



Laws and Customs of Rosh Hashana 5784-2023

Rosh Hashana occupies a central place in Jewish life and practice. It is known Biblically as "Yom Teruah", a day of blasts (Numbers 29:1), and later as "Yom Hadin", the Day of Judgment. It is a time for family and food in the home, and generally of extended reflection, prayer, and song in the synagogue, filled with law and custom dictating and shaping each of these components. A tension between festivity and fear inheres in the day, and colors many of the laws and customs.

During these first day(s) of the New Year, we especially strive to live ideally. It is our hope that this guide will help explain the basic practical laws of the day as well as some of their underlying meanings so that we can live the days in accordance with tradition. We urge you to be in touch with us with any questions about these laws or about others that are not mentioned here. The halakhic positions indicated tend to represent majority opinion or widespread practice, but do not always reflect the breadth of halakhic possibility. Please feel free to follow up and ask any member of the Bayit clergy. *Shanah Tovah!*

The Bayit Rabbinic Team: Rav Steven, Rabbanit Bracha, Rabba Sara, Rav Avi.

Erev Rosh Hashana (Fri, Sept 15, 2023)

Some have the custom to fast (not widely practiced) on some or all of Erev Rosh Hashana as a request for repentance. If one is fasting all day, it is best to break the fast **before** the holiday begins. We do not recite *Tachanun* in *Shacharit* or *Mincha* (although we do in *Selichot*), nor do we blow shofar in shul. However, a *ba'al teki'ah* (shofar blower) may continue to practice.

We perform *hatarat nedarim*, the annulling of vows, in front of an ad hoc court of three adult Jewish men, usually after *Shacharit*. This ritual requests the permitting of vows or practices we have inadvertently adopted over the past year. Anything we consciously vowed or committed to which we want to permit needs to be specified. As a legal activity, this request must be understood by the petitioner and the court, and should be read in a language in which it can be understood. *Hatarat nedarim* can be recited through Erev Yom Kippur.

We prepare for Rosh Hashana as for a regular Yom Tov with haircuts and festive clothes, and in recognition of the awesomeness of judgment, many have the custom to wear white. Prayer leaders have the custom to wear a *kittel* (white robe), as do many worshippers.

Many men have the custom to immerse in a *mikvah* to enter the holiday in a greater state of ritual purity.

Many have the custom to visit the graves of relatives or close friends on this day. Even within the 30 days of mourning or the year of mourning for a relative, one may go to visit that relative's grave.

Rosh Hashana in the Home

It is recommended to light a *Yahrtzeit* candle or other long-lasting candle for lighting the candles or a fire on Yom Tov by **transferring** the flame.



RH I (Friday night-Shabbat 9/15-16)

Friday night: Candles are lit with the Yom Tov blessing and the Shabbat insertion at **6:47pm**. Yom Tov Kiddush¹ on both night and day are recited with the Rosh Hashana and Shabbat insertions. Although cooking is generally allowed on Yomtov, since the first day is Shabbat all cooking for Shabbat must be finished before Shabbat starts.

RH II (Motzaei Shabbat -Sunday 9/16-17)

Saturday night: Candles are lit from an **existing** flame with the Yom Tov blessing only on the second night, after Shabbat ends at **7:45pm**. Yom Tov Kiddush is recited with the Rosh Hashana; Havdalah insertions are added as we transition from Shabbat to Yom Tov only. This follows the acronym *yaknaha*"z and includes blessings on spices and fire.

Cooking on the second day is allowed per the usual Yom Tov *halakhot*. However, we do not prepare from one day to the next on Yom Tov and from Shabbat to Yom Tov. We even refrain from setting the dinner table specifically for the second day, while it is still the first day of Rosh Hashana. However, there is room for leniencies in case of need. Please feel free to reach out to a clergy member if you have questions.

Because some consider Rosh Hashana to be one long day, such that a *Shehecheyanu* would not be required on the second day, there is a *safek* (doubt) about whether we should say it on the second night. Therefore, halakhic decisors recommend saying the second day's *Shehecheyanu* on a new fruit or garment that is present both at candle lighting and at *kiddush*, each time the *Shehecheyanu* is recited. This is the widespread and accepted custom. However, even in the absence of a new item, the *Shehecheyanu* should still be said on the second day.

➤ When the same person is reciting the blessing on lighting candles as well as making kiddush, the *Shehecheyanu* blessing should be recited **once** only per night, and preferably over *kiddush*, not at candle-lighting. This is because the *Shehecheyanu* blessing was decreed by our sages to be said over *kiddush*, while at candle-lighting it is simply a strong *minhag* (custom).

Our Rosh Hashana meals are festive and joyous while still maintaining a sense of reverence for God and the Day of Awe at the Yom Tov table. The Talmud attributes meaning to symbolic wordplay. Thus, it is customary on Rosh Hashana to eat foods whose names or qualities play on our hopes for the coming year, like gourd (*kara*), so that the negative parts of our decree for the coming year be torn up (*yikar'u*), and pomegranates, so that our merits be as numerous as the seeds. We include wordplays in the vernacular of our time, hence the ever-popular "raisin celery" (raise in salary)!

Perhaps the most popular gastronomic custom is dipping the apples in honey, a symbol of a sweet year. Because the apple is not an integral part of the meal, it warrants a separate blessing of "*borei peri ha'etz*" after the meal has begun. One should be careful to eat some apple and honey after the blessing and before reciting the short "*yehi ratzon*" prayer wishing for a sweet year so as not to interrupt between blessing and eating. Others recite the "*yehi ratzon*" before the blessing, so there is no interruption between the *beracha* and the eating.

➤ There is a serious contemporary *halakhic* debate regarding whether to repeat *bentching* (Grace After Meals) if "*yaaleh veyavo*" (insertion for Yom Tov) is forgotten. The predominant position is that *bentching* should be repeated.

¹ As on Shabbat, men and women have the same obligation in **kiddush** and therefore men and women can equally recite kiddush for each other.



Some sources describe the custom of not sleeping during the daytime on Rosh Hashana as a guide for it to be a day of meaningful activity. More than representing the idea that it is an omen for the year, the sources of this custom suggest that if one sleeps on Rosh Hashana, the forces that intercede on that person's behalf will sleep, too. Nonetheless, if one needs to nap, one of course should, rather than fighting sleep to no benefit.

Rosh Hashana in Shul

We do not recite *Hallel* on Rosh Hashana in keeping with the sense that unabashed joyous song is at odds with the tone of the day when the Books of Judgment are open. We do recite *Avinu Malkeinu*, a prayer pleading with God as Father and King for mercy and blessing. We recite this prayer at *Shacharit* and *Mincha* throughout the week up through Yom Kippur (except Friday *Mincha* and Shabbat, and the day before Yom Kippur).

➤ The *Avinu Malkeinu* prayer is omitted this year on the first day of Rosh Hashana as it is Shabbat and we refrain from prayers addressing our personal needs to God on Shabbat..

The core liturgy of this day is the special *Amidah*, the lengthy *Musaf Amidah* which is comprised of three main sections, *Malkhuyot* (God's Kingship), *Zikhronot* (God's Memory), and *Shofarot* (the significance of Shofar blasts). Each section has an introduction regarding its theme, and then concludes with 10 verses expressing that theme, 3 verses from Torah, 3 verses from *Ketuvim* (Writings), and 3 verses from *Nevi'im* (Prophets), with a concluding verse from Torah. This is a unique construction, and well worth following and dwelling on in our silent recitation and the *ba'al tefillah's* communal recitation.

The single Biblical mitzvah of the day is to hear the sounding of the shofar². The number of blasts have expanded over time to our current practice of 100 as follows: 30 *kolot* (blasts) before the *Musaf Amidah*, 30 *kolot* during the repetition of the *Amidah*, and 40 *kolot* after the repetition. These last 40 *kolot* are treated more leniently as pure custom, and the 30 *kolot* in the repetition are thought of as more essential than the first 30 *kolot*. The symbolism of the shofar blast are many – a wakeup call, the sound of cries, a call to herald the king, an assembling of people, to name a few. It is a powerful part of the day – a non-verbal prayer during so much fixed spoken liturgy.

➤ Hearing the minimum number of 30 *kolot* perfectly fulfills the halakhic requirement.

We fulfill our obligation by listening to the blasts, so we aim to be quiet and hear every blast in its entirety. After the recitation of some preparatory liturgy, the *Ba'al teki'ah* (shofar blower) recites the blessing "*lishmo'a kol shofar*" (to hear the sound of the shofar) as well as *Shehecheyanu* (both days). We answer "amen" (but do not say "*barukh hu uvarukh shemo*", because we are fulfilling our obligation through this blessing, and also speaking in the middle constitutes an interruption) and stand for the blessings and for all shofar blasts.

Because the shofar blasts are an ongoing fulfillment of a mitzvah that begins with the blessing and ends after the repetition of the *Amidah*, we try not to interrupt during this time. Interruptions that are necessary for the shofar blasts are acceptable, and anything necessary for, or related to the prayers are post facto (*bedi'avod*) not considered interruptions. If one uses the bathroom during this period, it is permissible to say the "*asher yatzar*" blessing afterwards. If one arrives late amid the blasts, one should recite the blessing to oneself in between sets, and ask a shofar blower to blow the missed blasts after shul (if one did not even hear the 30 *kolot* minimum).

²As shofar blowing is a "time bound mitzvah" (מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא), women are not **Biblically obligated to perform this mitzvah**. Therefore, men can blow a shofar for men and women, while women may blow shofar for themselves or other women, but not on behalf of men.



As in previous years, there will be outdoor Shofar blowing at various locations throughout Riverdale with the minimum Halakhic requirement of 30 *kolot* being blown. Please refer to the Bayit bulletin and High Holiday emails regarding the schedule of times and locations.

On the first day of Rosh Hashana after *Mincha*, we observe the custom of *Tashlikh* (casting away), by going to a body of water, preferably flowing, to symbolically cast away our sins. We recite a few prayers, including the verse, "and cast into the depths of the sea all of their sins" (Micah 7:19). If one is concerned that there will not be enough time after *Mincha*, one may recite *Tashlikh* before. If one cannot make it on the first day, one may go the second day of Rosh Hashana. If that, too, is not possible, one may recite *Tashlikh* until Yom Kippur.

➤ This year, as the first day of Rosh Hashana is Shabbat, we defer *Tashlikh* to the second day.

The End of Rosh Hashana and Time Following

Havdalah at the very end of Rosh Hashana consists only of the blessing over the wine and the blessing of "*hamavdil*". Rosh Hashana ends on Sunday, September 17, at 7:47pm.

➤ We omit the blessing on spices as there is no "*neshamah yeteirah*" (additional soul) granted on Yom Tov as there is on Shabbat. We omit the blessing on fire as we are allowed to transfer flame and use fire on Yom Tov.

The day after Rosh Hashana is *Tzom Gedaliah*, a minor fast day. This year it falls out on Monday, September 18. For fasting times and more information please click [here](#).

Many have the custom not to recite *Kiddush Levanah* (Sanctification of the Moon) until after Yom Kippur, since the anxiety of judgment can prevent us from a full-hearted praise of God's natural universe until after Yom Kippur. If there is reason to believe it will be a very cloudy week, we would recite it on the Saturday night of *Shabbat Shuvah* (the Shabbat in between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur).

Aseret Yemei Teshuvah

The 10 days that begin with Rosh Hashana and end with Yom Kippur are called *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* (Ten Days of Return). The Talmud tells us that God is close at hand during this time. Coming on the heels of Rosh Hashana, it provides a week to reflect on that theme and intensify our self-improvement leading into Yom Kippur. We not only recite *Avinu Malkeinu* (as indicated earlier) at *Shacharit* and *Mincha*, but our *Selichot* are longer, and we recite *Shir Hama'alot*, Psalm 130, after *Yishtabach* every morning.

The Shulchan Aruch dictates that during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*, even one who is not generally particular about *pat yisrael* should strive to eat only baked goods that were baked by Jews.

We make six additions in the *Amidah*, emphasizing God as true King and Judge. All changes are indicated clearly in the *siddur*. They break into two types – the two historically earlier **alterations** of the actual blessing formulas, and the four later **additions** to the blessings. The latter, if forgotten, do not require the repetition of the whole *Amidah*. Of the former two, the change from "*ha'el hakadosh*" to "*hamelekh hakadosh*", if forgotten, requires repeating the *Amidah*. However, if "*melekh ohev tzedakah u'mishpat*" is not changed to "*hamelekh hamishpat*", one need not repeat.

The Shabbat during this period is called *Shabbat Shuvah*. It is marked with the above mentioned liturgical changes as well as a special *Haftarah*, and a special *derashah* (sermon) helping the community move forward in their process of *teshuvah*.

Shanah Tovah U'Metukah: May the New Year bring sweetness and goodness!