

## Rosh Hashanah as a 'Memorial'

The commandment to observe the feast of Rosh Hashanah is only a few verses:

**Leviticus 23:23-25** - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD."

It is called a "memorial" - but what are we supposed be remembering?

The rabbis specifically said it was harking back to the incident in Genesis 22 when God told Abraham to travel to Mount Moriah and sacrifice his son Isaac.

Because Abraham carried through on his part until the angel stayed his hand. At that point God swore a grand promise:

**Genesis 22:17-18** - "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

This is the only place where God is recorded as not just speaking but "swearing by Himself."

The shofar or ram's horn is blown at this feast to remember the ram caught in the thicket that took Isaac's place as a sacrifice.

The apostle Paul clarifies this promise for us in terms of looking toward Jesus as the Messiah:

**Galatians 3:16** - "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say, "and to seeds," meaning many, but "and to your seed," meaning One, who is Christ."

One part of the promise we've discussed before concerning Jesus after the transfiguration. Speaking to Peter he said, "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The meaning is that the church as Christ's body participates in His victory in which He will "possess the gates of his enemies." as God promised Abraham.

The rest of the promise is fulfilled in the blessing of all the nations of the earth through Christ's death on the cross, inheritance of the Promised Land as the New Jerusalem, the multiplication of spiritual Israel throughout the world, and probably the carrying out of the gospel story as it is depicted in the constellations and the "stars of heaven."

## The Shofar

The word “shofar” comes from the root “*shefer*” which means beauty or grace or even eloquence.

But the sound coming from the shofar is not beautiful music. It sounds more like a wordless cry from the depths of the soul. From its twisted frame, representing humility forged by life’s experiences, a sound emanates from deep within that God responds to.

As it is written in Zohar, “He who blows, blows from within him,’ that is to say, from his inwardness and his innermost being” (Tanya, chapter 2).

But the mitzvah of shofar is not to blow the ram’s horn, but rather to *hear* the sound that the blowing of the horn produces, and understand what it communicates.

The blessing said before the shofar is sounded:

“Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, Who sanctifies us with His mitzvos and commands us to hear the voice of the shofar.”

Those with ears to hear understand the beauty of humility that God appreciates.

Truly hearing the sound of the shofar has radical effects.

A shofar was blown at the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.

**Exodus 19:16** - “And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.”

The Torah tells us that the people ‘experienced the thundering’, *ro'im et hakolot*. While the root *ra'ah* (see) can also mean experience, the midrash prefers to read the verse quite literally. That is to say, the people actually saw the sounds. What the rabbis are really saying, is that at the moment of Sinai, the people’s very sense of reality began to break down. The world and even their very sense of self began to melt away. Revelation, seen this way, is not simply about seeing something outside of the self, but an upheaval within the soul. Our general assumptions about the world are uprooted to their core. The external revelation was at the same time an internal revolution of the soul.

[See <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/rosh-hashanah-of-revelations-and-revolutions/> ]

It’s important to remember that the blowing of the shofar is also a call to battle with enemies and voices within us.

**2 Corinthians 10:6** - “...having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”