



חגים וזמנים

The Festival Times

A Community Kollel of Dallas publication

Vol. 3, No. 1
High Holidays, 2007/5768



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The Community Kollel of Dallas is a project of Yeshiva University's Global Kollel Initiative

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editor - <i>Rav Benjy Myers</i> _____	4
Greetings - <i>Rabbi Herbert J. Cohen</i> _____	5
Laws and Customs of Rosh haShana _____	6
Laws and Customs of Yom Kippur _____	8
Laws and Customs of Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah _____	9
<i>Eiruv Tavshilin</i> _____	11
Candle Lighting _____	12

Articles

Not By Bread Alone - <i>Rav Hanan Schlesinger</i> _____	13
Smiling is Beguiling - <i>Rabbi Herbert J. Cohen</i> _____	16
Redefining Rosh haShana Rituals - <i>Sharon Weinstein</i> _____	18
GPS for the Soul - <i>Rabbi Maury Grebenau</i> _____	17
Rosh haShana: Can We Really Be Happy? - <i>Rabbi Jay Weinstein</i> _____	23
Something's Fishy - <i>Rav Benjy Myers</i> _____	24

For the Family

Kids Korner #1 _____	14
Rosh haShana Crossword _____	15
Prayer: One Letter at a Time - <i>Rabbi Abraham Twerski</i> _____	17
Kids Korner #2 _____	19
Who is Helped by Tzedaka? - <i>Rabbi Abraham Twerski</i> _____	21
Two Attitudes to Teshuva - <i>Rabbi Abraham Twerski</i> _____	22

FROM THE EDITOR

תכלה שנה וקללותיה. תחל שנה וברכותיה

Let the old year and its curses end, and let the new year and its blessings begin.

As one year ends and a new one begins, the Community Kollel of Dallas is once more happy to present to you the High Holidays edition of The Festival Times, this time on the theme of Rosh haShana and *teshuva* - repentance.

There are articles written by members of the Kollel, as well as Judaic faculty members of Yavneh Academy, Dallas.

The Kids Korner for younger members of the family has been joined by three excerpts from Rabbi Abraham Twerski's book, Not Just Stories, on three of the central themes of the High Holidays: *teshuva*, *tefilla*, and *tzedaka* - repentance, prayer and charity. Our thanks to the publishers, ArtScroll/Mesorah, for their kind permission to cite from the book.

We have included information about the other festivals of the month of Tishrei, including blessings for candle lighting, selected laws & customs, as well as the procedure for *eiruv tavshilin* which is done whenever Shabbat falls immediately after Yom Tov, as it does this year.

We look forward to your thoughts and comments on any part of The Festival Times, and take this opportunity to wish you, your families, friends and all of Israel a happy, healthy, successful and sweet new year.

Rav Benjy Myers

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ABOUT US

The Community Kollel of Dallas seeks to strengthen our Jewish community through the shared experience of Torah study in a non-judgmental environment. A unique combination of worldliness and Judaic scholarship characterizes the men & women of the Kollel, who are wonderful ambassadors of Jewish living and learning in our modern society.

GREETINGS

Rabbi Herbert J. Cohen - Executive Director/Family Educator

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to present The Festival Times, a collection of Torah insights compiled by the members of the Community Kollel of Dallas and other educators in the Dallas community. The articles reflect the very mission of the Kollel, which is to teach Torah and relate that Torah knowledge to the living Jewish experience.

The theme of this issue is Rosh haShana and *teshuva*/repentance. *Teshuva* means returning to God, getting close to Him. The Talmud tells us that when we are sensitive and kind to our fellowman, we bring godliness into our lives. One of God's names is "the Compassionate One," and we are godlike when we exhibit compassion towards people, who are created in the image of God.

Being good to human beings draws us closer to God, and that is our goal during this holy time of the year. The words of Torah in this issue will stimulate your thinking, and, hopefully, inspire you to ever greater interpersonal relationships and an enhanced connection to God.

The Community Kollel of Dallas is willing and anxious to study with all Jews on a spiritual journey. If you would like to attend a class or arrange one-on-one learning, please call (214-907-2858 cell) or email me at rabiherbcohen@sbcglobal.net. I would be pleased to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Herbert J. Cohen

LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF ROSH HASHANA

◆ *Teshuva and Hatarat Nedarim* - Repentance and annulling of vows

As we prepare to begin a new year, it is time to reflect on the things we have done over the course of the previous year in the hope of entering the new year with a clean slate. Traditionally we are told that Yom Kippur only provides atonement for sins between a person and God, but not in cases of inter-personal relationships. It is therefore a good time in the time leading up to this most auspicious day to ask for forgiveness from our family and friends for any wrong we may have done them throughout the year.

Hatarat nedarim is another customary way of cleaning the slate. The person recites a fixed formula before an ad-hoc *beit din* asking to be absolved of any vows undertaken during the year which may have been forgotten or gone unfulfilled.

◆ **Symbolic foods**

There are many customs regarding foods that are eaten on Rosh haShana. Many have the tradition to use a round *challa* signifying the cycle of the year as well as the cycle of life, and to dip the *challa* in honey. See page 7 for other foods and the accompanying recitations.

◆ **Shofar**

One of the focal points of Rosh haShana is the sounding of the shofar. Rosh haShana is the day when we crown God as King and ask Him to recall the covenant with our forefathers, and therefore inscribe us in the Book of Life. The shofar plays a number of roles. It announces the arrival of the Monarch and serves as a reminder that now is the time to ask for forgiveness from our fellow man and from God.

◆ **Tashlich**

On the afternoon of the first day of Rosh haShana (or second day if the first day is on Shabbat) it is customary to go to a body of water such as a stream, river or sea and symbolically cast away our sins. The highlight of the ceremony is the verse from the Book of Micah (7:19) petitioning God to “throw all their sins into the depths of the sea”.

סִימְנִים - SYMBOLIC FOODS

The Talmud in Kareitot 6a, and the Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayim 583:1 teach us that there is a custom to eat certain types of food on Rosh haShana, for they symbolize different things that we wish for ourselves, family, community and all the Jewish people. Below is a sampling of some of the more popular customary foods. Enjoy!

Apple and honey:

The apple is dipped in honey, and the blessing is then recited. After taking a bite from the apple, the special pronouncement is made:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-Olam borei p'ri ha-eitz

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּחַדֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוּקָה

May it be Your will our God and God of our forefathers that You renew upon us a good and sweet year.

Pomegranate

The pomegranate contains many edible seeds, and these symbolize the mitzvot that we have kept during the past year, and the merits that we ask God to now look upon as He sits in judgment.

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנֶּרְבָּה זְכוֹת כְּרַמּוֹן

May it be Your will our God and God of our forefathers that our merits be as many as the seeds of a pomegranate.

Head of sheep or fish

There are some who have the custom to place the head of a sheep or fish - and some even have a ram's head - on the table. This symbolizes our desire to be strong in our service of God. The Ram's head further symbolizes the binding of Isaac which plays such a prominent role throughout Rosh haShana.

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנְּהָיָה לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב

May it be Your will our God and God of our forefathers that we be like the head and not like the tail.

LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF YOM KIPPUR

◆ *Seuda mafseket - the final meal before the fast*

Before Yom Kippur begins, we eat a festive meal known as the *seuda mafseket*. It is a mitzva to eat on the eve of Yom Kippur, and the Talmud in Berakhot 8b teaches us that “one who eats on the ninth [of Tishrei], it is as if he has fasted on the ninth and the tenth”.

Some men also have the custom of immersing in the *mikve*, signifying spiritual cleansing. Exiting the water is also a reminder of birth. We ask that just as a new born baby is pure and free of sin, we should also merit having our transgressions forgiven and return to our former state of purity and holiness.

◆ *Kittel*

The *kittel* is a long white robe worn by many men throughout Yom Kippur and symbolizes righteousness and purity. It also reminds us of the verse: “Though your sins may be as red as scarlet, they shall become as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

It further recalls the shrouds in which a person is buried and is a visual reminder throughout the day that God is sitting in judgment over of living things.

◆ *The five abstentions*

Yom Kippur is a day dedicated to prayer and beseeching God for forgiveness, and is a day when we try to emulate the angels in their complete state of purity. As such, one aspect of Yom Kippur is the abstention from certain physical pleasures that may distract us from the intensity of the sacred day. These include: a) Eating and drinking; b) Washing for pleasure; c) Anointing (non-medicinal application of oils, lotion and perfumes); d) Wearing leather shoes, and e) Marital relations

For further guidance, please speak to your local rabbi or contact the Kollel office.

◆ *Next year in Jerusalem*

At the conclusion of *Neila*, we call out with great fervor: “Next year in Jerusalem”. We yearn to see the ingathering of the exiles to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the Temple, and peace for all the nation of Israel.

LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF SUKKOT, SHMINI ATZERET AND SIMCHAT TORAH

◆ *Sukka*

The *sukka* is a temporary abode with its own unique set of construction guidelines in which we eat, drink, learn, and, under certain conditions, sleep for the duration of the festival of Sukkot.

Moving from our permanent homes of bricks and mortar into temporary and less sturdy homes exhibits our faith in God that just as in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt he watched over us with clouds of glory, so too He will watch over us in this day and age.

◆ *Arbaat haMinim* - The four species

Made up of the *etrog*, *lulav* (palm frond), three *hadasim* (myrtle branches) and two *aravot* (willow branches), these four species are taken together and waved before God each day of Sukkot except Shabbat. Many symbolisms have been attached to the four species. One symbolism speaks of each of the species representing a different type of Jew, all of whom then come together in a show of national unity and without whom the Jewish people would not be a whole nation.

◆ *Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah*

In Israel, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated on the same day. However, outside of Israel where two days of Yom Tov are kept, they became separated, with each day taking on its own unique characteristics.

The highlight of Shmini Atzeret is the prayer for rain. The land of Israel does not have many natural water resources and is, therefore, dependent on God for rain. In this prayer, we make mention of various times throughout our history where water has played a central role, such as the splitting of the Red Sea, and end off with a petition to God that He should bless us with rain.

On Simchat Torah we celebrate the completion of the cycle of weekly Torah readings. We take the Torah scrolls out of the Ark and dance with them to show our love of God and his Torah. Furthermore, to remind ourselves that we never finish studying and that there is always something new to learn, as soon as we finish reading the last portion of the Torah, we immediately start reading from the beginning of the Torah.

אושפיזין - USHPIZIN

On each night of Sukkot we invite our forefathers and great leaders of the Jewish people to our sukkah. We begin each night with the following general invitation, followed by the personal invitation relevant for that night.

אֲזַמֵּן לְסַעֲדָתִי אֲשֶׁפִּיזִין עַל־אֵין אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד
I invite to my feast honored guests – Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Yoseif, Moshe, Aharon and David

בְּמִטּוֹ מִנְּךָ
With your permission

1. אַבְרָהָם 2. יִצְחָק 3. יַעֲקֹב 4. יוֹסֵף 5. מֹשֶׁה 6. אַהֲרֹן 7. דָּוִד
1. Avraham 2. Yitzhak 3. Yaakov 4. Yoseif 5. Moshe 6. Aharon 7. David

אֲשֶׁפִּיזִי עַל־אֵי דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְךָ כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזִי עַל־אֵי
My honored guest, that all the other honored guests sit here with me and with you -

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Yitzhak, Yaakov, Yoseif, Moshe, Aharon and David | 1. יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד |
| 2. Avraham, Yaakov, Yoseif, Moshe, Aharon and David | 2. אַבְרָהָם יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד |
| 3. Avraham, Yitzhak, Yoseif, Moshe, Aharon and David | 3. אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד |
| 4. Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon and David | 4. אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד |
| 5. Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Yoseif, Aharon and David | 5. אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד |
| 6. Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Yoseif, Moshe and David | 6. אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה וְדָוִד |
| 7. Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Yoseif, Moshe and Aharon | 7. אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן |

עֲרוּב תַבְשִׁילִין - EIRUV TAVSHILIN

Whenever Yom Tov falls out on a Friday, an *eiruv tavshilin* must be made before the start of Yom Tov (Wednesday afternoon) in order to allow cooking for Shabbat to take place on Yom Tov. One 'bread product' (a *matza*) and one 'ready to eat' food (traditionally, a hard boiled egg) are set aside and designated as the bare essentials of the Shabbat meal, and the blessing "*al mitzvat eiruv*" is recited. Setting aside the basic essentials of a Shabbat meal means that any food cooked on Yom Tov could, theoretically, be eaten on Yom Tov, should the need arise. The mere possibility that the food cooked on Yom Tov might be eaten that day is the basis of the dispensation for cooking to be done on Yom Tov, even if it is intended for Shabbat consumption.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל מִצְוַת עֲרוּב.

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh haOlam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav,
v'tzivanu al mitzvat eiruv.*

Blessed are You, God, King of the Universe, who sanctified us with His
commandments and commanded us regarding the *eiruv*.

After the blessing is recited, the following declaration is made:

בְּהֵדִין עֲרוּבָא יְהֵא שְׂרָא לְנָא לְמִיפָא וּלְבִשְׂלָא וּלְאַטְמָנָא, וּלְאַדְלָקָא שְׂרָגָא, וּלְמַעֲבַד כָּל צְרָכָנָא,
מִיּוֹמָא טָבָא לְשַׁבְּתָא, לָנוּ וּלְכָל הַדְּרָיִם בְּעִיר הַזֵּאת.

Through this *eiruv* we will be permitted to bake, cook, insulate, light a flame and do
all necessary labor from *Yom Tov* to *Shabbat*, we and all who live in this town.

CANDLE LIGHTING - הַדְּלֵקַת נְרוֹת

On Shabbat:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְּלִיק נֵר שַׁבָּת.
*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-Olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu
 l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat*

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the Universe,
 who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the Shabbat candle.

On Rosh haShana, Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
 לְהַדְּלִיק נֵר שַׁל (בשבת - שַׁבָּת וְשַׁל) יוֹם טוֹב.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-Olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu
 l'hadlik ner shel (On Shabbat - Shabbat v'shel) Yom Tov*

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctified us with His
 commandments and commanded us to light the (*On Shabbat - Shabbat and*) Yom Tov candle.

On Yom Kippur:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְּלִיק נֵר שַׁל יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים.
*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-Olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu
 l'hadlik ner shel Yom haKippurim*

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctified us with His
 commandments and commanded us to light the Yom Kippur candle.

On the Festivals and on Yom Kippur:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-Olam shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higi-anu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us
 and brought us to this time.

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

Rav Hanan Schlesinger – Rosh Kolloh

“*Not by bread alone does man live, rather man lives as well by the decree of God.*” So reads the famous verse in the eighth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. In context, the message may be that man’s labor and its physical products are not the be all and the end all of our existence. Without the will of God that allows humankind the strength and the ingenuity to bring forth bread from the earth, there could be no prosperity, nay, no life at all. Yes indeed we must rely on our own efforts, our own blood, sweat and tears, but at the same time we must be eternally cognizant that it is “the Lord your God who gives you the wherewithal to succeed” (ibid). Our creative powers and bodily capabilities are all from Him, and this must never be forgotten.

This same verse, however, according to Rav Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbich, can be interpreted in a radically different fashion. In the Mei haShiloach, his two volumes of *hassidic* insights on the weekly Torah portion, he opines that ‘bread’ may symbolize the standard spiritual fare of the Jewish people, in other words, the 613 commandments of the Torah. Man must certainly live by bread, but not by bread alone. The mitzvot are incumbent upon us, in all their complexity and minutia. They are the foundation of Jewish spiritual life. At the same time, however, they are necessary but hardly sufficient. There is much more at the pinnacle of religious life than the bare scaffolding of mitzvot alone.

In addition to the ‘bread,’ one’s ears must also be attuned to the particular and individualized decree of God that is unique for each soul. There is a special way of doing the mitzvot that God wants you to discover. And furthermore, God has a task and a role for each of us...and mine is very different than yours. Every person’s religious life should look a little bit different. Not because this Jew does more mitzvot and this Jew less, not because one is more punctilious than the other, rather because over and above the basic bread of religious life, each person must seek out the unique flavor and hue of Judaism that God has decreed for him.

In light of this insight of the Mei haShiloach, we may understand the words of Rav Avraham Yitzchak haCohen Kook near the beginning of his groundbreaking work “Lights of Repentance.” After reminding us that we must each work to purge our deeds of sin and to bring our lives into realignment with the

obligations that the Torah places upon us, he emphasizes that this does not accomplish the fullness of repentance. The peak of penitential expression lies ahead, and it grows out of “a comprehensive outlook on life.” That is to say, that after we assess if we have done all the mitzvot as the codes of Jewish law demand of us, we must ask ourselves if through doing the mitzvot we have become the unique human being that God wants us to be. Have we served God with the talents and potentialities that He gave only to us, or have we wasted them, letting them lie dormant or harnessing them for ends that do not accord with the greater glory of God or the advancement of humanity? Have we built a life of unique holiness out of the obedience to the commandments? Have we allowed the mitzvot to transform us and bring us closer to the Source of All Life, or have we only superficially gone through the motions? Have we gone beyond the letter of the law, to serve God with all our heart and with all our soul, discovering Divine decrees that are incumbent only upon the unique individual personalities that each of us are?

There is a level of penitence whose standards are one size fits all. And then there is a level of penitence that each of us must discover on our own. May we each find the humility to conform to the former, and the courage to live up to the latter.

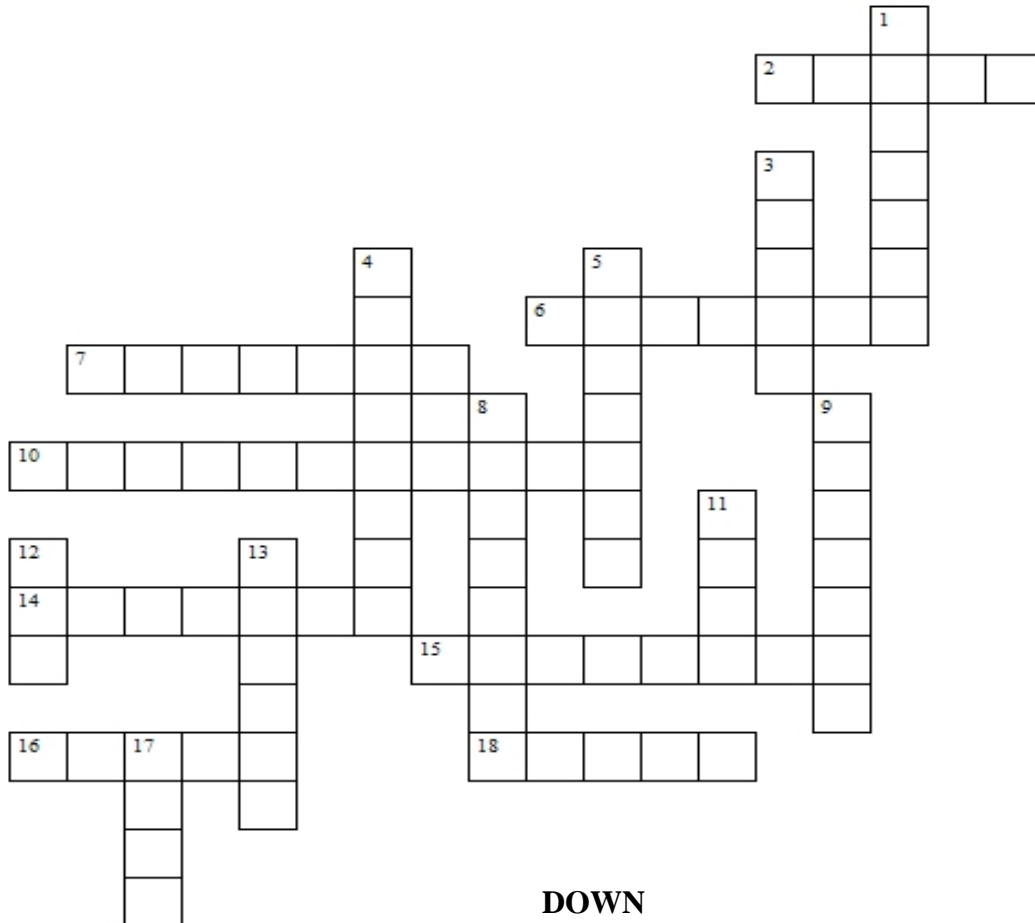
* * * * *

kids korney

Teshuva, tefilla and tzedaka - repentance, prayer and charity. On Rosh haShana and Yom Kippur we all say loudly and in unison that these three things will help remove the evil decree.

With your parents, discuss why it is specifically these three things that help.

ROSH HASHANA CROSSWORD



ACROSS

2. We pray that the coming year will be happy and ____
6. The Hebrew word for repentance
7. The month in which the High Holidays occur
10. A red fruit with many seeds
14. I was willing to offer up my son in service of God
15. I was bound on the altar by my father
16. One long blast
18. In what is the apple dipped?

DOWN

1. The Hebrew word for prayer
3. Nine short blasts
4. Three short blasts
5. Rosh HaShana is the Jewish _____
8. The ceremony on the afternoon of Rosh HaShana where we symbolically get rid of our sins
9. The Hebrew word for charity
11. The body of water where we symbolically get rid of our sins should have these
12. I was caught in a bush by my horns and offered up as a sacrifice
13. The instrument we sound on Rosh HaShana
17. On Rosh HaShana we crown God as this

SMILING IS BEGUILING

Rabbi Herbert Cohen – Executive Director & Family Educator

This is an excerpt from Rabbi Herbert Cohen's book, *Kosher Parenting, a Guide for Raising Kids in a Complex World*.

Our existential reality today is much different from when I grew up. The world that we leave to our children in the 21st century is fraught with peril unimagined just a few years ago. Which is why little things count for a lot. A smile, for example, goes a long way. When you smile, it invariably leads to someone else smiling, making the world a nicer place. We cannot easily change the political forces that are at work in the world, but we can on a daily basis make our own little world a more pleasant place in which to be.

Show your teeth

As a college student at Yeshiva University in Manhattan, I was invited by a close friend to participate in a group devoted to building character. The plan was to visit once a week a Brooklyn rabbi, known for his work in character development, to listen to his words of wisdom. As a rabbinical student, I was intrigued by the opportunity to be part of this select group of young men, who would journey to the far-off borough of Brooklyn, to hear a twenty minute talk on how to refine one's character.

Our first trip, which took about 45 minutes travel time each way, was strange. We were escorted into the rabbi's living room and waited a few minutes for him to appear. When he did, he did not give us a straightforward lecture on how to be a better Jew. Instead, he told us how important it was for us to smile whenever we met someone. He quoted a verse from Psalms, "Happy are those who dwell in Your (the Lord's) house (Psalms 84:5)," indicating that happiness is the normative state of the religious Jew. The Jew is happy because he is thankful for the everyday miracles that God bestows upon him. He can breathe, he can move his limbs, he can eat, and he can think about life.

He then gave us an assignment. We had to smile at everyone we met during the course of the following week, and then at our next meeting report to him the consequences of

our experiment. The smile, he said, had to be big, almost unnatural, and we had to show our teeth. He acknowledged that some people might look askance at us, but that is what we had to do, nonetheless.

During the ensuing week we completed our mission, often laughing to one another when we met in the school hallways. But we quickly saw the results the rabbi intended us to experience. Everyone whom we met smiled at us; and in subsequent encounters, they even smiled before we did. Smiling became contagious, and the expectation of those who met us was that our encounter with them would be a pleasant one.

Making the world a better place is a tall order for anyone. It is wise for parents to let children know that they can improve the world each and every day by smiling at those whom they meet. The Talmud sums it up best: “One who shows his white teeth to his friend is better than one who gives him milk to drink (Ketubot 111b).”

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Prayer: One Letter at a Time

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev delayed the start of services on Rosh Hashannah and explained to the worshippers:

There is a young shepherd who was orphaned as a child, and did not have the opportunity of a cheder education, never learning to read Hebrew. He somehow came to know the letters of the Aleph-Beis. This morning, when he saw people streaming to shul, he felt bad because he did not know how to pray. He therefore said to God, ‘Dear God, I would like to pray to You, but I don’t know how. All I know is the letters of the Aleph-Beis. I will recite these to You, and You put them together to make the proper words.’

“That is why we must wait now,” Rabbi Levi Yitzchak said, “because God is presently occupied arranging the letters recited by the shepherd.”

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REDEFINING ROSH HASHANA RITUALS

Sharon Weinstein – Judaic Faculty, Yavneh Academy

Rosh haShana is a day filled with traditions. While many of us look forward to the tasty apple in honey and the customary shofar blasts, the challenge we must face is to infuse these time-honored rituals with new meaning relevant to us now at the end of this particular Jewish year. The challenge of maintaining the standards and practices from ancient times and yet still trying to make them meaningful is one we face often. Mistakenly, some assume that by repeating certain traditions annually or even daily, it becomes impossible to make those traditions unique for each person.

A few years ago I gave a model lesson in a pluralistic high school, which tried its best to have teachers from all denominations of Judaism and accommodate each student with regard to their view of Judaism. At my interview, the Judaic administration explained to me that there were different prayer options for the students to choose from, such as the Musical Minyan, which used musical instruments to connect with God, or the Movie Minyan, which watched short films in order to trigger a philosophical conversation about God. They asked me if I could monitor the Keva Minyan, the Orthodox service where the students prayed from the traditional siddur each day. I asked them how many students attended this *minyan*, and they responded that it was actually quite popular. Unfortunately the reason was because, as they named it, it was a *minyan* of pure “keva”, routine, where no one had to think or actively try to connect with God, because they just read the same set prayers every day.

This challenge applies to all of us, but especially on a day like Rosh haShana when we spend much of the day praying from our set prayers. Even the sound of the shofar can become “keva” if one has heard it blown many times before. I think that the order of the *mishnayot* in the third chapter of Tractate Rosh haShana can give us a hint as to how to tackle this challenge. This chapter of *mishna* discusses details of the laws about blowing the shofar such as what type of shofar must be used and who can blow the shofar. Towards the end of this chapter a seemingly unconnected *mishna* appears.

*“Whenever Moshe held up his hand, Israel prevailed [against Amalek]...” (Shemot 17).
Do Moshe's hands make or break the battle? Rather, this teaches you that so long as*

Israel were looking upwards and subjugating their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were victorious; if not, they would fall.”

What is the connection of this *mishna* to the detailed laws of the *shofar*? In Rambam’s (Maimonides’) commentary of the *mishna* he explains, “All this is clear in light of what requires mention in our context, and in accordance with the book’s purpose.” What is Rambam trying to tell us? How is the intention of the Israelites during their war with Amalek contextually connected to the laws about Rosh haShana? Perhaps the *mishna* is trying to remind us not to fall into the trap of feeling content by just hearing the *shofar* being blown or by a simple performance of any of the holiday rituals. While the set rituals and prayer texts have immense significance, the secret and power behind it all is our own personal thoughts and intentions which these rituals are meant to stimulate. Externally it might seem that we are all just passive participants in the service, but in order for it to have true meaning, we must remind ourselves of what God really wants to hear, which is our own thoughts about ourselves as people and our connection to God. Externally we pray together as a unified community and nation but internally we must also pray in a way which reflects our own individual thoughts. Let us rise to the challenge and fulfill the *mishna* in Berachot (28b) which tells us not make our prayers a routine task, “*keva*,” but rather turn them into genuine supplication.

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In each of the following sets of Rosh haShana words, which one is the odd one out? Do you know why? Answers can be found on page 26.

1. Shevarim, terua, shofar, tekia
2. Shacharit, Maariv, Mussaph, Neila
3. Fish, apple, pomegranate, cauliflower
4. Day of Atonement, Day of Judgment, Day of Remembrance, Day of the Sounding of the Shofar

GPS FOR THE SOUL

Rabbi Maury Grebenau – Judaic Faculty, Yavneh Academy

A cake with candles lit and children sitting around the table ready to burst into song. Balloons, presents and decorations are strewn around the room. The scene is familiar enough; a birthday party. But what if instead of a smiling 6 year old at the head of the table, we picture...the universe? Not the normal picture of a birthday, certainly. But it seems that we are doing just that on Rosh haShana. Immediately after we blow the shofar, arguably the centerpiece in our liturgy, we recite the phrase, “*hayom harat olam*” – “Today the world was created.” It seems odd for this statement to take such a central role in the Rosh haShana davening. It may be noteworthy that this was the day that the world was created, but what relevance does this have to the overall themes of the day?

The Sefer haChinuch (mitzva 311), an enlightening medieval list of the mitzvot (commandments) which elucidates aspects of the reasons behind them, says that the impetus behind Rosh haShana is Hashem’s tremendous capacity for compassion. Hashem wanted to give us a day once a year where we can wipe the slate clean so that the amount of sins we each bear would never become too overwhelming. He writes that if we would let the sins continue to pile up and then finally be judged when we leave this world it would result in our complete destruction. It is because of Hashem’s infinite kindness that we have the holiday known as Rosh haShana.

With this idea we can suggest a new spin on the idea of “*hayom harat olam*.” Rosh haShana is the once a year cleaning that keeps the world going. The world is recreated on Rosh haShana each year since that is our yearly cleaning! It is the yearly maintenance of the world that sustains us and essentially recreates the world each year. But perhaps the idea in the Sefer haChinuch is even deeper.

There is an inherent tension in the day of Rosh haShana. On one hand it is a festive day in which we enjoy family meals and the festivities normally associated with a holiday. On the other hand there is an overtone which is quite serious. We are being judged and that puts a very somber mood on the day. This is the reason that we don’t say Hallel on Rosh haShana (Talmud Bavli Rosh haShana 32b). Considering the theme of the day we can easily understand the somber tones. What is more difficult to understand is the root of our celebration.

We can suggest that we celebrate the lives we live as Jews who have a day, and even a full season, where the theme is introspection. Hashem in His kindness has given us a day where we take stock of our past year and where it has left us. We ruminate over where we currently are and what our goals for the coming year should include. This is truly a gift to be celebrated. This is the gift of an examined life. And as Socrates said, “an unexamined life is not worth living.”

Too many people wake up one day, late in life, and have a mid-life crisis with the realization that they have ‘wasted’ many years of their lives. They don’t like their position in life, and wish they could turn back the clock. This is truly an unfortunate situation and a mechanism to avoid such a pitfall should be celebrated. Hashem has given us a day of introspection where we take stock on a yearly basis so we never can get too far afield. Rosh haShana is very much a day of judgment, but much of that judgment must be our own self evaluation! Let us use this Rosh haShana to focus ourselves on our spiritual journey and how we can best use the coming year to further our goals. May we all take full advantage of this opportunity to really consider where we are and may we truly have a year which brings us many steps farther on our spiritual journey through life.

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Who benefits from tzedaka?

Tzedakkah is generally translated as “charity.” It is clear, however, that the Torah concept of *tzedakkah* is quite different than that of charity, which signifies a favor from the donor to the recipient. The word *tzedakkah* is derived from the word *tzedek* which means “justice,” connoting that it is only just and fair that the “haves” share their assets with the “have-nots.” the Talmud says that in the transaction of *tzedakkah* the recipient benefits the donor more than the donor does the recipient (Vayikra Rabbah 34:10). The value and reward of the mitzvah which the donor accrues far exceeds the value of the gift of the recipient.

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Two Attitudes to Teshuva

Two attitudes should dominate the concept of *teshuvah*. One is that out of devotion to and love for God, a person should not do anything that displeases Him, and the second is that by disobeying the Divine will, we are actually harming ourselves, which is simply a foolish thing to do.

A chassid of Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitz, whose business was dealing in lumber, once complained to the rebbe that he had bought a huge forest for lumbering and the price of wood had dropped, causing him a significant loss. Rabbi Mordechai said, "The Talmud says that when a person is in distress, this causes the Shechinah (the Divine presence) to also be in distress. If you are in pain because of your financial loss, this causes God to suffer along with you. Now tell me, is it worthwhile to cause God to suffer because of a few pieces of wood?"

A young man who was in recovery from drug addiction decided to become a drug counselor, and in his training he worked with adolescents and their parents. One day he said, "I never realized before how much suffering I caused my parents, and their greatest pain was for the harm that I was doing to myself." I am sure he will be an excellent counselor, because he will be better able to convey to young addicts that their behavior is causing their parents much distress, and that this distress is primarily due to their parents' love for them, and this is why their parents are trying to prevent them from harming themselves. The Baal Shem Tov was equally displeased with itinerant preachers who used to harshly reprimand people with their sermons. Instead, he wished to convey to people how much God loves them and that the Divine commandments are for their own welfare. When one deviates from the Divine rule, one not only causes distress to God, but also injures oneself. It is the understanding of these concepts that comprises the essence of *teshuvah*.

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ROSH HASHANA: CAN WE REALLY BE HAPPY?

Rabbi Jay Weinstein – Young Adults Coordinator

Rosh haShana is tricky day! On the one hand, it's a "holiday" (in fact, a high holiday) which requires us to celebrate. We dress in fancy clothes and enjoy a festive meal. On the other hand, it's a terrifying day on which we are being judged. In the famous prayer of *unetaneh tokef*, we allude to the seriousness of the moment. We recall that on this day God decrees how many people will live and die this year. Who will die by sword? Who in a fire? In contrast to the other festivals, we don't refer to Rosh haShana in our prayers as one of the *moadim l'simcha* (festive holidays). Further, we don't say Hallel (a prayer of unique praise to God) on Rosh haShana like we are accustomed to on the other holidays.

How can God expect us to do both? How can we be happy when we know God is judging us on this day? Shouldn't we be scared for our lives? Can you imagine being on trial for a capital crime, potentially facing the death penalty, and that night going out to a fancy restaurant?

The Hafetz Hayim in his work, *Mishna Berura*, suggests that in our own hearts we are nervous and fear the day. However, on a collective plain, as the nation of God, since we have the merits of our entire nation and our ancestors, we can celebrate because we know the outcome will be positive.

Perhaps a second answer is that we are happy to be judged. To be a judge over someone is no simple task. Not only does it require God to have an involvement and understanding of our lives but even more importantly, it means that God really cares! God takes an active role in our life. God's connection to us hasn't been sidetracked or suspended, but rather God follows, play by play, detail by detail, everything that is occurring in our life.

This is why we are happy on Rosh haShana. We celebrate God's continued concern for us and connection to us. We should all take the *simcha* we experience, the happiness we feel of God's close presence to us, and carry it over into the rest of the year. The closeness we feel today should empower us to realize that God is always close to us and is always accessible.

Shana Tova!

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SOMETHING'S FISHY

Rav Benjy Myers - Programming & Publications

I don't like fish. At a *kiddush* when herring is served, I do not eat it. I do not partake, when available, of bagel and lox. The High Holidays are therefore difficult days for me, for we seem to be surrounded by fish, in food, action and thought. What is it about fish that they become a such focal point during this time?

1. Symbols – סימנא מילתא

Fish in food. Some have the custom to eat the head of a fish or to place it on the table during the festive meal of Rosh haShana. A number of different reasons are given for this custom. One is based on the verse in Devarim 28:13 “*And the Lord shall make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath; if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, to observe and to do them.*” The second part of the phrase seems to be superfluous. Surely if you are the head, you cannot be the tail? Why does the Torah make a point of stressing this? Ramban (Nachmanides, b. Spain, 1194 – d. Israel, 1270) points out that it is indeed possible to be the head of one thing, and yet still be the tail, still be subservient to something else. On Rosh haShana we pray that our subjugation be only to the King of the Universe, and not to any one of the many nations who in the course of our history have tried to trample us underfoot.

A further reason is that fish a fertile species. In the awe-inspiring prayer of *unetaneh tokef* we recall that Rosh haShana is the day on which God decides who will live and who will die. How many babies will come into this world this year? The fish on our table symbolizes our fervent hope and prayer on the anniversary of the creation of the world, that we continue to be partners with Him in its ongoing creation.

2. Tashlich – תשלײך

Fish in action. On the first afternoon of Rosh haShana, or the second if the first day is on Shabbat, there is a custom to go to a body of water and partake in *tashlich*, where, symbolically, we throw away our

sins into the deepest depths.

Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1802-1884, Hungary) in his work *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* 129:21 writes:

The river, preferably, should be outside the city and contain fish to remind us, that just as like these live fish can be caught in traps, so are we caught in the trap of (the threat of) death and judgment. As we think of this, we should be more awakened to repentance...Some say that the reason is that fish do not have eye-lashes and their eyes are always open, and so one's eyes should be awakened to watchfulness.

Furthermore, the fish never close their eyes, and so too we pray that God should always keep an eye on us and save us from any harm.

3. **Jonah – יונה**

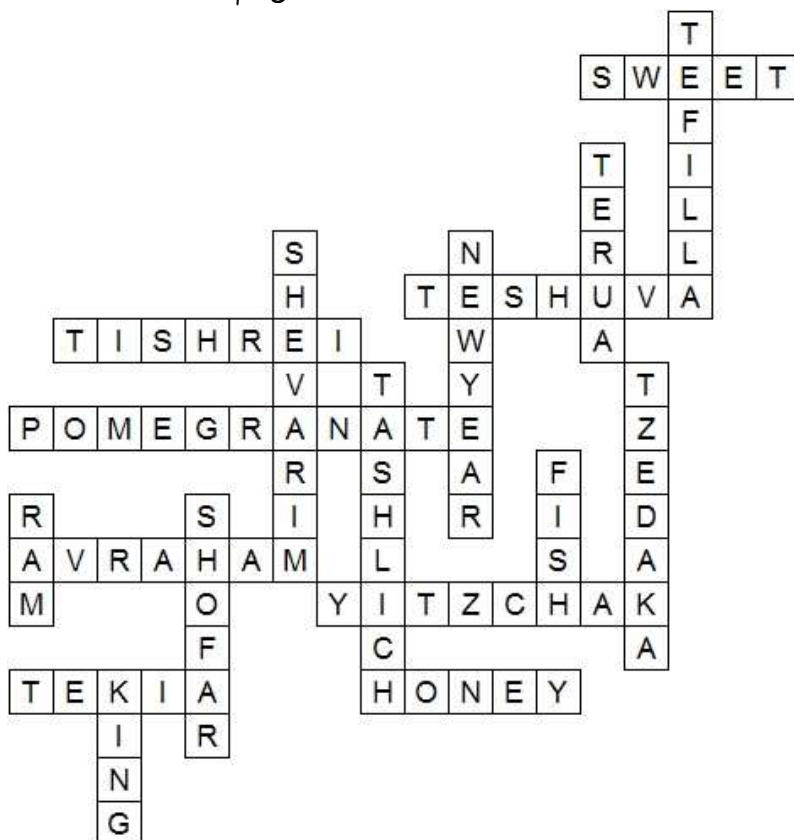
Fish in prayer. As part of the Mincha service on Yom Kippur, we read the book of Jonah. The main character of the story is undoubtedly the prophet who did not want to fulfill his mission from God. However, it is only after reaching the depths of despair that Jonah acquiesces to God's directive to warn Nineveh of their impending doom. The fish is an integral part of the story. The fish is at one and the same time a savior and a jailer. It saved Jonah from certain death and protected him from drowning, and at the same time it forced Jonah to enter a period of introspection, where he had nothing to do but think about his actions, consider his place in God's world, and pray to the Almighty.

The fish, it would seem, has a multitude of lessons to teach us during these Days of Awe. We learn to be partners with God in the creation and sustaining of the world. We learn to always open our eyes to possible dangers, physical and spiritual, and pray that God keeps an eye on His people. We learn that a fish can be a servant of God and it can be a tool to return others to the straight and narrow, and if a fish can do it, so surely, can we. It seems that even those of us who, on a regular basis, are not fond of fish, come the High Holidays should try and put their prejudices to one side, and see the good that is in everything and everyone. May we all have a happy, sweet (and fishy) New Year.

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Answers to the crossword on page 15



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Answers to page 19

1. **Shofar** - this is the instrument we sound on Rosh haShana. The other three words are the names of the sounds made with the shofar.
2. **Neila** - This is the name of the final prayer that is only said on Yom Kippur. The others are prayers that are said also on Rosh haShana.
3. **Cauliflower** - Is not one of the special foods that we eat on Rosh haShana.
4. **Day of Atonement** - This is one of the names of Yom Kippur. All the others are names of Rosh haShana.

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