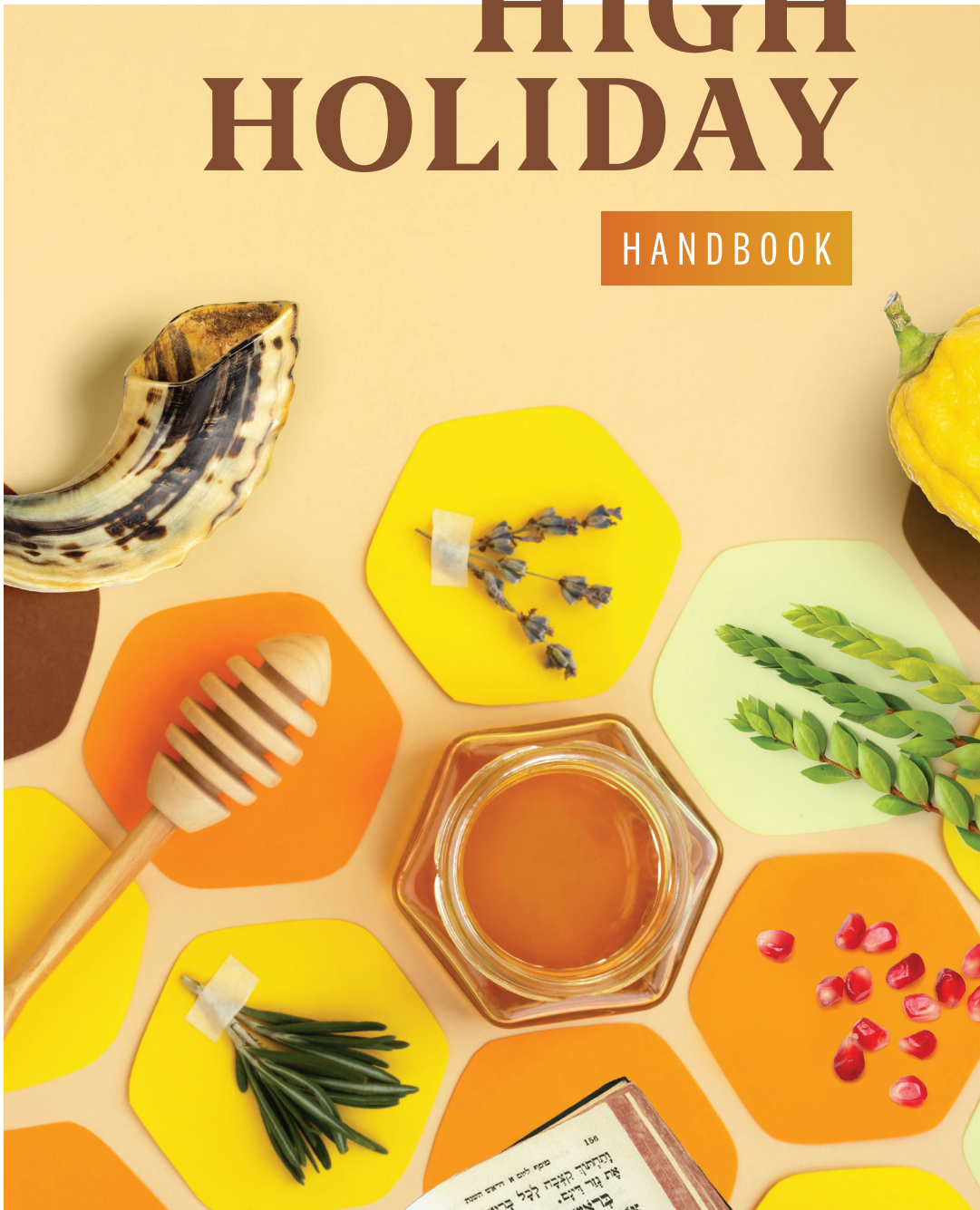


# HIGH HOLIDAY

HANDBOOK



JEWISH LIFE AT VCU



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# The Month of Tishrei

“The month of Tishrei is saturated with holiday-related mitzvah opportunities.”

Midrash, *Yalkut Shimoni*, Emor 645

The Jewish New Year is approaching. Rosh Hashanah, which begins the evening of **Friday, September 18**, will inaugurate the Jewish calendar year of 5781.

The Torah (Leviticus 23:24) characterizes Rosh Hashanah as the first day of the seventh month. (The counting of Jewish months begins with Nisan). The Hebrew word for “seventh,” *shevi'i*, shares the same root as the word *sova*, which means satiation. Indeed, we are satiated this month with physical and spiritual goodness: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Atseret, and Simchat Torah. This plethora of auspicious dates provides a full range of experiences that allows us to stockpile the physical and spiritual energy to live productively throughout the coming year.

The etymology of *shevi'i* is also related to the Hebrew “*shevuah*,” which means “oath.” The Midrash explains that G-d swore to Abraham that He would forgive and be merciful to Abraham’s descendants during this month. Indeed, our sages note that the word Tishrei, the Hebrew name of

this month, means “release,” indicating that G-d releases, acquits, and atones for the failings of His people.

This year, many Jews around the globe will celebrate the holidays differently from previous years, with many being unable to participate in synagogue services or other communal events. As you prepare to celebrate these special days in a more personal way, this booklet presents you with some of the most noteworthy teachings about these holidays, along with some practical guidance, geared to delight, inform, and inspire, and thus enhance your holiday experience.

Globally, humanity is very much in need of a release from the hazards and hardships of the past year and the initiation of blessing and renaissance. Indeed, let us pray that 5781 be marked by health and happiness, and that we all be inscribed for a good and sweet new year.

With wishes for a meaningful and joyous holiday experience,

***Rabbi Matisyahu and Chana Rivka Friedman***

# Tishrei Holidays 5781

September 19–October 11, 2020

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SHABBAT
<b>20</b> 2 Tishrei	<b>21</b> 3 Tishrei	<b>22</b> 4 Tishrei	<b>23</b> 5 Tishrei	<b>24</b> 6 Tishrei	<b>18 Sept.</b> 29 Elul <b>ii</b> at 6:54 PM	<b>19</b> 1 Tishrei <b>Rosh Hashanah</b> <b>ii</b> after 7:49 PM
<b>Rosh Hashanah</b> Holiday ends 7:48 PM					<b>ii</b> at 6:43 PM	<b>26</b> 8 Tishrei Shabbat ends 7:38 PM
<b>27</b> 9 Tishrei	<b>28</b> 10 Tishrei	<b>29</b> 11 Tishrei	<b>30</b> 12 Tishrei	<b>1 Oct.</b> 13 Tishrei	<b>2</b> 14 Tishrei	<b>3</b> 15 Tishrei
<b>ii</b> and fast begins at 6:40 PM	<b>Yom Kippur</b> Fast ends 7:35 PM				<b>ii</b> at 6:33 PM	<b>Sukkot</b> <b>ii</b> after 7:28 PM
<b>4</b> 16 Tishrei	<b>5</b> 17 Tishrei	<b>6</b> 18 Tishrei	<b>7</b> 19 Tishrei	<b>8</b> 20 Tishrei	<b>9</b> 21 Tishrei	<b>10</b> 22 Tishrei
<b>Sukkot</b> Holiday ends 7:26 PM	<b>Chol Hamoed</b>	<b>Chol Hamoed</b>	<b>Chol Hamoed</b>	<b>Chol Hamoed</b>	<b>Hoshana Rabah</b> <b>ii</b> at 6:22 PM	<b>Shemini Atzeret</b> <b>ii</b> after 7:18 PM
<b>11</b> 23 Tishrei						
<b>Simchat Torah</b> Holiday ends 7:16 PM						

Times for Richmond, Virginia

## Introduction

“Adam and Chavah were created on Rosh Hashanah. . . . On that day they transgressed, and on that very same day they were forgiven.”

Midrash, *Vayikra Rabah* 29:1

Rosh Hashanah marks the creation of Adam and Chavah, the beginning of the human story. The *Zohar* (1:221b) relates that upon being created, Adam said to the various creatures around him, “Join me in accepting G-d as our king.” On this anniversary each year, we reenact this bid for transcendence by rededicating ourselves to the principle that G-d created us in His image and tasked us with the noble mission of partnering with Him to perfect His creation.

It is noteworthy that Rosh Hashanah marks the birth of humankind rather than the beginning of Creation. It is true that “G-d saw *all* that He had made and behold it was very good” (Genesis 1:31), but nothing in existence could reach its ultimate potential without the crowning presence of the human being. The same applies, in a microcosmic sense, to our own lives. There are many different facets that make up the narratives of our lives: family, friends, career, hobbies, and so forth; but Rosh Hashanah reminds us that what’s truly worthy of celebration is the part of us that is uniquely human—namely, the drive to live a more meaningful and mission-oriented life. It is this that suffuses all the other elements of our existence with enduring value.

The opening chapters of Genesis famously describe how Adam and Chavah were

unsuccessful in adhering to the task given to them by G-d. The Midrash notes that they committed their transgression on the very first day of their existence. It states further that G-d extended forgiveness to them on that very same day. We tap into the unique possibilities of forgiveness that are embedded in this day by celebrating Rosh Hashanah in a spirit of repentance and renewal.

Rosh Hashanah is not celebrated in (or toward) the middle of the lunar month, when a full moon is on display in the sky; it is on the first day of the lunar month, when the new moon is not yet visible. This theme of invisibility reflects how this special holiday carries the potential to render imperceptible any spiritual blemish that may have attached to our souls.

Every Jewish holiday has its special mitzvah deserving of special attention. The primary mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah is to hear the sound of the shofar. This mitzvah prompts us to consider the primary themes of this day, as will be explained on pages 22-23. As you prepare to celebrate Rosh Hashanah this year, be sure to include in your plan to **hear the shofar in person on Sunday, September 20**, the second day of the holiday. (This year, the shofar is not sounded on the first day of Rosh Hashanah because it falls on Shabbat.) Every effort should be made to fulfill this special mitzvah.








# Rosh Hashanah Foods

“Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks. . . .  
Your joy on this day will give you strength.”

Nehemiah 8:10

We celebrate Rosh Hashanah with a number of lavish meals. The traditional meal begins with Kiddush over wine and includes challah, a fish course, and a meat or chicken course. Fish and meat commonly and cross-culturally provide pleasure and are conducive to happiness, which are crucial on the holiday; if these don't bring you pleasure and joy, feel free to design a different menu.

The meal served on the first night of Rosh Hashanah features a rich tradition of foods imbued with symbolic meaning. Here are some famous examples:

	FOOD	SYMBOLIZING OUR WISH . . .
	<b>ROUND CHALLAH</b>	for a year in which blessings continue without end.
	<b>APPLE DIPPED IN HONEY</b>	for a sweet new year.
	<b>POMEGRANATE</b>	that our merits be numerous as the seeds in a pomegranate.
	<b>HEAD OF A FISH</b>	that we be a head, not a tail.
	<b>CARROT</b>	to multiply. (The Yiddish for carrots is <i>merin</i> , which also means “to multiply.”)
	<b>BEET</b>	that our foes be removed. (The Aramaic word for beets is <i>silka</i> , which also means “to remove.”)
	<b>SQUASH</b>	that our merits be read and noticed. (The Hebrew word for squash is <i>kara</i> , which also means “to be read aloud.”)

It is also customary to eat a new fruit—that is, a fruit you have not yet enjoyed since it came into season—for the second night of Rosh Hashanah, as this enables the recitation of the Shehecheyanu blessing on that night (see page 19). Use this opportunity to check out the exotic fruit section at your local supermarket, and try to find something new.

# New Year's Apple Salad

By Shifra Klein *Fleishigs Magazine* [www.fleishigs.com](http://www.fleishigs.com)

**4 cups baby arugula**

**1 Granny Smith apple**  
*thinly sliced*

**1 Fuji or Honeycrisp apple**  
*thinly sliced*

**3 stalks celery**  
*peeled and sliced into thin strips*

**1 small red onion**  
*thinly sliced*

**1/3 cup green pumpkin seeds**

**1/3 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice**

**1/4 cup olive oil**

**2 Tbsp honey**

**1 tsp Dijon mustard**

**1/2 tsp pumpkin pie spice**

**1/2 tsp kosher salt**

**1/2 cup pomegranate seeds**  
*for garnish*

This salad truly delivers all of the elements that an excellent salad is known for: sweet, savory, crispy and crunchy while simultaneously bringing the flavors of the Jewish New Year onto a plate. Showcasing the salad on a platter versus tossed in a bowl allows all of the ingredients to shine.

Peeling the outer layer of the celery completely transforms this underrated vegetable. By removing the fibrous outer layer, you are left with a refreshing crunchy bite.

Combine arugula, apples, celery, and red onion on a serving platter.

Top with pumpkin seeds.

Whisk together lemon juice, oil, honey, Dijon mustard, pumpkin pie spice, and salt and drizzle over the salad.

Garnish with pomegranate seeds.

Tip: Mason jars are the perfect vessel for preparing and storing homemade salad dressings. Combine ingredients, cover with a lid and shake.



SERVES 8

PAREVE

PRE-YOM KIPPUR RECIPE

# Lekach— Honey Cake

By Chanie Apfelbaum *Reprinted with permission from [www.busyinbrooklyn.com](http://www.busyinbrooklyn.com)*

**4 eggs**  
**2 cups sugar**  
**1 cup canola oil**  
**2 cups honey**  
**2 cups self rising flour** (*see tip*)  
**2 cups regular flour**  
**2 Tbsp cocoa**  
**1 tsp cinnamon**  
**1 tsp baking soda**  
**2 cups boiling water**

Preheat oven to 350°F. Beat eggs and sugar until creamy. Add oil and honey and beat until incorporated. In a separate bowl, mix flours, cocoa, cinnamon and baking soda. Add wet ingredients and mix well. Pour boiling water into the batter and mix by hand. Pour into greased round pans (see note) and bake for about 50 minutes or until toothpick inserted comes out clean.

Tip: If you don't have self rising flour, add 2 tsp salt + 3 tsp baking powder to a measuring cup, and add flour until you measure 2 cups.

Plan Ahead: This recipe freezes really well. Wrap well with 2 layers of plastic wrap.



2-3 CAKES

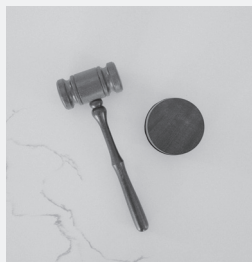
PAREVE

60 MINS.

# 10 Sweet Facts about Rosh Hashanah

## MULTIPLE NEW YEARS

Rosh Hashanah is not the only Jewish new year. There are three more on the Jewish calendar: The first day of Nisan, for monarchial and holiday purposes; the fifteenth day of Shevat, for trees; and the first day of Elul, for the tithing of animals. The Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashanah, explains the function of each of these dates.



## DAY OF JUDGMENT

The Talmud teaches that Rosh Hashanah is the “Day of Judgment.” According to Rabbi Shlomo Efraim Luntshitz (1550–1619), this fact is not stated clearly in the Torah to underscore that we are meant to treat each day as a day of judgment.

## DAYS OF THE WEEK

The way the Jewish calendar is arranged, the first day of Rosh Hashanah cannot fall on Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday. This ensures that Yom Kippur won’t be on a Friday or Sunday (which avoids having two consecutive days when all forms of labor are forbidden), and that the seventh day of Sukkot won’t be on Shabbat (so we can observe the custom of the willow on this day).

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## ANSWERED PRAYERS

The Bible documents how Sarah, Rebecca, and Chanah each struggled for a long time to conceive a child and how their wishes were finally fulfilled. The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 11a) notes that their prayers were answered on Rosh Hashanah.

## SEPHARDIC CUSTOM

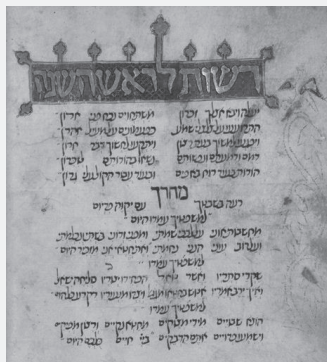
Sephardic communities begin their prayers on Rosh Hashanah eve by reciting a poem composed in Gerona during the thirteenth century called “Ahot Ketanah.” The chorus of this poem, repeated eight times, states: “Bring an end to the year and its curses.” In the final stanza, the chorus changes to: “Begin the new year and its blessings.”

## ETYMOLOGY OF MACHZOR

The word *machzor* means “cycle.” Originally, prayers for all holidays were included in one volume, which was appropriately called *machzor* as it cycled through the prayers of the year. Later, the prayers for each holiday were separated into distinct volumes, but the name *machzor* has endured.

## YEMENITE CUSTOM

In Yemenite communities, the cantor sings a short prayer following the blowing of the shofar, which, in part, reads: “Just as you heard the sound of this shofar, so shall Zerubbabel arrive and sound his great shofar and gather you from the corners of the earth and return you with G-d’s help.” (Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David, led the return from Babylonian captivity and laid the foundation of the Second Temple. His name, therefore, is at times used as a symbol for the Messiah.)



## ANCIENT MACHZOR

*Machzor Catalonia* is a handwritten *machzor* composed on parchment around the year 1280 in Catalonia. It survived the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and was in Berlin on Kristallnacht, in 1938, but was unscathed. It is housed today at the National Library of Israel.

## SANS NAP

Even though napping on Shabbat is a proper way to celebrate the day of rest, the Code of Jewish Law states that on Rosh Hashanah we make a point of *not* napping.

## WORLD RECORD

According to the Guinness World Records, the largest shofar ensemble involved 1,022 participants at an event in Whippany, New Jersey, on Sunday, 21 September 2014, a few days before Rosh Hashanah.



# Shabbat and Holiday Candles

“The holiday is a time of joy, and there cannot be joy without light.”

*Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chayim 263:12*

We usher in the new year by lighting special candles to mark the onset of Rosh Hashanah and Shabbat. These glowing flames generate an atmosphere of reverence that dignifies the day and makes us more sensitive to its prestige and sanctity. We use candles or oil, as this is the time-honored way of performing this ritual, and it links us with our Jewish ancestors from our storied past.

## NOTE

The instructions below apply to candle lighting on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, **Friday night, September 18**. See page 18 for instructions regarding candle lighting on the second night of Rosh Hashanah.

## WHEN?

- There is a common custom to light them eighteen minutes before sunset. This is the candle lighting time that appears on page 5.
- If candles were not lit before this time, they can be lit during the eighteen minutes until sunset but not after that.

## WHO?

- The mitzvah of lighting candles applies to men and women. However, when husband and wife are both home, the longstanding tradition is that the women light the candles for the household.

- The Lubavitcher Rebbe initiated a campaign encouraging every Jewish girl to light her own candle.

## WHAT?

- We use wax candles or oil for this mitzvah. The candles should be long enough, or the oil plentiful enough, to burn until nightfall and, ideally, until after the Rosh Hashanah dinner.
- The mitzvah can technically be fulfilled by lighting a single candle. However, there are various customs regarding the number of candles to light. The established custom is for single girls and women to light one candle, and married women to light (at least) two.
- Many women add an additional candle upon the birth of each child, increasing in light as the family grows.

## WHERE?

- Set the candles on a metal tray in a location that is out of the reach of young children and clear of flammable objects.
- The candles should ideally be visible from the table on which the holiday meal will be eaten, so that those enjoying their meal can benefit from their glow.

## HOW?

- It is customary to light the candles while dressed in clothing that befit the holiday.
- It is appropriate to place some money in a charity box before lighting the candles.
- Light the candle(s).
- Do not extinguish the match, but let it burn down on the metal tray upon which the candles are standing.
- Circle your hands over the flames and toward yourself three times.
- Cover your eyes with your hands and recite two blessings, at right.
- After you recite the blessings, while your eyes are still covered, take a moment to pray silently for whatever your heart desires.
- Open your eyes and say, “Good Shabbos, good *Yom Tov*,” and/or “*Shanah tovah*” to anyone present.

There are different customs regarding the first blessing. The following version is the Chabad custom:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ  
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל יוֹם הַזְכָּרוֹן.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהֵחֵינּוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנָן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu  
melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu  
bemitsvotav, vetsivanu lehadlik ner  
shel Shabbat veshel Yom Hazikaron.*

*Baruch atah Ad-onai, Elo-heinu  
melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu,  
veki'yemanu, vehigi'anu lizman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
King of the Universe, Who  
has sanctified us with His  
commandments, and commanded  
us to kindle the light of Shabbat  
and of the Day of Remembrance.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King  
of the Universe, Who has granted  
us life, sustained us, and enabled  
us to reach this occasion.



# Evening Prayer

“Seek G-d while He can be found’ (Isaiah 55:6).  
This refers to Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the days in between.”

Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 18a

Two general themes pervade the prayers of Rosh Hashanah. One is G-d-centered and includes prayers that allude to our accepting G-d as sovereign. The other is human-centered and includes the prayers in which we ask for our personal needs and to be inscribed for a good year.

At first blush, these two themes seem to contradict each other. And yet, a deeper perspective provides a unifying synthesis. G-d desires to be present and felt in our physical experience. Our souls are moved to beseech G-d for material blessing so that we can fulfill this G-dly desire and make a home for G-d in our world. We might not be conscious of the ultimate meaning of our cravings for success, and we might process them as impulses of natural selfishness. But if we train ourselves to listen, we may start hearing the echoes of the soul’s footprints in our personal requests as well.

The first prayer of Rosh Hashanah is the evening prayer, *arvit* or *maariv*, to be recited on Friday evening, **September 18**. In the *machzor*, this prayer begins on page 23.\* The special Amidah for Rosh Hashanah begins on page 33. The evening prayer concludes on page 44.

\* All references to the *machzor* in the section on Rosh Hashanah are to the *Machzor for Rosh Hashanah with English Translation, Annotated Edition* (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 2003). This *machzor* can be purchased at: [www.tinyurl.com/RHmachzor](http://www.tinyurl.com/RHmachzor)

During the Amidah, we inaugurate (on page 34) a brief but powerful request, which we repeat in all our prayers though the conclusion of Yom Kippur:

זְכֵרְנוּ לְחַיִּים, מֶלֶךְ חַיִּים בְּחַיִּים,  
וְכַתְּבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים,  
לְמַעַן יִצְלַח אֱלֹהֵינוּ חַיִּים.

Remember us for life,  
O King Who desires life;  
inscribe us in the book of life,  
for Your sake, O G-d of life.

After completing the evening prayer, it is customary to bless those present by saying:

לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּכְתָּב וְתִתְּתָם!

May you be inscribed and  
sealed for a good year!

# Evening Meal

“It is customary to consume on Rosh Hashanah sweet foods and hearty meats, symbolizing our hope for a sweet and hearty year.”

*Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chayim 583:4*



The Rosh Hashanah meal begins with Kiddush (sanctification), a verbal proclamation about the sanctity and uniqueness of the day. This liturgy is recited over a cup of wine in order to lend the occasion prominence. The liturgy can be found in the *machzor* on page 46.

## CHALLAH

- After Kiddush, we wash our hands ritually and eat challah, the traditional loaves prepared especially for Shabbat and holidays. For Rosh Hashanah—in fact, for all Shabbat and holiday meals during this month—there’s a widespread custom for the challah loaves to be round. Rabbi Moshe Sofer (1762–1839) explains that we shape these loaves in a circle, which has no end, to symbolize our wish and prayer to be blessed on Rosh Hashanah with a long life, with no end in sight.
- On a regular Shabbat or holiday, we dip our challah in salt before eating it. On Rosh Hashanah, we dip the challah into honey, signifying our wish for a sweet year.

## APPLE DIPPED IN HONEY

After the challah, it is customary to eat a slice of apple dipped in honey—again symbolizing our quest for a sweet year. We use an apple because it is a widely available sweet fruit. In addition, unlike some other sweet fruits, the apple has a charming look and a pleasant smell. These three positive assets—taste, sight,

and smell—represent our wish for a sweet year in three areas: sustenance, family life, and health.

Before we eat the apple dipped in honey, we recite a blessing and short prayer:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.  
יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, שֶׁתַּחֲדֵשׁ עֲלֵינוּ  
שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוּקָה.

*Baruch atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu  
melech ha'olam, borei peri ha'ets.*

*Yehi ratson milfanecha, she-tichadesh  
aleinu shanah tovah umetukah.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the  
Universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree.

May it be Your will to renew for  
us a good and sweet year.



# Rosh Hashanah Morning Prayer

“From the depths I have called to You.”

Rosh Hashanah Morning Prayer (from Psalms 130:1)

An elementary question about prayer was first asked long ago: The events of our lives are not random but the direct outcome of G-d’s desire. If G-d determined that we should undergo certain experiences, it would seem that nothing could alter that. What, then, is the purpose of prayer?

However, once we recognize that G-d is limitless, we can easily observe the frailties of this question. For the infinite G-d could surely choose to create the world in such a way that prayer can effect change and alter one’s destiny.

Nevertheless, one answer provided by Jewish thinkers resonates profoundly on Rosh Hashanah, when we seek inner renewal. According to this answer, when we pray in a mindful way—“From the depths I have called to you”—we experience a fundamental shift. Praying reduces our spiritual sloth and intensifies our consciousness of and connection to G-d, so much so that, in a sense, we become

a new person. G-d’s original plan never pertained to the new person we became through prayer.

Accordingly, prayer is an inner journey that never fails to leave its mark on our identities. In the traditional *machzor*, there are many Rosh Hashanah prayers that provide us with multiple entry points to experience this voyage of renewal.

Here are a few pointers regarding the Morning Prayer:

- The Morning Prayer service (*shacharit*) begins on page 60.
- The Shema is on page 105.
- The *shacharit* Amidah (which is where prayers unique to Rosh Hashanah begin) is on pages 109–114.
- The Amidah for the *musaf* prayer service is on pages 180–192.

### THREE BLESSINGS OF NOTE

The Amidah for *musaf* features three unique blessings that convey three fundamental tenets of the Jewish faith. In each of these blessings, ten biblical verses on the relevant theme are quoted: three from the Pentateuch, three from Psalms, three from the Prophets, and one final verse from the Pentateuch.

#### THEME OF BLESSING 1

#### MALCHİYOT | KINGSHIP

*G-d created the world at large, and each of us in particular, for a purpose.*

Passage from the blessing:

וַיֵּדַע כָּל פְּעוּל כִּי אֲתָה פְּעַלְתָּ וַיִּבִין  
כָּל יְצוּר כִּי אֲתָה יְצַרְתָּו.

Let all that has been made know that You made it; Let all that has been created know that You created it.

#### THEME OF BLESSING 2

#### ZICHRONOT | REMEMBRANCE

*G-d is involved in each aspect of His world, thus knowing and remembering all that transpires. Our choices matter.*

Passage from the blessing:

כִּי זוֹכֵר כָּל הַנְּשָׁכָחוֹת אֲתָה הוּא מְעוֹלָם  
וְאֵין שִׁכְחָה לְפָנֶי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ.

For you are One Who remembers forever all forgotten things, and there's no forgetting before the throne of Your glory.

#### THEME OF BLESSING 3

#### SHOFAROT | SHOFAR BLASTS

*G-d revealed Himself at Mount Sinai following a strong shofar blast and instructed for all time how we ought to live.*

Passage from the blessing:

אֲתָה נִגַּלְתָּ בְּעָנַן כְּבוֹדְךָ עַל עַם קָדְשְׁךָ לְדַבֵּר עִמָּם . . .  
כְּפָתוּב בְּתוֹרָתְךָ: וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְּהִיט הַבְּקָר וַיְהִי  
קוֹל וּבְרָקִים וְעָנַן כָּבֵד עַל הָהָר וְקוֹל שֹׁפָר הָזָק מְאֹד.

You revealed yourself in a cloud of Your glory to your holy nation, to speak with them. . . . As it is written in Your Torah, “Then on the third day, in the morning, there was thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and an exceedingly loud sound of the *shofar*.”

# Second Night and Day

“On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, G-d’s judgment is more exacting; on the second day, it is more forgiving.”

*Zohar 3:231a*

As we launch into the second night of the holiday, it is essential to remember that we are not merely repeating the motions of yesterday. Renewal takes time. Self-evaluation takes time. The second day of Rosh Hashanah enables us to better assimilate the holiday energies that are available to us during this special time and to begin the new year on a solid footing.

## CANDLES

The process for candle lighting on the second night, **September 19**, is similar to that of the previous evening. The following are some points of difference:

- The time to light candles is after nightfall; see the time on page 5.
- Light the candles from a preexisting flame that was kindled before *Yom Tov* (such as a *yahrtzeit* candle).
- The custom of placing money in a charity box before lighting is not observed on this night.
- Recite two blessings, like on the previous night, but there’s a minor difference in the first blessing. Here are both blessings to recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר  
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם הַזְּכוֹרֹן.  
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהֵחֵינּוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu melech  
ha’olam, asher kidshanu bemitsvotav,  
vetsivanu lehadlik ner shel Yom Hazikaron.*

*Baruch atah Ad-onai, Elo-heinu melech  
ha’olam, shehecheyanu, veki’yemanu,  
vehigi’anu lizman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the light of the Day of Remembrance.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

## PRAYER

The evening prayer service (*maariv*) for the second night is similar to the service on the first night. It begins on page 28 and concludes on page 44.

## FESTIVE MEAL

The festive meal runs similarly to the meal of the previous evening (see page 15), with the exception of the symbolic foods, which are not repeated on this night.

## NEW FRUIT

A unique custom for the meal of second night is to consume a new fruit immediately after Kiddush (before the challah). A new fruit is defined as one that you have not yet enjoyed since it came into season.

The purpose of this custom is rooted in a halachic uncertainty about the propriety of reciting the Shehecheyanu blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashanah. We'd really like to recite this blessing, because we are indeed thankful that G-d has "granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion" of the second night of Rosh Hashanah. Also, we want to treat the second night of Rosh Hashanah with the same prominence as the first night. On the other hand, if the second day is regarded as a continuation of the first, the blessing cannot be recited again after having already recited it on the first night. The solution is to find an unquestionable way to recite the blessing. We do this by reciting the

*Shehecheyanu* over the opportunity to consume a new fruit along with the opportunity to observe the second day of Rosh Hashanah.

The Shehecheyanu is recited as part of Kiddush (and at candle lighting). Before tasting the new fruit, we recite the following blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדוֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

*Baruch atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu  
melech ha'olam, borei peri ha'ets.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d,  
King of the Universe, Who  
creates the fruit of the tree.

## MORNING PRAYER

The prayers for the second day of the holiday are similar to those of the first. See page 16. The most significant difference *this year* is that the *shofar* is only sounded on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. (We don't blow the shofar on Shabbat.) If one is not present in the synagogue or unable to hear the shofar during prayer, one should be sure to hear the shofar at some other point during the day.



## Avinu Malkeinu

“Our Father, our King, we have no King but You.”

Avinu Malkeinu takes its place among the more memorable of High Holiday prayers. In this series of supplications, we direct our most vital collective wishes to “our Father, our King.” In the *machzor*, it appears on pages 152–154. Of its many verses, the following four bear upon Rosh Hashanah’s function as the time when our destiny for the upcoming year is determined:

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, כְּתִבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים טוֹבִים.  
אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, כְּתִבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר גְּאֻלָּה וַיְשׁוּעָה.  
אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, כְּתִבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר פֶּרֶקֶס וְכִלְפָּלָה.  
אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, כְּתִבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר זְכוּת.

Our Father, our King, inscribe us in the book of good life.

Our Father, our King, inscribe us in the book of redemption and deliverance.

Our Father, our King, inscribe us in the book of livelihood and sustenance.

Our Father, our King, inscribe us in the book of merits.

The final verse reads:

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ חַיָּנוּ וְעַנְנוּ בִּי  
אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים. עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ  
צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

Our Father, Our King, be gracious  
to us and answer us, for we have no  
meritorious deeds; act with us in  
charity and kindness and save us.

The Talmud (Chagigah 27a) states that even our greatest sinners are filled with *mitzvot* like the many seeds of a pomegranate. What, then, do we mean when we say that “we have no meritorious deeds”?

Rabbi Meir ibn Gabai (ca. 1480–1520) suggests that the answer can be found in the origins of this prayer.

The Talmud (Taanit 25b) relates that once there was a severe drought in the Land of Israel. A day of fasting and prayer was instituted, and Rabbi Eliezer, one of the greatest sages living in the Land of Israel during the late first and early second centuries CE, led the community in reciting twenty-four special blessings, but to no avail. Then Rabbi Akiva took to the podium and recited, “Our Father, our King, we have no King other than You. Our

Father, our King, for Your sake, have mercy on us.” Rain immediately fell.

According to Rabbi Meir ibn Gabai (ca. 1480–1520), Rabbi Eliezer approached his prayer with the attitude that he was a meritorious sage, from a meritorious family, praying on behalf of a meritorious people. All of this was, of course, true, and this approach can be effective some of the time. However, it was not effective at that particular moment, when G-d regarded the people as undeserving of rain. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, adopted a different mindset. Rabbi Akiva came from an undistinguished family and likely did not regard himself as highly meritorious. He said, “For Your sake, have mercy on us.” He didn’t ask for what he and his fellow Jews deserved; He asked that G-d simply have mercy on His people, and it proved effective.

It is therefore fitting that we close our Avinu Malkeinu—a prayer in which we elaborate on the theme first developed by Rabbi Akiva—with a verse that reflects this theme. “We have no meritorious deeds.” If we approach G-d in a deserving posture, our blessings will likely be limited, inasmuch as our good deeds are limited. We seek to shift the paradigm and to be granted life, sustenance, and happiness even if these are beyond what we deserve.



## The Shofar

“The primary mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah is the *shofar*.”

Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 3:3

The central Rosh Hashanah observance is hearing the shofar blasts, which this year is only done on the second day of the holiday, **Sunday, September 20**. There are many laws governing the proper way to observe this mitzvah, which is why we make every effort to hear the *shofar* from someone who is well versed in these laws and who sounds the shofar properly.

Jewish sages throughout the ages offered numerous insights into the import and deeper meaning of the shofar—all, of course, in addition to the underlying fact that this is G-d’s mitzvah and is thus the way to connect with Him on this sacred day. The following is a small sampling.

### **Maimonides (1135–1204) writes:**

*Although the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a G-dly decree, it also serves as an important wake-up call. The shofar’s sound is saying, “Wake up, you sleepy ones, from your slumber. Inspect your deeds, repent, and remember your Creator. Those who forget the truth devote their energies to vanity and emptiness that yield no benefit. Look to your souls. Improve your ways and your deeds. Abandon your evil path and thoughts.”*

*(Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 3:4)*

**Rabbi Saadia Ga'on (882–942) enumerates ten functions of the shofar. Below are three of the more famous ones:**

*Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of Creation, when G-d became King over the world that He created. When a king is coronated, trumpets and horns are sounded to proclaim the beginning of his reign. We do the same for G-d on this day.*

*The shofar reminds us of the scene at Mount Sinai, when the Torah was given. As it says (Exodus 19:16), "Then on the third day, in the morning, there were thunderclaps and lightning flashes, and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and an exceedingly loud sound of the shofar."*

*The sound of the shofar reminds us of the future ingathering of the exiles and stirs us to yearn for it. As it says (Isaiah 27:13), "It shall come to pass on that day, that a great shofar shall be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those exiled in the land of Egypt shall come, and they shall prostrate themselves before G-d on the holy mount in Jerusalem."*

(cited in Abudraham, Seder Tefilot Rosh Hashanah)

**The Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760) offered the following parable:**

*A king had an only child who was very bright and much adored. The king and prince decided together that it would be best for the prince's growth and development if he traveled to different countries to master different fields of wisdom and experience various cultures. So the king supplied his child with servants and valuables and sent him off.*

*However, during his travels, the son squandered all the money on the pleasures he was so used to having in the palace; in fact, being away from home, he spent money on many additional pursuits that were not befitting a prince, until he was left completely destitute. He eventually reached a foreign land where his father's name was unknown and no one believed that he was a prince.*

*After many years of having absolutely nothing, the prince resolved to return to his father's house. However, he had been away for so long that he forgot his native tongue. When he returned to the palace, he couldn't communicate with the guards. He attempted to signal that he was the prince, but the guards laughed at him. In utter despair, he cried out in a loud voice. The king recognized his son's voice and went out to investigate, whereupon they hugged and kissed.*

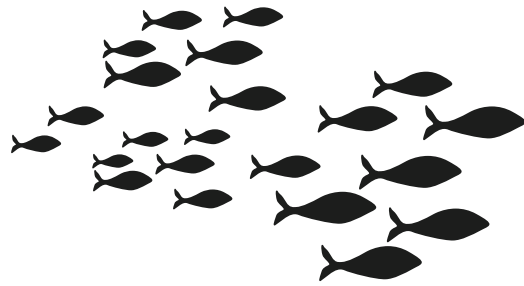
*The meaning of the parable: The king is G-d. The prince is the Jewish people. The king sends a soul down to this world in order to fulfill the Torah and mitzvot, which can propel the soul to new heights. However, we get distracted by the pleasures of the physical life. We forget who we really are. So we utter a simple cry to our Father in Heaven. This is the blowing of the shofar, a cry from deep within, expressing regret for the past and determination for the future. This cry elicits G-d's mercies, and He demonstrates His abiding affection for us and forgives us.*

(Keter Shem Tov, addenda 194)

# Tashlich

“After the Rosh Hashanah meal, we have a custom passed down from our ancestors, which is as sacred to us as the Torah: to go to a river to recite Tashlich.”

Yosef Omets 975



Tashlich, or “casting,” is a popular Rosh Hashanah custom, whereby we walk to a brook, pond, well, or any other body of water, and recite a short prayer. (Contrary to what some believe, feeding the fish is not part of the Tashlich ritual.) This year, since the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, the custom is practiced on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, **Sunday, September 20.**

When the prophet Micah fervidly described how G-d forgives iniquity, he said (Micah 7:18–19):

*Who, G-d, is like You,*

*Who pardons iniquity and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?*

*He does not remain angry forever,*

*But delights in loving-kindness.*

*He will again have compassion on us, hide our iniquities, and cast into the depths of the sea all their sins.*

To invoke the imagery of this final verse, we stand near a body of water to recite this passage, along with some additional prayers.

Some additional messages are conveyed by this custom:

- By standing where water meets dry land, we remind ourselves of the third day of Creation, when G-d separated the water from the dry land (Genesis 1:9). Invoking Creation prompts us to remember that we are created beings and, therefore, obliged to the task for which we were created. (Rabbi Moshe Isserlis, *Torat Ha'olah* 3:56)
- Water, the prerequisite for life, represents G-d's kindness. We recite a prayer near water to represent our wish for a year of kindness. (Rabbi Shne'ur Zalman of Liadi, *Siddur*)
- Unlike other animals, most fish do not have eyelids, so they don't close their eyes to sleep. Standing near a body of water with fish reminds us of the Almighty's watchful eye that neither sleeps nor slumbers. (Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz, *Shenei Luchot Haberit*, Tractate Rosh Hashanah)

■ The *Tashlich* service can be found in the *machzor*, pages 291–292. It can be downloaded before *Yom Tov* from [www.chabad.org/427289](http://www.chabad.org/427289).

## Introduction

“On this day, G-d will atone for you, to purify you.”

Leviticus 16:30

Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, begins at sunset on **Sunday, September 27**, and ends at nightfall on Monday, September 28. This is the Day of Atonement, when terrestrial man most resembles the supernal angels. For close to twenty-six hours, we abstain from eating and drinking, bathing, or anointing our bodies, wearing leather shoes, or engaging in marital relations. (The fast begins and ends at the times noted on the calendar on page 5.) Refraining from these everyday comforts emphasizes that we can be more than creatures of impulse and that we must endeavor to nourish our souls as we do our bodies.

On most special days, we do something to honor the day. On Yom Kippur, the day does something to benefit us. This great day, says the Torah, purifies us from all our wrongdoings. However, this atonement depends upon our doing *teshuvah*—returning to G-d—by sincerely regretting

our past shortcomings and committing to improve in the future.

The history of this solemn day takes us back to the generation that received the Torah at Mount Sinai. Not long after this climactic event, some Jews engaged in an idolatrous practice. This act, which our sages compared to a bride committing adultery at her wedding, damaged the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people. Moses’s breaking of the two Tablets that he had just received illustrated that a real crisis was at hand. Moses in turn pleaded with G-d to forgive the people he had led out of Egypt. On the tenth day of Tishrei, the day that would become Yom Kippur, G-d forgave the Jewish people and tasked Moses with preparing another set of tablets to replace the first.

Since then, Yom Kippur has served as the annual Day of Atonement.

# Teshuvah

“Great is the power of *teshuvah*,  
for it transforms sins into merits.”

Talmud, Yoma 86b

The primary Yom Kippur theme is *teshuvah*, commonly translated as “repentance.” Judaism teaches that *teshuvah* can be done for any act, by anyone, at any time. Nevertheless, Yom Kippur is particularly conducive for *teshuvah* because “the day itself atones” for those who tap into its potential by engaging in *teshuvah* (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance 1:3).

*Teshuvah* should not be understood as becoming someone we are not. Although we often feel that our self-oriented consciousness has more of a hold on our daily choices and that it is more vocal and motivating within our psyche, the truth is that our innermost—and thus truest—part of our identity is our G-dly soul. Accordingly, when something in our lives related to Torah and *mitzvot* requires improvement, we should not think of it as trying to *change* our natures. On the contrary, *teshuvah* brings us closer to our true nature. The word *teshuvah*, which means return, conveys that when something gets in the way and drives us to disconnect from our true identity, we

need to return to who we are. This return is never a long journey but merely an about-face. It is present in our hearts and minds; we need only remove the cover that conceals it.

Judaism also teaches that we can turn the experience of a transgression into something that spurs growth, thereby reframing the past negative act as something positive. Indeed, we sometimes see that a period of estrangement in a marriage can trigger the depth of feelings that the couple has for each other, fueling a deeper and more enduring commitment to each other. A reformed criminal who experiences true remorse for the injustices he inflicted on others might become even more scrupulously honest and a greater fighter for justice than the person who never committed a crime. It is with this in mind that the Talmud states that *teshuvah* “transforms sins into merits.” It is referring to a *teshuvah* that leads to growth. Because the cause for the advancement, in retrospect, is the sin, it is recast as something positive.



## Preparing for Yom Kippur

“It is a mitzvah to eat on the day before Yom Kippur and to celebrate it with a lavish meal.”

*Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chayim 604:1*

**Sunday, September 27**, the day preceding Yom Kippur, is treated as a holiday. There are several observances on this day that help prepare us for Yom Kippur.

### FESTIVE MEAL

The Talmud (Berachot 8b) teaches that when we partake in a festive meal on the day preceding Yom Kippur, and then fast on Yom Kippur itself, we are credited as though we fasted for two days. Practically, the festive meal is important because it gives us the strength for the subsequent fast and the many hours of immersive prayer. In addition, by celebrating the ninth of Tishrei, we demonstrate our eagerness for the renewal that

Yom Kippur provides. In fact, Yom Kippur itself is a day worthy of celebration, and in Judaism, we usually celebrate with a festive meal; because no festive meal can occur on Yom Kippur itself, we fulfill it on the preceding day.

### DRESS

Before the fast begins, we remove our leather shoes, which we refrain from wearing on Yom Kippur. It is also customary to wear a white garment on Yom Kippur, reminding us of our mortality and of our potential for purity. It is also customary to avoid wearing anything that is made of gold, to avoid invoking the sin of the Golden Calf.

### HONEY CAKE

On this day, it is customary to request—from a parent, rabbi, or friend—a piece of honey cake (in Yiddish, *lekach*), which symbolizes our wish for a sweet year. The custom is to specifically *ask* for the honey cake, so that if it had been decreed that during the year we should need to resort to a handout, the decree should be satisfied with this ask, rendering it the final instance of this need for the whole year.

### TSEDAKAH

It is important to give extra charity on this day. As it says (Daniel 4:24), “With charity you will remove your sin.” According to Jewish mysticism, G-d designed a world that requires constant acts of kindness because charity is the most effective tool for remodeling the universe into a home for G-d. Earnings are the product of planning, creativity, effort, and investment—and with a single act of charity, all this is spiritually elevated and connected to the Divine purpose of bringing Heaven down to earth.

### FORGIVENESS

Yom Kippur atones for transgressions between a person and G-d; Yom Kippur does not atone for transgressions between one person and another unless the offender has placated the victim. This is why Jewish law states that in the days prior to Yom Kippur we must ask forgiveness of anyone we may have aggrieved. Judaism teaches that it is only through the human interaction of the offender appeasing the victim and the victim granting forgiveness that the victim can best be healed and the wrongdoer most profoundly changed.

### YIZKOR CANDLE

Before Yom Kippur begins, many kindle a special candle in honor of the Yizkor prayers that they will recite the next day. When the soul on high

witnesses this, it takes pleasure, seeing that it is remembered and cherished.

### CANDLE LIGHTING

We kindle holiday lights in the moments prior to the commencement of Yom Kippur, just as we do for any Shabbat and festival. The directions are the same as those for the first night of Rosh Hashanah. See above, page 12. Recite the following two blessings:

ברוך אתה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ  
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים.  
ברוך אתה אֱלֹהֵינוּ,  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֵחַיְנוּ  
וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu  
melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu  
bemitsvotav, vetsivanu lehadlik  
ner shel Yom Hakipurim.*

*Baruch atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu  
melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu,  
veki'yemanu, vehigi'anu lizman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the light of Yom Kippur.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

## BLESSING CHILDREN

It is customary for parents to bless their children individually, both young children as well as adult children, before the onset of Yom Kippur. This blessing can, of course, be given over the phone or videoconference; when being given in person, some have the custom to recite the blessing while their hands are placed over the head of the child. The common custom is to invoke the notable blessings mentioned in the Torah, though, of course, one may add any heartfelt wishes:

*For a son (from Genesis 48:20):*

יְשִׁימֶךָ אֱלֹקִים כְּאַפְרַיִם וּכְמִנַּשֶּׁה.

“May G-d make you  
like Efrayim and Menasheh.”

*For a daughter (based on Genesis, *ibid.*, and Ruth 4:11):*

יְשִׁימֶךָ אֱלֹקִים כְּשָׂרָה  
כְּרִבְקָה כְּרָחֵל וְכִלְאָה.

“May G-d make you like Sarah,  
Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.”

*The following (from Numbers 6:22–27) is then added for both son and daughter:*

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. דַּבֵּר  
אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל בְּנָיו לֵאמֹר, כֹּה  
תְבָרְכוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲמֹר לָהֶם.  
יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ. יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו  
אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּחַנֶּךָ. יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ  
וַיִּשֶׂם לָךְ שְׁלוֹם. וְשָׂמוּ אֶת שְׁמִי  
עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָנִי אֲבָרְכֶם.

G-d spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to Aaron and to his sons,  
saying, “This is how you shall bless  
the Children of Israel. Say to them:

‘May G-d bless you and guard you.

‘May G-d make His countenance shine  
upon you and be gracious to you.

‘May G-d turn His countenance  
toward you and grant you peace.’”

They shall bestow My Name  
upon the Children of Israel,  
so that I will bless them.



## Kol Nidrei

“The first round of Kol Nidrei is recited in an undertone, to invoke the feeling of one who is overwhelmed when entering the king’s palace. The second round is recited louder, and the third round more loudly still, similar to one who is accustomed to being in the presence of the king.”

*Machzor Vitri 351*

The best known piece of High Holiday liturgy is undoubtedly Kol Nidrei, the rite that inaugurates the Yom Kippur services, chanted in a moving melody that involves keen emotional appeal. In the *machzor*,\* it’s on pages 35–36.

Kol Nidrei is actually a legal formula rather than a prayer. In it, we preemptively void any vow that we may make during the coming year.

During the Middle Ages, those who sought to libel and persecute Jews pointed to Kol Nidrei to prove that Jews’ vows and commitments in the commercial arena could not be trusted. These accusations, however, were made in bad faith. Kol Nidrei is irrelevant to the vows we make to other people; those vows cannot be unilaterally voided. Kol Nidrei’s vow annulment only pertains to those that don’t involve others, for example,

when one takes a vow to refrain from overeating. There have been times when taking vows on such matters was very common, while at other times, it was less common. Either way, Judaism regards such vows as being directed to G-d, even if this is not clearly specified. Many Jews are, therefore, careful to avoid taking vows in the first place, lest they fail to follow through, which would amount to a transgression. In case we do take a vow, we preemptively void it on Yom Kippur to ensure that it does not result in a violation.

In modern times, many wonder why this legal procedure—rather than a heartfelt prayer for forgiveness—initiates the Yom Kippur service and why it’s chanted in such a memorable tune. This question has induced some creative theories, most famously that it was the conversos (Jews in Spain who were forced to convert to Christianity but who remained committed to Judaism in secret) who composed this prayer. According to this theory, when they would clandestinely gather to pray on Yom Kippur,

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\* All references to the *machzor* in the section on Yom Kippur are to the *Machzor for Yom Kippur with English Translation, Annotated Edition* (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 2004). This *machzor* can be purchased at: [www.tinyurl.com/YKmachzor](http://www.tinyurl.com/YKmachzor)

they felt compelled to begin by annulling their vows—namely, the vows to the Inquisition that they would be good Christians.

In truth, Kol Nidrei existed long before the Spanish Inquisition, and none of the early sources that discuss this prayer mention anything of the sort. Nor is there any evidence that Kol Nidrei had extra resonance for the conversos, more so than any other Yom Kippur prayer.

Kol Nidrei seems to be an instance where contemporary values are somewhat at odds with the Torah's values. "Talk is cheap" reflects the reality that we don't take our words all that seriously. We are careful to avoid using hurtful words, and we know that we must keep commitments made to others. But beyond that, our words are just words.

Judaism regards things differently. The term used to describe humans in Jewish thought is *medaber*—"articulate." From all the different names and designations that could have been used for the human, Jewish sources zeroed in on the attribute of speech. This underscores the centrality of human speech to human identity. If G-d created everything in His world for a purpose, our speech must lie at the heart of the human purpose. When we use our speech in wrongful ways, we are undermining who we are in a particularly acute way. We are not taking ourselves all that seriously.

There are many ways to misuse our speech, but one egregious way is when we take a vow, which—as noted—is a commitment to G-d, and then fail

to execute it. Here we are unleashing a central human trait in a way that diminishes our appreciation for the Creator of all things. In a sense, we are not taking G-d all that seriously.

By beginning Yom Kippur with the preemptive annulment of our future vows, we take a small step to ensure that we will not violate any vow in the coming year. When we have done what we can to preemptively avoid transgression, we can turn to G-d with a clear conscience and ask for forgiveness for our shortcomings of the past year. When we take ourselves seriously and when we take G-d seriously, we can launch into the Yom Kippur service.

#### EVENING PRAYER

- ♦ Following Kol Nidrei, we recite the Shehecheyanu blessing (page 36), thanking G-d for enabling us to reach this auspicious day.
- ♦ We then begin the evening service (page 42) and recite the Shema (page 44). We recite the second sentence of the Shema, *Baruch Shem*, aloud (though it is normally said in a whisper), to underscore that on this day we are similar to the angels who recite this prayer.
- ♦ The unique Yom Kippur Amidah is on pages 47–57.
- ♦ This is followed by supplications, the confessional, and the conclusion of the evening service (pages 58–86).

# The Clay and the Potter

One of the celebrated liturgical poems that we sing on Yom Kippur eve is “Ki Hinei Kachomer” (page 66). Written by an unknown Ashkenazi author, it has been recited by Jewish communities since the twelfth century.

The poem begins by comparing our dependence on G-d to the dependence of clay in the hand of the potter, invoking a motif found in several biblical verses, such as Isaiah 64:7 and Jeremiah 18:6. It then continues to pursue this theme.

In each subsequent stanza, G-d is compared to a different artisan—mason, blacksmith, sailor, glazier, weaver, and silversmith—and we are compared to the material that each expert manages, shapes, and controls at will.

Each stanza ends with the plea, “Look to the covenant and do not regard our evil inclination.” We are asking G-d to remember the covenant that He made with us and to overlook our sins. This verse may have a second meaning as well, one directed to us: that we ought to remember our covenant with G-d and avoid being beguiled by the schemes of our selfish inclination.

Here are the first three stanzas of this liturgical poem:

כִּי הִנֵּה בְּחֶמֶר בְּיַד הַיּוֹצֵר  
בְּרִצּוֹתָו מִרְחִיב וּבְרִצּוֹתָו מְקַצֵּר  
כִּן אֲנַחְנוּ בְּיָדְךָ חֶסֶד נּוֹצֵר  
לְבַרִּית הַבְּטָ וְאַל תִּפְּן לַיֵּצֵר.

כִּי הִנֵּה כְּאֶבֶן בְּיַד הַמְּסַתֵּת  
בְּרִצּוֹתָו אוֹחֵז וּבְרִצּוֹתָו מְכַתֵּת  
כִּן אֲנַחְנוּ בְּיָדְךָ מְחַיֶּה וּמְמוֹתֵת  
לְבַרִּית הַבְּטָ וְאַל תִּפְּן לַיֵּצֵר.

כִּי הִנֵּה כְּנִרְזֵן בְּיַד הַחֶרֶשׁ  
בְּרִצּוֹתָו דֹּבֵק לְאוּר וּבְרִצּוֹתָו פֹּרֵשׁ  
כִּן אֲנַחְנוּ בְּיָדְךָ תּוֹמֵךְ עֲנֵי וְרֵשׁ  
לְבַרִּית הַבְּטָ וְאַל תִּפְּן לַיֵּצֵר.

*Indeed, as the clay in the hand of the potter,  
who expands and contracts it at will;  
So are we in Your hand, You Who remembers our deeds of kindness.  
Look to the covenant and do not regard our evil inclination.*

*Indeed, as the stone in the hand of the mason,  
who retains it and fragments it at will;  
So are we in Your hand, You Who gives life and brings death.  
Look to the covenant and do not regard our evil inclination.*

*Indeed, as iron in the hand of the smith,  
who thrusts it into fire and draws it out at will;  
So are we in Your hand, You Who supports the poor and the destitute.  
Look to the covenant and do not regard our evil inclination.*

# The Confessional

“It is customary to tap the heart while reciting the confessional, as if to say, ‘It’s our inner impulse that drives us to act incorrectly.’”

*Magen Avraham, Orach Chayim 607:3*

On Yom Kippur, at the end of each Amidah, we recite the confessional. For the evening prayer, it is on pages 71–76.

The core of *teshuvah* (repentance) is to regret a past transgression and resolve to not commit it again. Jewish law also specifies that we must verbalize our *teshuvah* by stating our transgression and our commitment to improve. This is offered privately to G-d, not to any other person—unless one has to ask forgiveness of another for wronging them. If remorse transpires in the mind alone, it can remain abstract. Verbalizing this forces us to confront our actions in a more tangible way and strengthens our resolve to not reoffend.

The Yom Kippur prayers feature approximately ten repetitions of the Vidui, the confessional prayer, providing us with numerous opportunities to reflect on our wrongdoing and resolve to be better moving forward.

As you read the confessional, you may notice that some of the listed transgressions are not things you struggle with. Nevertheless, we all recite the entire text. First, every transgression has more subtle manifestations, and those need to be considered on this day. Second, the entire confessional is written in the plural, “We have transgressed,” and so forth. This is not an instance of the “royal we”; rather, we address

G-d on this day not as single individuals but as components of a larger whole. We don’t view ourselves and our destinies as unrelated to our fellow Jews; we are one people, on one vessel, sharing the same voyage. What one does and does not do is felt by all, which is why all Jews are responsible for each other. We invoke this mutual obligation by confessing *our* sins.

What is our emotional state as we recite the confessional? Yes, we seek to feel genuine remorse. But the heart can simultaneously feel two different and even opposite emotions. We’ve all experienced these dualities of feeling: love and fear, anticipation and apprehension, disappointment and hope—both, respectively, at the same time. In the same way, we can experience remorse and regret over a past wrongdoing and, at the same time, rejoice over the opportunity for *teshuvah*.

The Baal Shem Tov once prayed in a synagogue on Yom Kippur where the cantor chanted the Vidui in a joyous tune. He was puzzled by this, because it was not the norm, and he later asked the cantor why he had done so. Replied the cantor, “When the king’s servants are cleaning the royal palace of the accumulated dirt in anticipation of his arrival, do they not do this work joyously?”

The Baal Shem Tov was pleased with this explanation.



# Morning Prayer

“Grant me knowledge to understand how to set forth my prayer, how to entreat you properly, without fault.”

Yom Kippur Morning Prayer

The Talmud (Chulin 60b) teaches that on the third day of Creation, the vegetation only grew slightly, remaining this way until Adam arrived on the sixth day and prayed for G-d’s mercy, as a result of which, rain fell and the vegetation grew. G-d could have given plentiful rain just as He provided everything else during the process of Creation, but He withheld rain because He wanted to ensure that Adam would turn to him in prayer. This was important to G-d because, as the Talmud continues, “G-d cherishes the prayers of the righteous.” Simply put, G-d desired that Adam foster the meaningful connection with Him that is possible through prayer.

Just as G-d desired this relationship with Adam, so does He desire this relationship with us. Just as He withheld rain so that Adam would pray for it, so did He design a system in which many of our potential blessings are stimulated by our prayers. We pray because we have needs, but we have those needs so that we will pray.

- The Yom Kippur Morning Prayer (*shacharit*) service begins on page 96.
- The Shema is on pages 141–143.
- The *shacharit* Amidah (which is where prayers unique to Yom Kippur begin) is on pages 145–155.
- In the synagogue setting, after the Amidah, the cantor leads the congregation in the repetition of the Amidah, with many notable Yom Kippur prayers added along the way. Some of the more famous parts of the liturgy are Lekel Orech Din (pages 170–171) and Shema Koleinu (page 117).
- We recite on this day Yizkor (see below, pages 36–39), and we then recite the *musaf* service. The Amidah is in the *machzor* on pages 215–226.
- In the synagogue setting, the cantor leads the congregation in the repetition of the Amidah, with many notable Yom Kippur prayers added along the way. Some of the highlights include Unetaneh Tokef (pages 238–239) and the Avodah (pages 246–258), a detailed account of the special service performed by the High Priest in the Holy Temple.

# שמע קולנו

## Shema Koleinu

We recite the Shema Koleinu a number of times over the course of Yom Kippur. In the synagogue setting, the ark containing the sacred Torah scrolls is opened for this prayer, and the congregation recites the following verses in unison.

שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, חוּס וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ, וְקַבֵּל  
בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרַצוֹן אֶת תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִשׁוּבָה, חַדֵּשׁ יְמֵינוּ בְּקָדֶם.  
אֵל תִּשְׁלִיכֵנוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, וְרוּחַ קִדְשְׁךָ אֵל תִּקַּח מִמֶּנּוּ.  
אֵל תִּשְׁלִיכֵנוּ לְעֵת זְקִנָּה, בְּכָלֹת פִּחְנוּ אֵל תַּעֲזֹבֵנוּ.

Hear our voice, L-rd our G-d, have pity and compassion upon us, and accept our prayer with mercy and favor.

Return us back to You, L-rd, and we will return. Renew our days as of old.

Do not cast us out of your presence, and do not take  
Your spirit of holiness away from us.

Do not cast us aside in old age; do not forsake us when our strength fails.



# Yizkor

“Those who have passed away also require atonement.”

*Sifrei*, Shoftim 210

*Yizkor*, a special memorial prayer for the departed, is recited on Yom Kippur during the Morning Service. In the *machzor*, it is on pages 210–211.

The word *yizkor* means “remember.” It is the first word of the prayer and also represents its overall theme. In this prayer, we beseech G-d to remember favorably the souls of our relatives who have passed on in the merit of the charity that we will give in their honor after the conclusion of Yom Kippur.

It is preferable to recite Yizkor in a congregational setting because of the special power of congregational prayer and the presence of the Torah scrolls. Nevertheless, when it is not possible to attend services, Yizkor can be recited at home.

## WHY YIZKOR?

Yom Kippur is a day of atonement not only for the living but also for those who have passed on. Indeed, the Torah calls this day *Yom Hakipurim*, in the plural (Day of Atonements), which some have explained refers to two atonements: for the living and for the dead.

Gan Eden (Paradise) is not a monolithic world but one comprised of myriad dimensions and levels. The proper positioning of the soul in the afterlife is determined on Yom Kippur. This determination is mostly shaped by the actions the deceased took while alive in this

world. However, we can intervene and positively influence the judgment of the soul on Yom Kippur: good deeds performed in the memory of the deceased are credited to them, atone for them, and give their soul an elevation.

This results from the fact that while Gan Eden is a most *pleasurable* realm, it is not the most *important* realm; with all of its deficiencies, our physical world is of greater importance. Only here is it possible to perform a mitzvah that affects both the physical and spiritual realms and fulfills the purpose of Creation.

The soul lacks the ability to perform *mitzvot* in the afterlife, and our performance of them on its behalf is the most potent way to atone for and elevate a soul. This is especially true regarding *mitzvot* performed by children on behalf of their departed parents.

This is the function of Yizkor. We pledge to give *tsedakah* in honor of our departed parents and loved ones, thereby bringing merit to their souls and facilitating their elevation to higher and greater levels in the hereafter.

#### HOW?

- Yizkor is customarily recited only by those who have at least one deceased parent.
- After reciting the Morning Prayers (*shacharit*), take a moment to meditate and emotionally connect with the loved ones in your life who have passed away.
- When Yizkor is recited at *shul*, all those who are fortunate enough to have both parents alive depart the sanctuary for the duration of Yizkor. This can be implemented at home as well.
- Identify which passage of Yizkor (see below) is appropriate for you (depending on whether you are reciting it for a father, mother, etc.). Then recite the text.
- If you wish, you can say the Kel malei rachamim prayer. (In the *Kehot Hebrew-English Siddur* [2002], it appears on page 466.)
- Then we recite the Av harachamim prayer, wherein we ask G-d to remember the countless martyrs who lovingly gave their lives to sanctify G-d's name (*machzor*, page 211).
- Take another moment to contemplate your connection with your loved ones and the immense gratification they are feeling at this moment—for you are lovingly remembering them and pledging to give charity in their behalf. Bask in the newly strengthened relationship!
- Remember, after the holiday, to make good on your pledge.

Whenever the name of a deceased is mentioned in the Yizkor service, it is given in the following form: the Hebrew name of the deceased following by בן, son of — or, בת, daughter of — and then the deceased's mother's Hebrew name.

#### FOR ONE'S FATHER

יזכור אלהים נשמת אבא מורי (name of the deceased and that of his mother) שהלך לעולמו, בעבור שבלי נדר אתן צדקה בערו, בשכר זה תהא נפשו צרוּרה בצרור החיים, עם נשמות אברהם יצחק ויעקב, שרה רבקה רחל ולאה, ועם שאר צדיקים וצדקניות שבגן עדן, ונאמר: אמן:

May G-d remember the soul of my father, my teacher, (name of the deceased and that of his mother) who has gone onto his [supernal] world, because, without making a vow, I shall give to charity on his behalf. As reward for this, may his soul be bound in the bond of life, together with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah; and together with the other righteous men and women in the Garden of Eden. Now let us respond: Amen.

#### FOR ONE'S MOTHER

יזכור אלהים נשמת אמי מורתני (name of the deceased and that of her mother) שהלכה לעולמה, בעבור שבלי נדר אתן צדקה בעדה, בשכר זה תהא נפשה צרוּרה בצרור החיים, עם נשמות אברהם יצחק ויעקב, שרה רבקה רחל ולאה, ועם שאר צדיקים וצדקניות שבגן עדן, ונאמר: אמן:

May G-d remember the soul of my Mother, my teacher, (name of the deceased and that of her mother) who has gone on to her [supernal] world, because, without making a vow, I shall give to charity on her behalf. As reward for this, May her soul be bound in the bond of life, together with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah; and together with the other righteous men and women in the Garden of Eden. Now let us respond: Amen.

#### FOR A MALE RELATIVE

יזכור אלהים נשמת husband בעלי | son בני | brother אחי | uncle דודי | grandfather זקני (name of the deceased and that of his mother) שהלך לעולמו, בעבור שבלי נדר אתן צדקה בערו, בשכר זה תהא נפשו צרוּרה בצרור החיים, עם נשמות אברהם יצחק ויעקב, שרה רבקה רחל ולאה, ועם שאר צדיקים וצדקניות שבגן עדן, ונאמר: אמן:

May G-d remember the soul of my grandfather/uncle/brother/son/husband (name of the deceased and that of his mother) who has gone on to his [supernal] world, because, without making a vow, I shall give to charity on his behalf. As reward for this, may his soul be bound in the bond of life, together with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah; and together with the other righteous men and women in the Garden of Eden. Now let us respond: Amen.

#### FOR A FEMALE RELATIVE

wife
daughter
sister
aunt
grandmother  
 יִזְכוֹר אֱלֹהִים נְשָׁמַת זְקֵנָתִי | דוֹרְתִי | אַחֹתִי | בִּתִּי | אִשְׁתִּי  
 (name of the deceased and that of her mother)  
 שְׁהִלְכָה לְעוֹלָמָהּ, בְּעִבּוֹר שְׁבִלֵי נֶדֶר אֶתֶן צְדָקָה  
 בְּעֵדָהּ, בְּשֹׁכֵר זֶה תִּהְיֶה נְפִשָׁה צְרוּרָה בְּצִרוֹר הַחַיִּים, עִם נְשָׁמוֹת אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק  
 וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה, וְעִם שְׂאֵר צְדִיקִים וְצְדִיקָנוֹת שְׁבִנֵּן עֵדֶן, וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן:

May G-d remember the soul of my grandmother/aunt/sister/daughter/wife (name of the deceased and that of her mother) who has gone on to her [supernal] world because, without making a vow, I shall give to charity on her behalf. As reward for this, may her soul be bound in the bond of life, together with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah; and together with the other righteous men and women in the Garden of Eden. Now let us respond: Amen.

#### FOR ONE'S EXTENDED FAMILY

יִזְכוֹר אֱלֹהִים נְשָׁמוֹת זְקֵנֵי וְזִקְנוֹתַי, דוֹרֵי וְדוֹדוֹתַי, אַחֵי וְאַחִיוֹתַי, הֵן מֵצַד אָבִי,  
 הֵן מֵצַד אִמִּי, שְׁהִלְכוּ לְעוֹלָמָם, בְּעִבּוֹר שְׁבִלֵי נֶדֶר אֶתֶן צְדָקָה בְּעֵדָם, בְּשֹׁכֵר  
 זֶה תִּהְיֶינָה נְפִשׁוֹתֵיהֶם צְרוּרוֹת בְּצִרוֹר הַחַיִּים, עִם נְשָׁמוֹת אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב,  
 שָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה, וְעִם שְׂאֵר צְדִיקִים וְצְדִיקָנוֹת שְׁבִנֵּן עֵדֶן, וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן:

May G-d remember the souls of my grandfathers and grandmothers, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters both on my father's side and on my mother's side, who went on to their [supernal] world, because, without making a vow, I shall give to charity on their behalf. As reward for this, may their souls be bound in the bond of life, together with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah; and together with the other righteous men and women in the Garden of Eden. Now let us respond: Amen.

# Jonah and the Whale

“It does not say of the people of Nineveh, ‘And G-d saw their sackcloth and their fasting,’ but, ‘And G-d saw their deeds, for they turned from their evil way.’”

Mishnah, Taanit 2:1

The *minchah* service of Yom Kippur afternoon begins on page 299, with the Amidah on pages 310–319. A highlight of the *minchah* service is the story of Jonah (in the *machzor*, on pages 306–308).

The biblical Book of Jonah opens with G-d instructing the prophet Jonah to travel to Nineveh, the ancient capital of Assyria (located near Mosul, in modern-day Iraq), to prophesy to the people that G-d would destroy their city if they did not repent.

Jonah decided to flee rather than relay this prophecy. He hurried to the port in Jaffa and boarded the first boat that was ready to depart. However, soon after departure, a fierce storm broke out that threatened to destroy the boat.

The pagan sailors prayed to their idols, but to no avail. Jonah, who assumed that the sudden storm was G-d’s way of preventing his escape, descended to the ship’s hold and went to sleep.

The captain came down and demanded, “Why do you sleep? Wake up and pray to your G-d,” but Jonah explained that they would be better off casting him into the sea. After some hesitation, the sailors cast Jonah into the sea and the storm immediately abated.

A large fish swallowed Jonah whole, and he remained in the fish for three days. Thereupon Jonah prayed to G-d, and the fish expelled him onto dry land in the area of Nineveh. Jonah delivered his prophecy to the people, upon which the entire city decided to abandon its evil ways. As a result of their repentance, the inhabitants of Nineveh were spared.

Jonah was unhappy with the outcome. According to the sages (*Mechilta*, Bo, Introduction), he knew that the people of Nineveh were designated to exile the people of Israel and to bring much suffering to them. Indeed, the sages explained, this is why he tried to flee his mission.

As Jonah left the city, the hot weather made him weary and unable to continue. G-d caused a plant to grow over him, providing him with much-needed shade. Jonah was overjoyed with the plant. The next day, G-d caused a worm to eat away at the plant, and it withered. When the sun shone, Jonah was in great pain.

The Book concludes with G-d telling Jonah: “You did not toil for the plant, nor did you make it grow. And yet, you were grieved by its loss. Should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people and many beasts as well?”



**Many commentaries have been written on this intriguing story. A few points are of particular relevance to Yom Kippur:**

- ♦ The first portion of the tale underscores the futility of seeking to escape G-d and the mission that He set out for each of us. As King David said (Psalms 139:7), “Where can I go from Your spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?”
- ♦ The second part conveys the dramatic efficacy of genuine *teshuvah*. The Talmud (Taanit 16a) notes that the inhabitants of Nineveh were so sincere in their campaign for repentance that if a person had stolen a beam and built it into his building, he tore down the entire building to return the beam to its owner. They wanted to repent completely by removing any remnant of stolen property from their possession.
- ♦ The final portion of the story conveys the utter indispensability of every creature. G-d allows Jonah to enjoy the shade of a simple plant and Jonah cannot imagine living without it. G-d uses this to demonstrate why He could not destroy the repentant city of Nineveh. Every person is created for a purpose and serves a particular function. In a sense, every individual is like the plant that protected Jonah from the burning sun. Without each person, the purpose of G-d’s world is unrealized. On Yom Kippur, G-d reminds us that He toiled to put us here, endowing each individual with a unique mission that no one else can fulfill. Each of us contributes life-sustaining shade to our own small corner of the universe.



## Ne'ilah

“Open for us the gates, as the gates begin to close, for the day is about to pass.”

The *Ne'ilah* Prayer

*Just as many distance runners receive a second wind after sensing depletion, so do many Yom Kippur observers sense a revitalization of their strength as the Yom Kippur sun begins to slip past the horizon.*

According to Jewish mysticism, during most of our lives, our conscious minds experience a degree of separation from G-d, even as we use action, emotion, intellect, and desire to relate to G-d. On Yom Kippur and, more specifically, during the final moments of this sacred day, a fundamental shift occurs. At this special time, our *yechidah* shines through—the level of soul that recognizes itself as a part of G-d—and we can become conscious of our inherent unity with G-d.

In the last moments that close out Yom Kippur, we pray the *ne'ilah* (“closing”) service. During this service, we seek to complete our Yom Kippur journey by expressing in prayer the deep oneness with G-d that is available to us at this special time.

The Amidah for *ne'ilah* is on pages 350–357. Notice that in this prayer we no longer ask G-d to *inscribe* us for a good year but that He *seal* us for a good year, indicating that these are the final moments of the Days of Judgment.

The climactic finale of *ne'ilah* is when we declare three potent statements of our creed.

THE FIRST VERSE IS RECITED ONCE:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד.

Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our  
G-d, the L-rd is one.

The verse, from Deuteronomy chapter 6, occupies a central place in Judaism. So many Jews, regardless of their involvement with Judaism, recognize these words. Children are taught this prayer from the time they can speak. We chant it over the cradle of our baby boys on the night before their *brit milah*. These are, traditionally, the last words a person utters before passing on—which includes the millions of Jews who were killed for clinging to their faith. At this moment of *ne'ilah*, when we are able to sense a deep connection with G-d, the fact that our ancestors sacrificed so much for G-d's sake finds particular resonance.

Shema is an affirmation of our core belief in monotheism. We don't believe, like other civilizations and religions, that there are many independent powers in this world, such as the god of the sun and the moon and the god of agriculture. Today, although the majority of society doesn't typically worship those "gods," we worship plenty of others: the gods of money, status, love, fame, and so on. As Jews, when we say Shema, we declare that there is only one Power that orchestrates our lives and the world. All of Judaism flows from this principle.

**THE SECOND VERSE IS RECITED THREE TIMES:**

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מְלֻכּוֹתָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.

This passage is recited following the first verse of Shema. The Talmud (Pesachim 56a) teaches that when our forefather Jacob's twelve sons, the progenitors of the tribes of Israel, declared their faith in G-d by reciting the Shema, Jacob expressed his happiness by reciting *Baruch Shem* in response. In a similar way, we repeat this phrase to offer thanks that we continue living by this tradition and that we will pass this along to the next generation.

**THE FINAL VERSE IS RECITED SEVEN TIMES:**

ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים.

The L-rd is our G-d.

This verse is rooted in an event that occurred in the days of Elijah the prophet. At that time, many Jews practiced a mix of Judaism and polytheism, adopting various idolatrous practices from the surrounding nations. Elijah

arranged a showdown with the leaders of this movement and demonstrated to the Jews what their ancestors had known and what they had chosen to forget—that the G-d of the Bible is the only Power worthy of worship. The Jews proclaimed, "The L-rd is our G-d." We make this proclamation each year at the closing of Yom Kippur to underscore that we too will endeavor to keep our Judaism pure.

The Chabad custom is to proceed with joyous singing and dancing, expressing our confidence that our *teshuvah* has been accepted and that we will be inscribed for a good year in both the physical and spiritual sense.

In the synagogue, the shofar is sounded after the recitation of the aforementioned verses. One reason is to notify the people that nightfall has occurred and that the fast is over. (The time for the ending of the fast can be found on page 5.)

Another reason for this shofar blast is to raise a sound of triumph, similar to armies who return from a victory by sounding trumpets and horns. Yet another explanation is that this blast serves to proclaim that the night following Yom Kippur is regarded as a holiday, and that we are meant to celebrate it with a lavish meal and a happy heart. As the verse says (Ecclesiastes 9:7), "Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for G-d has approved of what you do."

**FOLLOWING THE SHOFAR BLAST, WE PROCLAIM:**

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם!

Next year in Jerusalem!

## THE SUKKOT FESTIVAL

# Introduction

“Celebrate the festival of Sukkot for seven days. . . . Be joyful at your festival. . . . And you will only be happy.”

Deuteronomy 16:13–15

The joyous holiday of Sukkot will begin in the evening of **Friday, October 2**, and it extends until the evening of Friday, October 9. The first two days, through Sunday, October 4, are the primary days of the holiday: we light the festival candles in the evening (the proper times can be found on page 5), we celebrate with festive meals that are preceded by Kiddush and the eating of challah, and we refrain from work. The remaining days are known as *chol hamo'ed*, “the weekday of the holiday.” Throughout the seven days of Sukkot, we eat our meals in the sukkah, a hut of temporary construction with a roof comprised of cut branches, and we recite a special blessing over “the four kinds” of produce.

While most biblical festivals recall a specific event in Jewish history, the festival of Sukkot commemorates an entire epoch: the forty years that the people of Israel traversed the wilderness, when G-d “had the Children of Israel dwell in sukkot” (Leviticus 23:43). The Talmud (Sukkah 11b) records two opinions about the nature of these “sukkot.” Rabbi Eliezer says it refers to the miraculous clouds of glory that sheltered the Jews as they dwelt in the wilderness. Rabbi Akiva says that they were literal shelters that the Jews made for themselves during this period.

In the first view, the holiday of Sukkot commemorates G-d’s special protection and care for our ancestors during

their journey through the wilderness. Indeed, the Torah describes how the heavenly manna nourished them, the well of Miriam provided them with water, and clouds of glory surrounded them. On Sukkot, we replicate our ancestors' experience by dwelling in a sukkah to recall the loving care that G-d displayed to our ancestors and that He continues to show to us in our time.

In the second view, we dwell in sukkot to draw a contrast between our prosperous living conditions and the primitive form of our ancestors' dwelling in the desert. This moves us to be grateful for the positive blessings in our lives, which leads to feelings of joy and indebtedness to G-d. We thus avoid the all-too-human vice of taking our blessings for granted.

The Torah also calls Sukkot the "Festival of the Ingathering," referring to the fact that in the Land of Israel, this holiday coincides with the farmers bringing their harvested crop into their homes and storehouses. It is precisely at this time, when farmers observe the success of their toil, that they are most vulnerable to losing sight of their dependence on G-d. By removing themselves from the comfort of their homes, into which they brought an abundance of grain, the farmers are prodded to recall that their success wasn't inevitable and that G-d is the source of

all of their blessings, and they must endeavor to keep this in mind even when feeling secure and satisfied.

We place a major emphasis on joy during this holiday. On a basic level, this joy is derived from the many blessings in our lives, both physical and spiritual. This joy is significantly enhanced when considering that these gifts demonstrate that G-d is looking out for us, caring for us, loving us, and providing us with all that we need.

According to Chasidic philosophy, our joy on Sukkot emerges from a spiritual version of the ingathering of the grain. We experience different phases in our spiritual journeys. Sometimes the spiritual commitment rooted in our souls resonates less with our conscious selves. We retain our faith and remain committed to our heritage, but we don't feel that it is truly integrated with our everyday personalities. The ingathering of the grain, in the spiritual sense, refers to the spiritual state where the soul convictions are brought into our everyday thinking, where the teachings of the Torah become one with us. After the investment we made on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we are empowered to partake in this deeper relationship with our spiritual selves. The result is a deep joy.



# The Sukkah

“Between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, all Jews are immersed in mitzvah activities. Some are busy building a sukkah while others are preparing the four kinds.”

Midrash, *Vayikra Rabah* 30:7

Jewish law sets forth specific guidelines for how to fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah properly. Some of the more notable building specifications are:

## SECHACH

The most important feature of the *sukkah* is the roof covering, called *sechach*, which consists of nonedible plant matter, that has been detached from its source, and that is still in its raw state (not having been made into a vessel of sorts). Common examples of *sechach* are bamboo poles, evergreen branches, or palm leaves. There needs to be sufficient *sechach* so that there is more shade than sun in the sukkah.

## POSITION

The sukkah should be directly under the sky. It should be not be built under a tree or overhang.

## WALLS

The walls of the sukkah can be made of any material, as long as they are sturdy enough to withstand a common wind. A sukkah must have at least three walls.

## THE BLESSING

During the Sukkot festival, when in the sukkah, about to eat a meal (a meal is defined by eating a grain or drinking wine), we recite the blessing specific to that food followed by the following blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ  
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לֵישֵׁב בַּסֻּכָּה.

*Baruch atah Ado-nai,  
Elo-heinu melech ha'olam,  
asher kidshanu bemitsvotav,  
vetsivanu leishev basukkah.*

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to dwell in the sukkah.

# The Four Kinds

“You shall take for yourselves, on the first day, the fruit of the citron tree, an unopened palm frond, myrtle branches, and willows of the brook; you shall rejoice before G-d for seven days.”

Leviticus 23:40

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We take the four fruits/plants on each day of Sukkot (except for Shabbat).  
The four kinds are:



**ETROG**  
Citron



**LULAV**  
Palm Frond



**HADAS**  
Myrtle



**ARAVAH**  
Willow

---

To perform this mitzvah, we need one *etrog*, one *lulav*, a minimum of three *hadassim*, and two *aravot*. It is customary to tie the latter three together at the lower stem area before the holiday, and the *etrog* remains separate.

On each day of the holiday, preferably in the morning, we perform the mitzvah as follows:

- Face east while holding the *lulav* (with the *hadassim* and *aravot* attached to it) in the right hand. The *etrog* should be within reach on the table.

- Recite the following blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
וַיְצַונו עַל נְטִילַת לֻלָב.

***Baruch atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu  
melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu  
bemitsvotav, vetsivanu al netilat lulav.***

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding taking the *lulav*.

- Lift the *etrog* in your left hand.
- If today is the first time this year that you are performing this mitzvah, recite a second blessing. On the other days, skip this step.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהֵחֵינּוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעְנוּ לְזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.

***Baruch atah Ad-onai, Elo-heinu melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu, veki'yemanu, vehigi'anu lizman hazeh.***

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion.

- Bring the *etrog* and *lulav* together and ensure that they touch, while each remains in its respective hand. This accomplishes the mitzvah.
- It is customary, however, to add waving to the ritual. Wave them:
  - Three times to and fro to the right.
  - Three times to and fro to the left.
  - Three times to and fro in front of you.
  - Three times to and fro in an upward motion.
  - Three times to and fro in a downward motion.
  - Three times to and fro behind you (by turning somewhat to the right).

Jewish sages throughout the ages offered numerous insights into the deeper meaning of this mitzvah—all, of course, in addition to the underlying fact that this is G-d's mitzvah and is thus the way to connect with Him on this festival. The following is a small sampling.

### The Midrash records:

*The etrog represents one type of Jew. Just as the etrog has a taste and aroma, so does Israel include those who have both Torah learning and good deeds.*

*The lulav, from the date palm, represents a second type of Jew. The date has a taste but no aroma; so does Israel include those who have Torah but do not have good deeds.*

*The hadas presents a third type of Jew. The myrtle has an aroma but no taste; so does Israel include those who have good deeds but no Torah.*

*The aravah represents a fourth type of Jew. The willow has no taste and no aroma; so does Israel include those who do not have Torah or good deeds. . . .*

*Says G-d, "Let them all bond together in one bundle and atone for each other. And when you do so, I will be elevated, for G-d is elevated when the people of Israel come together as one."*

(*Vayikra Rabah* 30:12)

**Maimonides (1135—1204) writes:**

*The four species are a symbolic expression of our rejoicing over our ancestors leaving the wilderness, an uninhabitable place, and entering a country full of fruit-trees and rivers.*

*To remember this, we take the etrog, the most pleasant looking fruit; the hadas, the most fragrant plant; the lulav, which has the most beautiful leaves; and the aravah, one of the best plants.*

*These four kinds also have the following three qualities: They are plentiful in the Land of Israel so that everyone could find them. They look pleasant; the etrog and hadas have a pleasant aroma while the other two have neither a good nor bad smell. Thirdly, they keep fresh and green for seven days, which is not the case with many other fruits.*

*(Guide for the Perplexed 3:43)*

**The Sefer Hachinuch (thirteenth century) states:**

*The days of Sukkot are days of great joy for Israel, because it is the time of the gathering of the grain and the fruit of the tree into the home; at this time of year, all are greatly rejoicing. G-d commanded His people to make a holiday dedicated to Him at that time, to direct the focus of the joy toward G-d.*

*However, joy can easily lead to excessive physical indulgence and to forgetting G-d. Therefore, G-d commanded us at this time of joy to take in our hands things that remind us that all the joy in our heart is for His sake*

*and His honor. He wanted this reminder to be from something that brings joy, and it is well known that it is the nature of these four species to gladden the hearts of those who see them.*

*(Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah 324)*



## SHEMINI ATSERET AND SIMCHAT TORAH

“The Torah wants to dance around the reading table on Simchat Torah. But the Torah has no feet. On Simchat Torah, the Jew becomes the dancing feet of the Torah.”

*Likutei Sichot 4, p. 1169*

The festival of Sukkot leads directly into a two-day holiday: Shemini Atseret begins the evening of **Friday, October 9**. Simchat Torah begins the next evening and concludes on Sunday, October 11, at nightfall. Over the course of these two days, we light the festival candles in the evenings (the proper times can be found on page 5), we celebrate with festive meals that are preceded by Kiddush and the eating of challah, and we refrain from work.

The most famous aspect of this festival is the universal custom to complete the yearly Torah cycle on Simchat Torah (Sunday, October 11). This makes this two-day holiday, and especially the final day, particularly joyous. For whenever one engages in a mitzvah that takes a long time to accomplish, the day of completion is a joyous occasion. This applies to any


mitzvah that takes a while to accomplish, and it certainly applies when we complete the entire Torah.

On Simchat Torah, we don't only complete the Torah, we also begin it again. Just a few short minutes after we read the final verse of the Torah, we begin to read from the beginning of the Torah. We wish to show *right away* that the Torah is important to us and that we will continue to study it to gain a deeper appreciation for it and deeper insights into its important teachings. In fact, the very first word that we read from the beginning of the Torah is “In the beginning.” The Lubavitcher Rebbe notes that this is no coincidence: even after completing the entire Torah, we are still “in the beginning” of a long journey, for there are always additional insights that we can derive from the Torah.

However, it is important to note that the joy of Simchat Torah is not limited to those who spent the year immersed in Torah study or attentive to the Torah reading during the synagogue service. We know this from the fact that the primary method of celebration on Simchat Torah is not through reading from the Torah, but to dance with the Torah while it is closed. This demonstrates that Simchat Torah celebrates a deeper relationship with the Torah, one that every Jew has. The Torah is the inheritance of each Jew, irrespective of whether one taps into this treasure.

Simchat Torah is a day to celebrate this bond that we all have with the Torah. We dance with a closed Torah to accentuate the fact that we all equally share this bond with the Torah—from our greatest scholars to the most unlearned.

Of course, we don't wish to suffice with an inherent connection to the Torah that remains abstract. The goal is to utilize Simchat Torah—the day that celebrates our inherent connection to the Torah—to bring more Torah study and practice into our lives throughout the year.

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