

High Holidays

part one

A Basic Summary of Holiday Laws
In a Clear and Simple Style

❖ ELUL - THE MONTH LEADING UP TO ROSH HASHANAH	2
SELICHOS	2
❖ EREV ROSH HASHANAH -THE DAY PRECEDING ROSH HASHANAH	2
ANNULLING VOWS	3
❖ ROSH HASHANAH	3
MEALS	3
HEARING THE SHOFAR	4
TASHLICH	4
PREPARATIONS FOR THE SECOND DAY	4
❖ THE SECOND DAY OF ROSH HASHANAH	5
NEW FRUIT	5
HAVDALAH	5
❖ ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH - THE TEN DAYS OF PENITENCE	5
PAS YISROEL	5
CHANGES IN PRAYERS	5
❖ TZOM GEDALYAH	6
❖ SHABBOS SHUVAH	6

Basic

Detailed

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❖ Elul - The Month leading up to Rosh Hashanah

- Beginning the first day of Elul two items are added to the daily prayers:
 - The shofar is blown after shacharis¹. This continues until, but not including, the day before Rosh Hashanah².
 - It is customary to say the 27th chapter of Psalms twice daily- once after shacharis and once after mincha or ma'ariv. This continues through Shmini Atzeres (the eighth day of Sukkos)³.

Selichos

Additional prayers called *selichos* are recited on the days leading up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur⁴. These prayers are not found in the siddur but in a specific book called a "Selichos". The books are usually available at the synagogue but one who prefers a translated version, will likely need to bring his own.

- The first selichos recital always begins on a Saturday night or early Sunday morning⁵. In many communities, there is a special service for this first time shortly after the middle of the night.
 - Since this year Rosh Hashanah begins on Thursday, the first selichos recital will be at the start of that week.
- After the first day, selichos are usually recited just before dawn. If this is not practical, they are recited any other time during the day- preferably before Shacharis⁶.
- The morning blessings over Torah study should preferably be recited before selichos.⁷
- If one is arising before dawn, the morning netilas yodayim is performed twice- once upon arising and again after dawn. The blessing is only recited after the first washing⁸.
- The earliest time to wear a tallis is forty minutes before sunrise⁹. If selichos are recited before then, only the chazzan wears a tallis. It should be a borrowed one and worn without a blessing¹⁰.
- It is proper to stand for the entire selichos. But at the very least, one should stand for the following three items: the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, the paragraph recited before it and the viduy- confession that is recited near the end of selichos¹¹.
- The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are only recited when saying selichos with a minyan¹².
- Be aware that most communities do not recite every prayer in the Selichos-book and some communities occasionally deviate from its order. It is a good idea to find out in advance what will be recited at your Synagogue.
- The purpose of reciting selichos is to arouse feelings of repentance. Unfortunately though, many synagogues rush through them and it difficult to focus on what is being said. In this case, it is proper to say them independently of the congregation.
 - One who has limited time should ask a knowledgeable person which items should be prioritized.
 - Note that each time the congregation recites The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, all recite it together irrespective of where in the selichos they are.

❖ Erev Rosh Hashanah -The Day Preceding Rosh Hashanah

- Selichos on Erev Rosh Hashanah are much longer than usual. Expect them to last at least an hour or two.
- There is a custom to fast on Erev Rosh Hashana¹³ and most communities fast until midday¹⁴.
 - As with most customs, it is advisable that those who fast have in mind not to accept this practice as a vow. Otherwise, it will become one after fasting for three consecutive years¹⁵.
- All men go to the mikvah today¹⁶; it is customary for boys to go as well.

- You may want to obtain a machzor. This is a siddur especially formulated for the holidays that is published in a number of different formats and styles. Taking the time to find one that appeals to you can make all the difference for meaningful Rosh Hashanah prayers. Consult with someone knowledgeable to ensure that the one you choose follows the customs of your tradition or synagogue (e.g. Ashkenaz, Sefard, Ari or Eidut Hamizrach).
- Remember to buy the different symbolic foods that are customarily eaten on Rosh Hashanah evening (see your machzor for a list of them). Additionally, be sure to obtain a new fruit, which will be used on the second night of Rosh Hashanah.

Eruv Tavshilin

This year, Rosh Hashana begins on Thursday, and a procedure called "Eruv Tavshilin" is necessary. Its details are delineated in an accompanying pamphlet.

Annulling Vows

On Erev Rosh Hashanah, we annul our vows after shacharis. It is done with a group of four men. One man stands in turn before the other three (the "court") who are seated. He declares his wish for annulment and they respond in kind. The specific texts can be found in most siddurim.

- For proper annulment, it is necessary to understand what is being said. The declaration and response may be recited in any language that is understood by the reciter and the listeners¹⁷.
- The benefit of this annulment is limited to vows that have been made and since forgotten¹⁸. One who is aware of a particular vow and wishes to annul it must consult a rabbi¹⁹.
- Although women do not do this procedure, wives should ask their husbands to represent them. In this case, before the husband begins his turn he should state that he is also representing his wife²⁰.

❖ Rosh Hashanah

- As mentioned above, many of the Rosh Hashanah prayers are only found in a machzor.
- After evening prayers, we extend special greetings to each other²¹. These greetings are found in the machzor.
 - In most communities, these greetings are only shared the first night of Rosh Hashanah²².
- Since the way we act on Rosh Hashanah influences our judgment, one should try very hard not to get angry throughout the holiday²³. Additionally, one should try not to nap during the daytime of Rosh Hashanah at least until midday²⁴.

Meals

There is an obligation to have a festive meal each evening and day of Rosh Hashanah²⁵.

- During the meals, the challah is customarily dipped in honey²⁶. Customs vary if this is a substitute, or an addition to, salt.
 - This custom continues through Shmini Atzeres (the eighth day of Sukkos).
- At the evening meal, symbolic foods are eaten and each food is accompanied with a specific prayer²⁷. A list of the foods with their appropriate prayers can be found in a machzor.
 - It is important to note that even though the *Ha'motzee* over bread has been recited, the blessing of *Ha'etz* is still necessary before eating the first symbolic fruit²⁸. Immediately after the blessing, a bit of the fruit is eaten before continuing with its specific prayer²⁹.
 - If any of the seven species is present, (such as a date or pomegranate,) it should be eaten first so that the *Ha'etz* blessing is primarily recited over it³⁰.
 - The symbolic vegetables do not require a blessing if they are a type of food that is often eaten during a meal³¹.
- It is customary to avoid eating nuts³² or sour foods³³ throughout Rosh Hashanah.

- No restrictions apply if these foods are an insignificant ingredient in a prepared food³⁴.
- Since these food restrictions are just customary, one who is eating at a meal where these foods are served is completely permitted to eat them if a possibility exists that the host/hostess may otherwise be offended.

Hearing the Shofar

One hundred shofar blasts are blown in shul each day of Rosh Hashanah: thirty before the musaf prayers, thirty during musaf and forty after musaf³⁵.

- For someone who is unable to come to shul, one set of thirty blasts is sufficient³⁶.
- Men and boys over bar mitzvah have a Torah obligation to hear the shofar on Rosh Hashanah³⁷.
- Although women do not have the same obligation to hear the shofar as men do, they should still try if at all possible to hear at least one set of thirty blasts³⁸.
- Children under bar/ bas mitzvah that are old enough to comprehend the concept of hearing the shofar must be trained to fulfill this mitzvah in manner similar to an adult³⁹.
- **Children who could become disruptive are not to be brought to shul at this time⁴⁰.**
- It is important to pay attention while the blessings are recited. While listening to the blasts one should have in mind to fulfill the Torah commandment to hear the shofar.
 - Someone who did not hear the blessings as they were recited by the shofar-blower should say them on his or her own prior to hearing the shofar⁴¹.
- Throughout the second set of shofar blasts (those blown in the middle of musaf) all who are physically capable must stand without leaning on anything. It is proper to stand for the other blasts as well⁴².
 - Similarly, one who is listening to only thirty blasts must try to stand for them⁴³.
- This mitzvah may not be interrupted with unnecessary speech starting from when the blessings are recited before the first set of shofar blasts through the very last blast⁴⁴.
- Men may not eat a meal before hearing the shofar⁴⁵; women may eat a meal if it is difficult for them to wait⁴⁶.
- Other than for the mitzvah purpose, it is prohibited for adults to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah just as is prohibited to play any instrument on Shabbos or Yom Tov⁴⁷.

Tashlich

Tashlich is a unique prayer that we recite while standing next to a body of water⁴⁸. It is customarily said on the first day of Rosh Hashanah during the afternoon. Many synagogues say it after mincha⁴⁹.

- Some have a custom to recite tashlich specifically next to a body of water that contains fish⁵⁰. (Note that it is forbidden to feed these fish on Yom Tov⁵¹.)
- Although there are many additional supplications written in the machzor, the main verse that is recited is "*Mi keil kamocho...v'sashlich b'mitzulos yam kol chatosam*". Who is a G-d like You who pardons sins... and You will cast into the depths of the sea all their sins."

Preparations for the Second Day

It is forbidden to do activity on the first night/day of Rosh Hashanah that is clearly in preparation for the second night/day⁵². Some examples of preparing are washing dishes, setting a table, cooking, and lighting the Yom Tov candles. Only after the first day concludes - at least fifty minutes after sunset - are these activities permitted.

- If this is difficult, a rabbi may be able to suggest some methods that avoid this prohibition⁵³.

❖ The Second Day of Rosh Hashanah

It is noteworthy to mention that the second day of Rosh Hashanah is not merely a repetition of the first. Kabbalah teaches us that on each day of Rosh Hashanah different aspects of the world are judged. In fact, the judgment that affects us most as individuals occurs on the second day⁵⁴.

New Fruit

On the second night of Rosh Hashanah, a new fruit is eaten⁵⁵. This is a seasonal fruit or vegetable that one enjoys eating and has not yet tasted it since its season began⁵⁶. The new fruit should be placed on the table before Kiddush. This way, the blessing of *Shehechyanu* that is recited will refer to the fruit as well⁵⁷.

If one has a custom to recite *Shehechyanu* during candle lighting, the fruit should be present while it is recited.

- The fruit is eaten right after the *challah*⁵⁸. Even though the *Hamotzee* over bread has been recited, the *Ha'etz* (or *Ha'adomah*) blessing is still required⁵⁹.
- Even when a new fruit is unavailable, the *Shehechyanu* blessing is still recited in Kiddush and in candle lighting (for those who recite it then)⁶⁰.
- There are varying customs whether the symbolic foods are eaten and their prayers recited (see above) on the second night of Rosh Hashanah⁶¹.

Havdalah

Since this year Rosh Hashanah concludes on Friday night, no Havdalah is recited. The normal Friday night *kabalas Shabbos* prayer is also abridged.

❖ Aseres Yemei Teshuvah - The Ten Days of Penitence

Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is the balance of Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. It is an auspicious time to make amends for all we have done wrong. Since Hashem only forgives interpersonal sins if the injured party also grants forgiveness, it is essential for people to seek forgiveness from each other as well. It is also important to increase in Torah study during this time as this is the most effective way to connect with Hashem.⁶²

Pas Yisroel

Two basic laws pertain to the type of bread that we may eat: It must be made from kosher ingredients and it must also be baked by a Jewish person.⁶³ (Bread baked by Jewish person is referred to as *pas yisroel*.)

A leniency exists that permits bread baked by a non-Jew when it is commercially baked⁶⁴ (referred to as *pas palter*). This leniency is usually acceptable⁶⁵ but it should not be relied upon during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. Therefore, even if commercially baked breads, cakes and cookies are certified kosher, they should only be consumed during this time if they are also *pas yisroel*. (This is often indicated on the packaging.)

Changes in Prayers

Special changes and additions are made to the *Shmoneh Esrei* (Amidah) during these days.

- The third blessing concludes differently than usual.
 - If this was forgotten, one must repeat the *Shmoneh Esrei*⁶⁶. Of all the changes during this time, only this mistake could require one to repeat the *Shmoneh Esrei*.
 - One who is unsure what was said should assume that a mistake was made unless he or she was praying from a *machzor*⁶⁷.
- The eleventh blessing also concludes differently than usual⁶⁸.
- Phrases are added to the first two and last two blessings of *Shmoneh Esrei*. When the chazzan repeats the *Shmoneh Esrei*, these phrases are said aloud by the congregation⁶⁹.
- During the weekdays, *avinu malkeinu* is recited after *Shmoneh Esrei* of shacharis and mincha⁷⁰.

- During shacharis, some communities recite psalm 130 before *Borchu*.⁷¹

❖ Tzom Gedalyah

Tzom Gedalyah is a fast-day that commemorates the final blow in the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdosh (Temple)⁷².

- The fast begins at dawn and should conclude no earlier than fifty minutes after sunset. In instances of significant need, it may be concluded forty-one minutes after sunset.⁷³
- Tasteless medicine may be taken with whatever amount of water is necessary. Regarding medicine that has a taste, a rabbi should be consulted.⁷⁴
- Pregnant, nursing, elderly or infirm people that find it difficult to fast should consult a rabbi.⁷⁵
 - Even those who are exempt from fasting may not eat particularly tasty foods or treats.⁷⁶
- Prayers on a fast day are longer than on a usual day. At the synagogue shacharis, be prepared for a Torah reading, and mincha is twice as long as usual and it includes both a Torah and a Haftarah reading.
 - During the Torah readings, specific verses are recited aloud by the congregation in advance of the reader.

❖ Shabbos Shuvah

On the Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is customary for the rabbi of the synagogue to deliver a sermon focused on repentance⁷⁷.

אשירה לד' כי גמל עלי

I am indebted to my wife for all the patience and support she continues to have for me.

Thank you my dear reader, for without your interest this pamphlet would not exist.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to be a quick review of some pertinent laws relevant to this time of year. It was formulated for those who do not have the opportunity or resources to study the laws in detail.

Many of these laws and sources are from the seforim:

שליט"א by Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Karp הלכות חג בחג
קונטרס שיעורי הלכה מתוך שיעורים של רב שמואל פעלדער

Please share your feedback with me at yschnall@jeprockland.org

Feel welcome to make copies of this pamphlet for free distribution

Elul 5774

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- ¹ Rema 581:1
² Rema 581:3
³ Mishna Berura 581:2
⁴ Rema 581:1
⁵ Rema 581:1
⁶ See Hilchos Chag B'chag 2:2-3
⁷ Mishna Berura 46:27
⁸ Shulchan Aruch and Rema 4:14
⁹ Iggros Moshe Orach Chayim volume IV #6
¹⁰ Mishna Berura 581:6
¹¹ Mateh Efrayim 581:18
¹² Mishna Berura 581:4
¹³ Shulchan Aruch 581:2
¹⁴ This is the common custom. The closest source to this that I am aware of is the Machatzis Hashekel 581 "Ain Tzorich Lehashlim"
¹⁵ Mishna Berura 581:19
¹⁶ Rema 581:4
¹⁷ Chayei Adam 138:8
¹⁸ See Hilchos Chag B'chag 4:8
¹⁹ Rema Yoreh Daiya 211:1
²⁰ See Hilchos Chag B'chag 4:8
²¹ Rema 582:9
²² See Mishna Berura 582:25
²³ Mishna Berura 583:5
²⁴ Rema 583:2, Mishna Berura 583:9
²⁵ See Mishna Berura 597:1
²⁶ Mishna Berura 583:3
²⁷ Shulchan Aruch and Rema 583:1
²⁸ Mishna Berura 583:3
²⁹ Mishna Berura 583:4
³⁰ Shulchan Aruch 211:1
³¹ See Hilchos Chag B'chag 6:10
³² Rema 583:2
³³ Mishna Berura 583:5
³⁴ Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder
³⁵ Shulchan Aruch 585:2; Rema 592:1; Rema 596:1
³⁶ Shulchan Aruch 589:3
³⁷ Rambam Tekias Shofar 1:1
³⁸ See Hilchos Chag B'chag 10:1
³⁹ Mishna Berura 343:3
⁴⁰ Mishna Berura 587:16
⁴¹ Rema 589:6
⁴² Mishna Berura 585:2
⁴³ Mishna Berura 585:2
⁴⁴ Shulchan Aruch and Rema 592:3; Chayei Adam 141:9
⁴⁵ Mateh Efrayim 588:2; Mishna Berura 692:15; see Hilchos Chag B'chag 8:25
⁴⁶ Chayei Adam 141:7
⁴⁷ Rema 596:1
⁴⁸ Rema 583:2
⁴⁹ Mishna Berura 583:8
⁵⁰ Mishna Berura 583:8
⁵¹ Mateh Efrayim 598:5; Shulchan Aruch 496: 2
⁵² Shulchan Aruch 503:1
⁵³ See Shulchan Aruch and Mishna Berura 503 and 667
⁵⁴ See Michtav M'Eliyahu volume II page 76
⁵⁵ Shulchan Aruch 600:2
⁵⁶ Shulchan Aruch 225:6
⁵⁷ Mishna Berura 600:4
⁵⁸ See Hilchos Chag B'chag 16:9; Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder
⁵⁹ Similar to Mishna Berura 583:4

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- ⁶⁰ Shulchan Aruch 500:2
⁶¹ Mateh Efrayim 600:14; Elef Hamagen (9)
⁶² See Mateh Efrayim 603:4-5; Chayei Adam 143
⁶³ Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Dayah 112:1
⁶⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Rema Yoreh Dayah 112:2
⁶⁵ Note that many communities only rely on this leniency when no Pas Yisroel bread is unavailable - see Aruch Hashulchan Yoreh Dayah 112:17
⁶⁶ Shulchan Aruch 582:1
⁶⁷ See Mishna Berura 582:4
⁶⁸ Shulchan Aruch 582:1
⁶⁹ Mishna Berura 582:15
⁷⁰ Rema 602:1
⁷¹ Mishna Berura 54:4
⁷² Rema introduction to 602
⁷³ Iggros Moshe volume 4 #64
⁷⁴ Laws of Daily Living: The Three Weeks page 16
⁷⁵ See Shulchan Aruch 550:1
⁷⁶ Mishna Berura 550:5
⁷⁷ Mateh Efrayim 602:42