

Rosh Hashanah at Home

Jewish Family Living – Holiday Celebrations at Home

Congregation Beth El ♦ Bethesda, MD

The Head of the Year

The Rabbinic Sages teach that in our tradition, there are four new years—one falls upon the first day of the spring month of Nisan (the month in which we celebrate *Pesach*); another, usually around February, that is the new year of the trees, Tu B'Shvat; one falls in late summer signifying the annual renewal of tithing of cattle, on the first of Elul; and the fourth is Rosh Hashanah. Arriving in early autumn on the first day of the month of Tishrei, this is the most familiar of these new years. It is a holiday on which many find themselves in synagogue, spiritually awakening to the call of the shofar, taking stock of the past year, and readying themselves for the year ahead.



Rosh Hashanah at Home Guide

Since Jewish holidays begin at sunset, most home rituals take place in the evening. The central home ritual for Rosh Hashanah is a festive holiday meal, during which families often use their nicest china and place settings. The following is a step-by-step guide for home observance of Rosh Hashanah. It includes information on traditional and symbolic foods to incorporate into your celebration of the holiday, prayers to add during meal times with your family, and some ideas for family activities during this festive time.

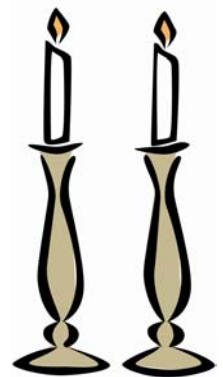
The Order of the Home Service/Ritual

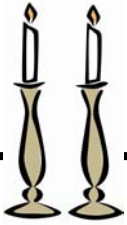
1. Lighting Candles
2. Reciting Kiddush (sanctifying the day with a blessing over the wine)
3. Washing Hands
4. Chanting Hamotzi (a blessing over the bread)
5. Blessing for eating apples and honey
6. The Meal
7. After the Meal

1. Lighting Candles

The holiday celebration begins with the lighting of candles (*hadlakat nerot*), symbolizing the transition between profane and sacred time, much like the lighting of candles both at the beginning and end of *Shabbat*. Candles should be lit eighteen minutes before sunset on the first night of Rosh Hashanah. On the second night, candles should be lit one hour later than they were lit the previous night.

This blessing is the same as the blessing said over the candles on Friday night except for the last words. On Shabbat you include the words in the parentheses.





BLESSING OVER THE CANDLES

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav,
V'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel)
Yom Tov.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי, וְצִוְּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק
וְצִוְּנוּ נֵר שֶׁל (שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם טוֹב.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe whose mitzvot add holiness to our lives and who gave us the mitzvah to kindle lights for (Shabbat and for) the Festival.

After lighting the candles, you say **Shehecheyanu** to thank God for enabling us to reach this season.

SHEHECHEYANU

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Shehecheyanu v'kimanu v'higi-anu laz'man
hazeh.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהַחַיֵּנוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, for keeping us alive, for sustaining us, and for helping us to reach this season.

2. Reciting Kiddush

We sanctify the holiday by reciting the special *kiddush* (blessing over wine) for Rosh Hashanah. It is a custom to ensure that all family members and guests are able to participate by holding and drinking from their own cup of wine or grape juice.

There are three parts to the *kiddush*. When Rosh Hashanah falls on Friday evening, we include the first paragraph, the *Vayechulu*, which comes from the Torah. The next part is the daily blessing over the wine or juice. The third piece, the Kiddush is the longer blessing sanctifying the festival (and Shabbat) and reminds us of creation and the Exodus from Egypt. As with all other festivals, it is traditional to recite the *shehecheyanu* prayer again after the *kiddush* and before drinking.

VAYECHULU (only on Shabbat)

The sixth day –
The heavens and the earth, and all within them,
were finished. By the seventh day, God had
completed the work which He had been doing;
and so God rested from all his work. Then
God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it
because on it He rested from all the work of
His creation.

וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי: וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צְבָאָם: וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם
הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:



BLESSING OVER THE WINE



*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Borei p'ri hagafen.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates fruit of the vine.

KIDDUSH

On Shabbat, include the words in parantheses.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher bachar banu mikol am
v'rom'manu mikol lashon, v'kid'shanu
b'mitzvotav. Va-teeten lanu Adonai Eloheinu
b'ahava et (yom haShabbat ha-zeh v'et) yom
hazikaron hazeh. Yom (Zichron) t'ruah
(b'ahava) mikra kodesh zeicher l'tiziat
mitzrayim. Ki vanu vacharta v'otanu kidashta
mikol ha-amim ud'varcha emet v'kayan la-ad.
Baruch atah Adonai, melech al kol ha'arets
m'kadeish (haShabbat) v'Yisrael v'yom
hazikaron.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל עַם
וְרוֹמַמְנוּ מִכָּל לָשׁוֹן, וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו.
וְתַתֵּן לָנוּ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה
אֶת (יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה וְאֶת) יוֹם הַזִּכְרוֹן הַזֶּה.
יוֹם (זִכְרוֹן) תְּרוּעָה (בְּאַהֲבָה),
מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ זִכָּר לְיִצְיַאת מִצְרַיִם
כִּי בָנוּ בְּחִרְתָּ, וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ
מִכָּל הָעַמִּים. וַיְדַבֵּרְךָ אֱמֶת וְקַיָּם לְעַד.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל-הָאָרֶץ
מִקְדֵּשׁ (הַשַּׁבָּת וְ) יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיוֹם הַזִּכְרוֹן.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe who has chosen and distinguished us by sanctifying our lives with Commandments. Lovingly have you given us this (Shabbat and this) Day of Remembrance, a day for recalling the shofar sound, a day for holy assembly and for recalling the Exodus from Egypt. Thus have you chosen us, sanctifying us among all people. Your faithful word endures forever. Praise are You, Adonai, Ruler of all the earth, who sanctifies (Shabbat), the people Israel and the Day of Remembrance.

SHEHECHEYANU

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Shehecheyanu v'kimanu v'higi-anu laz'man
hazeh.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהַחַיְנוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, for keeping us alive, for sustaining us, and for helping us to reach this season.

3. Washing Hands

The ritual washing of hands has nothing to do with physical cleanliness. While the hands are obviously to be clean of dirt before food is eaten, even hands that are physically clean should be ritually washed before sitting down to eat. This ritual, originating in Temple times, has continued on the grounds that the ideal of holiness demands a special ritualistic washing of the hands – this act is seen as the introduction of holiness into the everyday life of a Jew. It is just another way, like lighting candles and saying *kiddush*, that we separate special days like Shabbat and Rosh Hashanah, from the rest of the week.



BLESSING FOR WASHING THE HANDS

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech
ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav
vzvivanu al n'tilat yadayim.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל
נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe,
who has sanctified us with commandments and has commanded us to wash our hands.

4. Chanting HaMotzi

Before eating dinner we recite *HaMotzi*, the blessing over bread. Just like on Shabbat, we say this blessing over challah, however, because Rosh Hashanah celebrates the cyclical passage of time, it is customary to use a round, sweet loaf of challah. We drizzle honey over the bread to ensure that the coming year is a sweet one.

HAMOTZI



*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

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

5. Blessing for eating apples and honey

During Rosh Hashanah, it is traditional to eat apples dipped in honey, to symbolize our hopes for a "sweet" new year. The apple is dipped in honey, the blessing for eating tree fruits is recited, and then we ask God to "renew for us a good and sweet year."



*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-
olam, borei p'ri ha-eitz.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

*Y'hi ratzon mil'fanecha, Adonai Eloheinu
veilohei avoteinu, Shet'chadeish aleinu
shanah tovah um'tukah.*

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ,
שֶׁתַּחַדֵּשׁ עֲלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוֹקָה.

May it be Your will, our God and God of our ancestors to renew for us a good and sweet year.

6. The Meal

The Rosh Hashanah evening meal is often quite festive and we enjoy foods we might not have during “normal” dinners. The meal can encompass an ancient custom of eating symbolic foods, like a mini Seder. Besides apples and honey, there are other foods we may want to have at our holiday table. Other special foods (mentioned in the *Talmud*, *Shulhan Arukh* and other sources) include leeks or cabbage, beets, fenugreek or carrots, dates, gourds, pomegranates, fish, and the head of a fish. (Visit myjewishlearning.com to find out more!)

7. After the Meal

After dinner is finished you may choose to recite *Birkat HaMazon*, the grace after meals, which can be found in [Siddur Sim Shalom](#) beginning on page 754. Make sure to include the paragraphs for Rosh Hashanah and Shabbat (if Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat).

FAMILY ACTIVITIES FOR ROSH HASHANAH

BEFORE THE HOLIDAY BEGINS:

- Take some time to make greeting cards to wish friends and relatives a *Shanah Tovah*, or “A Good Year.” This is a great way to be creative together while reviewing some common greetings for this festive time of year.
- Go apple picking! It is traditional to eat first fruits to celebrate the new year, so use your harvest in special recipes for your Rosh Hashanah dinner (and dessert!)
- Make a special Rosh Hashanah challah cover. A simple challah cover can be made with a hemmed square or rectangle of fabric. If using a light colored fabric, your family can decorate it with fabric markers. You can also sew a decorative ribbon on as a border.

AT YOUR HOLIDAY TABLE:

- As a family, reflect on the happy and sad memories of the past year. Have each family member discuss what they hope to accomplish during the coming year, perhaps identifying ways in which your family will incorporate new Jewish rituals or observances in your home.
- Pomegranates are another traditional food to eat on Rosh Hashanah. The 613 (supposedly) seeds inside correspond to the number of commandments in the Torah and in eating the seeds of the pomegranate we pray that our merits will increase in great number.

OTHER HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES:

- During the High Holy Days, usually on the first day of Rosh Hashanah in the afternoon, it is traditional to go to a nearby body of water and symbolically cast away our sins or wrongdoings from the past year in a ceremony called *Tashlich*. This year, take some bread crumbs as a family to a nearby lake or stream. As you throw your crumbs into the water, you can either say your mistakes aloud or think them to yourself.
- Set the tone for your upcoming year by performing at least one *mitzvah* each day from the start of Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. Perhaps one day it is doing some Jewish learning as a family, and another day could bring the *mitzvah* of giving *tzedakah*, visiting the sick, or feeding the hungry.

This guide was prepared by Elisha Rothschild Frumkin, Family Education Director at Congregation Beth El, with help from: [Celebrating the Jewish Year](#) by Paul Steinberg and myjewishlearning.com. Prayer excerpts are from [B'kol Eched](#) published by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.