



Insights into the Rosh HaShana Machzor



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עמותת קול קורא Amutat Kol Koreh

כתובת: רח' ירושלים 6/2, רמת בית שמש 99090 // Address: 6/2 Yerushalayim Street, RBS //

טלפון: 052.704.2700 // www.kolkoreh.org // email: info@kolkoreh.org

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INTRODUCTION

Rosh Hashana (1 Tishrei) is the Jewish New Year, the first day of the year on the Jewish calendar. According to Rabbi Eliezer, it was the day on which Hashem created Adam and Chava, which completed the creation of the world. Since it was on this day that the world was complete and life in this world began, it became the beginning of the year.



What is an appropriate way to celebrate the beginning of a new year? In some places, the new year is celebrated with parties and entertainment. In Judaism, we mark the new year by davening to Hashem, doing Teshuva and enjoying a yom tov meal.



Rosh Hashana is a Yom Hadin (יום הדין), a day on which Hashem judges us and decides what the next year will be like for us. Therefore, we daven to Hashem and we blow the shofar to remind us to do Teshuva.



Rosh Hashana is also the day every year that we proclaim Hashem as our king.

The first Rebbe of Lubavitch taught that at this time of year, המלך בשדה, the King is in the field. Instead of staying in his palace in shamayim, Hashem comes down to this world so that anyone who wants to can get close to Him.

NAMES OF THE CHAG

Rosh Hashana has four names



1. Rosh Hashana (ראש השנה), which literally means the head or beginning of the year.



2. Yom Teruah (יום תרועה). This means the day of shofar blowing. On Rosh Hashana we have a mitzva to hear the shofar being blown.



3. Yom Hazikaron (יום הזכרון). Yom Hazikaron means the day of remembrance. On this day Hashem remembers everyone in the world and everything that we have done. We ask Hashem to remember us for good.



4. Yom Hadin (יום הדין), the day of judgement. On Rosh Hashana Hashem judges us and decides what kind of year we will have.

סימני ראש השנה

On Rosh Hashana night there is a minhag to eat certain foods which symbolize our wishes for the coming year. Before we eat each food we say a tefilla which expresses the wish that the food represents.

Some of the more common foods that we eat are:



1. Apples dipped in honey - to symbolize a sweet new year

Before eating the apple in honey, say the following tefilla:
יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שתחדש עלינו שנה טובה ומתוקה
May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that You renew for us a good, sweet year.



2. The head of a fish or lamb - to symbolize that we should always be at the top

Before eating the head say the following tefilla:
יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שנהיה לראש ולא לזנב
May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that we be a head and not a tail.

When we ask to be a head and not a tail, this refers not only to our place in the world but also to our level of observance of Torah and mitzvot. It has been suggested that the word "לראש" stand for שבשמים - to do the will of our father in shamayim



3. Pomegranate - to symbolize all of the zechuyot we hope we have. Pomegranates are filled with a lot of seeds. We ask Hashem to allow us to have as many zechuyot, merits, as the seeds of a pomegranate

Before eating the pomegranate say the following tefilla:

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו שירבו זכויותינו כרימון

May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that you increase our merits like the seeds of a pomegranate.



4. Dates - to symbolize the end of our enemies.

The Hebrew word for date is Tamar. Tamar is related to the word “tam” which means to end. We ask Hashem to put an end to all of our enemies.

Before eating the dates say the following tefilla:

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, שיתמו אויבינו ושונאינו וכל מבקשי רעתנו

May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that there come an end to our enemies, haters and those who wish evil upon us.

ROSH HASHANA GREETINGS

There is a minhag to greet people on Rosh Hashana night with a wish that they be written down for a good year:

To a man or boy you say: לשנה טובה תכתב ותחתם

To a woman or a girl you say: לשנה טובה תכתבי ותחתמי

INSIGHTS INTO THE ROSH HASHANA TEFILLOT

שחרית



On Rosh Hashana we announce that Hashem is our king. The chazan for Shacharit starts at the end of Pesukei D'zimra with the word המלך, which means THE KING, referring to Hashem. He sings this word out loud in a special tune.

תהלים קל



From Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur we add this perek of Tehillim into our tefillot between Pesukei D'zimra and the brachot of Kriat Shema. In this mizmor we call out to Hashem and ask Him to listen to us and to forgive us for our sins. The chazan says each pasuk out loud and the kehilla repeats it after him.

קריאת שמע



Kriat Shema is a mitzva from the Torah and should be said with a lot of kavanah. It has a lot of important ideas that you should think about while you are saying this tefillah. While saying Shema, think about the fact that Hashem exists and He is the one and only G-d. Think about how you are committed to Hashem and his mitzvot. You should also remember that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim in order to be His special nation.

When we really think about these ideas we realize that Hashem is really special and we owe Him a lot. If we always had this mind it would be much easier to avoid doing aveirot.

שמונה עשרה - שחרית

The Shemoneh Esrei, or the amida, is the main tefillah that we say every day. It can be divided into three sections. On regular days, we start with praise of Hashem, we then ask Hashem for things that we need, and we end with thanking Hashem for everything he does for us. On Shabbat and Yom Tov we don't ask Hashem for things that we need. Instead, we start the amida with praises of Hashem, then we talk about what is special about the day (kedushat hayom) and we end with thanking Hashem for everything He does for us.

On Rosh Hashana, the middle section of the amida talks about how Hashem is our King. We also mention that one day, everyone in the world will recognize Hashem and realize that He is the King over the entire world. We hope that day comes soon.

From Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur we add 4 sentences into the amida asking Hashem to remember us and give us a good life.

אבינו מלכנו

From Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur (the Aseret Yimei Teshuva), we add the special tefilla of Avinu Malkeinu after the Amida of shacharit (except on Shabbat). According to the Gemara (Taanit 25b), this tefilla was first said by Rabbi Akiva:

There was once a terrible drought in Eretz Yisrael. The people were desperate for water, so Rabbi Elazar declared a public fast day. He said 24 different brachot to try to get Hashem to bring rain but nothing helped. Finally, Rabbi Akiva called out, "Avinu Malkeinu, Our Father, our King! We have no one else but you! Avinu Malkeinu, Our Father, our King! For Your sake have mercy upon us." It immediately started to rain.

The words Avinu Malkeinu beautifully describes the relationship between Hashem and B'nei Yisrael. On the one hand, Hashem is our father in shamayim. We love Him like a parent (ahavat Hashem), and He loves us like a father loves a child. He also takes care of us like a father takes care of his children. On the other hand, Hashem is also our king and we have fear Him (yirat shamayim). When we say this tefillah asking Hashem to forgive and save us we should think about Him as our father and our king.



In what way is Hashem like a father to us? In what way is He like a king? Try to think about this right before you say the tefillah of Avinu Maleinu. With these ideas in mind, speak to Hashem through this moving tefillah.

קריאת התורה



קריאת התורה ליום ראשון של ראש השנה

On the first day of Rosh Hashana, we read about the birth of Yitzchak to Avraham and Sarah. Sarah was not able to have children for many years and finally gave birth to Yitzchak when she was 90 years old! According to Chazal, we read this story on Rosh Hashana because Hashem remembered Sarah and allowed her to have a child on Rosh Hashana. Just as Hashem remembered Sarah on Rosh Hashana, on Rosh Hashana we hope that Hashem will remember us and give us a year full of good things.



What is something you really want from Hashem this year? Try to have this in mind while you are davening on Rosh Hashana.

הפטרה ליום ראשון של ראש השנה

The haftarah for the first day of Rosh Hashana is taken from the beginning of Sefer Shmuel. Just as Hashem remembered Sarah on Rosh Hashana and let her have a child, Hashem also remembered Chana on Rosh Hashana and let her have a child, the navi Shmuel. This beautiful story also teaches us the power of tefilla, since it was only after Chana davened with all her heart that her wish for a child was granted. This is a very important message for Rosh Hashana when we spend a lot of time davening to Hashem. We say at the end of the tefillah of Unetaneh Tokef, Teshuva, Tefilla and Tzedaka have the power to change a bad decree. Sincere tefilla is especially important at this time of year.



We learn a lot of the halachot about tefilla from the tefilla of Chana. The pasuk describes Chana's tefilla as follows:

וְחָנָה הָיָא מְדַבֵּרַת עַל לִבָּהּ, רַק שִׁפְתֶיהָ נָעוּת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמָע (שמואל א א:יג)

Chana davened from her heart. She moved her lips but her voice was not heard.

We learn from this pasuk that we have to daven with kavana from the heart. We also have to move our lips but we should not say our tefillot too loudly. We should hear what we are saying but the people around us should not.



How do I daven to Hashem? Do I just say the words or do I really mean them?

If we really want Hashem to accept our tefillot we need to think about what we are saying and daven from our hearts like Chana did.

קריאה ליום שני של ראש השנה



On the second day of Rosh Hashana we read about the story of Akeidat Yitzchak. According to the Midrash, this story also took place on Rosh Hashana. We read this story on Rosh Hashana to remind Hashem of how much emunah Avraham and Yitzchak had in Hashem and what they were willing to sacrifice, or give up, for Hashem. Avraham was willing to give up his son, and Yitzchak was willing to give up his life, without asking any questions. We ask Hashem to save us in the zechut of Avraham and

Yitzchak. We also ask Hashem to save us just like he saved Yitzchak on the mizbeach.



What am I willing to give up for Hashem? How strong is my emunah in Hashem?

הפטרה ליום שני של ראש השנה

The haftarah for the second day of Rosh Hashanah is taken from Yirmiyahu perek 31. We read it on Rosh Hashana because it talks about Hashem's promise to save B'nei Yisrael, to bring them back to Eretz Yisrael and to have mercy on them. On Rosh Hashana, we daven for Hashem to have mercy on us and save us. We also ask him to bring Mashiach and to bring all of Am Yisrael back to Eretz Yisrael.

תקיעת שופר



Tekiat shofar is the main mitzva of Rosh Hashana. It is so important that the Torah calls Rosh Hashana a Yom Teruah, a day of shofar blowing. Most communities blow 100 sounds on the shofar on each day of Rosh Hashana. The first 30 sounds are blown before musaf.

There are 3 different sounds that we blow on the shofar:

Tekiah - one long blast

Shevarim - three medium-length groaning sounds

Teruah - nine or more short whimpering sounds

The baal tokea, the person blowing the shofar, blows a combination of different sounds:

Tekiah, Shevarim Teruah, Tekiah

Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah

Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah

Before Musaf, He blows each combination 3 times for a total of 30 kolot. Each sound is announced and approved by a person known as the makri, often the Rabbi of the minyan.

There are a lot of reasons given for why we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana. Here are some of them:

1. According to the Ramabam, it is supposed to wake us up to do teshuva like an alarm clock

2. On Rosh Hashana, we proclaim Hashem as our king. We blow the shofar when we proclaim Hashem as our king, just like they used to blow trumpets when a new king was crowned.

3. When B'nei Yisrael accepted the Torah on Har Sinai a shofar was sounded. We blow the shofar to remind us to keep the Torah and mitzvot.

4. The shofar reminds Hashem of Akeidat Yitzchak because the shofar is usually made from the horn of a ram, the animal that Avraham offered to Hashem instead of Yitzchak. We want Hashem to remember what Avraham and Yitzchak were willing to sacrifice for Hashem, and in their zechut to save us, their children.

5. During the time of Mashiach, a shofar will be blown when Hashem brings back all of Am Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael (kibbutz galuyot) and during tehiyat hameitim. Blowing the shofar reminds us to daven for Mashiach, kibbutz galuyot and tehiyat hameitim.

6. The sound of the shofar is like a cry to Hashem without words. It represents all the things we want from Hashem but don't know how to ask for.



What do you think about when you hear the shofar? Pick one or more of these ideas and think about it each time you hear the sound of the shofar.

A mashal told by the Baal Shem Tov about the shofar on Rosh Hashana (adapted from Chabad.org):

A young prince was once sent away from the palace of his father, the king. The young boy spent years among the peasants and forgot about his royal roots. After years of wandering, he finally hit the low point in his life and decided to return home. By that point his clothes were well-worn and torn, his hair was long, and he looked nothing like the prince he was raised to be.

When he arrived at the palace, the guards did not recognize him and quickly sent him away from the royal gates. Try as he might to return, he was ignored since they thought he was just a regular person trying to get into the palace. Feeling hopeless, he sat down by the castle walls and began to cry.

The king sitting in his royal chamber heard a faint but familiar voice. He followed the sound until he reached his long lost son. After an emotional embrace, the king welcomed his son back home to the palace. In this mashal the prince is the Jewish people and his cry is the sound of the shofar.

The cry of the shofar is like the cry of a child who doesn't know where to turn. It is a cry from the deep inside our neshama. Hashem hears the wordless cry and embraces us.

Parents often know that their children could have done better, could have tried harder, and should have followed instructions the first time, yet when a child asks for his parent's support, his parents are always there for him no matter what. So too, Hashem knows all of our mistakes. But when He hears the sound of the shofar, simple and wordless, He is there for us as well.

תפילת מוסף

Musaf is said on Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Yom Tov. Just like the amida of Shacharit, the amida of Musaf is broken into three main sections. It starts with praising Hashem, has a section about the korbanot that were brought in the Beit Hamikdash on that day and ends with thanking Hashem.

On Rosh Hashana, the middle section of the amida of Musaf contains three special brachot which speak about three major themes of the day of Rosh Hashana: machlchuyot (מלכות), zichronot (זכרונות) and shofarot (שופרות). Each bracha talks about one of these three ideas, includes ten pesukim from Tanach that relate to the idea, and ends with a request of Hashem.



1. מלכות - Malchuyot - In the bracha of malchuyot we talk about how Hashem is the true king over everyone and everything. He is the King of all kings. We quote 10 pesukim from Tanach which refer to Hashem as king. We end the bracha by asking Hashem to rule over the entire world, and that everyone should recognize that He is the one true king.



Hashem is our king but he is also our father. What kind of relationship am I supposed to have with him?



2. זכרונות - Zichronot - The bracha of zichronot contains the ideas of remembrance and judgement. We speak about how Hashem remembers everyone and everything. He uses His memory to judge us on Rosh Hashana and decide what kind of year we deserve. We quote 10 pesukim from Tanach which speak about Hashem remembering things. We end the bracha by asking Hashem to remember the brit He made with Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and to remember Akeidat Yitzchak. In the zechut of these things, we ask that Hashem remember us for good.



What is something that you did this year that you would like Hashem to remember on Rosh Hashana?



3. שופרות - Shofarot - The bracha of shofarot speaks about blowing the shofar and Hashem appearing to us through the sound of the shofar. The shofar was blown when Hashem appeared to us on Har Sinai. We ask Hashem to appear to us again and finally blow the shofar that will bring mashiach and return the rest of Am Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael from all over the world. We quote 10 pasukim from Tanach which speak about the shofar and we ask Hashem to listen to and accept our shofar blowing with mercy this Rosh Hashana.



Imagine a time when the whole world is at peace, all of Am Yisrael live in Eretz Yisrael, there is a Beit Hamikdash in Yerushalayim and everyone in the world believes in Hashem. What do you imagine the world will look like at that time? Do you really mean it when you daven for Mashiach, or is it just something else we say in our tefillot?

According to the Gemara, Hashem says that on Rosh Hashana we should say pesukim whose themes are malchuyot, zichronot and shofarot. Malchuyot, so that B'nei Yisrael should make Him king over them; zichronot, so that Hashem should remember us for good; and with what? With a shofar.

Based on this Gemara, we learn that we are supposed to blow the shofar at the end of each of these three sections. Therefore, we blow the shofar after each of these three brachot during chazarat hashatz of musaf. There are some communities that also blow the shofar at the end of these sections during the silent amida.

ונתנה תוקף

During chazarat hashatz of musaf, the tefilla of Unetaneh Tokef is said. It is one of the most emotional tefillot of all of the Yamim Noraim. It talks about how Hashem judges everyone in the entire world on Rosh Hashana. Every person passes before Hashem like sheep before a shepherd, and Hashem remembers everything they have done, even the things that we have already forgotten about. Hashem judges us based on our actions and decides what kind of year we will have, both for good and for bad.

בראש השנה יכתובו וביום צום כפור יחתמו

In the middle of the tefilla we say that on Rosh Hashana Hashem writes down his judgement and on Yom Kippur he seals it. During the days in between we are supposed to do Teshuva and as many mitzvot as possible so that we will be sealed for a good year on Yom Kippur.

ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה מעבירין את רע הגזירה

The tefilla ends with the words ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה מעבירין את רע הגזירה - Teshuva, Tefilla and Tzedaka can change a bad judgement into a good one. Therefore, the 10 days from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur are days when we are supposed to have extra kavana in our tefillot. We do teshuva and ask Hashem and everyone we have wronged to forgive us, and we give extra tzedaka. We hope that by the time Yom Kippur comes around and Hashem seals His judgement, any bad judgements we might have been given on Rosh Hashana have been changed to good ones.



Can you think of something wrong you did to Hashem? What about something wrong you did to someone else like a friend or your parents? What can you do now to make these things better? What can you do to make sure you won't make the same mistake again?

Story about Teshuva based on the Gemara, Avodah Zarah 17a

There was once a man named Elazer ben Durdaya. He had a great yetzer hara to sin, and there was almost no sin in the world that he did not commit. One day he heard of a sin that he had never committed. It was far away and very expensive, but he was determined to do it.

While he was in the middle of sinning, someone said to him that because of all the sins he had committed, Elazer would never have a place in Olam Haba. Hearing this was very upsetting to Elazer, and he went to look for help. He called out:

"Mountains and hills, ask for mercy for me." "Ask for mercy for you?," they replied, "We must ask for mercy for ourselves."

"Heaven and earth, ask for mercy for me." "Ask for mercy for you?," they replied, "We must ask for mercy for ourselves."

"Sun and moon, ask for mercy for me." "Ask for mercy for you?," they replied, "We must ask for mercy for ourselves." "Stars and planets, ask for mercy for me." "Ask for mercy for you?," they replied, "We must ask for mercy for ourselves."

Elazer sat on the ground and thought. He realized that he was the only one responsible for his actions, and only he could help himself. He called out "Ein hadavar taluy ela bi" — "It all depends on me — the responsibility is all mine!" He put his head between his knees and cried so hard that his neshama left him. As he died, a voice came from shamayim and declared, "Elazer ben Durdaya is worthy of Olam Haba."



What lesson did Elazar ben Durdaya learn?

What can we learn about teshuva from the story of Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya?

Why was Elazar ben Durdaya worthy of Olam Haba in the end?

לדוד ה' אורי - תהילים כז

From the beginning of the month of Elul until Shemini Atzeret we add Tehillim perek 27 (כז) twice a day at the end of our tefillah. According to the Midrash, the reason we add this perek of Tehillim at this time is because it hints to Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

Another reason can be found in the beginning of the mizmor which starts with the words: לְדָוִד ה' אֹרִי וְיִשְׁעִי - to David, Hashem is my light and the one who saves me.

We ask Hashem to be our light and guide us through the darkness of our sins on Rosh Hashana, and that He should save us on Yom Kippur by forgiving us.



תשליך

There is a minhag to say Tashlich in the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashana. It is said next to a body of water, preferably one that has live fish. If the first day of Rosh Hashana is Shabbat, Tashlich is said on the second day of Rosh Hashana. Tashlich can be said up until Hoshana Raba.

The tefillah of Tashlich expresses our hope that Hashem will forgive us for our sins.

There are a few reasons given for why it is said next to water:

1. In this tefilla we ask Hashem to throw our sins deep into the water
2. According to the Midrash, when Avraham and Yitzchak were on their way to do Akeidat Yitzchak, the satan tried to stop them by turning into a river in which they almost drowned. He hoped that this would stop them from continuing on their journey, but they kept going. We hope that by saying Tashlich near water Hashem will remember Avraham and Yitzchak and save us because of them.
3. On Rosh Hashana we crown Hashem as our king. In ancient times, kings were crowned next to a river.



”לשנה טובה
תכתבו ותחתמו...”

Kol Koreh wishes you a
happy and healthy new year

