



# *Rosh Hashanah Seder*

Congregation Beth El of Montgomery County  
Bethesda, Maryland

## *Seder Welcome*

שנה טובה!

Happy New Year!

Traditionally Rosh Hashanah is a time of introspection and reflection. We look back at the year that is closing and ask ourselves, how did we do? Where did we hit the mark, and where did we go slightly astray? What are we hoping to change for the year that stretches ahead of us?

During this meal, we will rejoice in being together - whatever that looks like for your family, whether you are gathering around the same table or using technology to bring everyone together - and think backwards on the year that was and forward to the year that will be.

L'Shanah tovah u'metukah - to a sweet new year!



## *Inviting Your Full Self to the High Holidays*

Source: Jewish Meditation Center of 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.

## *Inviting Your Full Self to the High Holidays*

Source: Jewish Meditation Center of Brooklyn

### 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?



# *High Holidays in Five Senses*

## **What do the High Holidays smell like?**

They smell of freshly-baked sweet challah, the vanilla-y pages of an old book, your grandfather's aftershave, the tang of the etrog and the perfume of lulav branches.

## **What do the High Holidays feel like?**

They feel like fists beating on chests, shifting your tush on a wooden pew in an unairconditioned sanctuary, running your fingers through the fringes of a tallit, dropping crumbs into the water as you cast your sins away, sticky honey dripping onto your fingers.

## **What do the High Holidays taste like?**

They taste of honey, pomegranates, apples, dates, carrots and squash, sweet challah with raisins, tsimmes and taiglach.

## **What do the High Holidays look like?**

They look like a room of people wearing their best new outfits, palm branches carefully placed on top of a tiny hut, the entire scroll of the Torah unrolled and encircling everyone, your grandmother's china hauled out from its secure hiding place and arranged on the table.

## **What do the High Holidays sound like?**

They sound like the blast of the shofar, the crunch of newly-fallen leaves, the mumbles of people stumbling through prayers said sporadically, shouts of "Shana tova!" and hymns at once deeply familiar and utterly foreign.



## *Candlelighting for Rosh Hashanah*

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 שְׁלִיּוֹם טוֹב.

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

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

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

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

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

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.



## Full Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah Evening

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!

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.  
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל עַם וְרוֹמַמְנוּ מִכָּל לְשׁוֹן,  
וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו. וַתִּתֶּן לָנוּ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה אֶת (יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה וְאֶת) יוֹם  
הַזִּכְרוֹן הַזֶּה. יוֹם (זִכְרוֹן) תְּרוּעָה (בְּאַהֲבָה), מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ זִכָּר לְיִצְיַאת מִצְרַיִם.  
כִּי בָנוּ בְּחַרְתָּ, וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים. וּדְבַרְךָ אֱמֶת וְקַיָּם לְעַד.  
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל-הָאָרֶץ מִקְדֶּשׁ (הַשַּׁבָּת וְ) יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיוֹם הַזִּכְרוֹן.



*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam, borei peri ha'gafen.*

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher bakhhar banu m'kol am, v'romemanu m'kol lashon v'kidishanu b'mitzvotav. Vatiten lanu Adonai Eloheinu b'ahava et (Yom HaShabbat ha'zeh v'et) Yom HaZikaron ha'zeh. Yom (zichron) teruah (b'ahava) mikra kodesh, zekher le'yitziat mitzrayim. Ki vanu vakharta v'otanu kidashtah m'kol ha'amim, u'devarkha emet v'kayam la'ad. Barukh atah Adonai melekh al kol ha'aretz, mekadesh (haShabbat) v'Yisrael v'Yom HaZikaron.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has chosen us from among all peoples and sanctified us with God's commandments. And You gave us, Adonai our God, in love this Sabbath day and this Day of Remembrance. It is a Day of Remembrance a day for recalling with love the sounding of the Shofar, a sacred convocation, a commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt. For You chose us and sanctified us from among all peoples, and Your word is truth and endures forever. Blessed are You, Ruler over all the earth, who sanctifies the Sabbath and Israel and the Day of Remembrance.

## *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.

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

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

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





## *HaMotzi - Blessing for Challah*

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 and the fullness of the year that is coming, it is customary to use a round, sweet loaf of challah. Many people eat raising challah on Rosh Hashanah and drizzle honey on top to ensure the coming year is extra sweet.

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

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

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



## *Apples and Honey - Blessings for a Sweet Year*

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:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

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

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

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ,  
שֶׁתְּחַדֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוּקָה.

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

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

## *Traditional Sephardic Rosh Hashanah Wishes*

For centuries, Sephardi Jewish families have gathered to celebrate a special Rosh Hashanah ceremony with a plate or meal of symbolic foods. Each food is eaten after requesting a specific kind of Divine blessing that sounds like the name of that food in Hebrew.

Before eating dates ( *tamar* ): May it be your will, God, that hatred will end. ( *Tamar* resembles the word for end, *yitamu* . )

Before eating pomegranate: May we be as full of mitzvot as the pomegranate is full of seeds.

Before eating apple: May it be Your will, God, to renew for us a good and sweet year.

Before eating string beans ( *rubia* ): May it be Your will, God, that our merits increase. ( *Rubia* resembles the word for increase, *yirbu* . )

Before eating pumpkin or gourd ( *k'ra* ): May it be Your will, God, to tear away all evil decrees against us, as our merits are proclaimed before you. ( *K'ra* resembles the word for tear and proclaimed, *likroah* . )

Before eating spinach or beet leaves ( *selek* ): May it be Your will, God, that all the enemies who might beat us will retreat, and we will beat a path to freedom ( *Selek* resembles the word for retreat, *yistalku* ).

Before eating leeks, chives, or scallions ( *karti* ): May it be Your will, God, that our enemies be cut off. ( *Karti* resembles the word for cut off, *yikartu* . )

Since Rosh Hashanah means the head of the year, we eat foods that symbolize our wish to be heads, not tails in the year to come. Traditionally, families ate the head of a fish or sheep. You may want to instead enjoy a head of lettuce, or a more whimsical option involves gummy fish.

May it be Your will, God, that our heads remain clear and focused on creating a better world this year.

# *Yom HaDin - Day of Judgment*

*From Custom & Craft*

Since the start of the month of Elul 30 days ago, our internal calculators have been in overdrive. Cheshbon haNefesh means an accounting of the soul, reflecting on a whole year of triumphs and mistakes and asking for forgiveness as we work to forgive others. We look backwards in order to move forward.

Together, we make a toast to Judgment, Justice and Transparency, adapted from Rami M. Shapiro:

"Today we stand before the Mirror of All, to see ourselves as we are. We come with no gifts, no bribes, no illusions, no excuses, no defenses. We come with error and needless pain, but also joy and remembered moments of love and right doing. Let us be bold enough to see, humble enough to feel, daring enough to turn and embrace the way of justice, mercy and simplicity."

## **Blessing to Pursue Justice:**

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu ruach ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu lirdof tzedek.*

We praise You, Eternal God, Spirit of the universe, who calls us to holiness through mitzvot, commanding us to pursue justice.

## **Reflection Questions for Yom HaDin - Day of Judgment**

- From whom do I need forgiveness?
- Who do I need to forgive?

# *HaYom Harat Olam - Day of Recreation*

*From Custom & Craft*

Like people, the Universe has a birthday and it falls on Rosh Hashanah. And like our birthdays, it's a moment for us to dwell in a moment of renewal and recreation. We open ourselves up and rewrite our stories and our aspirations for the next year.

As we close our Rosh Hashanah seder, we make a fourth and final toast to Recreation, adapted from Emily Stern:

“Each moment is a microcosm of who we are becoming. We bless each other and ourselves, celebrating our moments of gratitude. We bring presence and positivity into our hearts, and clarity about the truest, most authentic version of ourselves that, we pray, will find expression and aliveness in the coming year. We act as conscious co-creators with The Creator.”

## **Blessing of Creation**

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam, oseh maasei v'reishit.*

We praise You, Eternal God, Spirit of the universe, who makes the works of creation.

## **Reflection Questions for HaYom Harat Olam - Day of Recreation**

- What do I want to practice, seek or commit myself to for the year to come?
- What do I want to create for myself and the world?

# *The Past Got in My Eyes*

From Custom & Craft



There is a Peanuts cartoon that poses food for thought for the High Holy Days. In the cartoon, Lucy walks toward Charlie Brown, who is standing on the pitching mound. She tosses him the baseball and says, “Sorry, I missed that easy fly ball. I thought I had it, but suddenly I remembered all the others I’ve missed. The past got in my eyes!”

The purpose of the High Holy Days is to acknowledge the past, deal with it and ask for forgiveness for our failures. The hope is that we leave it behind and begin our new year with a clean slate. This cartoon reminds us that if we choose to allow it, the past can continue to influence our present and, in turn, our future.

To what avail, we might ask? Are we to let our past misdeeds be the sole determinant of what happens to our future? Or perhaps, if we enter the New Year with a new image, one in which the past does not get in our eyes, this time we may catch on to the importance of taking a renewed look at dealing with life.

## *Tashlich - High Holidays Writing Exercise*

Adapted from David Wolkin/Custom&Craft

The 10 Days of Repentance represent the window of time in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, during which time we are meant to repent on the sins of the past year. I've always found it tough to focus on this and properly bring it down to earth so I developed this writing exercise to help me through it. It can work for anyone, irrespective of faith. Read on...

Imagine you had to spend ten days in a room confronted with all of your sins/mistakes/wrongdoings of the past year:



1. What would that room look like? How big would it be?
2. Who or what would be in this room? Would there mostly be people in that room? Actions? Thoughts? Decisions? Ideas?
3. What would you say to them/what would they say to you?
4. What would it feel like to spend ten days there? Could you handle it?
5. What would you do with that time that you had in there? What would you address first? Last?

At the end of the ten days, whatever you do, it's time for you to leave that room and close the door for the next year. But don't close it all the way. Leave it just a little bit ajar. You may have done all you can, but accept the fact that come next year you might re-enter that room and be confronted with some of the same things. And Yom Kippur comes along, you can be the one closing the gates, writing the book. You don't have to let God make all of the decisions since at the end of the day, so much of it is completely in your own hands.

