

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

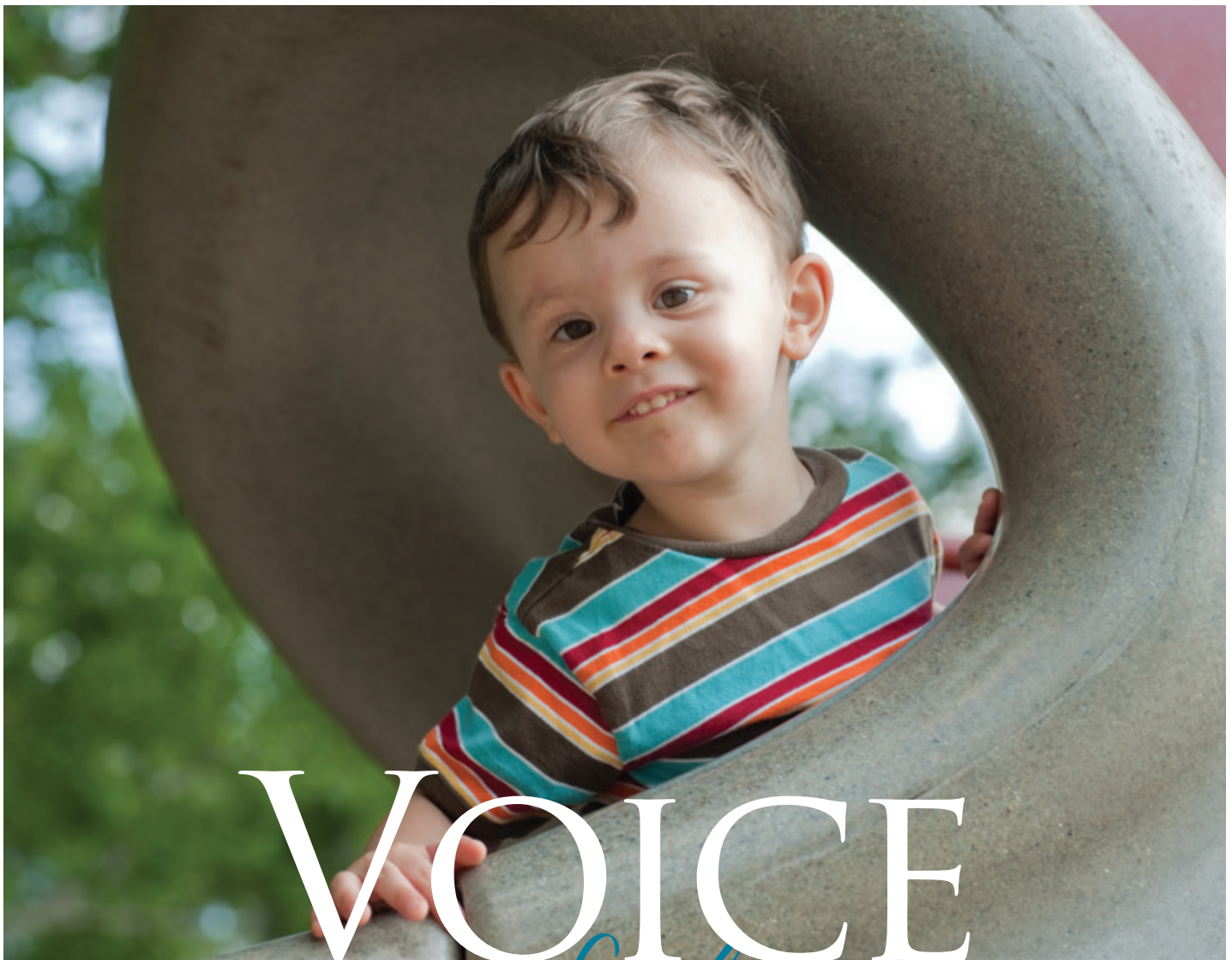
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VOICE *of the* SHOFAR

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VOICE *of the* SHOFAR

IN AN ARTICLE by Jewish writer Sara Debbie Gutfreund, she describes losing her son in an Israeli amusement park one day and the ensuing, frantic search for him. She called again and again but there was no response. When she finally found him, the toddler was completely unaware that he was lost. He was happily playing with a new-found friend and didn't realize the danger of wandering away.

Gutfreund said that, in our own lives, we often don't realize our "lostness" and our utter helplessness when we are disconnected from the Source of life. She wrote: "Too often I go through my days as if I'm the one writing the script. Meanwhile, He is looking for me. He sends out search parties. He calls my name. 'Has anyone seen her? She was here just a second ago. She doesn't even know how to get back. She doesn't realize that she can't survive on her own. Why doesn't she answer my call?'"

Our Abba calls, and the voice of the shofar is His wordless cry. We are deafened by the sounds of life around us and we don't hear or we don't bother to listen. He wants us to shake off our deafness and answer the insistent call of His shofar. He wants us to run to Him and be gathered to His embrace—where we will be safe and secure...and found.

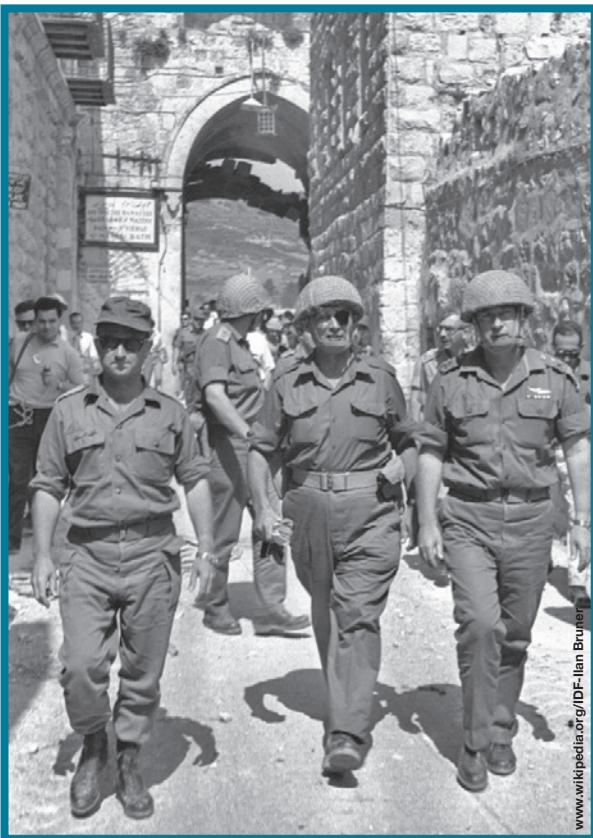
Rabbi Nosson Scherman says, "[the shofar] is a primitive instrument, barely capable of modulating its tones or shifting notes. Can anyone play a symphony or even a song on a shofar? No, but its piercing sound symbolizes the inarticulate cry of the indelibly stained soul that longs to be cleansed but does not know how. It is a cry that only God's ear can translate into the plea, 'it is our desire to perform your desire,' but we do not know how. The constant poundings of the Evil Inclination, of society, culture, habit, surroundings have numbed us to your touch, have deafened us to your message."

God Blows The Shofar

At least twice in Scripture God blows a trumpet and both times it is a shofar, a ram's horn trumpet. A ram's horn is a completely natural musical instrument—it is not man-made, it's God-made, and it is one of the oldest musical instruments in history—at least 5,000 years old. The shofar has been in continuous use for 3,000 years in Israel, spanning the fall of Jericho to the present day and sounded in Jewish communities all over the world.



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Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Yitzhak Rabin in the entrance to the old city of Jerusalem during the Six Day War, with Moshe Dayan and Uzi Narkiss.



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Recent scientific studies confirm that listening to the sound of the shofar actually causes our bodies to react physically. The response to the loud, insistent sound is sometimes called “fight or flight”—the same response we would have at the sound of a siren. Our senses are immediately alerted to danger or stress. They “wake up,” are sharpened, and we are given more energy to actively respond, more clarity in our thinking, and more ability to see things we would not otherwise notice. We are transformed into a new state of awareness.

When the shofar is blown, its piercing, evocative cry reverberates deep within us, striking the chords of our inmost being and echoing the Jewish people’s heart-cry of victory, celebration, and repentance. It awakens every part of our being to God’s voice.

“Echoes of a Shofar”

I don’t think I realized just how integral the sound of the shofar is to the Jewish people’s worship of the Lord until I heard a story called “Echoes of a Shofar.” Not so long ago, blowing the shofar took special courage and chutzpah, because those who were caught doing so were arrested and jailed.

In 1930, during the British Mandate in Palestine, the British made it illegal for anyone to blow the shofar at the *Kotel* (Western Wall), on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, and *Yom Kippur*. Jews were also forbidden to pray out loud or bring *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) scrolls to the Wall, in case it caused offense to the Muslim residents of Jerusalem. For 18 years, that law was in force until the British Mandate ended.

During the first year of restrictions at the *Kotel*, a courageous young rabbi named Moshe Segal thought to himself, “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 *tallit* [prayer shawl] 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.”

Concealed in his prayer shawl was a shofar on which Moshe Segal proceeded to sound a loud defiant blast. He was immediately arrested. He wrote in his memoirs: “For the next eighteen years, until the Arab conquest of the Old City in 1948, the shofar was sounded at the *Kotel* every *Yom Kippur*. The British well understood the significance of this blast; they knew that it would ultimately demolish their reign over our land just 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 knew they would be arrested for their part in staking our claim on the holiest of our possessions.”

Other brave young men followed in Rabbi Segal’s footsteps and smuggled shofars to the Western Wall, risking arrest and jail. They said, “We swore to give our lives for the resurrection of the Jewish people.” And that sentiment was rampant amongst the idealistic youth who didn’t think twice about their acts of defiance. If it meant jail, it was a small price to pay for preserving their spiritual heritage.

Enhancement and Beauty

The blowing of the ram’s horn referred back to the Binding of Isaac, when a substitutionary sacrifice was supplied by God in the form of a ram caught by the horns in a thicket of thorns. After Isaac questioned his father about a lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham responded, “*My son, God will provide HIMSELF a lamb for a burnt offering*” (Gen. 22:8 KJV, emphasis added). Many Christians believe this foreshadowed the substitutionary sacrifice of Yeshua (Jesus), the Lamb of God, crowned with thorns.

There is a rich dichotomy in the use of a shofar. In Scripture, a horn usually represents the power and strength of a king, but the ram’s horn is also curved which represents bending in submission to God. Here, some Christians see a beautiful representation of Messiah—who first came as a humble servant, and will come again as King.

Yoram Ettinger says that the word shofar has its root in the Hebrew word for enhancement and improvement. Some other sources simply say the root is beauty. God required the blowing of trumpets to commemorate one of His appointed times, the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24–25). Ettinger states that the blowing of the shofar was “a wake-up call, a break away from the professional, social and political mundane, in order to recommit oneself to basic values and repairing one’s order of priorities.” It signified a time of repentance and getting right before God. Reordering our priorities and repentance would enhance, improve, and beautify our relationship with the Creator.

The Shofar in Scripture

Now, let’s take a look at a few of the many biblical uses of a shofar and its significance today.

The Presence of the Lord: The first time God blew the shofar was at Mount Sinai when He gave Moses His commandments in Exodus 19:18–19: *“Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.”*

The second time the Bible speaks of God blowing the shofar is in Zechariah 9:14: *“Then the Lord will be seen over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord God will blow the trumpet, and go with whirlwinds from the south.”*

In both these verses, the blowing of the trumpet announced the presence of the Lord. The shofar blast is a reminder of the everlasting covenant between God and His people. Our joy and strength are in His living presence, and our fulfillment is found entirely in relationship with Him.

Days of Repentance: The shofar was blown on the feast days of repentance—the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. The blowing of the trumpets began in the sixth month of Elul and marked a time of looking inward when the Jewish people prepared their hearts before the Lord for the ten Days of Awe. They examined their behavior, sought the face of God, and repented of their sins. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says that the curve in a shofar is symbolic of a broken and contrite heart, humbled before Him in repentance. The word shofar is translated as “to incise” or “burn into,” which captures the way the shofar powerfully penetrates to our very core and motivates us to change when we hear its distinctive sound. It’s also interesting that both the altar of incense and the altar of sacrifice in the Tabernacle had horns on each of their four corners, symbolic of God’s forgiveness and redemption.

A Spiritual Weapon: Ancient Israel knew that the shofar was a powerful spiritual weapon. Its distinctive sound struck terror into the hearts of Israel’s enemies, so that their hearts



www.wikipedia.org/Picasa – Lilach Daniel

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melted. When Joshua surrounded the city of Jericho, God commanded the people to sound the shofars. Seven priests blowing seven shofars circled the city seven times for seven days. *"So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then...they took the city"* (Josh. 6:20).

Then, in Judges 6 and 7, God used a fearful Gideon and his tiny army to smite Israel's enemies, the Midianites. Even as Gideon was in hiding, God called him a "mighty man of valor," and showed him how he would be used in a great exploit of God's making. *"Then he (Gideon) divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers...Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers—they held the torches in their left hands and trumpets in their right hands for blowing—and they cried, 'The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!'"* (Judg. 7:16,20).

Today, the shofar is as much a powerful spiritual weapon as it ever was. As Israel is surrounded by her enemies and far outnumbered on every side, sounding the shofar in Zion reminds us that we serve a Mighty God who is able, not only to defend His people, but to defeat His enemies in supernatural ways. Almighty God will bring victory to His people, against all odds.

A Coronation: The shofar was not only blown at the anointing and coronation of a king, but the anointing oil was usually held in a horn, not in a flask—again, a container that was not made by man. This signified that the king was God's choice, anointed by Him to do His will and perform His work. 1 Samuel 16:13 says, *"Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him (David) in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward."*

A Dedication: The shofar was blown when the Temple was dedicated. *"When they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: 'For He is good, for His mercy endures forever,' that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God"* (2 Chron. 5:13–14). The sound of the shofar is a call to worship, and a reminder of the privilege we have to enter His presence as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

A Call to Restoration: In the book of Nehemiah, the Jewish people returned from exile to restore the walls of Jerusalem. They faced opposition and danger on every side. Nehemiah said to the people, *"The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us"* (Neh. 4:19–20). The sound of the shofar is a reminder of God's faithful promise to bring the Jewish people back from their dispersion, and to restore the Land and the people of Israel to Himself.

An Alert to Danger: The shofar was sounded by watchmen on the walls of a city to alert the people to imminent danger. One long blast during the watches of the night reassured the inhabitants of the city that all was well. But a series of sharp, staccato blasts raised the alarm that enemies were in sight and to rally to arms. Isaiah 58:1 says, *"Lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."* Joel 2:1 says, *"Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand."* The sound of the shofar reminds us that we are watchmen on the walls, appointed to alert others that the Lord's Day of judgment is coming.

The shofar is mentioned in the writings of the Apostles as well. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, *"Behold I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed"* (1 Cor. 15:51–52).



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"...the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers—they held the torches in their left hands and trumpets in their right hands for blowing—and they cried, 'The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!'"

(Judg. 7:16,20)

“The Bridegroom Is Coming!”

The whole message of the Bible revolves around God’s marriage covenant with His people, and first century wedding customs are rife with that symbolism. That includes the blowing of the shofar.

When a first-century Jewish man found the woman of his dreams, he had to establish a marriage contract, called a *ketubah*. First, the prospective bridegroom went to her home to talk and negotiate with her father. Once the father was satisfied that this was a good match for his daughter, a price for the bride was established. That was the most important part of the covenant. The more her future husband valued her, the higher the price he was willing to pay. He gave as much as he could to secure her as his wife.

In a classic book called *Our Jerusalem* by Bertha Spafford Vester, an American woman whose parents established the American Colony in Jerusalem, Mrs. Vester relates the story of a visit she and her husband made to a Bedouin encampment in 1915. The sheik and his entourage told them that the amount of money and goods a future husband offered a woman’s family for her hand was indicative of how much he valued her. In this case, the sheik’s cousin had recently married, and had paid an exorbitant sum for his beautiful bride. Mrs. Vester wrote, “The price was one thoroughbred mare, one modern rifle, two cows, one camel, one hundred and eighty sheep, one hundred and twenty goats, one hundred and twenty measures of wheat, and eighty napoleons [a gold twenty-franc French coin].”

She said, “They were anxious to know what my husband had paid for me, and looked absolutely horror-struck when I showed them my wedding ring. They decided then that a wife with us was a cheap luxury. But I said that, before I allowed my husband to put that ring on my finger, he had placed his heart in my hand. They appreciated such sentimental talk.”

So after the all-important price was established—and, equally important, the bride had agreed to the marriage—the groom went back to his father’s property and began building a new home, usually one that would adjoin his father’s house. Christians see a parallel to this custom in the Gospel of John when Yeshua said, “*In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you*” (John 14:2).

While the groom was building the house, the bride was preparing herself for his arrival. She had to separate herself from all other suitors, and be prepared because she did not know exactly when he would come.

At last, the groom’s father would give him permission to go and claim his bride, and the young man would be thrilled because he hadn’t seen the bride since their betrothal, a period that could be as long as two years. He and his entourage of friends arrived in the middle of the night when the bride was least expecting him; they approached the gate of the village where she lived, and gave a great shout and a loud blast on the shofar to announce the bridegroom’s arrival. That was the sound the bride was waiting for—and she had to be ready, because the groom had the right to leave her behind if she wasn’t. In the Gospel of Matthew, Yeshua (Jesus) alluded to this custom in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour*” (Matt. 25:13).

In the writings of the Apostles, the analogy of the bridegroom is often used to describe Yeshua’s relationship with His followers. In his letter to the believers in Thessalonica, Pauls tells us that the Bridegroom will appear and the sign of His coming will be a shout and the blast of a shofar. In God’s perfect time, He will say to the Bridegroom, “now is the time—go and get your Bride,” and Yeshua will “*descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God... We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord*” (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Many in the Christian world have been anticipating such an event for a long time, believing it to be the glorious destiny of the Church. “*They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*” (Matt. 24:30b–31).



The whole message of the Bible revolves around God’s marriage covenant with His people... and that includes the blowing of the shofar.



Jewish wedding 1903

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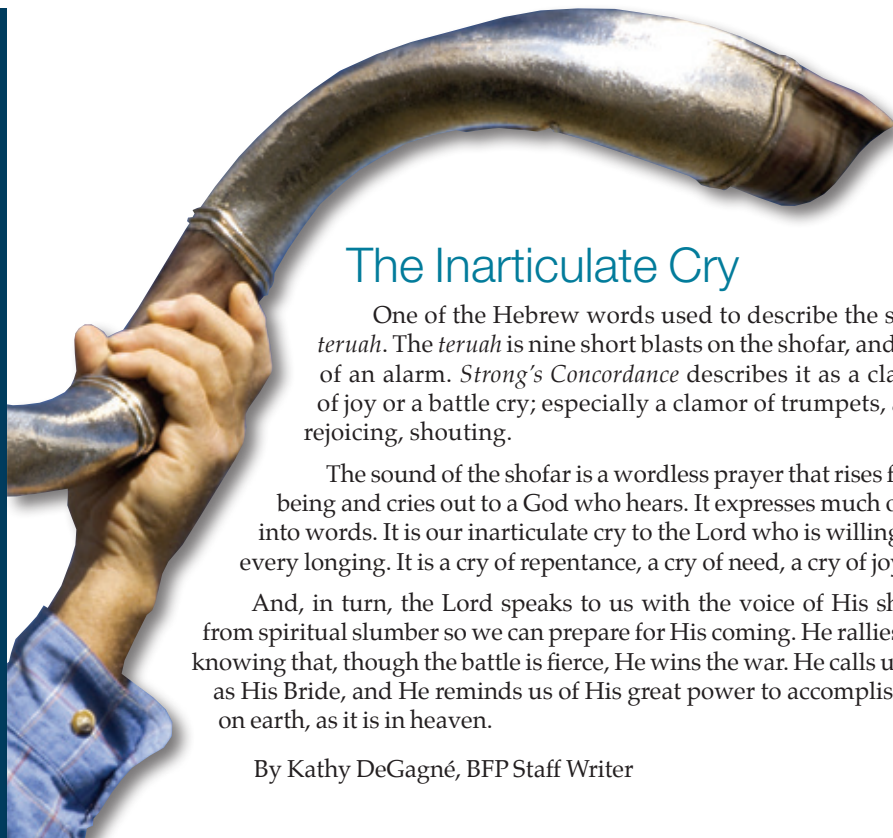
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The Inarticulate Cry

One of the Hebrew words used to describe the sound of the shofar is *teruah*. The *teruah* is nine short blasts on the shofar, and resembles the sound of an alarm. *Strong's Concordance* describes it as a clamor, an acclamation of joy or a battle cry; especially a clamor of trumpets, an alarm, joy, jubilee, rejoicing, shouting.

The sound of the shofar is a wordless prayer that rises from the depths of our being and cries out to a God who hears. It expresses much of what we cannot put into words. It is our inarticulate cry to the Lord who is willing and able to meet our every longing. It is a cry of repentance, a cry of need, a cry of joy, a cry of victory.

And, in turn, the Lord speaks to us with the voice of His shofar. He awakens us from spiritual slumber so we can prepare for His coming. He rallies His troops for battle, knowing that, though the battle is fierce, He wins the war. He calls us to draw near to Him as His Bride, and He reminds us of His great power to accomplish all He intends to do on earth, as it is in heaven.

By Kathy DeGagné, BFP Staff Writer

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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