A tool of remembrance: the shofar in modern music, literature and art
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Part I

The Shofar in Traditional Religious Texts
Part I offers an overview and a classification of the shofar in traditional religious texts. Chapter 2 deals with the Bible and Chapter 3 with the prayer books for the High Holy Days; the latter is divided into 3.1 on the halakhah concerning the shofar, 3.2 on shofar prayers, and 3.3 on shofar blasts.

For research on the dialogue between traditional religious texts and works of art, the “toolbox” of A Tool of Remembrance contains concepts of Mikhail Bakhtin. Even within the traditional religious texts themselves, shofar blasts are part of dialogues; they are utterances of speakers—or, in this case, blowers—who address themselves with specific intentions to hearers. For research on these “speech acts,” John Searle’s philosophy of language is useful. His article “A Classification of Ilocutionary Acts” (1976) is used in Part I of A Tool of Remembrance, in order to facilitate the overview of the numerous and scattered shofar verses in the Bible and the prayer books and to enhance the understanding of the functions of the instrument in these traditional religious texts.

According to Searle, a simple statement is a “locutionary act,” whereas an “illocutionary act” is more than only a statement. In the latter, “the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he makes explicit, thanks to the general reasoning with shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic.” As will be explained below, all shofar blasts in the Bible and the prayer books are illocutionary acts, and an example from the Bible may illustrate this. When the Israelites in Josh. 6 blow the shofar at the gates of Jericho, these shofar blasts are not locutionary acts, meant to draw the attention of the citizens of Jericho to the presence of a foreign army—which had certainly not escaped their notice—but illocutionary acts, with which the Israelites indicate that their God supports the attack on the city and that resistance is useless, which turns to be true when the shofarot blow down the city walls.

Normally, a speech act is a sentence with a subject and a predicate. Some shofar blasts, however, would rather be compared to interjections, whereas others are located on the borderline between speech and music. The shofar blasts at the coronation of King Solomon in 1 Kings 1:39 are like cheers, whereas those in Ps. 150:3 are more like music. Moreover, shofar blasts in the Bible and in prayer books are always accompanied by linguistic utterances, which can clarify their intent. Searle distinguishes five categories of speech acts.

1. With an “assertive,” the speaker indicates that he vouches for the truth of his proposition—and in the case of a shofar blast, this proposition lies mainly in the accompanying linguistic utterance. According to Searle, belief is the expressed psychological state in this category of speech acts.

2. A “directive” is a question, request, prayer or order, with which the speaker incites the hearer to an action.

3. A “commissive” refers to the speaker, who commits himself with a promise, vow, warning or threat for a future action.

4. An “expressive” is a greeting, congratulation, condolence, excuse, or utterance of

27 Searle, Expression and Meaning 31-2.
28 Cf. Reber, Affectivity in Interaction: Sound Objects in English 25-32, about the debate on the question of whether interjections should be considered speech acts.
gratitude, which expresses the speaker’s attitude or mood.

5. With a “declarative,” the speaker brings the world in accordance with the statement; as Searle puts it, “he changes the world by saying so.” Examples include a declaration of war and the declaration accompanying the crowning of a king.

A speech act has an intended meaning, an “illocutionary point,” and according to Searle, some illocutions try to get their propositional content: the words—or shofar blasts—to match the world, whereas other illocutions try to get the world to match the words. In this connection, Searle speaks of a difference in the “direction of fit.” The direction of fit of an assertive is “words-to-world,” because the shofar blast expresses agreement with the conditions created by God. The direction of fit of a directive or a commissive is “world-to-words,” because the shofar blower gives the signal for the change of circumstances according to God’s will. An expressive has no direction of fit, because the existence of fit is presupposed. The declarative is a special case, because it brings about a fit and there must be an extra-linguistic institution to which both the speaker and the hearer belong; an example of this is the covenant between God and the Israelites.