

Laws and Customs of Rosh Hashanah 5786

I. The Day Before Rosh Hashanah

The day before Rosh Hashanah—Monday, September 22—begins early with *Selichot* services at 6:15 AM.

Following *Shacharit*, many have the custom to perform *hatarat nedarim*, the permitting of vows, in front of an ad hoc court of three adult Jewish men. This ritual requests the permitting of vows or practices we have inadvertently adopted over the year. As a legal activity, this request must be understood by the petitioner and the court, and should be read in a language in which it can be understood. An English translation can be found in most *siddurim* and will also be distributed on Monday morning. *Hatarat Nedarim* can be recited through Erev Yom Kippur.

II. Rosh Hashanah in the Home

The *Shebeheyanu* blessing is recited at candle lighting and *kiddush* on both nights of Rosh Hashanah. Because some Jewish sources consider Rosh Hashanah to be one long, 48-hour day (such that a *Shebeheyanu* would not be required on the second day) many recommend saying the second day's *Shebeheyanu* with a new fruit or garment in mind at candle lighting and *kiddush* (a separate one for each). This is the widespread custom. Even in the absence of a new item, the *Shebeheyanu* blessing should still be said on the second night of Rosh Hashanah.

It is customary on Rosh Hashanah to eat foods whose names or qualities play on our hopes for the coming year, like gourd (*kara*)—so that the negative parts of our decree for the coming year be torn up (*yikar'u*)—and pomegranates—so that our merits be as numerous as its seeds. We include wordplays in any language, hence the newer custom of eating a raisin celery salad (for a raise-in-salary...).

Perhaps the most popular food custom is eating apples with honey, a symbol of a sweet year. Because the apple is not an integral part of the meal, it warrants a separate blessing of "*borei peri ha'etz*" after *ha-motzi*. One should be careful to eat some apple and honey after the blessing and before reciting the short "*yehi ratzon*" prayer wishing for a sweet year so as not to interrupt between blessing and eating. We also dip our challah into honey instead of salt on Rosh Hashanah and many continue this practice for each Shabbat and holiday meal through the end of the Jewish "holiday season" at *Simchat Torah*.

III. Shofar

Hearing the sounds of the shofar is considered a biblical mitzvah on Rosh Hashanah, as the Torah says (Bamidbar 29:1), "yom teruah yehiyeh lachem." The mitzvah involves hearing three types of blasts—tekiah, shevarim, and teruah—in specific sequences, totaling at least nine blasts. Throughout the course of each day, we hear 100 blasts from the shofar.

IV. Tashlich

As a community, we will recite the *tashlich* prayers on the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah. These prayers, customarily recited adjacent to a body of water, express our confidence in our own ability, with God's help, to cast away our sins and redirect and renew our lives at the new year. We will gather at the lake on Tuesday at the Boat Park (at Roscoe and Lake Shore) for Tashlich in partnership with Chabad of Lakeview.

V. Fast of Gedaliah

After the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians, Gedaliah was placed as a governor over the remaining Jewish population in and around Jerusalem. Jewish extremists assassinated Gedaliah. They considered him a traitor for collaborating with the Babylonian occupying army. In turn, the Babylonians destroyed what was left of autonomous Jewish life in *Eretz Yisrael*. The Prophet Jeremiah witnessed and mourned this self-destructive violence. The anniversary of Gedaliah's assassination, the third day of Tishrei, is marked as a day of fasting. The fast begins at

5:29 AM on Thursday, September 25th. We read Torah at Mincha (which will begin early, at 6:15 PM) and the fast concludes at 7:16 PM.