



The Call of the Shofar

Rabbi Yael Vurgan

When I recently asked some nursery school children in our region of Sha'ar Ha-Negev: What feelings does the shofar stir up in you? I got a lot of different answers. Some said it's frightening. Some said it sounds like an alarm clock going off!

The shofar is the central symbol of the Hebrew month of Elul and is intended to awaken our hearts and souls to the possibilities of our lives.

Yet it is a curious choice of instrument. A trumpet certainly could be used for this purpose! Why must we use an animal horn?

According to one interpretation, the raw and broken sound that comes out of the shofar is meant to imitate the sounds of a calf just emerging from its mother's womb. Understood in this way, the sound of the shofar is meant to evoke in us parental compassion, concern, and love.

Another interpretation asks why in Aramaic is *Yom Truah* (the day of the sounding of the shofar) translated as *Yom Yavva* (the day of wailing)? The word *Yavva* invokes the crying of a nameless Canaanite mother in the book of Judges, waiting in vain for her slain son to return home from war with the Israelites. This interpretation challenges us to hear the voice that is difficult for us to naturally hear, to be able to feel compassion for the pain of every mother and every person – even the mother of our enemy.

On Rosh HaShanah we say "Today the world was birthed (*Hayom Harat Olam*)."¹ From one great "womb" the world was birthed. Soon it will be the birthday of all of humankind. Through the sounds of the shofar, this season calls on us to find within ourselves compassion and loving concern for all of creation.



Rabbi Yael Vurgan serves the Sha'ar Hanegev region on behalf of the Reform Movement in Israel. She serves as rabbi to ten kibbutzim, a number of which are less than one kilometer from the border with Gaza. Rabbi Vurgan works to make Judaism more accessible to the diverse residents of her region.

