Oft the three blessings unique to Musaf on Rosh Hashanah, Shofarot is perhaps the most obscure and, on face value, superfluous. Whereas the other two blessings evoke themes related to the essence of the day, the blessing of Shofarot, whose content is about the shofar, seems to be wholly unnecessary. Why, if we are already blowing the actual shofar, is it necessary to recite a blessing dedicated specifically to this act?

This notion is further exacerbated upon analyzing the rationale provided in the Gemara for the recital of Shofarot: “Recite before Me on Rosh Hashanah Malchuyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot: Malchuyot – so that you will crown Me over you; Zichronot – so that your remembrance will ascend before Me for good; And with what? With the shofar” (Rosh Hashanah 16a).

This statement appears to be somewhat flawed. It commences with all three blessings and enumerates the purpose of each one yet, ultimately, it omits the rationale for Shofarot, substituting it with the all-encompassing role of the shofar itself.

Ritva (ad loc.) raises this question, and offers two explanations: “It is obvious that once there is a shofar there should also be verses about the shofar.

Furthermore, this is what it means: And with what? With the actual shofar and with the verses of Shofarot, for the blessing of Shofarot is for the shofar, so that even when one has no shofar, he will mention it and establish a blessing for it…”

I believe that Ritva’s two explanations indicate different understandings as to the nature of Shofarot. According to Ritva’s first answer, Shofarot is an articulation of one of the facets of the day. Just as there are blessings of Malchuyot and Zichronot which reference the holiday’s themes of kingship and remembrance, so too is there a blessing of Shofarot which references the day’s shofar blowing.

Ritva’s second answer, however, offers a different approach for understanding Shofarot. According to this explanation, Shofarot is not a reference to the shofar blowing which occurs on Rosh Hashanah; rather, it is a substitute for it. The shofar blowing that is a pinnacle of Rosh Hashanah is referenced in prayer and embodied therein. The shofar blowing is incorporated in the text itself.

To emphasize his point, Ritva evokes the following statement from the Tosefta: “Recite... Shofarot – so that your prayers will ascend in terua” (Tosefta Rosh Hashanah 1:11).

Ritva’s reference to this source is clear. The verses of Shofarot are, so to speak, akin to the terua sounds of the shofar which accompany our prayers before G-d. The blessing of Shofarot is in some sense a textual equivalent to the shofar blasts, a provision of words for the wordless act of shofar.

This notion is reflected in the text of Shofarot. Like shofar blowing itself, the blessing of Shofarot has multiple meanings. The blessing commences with a colorful description of the Divine-induced shofar at Sinai, citing verses therefrom which convey G-d’s kingship – “the sound of the shofar grew very loud,” proceeding on to general calls to sound the shofar as a declaration of G-d’s majesty – “praise Him with the shofar blast.” Shofarot, like the shofar blasts, is a declaration of G-d as King.

The blessing then progresses, from the shofar that once was to that which is yet to come, from the shofar of Sinai to the “great shofar” that will be sounded at the time of the redemption. We now pray that G-d should “sound the great shofar for our freedom” and ingather the exiles with its call. Just like the shofar blasts, the text of Shofarot is timeless and all-encompassing in the themes that it evokes.

We ultimately conclude, however, not with the wish that G-d should “sound” the shofar, but that He should hear ours: “Blessed... who hears the sound of the terua of His people Israel with mercy.” Thus, Shofarot is a two way relationship between G-d and us, much like the shofar blasts themselves. On the one hand, we recognize the Divine shofar call throughout history and yearn for His “great shofar” that is yet to come. Yet we also sound our own shofar and recite our own Shofarot, praying that G-d hears our terua in musical and textual form. Hence, it is both the shofar blasts and their textual counterpart which accompany our Rosh Hashanah prayers before G-d: “And with what? With the shofar.”