

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**  
**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY**

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**Decorating the Shofar**

The mishna (Rosh Ha-shana 26b) describes the unique ceremony of blowing the shofar in the Mikdash (Temple). Although the mitzva of shofar applies everywhere, it has a special relevance to the Mikdash. Based upon the verse, "With trumpets (chatzotzrot) and the voice of shofar, make noise before God the King" (Tehillim 98:6), the mishna determines that when the shofar was blown in the Mikdash on Rosh Ha-shana it was accompanied by two trumpets. In addition, the shofar used in the Mikdash was covered with gold to make the process more aesthetic. Disturbed by this scenario, the gemara considers whether a shofar may be plated with any foreign material. This shiur will examine the various concerns the gemara raises regarding these plates or coverings.

The gemara (Rosh Ha-shana 27a) questions the mishna by citing a source disqualifying a shofar whose mouth is covered with gold. To solve this contradiction, the gemara claims that the mishna (describing the shofar in the Mikdash) refers to a gold plate covering an area other than where the shofar-blower places his mouth. The beraita which prohibited a gold covering referred to gold placed in the area where the mouth touches the shofar. However, the gemara provides no reason to differentiate between these two situations.

To complicate matters further, an ensuing gemara (27b) cites a beraita that any gold covering the inner area of the shofar invalidates the entire shofar. If, however, the gold covers the outside area of the shofar, the shofar may still be used, as long as the gold doesn't alter the sound emitting from the shofar. This gemara seems to provide a basis for its ruling - namely, the altering effect of the gold upon the sound. Presumably, ANY gold covering the inner surface area will affect the sound and, hence, such a scenario is completely unacceptable. By contrast, gold on the outside of the shofar may not influence the sound and hence cannot be absolutely rejected. Its impact upon the sound must first be gauged, and only if such impact is determined can the shofar be invalidated.

What remains unclear is the exact relationship between these two

statements. If the gemara (27b) allows gold covering the outside (as long as the sound remains unchanged), then to what scenario does the gemara (27a) refer when it allows gold to cover an area where the mouth doesn't touch? Doesn't this gemara refer to the outside surface, as well? If so, the two gemarot appear to be redundant!

The Rishonim deal with these issues in two basic ways. Tosafot claim that indeed these two gemarot, which allow gold "where the mouth doesn't blow" (27a) and gold "on the outside of the shofar which doesn't affect the sound" (27b) are essentially identical. While Tosafot ponder why the gemara might have restated the same halakha, the Rosh provides a reason. Any gold on the outside surface which doesn't alter the sound is deemed by the gemara (27b) to be valid. Gold covering the lower end of the shofar (near but not directly where the mouth makes contact) might have raised a different problem – "shofar be-tokh shofar," one shofar inside another. The gemara (27b) disqualifies one from blowing two shofarot simultaneously. We might have therefore disqualified SPECIFICALLY a shofar plated with gold near its mouthpiece for this reason. Hence, the gemara felt compelled to relate to this scenario directly and assure us that as long as outside plates do not affect the sound, the shofar may be blown - no matter how close to the mouthpiece the outside plate is.

This concern suggested by the Rosh (as the the gemara's initial presumption) highlights an interesting notion surrounding the structure of the shofar. Can we deconstruct the shofar into segments and possibly target the essential part in distinction from the secondary unit? Or do we view the shofar as one undifferentiated instrument?

The gemara itself (27b) instigates this question when it discusses the case of a shofar which has split. If the distance from the mouthpiece to the split is larger than the minimum measure of a shofar, the entire shofar may be used. Does this gemara suggest that the lower part of the shofar is the primary segment, and if the split appears beyond this section the shofar can be validated? Or does the gemara merely intend that the part of the shofar beyond the split is considered as halakhically detached (due to the split), effectively reducing the shofar to a miniature but integrated and undifferentiated shofar? Rashi assumes the second approach. The Ittur, however, extended this concept to other flaws which potentially may disqualify a shofar (such as a hole stopped up with a foreign substance), suggesting that he did indeed envision a shofar as divisible into sections.

The idea we considered earlier – namely, that any gold placed specifically on the bottom part of the shofar (even if it did not affect the sound) would render the shofar a "double shofar" - suggests the Ittur's anatomy of a

shofar. By rejecting this notion (according to the Rosh), does the gemara mean to dismiss the Ittur's position? Or does the gemara negate this possibility for another reason (perhaps a swath of gold cannot qualify as a shofar)?

The Ramban develops a different strategy for explaining the two gemarot. The discussion on 27b centers solely around the issue of affecting the sound. Any inner gold will change the sound and is therefore invalid, while gold plating on the outside must be checked for this effect. The gemara (27a) which distinguished between gold on the mouthpiece and away from the mouthpiece was concerned with a different issue. Aside from the impact upon the sound, there cannot be a chatzitza (buffer) between the person's mouth and the shofar. Gold on the outside of the shofar – near the mouthpiece - could potentially prevent the mouth of the blower from touching the shofar. From this, the Ramban infers that the blower must blow directly into the shofar. He cannot blow into the air in the direction of the shofar, indirectly causing a sound to emit. The two gemarot were in effect addressing completely different halakhic issues - changes in sound, and chatzitzot.

This additional provision of chatzitza arouses much interest among the Rishonim. The Meiri raises an interesting question from a gemara (Sukka 34) regarding the definition of chatzitza. The gemara considers placing a golden wreath around the arba minim (lulav etc.) for decoration. Pressured to defend against the problem of chatzitza (i.e., the gold band lying between a person's hand and the arba minim), the gemara responds (at least according to Rava) that anything meant to enhance a mitzva cannot be considered a chatzitza. Based on this yardstick, a gold plate decorating the shofar should also not be considered a chatzitza!

There are two basic approaches to solving this question. One view attempts to differentiate between the gemara in Sukka, which doesn't regard ornamental arba minim binders as chatzitza, and the Ramban, who appears to define a gold decoration lying between the mouth and the shofar as chatzitza. A second strategy (presented by the Avnei Nezer, #434) claims that the Ramban does not disqualify the gold because of chatzitza (since it is ornamental). Even items which do not qualify as chatzitza might still prevent actual physical contact and invalidate situations which call for this contact. For example, the gemara (Bekhorot 9b) does not regard a fetus as a chatzitza between the twin fetus and the mother's womb (for purposes of sanctity of the firstborn), since "min be-mino einu chotzet" (only foreign items are deemed chatzitza). Commenting upon this gemara, the Ramban still insists that although no chatzitza exists, we cannot deny that one fetus was prevented from full contact with the mother's womb by the other fetus, hence inhibiting the establishment of sanctity of the firstborn. In a similar vein, we cannot view

the gold plate as a chatzitza since it decorates the shofar. However, the blower's mouth hasn't fully touched the shofar if it is separated by the gold. As such, the blowing is invalid.

The Avnei Nezer does not clarify exactly why such contact between blower's mouth and the shofar is necessary. Contact was crucial between womb and fetus in order to install sanctity of the firstborn, but what role does contact between mouth and shofar play? What function does shofar perform which might necessitate direct contact between a person's mouth and the shofar? This raises the question of the connection between shofar and prayer, which is the subject of other VBM shiurim.