

Laws and Customs of Rosh Hashanah 5781

I. The Day Before Rosh Hashanah

The day before Rosh Hashanah—Friday, September 18—begins early with *Selichot* services at 7:00 AM.

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. An English translation can be found in most *siddurim*. *Hatarat Nedarim* can be recited through Erev Yom Kippur. This year, *Hatarat Nedarim* will be broadcast on Zoom - details to follow.

II. Rosh Hashanah in the Home

The *Shebeheyanu* 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 *Shebeheyanu* would not be required on the second day) many recommend saying the second day's *Shebeheyanu* 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 *Shebeheyanu* 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 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 its seeds. We include wordplays in any language, hence the custom for eating a raisin celery salad (for a raise-in-salary...).

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 *ha-motzi*. One should be careful to eat some apple and honey after the blessing and before reciting the short "*yehei 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. Tashlich

Typically, we recite the *tashlich* prayers as a community on the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah. These prayers, customarily recited adjacent to a body of water, express our confidence in our own ability, with God's help, to cast away our sins and redirect and renew our lives at the new year. This year, *tashlich* will take place in small groups only to avoid crowding and maintain social distancing. We will distribute *tashlich* text, or you can find the text in your *machzor*. *Tashlich* can be recited anytime between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

IV. Fast of Gedaliah

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 5:26 AM on Monday, September 21. We read Torah at Mincha (which will begin early, at 6:25 PM) and the fast concludes at 7:21 PM.

Erev Rosh Hashanah – September 18

- Candle lighting should take place 18 minutes before sundown at 6:35 PM. The beracha should conclude **להדליק נר של שבת ושל יום טוב**.
- Weekday Mincha should be completed before sundown 6:53 PM.

First Day of Rosh Hashanah

Friday Night – September 18

- An abridged קבלת שבת is recited that begins with מזמור שיר ליום השבת. מזמור שיר ליום השבת should also be omitted.
- Both ושמו and תקעו בחדש שופר are recited before the Amidah.
- Ma'ariv Amidah for Rosh Hashanah with proper insertions for Shabbos. There are a number of insertions into the Amidah that are recited throughout Aseres Yemei Teshuva.
- Vayechulu is recited after the Amidah (omitting the beracha "Magen Avos") followed by לדוד מזמור and then Aleinu.
- Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah with proper Shabbos insertions. Kiddush begins with יום הששי. Shehechyanu is recited.
- The traditional symbolic foods (simanim) are eaten on the first night together with their respective ריצון.
- Birkas HaMazon should include the insertions for Shabbos and Rosh Hashanah.
- If Ma'ariv was recited before nightfall (7:35 PM), Kerias Sh'ma should be repeated after nightfall.

Daytime – September 19

- On Rosh Hashanah, the שיר של יום and שיר ליום השבת are recited at the beginning of davening. Shir HaYichud and Shir HaKavod are omitted when davening without a minyan.
- Shir HaMa'alos is recited after Yishtabach.
- Birchos Kerias Sh'ma for Shabbos (הכל יודוך).
- Shacharis Amidah for Rosh Hashanah with the proper insertions for Shabbos.
- The Torah reading for the first day is Bereishis 21:1-34, the maftir is Bamidbar 29:1-6 and the haftarah is from Shmuel I 1:1-2:10.
- The shofar is not blown on Shabbos.
- Mussaf Amidah for Rosh Hashanah with proper insertions for Shabbos.
- Those who are davening without a minyan are encouraged to study and recite the piyutim that are added to Chazaras HaShatz, particularly ונתנה תוקף.
- Mincha Amidah for Rosh Hashanah with the proper insertions for Shabbos. Mincha should be recited before shekiyah (sunset) which is at 6:52 PM.
- Seudah Shlishis should ideally be eaten before the tenth hour (4:48 PM) and preferably after reciting Mincha. If one did not do so, one may eat seudah shlishis until sunset.
- Preparations for the second day may not begin until nightfall (7:33 PM).

Second Day of Rosh Hashanah

Saturday Night – September 19

- Candle lighting must be performed after nightfall.
- Ma'ariv should be recited after nightfall.
- Ma'ariv for Rosh Hashanah includes ותודיענו.
- Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah includes Meorei Ha'Eish, Havdalah and Shehechyanu (יקנה"ז). The new fruit should be placed on the table before Kiddush and is eaten after Kiddush. If one does not have a new fruit or new clothing, one may still recite Shehechyanu.

Second Day (Daytime) – September 20

- On Rosh Hashanah, the שיר של יום and שיר ליום השבת are recited at the beginning of davening. Shir HaYichud and Shir HaKavod are omitted when davening without a minyan.

- Shir HaMa'alos is recited after Yishtabach.
- Birchos Kerias Sh'ma for weekday (המאיר לארץ).
- Shacharis Amidah for Rosh Hashanah.
- The Torah reading for the second day is Bereishis 22:1-22:24, the maftir is Bamidbar 29:1-6 and the haftarah is from Yirmiyahu 31:1- 31:19.
- If someone davening at home can blow shofar on his own, he should blow the first thirty sounds before Mussaf. The second thirty sounds should not be blown during the silent Amidah. One may blow 70 additional sounds after the Amidah, but there is no requirement to do so.
- If someone else is blowing on behalf of others:
 - If the ba'al toke'a (shofar blower) already fulfilled his mitzvah, the berachos (לשמוע קול שופר and שהחיינו) should ideally be recited by one of the listeners. If the listeners are all women, the ba'al toke'a may not recite the berachos; they must be recited by one of the women.
 - If the listeners are spread out across a large area, each person can recite his/her own beracha.
 - Only 30 sounds are blown.
 - If one is going to hear the shofar before the seventh halachic hour of the day (1:42 PM), one should wait to recite Mussaf until after hearing the shofar.
- Mussaf Amidah for Rosh Hashanah.
- Those who are davening without a minyan are encouraged to study and recite the piyutim that are added to Chazaras HaShatz, particularly ונתנה תוקף.
- Mincha Amidah for Rosh Hashanah. Mincha should be recited before shekiyah (sunset) which is at 6:50 PM.
- Traditionally Tashlich is recited on Rosh Hashanah afternoon (not on Shabbos) next to a body of water. If this cannot be performed with proper social distancing measures, one can recite it any time until Yom Kippur. If it was not done before Yom Kippur, there is still some benefit in reciting it until Hoshana Rabba.

Motzaei Yom Tov/Tzom Gedaliah – September 20 / September 21

- Weekday Amidah should be recited including Atah Chonantanu and the special insertions for Aseres Yemei Teshuva.
- Havdalah consists of two berachos: HaGafen and HaMavdil (no besamim or eish).
- The fast begins at 5:26 AM.