

Khlavne, Chelm's Famed Clarinetist

by Philip Fishl Kutner

It all began with a challenge from the Lublin Shofar Blowers Association. A Chelmer once mentioned that the Chelmer Shofar Blowers are much better than their Lublin counterparts. Since the contest never actually did take place, we do not know to this very day whether this statement is true or false. However it did lead to another story and a series of events.

In Chelm undoubtedly the best shofar blower was Simkhe the Shames. He was the fourth in an unbroken line of superior shofar blowers. His ability to make his shofar wail and croon was like a crane in the marsh. He could trill and do magic with his shofar.

Just as was being done in shuls all over the world on Rosh Hashanah, Simkhe replicated the age-old sequence of the three sounds of the traditional shofar blowing:

Tekiah -- One long powerful blast. It proclaims that God is our mighty ruler.

Shevarim -- Three medium blasts. It is our individual promise to do our best in the coming year.

Teruah -- Nine short rapid blasts. It is our reawakening to the call for the New Year.

Simkhe's son, Khlavne, sat on his father's knee and marveled at the beautiful tones that came out of his father's musical instrument. As Khlavne grew older, Simkhe placed the shofar to his son's mouth, and it made funny sounds.

When Khlavne was only five, he received his first miniature shofar for a gift. Just as a young athlete walks around with a piece of athletic equipment so that it actually feels as a part of his arm, so did Khlavne carry his shofar around all day long. Wherever Khlavne went, his shofar went along.

Khlavne did not try to imitate the traditional sounds for the High Holidays. Unlike his father Khlavne changed the pitch and tone until the sounds were unlike any that had ever been heard from a shofar.

Khlavne went into the woods and visited the outlying farms. Everywhere he roamed, he tried to replicate the sounds of the animals and insects. Soon his shofar could sound like a lamb bawling, a calf mooing, a colt neighing, a rooster crowing, a

hen cackling a duck quacking and even a snake hissing.

As Khlavne grew into a young man, he also started to learn to play the clarinet. He could make the clarinet sound like a shofar and the shofar to sound like a clarinet. Since the clarinet is the quintessential klezmer musical instrument, it was not long before his interest turned to klezmer music.

He was compared to Giora Feidman. It was not long before Khlavne formed his own band, the Khlavne Chelm Kvortet. His fame spread far and wide beyond the borders of Poland, and there was a rumor that his group might be invited to a future KlezKamp.

When you next have a mitsve—a wedding or bar/bat mitsve seriously consider having Khlavne and his group play for you. Your event will be one to remember.

Khlavne has produced three CDs:

Sounds of the Chelm Shtetl—Replications of daily activities of Chelmer men women and children.

Love Songs of the Birds—The beautiful avian sounds of the forest are reproduced on the shofar and accompanied by the other members of the kvortet.

Shofar in the Shul—The traditional trilogy of Rosh Hashanah shofar blowing. The long single blast is ear shattering and seems endless. The 3 medium blasts sends shivers up and down your spine. The 9 blasts gets you out of your chair in a hair-rising finale.

There is a special rate for major vendors purchasing multiple copies. Individual copies may be had by sending 12 kopeks (cash only) to Khlavne Associates, c/o the Chelm Recording Studio, Narishkayt, NY 10016-0011

This includes labeling, packing, shipping and handling. You also will receive an autographed picture of Khlavne when he was a little boy sitting on his father's lap. It is a wonderful memento to hang in your den.

Contributions also will be accepted for the lost children of the Chelm Foundling Asylum. Please earmark these funds separately.