

Rosh Hashanah

Watch overview video:

- History of Rosh Hashanah (2:48)
<http://www.history.com/topics/rosh-hashanah-history/videos#history-of-rosh-hashanah>

Basics:

Pronunciation: ROHSH hah-shah-NAH (♫ <http://bit.ly/18k7m1D>)

Meaning: The Head of the Year, New Year of Kings

Jewish Date: 1st and 2nd of Tishrei

Secular Date: Generally falls around mid-to-late September

Length: 1 day holiday in Israel, 1 or 2 day holiday in Diaspora (depending on denomination, too)

Themes:

- Creation of the world
- Renewal
- Self-examination and introspection
- Sovereignty of the Holy One
- Remembrance
- Blowing of Shofar
- Opening of the Gates
- Days of Awe

History & Overview:

Read: <http://bit.ly/1gBXKqR>

Rosh Hashanah is not named as a holiday in the Torah

- In the Torah the holiday that falls on the 1st day of the 7th month, which we call Tishrei, is known as Yom HaZikaron (the day of remembrance) or Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar).

Rosh Hashanah is also called the “birthday of the world” because it is traditionally considered to be the 6th day of creation when humanity was created.

Rosh Hashanah begins a 10-day period, until end of Yom Kippur, called the “Days of Awe” (Yamim Norarim), where Jews are encouraged to do Prayer (Tefilah), Repentance (Teshuvah) and Acts of Charity (Tzedakah) to ensure being inscribed in the “Book of Life” for the coming year.

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Halakhah

Listen: <http://bit.ly/GVxQRK>

- Work is not permitted
- The shofar is blown, unless holiday falls on Shabbat
 - Note: some non-orthodox communities will still choose to blow a shofar on the Sabbath, as Rosh Hashanah services will be the only time many Jews will attend synagogue and be able to observe the commandment to hear the shofar.
- The prayer “Avinu Malkeinu” (Our Father Our King) is not recited on the Shabbat by Orthodox and more traditional communities because it is considered a prayer of petition, and asking the Holy One to perform “work.”

Customs

Read: <http://bit.ly/GVAfvV>

- Greetings:
 - L'Shanah tovah
 - Lit: To a Good Year
 - Idiomatic: Happy New Year
 - L'shanah tovah tikatemu v'taihatevu
May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year.
- Eating foods symbolic of an auspicious new year
 - Sweet foods: Dipping apples or challah in honey is a common Ashkenazic custom
 - Yehi Ratzon: Sephardic Rosh Hashanah Seder where symbolic foods are eaten and then the phrase “yehi ratzon” – may it be your will – and a special blessing is said.
 - Challah is not salted during Rosh Hashanah

Liturgy

Read: <http://bit.ly/1bozl4s>

- Both Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah use a prayer book that is called a Machzor, which means, “cycle.”
- The liturgy is a modified version of the standard daily prayer cycle, with the additions of unique prayers and melodies, liturgical prayers (piyyut), recitation of Avinu Malkeinu (our father our king), blowing of the shofar, special verses on the Holy One’s sovereignty, remembrance of the Jewish people, past and promised redemption
- Prayer Services in Chronological Order:
 - Hatarat Nedarim – personal release of vows, done in small groups. Not generally a synagogue service. This is not a common practice, but one that is seeing resurgence of popularity in some communities.
 - **Erev Rosh Hashanah:** modified version of the Minchah/Maariv services.

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- **Rosh Hashanah Day:** modified version of the Shacharit service, with a Torah Reading and Musaf/Shofar Service
 - Unique elements of Musaf: Malkhuyot (verses relating to God's Kingship), Zikhronot (verses relating to memory), and Shofarot (verses relating to shofar). According to *The Jewish Holidays* by Michael Strassfeld, these three sections symbolize three central principles of Judaism:
 1. The acceptance of God as King of Universe
 2. The acknowledgement that God intervenes in the world to punish the wicked and reward the good.
 3. The recognition that God was revealed in the giving of the Torah at Sinai, and will again be revealed at end of days.
 - **Torah Portions:**
 - **Rosh Hashanah** (Gen 21:1-21:34 & Num 29:1-29:6)
Yitzhak Born, Yishmael & Hagar Banished, Festival Offerings
 - Note: some congregations choose to use part of Parsha Bereshit (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4), instead of the traditional readings above because Rosh Hashanah is also called the “birthday of the world”
 - **Rosh Hashanah II** (Gen 22:1-22:24 & Num 29:1-29:6)
The Great Test, Festival Offerings
- **Tashlich:** Optional service with no halakhically required liturgy, but generally includes psalms. Communities gather at natural bodies of water and “cast off” their sins by tossing breadcrumbs into the water
- **Rosh Hashanah Afternoon:** modified version of Minchah service, including Avinu Malkeinu

Sources and Bibliography

Books:

- *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide & Commentary*, Michael Strassfield
- *Seasons of our Joy*, Arthur Ocean Waskow
- *The Jewish Book of Days*, Jill Hammer
- *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Fall Holidays*, Paul Steinberg
- *The Rosh Chodesh Table: Foods at the New Moon*, Judith Solomon
- *Seasons for Celebration*, Karen L. Fox and Phyllis Zimblor Miller
- *Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Patkin Teutsch
- *High Holy Day Prayer Book*, Morris Silverman (1951)

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Websites:

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