

# Yemenite Shofar: Ideal for the Mitzvah?

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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)

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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'anani, "Zoological aspects in *Hilchos shofar*" [Hebrew], 269-294, in *B'Rosh Hashanah Yikateivun*, edited by Amnon Bazak, Alon Shvut, 5763.

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

1) The Mishnah<sup>2</sup> records that for Rosh Hashanah all *shofarot* are kosher with the exception of the cow horn because it is a *keren*.<sup>3</sup> Rav Yossi responded that indeed all *shofarot* are called *keren* and thus that should not disqualify a cow's horn.

The Talmud<sup>4</sup> 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*].<sup>5</sup> 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],<sup>6</sup> on fast days it should be from a bent horn of a *zachar*

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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



[ram],<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

In the Talmud,<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Yehuda's

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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*)<sup>11</sup> 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*),<sup>12</sup> 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.

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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.



From the mishnaic sources above it seems that there are two debates. The first is between the Rabbis and Rav Yossi regarding the use of a cow's horn. The second is between the Rabbis and Rav Yehuda, and seems to be regarding the preferred *shofar*, not which are valid or invalid. This is how many *Rishonim* see it.<sup>13,14</sup> In this manner Rabbi Abahu's statement is an explanation of the preferred, not the only, source of a Rosh Hashanah *shofar*.

As will be seen shortly, the Rambam did not understand the sources this way, but the *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 586:1) rules in this manner and states that the mitzvah on Rosh Hashanah is with a curved ram's horn, but post-facto all *shofarot*, whether curved or straight, are kosher, although curved is preferred, except that from a cow, which is always unacceptable. The *Elef Hamagen* (586:5) delineates the order of preference:<sup>15</sup> 1) curved ram; 2) curved other sheep; 3) curved other animal; 4) straight – ram or otherwise;<sup>16</sup> 5) non-kosher animal; 6) cow horn. The first four categories are used with a *beracha*, the fifth without a *beracha*, and the final, not at all. The *Mishnah Berurah* (586:4) subdivides level three with a preference for a goat over an

13. This is the way Tosafot (RH 26b, s.v. *shel yael*), Rosh (RH 26b and *Kitzur Piskei HaRosh*, RH 3:1), Rashba, Ran, Ramban (*Chidushei Ramban* RH 26b – who thought this was so obvious he apologized for writing it), Raavad (commenting on Rambam, *shofar* 1:1), *Rokeach* (203, p. 93 in 5727 ed.), and Meiri (RH 3<sup>rd</sup> perek, Mishnah 4) understood the discussion.

14. A modified version of this understanding is that the Rabbis and Rav Yossi were debating the source of the *shofar* while the Rabbis and Rav Yehuda were discussing the preferred shape of the *shofar* (Ramban, Rashba, *Turei Even*).

15. This order is also how the *Taz* (586:1) and the *MB* (586:5) understand the *Shulchan Aruch*. See a similar list in Rav Chaim Kanievsky, *Shoneh Halachot*, 586:1-4. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (OC 586:3) suggests the possibility of a slightly different order in which a ram, even straight, is preferred over a curved, non-ram.

16. This would probably include the gemsbok, even though it is today called in Hebrew *re'em*. See my forthcoming article for a discussion regarding the horn of a *re'em*.

antelope, because it is more akin to a ram, and thus more reminiscent of the *akeidah*.

Most authorities permitted *shofarot* from other than ram's horns, but clearly viewed ram's horns as a preference. This led to an interesting edict in early 15<sup>th</sup> century Germany. Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Muelhausen<sup>17</sup> issued a public proclamation in which he notes that the Rambam and others permit only *shofarot* from rams and those who do permit non-ram *shofarot*, prefer that it be from a ram. Yet, he says, for the previous 40 years all *shofarot* made in Germany were from goats! And even when people brought ram's horns to the sole (non-Jewish) *shofar* maker, he substituted goat's horns and fashioned them into *shofarot*. Rav Muelhausen states that in order to rectify this travesty, two years prior he got Jewish *shofar* makers to produce *shofarot* from ram's horns and they are now spreading; therefore, he is issuing a curse on anyone who makes or utilizes a non-ram *shofar*. This was true whenever a ram's horn was available, even if it were smaller or produced an inferior sound.

### Halachic Rulings – Rambam and Others

The Rambam (*Hilchot shofar* 1:1) understands the apparently competing mishnahs as just that, and rules significantly differently than the *Shulchan Aruch*. He views Rav Levi's statement and Rav Abahu's statement as exclusive and not merely as the preference, and the halacha does not follow the first mishnah. Thus, he states that the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah and *yovel* must be from a curved sheep's horn.<sup>18</sup>

17. Muelhausen's letter was republished by Avraham Berliner in "*D'varim Atikim, Kvod Halevanon*," Sept 2, 1869 [26 Elul, 5629], *Halevanon*, vol. 6, pages 278-279, available on the Hebrew University website. I thank Professor Yisrael Yaakov Yuval for pointing this letter out to me. On the preference for a ram's horn over a goat's see: *Otzar Hageonim*, 53.

18. Significantly the Rambam does not say *ayil* but *keves*.



From where did the Rambam derive this? Rav Kapach<sup>19</sup> observes that Rav Saadya Gaon<sup>20</sup> had ruled similarly, and suggests that the source is the Gemara<sup>21</sup> quoting a *braita* in which Rabbi Akiva explained that the word *yovel* (Jubilee) means a ram, and thus a ram's horn is used. Because the laws of Rosh Hashanah are learned from *yovel*, Rabbi Akiva holds that on Rosh Hashanah only a ram's horn is kosher, and there is a general rule that the halacha follows Rabbi Akiva.

Despite the *Tur*'s<sup>22</sup> comment that the Rambam was opposed by all, the *Aruch Hashulchan*<sup>23</sup> has a different read on the debate. He concurs that the *Shulchan Aruch* is following in the footsteps of the Raavad, Rosh, Ramban, Ran, and *Tur*. However, he claims that the Rambam is not alone, and expresses surprise that the *Shulchan Aruch* did not even mention the Rambam's opinion, and notes that Rashi, Tosafot, *Smag*, *Yereim*, and *Hagahot Maimoni* all agree with it.<sup>24</sup>

Some suggest that the Rambam agrees with the *Shulchan Aruch*. They suggest that when the Rambam ruled that all *shofarot* not from *keves* are *pasul*, he meant to exclude only bovine ones; however a goat and *yael*<sup>25</sup> are acceptable and are included in

19. Commentary to Rambam, *Hilchos shofar* 1:1, note 8.

20. *Siddur Rav Saadya Gaon*, 5730 ed, p. 217.

21. RH 26a.

22. OC 586.

23. OC 586:3, 5.

24. There are several sources, including a note in the 5746 edition of *Match Efraim*, that direct one to see *Shu"t Pnei Yehoshua* OC:30 who supposedly defends the Rambam's position against all attacks. I have been unable to locate such a *Pnei Yehoshua*. See, however, the *Lechem Mishneh* who indeed defends the Rambam's position at great length.

25. *Yael* is included because it is considered a "wild goat." The Radak in his *Sefer Hashorashim* (end of *shores* "yael") defines a *yael* as a "tayish bar – wild goat". So too *Metzudot Tzion* on *Iyov* 39:1 translates *yael sela* as "wild goat."

*keves*. Rav Yosef Karo in the *Beit Yosef*<sup>26</sup> cites this without comment, the *Taz*<sup>27</sup> cites it approvingly, and Rav Yosef Karo in the *Kesef Mishneh* quotes this suggestion and rejects it as not being what the Rambam meant. Indeed most commentaries understood the Rambam as he clearly wrote – nothing but sheep. However *Sefer Beit David* on the *Tur*<sup>28</sup> asserts that this interpretation of the Rambam, which he attributes to the *Orchot Chaim*, nicely explains the Rambam's statement in his commentary to the Mishnah that the halacha is not like Rav Yossi.

### Kudu Horns

While the Rambam seems to be in the minority in this regard, if one follows the Rambam, his opinion seems clear. Thus, for example, most Yemenites in general follow the Rambam and not the *Shulchan Aruch*, and thus would seem to be bound by this ruling as well. This raises an interesting problem. The vast majority of the Jewish world uses ram's horns, the major exception being "Yemenite *shofarot*", the long curved horns made from the greater kudu (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*).<sup>29</sup> How is it that they use *shofarot* that are not from rams?

The first question is did/do Yemenites actually use the kudu horn?<sup>30</sup> In the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (Vol. 11, page 303) there are

26. OC 586, end of s.v. *v'dah*.

27. 586:1.

28. Rav Yosef David, 1734; #406.

29. The greater Kudu (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*), a slender antelope of order Artiodactyla, family Bovidae, is native to eastern and southern Africa. It is 1.3 meters at the shoulder, reaches a maximum weight of 450-600 pounds. With its narrow, vertical white stripes on its reddish brown body and a fringe on the throat it is easily identifiable. The male has long divergent corkscrew like horns, the longest of which was measured at 67 inches.

30. Yemenites may not be the only ones who use other than a ram's horn. Rabbi Herbert Dobrinsky (*A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs*, Ktav,



pictures of 13 different *shofarot*. Only number 1 is from a kudu and the legend describes it as used by the "Beni-Israel of Bombay." Interestingly, none of the 13 is said to be from Yemen. However, all of those pictures are taken from a pamphlet issued as part of the *Smithsonian Annual Report* in 1892 written by Cyrus Adler and called *The shofar – Its Use and Origin*.<sup>31</sup> *Shofar* #5 from plate XLVIII is the above referred to *shofar* and has the same legend. On page 301 additional details are provided, and it notes about that *shofar* that "It was brought from Aden [Yemen], and is said to be made of the horn of an animal called the 'cudoo'". In the 1974 *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Vol. 14, entry: *shofar*, pages 1445-1446) there are pictures of 8 *shofarot*. Number 8, the kudu *shofar*, is described as "Yemen, 18<sup>th</sup> century". Rav Yaakov Sapir (*Even Sapir*, 5749 ed., page 165) records that when he visited Yemen in the late 1850s, in all of Yemen they used *shofarot* of a *yael* that were two *amot* long and very curved. Avraham Shmaryahu, who moved to Israel from Yemen in 1949 and now lives in Ramat Gan, clearly remembers that in the synagogue in Yemen they used the very long, curved *shofarot*, although there were also medium sized *shofarot* available.<sup>32</sup> It indeed appears that in at least some parts of Yemen the kudu horn was used as a *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah.

What would the Rambam say in the absence of a ram's horn? The Chida (*Birkei Yosef*, 586:1) quotes his teacher as saying that in places where they have accepted the Rambam as their authority, if there is no ram's horn available, they should not

1986, p. 331) records (without source) that "It is a tradition among the Spanish and Portuguese Jews to use the horn of an antelope for the *shofar*. Thus, it is longer and straighter, without the many bends that some *shofarot* contain." Indeed Rabbi Nathan Cardozo reports (personal email March 1, 2002) that the Spanish Portuguese in Amsterdam use an antelope *shofar*. However, Rabbi Abraham Levy of the London Spanish and Portuguese synagogue reports (Personal conversation 3/30/2000) that they use a "regular" *shofar*.

31. From the Proceedings of the United States National Museum, vol. XVI,

say a *beracha* on any other *shofar*. He, however, disagrees. Rav Aharon Kapach (*Yeriot Aharon*, Jerusalem, 5763, p. 41) asked his teacher Rav Yosef Kapach (no relation) about using other horns and he replied that according to the Rambam, blowing anything other than a ram's horn is the same as using a piece of wood.

Rav Ovadya Melamed<sup>33</sup> suggests that rams' horns are easier to acquire than the "*yael*" horns that the Yemenites use and this is a proof that there must be an ancient Yemenite tradition that preceded the Rambam, that *yael* horns are acceptable, and maybe even preferable because of the greater amount of curves. Rav Shlomo Muchrar,<sup>34</sup> an elderly Yemenite *talmid chacham* who grew up in Yemen and now lives in the Haifa area, stated exactly the opposite. He remembers that the only reason the kudu horn was used in Yemen despite it being less than the ideal was that in parts of Yemen sheep with usable horns were virtually non-existent.

Rav Yosef Kapach<sup>35</sup> addresses the issue of the source of *shofarot* used in Yemen. He observes that most Jews in Yemen used rams' horns as required, but there were those who used horns from a *yael*, and in the city Tza'ana there were those who used the long, curved horns. Others objected to its use and in defense it was claimed, and Rav Kapach says it seems quite implausible, that they are also rams' horns. Others, he writes, admit it is not from a ram, but argue that it is an ancient tradition among Yemenite Jews to use it and it accords with the basic law that all horns other than from a bovine are kosher. In 1887 Rav Yechezkael Shaul-Rofeh was sent from Tiberias to Yemen as an emissary of the *beit din*, and upon returning to Tiberias he brought one of those *shofarot* to ask the sages of Tiberias about

1893, pages 287-301 with plates XLVI-XLIX.

32. Personal conversation, November 19, 2006.

33. *Mesoret hatefillah v'shoresh haminhag l'eydut yeshurun*, n.d., p. 301.



using it. Their response was simply that in their region there is no such thing as a horn like that from a member of the sheep family, nor have they ever heard of such a thing, and therefore the sender should continue to research the source.<sup>36</sup>

There may actually be a side benefit to the Yemenite custom. The fact that the Yemenites use the horn of this antelope for a *shofar* may have kashrut ramifications. The *Chochmat Adam*, *Chazon Ish*, and others<sup>37</sup> require a *mesorah* for an animal species to be kosher. Assuming that there is no disagreement that the horn of a non-kosher animal is not acceptable for use as a *shofar*, the Yemenites' use of a kudu horn might be sufficient to satisfy the requirement for a *mesorah* and enable all segments of Jewry to treat the kudu as a kosher animal. But this is currently only speculative.

### Shape of the *shofar*

The Mishnah<sup>38</sup> mentioned "a straight horn of a *yael* (antelope)" and a bent horn of a *zachar* (ram)". Yet an antelope horn does not appear to be straight. One common explanation is that the *yael* horn is *curved* while the ram horn is *spiraled*. This would mean that the description of the *yael* horn as "*pashut*" means bent but not spiraled. Alternatively, the difference is not in the quality (curved vs. spiral) but in the quantity of the curves, as the Meiri there explains, that "*pashut*" means not as bent as a

36. Although no corroboration should be necessary to justify what appears to be a longstanding tradition of an entire ancient Jewish community, former chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Daron recently stated for the record that kudu *shofarot* are kosher, are not from a bovine species, but are also not from a ram (cited in Rabbi Dr. I.M. Levinger, "List of potentially kosher animals" [Hebrew], *Teudat Kashrut*, 28-29 [Nissan-Iyar 5764 / April-May 2003], p. 43).

37. See sources in Ari Zivotofsky, "Buffalo, Giraffe, and the Babirusa ("kosher pig"): The Halakhic and scientific factors in determining their kashrut status", *BDD*, Winter 2001, 12:5-32.

38. *RH* 3:3-5.

ram's horns. However, the same word, *pashut*, is used in a Mishnah in *Eruvin* (ch. 1) and there it must mean actually straight and cannot mean bent as a *yael* horn. It is possible that the Mishnah in *RH* really meant straight, and that *yael* has a broader definition. It includes not only the ibex found in Ein Gedi, but cousins such as the gemsbok (*Oryx gazella*), a type of African oryx that indeed has ramrod straight horns.

In making a *shofar*, the ossicone is removed from the casque, leaving the proximal end of the "*shofar*" hollow. Because the ossicone does not extend the entire length of the casque, the distal end is hollowed by drilling. If it is curved this is not an easy task. It is made easier either by cutting off a larger section of the solid end or by applying heat to straighten the mouthpiece end.<sup>39</sup> Rav Yosef Kapach has strongly argued against this straightening, which he says is not done by Yemenites.<sup>40</sup> He notes that the Mishnah, Gemara, Rambam, and *Shulchan Aruch* all stress that a *shofar* should be a curved ram's horn. The word curved would seem to be superfluous because all ram's horns are by nature curved, and he thus concludes that it may not be straightened. How much is too straight? Rav Kapach suggests that it should be considered straight if it resembles a *yael* horn, and from his accompanying illustration it appears that he understood a *yael* to be an ibex. Not only is it no longer a

39. Experimentation (by Dr. Ethan Schuman) has found that dry heat at 550 degrees Fahrenheit can significantly soften the horn. Supposedly the heating can soften it to the extent that it can be "poured" into a mold and made into a "perfect" *shofar*. There was such a scandal in 1992, with *shofarot* that were all identical and literally "too good to be true" (*Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 4, 1992).

40. "*Shofar shel Rosh Hashana*", *Sinai*, Nissan-Elul, 5731, 69:209-212; also found in his commentary to Rambam, *Hilchot shofar* 1:1, note 7, and emphasized again in the middle of note 8. Note that in addition to the problem raised by Rav Kapach and discussed here, this heating introduces another problem. During the heating and straightened holes may develop in the *shofar* and less than scrupulous *shofar* makers have been known to fill in those holes, and this may invalidate the *shofar*.



preferred curved *shofar*, but, he argues, it is no longer a *shofar* at all, but rather a *chatzotzra* (trumpet). Both a *chatzotzra* and a *shofar* can be from an animal's horn, so there must be a difference.<sup>41</sup> This difference, he argues, is that a *chatzotzra* is straightened out while a *shofar* is not. Such a straightened horn would thus be *pasul* (invalid) as a *shofar*.<sup>42</sup>

*Mateh Efrayim* (586:2) prefers a bent horn (*mitzvah l'chatchila*) to a ram's (*mitzvah min ha'muvchar*) and rules that if it was straightened out, it is considered as if it was initially straight.

Rav Saadya Gaon<sup>43</sup> states that it is prohibited to change the shape of the horn. The *Pri Megadim*<sup>44</sup> rules that if artificially straightened, it loses the advantage of being curved, and it is like *pashut*, although it is certainly still kosher. Rav Yaakov Etlinger<sup>45</sup> similarly explains that the Gemara gives both the reason of a remembrance of the *akeidah* and that one should be bent in his prayers to teach that a *shofar* from a ram is not sufficient if it is straightened in hot water.

Rav Moshe Sternbuch<sup>46</sup> writes that one should preferably use a Yemenite *shofar* made from a ram's horn because they do

41. In the talmudic period and later, the names *shofar* and *chatzotzra* took on interchangeable and confused meaning as indicated by Rav Achai Gaon in the *Sheiltot* (171), writing that on the first of *Tishrei* we are obligated to blow a *chatzotzra*. For sources on the shape, source (including that *chatzotzra* can be of animal source and not only silver), and use of a *chatzotzra*, as well as on the confusion that existed, see Rav Mordechai HaKohen, "B'kol *shofar* v'*chatzotzra*," *Torah She'b'al Peh*, vol. 7, 5725, 47-53.

42. The existence of this discussion is due to the natural shape of the ram's horn, which is usually quite curved at the narrow end and thus requires straightening to drill it. A cow's horn is actually much straighter and thus easier to make into a *shofar*.

43. *Siddur Rav Saadya Gaon*, 5730 ed., p. 217.

44. *Eishel Avraham* 586:1 and *Mishbetzet Zahav* 586:1.

45. *Aruch Laner*, RH 26b, *Tosafot* s.v. *shel yael*.

46. *Mo'adam U'zmanim*, vol. 8, notes on vol. 1, #5, "hiddurim in *shofar*".

not alter the shape by heat treatment, and it is preferable to use a *shofar* whose natural shape has not been changed.<sup>47</sup> Rav Kapach once explained to his students that in Yemen the hole was "drilled" in the curved part of the horn without straightening it, by using a piece of flexible metal heated red hot.<sup>48</sup> There was thus no need to cut off a large percentage of the horn in order to bore the hole.

Despite all of this, it is clear that the standard practice, at least in Ashkenazi lands, was to straighten the *shofar*. Scribal books<sup>49</sup> compare the shape of the *shofar* to the letter *vav* – which is straight with just a small curve at the end – a clear indication that typical Ashkenazi *shofarot* were straightened for a significant fraction of their length.

### *Shofar Hagadol* in Jewish Thought

One might be inclined to refer to the kudu *shofar* as a *shofar hagadol*, a phrase that is found in *Tanach*, lore, and liturgy. It should be obvious that "*gadol*" in those contexts can mean great and not necessarily large, but it is interesting how this phrase is understood by various *midrashim* and commentators. The *Rokeach*<sup>50</sup> actually understood it as large, suggesting that for *tchi'at hametim* God will use a *shofar* that is one *amah* as measured by His *amah* based on *Zechariah* 9:14..

The Rebbe of Kotzk once explained that "*u'bshofar gadol yitaka*" means that if an *adam gadol*, a great person, will blow the *shofar*, then even if the only sound that emerges is a *kol d'mama daka* –

47. Note that although he writes about a "Yemenite *shofar*" he does not mean a kudu horn, but rather a ram's horn made the way Yemenites fashion it without straightening.

48. Reported to me by Rav Hananel Seri on 9/26/06.

49. Cited in Yosef Bransdorfer, *Orah V'simcha* on *Hilchot shofar* of the Rambam, *Yerushalayim*, 5766, p. 12-13.

50. End of 203, p. 96 in 5727 ed.



a soft small sound, nonetheless *malachim yichafezun chil v'ra'ada yocheizun* – the angels will hasten, a trembling and terror will seize them.<sup>51</sup>

In the weekday *amidah* and in the *musaf* of Rosh Hashanah we ask for God to blow a *shofar gadol* to usher in the redemption. Rav Kook<sup>52</sup> explained that there are three levels of “*shofarot* of redemption” corresponding to the three levels of kosher *shofarot*. On Rosh Hashanah there is the ideal ram’s horn, the kosher horn of other species, and the *b'deived* horn of a non-kosher animal or a non-Jewish *avodah zara* animal. The “*shofar*” of the *mashiach* refers to the motivation, the call, which gathers the dispersed Jews home to Israel and Jerusalem. The ideal redemption and ingathering will be when the Jewish people appreciate that their mission as a holy people can only be actualized in the holy land. This is a religious motivation that is called the great *shofar*. Less ideal, but acceptable, is if the Jewish people return to the Land as an expression of our desire to live among our own people in our own land in a free state, i.e. a social and political motivation. This is an average *shofar*. Finally, there is the small, *pasul* (unworthy) *shofar* that is blown when no kosher *shofar* is available. The least desirable is if none of the positive motivations exist and instead our enemies awaken our need for redemption and drive us home to our land. One who fails to heed the first or second clarion call because his ears are stuffed, will perforce hear the call of the third small, *pasul shofar* and thereby fulfill his obligation. However, we pray to hear the great *shofar*, the ideal call to redemption and return that arises from deep within the Jewish

51. *Sippurei Chassidim*.

52. In a *drasha* delivered on Rosh Hashanah 5694 [1933] in the Churva Synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem and printed in *Ma'amarei HaRaya*, vol. 1, pp. 268-269. I thank Rabbi Prof. Moshe Sokolow for first drawing my attention to this beautiful *drasha*.

soul and calls us to accept our holy mission in our Holy Land, and that God will no longer need to blow the *pasul shofar*. Even for the average *shofar*, the secular nationalism, we no longer pine. Rather, it is the great *shofar* of the ram’s horn that symbolizes the great religious and spiritual yearning that we hope will drive all Jews home.

### *Akeidat Yitzchak*

As noted above, the preference for a ram’s horn is based on several factors, one of them being its connection with the *akeidah* (binding) of Yitzchak. In the eyes of *chazal*, the *akeidah* is a central theme on Rosh Hashanah, and thematically it is intertwined with the future great *shofar* and the redemption. The section of the Torah (Gen 22:1-24) describing the *akeidah* was selected as the Torah reading for Rosh Hashanah. Foods customarily eaten on Rosh Hashanah include the head of a ram in remembrance of the *akeidah*.<sup>53</sup> In the medieval period, some *shofarot* had pictures of rams engraved on them. The earliest source to mention the custom of *tashlich* explains that its purpose is to commemorate the *akeidah*.<sup>54</sup> And it is repeatedly invoked in the prayer service.

The Midrash<sup>55</sup> states that the donkey that the *messiah* will ride on (*Zechariah* 9:9) is the same donkey used by Avraham en route to the *akeidah*, just as the *shofar hagadol* that we await (*Isaiah* 27:13) is identified with the right horn of the ram used in lieu of Yitzchak. Regarding the *shofar*, the Midrash states that two *shofarot* were made from the horns of the ram: The left horn was heard at Mount Sinai (*Exodus* 11:19). The larger, right horn will be blown in the future at the ingathering of the

53. See *Tur* (OC 583 in the name of Maharam Rothenburg), *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 583:2), and *Kaf Hachayim* OC 583:22.

54. *Maharil*, section on Rosh Hashanah, chapter 39.

55. *Pirkei D'rebbi Elazar* 31.



exiles (Isaiah 27:13).<sup>56</sup>

The Midrash (*Midrash Rabbah*, *Vayera*, 56:9) sees the *akeidah* as a microcosm of all of Jewish history and eventually we will be redeemed by the ram's horn as it is written, "... and the Lord God shall blow the *shofar* ..." (*Zechariah* 9:14).

## Conclusion

There is a great deal more to discuss about the philosophy and significance of the mitzvah of *shofar*. The present study addresses just the technical aspects of the source of the *shofar* and in particular the points relevant to the use of kudu horns for the mitzvah. According to all opinions the preferred horn to use for a *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is a curved ram's horn, and according to the Rambam this is the only option. There are various reasons for this preference including its curved shape and the memory of *akeidat* Yitzchak. It is also a reminder of our prayers for the future redemption based on the fact that the above cited *midrashim* all imply that the future "great *shofar*" will be a ram's horn.<sup>57</sup> The *Ateret Zekanim*<sup>58</sup> cites the *Zohar* that specifically a ram's horn should be used, because through it Israel removes the Throne of Judgment and replaces it with the Throne of Mercy.

With so much in favor of a ram's horn, the question arises why one would perform the only biblical mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah, in anything less than the ideal manner?

The *Aruch Hashulchan* (OC 586:3) concludes his discussion of this topic by noting that although the *Shulchan Aruch* ruled in

56. This midrash implies a specific *shofar hagadol*, while Isaiah 27:13 says *b'shofar*, not *bashofar*, indicating a great *shofar*, not the great *shofar*.

57. Such horns can indeed also be physically big, sometimes containing two or even three complete spirals.

58. Cited in *Elef Hamagen* 586:2.

the footsteps of the Raavad, Rosh, Ran, and *Tur*, nonetheless, seeing that Rashi, Tosafot, *Smag*, *Hagahot Maimoni*, and *Yereiim* all ruled like the Rambam, that the only kosher *shofar* is a curved ram's horn, it is obvious that we should be concerned for their opinion as well, certainly regarding a biblical mitzvah, and not permit any other *shofar*. Indeed that is the custom of the Jewish people.

The rationale for using a kudu *shofar* are either if one is a Yemenite who has that tradition, in which case there is merit to preserving a custom, or if the kudu horn is not at all artificially straightened and the ram one is, maybe it is better to use a curved kudu rather than a straight ram's horn. However, the mouthpieces of most commercially available kudu *shofarot* are straightened. Barring those circumstances, it seems clear that the ram's horn is given preference.



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