

Fun Facts

Fun Fact: In addition to symbolic foods (see “How We Celebrate” on the other side of the sheet), some eat specific foods on the holiday to symbolize blessings for the new year. It is usually based on a wordplay with the food’s name. Here are some examples:



Carrots: based on the similarity of the Yiddish words for carrots (*mern*) and more (*mer*), carrots symbolize the desire for increased blessings (more of what we want) in the new year.



Beets: based on the similarity of the Hebrew words for beet (*selek*) and remove (*salak*), beets symbolize the hope that our enemies will depart.



Gourds: based on the similar sounds of the Hebrew words for gourd (*kara*, with the letter *aleph*) and rip (*kara*, with the letter *ayin*), gourds symbolize the hope that God will remove any evil decree against us.



Head of a fish: symbolizes our hope that we are likened to a head, and not a tail; moving forward in the new year, and not falling behind.



Pomegranate: interestingly, it may be the most iconic food of the holiday, but its connection is not linguistic, rather it’s because of the fruit’s many seeds, symbolizing the hope for the many good deeds we hope to perform in the new year.



And in the seventh month, on the first day, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall not perform any mundane work. It shall be a day of Shofar sounding for you.



– *Bamidbar/Numbers 29:1*

All about Rosh HaShanah

The Jewish ‘New Year’ and beginning
of the 10 Days of Repentance

Night of Day of
Sep 11 – Sep 13 / Tishrei 1 – 2



Listen for the Shofar –
The original New Year’s
noisemaker!

The Backstory



An ancient Jewish teaching (*Vayikra Rabbah* 29:1) connects the holiday of Rosh HaShanah to the creation of human beings on the 6th day of creation. On this day in biblical history, the arrival of human subjects paves the way for G-d's coronation as King. The other significant occurrence on the 6th day was the first sin when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge. What makes it noteworthy is

not that a person sinned, King Solomon in his significant wisdom taught that "there is no righteous person on earth who does good and doesn't sin," (*Ecclesiastes* 7:20), but what follows when Adam and Eve are subsequently judged and pardoned by G-d. This Divine forgiveness sets the precedent for the annual time of judgment each year during the High Holidays when we too seek repentance with an assurance that our sincere introspections, regrets, and resolutions for a better future will be met by G-d's mercy and ongoing support.

This backstory sets the stage for the three big themes for the day's prayers – *Malchuyot* (verses of Kingship emphasizing the sovereignty of G-d), *Zichronot* (verses of Remembrance calling attention to G-d's mindfulness of us, our situations,

and our covenantal history), and *Shofarot* (verses recalling the Shofar with a focus on G-d as Redeemer).

This awareness also begins the 10 Days of Repentance (*Aseret Yemei Teshuva*) which culminate on Yom Kippur and whose enormity is captured in the cantorial highlight of the *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer which is recited on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Playing off the imagery of the Talmud (*Talmud Bavli Rosh HaShanah* 16b) describing the books of life and death which are opened and inscribed on Rosh HaShanah and then sealed on Yom Kippur, this prayer emphasizes how our activity generally, and particularly during this small window of time, can tip the scales in our favor as G-d determines our course for life or death in the year to come. As such, custom has evolved to be 'extra good' during this time period, often adopting extra ritual stringencies. But, as captured in *Unetaneh Tokef*, the most impactful behavior changes come through increasing *Teshuva* (Repentance), *Tefilah* (Prayer), and *Tzedaka* (Charity).

The result of these entwined themes is that Rosh HaShanah is simultaneously a day of solemnity and earnest introspection as well as a day of great joy and celebration. This dichotomy often manifests in the contrast between serious heartfelt prayers in the synagogue, and the upbeat family feasts we enjoy around our tables. It is the *Gilu Birada*, the "rejoicing while trembling" (*Psalms* 2:11), which is our natural response as we hear the call of the Shofar.

How We Celebrate

Shofar: This horn from a Kosher animal (but not from a cow – *Mishna Rosh HaShanah* 3:2) is the quintessential symbol of Rosh HaShanah. It is the ritual specifically commanded by the Torah and a highlight of the service for many. There are traditionally 100 *Kolot* (blasts) of the Shofar blown each of the two days of Rosh HaShanah, with four special patterns to the sound. The *Tekiah* is a single long tone, the *Shevarim* is comprised of three short blasts in succession, and the *Teruah* is made up of nine quick staccato notes. The final blast is a *Tekiah Gedolah*, a single extra-long call unique to the *Yamim Noraim* (High Holidays).

Tashlich: Typically on the afternoon of Rosh HaShanah or at some other point during the 10 Days of Repentance, individuals or whole communities will gather at a naturally flowing body of water "to cast off" their sins (*Tashlich* comes from the Hebrew meaning "cast off"). Different customs, like turning out one's pockets, shaking out one's *Tzitzit* (ritual fringes), or even tossing breadcrumbs to the water, help us to psychologically break free from previous sins. The message of *Tashlich* is clear. We possess the capacity to effect positive change in our actions and in our communities as our past need not dictate our future.

Symbolic Foods: For many, the highlight of Rosh HaShanah is partaking in delicious meals filled with unique family traditions. Certain culinary traditions are more universal: the use of round *Challah* bread (symbolizing the round or cyclical nature of the year), dipping apples into honey (prayers for a sweet new year), and eating "new" fruits (something you haven't eaten in quite some time) to symbolically usher in the new year.

Words of Greeting: Throughout this period there are traditional words of greeting which we offer to each other. The most basic formulation is simply "*Shanah Tovah*" (good year), though it's easy and common to also append the word "*u'Metukah*" (and sweet) to the end of it. You may also hear variations on "*Ketivah v'Chatima Tovah*" – a blessing that one should be inscribed and sealed for a good year, and the Yiddish "*A Gut Gebentcht Yohr*" (a good and blessed year).

שנה טובה
ומתוקה

