

# Shofar blowing

The **blowing of the shofar** (Hebrew: **תְּקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר**, pronounced [*teki'at shofar*']) is a ritual performed by Jews on Rosh Hashanah. The **shofar** is a musical horn, typically made of a ram's horn. Jewish law requires that the shofar be blown 30 times on each day of Rosh Hashanah, and by custom it is blown 100 or 101 times on each day.



A man blowing a shofar

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## Modern practice

### Types of blast

The following blast are blown on Rosh Hashanah:

- *Tekiah* is a single long blast of the shofar.
- *Shevarim* (or *sh'varim*) (שְׁבָרִים) is composed of three connected short sounds.
- *Teruah* - in most Sephardic and Ashkenazi traditions, this is a string of many short-lived, broken blasts made by the tongue (e.g. tut-tut-tut-tut, etc.). In the Yemenite and Babylonian Jewish communities, it is a single long, trembling blast.
- It is customary for the last *tekiah* in a set of 30, and the last *tekiah* blown overall on a day of Rosh Hashana, to be extended in length, called a *tekiah gedolah* ("great *tekiah*").

## Combinations of blasts

The blasts are blown in the following set groups:

- *tekiah-shevarim-tekiah* (abbreviated *TaShaT*)
- *tekiah-teruah-tekiah* (abbreviated *TaRaT*)
- *tekiah-shevarim-teruah-tekiah* (abbreviated *TaShRaT*)

## Place in the prayer service

In Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities, it is customary to hear 100 or 101 sounds in the synagogue on Rosh Hashana morning, although the minimum requirement is to hear 30 sounds. The sounds are scheduled as follows:



Shofar sound for Rosh Hashana,  
Ashkenaz version

- 30 shofar blasts are sounded to fulfill the mitzvah of shofar blowing, after the Torah reading and before Mussaf. These blasts are preceded by reciting Bible verses related to the shofar, followed by two blessings: one on the Biblical commandment of "hearing the sound of the shofar", and the blessing of Shehecheyanu. The blasts here consist of the *TaShRaT* sequence three times, followed by *TaShaT* three times, then *TaRaT* three times.
- 30 shofar blasts are blown in the silent Mussaf prayer, 10 blasts after each of the three central blessings. Each sequence of 10 blasts consists of *TaShRaT*, *TaShaT*, *TaRaT* one time each. (In some communities these blasts are not performed.)
- 30 shofar blasts are blown in the leader's repetition of the Mussaf prayer, 10 blasts after each of the three central blessings. Each sequence of 10 blasts consists of *TaShRaT*, *TaShaT*, *TaRaT* one time each.
- 10 (Ashkenazi) or 11 (Sephardic) blasts are blown after the Mussaf prayer. If the shofar was not blown during the silent Mussaf prayer, 40 or 41 blasts are blown here.

Yemenite Jewish custom is to only blow 40 blasts: 30 before Mussaf, and 10 in Mussaf (*TaRaT*, *TaShaT*, and *TaShRaT* once each). The blowing of 10 rather than 30 in Mussaf is based on the opinion of the Rif that the Torah obligation to blow the shofar was satisfied with the initial shofar blasts, and blowing too many more would be a burden on the community.<sup>[1]</sup>

Those who practise making 70 shofar blasts, such as the Yemenite Jews of the Baladi-rite, do so only because the first thirty blasts are made while the congregation is sitting. These same thirty blasts are repeated when the congregation stands up during the Mussaf-prayer, during which time the emissary of the congregation (*Shaliach Tzibbur*) leads them in prayer out-loud. Since he fulfills their obligation, the Mussaf-Prayer is only said once by them.<sup>[2]</sup> There is no "chazarah" (repetition of the prayer), and subsequently, there is no need to make an additional thirty blasts at this time. Another ten blasts are made at the end of the prayer, in accordance with a tradition passed down from the days of the Geonim.

According to all opinions, the mitzvah is fulfilled by hearing the initial set of 30 blasts. Thus, if a person cannot attend the synagogue prayers, they will commonly arrange for a shofar blower to visit and blow only 30 blasts for them.

## Additional laws

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### Duration of the notes

Among Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities, the *teruah* is blown as nine very short notes, while the *shevarim* is blown as three longer notes, each equal in duration to three short notes. The *tekiah* must be longer than the blast which it comes before and after. Thus the *tekiah* must be more than 9 short notes in duration when blowing *TaRaT* or *TaShaT*, and more than 18 short notes when blowing *TaShRaT*.<sup>[3][4][5]</sup>

The Shulchan Aruch rules that the minimum length of a *teruah* and *tekiah* are identical, but agrees that a longer *teruah* is also valid.<sup>[6]</sup> In Yemen, the practice was to make the *teruah* double the length of a *tekiah*.<sup>[7]</sup> Each community is admonished to follow its ancestral tradition.

### Pausing between *shevarim* and *teruah*

When *shevarim* and *teruah* are blown together, a dispute exists whether they must be blown in a single breath, or whether one may pause (for a duration of no longer than a breath) between them.<sup>[8]</sup> The Shulchan Aruch suggests that "one who fears God" should blow in a single breath before Mussaf, and with two breaths during Mussaf.<sup>[9]</sup> The Chazon Ish adopted this practice.<sup>[10]</sup> However, general Ashkenazi custom is to always stop for breath between *shevarim* and *teruah*, both before and during Mussaf (but not between the three blasts of *shevarim*).<sup>[11]</sup>

Rabbi Yihya Saleh, explaining the Yemenite custom, wrote that a breath is taken between *shevarim* and *teruah*, both before and during Mussaf.<sup>[12]</sup> In this regard, the Yemenite practice was more lenient than that of the Shulchan Aruch.<sup>[13]</sup>

## History

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### Initial 9 blasts

The Torah twice defines Rosh Hashanah as a day of *teruah* or horn-blowing (Leviticus 23:24 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0323.htm#24>), Numbers 29:1 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0429.htm#1>)), without specifying exactly how this is to be done.

The rabbis of the Talmud concluded that a shofar must be used for this blowing,<sup>[14]</sup> and that each *teruah* must be preceded and followed by a *tekiah*.<sup>[15]</sup> Since the word *teruah* appears three times in the Torah in connection with holidays of the seventh month, the rabbis concluded that a *teruah* must be blown three times,<sup>[16]</sup> making a total of nine blasts (three sets of *tekiah-teruah-tekiah*).<sup>[17][18][19]</sup> The three sets also correspond to the three special blessings of Mussaf: *malchiyot*, *zichronot*, and *shofarot*.

## From 9 to 30 blasts

In the Talmudic era, doubts arose regarding the correct sound of the *teruah* blast - whether it should be a series of short, lilting blasts similar to a person moaning (now known as *shevarim*), or else a staccato beat sound similar to a person whimpering (now known as *teruah*), or else a combination of the two sounds (*shevarim-teruah*).<sup>[20]</sup> Therefore, Rav Abbahu of Caesarea (3rd century CE), ruled that shofar blowing should be performed according to each of the three possibilities:

- Three sets of *tekiah, teruah, tekiah* (in case what we call *teruah* is the correct sound of the Biblical *teruah*)
- Three sets of *tekiah, shevarim, tekiah* (in case what we call *shevarim* is the correct sound of the Biblical *teruah*)
- Three sets of *tekiah, shevarim-teruah, tekiah* (in case what we call *shevarim-teruah* is the correct sound of the Biblical *teruah*)

If *tekiah, shevarim-teruah, tekiah* is considered to be four blasts, then Rabbi Abba's requirement makes for a total of 30 blasts.<sup>[21]</sup>

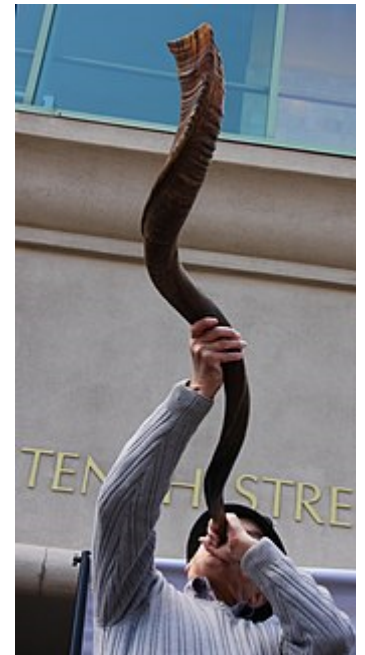
According to another opinion, Rabbi Abba's instituted a total of 12 rather than 30 blasts, specifically *tekiah, shevarim-teruah, tekiah* repeated three times.<sup>[22]</sup> However, modern halacha accepts the opinion that 30 blasts are blown.<sup>[23]</sup>

## From 30 to 100 blasts

The Talmud specifies that the shofar is blown on two occasions on Rosh Hashana: once while "sitting" (before the Mussaf prayer), and once while "standing" (during the Mussaf prayer).<sup>[24]</sup> This increases the number of blasts from the basic requirement of 30, to 60.

The Arukh mentions a custom to blow 100 blasts: 30 before Mussaf, 30 during the Mussaf silent prayer, 30 during the cantor's loud repetition of Mussaf, and 10 more after Mussaf.<sup>[25][26]</sup> The final 10 blasts are by tradition dating to the Geonim, and are usually blown in the middle of "Kaddish Tiskabal."<sup>[27]</sup> Blowing 100 (or 101) blasts is nearly universal today, though many congregations omit the 30 blasts in the silent prayer, and instead blow 40 after Mussaf.<sup>[27][28]</sup>

The number 100 in the Arukh is intended to correspond to the tears which Sisera's mother is said to have shed when her son was killed in battle.<sup>[25]</sup> (The Hebrew word used to describe her wailing is *vateyavev*; this is cognate to *yevava*, the Aramaic translation of *teruah*.<sup>[26]</sup>) The short Biblical story of Sisera's mother contains 101 letters;<sup>[29]</sup> while the Arukh only mentions 100 blasts. This discrepancy is explained by saying that while each shofar blast is intended to "nullify" one of her cries due to hatred of Israel, nevertheless we leave her one tear out of recognition of the pain suffered by any bereaved mother.<sup>[30]</sup> In any case, Sephardic communities typically blow 101 blasts, with the 101st symbolizing her legitimate mourning.<sup>[30][31]</sup>



A man blowing a shofar

# Symbolic meaning

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Maimonides wrote that even though the blowing of the shofar is a Biblical statute, it is also a symbolic “wake-up call,” stirring us to mend our ways and repent. He explained that the shofar blows call out to us: “Sleepers, wake up from your slumber! Examine your ways and repent and remember your Creator.”<sup>[32]</sup>



A Haredi man blowing a shofar

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook suggested that the doubt whether the shofar sound is supposed to be short, intermittent blasts (*Shevarim*), like a person groaning in remorse, or a series of short, staccato bursts (*Teru'ah*), like the uncontrolled wailing of a person in extreme anguish and grief,<sup>[33]</sup> may be connected to Maimonides' explanation. Some people are moved to better themselves due to an intellectual recognition that something was seriously amiss in their lives. Their shofar sounds – what motivates them to repent – are the heavy sighs and groans of the introspective individual, the *Shevarim*. For others, the stimulus comes from the heart. They are moved by the overwhelming pain and anguish of a person who has lost his way – the emotional outburst and wailing of the *Teru'ah*. The most effective form of repentance, however, utilizes the strengths of both faculties, the emotions and the intellect, combining together the *Shevarim* and the *Teru'ah*.<sup>[34]</sup>

## References

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1. Domb, Yoel (9 October 2015). "Why Do We Blow 100 Blasts of the Shofar?" (<https://www.hidabroot.com/article/156988/Why-Do-We-Blow-100-Blasts-of-the-Shofar>). *Hidabroot.com*. Retrieved 7 October 2018.
2. This practice is actually mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud (Berakhoth 32b and 36a). Even though the emissary of the congregation fulfills their obligation, the custom in Yemen was that each person prays silently along with the emissary of the congregation.
3. Mishnah Berurah 590:13-15
4. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 129:13
5. Yalkut Yosef, Moadim p.55 (<https://moreshet-maran.com/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%A6%D7%A8-%D7%A4%D7%A1%D7%A7%D7%99-%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%9B%D7%94/%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%9F-%D7%AA%D7%A7%D7%A6-%D7%A1%D7%93%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%A7%D7%99%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%95%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%94%D7%9D/>)
6. *Orach Chaim* 590:3
7. Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, *Hilchot Shofar* 3:4
8. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim*, 590:4-5; *Mishna Berura*, *ad loc*
9. *Orach Chaim* 590:4
10. Chazon Ish, *Hilchot Rosh Hashanah*, 136
11. Rabbi Moses Isserles, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim*, 590:4
12. *Tiklāl Etz Hayyim*. III. Jerusalem. 1894. p. 70a. (Commentary *Etz Hayyim* on the *Baladi-rite Siddur*)

13. Rabbi Yosef Qafih, while explaining the same Yemenite custom as he had seen it, writes that in the *TaShaT* series, "the custom and instruction that was widely accepted in Yemen was to make the [three] short lilting blasts (*Shevarim*) in [only] one breath, while the [three] short lilting blasts (*Shevarim*) and the long quavering blast (*Teru'ah*) in the [first] series known under the mnemonics as TaSHRaT, [and] which are [blown] when the congregation sits, are all done in one breath. Moreover, those [same blasts] (i.e. the *Shevarim* and the *Teru'ah*) that are made when standing are done in two breaths. And thus do I have it as a practice, etc." (See: Rabbi Yosef Qafih's Commentary on Maimonides' *Mishne Torah*, *Seder Zemanim* (part ii), *Hilchot Shofar*, ch. 3, vs. 3, footnote # 3, Kiryat Ono 1986 [Hebrew]). Cf. Tur 590:4 who brings down the aforesaid dispute in the names of Rabbeinu Tam and Rabbi Isaac ibn Giat.
14. Rosh Hashanah 33b ([https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh\\_Hashanah.33b.11?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh_Hashanah.33b.11?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en))
15. Rosh Hashanah 33b ([https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh\\_Hashanah.33b.13?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh_Hashanah.33b.13?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en))
16. Rosh Hashanah 34a ([https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh\\_Hashanah.34a.2?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh_Hashanah.34a.2?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en))
17. *Mishnah*, *Rosh Hashanah* 4:9; *Tosefta*, *Rosh Hashanah* 4:9
18. Yosef Qafih (ed.), *Mishnah, with Maimonides' Commentary*, Mossad Harav Kook: Jerusalem 1963, s.v. *Rosh Hashanah* 4:9 (p. 217)
19. Rabbi Isaac ibn Ghiyyat, *Sha'arei Simcha*, Hil. Rosh Hashanah, Furta 1861, p. 38 (Hebrew)
20. Rosh Hashanah 34a ([https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh\\_Hashanah.34a.21?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh_Hashanah.34a.21?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en))
21. She'iltot de'Rav Achai Gaon, *P. ve'Zoth Ha-berachah*, # 170 - *Le-Rosh Hashanah*: Translation: "One must blow a sustained blast (teki'ah), three [short] lilting blasts (shevarim), a quavering blast (teru'ah) and a sustained blast (teki'ah), seeing that Rabbi Abbahu enacted in Caesarea the mnemonics: TaSHRaK (teki'ah, shevarim, teru'ah and teki'ah), TaSHaK (teki'ah, shevarim, and teki'ah), TaRaK (teki'ah, teru'ah, and teki'ah)."; Maimonides, *Mishne Torah* (Hilchot Shofar VeLulav 3:2–3)
22. Isaac Alfasi, *Halakhot* (Rosh Hashanah 10b); see Bar-Ilan, Prof. Meir. " תקנת ר' אבהו בקיסרי" (<https://faculty.biu.ac.il/~barilm/articles/publications/publications0001.html>) [R. Abahu's decree in the Kessari] (in Hebrew). Retrieved 7 October 2018.
23. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 590:2
24. Rosh Hashana 16a. The reason given is "to confuse Satan".
25. Arukh 272:1; mentioned in Tosafot Rosh Hashana 33b s.v. שעור
26. Ben-David, Rabbi Yaron. "מאה תקיעות בראש השנה" (<https://daf-yomi.com/DYItemDetails.aspx?itemId=27487>) [A hundred blasts on Rosh Hashanah]. Retrieved 7 October 2018.
27. "ד – מנהג מאה תקיעות" (<https://ph.yhb.org.il/15-04-04/>) [The Custom of a Hundred Blasts] (in Hebrew). 4 April 2015. Retrieved 7 October 2018.
28. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 129:17, et seq.
29. There are 101 Hebrew letters in Judges 5:28-29, not including verses 5:30-31.
30. Kitov, Rabbi Eliyahu. "One Hundred Sounds" ([https://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template\\_cdo/aid/4387/jewish/100-Sounds.htm](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4387/jewish/100-Sounds.htm)). Retrieved 7 October 2018.
31. Arthur L. Finkle, *Shofar: History, Technique and Jewish Law*, (Saarbrücken, Germany: Hadassah Word Press, 2015)
32. *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance 3:4.
33. See Rosh Hashana 33b ([https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh\\_Hashanah.33b.10?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rosh_Hashanah.33b.10?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en)), where the Biblical name for Rosh Hashana ("Yom Teruah") is translated to Aramaic as "Yom Yababa"; the word "Yababa" is also used to describing the crying of Sisera's mother (Judges 5:28 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0705.htm#28>)) when she moaned the loss of her son.

34. Morrison, Chanan; Kook, Abraham Isaac (2010). *Silver from the Land of Israel: A new light on the Sabbath and Holidays from the writings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook*. Urim Publications. pp. 56–58. [ISBN 978-9655240429](#).
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