

Rosh Hashanah

in 30 minutes or less

by Rabbi Elazar Meisels



Rosh Hashanah in Scripture

דָּבַר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי
בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן זָכוֹן תְּרוּעָה מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ:

ויקרא פרק כג:כד

G-d spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, saying, "in the seventh month, on the first of the month, it shall be a day of rest for you." A remembrance of the sounding of the Shofar, a holy convocation.

וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל מְלָאכָת
עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם: במדבר פרק כט:א

"The first day of the seventh month shall be a sacred holiday to you on which you shall do no laborious work. It shall be a day of sounding the Shofar [ram's horn.]"

- Two of the Patriarchs, Abraham and Jacob, were born in the month of Tishrei.
- The prayers of three famous barren women were answered favorably on Rosh Hashanah: Sarah, Rachel & Hannah.
- The enslavement of our forefathers in Egypt ended on Rosh Hashanah.
- On Rosh Hashanah, Pharaoh dreamt his dreams, and Joseph was released from prison and appointed viceroy of Egypt.

Rosh Hashanah Facts

There are seven major Jewish holidays in the Jewish calendar, and they are spread throughout the year. One month, however, enjoys a disproportionate share of holidays:

1. Nissan – Passover
2. Iyar
3. Sivan – Shavuot
4. Tammuz
5. Av



6. Elul
7. **Tishrei – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succos**
8. Cheshvan
9. Kislev – Chanukah
10. Teves
11. Shevat
12. Adar – Purim

Of all the months, Nissan and Tishrei in particular are of great significance. For Jews in particular, the month of Nissan is important because the Jewish people came into existence as a nation during that month when they left Egypt during the Exodus. For this reason, the month of Nissan is referred to in the Torah as the "First month."

For the entire universe, the month of Tishrei assumes a particular importance because the human race, the focal point of the world, came into existence on the Sixth Day of Creation, which coincides with the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei.

Therefore, the first day of Tishrei is considered the birthday of the universe, and the New Year.

The original man was placed in the world free of sin, with unlimited potential, and a clear awareness of his Creator.

In parallel with this, we are bidden to devote this day to free ourselves of sin through repentance, commit ourselves to realize our boundless potential, and acknowledge our Creator in a myriad of ways.

אמר רבי אלעזר ג' דברים מבטלין גזרות קשות ואלו הן תפילה צדקה ותשובה: תלמוד ירושלמי תענית ח/ב

"Rabbi Elazar said, 'Three things nullify a bad decree: Repentance, Prayer and Charity'"

THREE KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL ROSH HASHANAH ARE:

- Repentance, which includes: Reflection on our past actions, regret for our misdeeds and a commitment to refrain from such behavior in the future
- The liberal dispensation of charity
- Prayer



"Take note of how differently the Almighty comports Himself in judgment from the conduct of beings of flesh and blood. Typically, humans will judge their friends during times of favor and goodwill, and their enemies during times of anger, in order to ensure the harshest judgment possible. The Almighty, on the other hand, judges the entire world [even those who flagrantly disobey His will] only during a time of favor; the month of Tishrei, in which there are numerous holidays and associated Mitzvos to increase their merits!"

SEFER HATODAAH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF OUR CREATOR IS ACHIEVED THROUGH:

- Blowing the Shofar – just as one heralds a king through the blowing of trumpets
- Prayers that speak unambiguously of His majesty and sovereignty over the universe [These prayers make up a good part of the text of the Amidah, and the songs and poems recited during the repetition of the Amidah.]
- Complete submission to His will



Day of Judgment

On Rosh HaShanah, every human being is judged by the Almighty to determine his fate for the coming year. On that day it will be decided whether one will live or die, how much one will earn, who will be born etc.

The reason Rosh Hashanah was chosen as the Day of Judgment is because on this day, Adam and Eve sinned by partaking of the Tree of Knowledge and were judged for their actions.

**בראש השנה נברא אדם הראשון בשעה ראשונה עלה במחשבה
בשנייה נמלך במלאכי השרת בשלישית כינס עפרו ברביעית גיבלו
בחמישית ריקמו בשישית העמידו גולם על רגליו בשביעי זרק בו
נשמה בשמינית הכניסו לגן עדן בתשיעית ציוהו בעשירית עבר על
ציוהו באחת עשרה נידון בשתיים עשרה יצא בדימוס מלפני הקב"ה,
אמר לו הקב"ה אדם זה סימן לבניך כשם שנכנסתה לפני בדין ביום
הזה ויצאתה בדימוס כך עתידין בניך להיות נכנסין לפני בדין ביום
הזה ויוצאין בדימוס אימתי בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש**

(ויקרא נג כד): פסיקתא דרב כהנא – פסקא

On Rosh Hashanah, the first man was created. In the first hour of the day, it entered the mind of the Almighty [to create him]; in the second hour He consulted with the Heavenly angels; in the third hour, He gathered the dirt together; in the fourth hour, He mixed it; in the fifth hour, He fashioned it; in the sixth hour, He stood him on his feet as a mute; in the seventh hour, He imbued him with a neshamah; in the eighth hour, He brought him into the Garden of Eden; in the ninth hour, He instructed him [not to partake of the Tree of Knowledge]; in the tenth hour, Adam violated this instruction; in the eleventh hour, [he was judged]; in the twelfth hour he emerged from his judgment victorious...

PESIKTAH D'RAV KAHANAH

The Ten Days of Repentance correspond to the Ten Commandments. Each day, one should focus on diligently fulfilling the commandment that corresponds to that particular day... YAAROS DVASH 1:5

There are twelve constellations in the heavens that are known as the Zodiac. The constellation of the month of Tishrei is Libra, in which the stars appear in the shape of scales. This is because this is the month of the judgment of the universe.

"Like the fruitful, fragrant apple tree among the barren trees of the forest, so is My beloved..." Why are the Jewish people compared to the apple tree? Just as the apple precedes the growth of its leaves, so too, the Jewish people said, "We will do," before they said, "We will listen." The apple reminds G-d of our steadfast devotion to His service and our willingness to accept His majesty even when we can't fully comprehend it.

Because they repented their actions, they were forgiven by G-d who then told them:

זה סימן לבניך כשם שנכנסתה לפני בדין ביום זה ויצאת בדימוס, כך עתידין בניך להיות נכנסין לפני בדין ביום זה ויוצאין בדימוס

פסיקתא דרב כהנא - פסקא נג אות א

"This is an omen to your children, that just as you stood before Me in judgment on this day and emerged victorious, so too your children are destined to stand before Me in judgment on this day, and they will emerge victoriously."

Customs of Rosh Hashanah

SYMBOLIC FOODS

אמר אביי השתא דאמרת סימנא מילתא היא לעולם יהא רגיל למיחזי בריש שתא קרא ורוביא כרתי וסילקא ותמרי... מסכת הוריות דף יב/א

"Now that you have said that an omen bears significance, at the beginning of each year, a person should accustom himself to eat gourds, fenugreek, leeks, beets, and dates."

"Some of these fruits taste sweet and symbolize a sweet year, while others grow abundantly and signify a profusion of merits."

"One may use any food whose name implies abundance even if it is not of Hebrew origin."

Together with the consumption of these omen foods, a special prayer is recited asking that we merit the blessing that the food symbolizes.

EXAMPLES OF FOODS THAT BEAR GOOD OMENS:

Apple – We dip the fruit in honey and ask for a good and sweet year

Dates – The Hebrew name is "T'marim," which can also mean to "eliminate," and we ask that our enemies be eliminated.

Fish – We ask that we merit to multiply like fish

Sheep [or fish] Head – We ask that we merit to be "heads" and not like "tails" [i.e., mighty and not weak]

Pomegranate – Our merits should increase like the bountiful seeds of the pomegranate

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

The Hebrew word for honey is, "Dvash." The numerical equivalent of this word is 306, which is the same as the words, "Av Harachamim" [Our Father of mercy,] and evokes Hashem's compassion for his children.]

"As many as a pomegranate's seeds are the merits of your emptiest..." Even the emptiest ones among us are full of mitzvos like a pomegranate [is full of seeds].

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

Just as one should eat foods that symbolize good things, he should also conduct himself in a manner that signifies his desire to improve his character. Therefore, on Rosh Hashanah a person should strive to rid his heart of anger and jealousy toward others and replace those feelings with love and concern for others.



WISHING WELL

On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to greet others with the following short blessing:

Male – לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּכְתֵּב וְתַחַתֶּם לְאַלְתֵּר לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וְלְשָׁלוֹם

Female – שָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּכְתְּבִי וְתַחַתְּמִי לְאַלְתֵּר לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וְלְשָׁלוֹם

Male – *Leshanah Tovah Tikoseiv V'Seichoseim L'alter, L'chaim Tovim U'leshalom*

Female – *Leshanah Tovah Tikoseivi V'Seichoseimi L'alter, L'chaim Tovim U'leshalom*

May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year!

TASHLICH

מי א-ל כמוך נושא עון ועובר על פשע לשארית נחלתו לא החזיק
לעד אפו כי חפץ חסד הוא: ישוב ירחמנו יכבוש עונותינו ותשליך
במצלות ים כל חטאתם - מיכה פרק ז:יח-יט

"Who is a God like You, Who pardons iniquity, and overlooks the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have mercy upon us; He will subdue our iniquities, and You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

In a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages, Jews congregate around a natural body of water – preferably one containing live fish – following Minchah on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, and recite the Tashlich prayer, which symbolizes our hope that G-d will "cast our sins into the depths of the sea."

If for whatever reason, Tashlich cannot be recited on Rosh Hashanah, it may be recited throughout the Ten Days of Repentance, or even until Hoshanah Rabbah.

While standing at the river's edge, the custom is to shake out our pockets three times to symbolize our desire to dispose of our sins and be free of them.

TORAH READINGS

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the story of how G-d "remembered" Sara on Rosh Hashanah and she conceived Isaac, the story of Isaac's circumcision, the spiritual threat posed by Ishmael, his exile, and how he was judged innocent despite his past and future sins because at the time he was repentant.

Why don't we say this blessing the second night as well? Since righteous people are signed and sealed in the Book of Life immediately, blessing someone in this manner on the second night would imply that he is not assumed to be righteous. Even if to all appearances he isn't perfectly righteous, only G-d knows that which lies in the hearts of man, and perhaps he is much greater than we believe.

When Abraham and Isaac traveled to the site of the Akeidah, Satan tried to dissuade them by causing a raging flood that threatened to drown them. Abraham refused to be deterred and continued on to carry out the will of the Almighty. Reciting these prayers at the river's edge evokes the merit of the Patriarchs and our desire to emulate their righteousness.



On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the story of Akeidas Yitzchak [The Binding of Isaac], which plays a vital role in Rosh Hashanah.

BLOWING THE SHOFAR

וּבַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאַחַד לַחֲדָשׁ מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יְהִי לָכֶם כָּל מְלֶאכֶת
עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יְהִי לָכֶם: במדבר פרק כט:א

It shall be a day of sounding the Shofar [ram's horn.]"

Blowing the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah is such an integral aspect of the day that the Torah refers to the day not as "Rosh Hashanah," but as "Yom Teruah" – a day of sounding the Shofar.

WHY?

1. At Mt. Sinai, the site of our original commitment to serve G-d through the observance of the Torah, "The Sound of the Shofar continually increased and was very powerful". The Shofar of Rosh Hashanah reminds us to renew that commitment.
2. Upon creating the universe, G-d became its sovereign ruler. Rosh Hashanah marks the anniversary of that day, and therefore we blow the Shofar as it is customary to blow trumpets at the coronation of a king.
3. The Shofar, the ram's horn, reminds us of Akeidas Yitzchak [The Binding of Isaac] when a ram was sacrificed in place of Isaac.
4. The Shofar reminds us of the ingathering of the exiles, which will occur through the blowing of a "great Shofar."

The Shofar's piercing blast symbolizes the heartrending cry of the Jew who has strayed from the path of G-d and wishes to return but doesn't know how.

The blessing recited over the performance of the mitzvah of Shofar is:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹאֵ אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לִשְׁמוֹעַ קוֹל שׁוֹפָר

Blessed are you Hashem our G-d, who has sanctified us with His mitzvos and instructed us to hear the sound of the Shofar

The Torah refers to the sound of the Shofar as a "Teruah."

The Talmud derives from Scripture that the Teruah must be sounded three times on Rosh Hashanah, and each Teruah must be preceded and followed by a "Tekiyah," – a long clear sound.

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

Rav Naftoli of Ropshitz once spent Rosh Hashanah with the sainted Chozeh of Lublin. When the time to recite Tashlich arrived, Rav Naftoli was delayed and could not walk to the river until the Chozeh had already returned. As he prepared to leave, the Chozeh asked him, "Where are you going?" Rav Naftoli replied, "I'm going to see if I can fish some of your sins out of the water because your sins are greater in merit than my mitzvos!"

The Haftorah reading of the first day is the story of the birth of the prophet Samuel to his mother, Hannah. She had been barren, and in a broken state, she beseeched G-d to grant her a child. This occurred on Rosh Hashanah, and her prayer serves as a model for proper prayer for all time.



There are three opinions cited in the Talmud as to what defines a Teruah.

1. A succession of nine quick blasts akin to whimpering sounds [known as Teruah]
2. Three wailing sounds of medium length [known as Shevarim]
3. A combination of three medium length and nine brief sounds [known as Shevarim Teruah]

The accepted custom is to blow all three varieties, which, counting the Tekiyas that precede and follow each Teruah, comprise a total of thirty sounds and constitute the minimum requirement.

In practice, we sound the first thirty blasts prior to the onset of the Mussaf prayer, and an additional 70 throughout and following the Mussaf prayer. One who cannot hear all 100 blasts should be sure to listen to a minimum of thirty.

SYMBOLISM OF THE SHOFAR

All Shofars are acceptable as long as they come from a kosher animal except that of a cow or a bull because these remind G-d of the sin of the Golden Calf. The Shofar must be hollowed out and not have holes or cracks that change its sound. The Shofar's curved shape is a reminder that we must bend our hearts in subservience to G-d. The broken notes of the Shofar also remind us that we have some breaking to do of our own: We must break the evil inclination which consistently leads us astray.

Rosh Hashanah is too important a day to allow to pass unnoticed. The Shofar, with its unique piercing sound, is used to pierce the spiritual plaque that surrounds our hearts and prevents us from realizing our desire to grow and flourish spiritually. It offers a unique opportunity to break free of the physical bonds that tie us down and helps us present ourselves before the Almighty in the very best light possible.

Points to Ponder

Before entering the High Holiday season, one should spend a few moments contemplating his conduct during the past year, and how he can improve through the coming year. Here are a few suggestions of things to consider:

1. What aspect of Torah must I study if I wish to maximize my knowledge of Judaism?

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

A great Shofar will be blown... and they will bow to Hashem..." The ingathering of the exiles through the Shofar will not be the end, but only the means to the end; the ultimate purpose is reached when they "bow to Hashem." The function of the Shofar is to remind a Jew to bow to the will of G-d.

"Through a Shofar, the remembrance of the Jewish people will come before G-d so that He may do good toward them."

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"G-d made man straight, but they seek to corrupt their ways..." A person begins life as righteous and corrupts himself with his sins. Upon repenting, the person becomes straight once again. This pattern is symbolized by the Shofar blowing, which begins with a Tekiyah [straight sound,] continues with a Shevarim and Teruah [broken sounds,] and is followed by another Tekiyah.



2. Of all my character traits, which one is in greatest need of an overhaul?
3. Would I be pleased by what I think people will say at my eulogy?
4. When do I feel that life is most meaningful? Is there some way to incorporate this recognition into my life more often?
5. What must I do to ensure that my children grow up as proud Jews and marry Jews?
6. Are there any ideals I would be willing to die for? Why?
7. What is the most important decision I need to make this year? What's holding me back?
8. When do I feel closest to God?

"It's not the quantity that counts, but the quality." The more heartfelt and sincere the prayer, the greater its ability to inspire Divine mercy. The Shofar represents the purest prayer we can possibly offer, a cry from the depths of the soul, unencumbered by words. No wonder the Shofar's blowing is reserved for the most critical of all days – the Day of Judgment

FIVE TIPS TO MAKE YOUR TIME IN SYNAGOGUE MORE MEANINGFUL

A significant amount of time on Rosh Hashanah is spent in the synagogue. Take advantage of this unique opportunity to enjoy the most meaningful Rosh Hashanah ever by implementing the following five strategies into your routine:

1. **Take Your Time Praying** – Don't worry about how fast you can say the prayers or whether you're keeping up with the congregation. Concentrate on the meaning of the words and think about how they apply to you.
2. **Prepare** – Take some time before the holiday to review the prayers and their basic meanings. Write out some of the thoughts that you wish to include in your prayers.
3. **Say it in English** – If you cannot read Hebrew, that's no reason not to join in. Just say the prayers in English or any language that you understand.
4. **Commentary** – Don't just settle for a basic prayerbook. Pick up a machzor that features commentary on the prayers and offers inspiring insights into the service.
5. **Seek to impress** – Don't be afraid to ignore the social scene in the synagogue. Remember, on Rosh Hashanah, the only one we're seeking to impress is G-d. Try your best to look good for Him!

