

Pnimityut

The Inner Dimension of Torah

Rosh Hashana

Special Rosh Hashana Edition

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ROSH HASHANA

Rosh Hashana is called by three names in the Torah: Yom HaDin, the Day of Judgment; Yom HaZikaron, the Day of Remembrance; and Yom Teruah, the Day of the Shofar. Three names for one day — and they are not in tension with one another. Together they describe a single, extraordinary moment in the life of the world.

The Tur points to something that sets this day apart. Jews prepare for Rosh Hashana differently than any people faces its day of reckoning. They dress in fine clothing, eat at a festive table, and stand before the King not with the posture of a defendant but with the settled trust of a beloved child. Not because the judgment is unreal — the stakes are entirely real — but because they know something deeper: that the King before whom they stand desires their good, and that approaching Him in trust is itself an act of love that moves Him. The Baal Shem Tov taught that the essence of Rosh Hashana is not judgment but coronation. When the Jewish people proclaim Hashem as King — in prayer, in the shofar blasts, in gathering together as one — they crown Him anew. The Zohar says: when He is crowned below, He is crowned above. Every word of Malchuyot, every tekiah, is an act of love — a declaration that Hashem alone is King of everything that exists.

This is the mood to carry into Rosh Hashana: not the crouch of a defendant, but the full presence of someone who came to crown their King. Fear and love together — but love leading. The awe is real, and it is held inside something much larger: the knowledge that this King created us, desires our return, and is already waiting for us to arrive.

THE SHOFAR

Before there were words, there was a cry. The shofar carries that cry — the sound of the soul before language, before reasoning, before explanation. It is the one moment in the Jewish year when prayer is stripped back to its most essential form: a sound that says nothing and everything at once.

The Rambam writes that the shofar calls out: Wake up, you sleepers. Rouse yourselves, you slumberers. Examine your deeds, return in teshuva, and remember your Creator. The shofar is not addressed to the ear — it is addressed to the soul that has grown comfortable in a life that does not quite match what it knows itself to be.

The three sounds of the shofar tell a story. The tekiah — one long, unbroken note — is wholeness. The shevarim — three broken sighs — is the cracked heart. The teruah — rapid, short bursts — is the soul's weeping. And then: tekiah again. The sequence moves from wholeness into brokenness and back into wholeness. This is the shape of teshuva itself — the journey the shofar traces in sound.

The shofar of Rosh Hashana is made from a ram's horn, connecting every blast to the Akedat Yitzchak. The Talmud says Hashem told us to blow the shofar of a ram so that He would remember the merit of Avraham. Every tekiah carries that memory — the moment when love for Hashem exceeded love for everything else. When we blow, we invoke that love. We say: we are those people.

ASERET YEMEI TESHUVA

The ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur carry a quality that cannot be found at any other point in the year. The Gemara quotes the prophet: seek Hashem when He is to be found, call upon Him when He is near — and teaches that this verse refers specifically to the Aseret Yemei Teshuva. These are the days when Hashem is closest.

The Rambam rules that while teshuva is accepted at all times, these ten days carry a special readiness. The same turn of the heart, the same word, the same decision to change carries more weight in these days than in any others. The gates that ordinarily take more effort to open are simply open. A person who uses these days genuinely arrives at Yom Kippur having already changed — and the Yom Kippur sealing ratifies what the ten days have begun.

The Arizal taught that each of the ten days corresponds to one of the ten categories of sanctified time in the Jewish year. By doing genuine teshuva on each day, a person can repair that entire category for the year that just passed. Ten days, ten repairs — a whole year made whole. This is the gift placed at the beginning of every new year: the opportunity to close what was left open.

The mood of these days is not heaviness. It is the specific alertness of someone who knows that the window is open and wants to use it fully. Reb Nachman of Breslov taught that sadness itself closes the gate — that a person who approaches these days with joy and earnestness opens something that dread alone cannot reach. Come close. These ten days are for exactly this.

EREV ROSH HASHANA

"A tradition has come down to us," writes the Nefesh Yosef, "that whoever reads on Erev Rosh Hashana these verses from Devarim — Hashem proclaims throughout the heavens: I have collected from this person all his debts, and his sins are forgiven."

וְהָיָה כִּי-תָבוֹא אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ נַחֲלָה, וּיְרִשְׁתָּהּ, וְנִשְׁבַּתְּ בָּהּ. וְלָקַחְתָּ מֵרֵאשִׁית כָּל-פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּבְנֶיָה מֵאֲרָצְךָ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ, וְשָׂמֶתָ בַּטֶּנָּה, וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לְשָׂכֹן שָׁמוֹ שָׁם. וּבָאתָ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַּיָּמִים, הַהֵם, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו: הִגְדַּתִּי הַיּוֹם לְה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ כִּי-בָאתִי אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לֵאמֹתִינִי לָתֶת לָנוּ. וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן הַטֶּנָּה מִיָּדְךָ, וְהִנִּיחוּ לִפְנֵי מִזְבֵּחַ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ. וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ: אֲרָמִי אֲבִד אָבִי, וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגְרֶם שָׁם בְּמִתֵּי מֶעֶט, וַיְהִי-שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל עָצוֹם וָרֹב. וַיִּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִים וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ, וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה. וְנִצָּעַק אֶל-ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קִלְנוּ, וַיֵּרָא אֶת-עֲנִינֵנוּ וְאֶת-עֲמָלָנוּ וְאֶת-לַחֲצֵנוּ. וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֶרַע נְטוּיָה, וּבְמַרְא גָדֹל, וּבְאֹתוֹת וּבְמִפְתָּיִם. וַיְבָאֵנוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה, וַיִּתֵּן-לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, אָרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבַשׁ. וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הֵבֵאתִי אֶת-רֵאשִׁית פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-נָתַתָּה לִּי ה', וְהִנְחִיתוּ לִפְנֵי ה'. אֱלֹקֶיךָ, וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ. וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ בְּכָל-הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לָךְ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ וּלְבֵיתְךָ, אֶתָּה וְהַלְוֵי וְהַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ.

Fasting

It is customary to fast on Erev Rosh Hashana.

Hataras Nedarim

Recited before a minyan of three in the morning — releasing unfulfilled vows before the new year begins.

Tzedakah

Give as generously as possible. Erev Yom Tov is an especially receptive time above.

Hafrashat Challah

A segulah and minhag for women to separate challah on this day with special intention.

Mikveh

The time for immersion is from the fifth halachic hour — one hour before midday. The Kaf HaChaim (581:83) records eight immersions based on the Arizal's order, each addressing a different dimension of the year:

- 1 Purification — kavana of אהיה = 151 = מקוה
- 2 Repairing the trait of anger
- 3 Repairing damage to the name ע"ב
- 4 Repairing damage to the name ט"ג
- 5 Repairing damage to the name מ"ה
- 6 Repairing damage to the name ב"ן
- 7 Removing weekday garments from the Nefesh
- 8 Receiving the illumination of Shabbat and Yom Tov of Yom HaZikaron

Mincha

The last prayer of the outgoing year. Daven Mincha with full attention and heart.

SEGULOT & CUSTOMS

Tehilim

The days from Rosh Hashana through Yom Kippur are unlike any other time of year. Rav Kanievsky would complete the entire Tehilim every single day of this period — a practice that speaks for itself. Whatever one can give of these ten days to the words of Tehilim is time well spent. Even a chapter said slowly and sincerely carries weight that ordinary days cannot match

Segulah for Zivug

Finishing the entire Tehilim twice on the first night of Rosh Hashana is a known segulah for finding one's zivug. It may be divided among family members so the whole can be completed together.

Simcha

Carry joy throughout these days. One who enters Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in genuine simcha opens channels above that fear alone cannot open.

Blessing and Positive Speech

Bless everyone you meet during these days. Speak only good — about others, about the year, about yourself. The mouth that blesses in these days carries special weight.

Birkat Hamazon — Parnasa

The Birkat Hamazon recited at the first meal of Rosh Hashana is the first of the year. Be careful to say it with full attention — it is a powerful segulah for parnasa throughout the entire year ahead.

Pitum HaKetoret

Recite Pitum HaKetoret before Birkat Hamazon or right after the meal, with intention to nullify all judgments. The ketoret has the power to stop decrees.

Parshat HaMann

Saying Parshat HaMann every day of the Aseret Yemei Teshuva is a strong segulah for parnasa and is especially potent when said with kavana during these ten days.

Adon Olam

The Mateh Moshe writes in the name of Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid, Rav Hai Gaon, and Rav Sherira Gaon: whoever has full intention when saying piyut Adon Olam — his prayer will be heard, no accuser will rise against him on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, his enemies will fall before him, and his evil inclination will make peace with him. On this the verse says: when Hashem favors a man's ways, even his enemies make peace with him.

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