



Shemini Atzeres: Warning and All Clear Sirens

There are two types of shofars blasts, which tell the story of the Jewish people from its inception. Which one are we hearing now?

The New Hit Song

Sirens.

In Israel, most people have become accustomed to being constantly alert, ready to run in on a moment's notice into a bomb shelter.

When the Warning Sirens start to blair, it could be incredibly stressful. You have a very short time to drop everything, stop everything you were doing, and run for safety. The siren is always a source of fear.

Many people in Israel are suffering from anxiety from the sirens, and they've also caused injury. Just two days before Sukkot, a Chabadnik in Israel fell from a ladder in his haste to get to safety and was severely injured.

In this climate, a new hit song was released in Israel. It's called, "Sirens Don't Scare Me." It quickly became wildly popular throughout the country, as many copies and adaptations going viral as well. And it was produced by none other than a 10 year old and 13 year old boy.

The refrain of the song explains why they are not afraid: "*Ki Hashem Tamid Iti*, because G-d is always with me," a line which is repeated again and again in the song. The two young composers have become celebrities in the country, being interviewed on the news and getting millions of views, and they always repeat one main point. They are actually not afraid of the sirens—because they truly feel like G-d is with them.

The Original Siren

Here's the thing about sirens. They're not new. The first version of a

siren existed for thousands of years, and you know it from Rosh Hashanah: it's called "the call of the shofar."

Everyone knows why we blow the shofar—it's a siren, a call to repentance. As the famous verse in Amos (3:6) says, "When the shofar is sounded in the city, will the nation not tremble?" Every year, when the shofar is sounded in the synagogue, it feels like the Warning Siren calling the entire community to make good resolutions for the upcoming year. The intensity of the moment is very palpable in the synagogue.

But there's another type of shofar blowing; one that does not induce anxiety, but rather induces the very opposite—a feeling of joy and relief. That's the shofar blowing at the conclusion of Yom Kippur. It's like the All Clear siren.

As the day draws to a close, synagogues around the world begin to fill up, and everyone waits with anticipation. When the shofar is finally sounded, everyone breaks out into a smile. There's a sense of joy in the room, everyone wishes each other a happy holiday, and heads off to break their fast with the feeling that G-d certainly has gifted us a happy and sweet New Year.

The Siren at Mount Sinai

The first time the Jewish people heard the sound of the shofar was 3,336 years ago, seven weeks after leaving Egypt. That Shavuot morning, everyone was still asleep when G-d descended onto Mount Sinai.

The Torah describes how suddenly, that morning, the shofar was sounded and it grew louder and louder. And everybody trembled. Maybe that's why we still have anxiety from sirens. This was the Warning Siren.

There was another shofar blast at the giving of the Torah. G-d had instructed Moshe to warn the people not to approach the mountain while His presence was there. Once the long blast of the shofar was heard, it signaled that it was safe to approach again just like an All Clear signal.

The Chizkuni, quoting Rav Saadiah Gaon, says that Moshe blew the shofar after the Mishkan was erected. That's when the people were given permission to once again approach the mountain.

Our Two Yearly Blasts

Well, the two shofar blasts we sound on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur symbolize the shofar calls at the giving of the Torah. The shofar on Rosh Hashanah serves as a reminder of that powerful sound heard at Mount Sinai, while the shofar blown at the end of Yom Kippur represents a second blast.

The journey of the Jewish people as G-d's chosen nation began with a shofar call, and, with G-d's help, it will culminate in the sound of Moshiach's shofar.

The Two Final Calls

The truth is, that there are two types of shofar blasts that are associated with Moshiach as well: the warning siren and the All Clear. One invokes deep awe and trepidation, and the other is a warm, fatherly call for the children to return home.

The prophet Zechariah foretells that G-d will sound the shofar and "come forth like a storm from the south." Commentators explain that before Moshiach arrives, there will be a war, and G-d will come to vanquish the enemies of the Jewish people, using the shofar as a tool to instill fear during battle. In contrast, the prophet Isaiah speaks of an entirely different kind of shofar blast: one that calls back those lost in exile, bringing them home.

But why is a shofar needed before the coming of Moshiach? Zechariah's prophecy makes sense, as it aims to intimidate enemies and secure victory, but what purpose does Isaiah's shofar serve?

The prophet himself offers insight in the preceding verse, when he says, "You will be gathered one by one, O children of Israel." The Rebbe explains that during our time in exile, the Jewish people are scattered across the globe, even to the most isolated corners of the world. But then, G-d will gather them back, one by one, and reintegrate them into the Jewish people.

However, there are so many who have become so lost in exile that they seem completely adrift. For them, "A great shofar will be blown." The shofar will rally those who have strayed and bring them back into the fold.

The Metaphors

My friends, the shofar blast doesn't necessarily have to be a literal, physical sound of a shofar. It's a metaphor—meaning that people will

gather and come together as if a great shofar had been blown, spreading a call throughout the world to unite and return (as explained in Metzudos).

In 1967, right after the Six-Day War, the Rebbe compared the two shofar blasts mentioned by the prophets to major events of the 20th century.

The shofar blast in the prophecy of Zechariah, which refers to wars, was likened by the Rebbe to the events of World War I and especially World War II. "Zechariah prophesied about an earlier period, when the shofar would be connected to turbulent wars between nations, shaking the established order of the world" (Toras Menachem v. ?, p. 213).

The second, 'all clear' shofar blast from Isaiah, in which G-d lovingly calls every Jew to return home, was compared by the Rebbe to the Six-Day War. As the Rebbe described it: "The great shofar represents a powerful awakening among all Jews, even those spiritually distant, shaken by the fatherly call from G-d, urging them to return" (p. 214). This, the Rebbe said, was seen in the Six-Day War, when open miracles led to Israel's swift victory over its enemies in just six days.

The Six-Day War sparked an immense awakening among Jews everywhere, particularly among the younger generation. Those who were teenagers at the time still recall the surge of Jewish pride that swept across America and beyond. Suddenly, it was something to be proud of—to be Jewish. The Jewish people stood taller and began asking themselves what it truly means to live as a Jew. From a spiritual perspective, it was a far more effective shock than any of the troubles and tribulations that had been wrought upon the Jewish people, even more than the Holocaust. Now, people were inspired to be Jewish. (p. 211).

The same, and perhaps even more, happened in the former Soviet Union. The war sparked an immense awakening among the youth. The movement of the "Refuseniks" was born out of that war. Suddenly, thousands of young Jews, who had been proud, loyal Communists, began asking themselves what it truly meant to be Jewish. They started searching for their roots and, as a result, longed to move to Israel. That was when they realized that Russia wasn't their real home. They wanted to reconnect with the Jewish people and live openly as Jews, something that was impossible in the Soviet Union at that time.

We might also say that in the war since October 7th, we experienced both types of shofar blasts.

The first blast, a year ago, was a warning siren, filled with terrible, devastating hardships. Many have compared it, to some degree, to the Holocaust. That already led to an awakening began among the Jewish people, leading Jews in Israel and everywhere to search for their Jewish identity. Here, too—more and more Jews came to services and events. The Jewish people, wherever they are, began returning to their roots.

And now, over the past month since the “beeper attack,” we’ve begun to hear and feel the ‘all clear’ shofar blast described by the prophet Isaiah. This is a shofar blast of miracles, stirring the Jewish people far more than any hardship ever could. Since Elul, the Jewish people have started to smile again. Yes, there’s still a long way to go, but we’re beginning to feel G-d’s embrace and the miracles He performs for us at every step.

This past month, it seems that G-d’s love for the Jewish people has once again been revealed in an open, unmistakable way. Today, we ask Him that the joy of Simchat Torah extends throughout the entire year. “Chazak, chazak, v’nitchazek.”

(From Jewish Insights, the Shofar of Love)