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Shofar Blowing During Elul

Question: What is the reason for blowing shofar during the month of Elul, and what halachot do I need to know about it?

Answer: The minhag is an old one, which the Tur¹ cites based on Pirkei d'Rabi Eliezer.² The reason recorded there is connected to the historical event when Moshe went up to Har Sinai to receive the Tablets a second time, which took place on Rosh Chodesh Elul. This was accompanied by the blowing of the shofar to warn the people that Moshe was leaving and that they must not make the type of mistake they made the first time with the Golden Calf.

Of course, our minhag extends the blowing of the shofar beyond Rosh Chodesh to the entire month of Elul

(minus Shabbat and the day before Rosh HaShana).

There are two further reasons that explain the extension of the minhag. One is that Elul is a time when teshuva³ is appropriate, and the shofar helps rally people to this end. The connection between teshuva and shofar is evident from the pasuk:⁴ “Shall a shofar be blown in a city and the nation will not tremble?”⁵ A final idea that is suggested is that blowing the shofar confuses the Satan as to when Rosh HaShana will be.⁶

These reasons complement each other. The first establishes the significance of the starting date, the second extends it past Rosh Chodesh,⁷ and the third explains why it is appropriate only until Rosh Hashana and not until Yom Kippur, which is the end of the period of teshuva.

During Elul, we blow one series of blasts. The minhag is not to be so careful to ensure that the blasts are halachically valid. Apparently, the view is that any reasonable reminder of teshuva, of a hint of Rosh HaShana, and/or of the events of the historical Rosh Chodesh Elul is sufficient.

¹ Orach Chayim 581.

² 46.

³ Repentance.

⁴ Amos 3:6.

⁵ Tur op. cit.

⁶ Ibid.

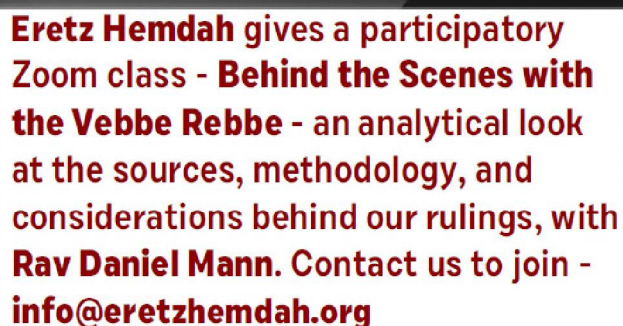
⁷ See Prisha, ad loc.

There is a significant difference between Ashkenazic and Sefardic practice regarding this minhag. Ashkenazim blow the shofar at the end of Shacharit, although there was once a minhag to do so in the evening as well.⁸ Sefardim do it during Selichot instead. This is consistent with their minhag to start Selichot in the beginning of the month of Elul. In fact, the Tur presents the two practices together, as both are linked to the special nature of Elul, which makes the joining of the two appropriate.

The fact that Ashkenazim blow the shofar in shul in the morning is significant according to two prominent, recent poskim. Rav Moshe Feinstein⁹ explains that we do it specifically during the day, and not after Ma'ariv, because of sources that indicate that the first half of the night is not an auspicious time to make supplications. The Tzitz Eliezer¹⁰ posits that the minhag applies only in shul, as is the common practice, and need not be fulfilled by one who missed shul. He explains that the historical shofar blowing was a public event and that the aforementioned pasuk that indicates the teshuva-powers of a shofar also refers to the blowing in a city, not in the home.

Therefore, most women, who are not usually present in shul daily, do not generally hear shofar blowing during Elul, which is perfectly acceptable.

There are different opinions and minhagim regarding on which of the two days of Rosh Chodesh Elul we should start the minhag. Some of the arguments relate to the day that Moshe went to Har Sinai for the 40-day period or how many days of shofar blowing we are interested in having.¹¹ In any case, the more prevalent minhag is to start on the second day of Rosh Chodesh, which is the first day of Elul, but either minhag that is practiced locally is acceptable.¹²



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⁸. See Tur op. cit.; Rama, *Orach Chayim* 581:1.

⁹. *Igrot Moshe*, *Orach Chayim* IV:21.

¹⁰. XII:48.

¹¹. See Bach, *Orach Chayim* 581, and Magen Avraham 581:2.

¹². *Igrot Moshe* op. cit.