

# Shofar's call to usher a new year

One of man's earliest musical instruments still in use is the shofar, or ram's horn.

Made from the processed curved horns of a ram, or even a wild goat, this ancient instrument has echoed the advent of the Jewish New Year—Rosh Hashanah—and served as a clarion call to war.

It takes only an hour to make a shofar that may last several lifetimes. This year, some 1,200 ram's horns, handcrafted in Israel, will be awarded to American synagogues for their participation in campaigns to sell Israel Bonds.

Users of a shofar will never wear it out. The life of the shofar is far longer than that of its owner or the house of worship he may serve. The tradition of the ram's horn is so profound that in the Bible this instrument is mentioned 69 times.

The 1,200 shofar (plural for shofar) purchased for bond supporters came from a tiny shop in Haifa, Israel, run by Meir Bar-Sheshet, who with his son, Zvi, carries on an eight-generation tradition of making them.

To prepare the shofar, Bar-Sheshet and his son select the best ram's horns they can find. They smooth them down with grinding wheels, straighten them over an open flame, cut one end for the mouthpiece and drill a hole through that end.

Grinding wheels are then used to smooth and buff the horns until they acquire the seeming patina of the ages.

The master craftsmen, who make about 1,500 shofar a year, test them before shipping them to many destinations.

THE RAM'S horns that enter the little shop in Haifa are all shapes and sizes.

Highly specialized skill is needed to fashion them in such a way that they can be blown with a minimum of effort for a maximum of sound. Traditional notes are sounded at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—and on occasions through the year as well, come a father by the end of the year, but he may have a problem if his first-born is a daughter.

Jewish religious law does not prevent a woman from making a shofar, but Zvi pointed out: "It is very hard physical work. If a daughter of mine

should grow up to be strong, then perhaps she could learn the way of shofar-making. But, after all, it could be a son."

Bar-Sheshet sons started working with shofar at the time of the Spanish Inquisition when the family fled from Spain to North Africa.

The patriarch of the clan, trained for the rabbinate, became a shoemaker in order to earn a living. That's how the tradition started. Meir Bar-Sheshet's father was himself a rabbi in Cassablanca, where Meir was a Yeshiva student and later studied to become a machinist.

In 1942, on a visit to relatives in France, Bar-Sheshet and 34 members of the family were turned over to the Germans by the French because they were Jews.

Bar-Sheshet was sent to the Bergen

Belsen concentration camp, and would have been killed except that the Nazis had use for his mechanical ability. That saved his life.

Following liberation, the inmates pooled 20 marks among them and bought a large ram with curled horns. The ram was slaughtered, the horns removed and Bar-Sheshet smoothed, prepared and polished them by hand into two beautiful shofar.

One he gave to the rabbi at Bergen-Belsen for the upcoming holidays, and the other he brought with him to Palestine, where subsequently he was invited to be the shofar-blower at the Western Wall.

In modern times the shofar plays an important part on many occasions. It is used in Israel at the inauguration of a new president. During the Six-Day War in June 1967, the chief chaplain of

the Israel Defense Forces blew it at the Western Wall after the Wall's liberation, using the same ram's horn which he sounded on Mount Sinai in 1858.

The shofar's call will sound for the new year on Sunday and subsequently through the High Holy Days.

In the metropolitan area a number of congregations will take part in holiday appeals for Israel Bonds and may receive the shofar crafted in the little shop in Haifa.

They are: Beth Achim, Bnai David, Shaaray Shomayim, Young Israel of Greenfield, Oak Woods and Southfield, Beth Abraham Hillel Moses, Beth Yehuda Emanuel Tikvah, Bnai Israel Beth Yehudah, Bnai Zion, David Ben Nachin, Mishkan Israel, Shomrey Emmanah and Temple Israel.



Zvi Bar-Sheshet carries out his specialized art of crafting ram's horns for the Jewish High Holiday.

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