Czechoslovakia Revisited

GABRIEL LEVENSON

A Plea for the Dead

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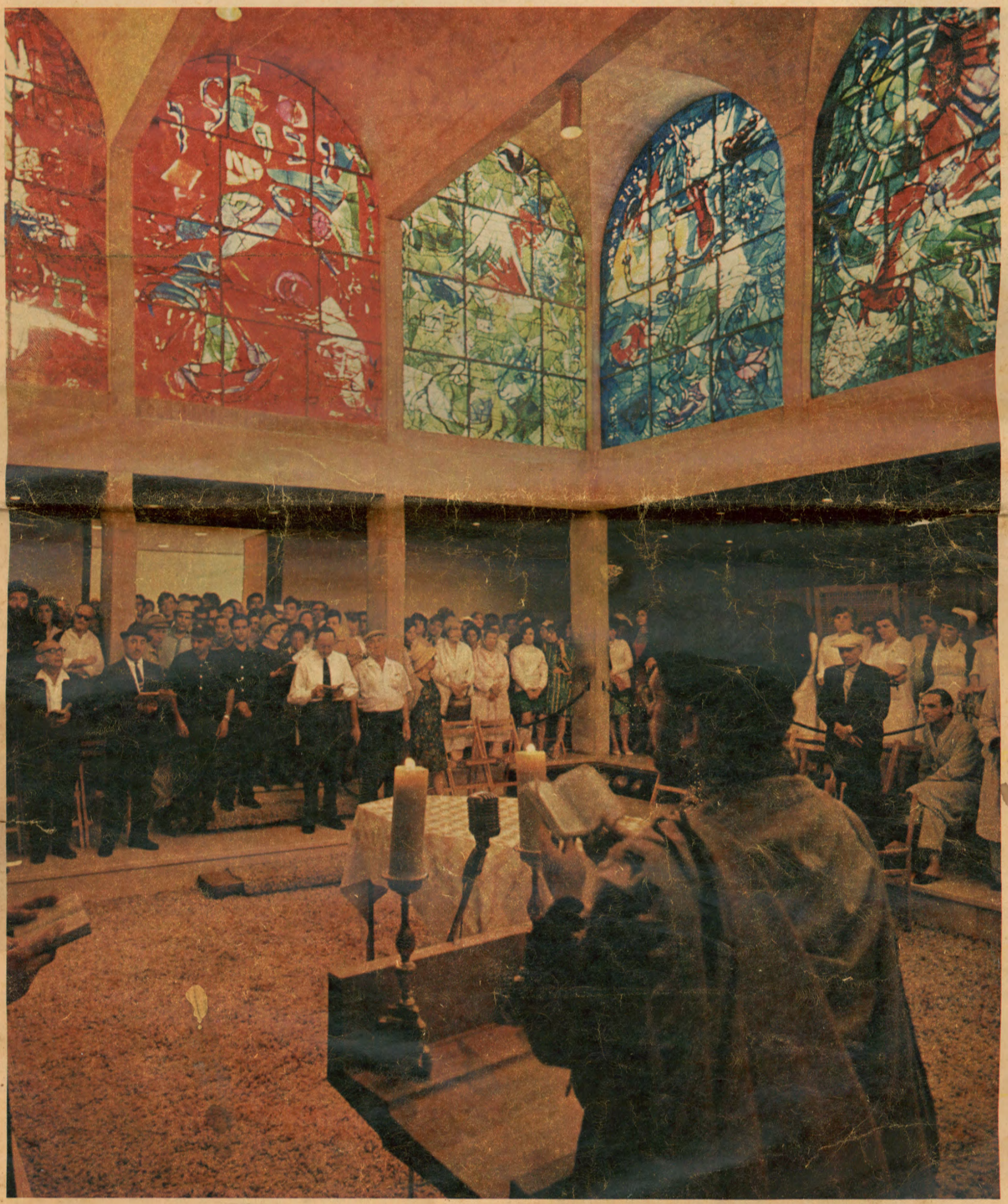

Yahrzeit Services for Those Who Fell in Six-Day War

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THE ONLY commercial shofar-maker in Israel, Meir Bar-Sheshet of Haifa, learned the 400-year-old family secret of shaping the ram's horn from his father in Morocco.

The SHOFAR Maker

By PAUL RADER

FROM the tender manner with which he cradled the object in his left arm one might suppose it was a baby that Meir Bar-Sheshet was bent over. Such an impression, too, might be furthered by the low, crooning melody that softly flowed from his lips as he industriously rocked back and forth in his Haifa workshop.

But it was no infant Bar-Sheshet held in his arm. It was a curved ram's horn, easily a foot long, a horn he gently caressed with the fingers of his right hand as he paused now and then in his labors. Bar-Sheshet—scion of the 16th-century Spanish sage "Haribash," Rav Yitzhak Bar-Sheshet—was fashioning a shofar from the horns of a prize Australian Merino.

"You know," said a recent visitor to his shofar workshop in Haifa, "there was a fascinating story in the paper the other day. The Bible tells us that seven priests circled the walls of Jericho for seven days, sounding blasts on seven shofarot. On the seventh day, the walls of Jericho crumbled. Our archaeologists have been busily studying the ground at Jericho where the walls once stood and they've come up with a new theory."

Bar-Sheshet continued to hone away at the horn, scarcely pausing in his song, but listening intently.

"Our archaeologists now believe that Joshua's engineers undermined the foundations, which had been poorly constructed. So Joshua had the priests parade around the ramparts for seven days as a diversionary tactic while at night the engineers were busily digging and weakening the fortifications."

Was that a shadow of a smile on Bar-Sheshet's face as he rummaged through an assortment of files and picked a narrow, pointed one? One might suppose he was saying to himself, "Joshua had his secrets and I have mine."

Secrets there are in shofar-making and perhaps the Bar-Sheshet family is unique in this respect. He is the only commercial shofar-maker in all Israel, for this is a select art that has been handed down in his family from generation to generation, going back 400 years. His ancestor of that era had emigrated from Spain to Algiers, where he served as *dayan*, a judge of a rabbinical court. Finding no proper shofarot available, he began to make them himself. The calling was thus passed down from father to son, each elder son succeeding to the post.

In the course of time, two closely guarded secrets have become part of the Bar-Sheshet lore: how to make the horn elastic enough so that the shofar can be shaped according to the wishes of the congregation, and how to give it the "proper tone."

"It's simple to bore a hole into a straight shofar," he said, "but try to do it with one of these curled ones. That's a Bar-Sheshet secret."

"There are three 'Bar-Sheshet' tones," the artisan went on.

"First, there is the deep, bass note, preferred by the Yemenites. For this tone, which follows the Biblical phrase 'and the big shofar shall be sounded,' an antelope's horn is used—giant-sized ones, too. They are the most expensive.

"Then comes the Sephardi shofar—a low and ceremonial note. Finally, there is the Ashkenazi—a high, supplicating note."

BAR-SHESHET rummaged through the bin, came up with half-a-dozen samples and pealed on several.

"Note," he said, "how easy mine are to blow. When you know how, you don't even require any effort. In fact, they won't sound if you blow hard."

A careful worker, Bar-Sheshet turns out around 400 shofarot a year, at the rate of one to three a day, depending on the size and the curvatures desired. He was born 45 years ago in Casablanca, Morocco, and early worked as a mechanic. He came to Israel aboard the ill-fated *Exodus* but

(*Continued on Page* 34)

"Hadassah Magazine", Sept. 1968

MEMBERS OF Presidium of World Zionist Congress pay homage at Mt. Herzl military cemetery to fighters who gave lives for Israel in Six-Day War.

Congress

(*Continued from page* 17)

THE Congress has given a new and clear definition to the Jerusalem Program, replacing the old one of 1951, and has set forth the aims of the movement geared to meet the needs of our day. That program defines the aim of Zionism as the ingathering of the Jewish people in their historic homeland, Eretz Israel, through aliyah. The aims of Zionism are further expressed as: The unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in its life; strengthening the State of Israel, based on the prophetic vision of justice and peace; preservation of the identity of the Jewish people by fostering Jewish and Hebrew education and Jewish spiritual and cultural values, and protection of Jewish rights everywhere.

Many important resolutions were passed. The Congress called on the Soviet Union to end its campaign of misrepresentation of the Zionist movement; expressed concern about the deteriorating situation of the Jews in Arab lands; appealed to the Jews of Western countries to promote aliyah and to establish a single Zionist roof organization in each country; emphasized the need to increase activity among the organized student bodies in the diaspora, and stressed that "every Zionist has the duty to study Hebrew and to give his children a thorough Hebrew and Jewish education."

For the next four years, the Zionist world will be bound by the resolutions of this 27th Congress. Whether there will indeed emerge a "new wind"—a "wind of change"—will depend in large measure on the determination of the Zionist federation, throughout the Jewish world, not to yield sovereignty to the rigid party system of Israel but to build that spirit of independence and spiritual resources which will attract and hold the youth, the intellectual elements and the committed Jews among us. As Jerusalem is now one and united, so may the Jewish people be one and united.

M.K.F.

Shofar

(*Continued from Page* 13)

the ship was returned to Germany by the British. When he finally came to stay, he found work at the Nesher cement factory, a trade he pursued until his father's death. Then, in compliance with his father's will, he resumed making shofarot, whose intricacies he had mastered in Casablanca. The father of six children, his own eldest son, now 17, is already an expert at the trade.

BAR-SHESHET'S "season" actually runs from shortly after Passover until the day before *Rosh Hashana*. He obtains the rams' horns from Australia in a consignment weighing one ton, containing enough material for approximately 800 horns. However, about half arrive unfit—with holes or split—or are spoiled during manufacture and become rejects. Those that are discarded are not wasted. During the rest of the year, he makes all sorts of decorations—table lamps, snuff-tobacco boxes, bracelets, rings and necklaces, serviette holders, etc. "I make anything to order," he says.

The shofarot are marketed through local shops and supplied to the Ministry of Religious Affairs for home consumption and for export abroad—about 300 go annually to the United States, Canada and Europe.

The shofarot wholesale from $8 to $20, the higher price for an elaborate Yemenite horn. Each carries his family trademark and the legend: "Made in the City of Elijah the Prophet," referring to Elijah's sojourn on Mt. Carmel.

"Shofar" in Hebrew also stands for mouthpiece and for the uneducated Sephardim of Haifa, Bar-Sheshet is their "shofar," writing letters for them when he is not volunteering to repair damaged shofarot and giving blowing lessons. On the High Holy Days, he makes the rounds of hospitals to blow for the patients.

A walking encyclopedia of his art, Bar-Sheshet was quick to point out that the term "trumpet" really does not apply to the shofar. It is more like a cornet or tuba, he declared.

"Consider the lowly ram," he said. "What a contribution he makes! The horns become wind instruments, the hollow thighbones are fashioned into flutes, the small intestines turn into harp strings. Yes, the ram alive produces one sound; dead, seven sounds." ■

HOLIDAY TIME AND ALL THE TIME

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See how much better your family likes the haimasche ta'am of Kraft Pure Fruit Preserves—strawberry, cherry, black raspberry, peach, grape—21 luscious flavors in all and all of them fresh-fruit good.

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Maker

By PAUL RADER

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