

Taking the Shofar into the Streets for 5781

By [Aviva L. Brown](#) | August 19, 2020



Unable to hear the [shofar](#) this year in person, Aviva took matters into her own hands

When I realized I wouldn't hear the shofar this year I cried.

If I'm being honest, the realization that I'll be missing the shofar blast on [Rosh Hashanah](#) was just the final chip in the dam I'd constructed around my feelings of loss in 2020. My temple is the center of my social and spiritual life, and not being able to be physically present with my community has been agony. I've held myself together because I know that during a global pandemic that has taken so many people's lives, sorrow

over not seeing my friends in person is very small.

However, confirmation that I would only be hearing the shofar virtually this year opened up the floodgate and I cried all of the tears I've been holding since March. I cried for the Passover [seder](#) I didn't have. I cried for the missed [Tikkun Leil Shavuot](#). I cried for my friends and their children and the *bnei mitzvot* that didn't go as planned. I cried until I had no more tears.

Seeing my [shul](#) at full capacity while greeting so many friends and acquaintances is only one highlight of [Rosh Hashanah](#). The true joy is hearing the shofar blast, reverberating deep inside, awakening my soul to the task ahead: *teshuvah*. It's time to return to the path of righteousness from which I have inevitably strayed.

In the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic, though, there will be no catching up before Rosh Hashanah morning services. No weeping at the beautifully rendered [Kedushah](#). No shofar to hit me deeply in emotional places I don't fully comprehend. For the safety of our congregants, we'll be having virtual services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They're beautifully done, but it isn't the same for me.

The depth of my depression over the loss of this year's Rosh Hashanah routine surprised me, and eventually I had an idea that snapped me out of it—if I can't hear the shofar at the temple, I can blow it for myself. I ordered a shofar and posted about my plan online. Within hours, I had a volunteer shofar teacher and several friends commiserating with me. Several more asked me to come to their houses and blast the shofar for them, from an acceptable social distance—the street. My teacher and I plan to have t-shirts made (*Shofar so good? We're here to have a blast?*), and drive our shofar caravan around town on Rosh Hashanah, waking up the souls of our friends (and probably waking their neighbors' dogs).

My shofar arrived from [Israel](#) and I examined it carefully. I felt the smooth, polished surface of the ram's horn. I looked inside and could see a stray ram's hair. I could smell the faint scent of livestock. I felt the weight of the horn in my hand and it felt at once foreign and also deeply familiar.

I put the shofar to my mouth and blew. I heard the hiss of air and tasted the essence of ram, but no blast sounded. This is why I need a teacher. I haven't yet had an official lesson, but a few more attempts resulted in a sound. Not the long *tekiah*. Nor the waves of *shevarim*. Not *teruah*, and certainly not *tekiah gedolah*. Those will come later.

Yet, that sound—my first sound—from the shofar struck at something deep in the pit of my stomach. It isn't the awakening of hearing the shofar like I've experienced before. It's the feeling of connection to the shofar, to the awakening of my soul, and hopefully the souls of others. It's the connection to every shofar player who came before, who is here now, and who ever will be. My one short blast was the connection that I've been missing since coronavirus shut everything down this past spring.

I have a lot of practicing to do in the few weeks before the new year. I will put in the time. I will put in the work. G-d willing, on Rosh Hashanah I will bring awakening and connection to my community, and to myself. The shofar must go on.