

## Celebrating *Rosh Hashanah*!

In summer, we mourn the destruction of the Temple in biblical times. Fall is a time of introspection and repentance in connection with the High Holy Days. And in the winter we celebrate our past victories on *Hanukkah* and *Purim*.

*Rosh Hashanah*—which literally means “the head of the year”—is the Jewish New Year, and the beginning of the High Holy Days.

The name itself tells us how we are to enter the New Year. Utilizing our intellect, we make an accounting of the past year and prepare ourselves for the upcoming challenges and goals of the New Year.

The two days of the *Rosh Hashanah* holiday are spent mostly in prayer.

The *shofar*, the ram’s horn blown repeatedly throughout prayer ceremonies on *Rosh Hashanah*, acts as a call to action, reminding us of our desire to be close to our Creator. Its blast also sounds like a cry, reflecting our yearning to be in sync with God’s plan.

Interestingly, the *Rosh Hashanah* prayers are not filled with personal requests, and we do not ask for forgiveness for our misdeeds—that is done ten days later on *Yom Kippur*.



Instead, we focus on God’s dominion over the world. When we enter the New Year, we first proclaim that the Creator is the ultimate ruler who controls all events that happen on a personal and global level throughout the year.

On *Rosh Hashanah*, we are standing before the King, and as such, we have no words, no thoughts that should distract us from the recognition of the Master of the Universe.

Our task as we enter a New Year is to first recognize God’s supreme authority. Only when we understand that we are not in control can we truly begin the process of introspection.

This is the foundation of our relationship with God, and as we enter the New Year it helps us relate to our neighbors and ourselves.

We work to achieve the realization that it is God who decides who will live, who will die, who will be awarded success, and who will not.

Therefore we begin to see that everyone—from the rich and most successful to the poorest and downtrodden—is an equal partner in our ultimate work—which is to be close with our Creator and to heed His word. *Shalom!*



*the Rabbi looks at...*

## Celebrating the New Year—*Rosh Hashanah*!

*Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is observed on the first day of the month of Tishrei on the Hebrew calendar, which falls in September or October on the Gregorian calendar (the calendar in common use throughout the world). It is a holy day marked by intense moral and spiritual introspection.*

There are a number of beautiful customs associated with *Rosh Hashanah*. People greet each other with the words, “*le-shanah tovah tikatevu v’taychataymu*,” meaning, “May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year.”

This practice stems from the traditional imagery in which God sits in judgment during the Ten Days of Repentance (the ten days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, the

Day of Atonement), deciding the fate of every living thing.

On *Rosh Hashanah*, Jewish tradition tells us that God opens up three books—one for those who were righteous during the year, one for those who were wicked, and one for those whose good and bad deeds balanced. Everyone’s fate is inscribed in one of those three books.

During the Ten Days of Repentance, however, Jews believe they can alter the course of their destiny by repenting, praying, and doing acts of charity.

On *Yom Kippur*, the final day of judgment, God closes all three books and seals humankind’s verdict for the coming year.

### **The Shofar**

While the theme of *Rosh Hashanah* is atonement for sin, the blowing of the *shofar*—an instrument made

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from the horn of a ram or other kosher animal—is the main ritual of the day.

The Bible refers to the festival of *Rosh Hashanah* as “the day of the blowing of the shofar.” As it states in Numbers 29:1, “On the first day of the seventh month hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. It is a day for you to sound the trumpets.”

And Leviticus 23:24–25 states, “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire.’”

There are three distinct types of blasts sounded on the *shofar*—a long, drawn-out sound called *tekiah*; a broken, plaintive sound called *shevarim*; and a series of sharp, wailing, staccato sounds called *teruah*.

A total of 100 blasts are sounded on each of the two days of *Rosh Hashanah*, followed by the congregational recitation of biblical verses reminding them of their covenant with God.

The *shofar* symbolizes:

- Revelation, the giving of the *Torah* at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 19)
- God’s coronation, the reaffirmation of God’s sovereignty and kingship (Psalm 98:6)
- The *akedah*, the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, where the ram’s horn, which was caught in the bushes, became an eternal symbol of Abraham and



Isaac’s trust in God, even in the face of death (Genesis 22)

- Repentance, a wake-up call to arouse the people from their moral reverie
- The Messianic age, a reminder of God’s promise to bring Messiah who ushers into the world an age of physical and spiritual peace (Isaiah 27:13)

### More traditions

No work is permitted on *Rosh Hashanah*, and much of the day is spent in the synagogue. Many people read Psalm 33 and 130.

On the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, people perform the *Tashlikh* ceremony in which they throw bread crumbs or stones into a running body of water such as a river or spring, symbolically casting off their sins into the water and beginning life anew.

This custom originated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and in all likelihood was derived from the biblical account of the scapegoat. (See Leviticus 16.)

## Celebrating *Rosh Hashanah*!

Today, Jews view *Tashlikh* as symbolic of the freedom from sin they can enjoy when they repent and trust in God’s miracle of forgiveness.

In the words of the prophet recited in the *Tashlikh* liturgy, “You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19).

### Scarlet and snow

White is the predominant color during the Ten Days of Repentance. The skullcaps, ark curtain, and *Torah* mantles are all white, signifying purity, holiness, and atonement for sin—“*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*” (Isaiah 1:18).

White is also the color of the shrouds in which Jews are buried. It reminds them of the gravity of judgment and the frailty of life.

It is also customary to dip a piece of *challah* (bread) or apple into honey at mealtime and recite the prayer, “May it be thy will that we be blessed with a

good, sweet year.” As with most other religious festivals, Jews partake of a festive meal on the two days of *Rosh Hashanah*. People are to feel joyful and



confident that God, the Father and King, will pass merciful judgment on their lives and forgive their iniquities.

### Season of repentance

Here is a personal reflection on *Rosh Hashanah* from Ami Farkas, a writer and photographer on staff in *The Fellowship*’s Jerusalem office:

**W**ith each season of the year, we see changes all around us in nature. We have grown accustomed to these changes, and patterns have emerged in societies to correlate with them.

The way we dress, our work habits, and even our food preferences follow seasonal cycles. This is reflected in the Jewish calendar. In the spring, Jewish people celebrate Passover and our freedom.



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