



FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

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Children Hearing *Shofar* Blowing

Question: Must children hear *shofar* blowing, at what age, when, and how many?

Answer: As a rule, boys are obligated to fulfill positive *mitzvot* on a Rabbinic level from the age of *chinuch* (Sukka 42a), and this includes *shofar* (Arachin 2b). (There is a fundamental *machloket* whether the child is himself obligated in the *mitzva* or whether it is the father who is obligated to make sure the child does the *mitzva* (see Rashi and Tosafot, Berachot 48a).) Girls are fundamentally exempt from *shofar*, as all women are exempt from this time-based *mitzva* (Kiddushin 33b). However, there is much to consider about the details in practice.

The *gemara* and Shulchan Aruch do not

give an age for when children become obligated. Rashi (Arachin 2b) invokes the ages found in Yoma (82a) – opinions range from 8-10, but Tosafot (ad loc.) argues that that context, fasting on Yom Kippur, which depends on physical ability, is irrelevant to other *mitzvot*. Tosafot points out that the *gemara* (Sukka 42a) gives potentially different stages for different *mitzvot* – for *lulav*, when he knows how to shake it; for *tzitzit*, when he knows how to cloak himself in it; for *tefillin* – when he knows how to stay clean with them on. An exact age is not given, and for *shofar*, not even a description.

Rav Shternbuch (Teshuvot V'hanhagot II:281) raised a simple question: If the *mitzva* is to hear *shofar*, then any boy who can hear should be required to do so? Noting that we do not take babies to hear, he posits that since *kavana* is required to fulfill *mitzvot*, a child would have to be able to understand to hear because Hashem commanded to do so. He identifies the age as four or five. One can, though, analyze the matter differently. A boy is obligated in *sukka* from the age he does not need his mother (Sukka 28a), even though he can perform the *mitzva* earlier. *Lulav* requires knowing how to shake it, even though the *mitzva* is fulfilled by simply holding it (Sukka 42a). The Netziv (ad loc.) explains that the obligation is when a child can

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perform the *mitzva* in a manner appropriate for adults. For *shofar*, that probably means that he can reasonably concentrate on the sets of sounds coming from the *shofar*, which is somewhat older (Rav M. Willig told me around six).

However, the *minhag* is that we try to have even younger children come to hear *shofar* blowing. The main cut-off point is when he can listen without disturbing (Mishna Berura 587:16). (The formal obligation is pertinent, impacting on how hard to try to have him in *shul* then and when a child is old enough to blow on behalf of children who are Rabbincally obligated). This is not surprising, as the *minhag* is to educate children before the time that they are halachically obligated (see Halichot Shlomo, Tefilla 22:20 regarding *berachot*). Also, the *minhag*, which we consider proper, is for girls to also be careful to hear *shofar* blowing.

Although one can argue that the *tekiot* during *Musaf* are the more prominent ones, the accepted approach is that our main fulfillment of the *mitzva* is with the 30 blasts, with the *berachot*, before *Musaf* (see Ha'amek She'ala 171:2). In fact, women, or even men, who are unable to be with a *minyan* all day suffice with 30 blasts, as the additional ones are related to *tefilla b'tzibbur* (see Rama, Orach Chayim 592:2; our column, Rosh Hashana 5781).

Therefore, only to the extent that a child is mature enough to take part seriously in *Musaf* is he expected to hear the additional sets of *shofar*. While the average child in the 10-13 age range should be up to a full day of *davening* (or close to it), the average six-year-old is not and would likely disturb (see Rama, OC 124:7 and Mishna Berura 124:28). For such a child, who will not be there throughout *davening*, it is not critical to hear those *tekiot*.

If an obligated child misses the *tekiot* in *shul*, he should hear them elsewhere. In a blowing just for children, it is better if one of the [older] children makes the *berachot*, but if they have trouble doing so, an adult can do so for the obligated children (Chayei Halevi V:52). ■

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