

One Hundred Blasts, Two Women, A Single Cry of Grief

An audio meditation on Israel/Palestine/Gaza for the High Holy Days, 5786

By Mark Schafer

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Audio recorded in Temple Ohabei Shalom in Brookline, MA.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LISTENING

- 1)** Read the explanatory text below.
- 2)** Put on a pair of headphones (the higher audio quality the better.)
- 3)** Click on the audio link and listen to the whole 3-minute piece.

Text for “One Hundred Blasts, Two Women, A Single Cry of Grief”

More than fifteen hundred years of rabbinic commentary concerning the one hundred¹ shofar blasts sounded on Rosh Hashanah suggest that they are simultaneously the cries of grief of our first matriarch over the loss of her child and the wailing of the mother of one of the Jewish people’s most merciless foes, grieving the loss of her child.

One rabbinic explanation says that the hundred blasts symbolize the number of letters in Sisera's mother’s lament (plus one) while she awaited her son's return from the battlefield, as recorded in the Song of Deborah.² Another says that they symbolize the one hundred cries Sarah let out as she watched Isaac depart with Abraham on his way to sacrifice their only son.³

These one hundred blasts are comprised of three sequences of notes, along with a fourth, sounded only once at the end of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services:

- ***Tekiah***: a single, loud blast on the shofar
- ***Shevarim*** (meaning “broken” or “fractured”): a series of three shorter notes
- ***Teruah*** (meaning “blast,” “yell,” or “cry”): a series of nine short blasts
- ***Tekiah gedolah*** (meaning “great blast”): a very long blast

A midrash in the Vayikrah Rabbah explains that the *tekiot* (many *tekiah*s) represent Sarah’s screams (Judges 20:2) while the Talmud notes that the mother of Sisera, hearing of her son’s death, either sighed and sighed (“therefore the *teruah* should sound like *shevarim*—a gasping sound”) or cried and cried (“and therefore the sound of the *teruah* should [sound] like uncontrollable crying.”) (The Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 33b) Maimonides suggested that because we don’t know whether the *teruah* is a woman’s wail, her deeply distressed sigh, or a sigh that becomes a wail, “we execute all three.” (Maimonides, Laws of Shofar 3:2)

The sighing or sobbing of Sisera's mother was her expression of grief over the loss of her child. Waiting for her son, she and her maid consoled themselves with the thought that Sisera, a Canaanite general and an implacable enemy of the Israelites, was slaughtering Israelite men, raping Israelite women, and sacking Israelite villages.

“On a certain level,” notes Eliyahu Kitov, “this woman, whose name we do not know, would not seem to be the object of our sympathy and her loss would not be regarded as anything to mourn. Perhaps this is the point that the

Sages are making: So great is the grief of any parent for the loss of a child, that we all are left completely bereft. The universality and commonality of suffering over the loss of a child transcends names and identities.”⁴

To hear the audio piece, click **here**.

To read additional commentary on the symbolism of the shofar blasts and their connection with Sisera’s mother, click **here**.

¹ In the Ashkenazi tradition, the shofar is sounded one hundred times on Rosh Hashanah. In Sephardic services, an additional *tekiah* is sounded before the recital of *Alenu* at the end of *Musaf*, for a total of one hundred and one shofar blasts. (“One Hundred Sounds,” Eliyahu Kitov, Chabad.org,

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4387/jewish/100-Sounds.htm, accessed August 20, 2026)

² There are one hundred and one letters in the lament of Sisera’s mother as recorded in Judges. “Therefore,” notes Eliyahu Kitov, “we implore: May the one hundred shofar sounds of compassion and mercy nullify every one of those other outcries -except one: the sorrow of a mother over her son. For even the most brutal of mothers is deserving of compassion when she laments her son. Thus, we sound a hundred sounds and not one hundred and one.” (“One Hundred Sounds,” Eliyahu Kitov, Chabad.org, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4387/jewish/100-Sounds.htm, accessed August 20, 2026)

³ “The Shofar: A Mother’s Cry,” Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (<https://www.ou.org/holidays/shofar-mothers-cry>, accessed August 20, 2026)

⁴ Ibid.