

# Youthful Israeli practices the ancient craft of manufacturing shofarot

By CAROL GREEN

World Zionist Press Association

HAIFA — In a tiny workshop above this city's main commercial district, a young man practices an ancient craft. The craft is shofar making — the manufacture of the ram's horn instrument blown annually to welcome the new year and call the faithful to repeat.

Zvi Bar Sheshet works painstakingly, in accordance with guidelines set down in the Talmud. Dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, he appears an unlikely heir to a 3,000-year-old profession. Yet Bar Sheshet regards his sacred craft with great seriousness.

For Zvi Bar Sheshet, shofar making is a family tradition as well. The tradition was begun by his ancestor, 16th-century Spanish sage Rav Yitzchak Bar Sheshet, known as Haribash.

When Haribash left Spain during the Inquisition to go to Algiers, he discovered that his new community did not have proper shofarot. He took it upon himself to solve this problem, and since then generation after generation of Bar Sheshets have been making shofarot.

As a boy, Zvi Bar Sheshet entertained thoughts of becoming an auto mechanic, but he found himself drawn to his father's workshop. By

the time he completed army service, it was clear that he would take up the ancestral trade.

Making shofarot, said Bar Sheshet, is a sophisticated and complex endeavor, with Jewish law dictating procedure at every point in the process.

The horns must come from a wild ram or goat. Bar Sheshet orders these horns from South Africa. Because they are to be used in a sacred ritual,

Jewish law further demands that the horns be free of cracks or blemishes. Bar Sheshet estimates that one ton of horns will yield 100 shofarot.

After making his selections, Bar Sheshet brings the horns back to his workshop, where they are scraped, cleaned and treated with a softening solution so they can be molded. Once they are softened, the horns are hollowed out and sculpted.

According to Bar Sheshet, the con-

struction of the mouthpiece is the most difficult aspect of shofar-making. Because the shofar is a musical instrument, the mouthpiece must be designed to fit the user. This means taking into account the shape of the user's lips as well as the Jewish community to which he belongs.

After the shofar is completed, it is polished to a high gloss, and, on occasion, engraved with decorative designs. Bar Sheshet calculates that

it can take up to three days for one shofar to be made from start to finish. A good shofar will last for several hundred years.

Bar Sheshet's prices range from \$30 to \$70. He supplements his income by operating a shop selling religious articles. A scarcity of softening material is expected to make the process more expensive, and Bar Sheshet predicts a shortage of shofarot in the coming year.



Zvi Bar Sheshet puts finishing touches on a shofar.

WZPS Photo by Joel Fishman