

Notes

יום תְּרוּעָה *Yom T'ruah/Rosh HaShanah (Festival of Trumpets, New Year) Lev. 23:32*

The Torah refers to Rosh HaShanah as Yom Teruah (יום תְּרוּעָה), “Day of blowing [the Shofar]” or Yom haZikkaron (יום הַזִּכְרוֹן) “Day of Remembering.” It was not called Rosh HaShanah until the Talmudic times, a name taken from Ezekiel 40:1.

There are four New Years in the Jewish calendar:

1. Nisan 1 - Beginning of the Festival cycle; first month in the religious calendar
2. Elul 1 - New year for tithing animals
3. Tishri 1 - Counting years; Sabbatical years (שְׁמִיטָה), *sh'mitah*; counting Jubilee (יּוֹבֵל), *yovel*
4. Shevat 15 - (ט"ו בְּשֵׁבַעַת, *Tu Bishvat*), *Tu Bishvat* for tithing fruit trees

Rosh HaShanah marks the beginning of what many term the “high holy days,” the days of repentance and seeking to have one’s life right before God and man. The month preceding Rosh HaShanah, Elul, is marked by blowing the shofar (ram’s horn) every morning at the morning service. The last week of Elul is marked by *selichot* (סְלִיחוֹת), or penitential prayers. In modern times, these prayers are traditionally begun the Saturday night before Rosh HaShanah.

The common greeting for Rosh HaShanah (begun during Elul, the month preceding) is: *Leshanah tovah* (לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה) “for a good year” or *leshanah tovah tikatevu* (לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּכְתְּיבוּ) “may you be inscribed for a good year.” The Rabbis taught that on Rosh HaShanah God inscribes the names of all the righteous in His book of life for the coming year, thus the greeting. For this reason, the greeting is not used after Rosh HaShanah, since it would be indelicate to suggest that the person you are greeting is not inscribed. The Rabbis further taught that those whose righteous and unrighteous deeds are equal, hang in the balance and their inscription in the book of life is put off until Yom Kippur.

Obviously, such a perspective is foreign to the Messianic believer. We recognize that having one’s name inscribed in the book of life is not a matter of one’s good deeds, but the benefit of having the blood of Yeshua cover one’s sins. For this reason, we use the traditional *leshanah tovah*, “for a good year” as the traditional greeting.

Specific traditions for Rosh HaShanah are:

1. Blowing the shofar on Rosh HaShanah. The Rabbis taught that the command regarding the blowing of the shofar is fulfilled simply by hearing it blown. For this reason (and some additional ones), it is traditional to blow the shofar at least 100 times on Rosh HaShanah, so that all will have ample opportunity to hear it.

There are three types of blasts on the shofar: *tekiah*, one long blast; *shevarim*, three short blasts; and *teruach*, nine staccato blasts. The Torah does not state explicitly how many shofar blasts are required, but some Rabbis (based on a complicated exegesis of Lev. 25:9 and 23:24, and Num. 29:1) derive the necessity to have three blasts of *teruach* preceded and followed by *tekiah*. Others emphasized the need for the shofar to sound like groaning (*shevarim*). Thus, to accommodate all interpretations, the tradition is to blow the shofar in every possible combination: *tekiah teruach tekiah*, *tekiah shevarim tekiah*, *tekiah shevarim teruach tekiah*.

2. A special liturgy for the synagogue service on Rosh HaShanah. These include (1) the reading of the *Akedah* (Genesis 22, the binding of Isaac; the word *akedah* means “binding.”), (2) three special blessings in the Mussaf service (additional service) which emphasize the acceptance of God as King of the universe (since Rabbinic tradition teaches that Rosh HaShanah celebrates the creation of the earth), the acknowledgment that God intervenes in the world to punish the wicked and reward the good, and the recognition that God revealed Himself and the Torah at Sinai and will fully reveal Himself again to bring about the end of days; (3) additions to the Amidah (Eighteen Benedictions) emphasizing the kingship of God and requesting that He remember us for life and write our names in the Book of Life; (4) even though Rosh HaShanah is a festival, the traditional Hallel Psalms (Psalms 113-118) included on other holidays are not recited. A midrash gives the reason: The heavenly angels ask why Israel is not reciting Hallel. God says, “Is it possible that a king sits on the judgment seat with the books of life and death open before Him and Israel will sing praise?!”; (5) the reading of the story of Sarah giving birth to Isaac in the Mussaf service.

3. It is traditional to eat apples dipped in honey on Rosh HaShanah as an expression of a desire for a sweet year. The phrase, “May it be Your will to renew us for a year that is good and sweet” is recited. Addi-

Notes

tionally, salt is not put on the Challah (though this is usually done on all Sabbaths) so as not to interfere with the sweet taste of the honey. The Challah is usually made in a round loaf (to symbolize a crown) rather than the traditional long loaf, in order to emphasize the kingship of God. It is traditional not to eat nuts, since the Hebrew word for nut, *egoz* (עֵגוֹז) has a numerical value equivalent to the Hebrew word for “sin” (חַטָּא, *chata*’, but this “works” only if the *aleph* of *chata*’ is not counted. *Egoz* = 17, *chata*’ = 18).

4. *Tashlikh* (תְּשַׁלַּח) On Rosh HaShanah afternoon of the first day, it is customary to go to a flowing body of water (a river, or ocean rather than a pond) and symbolically cast our sins away by throwing bread crumbs into the water, or small rocks, or something that cannot be retrieved. This ceremony usually is accompanied by reciting Micah 7:18-20, Psalms 118:5-9, and Psalms 33 and 130. From a Messianic viewpoint, this ceremony is an excellent time to be visibly reminded that Yeshua has taken our sins away from us, and removed them as far as the east is from the west. Often, the symbolic casting of objects into the water is a vivid reminder of how He has made us clean by His sacrifice.

5. Second Day of Rosh HaShanah – most festivals celebrated outside of the Land are carried on for at least two days, because in earlier generations it was not always easy to determine exactly what day the festival should be celebrated. But Rosh HaShanah is celebrated for two days in Israel as well. Why? Since it is also Rosh Chodesh (beginning of a month), it was difficult in antiquity for all people in Jerusalem and its environs to be informed exactly when the new moon appeared (according to Rabbinic judgment). So, two days were celebrated to make sure all could participate. When the calendar was fixed in the Middle Ages, dwellers in Israel celebrated Rosh HaShanah on only one day, but it was later turned back to the former custom, and today even in Israel the holiday lasts two days. The second day is much like the first, with only minor changes in the liturgy.

The ten days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are called the “ten days of repentance.” This is the period, according to the Rabbis, when those who are not certain that their righteous deeds outweigh their sins strive to “tip the balance” on the side of righteousness (see below for more explanation of this). The Sabbath that falls in these days is called *Shabbat Shuvah* (Sabbath of returning) or *Shabbat Teshuvah* (Sabbath of

repentance) and is marked by additions to the liturgy involving a seeking of repentance and making one's life right before God.

Meaning

Rosh HaShanah emphasizes the sovereignty of God in creation and that He cares about the world and remembers all our deeds—that He is not removed from the world that He created. It reminds us of His kingship over us personally, and of our need to affirm Him as our King. And this, through the sounding of the shofar, reminds us of the Torah that He has graciously given to us, and of our need to receive it willingly and to plant it deeply into our hearts and lives. Thus, Rosh HaShanah brings to us the true image of God and reminds us that as creatures created in His image, we are to reflect His likeness to the world. This Yeshua did perfectly and He stands before us as the supreme example of One who fully accepted God's kingship and lived accordingly.

Rosh HaShanah also carries with it an eschatological emphasis, a looking to the future when Yeshua will reign as king upon this earth. When He comes, the shofar will sound (1 Thess. 4:16) announcing His kingship, and He will set up His throne in Jerusalem. As we celebrate Rosh HaShanah, we thus anticipate the coming of our King Messiah, for to Him every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord of all.

The rabbinic emphasis upon “deeds weighed in the balance” cannot stand in light of the truth of the gospel proclaimed throughout the Scriptures. Our standing before the Lord is not a matter of our good deeds, but the result of being brought near through the atoning work of our Savior, Yeshua. Rather than being a day of ultimate trembling, as followers of Yeshua we find in Yom Teruah, or Rosh HaShannah, a day of reflection upon the value of our being written in the book of life, and the debt of love we owe to the One Who has called us to Him. The sound of the Shofar reminds us that He continues to call us back to Him. In those areas of our lives where we have strayed into sin, the call of this Lord is to “return,” to seek repentance and forgiveness. We also reckon with the fact that He is our King, and that we show him our full allegiance and loyalty. Rosh HaShannah is a festival of renewal, and God's appointed time to remind us of who we are in light of what He has done for us. It is therefore very needful, and a strategic appointment in our walk with Him.