism since antiquity, when it was used to mark Jewish graves more often than the Star of David. So how we use it is probably about something larger than the evocative drama it provides on the High Holidays.

From this single instrument we will hear as many as 100 different *kolot*, literally voices, as we carry on the ancient tradition of hearing the shofar this Rosh Hashanah.

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**T**HE BLESSING, recited before the shofar is blown, is on the hearing of its notes. Even the one who blows it makes a blessing—not on producing its various sounds, but on taking them all in as one.



CIAD

**S**O MANY *tekiot, shevarim* and *truot*. Wouldn't one giant blast, a single dramatic *tekiah g'dolah*, be enough? That depends on how we listen. Will we listen to the many blasts as individual sounds, or as a growing symphony?

**AS WE PREPARE OURSELVES** to hear the shofar's notes, we recite the words of Psalm 118, *From narrowness I called out to God, and was answered with expansiveness*. That is the move which the sounds of the shofar invite us to make.

- *Will we open ourselves up to the many sounds that can be produced from this one horn?*
- *Will we locate the narrowness in our own lives that can become places of expansiveness?*
- *Will we consider the many possibilities which can emanate from a single source, whether it is a shofar, a community, Torah, or the U.S. Constitution?*

**W**HEN WE MAKE this shift we will feel more deeply connected even to those with whom we disagree. We will discover insights in positions different from our own, and experience the renewal that we seek and the strength to better ourselves. And Rosh Hashanah really will be a new birthday for the world.

**H**ERE ARE A FEW TIPS, in addition to those on the Rosh Hashanah card, which will help you turn that potential minefield into a moment of opportunity and bring you closer to those you love, even when you do not always agree.

**AS PARENTS** distressed by their kids seeming departure from the traditions with which they were raised, you may discover that you have been a more successful teacher than you imagine. Try asking your kids to explain how their newly expressed identity is connected to lessons which they learned at home. You may not like how they are playing the lessons out, but you will never again see them as a form of “leaving you” or what you hold most dear.

**FOR KIDS** in that situation, try remembering that honoring your parents’ needs at home is no more “backing down” on your part, than expecting them to appreciate you is on theirs. If you have come home filled with new zeal for traditional Jewish practice, remember that it was your family that brought you to the place from which you could embrace this new approach. So, far from feeling “more Jewish” than them, you should recognize them as your most important teachers.

**AND IF YOU ARE A PARENT** feeling annoyed or threatened by all these new rules which your kid has embraced, try asking yourself if it isn’t worth supporting them in their way of being themselves now, so that you can create the context which allows you to request the same from them later.

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*There are few problems that cannot be addressed when we love the person in front of us more than the ideas inside of us.*

**M**ANY VOICES of the one shofar can bridge the divides not only in our complex world and often fractious community, but also help us to bridge the gaps between members of our own families. And with Rosh Hashanah often being the first time in the New Year when the entire family comes together, that can mean any number of gaps across which bridges need to be built, in order to keep relationships at home warm and meaningful.

This may be the first time that a college student is returning home after their first experience of being “on their own.” They will be different. If they are not, then they haven’t yet experienced a departure. Or, it may be the first big Jewish event celebrated as a family with a teenager newly returned from a year in Israel or a summer in camp during which they found new enthusiasm for Jewish tradition.

**A**LL OF THESE new experiences, whether of freedom and independence, or the embrace of practices different from those of one’s family deemed “less” or “more” traditional, can be wonderful opportunities for family members to learn from each other and grow closer. Often, as is the case, they become minefields which are avoided at best, or explode with hurt and recrimination, at worst.

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*Most importantly, keep reminding yourselves that you are a family.*

*That means that the love between you must always be greater than the disagreements that may currently divide you.*

*“Praised are You,  
who commands us  
to hear the voice  
of the shofar.”*

From the  
*Machzor* for Rosh Hashanah  
and Yom Kippur

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*This resource has been created  
to honor the memory of*

**LEAH LEVITZ FISHBANE**

*and her visionary work  
to strengthen Jewish Life.*

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*Many Voices.  
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One People.*