

Yemenite Shofar: Ideal for the Mitzvah?

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Introduction¹

The only biblical mitzvah associated Rosh Hashanah is to hear the blowing of the *shofar*. It is therefore important to clarify the laws surrounding this commandment, the most basic of which is the source of the *shofar*. From what animal may it be made? The typical image is of a *ba'al toke'a* blowing a ram's horn *shofar*. But today some people are opting for long, elaborate *shofarot*, others have almost straight ones, and yet others prefer the simple ram's horns. The easiest to make is from a cow's horn. Are there preferences? Are some kosher and others not?

Talmudic sources

The answers to these questions are not found anywhere in the Torah; there are two basic mishnaic statements and their talmudic discussions, and one unlinked talmudic statement, regarding the animal source of the *shofar*. None of them address the quality of the sound produced because that is halachically irrelevant. The Talmud explicitly states (*Rosh Hashanah* 27b)

1. For a thorough analysis of this topic, see "Drasha L'Rosh Hashanah" of the Ramban, *Kitvei Ramban*, Chavel ed., Mossad Harav Kook, 5738, vol. 1, pages 226-234. See also: Moshe Ra'anan, "Zoological aspects in *Hilchot shofar*" [Hebrew], 269-294, in *B'Rosh Hashanah Yikateivun*, edited by Amnon Bazak, Alon Shvut, 5763.

that all *sounds* are kosher for a *shofar*. The requirements discussed concern the *origin* of the *shofar*.

1) The Mishnah² records that for Rosh Hashanah all *shofarot* are kosher with the exception of the cow horn because it is a *keren*.³ Rav Yossi responded that indeed all *shofarot* are called *keren* and thus that should not disqualify a cow's horn.

The Talmud⁴ agrees that indeed all *shofarot* are called *keren*, but notes that all are called both *keren* and *shofar*, while that from a cow is only called *keren*. Ulla provides a further rationale for the exclusion of a cow's horn based on the principle of "*ein kategor na'asa sanegor*," a prosecutor [cow – reminiscent of the golden calf] cannot become a defender [by being used as a *shofar*].⁵ Abaye provided yet a third distinction between a cow's horn and others, based on how it grows.

2) In the following series of mishnahs (*RH* 3:3-5) two opinions are recorded regarding the source and shape of the *shofar* used on Rosh Hashanah. The first opinion maintains that on Rosh Hashanah the *shofar* should be from a straight horn of a *yael* [ibex],⁶ on fast days it should be from a bent horn of a *zachar*

2. *R.H.* 3:2.

3. And not a *shofar*. Rashi (26a, s.v. *she'hu keren*) explains that regarding *yovel*, *shofar* is written (Leviticus 25:9), and the laws of Rosh Hashanah are derived from those of *yovel*.

4. *R.H.* 26a.

5. It is striking that according to the Mishnah the *shofar* was gold plated and the Gemara's (*R.H.* 27a) only qualification is that the gold not be on the mouthpiece, with no mention of "*ein kategor na'asa sanegor*." Based on *Sukkah* 37, Rav Shmuel Kawior suggests (*HaPardes*, Kislev 5752, Nov-Dec 1991, 66:3, 9-10) that when the gold is for beautifying a mitzvah it is *batel* (nullified) and is like part of the *shofar*, and thus is not there to be an adversary. See *Chelkat Yoav* 3 and *Avnei Nezer* OC 432-433 for a discussion of when a "*hiddur*" interposes and when not.

6. Rashi translates *yael* as a "stein buck." Similarly, in Deut 14:5 he translates "*ako*" as "*yael* of the rocks," which he then says is "stein buck." Rashi was obviously not referring to the Steenbok (*Raphicerus campestris*) of Africa, a

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[ram],⁷ and Yom Kippur of *yovel* it has the same requirements as Rosh Hashanah. Rabbi Yehuda disagrees and holds that on Rosh Hashanah a ram's horn should be used, but agrees that on Yom Kippur of *yovel*, a straight *shofar* of a *yael* is required.⁸

In the Talmud,⁹ Rav Levi rules like Rabbi Yehuda regarding Rosh Hashanah, and states that on both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the mitzvah is with a curved ram's horn and on fast days a straight *shofar* is preferred.

In explanation of the debate, the Talmud (RH 26b) explains that the *shofar* is reflective of what one's internal posture should be on the various days. Thus, the first authority in the Mishnah holds that ideally on Rosh Hashanah one should be straight and upright in prayer, based on *Eicha* 3:41.¹⁰ Rabbi Yehuda's

small antelope with very short horns (record is 7.5 inches). Rather, he meant the Ibex, a type of wild goat from the genus *Capra*, especially *C. ibex* or *C. nubiana* (Nubian Ibex). In German Steinbock is a wild goat of the rocks, an ibex. Rashi (*Chullin* 59b, s.v. *v'harei tzvi*) also identifies the talmudic *tzvi* with "steinbuck." Moshe Catane (*Otzar Lo'azei Rashi*) says that the Old French *esteinboc* is derived from the German *steinbock*, and often the printed version of Rashi has the German word without the leading e, and it means "goat of the rocks." Calling an ibex a wild goat is appropriate; they are so closely related that goats and ibex have been successfully crossbred to yield a *ya'ez*.

Tosafot (RH 26b, s.v. *yael*) cite the *Aruch* that *yael* is an ewe (female sheep). *Tosafot Yom Tov* and others reject this identification for various reasons. *Tosafot Yom Tov* cites a *Yerushalmi* that a *yael* is rarer than a ram, a difficult statement if *yael* is a female sheep. *Chacham Tzvi* (*shu"t* 98) defends the *Aruch* against this proof from a halacha in *Bechorot*. Others (e.g. AH OC 586:1) note that female sheep do not have horns. The *Ohr Zarua* (*Kilayim*, 258) quotes the *Aruch* that *yael* in RH is a ewe (*kisba*), but elsewhere it is a *beast* that resembles a young female sheep (*rachel*).

7. In the Mishnah "*zachar*" is sometimes a synonym for ram, e.g. *Shabbat* 5:2 and *Shekalim* 5:3.

8. The Ramban (*Drasha*, p. 231) suggests that these *mishnayot* are only discussing what took place in the Temple.

9. R.H. 26b.

10. Rashi, based on a *Yerushalmi*, inserts the notion that the Gemara is referring to prayer and cites the verse.

view prefers that when one approaches God in prayer on Rosh Hashanah, a humble, bent posture is more appropriate, and Rashi cites I Kings 9:3. On the *Yovel* (Jubilee), when we proclaim freedom, an upright posture is warranted.

3) Another source states (RH 16a): "Rabbi Abahu asked: 'why is a *shofar* of a ram (*ayil*)¹¹ blown [on Rosh Hashanah]? Because God said 'blow before me with a ram's horn so that I will remember the sacrifice of Yitzchak the son of Avraham (*Akeidah*),¹² and I will credit you as if you sacrificed yourself to me'."

Halachic Rulings – The *Shulchan Aruch* and Others

The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 586:1) mentions a requirement that does not appear to have a talmudic source when he rules that the "horns" of most *chayot* [non-domesticated animals] which are one solid bone [i.e. antlers] and do not have an insertion are invalid as *shofarot*. The Ramo (*ibid*) adds another rule that is seemingly without a talmudic basis and that is difficult from both an halachic perspective and the reality, when he prohibits the use of a *shofar* made from the horn of a non-kosher animal. These two rulings require lengthy discussions and will be addressed elsewhere.

11. A sheep (*Ovis orientalis*) in its second year is called an *ayil*. Regarding *shofar* the age and gender are immaterial (*Taz* 586:1) and the Rambam (*shofar* 1:1) simply used the word *keves* – sheep, not *ayil*. This is as opposed to an *ayal* mentioned e.g. in Gen 49:21 and Deut 14:5, which is the common deer (*Cervus capreolus*). It is important to distinguish between *ayil* and *ayal* and the *Aruch Hashulchan* (OC 586:3) claims that the *Taz* (586:1) mixed them up. This apparent mix-up is also stressed by Rabbi Akiva Eiger (OC 586) and his son-in-law the *Chatam Sofer* (OC 586). *Tzvi* is most likely the gazelle (*Gazella gazella*) native to Israel.

12. See Genesis 22:13 where Avraham sacrifices a ram in lieu of his son Yitzchak. Note that the verse explicitly points out that the ram was entangled in its horn, encouraging the suggestion that the horns play a significant role.

