

## The Shofar and the Sabbath: What We Do and Why Rosh Hashanah 2009 / 5770

Dear CBE Friends:

The New Year just started, and already I have an apology to make. I am sorry for the confusion I created with regard to sounding of the shofar this past weekend. On Saturday morning, I mentioned that we were not going to do a Shofar service during the Rosh Hashanah service on account of the Sabbath – (we had a moment of silence instead.) And yet, before the service was over, the shofar came out and was sounded loud and clear. Confused?

What follows is an belated explanation how the CBE Ritual Committee and I have chosen to approach the ritual of blowing the Shofar when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat -- as it did this year.

According to Torah (Leviticus 23), the central rite of Rosh Hashanah is the sounding of the Shofar (in a holy convocation) to announce the onset of the 7<sup>th</sup> month. The question of whether we should also sound the shofar when Rosh Hashanah falls on the Sabbath is raised and addressed by the early sages in the Mishnah/Talmud. The primary concern stems from a Sabbath prohibition against transporting an object (like a shofar or a lulav) from a private dwelling to a public one (and visa versa). So as not to tempt us into ‘carrying’ their shofar from home to the synagogue, orthodox tradition prohibits the use of a shofar on Shabbat.

A secondary reason goes back to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and delays the shofar blowing one day in an acknowledgment of exile and the uniqueness of the *Beit HaMikdash* (Holy Temple of Jerusalem that is no more). A third concern has to do with the avoidance of petitionary prayers on the Sabbath. Among the varied interpretations of the shofar’s calls are several that understand them as a form of pleading before God. Ideally Shabbat is a day free from want or lack, thus the conflict.

Many Reform congregations have rejected this prohibition (against blowing the Shofar on Shabbat) for two reasons: 1) they do not adhere to the Sabbath prohibition against carrying; 2) as part of their effort to downplay the Jewish sense of exile, they choose to celebrate Rosh Hashanah (and other holidays) for one day rather than two – and they do not want to neglect the shofar altogether every time Rosh Hashanah fell on Shabbat.

At Beth Evergreen, we have tried to balance a desire to be inclusive with a respect for the Sabbath and its traditions. **Here is how we tried to honor Shabbat while at the same time ensuring that as many of us as possible have the opportunity to hear the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah.**

There are two separate sections of the traditional Rosh Hashanah service during which the shofar is sounded. Immediately after the Torah service there is a lengthy Shofar Service devoted exclusively to the shofar calls. Later, another set of intermittent shofar blasts are also woven into a unique three-part Mussaf Service.

Our compromise position, when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, is to bypass the Shofar Service in honor of the stillness, rest and fulfillment of the Sabbath, but to sound the shofar as part of our reconstructed Mussaf Service. This year the mussaf themes were leadership, legacy and literacy. The shofar then served to reinforce these themes. In this way we hoped to honor both the shofar, the Sabbath, and one another.

Below, I included the primary rabbinic text under dispute in the debate over whether or not to blow the shofar on Shabbat. As always, we welcome your commentaries and recommendations. L'shanah Tovah, Reb Jamie Arnold

In Mishnah Rosh Hashana 4:1 (BT 29b) it states:

When the Festival of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, the shofar was blown in the Temple [in Jerusalem], but not in the rest of the country. After the Destruction of the Temple R. Yohanan ben Zakkai decreed that the shofar be blown wherever there is a Beth Din.