

rosh hashanah 5784

Rosh Hashanah Overview

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This brief overview of Rosh Hashanah laws and customs is not meant to be complete, but will hopefully help you prepare for and enjoy this High Holiday season. Visit ckj.org/rhyk for all KJ High Holy Day details. For personal questions beyond the scope of this article, please visit ckj.org/our-team and contact one of the KJ rabbis.

I. Preparing for Rosh Hashanah

A. Physical and Spiritual Preparation

There are both physical and spiritual preparations for Rosh Hashanah. On the physical side, it is customary to buy a new outfit for the holiday (especially among women) and to eat festive meals with family and friends. Many men get their *tallitot* cleaned at this time. Some men also have the custom of wearing a *kittel*, a special white robe, on this holiday. Wearing white shows our hope and confidence that our sins will be 'whitened' back to innocence again. On the spiritual side, preparations should fit into 3 categories:

1. **Teshuvah** (repentance) – We think back over the errors, transgressions and rebellions we committed this year and repent for them. Formal repentance can be summarized by the "Three R's": **R**ecognition—articulating our sins (making a list can be helpful), **R**egret—feeling sorry that we have done them, and **R**esolve—affirming that we will not repeat them. For sins that had an impact upon other people, asking their forgiveness is required first.

2. **Tefillah** (prayer) – We spend most of Yom Kippur day in prayer, taking stock of our behavior over the past year and resolving to be our best selves in the New Year.

3. **Tzedakah** (charity) – Giving tzedaka is encouraged at this time of year as an act of redemption. This is why many synagogues have Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur appeals. These three actions are said to "nullify the harshness of the decree," or to be the most effective ways of asking God for a good year to come.

B. Selichot (penitential prayers) and Shofar

Selichot are recited once each day (usually late at night or early in the morning) on the four days before Rosh Hashanah and every weekday until Yom Kippur. They involve the invocation of God's 13 attributes of mercy.

During the month preceding Rosh Hashanah, the shofar is blown each morning to remind us that the holiday is approaching. Erev Rosh Hashanah, it is not blown, in order to separate between the shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah and those of before.

C. Hatarat Nedarim (Release of Vows)

It is customary to convene a Jewish court (*bet din*) on the day before Rosh Hashanah to release us from any unfulfilled vows we might have made this year. The court can be made up of any three Jewish men, who sit, while the petitioner stands before them and asks for a pardon for any eligible offenses. A husband, upon request, can ask for release for his wife's vows. If it is not done before Rosh Hashanah, one can still do it during the 10 days of repentance.

D. Mikveh

It is customary for men to go to the mikveh (a ritual pool) on the day before Rosh Hashanah and the day before Yom Kippur. This is done so that one can enter Rosh Hashanah in a higher state of purity and is usually done in the early afternoon. There are several mikvaot in Manhattan that open especially for this purpose. One should bring his own towel and should shower before entering the mikveh. Some have the custom of completely immersing once, some 3 times and some 7 times.

For Manhattan mikveh information, visit ckj.org/jewishues.

II. Rosh Hashanah Laws & Customs

A. Rosh Hashanah Greetings

Following the evening services on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to greet each individual person with the following special formula:

For men: *"l'shanah tova tikateiv v'teichateim"*

For women: *"l'shanah tova tikateivi v'teichateimi"*

It means: For a good year, may you be written and inscribed.

Other greetings often heard during this holiday season are:

- a) ketiva vachatima tova (sometimes said as: kesiva vachasima tova)
- b) may you have a good "gebencht yor" (Yiddish)
- c) shanah tova u'metuka – a good and sweet year

B. Rosh Hashanah Candle Lighting

The Rosh Hashanah candle lighting is the same as the regular festival candle lighting. Unlike Shabbat, one should first recite the blessing, then light the candles. Single men who are financially independent and do not live at home should light candles as well. Women should recite the *sheh-hechyanu* blessing at this time. [Men recite it during kiddush; women respond *amen* at that time.]

The Rosh Hashanah kiddush is similar to the festival kiddush. Men recite the *Sheh'hechyanu* blessing at this time. It is also customary at this time to bless one's children.

NOTE: One may carry on Yom Tov (if an item is needed for that day) without an eruv. This is different than Shabbat.

C. Simanei Milta (Symbolic Foods)

It is customary to eat special foods on the first night of Rosh Hashanah:

- a) After kiddush and hand washing, many have the custom to use special round *challah* rolls and to dip them in (or squeeze onto them) some honey.
- b) After the *challah*, many have the custom of dipping an apple in honey and saying the following blessing before eating: *Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-Olam, borei p'ri ha-etz* (on the apple)

After eating the apple and honey, one says: *Yehi ratzon milfanecha, Adonai Eloheinu vei'lohei avoteinu, she'te'chadeish aleinu shanahtova u'metuka.*

May it be your will, O God, the God of our forefathers, that You renew upon us a good and sweet year.

- c) Other foods eaten include carrots, leeks, beets, dates and pomegranates. A special statement accompanies each food. The Hebrew names of other foods symbolize that we should prevail over our enemies this year.

SECOND NIGHT: It is customary to eat a new fruit – one you have not eaten for a year – on the second night of Rosh Hashanah. The actual point of the custom is to find a reason

to say the *"sheh-hechyanu"* blessing, so any new item that brings joy to your family (like that new outfit) will do. (*baruch ata adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, she-hechyanu, v'kiymanu, v'higiyanu laz'man ha-zeh*)

D. Rosh Hashanah Prayer Insertions

The Rosh Hashanah prayers are similar to Shabbat and holiday prayers but are longer and include some special insertions.

i. *Four insertions in the amidah* – Before the first two and last two blessings of the silent devotion, short requests to be remembered and written for a good life this coming year are inserted. These are recited quietly in the silent *amidah* and aloud by the congregation (followed by the chazzan) during the repetition.

ii. In addition to this, the blessing *"ha'eil ha-kadosh"* is changed to *"ha-melech ha-kadosh"* from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur. At the end of the kaddish, *"oseh HA-shalom"* is said instead of *Oseh Shalom*.

iii. *Avinu Malkeinu* – "our father, one king" is famous for the melody of its closing line. Nine lines in the middle are recited responsively. This prayer is recited following the *amidah* in each service.

iv. *Shir ha'ma'alot* – Psalm 130 ("From the depths, I called out to You") is inserted in the service preceding barchu on Rosh Hashanah and all the 10 days of repentance.

v. Torah Reading – The Torah reading for the first day is the story of Sarah giving birth to Yitzchak (Isaac) in Genesis 21; Hashem decided this on Rosh Hashanah. The second day reading is the binding of Isaac, which resulted in the sacrifice of a ram trapped by its horn.

vi. Rosh Hashanah *Mussaf* – in the *mussaf* prayer, three special sections are added that define the essence of the Rosh Hashanah day:

- *Malchiyot* – recognizing and affirming God as our king
- *Zichronot* – asking God to remember us this year for the good
- *Shofarot* – asking for God's presence and revelation to be restored to us.

The shofar is blown at the conclusion of each section.

vii. Special poems – Certain special poetic prayers are inserted into the prayer service in honor of the day. These include:

- *U'netaneh Tokef* – the stirring call to repentance written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz on his deathbed.
- *V'chol Ma'aminim* – a rousing song in which we say that the Jews are and have always been *"ma'aminim,"* believers.

• *Hayom Tamtzeinu* – the jubilant finale of the mussaf service, in which we ask God to accept our prayers.

viii. Blessing of the Kohanim – This is said in the Diaspora by Ashkenazic Jews only on the festival days.

ix. Psalm 27 (L'David, Hashem Ori) is recited in the morning and night or each day throughout the month of Elul and the holiday season, including Sukkot.

E. Shofar

This year, the first day of the holiday falls on Shabbat. Therefore, the shofar will only be blown on the second day of the holiday, Sunday, Sept 17.

Hearing the shofar is a Biblical commandment on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. The most important shofar blasts are blown immediately preceding mussaf. Thirty individual blasts are blown at this time. During the course of the service, 70 more blasts are blown (30 during the repetition and 40 at the end of the service) to make a grand total of 100 sounds. One should hear the 100 shofar blasts (without interruption) both days of Rosh Hashanah. One who is unable to hear all 100 should make sure to at least hear the first 30.

The shofar makes three kinds of sounds:

Tekiah _____ (1)
Shevarim _____ (3)
Teru'ah - - - - - (9)

There are three kinds of shofar series:

1: _____
2: _____
3: _____

This totals 12 blasts. When repeated three times, it equals 30.

F. Tashlich and Not Sleeping on the First Day

Following services, kiddush is recited and a festive meal is eaten. Some have the custom not to sleep on the afternoon of the first day, so as not to have a *farshluffener* (sleepy) year.

The Tashlich service is performed in the afternoon at a local body of water. A special private prayer is recited in which we ask God to cast our sins “into the depths of the sea.” Some have the custom of throwing bread into the water.

This year, Tashlich is only done on the second day. If one is unable to do Tashlich on Rosh Hashanah, it may be done during the Ten Days of Repentance. Our community gathers on September 17 at Turtle Pond in Central Park and at Carl Schurz Park near the East River at 86th Street.

III. After Rosh Hashanah; The Ten Days Of Repentance

Including Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, there are ten days in the High Holiday season.

It is customary to be particularly careful during these days and to be more scrupulous than usual in keeping kosher and Shabbat, praying, giving *tzedakah* and being kind to others. It is customary to ask forgiveness from others during these days.

A. Shabbat Shuva

The Shabbat in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known as “The Shabbat of Return.” It is customary in many communities for rabbis to give special *d'rashot* (sermons) on these days to exhort people to go into Yom Kippur in the right frame of mind.

B. Fast of Gedaliah, September 18 (begins 5:27 am, ends 7:31 pm)

The Fast of Gedaliah is the day after Rosh Hashanah (3rd of Tishrei). It commemorates the assassination of Gedaliah (the leader of the Jewish community after the First Temple was destroyed) which resulted in the remainder of the Jews being exiled from Jerusalem. The fast goes from dawn until sunset.

RKJ *holydays*

WISHING YOU A SHANAH
TOVAH U'METUKAH!