



A GUIDE FOR THE
High Holy Days
2025/5786

Guide to the High Holy Days

Elul

The month of preparation

The month of Elul is dedicated to preparing ourselves for the upcoming holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

During Elul, we should analyze all that we have done during the past year: Are we nicer people? Are we properly committed to the service of God and that which the Torah requires? Have we improved at all? If we have improved, then we know we are on the right track. During Elul, we should work on ways we can further improve ourselves. If we have not improved, then we have our work cut out for us. Elul is a time to plot our course, our game plan, for the upcoming year. It is a time for repentance (Teshuvah) and introspection (Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh).

Ways to Prepare:

Say Psalm 27 each day: Psalm of David.

The Lord is my light and my help;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the strength of my life,
whom shall I dread?

When evildoers draw near to slander me,
when foes threaten, they stumble and fall.

Though armies be arrayed against me,
I will have no fear.
Though wars threaten,
I remain steadfast in my faith.

One thing I ask of the Lord,
for this I yearn:
To dwell in the House of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold God's beauty,
to pray in God's sanctuary.

God will hide me in His shrine,
safe from peril.
God will shelter me beyond the reach of disaster.

God will raise my head high above my enemies.
I will bring God offerings with shouts of joy, singing,
chanting praise to the Lord.

O Lord, hear my voice when I call;
be gracious to me and answer.

It is you that I seek, says my heart.
It is Your Presence that I seek, O Lord.

Hide not from me,
reject not Your servant.
You have always been my help,
do not abandon me.
Forsake me not, my God of deliverance.

Though my father and mother leave me,
the Lord will care for me.

Teach me Your way, O Lord;
guide me on the right path,
to confound my oppressors.

Abandon me not to the will of my foes.
False witnesses have arisen against me,
people who breathe lies.

Mine is the faith that I surely shall see the Lord's
goodness in the land of the living.
Hope in the Lord and be strong.
Take courage, hope in the Lord.

Hear the Sounds of The *Shofar*

Throughout the month of Elul, it is customary to sound the *shofar* each weekday morning. The *shofar* serves as a spiritual wake-up call, encouraging us to reflect, renew, and prepare for the upcoming High Holy Days.

Seek Forgiveness

Begin the formal High Holy Day season by learning and worshiping with us at our beautiful *Selichot* (Penitential Prayers) service

Sit down and spend some time with your family. Do an accounting with your spouse of the year just passed. Share honestly the gratifying experiences and the shortcomings. Examine your resources together that can be used to alleviate any shortcomings in the coming New Year. This can also be a time for parents and children to render their accounts as well.

Spend a few minutes each day during Elul to be alone with yourself. A few minutes for introspection, a few minutes each day to be, to think, to dream.

Take Time to Remember

Visit the graves of your loved ones. By going to the graves of our loved ones, we commune with those who were our first teachers and our first guides. When we stand there, we realize that we too are mortal, and that therefore, we need to make an accounting of what we are doing with our days and what we want to be remembered for when our time comes.

For those not able to visit the graves of loved ones, we offer a "Time for Memorial" on Monday, September 29, from 8:30 am – 6:00 pm in our Hollander Family Chapel.

Rosh Hashanah

"In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a holy day; you shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded." (Numbers 29:1)

Rosh Hashanah, which begins on the first of the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*, marks the beginning of a New Year. The Torah designates the first of *Tishrei* as a day of "memorial, proclaimed with the blast of horns." (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1) For Jews, the sound of the *Shofar* became a multi-faceted symbol recalling past events, looking to the Messianic future, proclaiming divine summons to examine our hearts, and to plead our case before the Eternal Judge.

Rabbinic tradition identifies *Rosh Hashanah* as *Yom Hadin*, Judgment Day, where God sits in judgment of the world and each individual. The image of God as judge, about to inscribe human beings according to their deeds into the Book of Life, underscores the Jewish concept of human beings having free-will and responsible for the choices they make.

The Mitzvot of Teshuvah, Tefillah, and Tzedakah

Teshuvah

According to Maimonides there are three major steps in repentance:

1. Recognition and confession of wrongdoing. This is the primary step. It is not enough merely to recognize sin; it must be admitted, i.e., articulated. Once the basic act of confession is done, God forgives even without being asked formally to do so. Once the admission is made, the rest is easier. The Talmud suggests that once the sinner takes the step of confession, there is divine help in the process of regeneration... "My children give me an opening of repentance no bigger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages will pass." (Song of Songs Rabbah, 5.2)

2. Regret at having done the evil so that one rejects it. In his classic work, *Sha'arei Teshuva* (Gates of Repentance), Rabbeinu Yonah (13th Century Spain) explains that, "true repentance is...to feel that sorrow in one's soul for the sins which one transgressed." Refraining from transgressions without feeling bad about what one did is very far from repentance.

3. A commitment not to repeat the wrongdoing. This is crucial to the integrity of the turning. Repentance is not momentary recoil or tiring but a basic turning to a new way of life and behavior.

Tefillah

It is a *mitzvah* to join the congregation in worship on Rosh Hashanah. As members of the Jewish people, we have personal and communal responsibilities.

Participation in congregational worship is one such communal obligation, but our attendance at services goes beyond obligation. The public celebration of Rosh Hashanah through prayer, song and Torah study is the heart of the Rosh Hashanah experience. Rosh Hashanah worship draws us into the circle of community, strengthening our ties to one another and to our historical values.

Tzedakah

It is always a *mitzvah* to give *tzedakah*, but on Rosh Hashanah, this deed takes on added significance. Through direct aid to the needy, and through aid to synagogues and other institutions, which support the spiritual and cultural life of the Jewish community, we exemplify our obligations as human beings to share the bounty of the earth with others.

The Shofar

The Torah does not refer to Rosh Hashanah by the name Rosh Hashanah, nor even as the Day of Judgment, rather it continually refers to this holiday as a day on which we sound the Shofar (Yom Teruah). The Shofar is a curved animal horn, traditionally a ram's horn, which evokes the memory of the binding and sacrifice of Isaac (in the end, a ram was substituted).

The primary meaning of the Shofar blast is the theme of coronation a symbolic declaration of faith in God as ruler of the world. "The Lord ascends (His throne) amidst a loud sound. God (rises) amidst the sound of the Shofar." (Psalm 47.6)

The other major meaning in the Shofar is its function as an alarm - to awaken people to repentance, in the eleventh hour. "Wake up from your deep sleep, you who are fast asleep, search your deeds and repent; remember your Creator...examine your souls, mend your ways and deeds. Let everyone give up his evil way and bad purposes." (Maimonides)

There are three variations in the call representing these two themes:

1. **Tekiah:** One long, straight, smooth coronation blast interpreted as the sound of joy, hope and trust in future redemption.
2. **Shevarim:** Three broken, groaning sounds reflecting a mood of awe.
3. **Teruah:** Nine short, broken, frantic blasts, the sound of awe, fear and trembling at the imminence of the trial and God's judgment. (To capture the mood of alarm and awe, some Jews blew the broken sound as moans - shevarim; others as a highpitched blasting wail - teruah; and some blew both together.)

In sounding the shofar both themes are combined in balance. The tekiah is of equal length to the shevarim or the teruah. When shevarimteruah are blown together, the length of the tekiah is extended. After the Temple destruction, Rabbi Abahu of Caesarea established our pattern of blowing all three sounds to reflect the views of all the traditions, i.e., to capture the experiences of all. Thus the shofar sounds also point to the unity and pluralism of the Jewish people.

Home Rituals for Rosh Hashanah

On the eve of the holiday, we recite the festival candle blessing and kiddush. We pronounce the motzi prayer as usual, but traditionally over a round challah. Finally, just before beginning the Rosh Hashanah meal, we customarily eat challah or apples dipped in honey. (***Blessings found on last page.***)

There are many explanations for why we use a round challah. Some people see the round shape as reflecting the continuing cycle of years and seasons. The most common interpretation, however, is that the challah resembles a crown, thus symbolizing the kingship of God. At a time of the year when our thoughts turn to repentance and resolution of self-improvement, the round challah reminds the Jew that God is central to our people and to our faith.

Apples and Honey

It is customary to dip a piece of apple in honey and to eat it after reciting the appropriate blessing. The apple and honey symbolize the hope for a good and sweet year.

Greetings on Rosh Hashanah

It is a time-honored tradition to greet friends and neighbors during the Days of Awe (Rosh Hashanah & Aseret Y'mai Teshuvah), by expressing the wish that they be blessed with a good year. In keeping with Rabbinic tradition that God sits in judgment upon us ready to inscribe us in the Book of Life, the traditional words of blessing are: *L'shanah tovah tikateivu* - "May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a good year."

Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

The ten-day period from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur is known as Aseret Y'mei Teshuvah, the Ten Days of Repentance. On Rosh Hashanah, the Jew takes the first steps towards atonement. But this initial recognition of sin with its accompanying remorse requires further steps to complete the process of repentance. Activities during this period

should be directed toward the sacred goal of reconciliation with both God and other human beings. Jewish tradition teaches that Yom Kippur makes atonement only for those sins that we commit against God, but it does not atone for those sins that we commit against other human beings unless we first attempt to make amends and seek their forgiveness.

The mood of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur permeates these days. A high point during this period is *Shabbat Shuvah*, the Sabbath of Return. Turning toward God and toward other people is the purpose of these days.

Yom Kippur

“Mark, the tenth day of this seventh month...it shall be a sacred occasion for you...For it is a Day of Atonement, on which expiation is made on your behalf before the Lord your God. Do no work whatever; it is a law for all time, throughout the ages in all your settlements. It shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for you and you shall practice self-denial; on the ninth day of the month at evening from evening to evening, you shall observe this your Sabbath.” (Leviticus 23:27-28, 31-32)

“For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before God.” (Leviticus 16: 30-31)

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, occurs on the tenth of Tishrei. It is the culmination of the Ten Days of Repentance. It alone of all the Jewish holidays is the equivalent of Shabbat in sanctity. Its mood is reflective and introspective - a day devoted totally to self-examination, confession and atonement. Yom Kippur provides us with the opportunity to alter our conduct, adjust our values and set things right in our lives. The day demands absolute honesty as we confess our wrongdoings: “We have sinned, we have transgressed, we have done perversely.” The grandeur of the liturgy and music adds to the drama and seriousness of the day. From *Kol Nidre*, the eve of Yom Kippur, to the last triumphant note of the *Shofar* at *Neilah* (the concluding service of Yom Kippur), its purpose is to move us toward reconciliation with God and our fellow human beings. Primary among the mitzvot leading to atonement is fasting. The Torah commands us to practice “selfdenial” on this day three different times, and the threefold repetition of this mitzvah has suggested three reasons for fasting...

1. Judaism calls for self-discipline. When we control our appetites on Yom Kippur, we remember that on other days, too, we can be masters, not slaves, of our desires.
2. Judaism calls for empathy. When we consciously experience hunger, we are more likely to consider millions who need no Yom Kippur in order to suffer hunger. For some, most days are days without food enough for themselves and their children.
3. Judaism calls for penitence. The confession we make with our lips is a beginning. The penance we inflict upon our bodies through fasting, leads us along further still toward the acknowledgment that we have sinned against ourselves and others.

Yom Kippur is a day of concentration on the past so that the future may be better for us as individuals, better for us as a community, and better for us as part of the human community. Despite its solemnity, Yom Kippur is also a day of joy, when the truly penitent person begins gradually to feel at one with God and humankind. Reconciliation is the goal of the day's prayers and fast.

Preparing for Yom Kippur

There are some things that should be done before the last meal preceding Yom Kippur. For example, it is a basic Jewish teaching that Yom Kippur does not atone for wrongs committed against other people, but only for transgressions against God. It therefore has become customary for Jews to seek out friends and relatives whom they have wronged during the year and to personally ask for their forgiveness before Yom Kippur begins. The person asked for forgiveness must forgive, and thus Yom Kippur serves as a healing function in the community. Yom Kippur is a time when all families should be at peace. Life is too short to indulge in petty arguments or to harbor grudges. Yom Kippur gives us a yearly opportunity to put aside past hurts and to make a new beginning.

When the Erev Yom Kippur meal is completed, the family departs for services - an experience unlike any other in the Jewish year. Upon arriving at the synagogue on Erev Yom Kippur, one immediately senses a special and unique atmosphere. It is *Kol Nidre* night, the holiest time of the Jewish year.

The Kol Nidre Service

Kol Nidre means "all vows," and is the name given to the special liturgical formulation chanted by Jews only on Yom Kippur. It is not actually a prayer; in fact, *Kol Nidre* does not even mention God. It is an ancient legal formula for the annulment of vows, which enables Jews to begin the New Year with a clean slate.

Fasting

Fasting was originally seen as fulfilling the biblical commandment to, "practice self-denial." Midrashic writings also stress fasting as a historical reminder of Israel's repentance for the incident of the golden calf. More importantly, however, the Yom Kippur fast enables us, for at least one day each year, to ignore our physical desires and instead stress our spiritual needs. We concentrate on prayer, repentance and self-improvement before returning to our usual daily routine.

According to tradition, all able-bodied souls from age thirteen must fast. It was, and is, the custom in many communities to encourage even younger children to begin fasting for several hours each year, so as to prepare them for full participation in the holiday when the proper time arrives. The traditional fast encompasses a full twenty-four-hour period, beginning after the Erev Yom Kippur meal and extending to the following evening. No eating or drinking is permitted; exception may be made for medical reasons.

Kindling Yom Kippur Lights

It is a mitzvah to light and recite the appropriate blessings over the Yom Kippur lights after the meal (Unlike Shabbat and the other festivals, on Yom Kippur the candles are lit after the meal because the lighting of the candles marks the formal beginning of Yom Kippur and therefore the beginning of the fast.) and before leaving for the synagogue. ***(Blessing found on last page.)***

Children and the High Holy Days

Perplexingly, the most important days in the Jewish year are not child-centered; and in fact they are not experiences, which easily invite children's participation. As educators and parents, we must do our best to make Rosh Hashanah into a celebration of apples and honey, and to make Yom Kippur into the great ritual of, "I'm Sorry." We need to expose the parts of the observance that have the potential to speak directly to our young. We strive to structure their participation in a limited way in order to set the pattern for later development. However, in truth, the Days of Awe are adult experiences, filled with seriousness, maturity and complexity. Despite this, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur offer us two important interrelated insights to share with our children - insights that can help to shape the way they grow and develop.

The first lesson: No matter what has gone before, we can always make a new beginning. While we have to take responsibility for what has already happened, we can always start again to make things better. That is the essence of Rosh Hashanah.

The second lesson: A person is always responsible for what he or she does. When we make a mistake, when we miss the mark, we have to do more than feel sorry. We have to do our best to correct the hurt we caused another person, and do our best to see to it that we never do the same thing again. This is *teshuvah* (repentance), the action demanded by Yom Kippur.

Greetings on Yom Kippur

In Rabbinic tradition, Yom Kippur is seen as the time in which God, having written us in the Book of Life, now formally seals us in the Book of Life. It is therefore traditional to greet friends on Yom Kippur with the blessing: *G'mar chatimah tovah* - "May you be sealed (in the Book of Life) for Good. Some also say: *G'mar tov* - "A Good seal.

BLESSINGS & PRAYERS

Rosh Hashanah

Candle Lighting

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצננו להדליק נר של (שבת ושל) יום טוב.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel) Yom Tov.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who sanctifies us through the Mitzvot, commanding us to kindle the lights of (Shabbat and) Yom Tov.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, melech ha-olam, shehecheyanu v'kiyemanu v'higiyanu la-z'man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has kept us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season.

Kiddush

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, בורא פרי הגפן.
ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר בחר בנו מכל עם ורוממנו מכל לשון, וקדשנו במצותיו. ותתן לנו יי אלהינו באהבה את יום (השבת הזה ואת יום) הזכרון הזה, יום תרועה מקרא לדש, זכר ליציאת מצרים. כי בנו בחרת ואותנו קדשת מכל העמים, ודברך אמת ולקים לעד. ברוך אתה יי, מלך על כל הארץ, מקדש (השבת ו) ישראל ויום הזכרון.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melech ha'olam, asher bachar banu mikol am v'rom'manu mikol lashon, v'kid'shanu b'mitz'votav. Vatiten lanu Adonai Eloheinu, b'ahavah et yom (hashabat hazeh v'et yom) hazikaron hazeh, yom t'ru'ah mik'ra kodesh, zeicher litzi'at mitz'rayim. Ki vanu vachar'ta v'otanu kidash'ta mikol ha'amim, ud'var'kha emet v'kayam la'ad. Baruch atah Adonai, melech al kol ha'aretz, m'kadeish (hashabat v') yisra'eil v'yom hazikaron.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has chosen and distinguished us by sanctifying our lives with the commandments. With love, Adonai our God, You have bestowed upon us (this Shabbat day and) this Day of Remembrance, a day for sounding the shofar, a day for holy assembly and for recalling the Exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us, sanctifying us among all people, and Your faithful word endures forever. Blessed are You Adonai, Sovereign over all the earth, who sanctifies (the Shabbat and) Israel and the Day of Remembrance.

Motzi

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe who brings forth bread from the earth.

Apples & Honey

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו: מלך העולם, בורא פרי העץ.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam borei p'ri ha-etz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

יהי רצון מלפניך, יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, שתחדש עלינו שנה טובה ומתוקה.

Ye'hi ratzon mil'fanecha, Adonai Eloheinu v'lohei avoteinu, shet'chadeish aleinu shana tova u'metuka.

May it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our people, that the new year be good and sweet for us.

Yom Kippur

Candle Lighting

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של (שבת ושל) יום הכפורים.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel) Yom HaKippurim.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who sanctifies us through the Mitzvot, commanding us to kindle the lights of (Shabbat and) Yom Tov.

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Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has kept us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season.

Sources include the Jewish Book of Why, Gates of Repentance, Gates of the Seasons and the Jewish Catalog.

Congregation B'nai Israel is a thriving center for the spiritual lives of over 1,000 families, Congregation B'nai Israel is a Reform Jewish synagogue with a deep rooted history of more than 40 years. Our mission is to develop a community that has a love for and pride in being Jewish, a positive Jewish identity and a strong understanding and application of Jewish ethics, history, practices and spirituality. Knowledge and appreciation of the Hebrew language, kinship with Israel and the motivation to pursue lifelong Jewish learning is gained through our numerous services and programs. Yet, most importantly, it is the foundation gained in one's personal relationship with God.