[משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ג׳:ד׳](file:////Mishneh%20Torah%2C%20Repentance%203%3A4)

(ד) אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁתְּקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה גְּזֵרַת הַכָּתוּב רֶמֶז יֵשׁ בּוֹ כְּלוֹמַר עוּרוּ יְשֵׁנִים מִשְּׁנַתְכֶם וְנִרְדָּמִים הָקִיצוּ מִתַּרְדֵּמַתְכֶם וְחַפְּשׂוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂיכֶם וְחִזְרוּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה וְזִכְרוּ בּוֹרַאֲכֶם. אֵלּוּ הַשּׁוֹכְחִים אֶת הָאֱמֶת בְּהַבְלֵי הַזְּמַן וְשׁוֹגִים כָּל שְׁנָתָם בְּהֶבֶל וָרִיק אֲשֶׁר לֹא יוֹעִיל וְלֹא יַצִּיל, הַבִּיטוּ לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם וְהֵיטִיבוּ דַּרְכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם וְיַעֲזֹב כָּל אֶחָד מִכֶּם דַּרְכּוֹ הָרָעָה וּמַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא טוֹבָה.

[Mishneh Torah, Repentance 3:4](file:////Mishneh%20Torah%2C%20Repentance%203%3A4)

(4) Even though the blowing of the shofar on Rosh HaShanah is a Biblical decree, it hints at something, i.e., “Wake up, sleepers, from your sleep! And slumberers, arise from your slumber! Search your ways and return in *teshuvah* and remember your Creator! Those who forget the Truth amidst the futility of the moment and are infatuated all their years with vanity and nothingness that will not help and will not save, examine your souls and improve your ways and your motivations! Let each of you abandon his wicked ways, and his thoughts which are no good."

[**https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/130009.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en**](https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/130009.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en)

**Respond to the following questions:**

1. **What is the purpose of the Shofar?**
2. **How does the Shofar related to the ability to reflect and repent?**

**What’s So Special About the Shofar (Read to find out!)**

[**https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ask-the-expert-why-blow-the-shofar/**](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ask-the-expert-why-blow-the-shofar/)

In the Torah , we’re given a commandment that on the first day of the seventh month (*Tishrei*) “you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts.” ([Leviticus 23:24](https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.23.24?lang=he-en)) These loud blasts, or *teruah*, were understood by the rabbis to allude to the blasts of the [shofar](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Rosh_Hashanah/In_the_Community/Shofar.shtml). So on [Rosh Hashanah](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Rosh_Hashanah.shtml) we blow the shofar in order to fulfill this commandment. The biblical text doesn’t go into precisely the reason that it’s so important that we hear a teruah, but there are a few possibilities.

You might imagine that a shofar was chosen for Rosh Hashanah just because it was the only horn-like instrument that the Israelites had in the desert when they were given the commandments. But actually, the Torah mentions a number of instruments the people had with them, including silver trumpets, so the use of the shofar doesn’t seem to have been born from necessity.

The Bible contains many explicit references to the shofar, not just the Rosh Hashanah commandment. When the people receive the [Ten Commandments](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Shavuot/In_the_Community/Torah_Reading_and_Haftarah/The_Ten_Commandments.shtml) from God on Mount Sinai, they hear a very loud blast of the shofar. We’re commanded to blow the shofar not only on Rosh Hashanah, but also at the beginning of the [Jubilee year](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/beliefs/Issues/Nature_and_the_Environment/Traditional_Teachings/Sabbatical_and_Jubilee_Years.shtml). Shofars were also blown by warriors in battle, and by musicians in the Temple.

The sound of the teruah is both earthly and Divine. It comes from an animal, but makes the same sound that was heard on the top of Mount Sinai when God addressed the people. Music can be celebratory, but the sound of the shofar is more than just a sound of jubilation. It is the sound of the presence of God, and the sound we use to cry out to God when we need God’s intervention.

The Talmud struggles with the same question that you have. In [Tractate Rosh Hashanah 16a](https://www.sefaria.org/Rosh_Hashanah.16a?lang=he-en) we read: “R. Abbahu said: Why do we blow a ram’s horn? The Holy One, blessed be He said: Sound before Me a ram’s horn so that I will remember on your behalf the [binding of Isaac](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Bible/Torah/Genesis/The_Binding_of_Isaac.shtml), the son of Abraham, and to account it to you as if you had bound yourselves before me.”

In this case, Rabbi Abbahu is claiming that the shofar is an allusion to the ram we read about in the story of the binding of Isaac, which is the Torah reading for Rosh Hashanah. The shofar reminds us of the sacrifice Abraham made, and we use it to remind God of that same sacrifice, so that He’ll credit their good actions to us, today. (Remember, in the end of that story, Abraham sees a ram and sacrifices it instead of Isaac.)

In your question you asked about why we don’t use a real trumpet, and I think it’s reasonable to consider that a trumpet is perhaps too technical for the function that a shofar serves. Trumpets have evolved over time, and there are many different kinds of horns, from bugles to cornets to French horns to sousaphones. Those instruments are all regulated to sound a certain way. But a shofar is taken from a living being. Every shofar sounds different, just like every community, and every listener, is different.

To get a little more insight on this issue, I contacted Rabbi Josh Feigelson, campus rabbi & senior director for educational initiatives at Northwestern University Hillel. Rabbi Feigelson is a trained tubist, and he wrote to me about some of the differences between playing the tuba (a brass instrument, like a trumpet) and blowing the shofar,:

Pitch is not so much an issue in playing the shofar. You’re not out to create a melody, which you are trying to do when playing the tuba. When I’m playing the shofar I’m more focused simply on the sound… The shofar isn’t a musical instrument. It is a battle cry, or a mournful cry, but its symbolism comes from its sound and the fact that it is the shofar making the sound on the day of Rosh Hashanah. The tuba has no inherent symbolism, and its sounds are ultimately judged and understood within the context of a melody or a larger work.

Also, he reminded me that shofars are notoriously stinky. Other brass instruments do not tend to carry quite the same level of aroma.

I also think there’s something to be said for the primitive nature of the shofar. It is nature-made. It is simple. Many people think that a teruah sounds like a voice crying out. Isn’t it appropriate for the instrument that calls us to reflect and repent to sound like a human voice?

1. **Explain the reasons why we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. What makes the Shofar unique?**