

# High Holidays

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
Welcome	3
Inviting Your Full Self to the High Holidays	4
Candlelighting for Rosh Hashanah	5
Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah	6
Shehechyanu	7
Blessing for Challah	8
Blessings for A Sweet New Year	9
Did you know?	10
Blessings for Apples & Honey	11
Kick-Ass Rosh Hashanah: Important Questions	12
How to Blow A Shofar	13
<b>PRAYERS FOR FORGIVENESS</b>	<b>14</b>
Why We Fast On Yom Kippur	14
<b>PRAYERS OF REMEMBRANCE</b>	<b>15</b>
Imagine a Time Machine of Do-Overs	15
We Remember Them	16
<b>COMMENTARY</b>	<b>17</b>
Rosh HaShanah Food Traditions: What's on the Table?	17

## INTRODUCTION

### Welcome

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Custom & Craft

Happy New Year! Traditionally, the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, is a time of introspection and reflection. How did we do in the past year? What are we hoping to change in the coming year? During this meal we will rejoice in being together, and think backwards on the year that was, and forward to the year that will be. Plus delicious food, puns, and casting off some bad karma. To a sweet new year!

## Inviting Your Full Self to the High Holidays

Contributed by [Jewish Meditation Center of Brooklyn](#)

Source: JMC Brooklyn

The *Yamim Noraim* (Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) are here. We're tasked with reflecting on our lives and practicing *teshuvah* (returning). Through *teshuvah* we examine our actions over the past year, seek forgiveness from ourselves, others, and the Divine and dedicate ourselves to do better next year. These sacred days provide an opportunity to ask ourselves the hardest questions and explore all the nooks and crannies of our thoughts, words, and actions over the past year. What's beautiful about this process is we're given the awesome opportunity to meet ourselves exactly where we are and practice being accountable. *Teshuvah* is about living a reflective life and taking responsibility for how we treat ourselves and interact with our family, friends, loved ones, colleagues, and even strangers.

**Practice Instructions:** Let's invite our full selves to this practice. Right now in the present, look back over your past year's journey, while visioning out the potential in the year to come. Before working with the three simple steps below close your eyes for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Bring your awareness to this moment in time, check in with your breath and your body. Feel the seat beneath you. Now return to your breath. Notice how you fill with breath and then how this same breath is released back to the world. As thoughts arise, notice if and where they reside in your body. Notice where you feel tension, and observe your reactions and responses. Use the questions below to guide your *teshuvah* practice. Spend time with each question and invite yourself to write your most honest answers. This is your practice, your life, and your opportunity to bring your entire self to the process. Whenever your mind inevitably wanders or wavers (which is what minds do), bring yourself back to this work and this paper in your hands. See the holiness in the task at hand, your role in creating the life you want to live and the capacity that you hold at every moment. With every breath, you can use the practice of *teshuvah* to return, reflect, forgive, and move forward.

### 1. Reflect

Over the past year, did I fully live my values? Did I treat other people how I would want to be treated? What do I most regret? What am I most proud of?

### 2. Seek Forgiveness

From whom must I ask forgiveness? To whom must I offer my forgiveness (regardless of outcome)?

### 3. Letting Go & Moving Forward

How can I release myself from any residue of the past year? What do I want to practice, seek, or commit myself to this year?

May we all be blessed with a sweet & meaningful New Year.

## Candlelighting for Rosh Hashanah

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Custom & Craft

Nearly all Jewish holiday begin with lighting candles, and so this one will, too. After we light the candles we wave our hands in three big horizontal circles to symbolically bring the light closer to us, and then cover our eyes while we say the blessing. When the blessing is over take a moment of silent reflection with your eyes covered, and then open your eyes and enjoy the beauty of candlelight, bringing you into the new year.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שְׁלִיחוֹטוֹב

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam  
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov.*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe,  
who has sanctified us with commandments, and commanded us to light festival candles.

## INTRODUCTION

### Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Custom & Craft

Wine or grape juice are also standards of nearly every Jewish holiday. Before we eat we take a moment to say a blessing over a glass of wine. In this special version Rosh Hashanah is called Yom HaZikaron, the Day of Remembering, and Yom Truah, the Day of Calling Out. Tonight during our meal we will do some remembering, and some calling out. We will also focus on the gratitude we feel for the past year, and all of the blessings that it contained. L'chaim!

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam borei peri hagafen.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

## Shehechyanu

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Custom & Craft

The shehechyanu blessing thanks the creator for giving us life, sustaining us, and allowing us to reach this day. This blessing is said at momentous occasions, and tonight counts because it is the night when we can finally look back on the whole previous year. We made it! Whether bitter or sweet, difficult or fun, tonight we celebrate and feel grateful for making it to today, and to this table to reflect with people we care about.

**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁהַחַיְנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהַגִּיעְנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה**

*Barukh ata adonai elohenu melekh ha'olam, shehecheyanu, v'kiymanu, v'higiyanu la'z'man ha'zeh*

Blessed are You Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe who has given us life, sustained us, and allowed us to reach this day.

## Blessing for Challah

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Custom & Craft

Finally, time to begin eating! Challah is a yummy egg bread eaten on most Jewish holidays. On Rosh Hashanah the challah is in the shape of a circle, to symbolize the circle of time, and the fullness of the year that is coming. Many people eat raisin challah on Rosh Hashanah, and drizzle honey on top of it, for extra sweetness. Yum!

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
הַמּוֹצֵיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,  
hamotzi lekhem min ha-aretz.*

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

## Blessings for A Sweet New Year

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Custom & Craft

The quintessential Rosh Hashanah treat is apples and honey. Take a sweet, crisp, apple and dip it in some honey. Before eating we say a mini-blessing, hoping that the year to come will be *tova umetukah*, good and sweet!

Pick up a slice of apple, dip it in honey, and say:

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam borei pri ha-eitz.*

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

*Yehi ratzon lifanecha, Adonai Eloheinu, v'Elohai avoteinu, she'te'hadash aleinu shanah tovah u'metukah.*

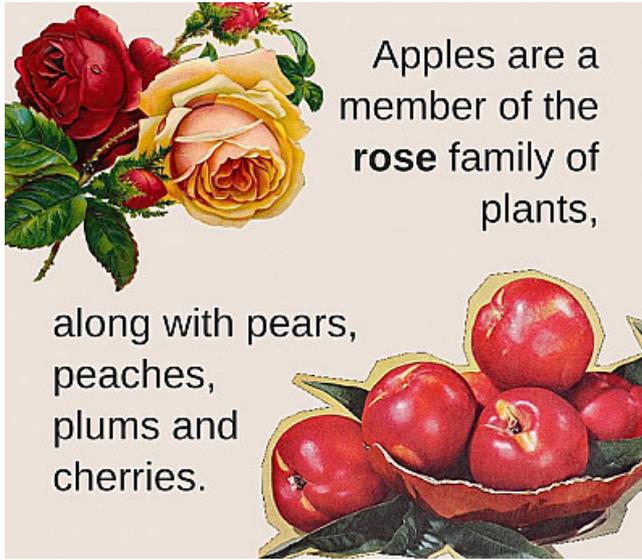
May it be Your will, Eternal our God, that this be a good and sweet year for us.

Eat the apple dipped in honey.

## Did you know?

Contributed by [SIJCC](#)

Source: SIJCC



Apples are a member of the **rose** family of plants,

along with pears, peaches, plums and cherries.

## Blessings for Apples & Honey

Contributed by [AJU Miller Intro to Judaism](#)

Source:

For Ashkenazi Jews, the primary symbolic food of Rosh Ha-Shanah is apples dipped in honey, a way of wishing for a sweet new year. Before eating apples and honey, say the following blessings:

**Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam borei pri ha-eitz.**

*Blessed are You, God, Ruler of the universe, who creates fruit of the tree.*

**Yehi ratzon lifanecha, Adonai Eloheinu, v'Elohai avoteinu, she'te'hadash aleinu shanah tovah  
u'metukah.**

*May it be Your will, Adonai our God, to grant us a good and sweet year.*

## Kick-Ass Rosh Hashanah: Important Questions

Contributed by [JewBelong](#)

Source: JewBelong, adapted from Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf

### ASK YOURSELF IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Like a mini-spiritual workout! You don't have to answer every question, but tackling a few is impactful.

- 1) When do I feel that my life is most meaningful?
- 2) What would bring me more happiness than anything else in the world?
- 3) What are my three most significant achievements in the past year?
- 4) What are my biggest mistakes in the past year?
- 5) What project or goal, if left undone, will I most regret a year from now?
- 6) If I knew I couldn't fail, what would I try to accomplish?
- 7) What is the most important decision I need to make this year?
- 8) What important decision did I avoid making last year?
- 9) Over the last year, did my most important relationships become closer and deeper, or was there a sense of stagnation and drifting?
- 10) What can I do to nurture those relationships this year?
- 11) If I could change one thing about myself, what would it be?
- 12) Are there any ideals I'd be willing to die for?
- 13) If I could live my life over, what would I change?
- 14) What do I want written on my tombstone? And how do I begin living that way now?

Adapted from "Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur Survival Kit" by Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf

Download the full PDF here: <http://www.jewbelong.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/PersonalRoadmap-1.pdf>

## How to Blow A Shofar

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Custom & Craft



**Tekiah:** One blow that lasts 2-3 seconds

**Shevarim:** A "broken" tekiah, made by sounding three quick blasts

**Teruah:** The alarm is made up of nine very quick pulses

**Tekiah Gedolah:** Meaning "Big Tekiah", the Tokea (person who sounds the shofar) blows the shofar for as long as possible, but at least 9 seconds. If more than one Tokea are sounding, they often compete to see who can last longer.

During Rosh Hashanah, a sequence of blows is done. At Yom Kippur, only Tekiah Gedolah is blown.

## Why We Fast On Yom Kippur

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield, Pardes

Fasting on Yom Kippur is not as obvious as one might think. Nowhere does the Torah explicitly command it. Instead, the verses teach us to “afflict ourselves” without defining the nature of this “affliction.”

We do know that Yom Kippur is about atonement and forgiveness. So how does “afflicting” ourselves through fasting relate to *teshuva*? Many assume that fasting is a form of self-punishment, a way of balancing the scales for over-indulgence or rule-breaking. The pietists of medieval Ashkenaz called this *teshuvat hamishkal*, literally repentance of balance. The pleasure brought by sin must be accounted for and balanced by physical discomfort. But this does not connect fasting to the personal growth and psychological transformation.

In his commentary on Leviticus, the Abravanel (1437-1508, Portugal) connects fasting to our capacity to be like angels. When we abstain from food and water we demonstrate our spiritual identities. As another medieval commentator noted, when we fast our bodies are afflicted, but our souls rejoice. I find the sharp dualism hard to connect with. I do not conceive of myself as a good, pure soul in constant conflict with and chained to a corrupt, sinning body. I find an integrated identity more relevant.

The Talmud alludes to another approach that I find to be the most helpful. In the section dealing with fasting, the rabbis note that Yom Kippur is referred to as a *shabbaton*, a day of rest. From this perspective, when we abstain from eating and drinking, we are actually “resting” or “pausing” from these activities. The discomfort we feel on Yom Kippur is not a direct result of the absence of physical pleasure but rather, from the psychic and spiritual pain brought on by sin.

When we act in ways that betray our inner goodness and contradict the essence of who we are as beings in relationship with God and each other, our souls are in pain. While this pain is always present, many of us ignore it, cover it up, or distract ourselves with physical pleasure.

On Yom Kippur we “rest” from these distractions and allow the “affliction” in our hearts (from pain caused, opportunities missed, and alienation from our best selves) to be fully experienced and felt. This type of affliction can then push us towards growth, forgiveness and transformation!

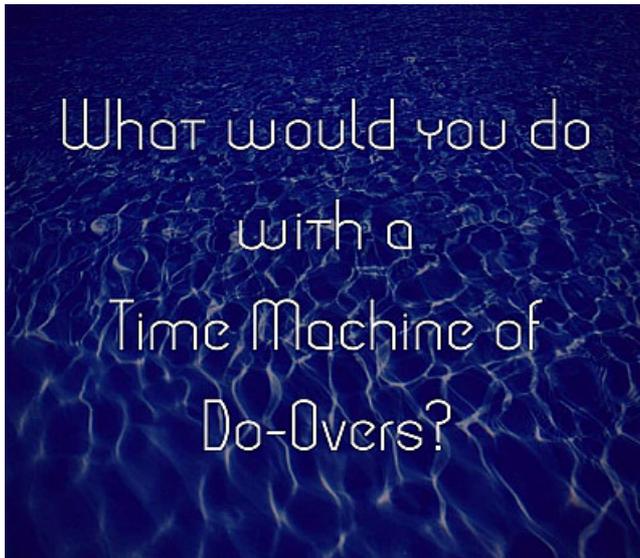
Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield teaches Talmud, Halakha and Jewish Thought.

From “The Pardes Companion to Yom Kippur”: <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/09/the-pardes-companion-to-yom-kippur/>

## Imagine a Time Machine of Do-Overs

Contributed by [SIJCC](#)

Source: SIJCC



## We Remember Them

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: <http://www.shiva.com/learning-center/resources/poems-of-comfort/>

by Sylvan Kamens & Rabbi Jack Riemer

At the rising sun and at its going down; We remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter; We remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring; We remember them.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer; We remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of the autumn; We remember them.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends; We remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as We remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength; We remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart; We remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make; We remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share; We remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs; We remember them.

For as long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as, We remember them.

## Rosh HaShanah Food Traditions: What's on the Table?

Contributed by [Sara Shapiro-Plevan](#)

Source:

The Rosh Hashanah Seder finds its earliest written source in a peculiar menu whose symbolic significance is not revealed...and your dinner menu can include many of these items that can draw on our earliest history and connect us to our hopes and dreams for our present and our future.

"For a good omen on Rosh HaShanah one should make it a habit to eat squash [like pumpkin], legumes [like string beans], kartei (leeks), spinach and dates."

*Talmud BT Keritot 6a*

Tunisian Jews often "publish" a French and Arabic menu called the "Honey Page" for it lists all the special foods to be eaten and to be used to symbolize New Year's wishes and of course it is headed by the word "Devash – honey." Then the list often continues with figs, dates, pomegranates, apples, and the head of a ram or a fish. Jews from other lands add carrots and beets, but obviously any food will do as long as you have a creatively corny sense of humor and a willingness to share your greatest fears and hopes.

Many families add a conversation following each of these meditations. Prompts are shared below.

### *Apples and Honey*

*Y'hi ratzon milfanech, shetichadesh aleinu shana tova u'metukah.*

May it be God's will we will be renewed for a sweet new year.

With this blessing, we also recite the blessing over apples:

*Baruch Ata, Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, borei pri haetz.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the tree.

What is new about you, for you, with you in this new year? We ask that God will "renew" us. How might you imagine being renewed in this coming year? How might you help this to happen? This is the most commonly known symbol and food for Rosh HaShanah. Why do you think it has become so popular? What might you substitute in its place if you were to reinvent the ritual?

### *Challah*

For dipping challah (into honey) we might use this Hassidic wish:

May God create yeast in your soul, causing you to ferment, and mature, to rise, elevate, to your highest possibilities, to reach your highest self.

How have you matured or "fermented" this year? What is something that you have accomplished that you can celebrate with us? What are your hopes for "fermentation" for this coming year? What is something you hope to accomplish?

### *A Head*

Traditionally the head of a lamb or a carp is the occasion for a blessing (though vegetarians might perhaps substitute a head of cabbage or a head of lettuce):

*Y'hi ratzon sheh- ni-hi-yeh l'Rosh v'lo l'zanav*

May it be God's will that we will be a head and not a tail.

What does this mean? How might you interpret the blessing? Would you rather be a head or a tail? Why? How might this food be connected to the Jewish calendar?

### *Spinach or beets*

In Hebrew, spinach or beets are traditionally called *seleck*, which can also mean "to remove decisively." They elicit this New Year's wish:

*Y'hi ratzon sheh- yis-talku soneinu.*

May it be God's will that our enemies be removed from our presence.

When this was written, who do you think it could have referred to? What are different ways we can understand "enemies"? Who might it refer to today? Tell a story from our Jewish past that illustrates how our enemies were "removed decisively."

### *Pomegranate*

Pomegranates, filled with numerous sweet seeds, traditionally recall the 613 commandments or mitzvot found in the Torah. The blessing is:

*Y'hi ratzon sheh-ni-hi-yeh malei mitzvot ka-rimon*

May it be God's will that our lives may be as full of mitzvot as the pomegranate is filled with seeds.

What is a mitzvah that you hope to fulfill this year? Here, seeds symbolize mitzvot. What else might they symbolize? What does the performance of a mitzvah do for you, the one who performs the mitzvah? How does it feel? What inspires us to do mitzvot?

### *Carrots and Squash*

These root vegetables or nightshades, which are called respectively, Gezer (decree) or Kara (tear up or read) are used for:

*Yehi ratzon milfanecha she-yikara roa gezar dinneinu, v'yikaru lfanecha zakiyoteinu*

May it be God's will that the evil decrees against us be torn up and our good merits be read out before You.

To yourself: If you could choose one thing that would be wiped from your memory this year, what would it be? To yourself: What is something that you wished you'd done differently this year? If you could do it all over again, would you do it the same, or different? What is a "good merit" about you that perhaps no one knows about?

### **The Power of the Pun: Inventing Your Own Seder Rosh HaShanah**

Let us suggest some contemporary "green grocer" wishes punning in English on the shape, name or color of these fruits and vegetables:

Dates: May it be God's will that all my single friends have many dates this year.

Tomatoes or Hot Peppers: May it be God's will that this be a juicy/red-hot New Year.

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg (CLAL 1977) suggested:

Peaches – May we have a "peachy" year! Brussels or other sprouts– May our good fortune "sprout"!

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includes some excerpts from Noam Zion, *The Rosh HaShanah Seder*

