



Easy Peasy
Rosh Hashanah
Yom Kippur
Guide

Seed

A decorative border on the left side of the page features fresh pomegranates, sliced apples, a small bowl of honey with a wooden dipper, and a glass bowl of pomegranate seeds, all set against a light, textured background.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the most highly charged days in the Jewish calendar.

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of a new year and gives each of us an opportunity to reflect upon the year that has passed and how we can improve for the year ahead. Hashem judges us based upon our deeds and allocates us everything we need for the year ahead. Most of us do not have a clear majority of good or bad deeds but rather waver between them; therefore we are given until the end of Yom Kippur to improve ourselves when our judgement is sealed.

The Halacha is literally translated as a pathway because it provides us with a clear route to navigate through our lives. RH & YK can be confusing and even a little overwhelming. Therefore I have written this guide to explain how the halacha guides us on these days. I have started by setting out the essentials and continued with a little more detail, differentiating between mitzvot and customs. Don't worry if you read something that is currently beyond your level of Jewish practice. Life is a journey.

Wishing you a happy and sweet new year
Rabbi Dov Birnbaum



For any further questions and easy peasy answers contact Rabbi Dov Birnbaum at dbirnbaum@seed.uk.net

Family Shul Experience
Beis Moshe v'Chaya

Rosh Hashanah

The Essentials

The Shofar is our wake up call to do Teshuva (repent). We have a mitzvah to hear 30 shofar notes on each day of RH, unless it occurs on Shabbat. Our custom is to blow 100 notes in shul. Both men and women should make an effort to hear the Shofar. If you cannot get to shul, ask your Rabbi if he can arrange someone to blow in your house.

We have a special Mussaf prayer service that we say on RH morning which encompasses the central themes of the day – Hashem's greatness, divine providence and the shofar. If it is easier, you can say this in English. (Artsroll Machzor p.448)

We eat festive meals in the night and day of RH, rejoicing in confidence that we will be judged for a good new year. We make Kiddush on RH just like on Shabbat, however the text is different. (see p.94)



Rosh Hashanah

a little more detail



There are three main parts to Rosh Hashanah – Davening, Shofar and Yom Tov meals.

Davening

Look out for the changes that we make to the Amidah starting on RH, until after YK.

If you forget any of these changes you do not repeat the Amidah, except for Hamelech Hakadosh - if you forget this you have to repeat the Amidah. During the Mussaf service, we kneel once on each day of RH and four times on YK. Before kneeling on a wooden or stone floor we place a mat on the floor. This is to ensure that it doesn't resemble idol worship.

Shofar

The person blowing the Shofar says two brachot on each day of RH. Make sure to listen carefully to them and answer Amen.

It is preferable to stand when listening to the Shofar. A person who is elderly or unwell may sit.

Since the brachot cover all of the notes of the Shofar, we try not to speak from the brachot until we have completed all 100 notes. When necessary, it is permitted to speak concerning the davening or the shofar, after hearing the first 30 notes.

When listening to the Shofar make sure you are in the same room that it is being blown in. If this is not possible ensure you can at least hear it clearly. Make sure that you hear each note of the Shofar from beginning to end.

When RH occurs on Shabbat we don't blow the Shofar. In fact, the Shofar is muktzah and should not even be moved on Shabbat.

Yom Tov Meals

On both nights of RH we make the Shehechayanu bracha to thank Hashem for sustaining us until this special time. Women say it when lighting the candles and men say it during Kiddush.

Since we already made this bracha on the first night it is preferable (but not imperative) for another object to be present that requires a Shehechayanu bracha. This could be a new fruit that you haven't eaten since the beginning of its season or a new garment.

Rosh Hashanah Customs

There are a number of widespread customs that we observe on RH. These help to enhance our appreciation of the festival and deepen our experience.

We sound the shofar every weekday morning throughout the month of Elul which precedes RH. This encourages us to begin our process of soul-searching in good time. We say special prayers called Selichot – asking Hashem for forgiveness, beginning at least four days before RH until YK.

Men go to the mikvah on the afternoon before RH. We annul our vows in shul on the morning before RH. One who did not do this may rely on the general annulment of Kol Nidrei.

After saying the Hamotzi bracha we dip the Challah in honey rather than salt to symbolise our wish for a sweet new year. Many people continue this practice until Simchat Torah. Make sure that you still have salt on the table.

We eat various foods on RH night at the beginning of our meal that are symbolic of us having a good year. There is a short prayer that we say whilst eating them (see p.96 for details). Some people do this on both nights of RH. Many people avoid eating nuts on RH since the numerical value of nut in Hebrew is equal to sin.

On the first day of RH (or the second day if the first is on Shabbat) we go to a stream or lake and say the Tashlich prayer (see p.630). This is a prayer to ask Hashem to cast off the effect of our misdeeds from us. It is forbidden to feed fish on Yom Tov unless they belong to you.

There is a custom not to sleep on RH afternoon in order not to waste time on this special day.

Yom Kippur

The Essentials

It is a mitzvah to do Teshuva (repent) on Yom Kippur. This involves three steps:

- 1) Confessing our transgression**
- 2) Regretting the act**
- 3) Accepting upon ourselves not to repeat it**

It is a mitzvah to eat on the day before Yom Kippur.

There are five prohibitions on Yom Kippur:

- 1) All activities that are prohibited on Shabbat**
- 2) Eating and drinking**
- 3) Washing and putting on perfume**
- 4) Wearing leather shoes**
- 5) Marital relations**

Yom Kippur is an opportunity to achieve total forgiveness and to start afresh. Therefore we spend the day in shul davening. It is perfectly acceptable to daven in English if you will understand better.



Yom Kippur

a little more detail



There are three main aspects of Yom Kippur - Erev (the day before) Yom Kippur, Fasting and other restrictions, and Davening.

Erev Yom Kippur

It is a mitzvah to eat starting from nightfall on the day before Yom Kippur. The last meal before the fast is called the Seudah Hamafseket (the final meal) and should be a festive meal, although we don't make kiddush. Make sure you don't eat too much and finish in good time before the fast begins!

We daven Mincha before this final meal and say the Viduy (confession) prayer for the first time. We light two candles with a bracha before YK begins just like on Shabbat. The bracha is slightly different (see p.34). In addition to this we light a 24hr candle for each married couple. One whose parents have passed away lights a yahrtzeit light (24hr candle) in their memory.

Yom Kippur does not atone if we have wronged another person until we ask forgiveness. Therefore make sure to ask forgiveness before Yom Kippur begins.

Davening

Yom Kippur is the only day on which we say five different prayers. Each Amidah (silent prayer) is followed by Viduy (confession) in the silent prayer and is repeated in the chazzan's repetition. We say the text in the machzor for Viduy which covers the regular transgressions. However, you should add your own list on at least one occasion on Yom Kippur. This can be said in English if necessary.

We stand whilst saying Viduy with our head slightly bowed. If the Chazzan begins his repetition whilst you are saying Viduy you should answer Kedushah.

Restrictions

All activities that are prohibited on Shabbat are prohibited on YK too.

Fasting

We do not eat or drink anything on YK. Even one who feels unwell should make an effort to fast on YK. If staying at home will help you complete the fast you should not come to shul. Consult your Rabbi if you feel unable to fast. Children below Bar/Batmitzvah should not fast. They should eat a festive meal and add Ya'aleh Veyavo in the benching, but do not make kiddush.

A person who is ill to the extent that he has to lie down may take a pill. The pill should be swallowed without water. If this is not possible it should be taken with a small amount of bitter tasting water. If you have a medical condition that requires you to take regular medicine ask your Rabbi. We do not brush our teeth or even use mouthwash on YK.

Pregnant or breastfeeding women should consult their Rabbi regarding fasting on YK since the ruling changes per situation.

Washing and Perfume

We do not wash our hands or any part of our body on YK for pleasure. If you are dirty it is permitted to wash off the dirt. It is permitted to wash food when feeding children even though your hands will become wet by doing so. When you wake up in the morning wash your hands until the knuckles and if necessary, wipe your eyes whilst your hands are still moist. We do not apply perfume on Yom Kippur, however anti-perspirant is permitted.

Wearing Leather Shoes

We do not wear leather shoes on YK. Children should also not wear leather shoes.

At the end of the fast we say Havdalah using a candle that has been alight the whole of YK; ideally the one you lit for this purpose before YK. We don't eat or drink before Havdalah besides for water.

Yom Kippur Customs

Kapparot – the day before YK we take money and circle it over our head whilst pledging to give it to the poor. (see p.2 for the full text)

We put a white tablecloth on the table during YK just like on Shabbat.

Many married men wear a kittel whilst in shul on YK. This is a long white garment and symbolises our similarity to angels.

Women should not wear Shabbat jewellery on YK. Everyday jewellery may be worn.