

The Shofar Blast That Was Heard Around The World

By Zev Golan

(WZPS) — Rabbi Moshe Segel, once a member of the Etzel leadership and since his aliya from Poltava, Russia in 1924, active in religious life, was the first Jew to resume residence in the Old City after the Six-Day War in 1967.

More than anything, however, his name will always be linked with the courage he showed as a young man when he defied an order by the British mandatory authorities in Palestine, smuggled a shofar to Jerusalem's Western Wall one Yom Kippur and blew with all his might. This blast was seen as an act of defiance and served as an inspiration to many Jews in their war against the British.

In the rebuilt Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City lives an old man whom everyone calls "the first blower of the shofar," despite the fact that shofars have been blown for thousands of years. Rabbi Moshe Segel, now 81-years-old, with a long white beard and sparkling eyes, nonetheless earned himself the title.

It was during the British Mandate that local Arabs filed a complaint with the British authorities then governing the Land of Israel. The Jewish prayers at the Western Wall disturbed them, they said, as they walked on the Temple Mount above. They were especially offended by the blowing of the shofar at the Wall. The British decided in favor of the Arabs and forbade the blowing of the shofar at the Wall on the holy days of Yom Kippur.

"I stood at the Wall and saw that no one was going to blow the shofar," remembers Segel. "I thought; 'the holiest spot in the world, the holiest day, the holiest moment at the end of the

day - the holiest acts is to blow the shofar.'" Segel found a shofar and borrowed a prayer shawl to cover himself and conceal the shofar. "When I was under the shawl, I knew: I had created a free Jewish state. In that little area under the shawl I could act as a free Jew."

Segel blew the ram's horn, concluding the days of awe and atonement that had begun with Rosh Hashana, at the same time opening a new chapter in Zionist history. All over the world newspapers carried the story of the young man who had been arrested for defying the Arabs and the British mandatory forces. Events escalated when Chief Rabbi Abraham I. Kook threatened a prolonged hunger strike on Segel's behalf, and the British were eventually forced to release Segel from prison.

The Jewish world was electrified by the shofar blast. Every year afterwards, until 1948, young Jews, smuggling shofars, streamed to the Wall and every year several were arrested for following in Segel's footsteps by illegally blowing the shofar. Segel's act of civil disobedience was one of the first steps in the direction of the war the Jewish community was to wage against the British - and even today it remains a symbol in the minds of most Israelis of the patriotic fervor that has inspired three generations of Israelis. That one blast stirred Jews as no other had, and the British soon learned to fear the fury of an aroused Jewish populous.

"The Shofar," says Rabbi Segel, "has from before the time of Joshua been a symbol of national courage and strength; the shofar is, too, a religious tool inspiring awe and repentance." Of course, Jewish legend also assigns the shofar

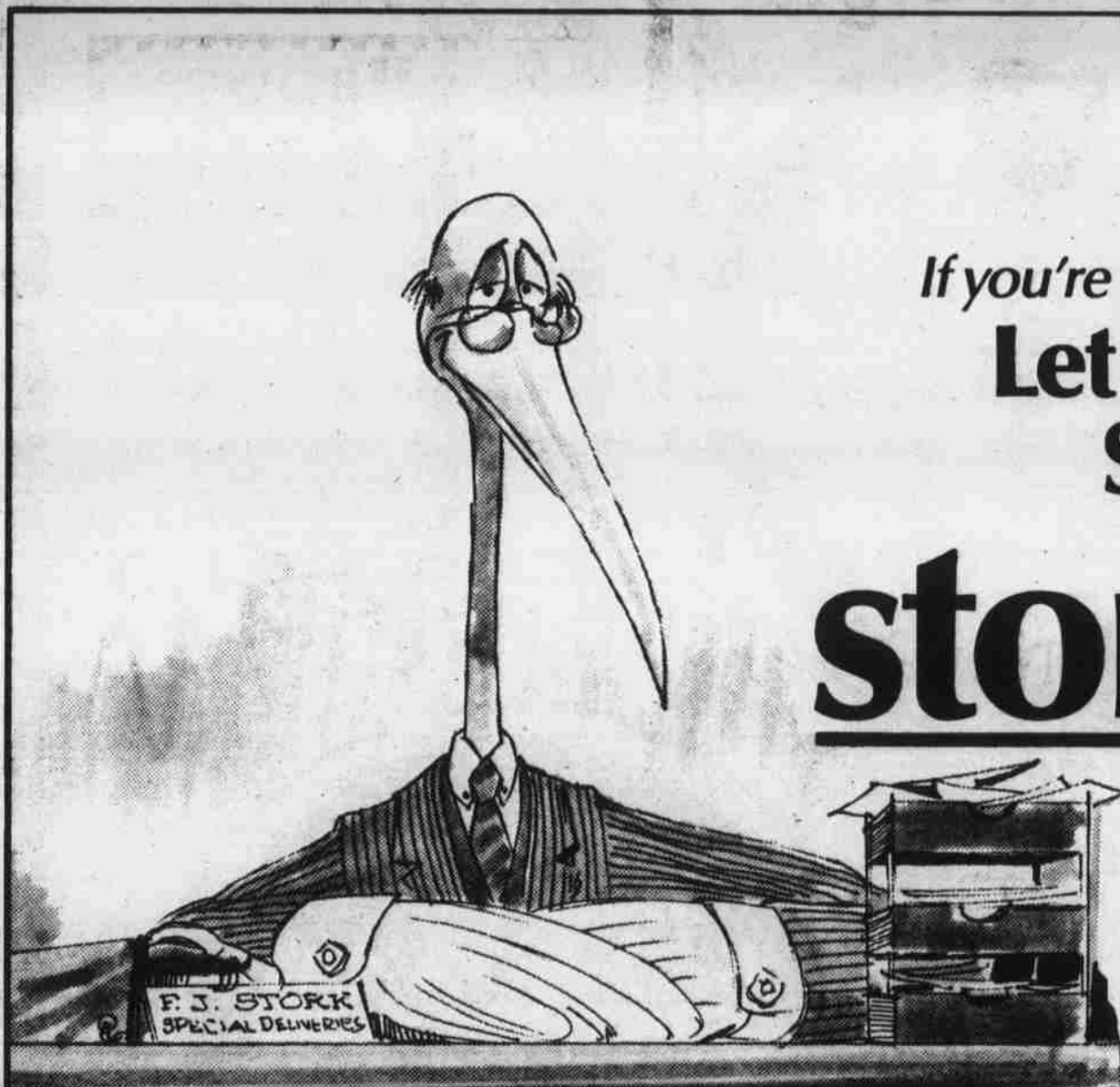
the role of harbinger to the Messiah, and some Israelis believe the shofar fulfilled that role in the hands of Segel and his 'followers.'

Comments Segel: "Some people do say Israel is a sign that the Messiah is on his way, but others say we must sit and wait patiently for G-d to bring the Redemption. I say that as a healthy, creative people fulfilling a role in history we needed, fought for and won a State. Returning to our Land, settling it, building a great State, gathering our people from around the world - these are the basic needs and glories of our nation, regardless of when the Messiah is coming."

During the 1948 Arab siege of Jerusalem, Moshe Segel was put in charge of the city's food distribution. In the 1950's he relocated to the agricultural Kfar Habad to work the land and help absorb new immigrants. Then in 1967 he became the first Jew to resume residence in Old Jerusalem. He continues to blow the shofar on Yom Kippur near the Wall, at the gate to the Temple Mount and Rabbi Segel is still an inspiration to the many young Israelis from all over the country who congregate in his apartment.

"I don't know if I affected history or not," muses Rabbi Segel. "But I had no choice. As I look back, take an accounting as Jews do on Rosh Hashana, perhaps I could have led an easier life. But if our people were suffering, my place was with them. If our people was moving towards its goal, I could not help but move with them. And if we are making history here in our land, then how could I be elsewhere?"

NEW YORK (WNS) — Vladimir Brodsky, a 41-year-old Moscow cardiologist, was sentenced to three years in a Soviet Labor camp on charges of alleged "hooliganism," the National Conference on Soviet Jewry reported. Brodsky's wife, who was at the trial, reported that he vows to continue the hunger strike he began several weeks ago for the duration of his sentence. Brodsky first sought to be repatriated to Israel in 1980.



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