



A Simple Rosh Hashanah Service

Rosh Hashanah is the start of a ten-day period of introspection, prayer, reflection, and forgiveness—culminating with the Yom Kippur fast.

Tonight, as we gather together to begin the holiday with a festive meal, we will say a few short blessings before eating. As always, there is symbolism in much of what we do.

On Rosh Hashanah, we will eat apples and honey; apple slices dipped in honey represent our desire for a sweet year ahead.

We eat Challah, baked into braids, and shaped into round loaves to symbolize the circular nature of our interweaving lives, reminding us that we are all connected to each other in many ways.

On the second night of Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to eat a fruit that is new to us for the season, so that we may again say the *shehechyanu* blessing, thankful for reaching this season.

Pomegranates are often a popular choice because of their many seeds; symbolic of the hope that our good deeds in the coming year will be as bountiful as the seeds of the fruit.

The Torah says the first day of the seventh month—which begins at sunset—shall be “a sacred occasion,” a “day of rest and remembrance, commemorated with loud blasts.”

Originally, Rosh Hashanah was a one-day holiday. Rabbis added a second day to insure we were following the biblical commandment on the correct day. Orthodox and Conservative Jewish communities generally observe Rosh Hashana for two days in Israel and throughout the world.

Reconstructionist, Reform, Renewal, and other Jewish communities often only observe the first day of Rosh Hashanah.

In Torah times this holiday, which begins at sunset, did not mark the New Year; Passover was the holiday that marked the beginning of a New Year--in the Springtime.

Like the holiday of Passover, this holiday celebrates freedom and the need for us to be free of the things that enslave us. It gives us all another opportunity to renew our faith in order to make our lives richer and grounded to what is truly important.

One of the foundations of this holiday is kindness. We become kinder when we act in kind and compassionate ways.

This doesn't mean that we ignore crimes and injustices, but it does mean that we try to be sensitive to others; it requires remembering that each one of us—however imperfect we may be on the outside—is endowed with a soul on the inside.

We are reminded every year at the holidays—and every single day if we really believe what we practice—to be better, to do better, to forgive, to offer forgiveness, and to accept forgiveness.

We begin the holiday with the traditional candle lighting just before sunset. We cover our heads as we kindle these lights and say together:

Baruch ah tah Adonoy elohanoo, melech olom asher kidishanu, b'mitzvohsov vitzivanu la had lek ner shel yom tov.

Blessed art Thou our Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by giving us your commandments and bringing us to this sacred place tonight, where we mark another year that has gone by--and another year that is about to begin--by lighting these holiday candles.

Next, we say the *shehechyanu* prayer, thankful that we have reached this holy day and arrived at another season.

Baruch ah tah Adonoy, elohanoo, melech ha-olom, sheh hech he yanoo, va-kee y'manu, va hig-ee-yanu, la-ahz man, haw zeh.

*Blessed Art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who hast granted us life, sustained us, and once more brought us to this festive season to usher in another holiday and share a meal with family and friends.
Amen.*

May this coming year be a time of health and goodness for our friends and family and for all people. May these Holiday candles bring illumination and peace within our souls, goodness and cheer within our hearts, and happiness and harmony within our families and in our homes.

This Holiday serves to mark the task of examining our lives and sincerely seeking forgiveness for any wrongs we have committed during the year. We are guided to make amends with anyone we have wronged and to make plans for improving our relations with each other during the coming year.

Rosh Hashanah is about making peace with those around us, and making peace in our families, in our community, and in our world.

We are urged to take stock of what we have.

We are urged to repair what is broken – and to reach out to those we may have hurt.

We seek forgiveness and we offer forgiveness as well.

Next, we recite a blessing—or Kiddush—on wine. It is acceptable to say this blessing in English. For many people, Hebrew is the “preferred” language of prayer because it is the language of the Torah and is considered “holy.” There is no reason however to refrain from saying prayers if one cannot read, understand, or pronounce Hebrew. What *is* important is offering our appreciation and thankfulness *in any language*.

We raise our glasses and say together:

Baruch atah Adonoy Ellohanu, melech Haw Olom, boray pre Hagofen

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine

As we share in the sweetness of this wine, symbol of joy and gladness, we are thankful for the blessings of life and of health. We pray that the coming year will be a year of happiness for all of us gathered together here; a year that yields meaningful work for each of us, and a year where we recognize our place in the world, and work to make our lives—and the lives of those around us—better.

We ask that we will all learn to appreciate the many blessings we have been given every single day and to extend kindness and compassion to everyone we encounter.

We are grateful for this moment, this gathering, this holiday, and the chance to grow from each new experience we are given; those that are joyful and happy—as well as those experiences that seem to be sad and sorrowful.

Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has given us the choice to be holy through commandments; who has given us the Sabbath and festival days to be thoughtful; and has given us these holidays of in-gathering. We are grateful that you have granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion together.

Our faith gives us many holidays to celebrate throughout the year and they are all times for self-reflection, gently guiding us to a better path in life.

The central theme of the High Holidays presents us with the need to reflect and think about who we are and what we have achieved in our lives. Not as a marker of wealth or status, but as a marker for who we truly are and what we stand for.

This is the idea behind teshuvah and its challenge to us— to begin a process of self-reflection that result in a "turning" towards some higher purpose.

This holiday especially is one where we are given a chance to reflect on our past year; to think about where we have been and how we will live our lives in the year to come. It is a time to think about those around us whose lives have touched us and to think about those who are no longer beside us, but whose lives have made us who we are today.

It is also a time to ask forgiveness of those around us—our friends and loved ones—for any hurtful thing we may have done or said—either intentionally or unintentionally; and a time to reaffirm our commitment to lead a good and meaningful life, making peace wherever we go.

Just as importantly, we are urged to *give* forgiveness as well as ask for it—something that is often harder to do because it involves letting go; letting go of the anger, hurt, and resentment that trap us and keep us enslaved.

This moment tonight—right now—at the start of a new year and a new day-- is truly the beginning of the rest of each of our lives; may we all live them happily--and well--and towards a good and worthy purpose.

Before we break bread together, we wash our hands together and recite:

Baruch ahtah Adonoy Ellohanu melech ha-olam, asher kidishanu bamitzvah sawv vitzivanu, ahl netee lahs, yaw daw yeem

Blessed art Thou our Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us by thy commandments and granted us the privilege of these blessings of food after washing our hands.

We are thankful for the food, which we are about to eat. We are also aware of those in the world who are less fortunate than we are.

We pledge to honor the Torah commitment to help others—both those whose paths we cross directly and those we are able to help anonymously.

Removing the challah cover, we break bread and say:

Baruch atah Adonoy Ellohanu melech ha-olom, ha motzie lechem, min ha—aretz

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth

Finally, a prayer for the New Year, afterwards we will begin our meal by dipping an apple into honey, to symbolize our hope for a sweet, good year ahead.

As we taste the sweetness, we are urged to take a moment to savor that sweetness and remind ourselves that even if life is not always sweet, we can always find something around us that is.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who created the fruits of the vine

May it be thy will O Lord our God and God of our ancestors, to renew unto us a sweet and good year.

We hope that by our prayers, by our thoughts and by the way we conduct ourselves throughout our daily lives, we may be worthy of continued blessings and goodness, and that health, happiness and simple joys be given to all of us gathered around this table here tonight; as well as to our family and to our friends; to our people; and to all of humankind. Amen.

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