

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's portion Mattos the Torah tells us how the Bnai Yisroel used horn blasts in their battles against Midian. In this vein, the Midrash discusses some of the other uses of horn blasts in Jewish communal life. These days, the shofar is used by Jews to signify that we are going out on a spiritual war. The following story is told by the person himself as it happened to him in Jerusalem.

"In the years before the founding of the State, the area in front of the Kosel did not look as it does today. Only a narrow alley separated the Kosel and the Arab houses on its other side. The British Government forbade us to place an Ark, tables or benches in the alley; even a small stool could not be brought to the Kosel. The British also instituted the following ordinances, designed to humble the Jews at the holiest place of their faith: it is forbidden to pray out loud, lest one upset the Arab residents; it is forbidden to read from the Torah (those praying at the Kosel had to go to one of the synagogues in the Jewish quarter to conduct the Torah reading); it is forbidden to sound the shofar on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The British Government placed policemen at the Kosel to enforce these rules.

On Yom Kippur of that year [1930] I was praying at the Kosel. During the brief intermission between the musaf and minchah prayers, I overheard people whispering to each other: "Where will we go to hear the shofar? It'll be impossible to blow here. There are as many policemen as people praying..." The Police Commander himself was there, to make sure that the Jews will not, G-d forbid, sound the single blast that closes the fast.

I listened to these whisperings, and thought to myself: Can we possibly forgo the sounding of the shofar that accompanies our proclamation of the sovereignty of G-d? Can we possibly forgo the sounding of the shofar, which symbolizes the redemption of Israel? True, the sounding of the shofar at the close of Yom Kippur is only a custom, but "A Jewish custom is Torah"! I approached Rabbi Yitzchak Horenstein, who served as the Rabbi of our "congregation," and said to him: "Give me a shofar." "What for?" The Rabbi said. "I'll blow." "What are you talking about? Don't you see the police?" "I'll blow." I told him.

The Rabbi abruptly turned away from me, but not before he cast a glance at the prayer stand at the left end of the alley. I understood: the shofar is in the stand. When the hour of the blowing approached, I walked over to the stand and leaned against it.

I opened the drawer and slipped the shofar into my shirt. I had the shofar, but what if they saw me before I had a chance to blow it? I was still unmarried at the time, and following the Ashkenazic custom, did not wear a tallis. I turned to person praying at my side, and asked him for his tallis. My request must have seemed strange to him, but the Jews are a kind people, especially at the holiest moments of the holiest day, and he handed me his tallis me without a word.

I wrapped myself in the tallis. At that moment, I felt that I had created my own private domain. All around me, a foreign government prevails, ruling over the people of Israel even on their holiest day and at their holiest place, and we are not free to serve our G-d; but under this tallis is another domain. Here I am under no dominion save that of my Father in Heaven; here I shall do as He commands me, and no force on earth will stop me.

When the closing verses of the ne'illah prayer—"Hear O Israel," "Blessed be the name" and "The L-rd is G-d"—were proclaimed, I took the shofar and blew a long, resounding blast. Everything happened very quickly. Many hands grabbed me. I removed the tallis from over my head, and before me stood the Police Commander, who ordered my arrest. I was taken to the kishla, the prison in the Old City, and an Arab policeman was appointed to watch over me. Many hours passed; I was given no food or water to break my fast. At midnight, the policeman received an order to release me, and he let me out without a word.

I then learned that when the chief rabbi of the Holy Land, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, heard of my arrest, he immediately contacted the secretary of High Commissioner, and asked that I be released. When his request was refused, he stated that he would not break his fast until I was freed. The High Commissioner resisted for many hours, but finally, out of respect for the Rabbi, he had no choice but to set me free.

For the next eighteen years, until the Arab conquest of the Old City in 1948, the shofar was sounded at the Kosel every Yom Kippur. The British well understood the significance of this blast; they knew that it will ultimately demolish their reign over our land as the walls of Jericho crumbled before the shofar of Joshua, and they did everything in their power to prevent it. But every Yom Kippur, the shofar was sounded by men who know they would be arrested for their part in staking our claim on the holiest of our possessions. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**