

Laws and Customs of Rosh Hashanah 5778

I. The Eve of Rosh Hashanah

Following Shacharit, many have the custom to perform hatarat nedarim, the permitting of vows, in front of an ad hoc court of three adult Jewish men. This ritual requests the permitting of vows or practices we have inadvertently adopted over the year. 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.

II. Rosh Hashanah in the Home

The Sheheheyanu blessing is recited at candle lighting and kiddush on both nights of Rosh Hashanah. Because some Jewish sources consider Rosh Hashanah to be one long, 48-hour day (such that a Sheheheyanu would not be required on the second day) many recommend saying the second day's Sheheheyanu with a **new fruit or garment** in mind at candle lighting and kiddush (a separate one for each). This is the widespread custom. Even in the absence of a new item, the Sheheheyanu blessing should still be said on the second night of Rosh Hashanah.

It is customary on Rosh Hashanah to eat foods whose names or qualities play on our hopes for the coming year, like pumpkin (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 its seeds. Perhaps the most popular food custom is eating apples with 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 hamotzi. 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. We also dip our challah into honey instead of salt on Rosh Hashanah and many continue this practice for each Shabbat and holiday meal through the end of the Jewish "holiday season" at Simchat Torah.

III. Erev Tavshilin

It is prohibited to prepare in any way on one day of Yom Tov for the next or on Yom Tov for Shabbat, but it is permitted to prepare from Friday, the second day of Yom Tov, to Shabbat by means of an eruv tavshilin—two cooked dishes (customarily a hard-boiled egg and a piece of bread or matzah). These dishes are prepared on Erev Rosh Hashanah and symbolize the beginning of the preparation for Shabbat before Yom Tov. In this way, the preparation on Yom Tov is not a new preparation, but just the conclusion of a process that began before Yom Tov, rendering it permissible.

The items are held in the right hand and a blessing and formula are recited over them, found in the Artscroll Siddur on page 654. Recite the blessing, "Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav vetzivanu al mitzvat eruv." Then say the following: "By virtue of this eruv, we—the members of this household—shall be permitted to cook, bake, keep foods warm, carry, light candles, and do all preparations on Yom Tov (i.e. Thursday night and Friday day) for Shabbat." The items should be eaten on Shabbat and may not be eaten before that as long as preparations are being made for Shabbat. If one forgets to make an eruv tavshilin, one may rely on the eruv tavshilin

that I will make in my own home on behalf of the community, but this should not be relied on initially—everyone should make his or her own.

IV. Fast of Gedaliah Sunday 24 September

After the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians, Gedaliah was placed as a governor over the remaining Jewish population in and around Jerusalem. Jewish extremists assassinated Gedaliah. They considered him a traitor for collaborating with the Babylonian occupying army. In turn, the Babylonians destroyed what was left of autonomous Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael. The Prophet Jeremiah witnessed and mourned this self-destructive violence. The anniversary of Gedaliah's assassination, the third day of Tishrei, is marked as a day of fasting.

The fast begins at 4:29 AM

Mincha 5:30pm

Fast ends 6:29pm