

## Introduction

We all know how powerful the Yamim Noraim can be for us. So much is at stake, and there's so much opportunity in the air. When working with beginners to Judaism, the opportunities are ever more pronounced. Many secular Jews will come to High Holiday services even if they would not step foot in a synagogue the rest of the year. As a Jewish educator or communal leader, this is crunch time for sharing the relevance of Judaism with those of limited background.

So, while the Yamim Noraim are an intense time of teshuva, tefillah, and tzedakah for ourselves, when it comes to beginners' services the focus has to be on making them enjoyable, fun, and interesting. We want people to walk out being inspired to return for more. This goal must inform everything that we do on these days.

The service can be described as a traditional minyan with brief explanations about what is happening. It is vital to keep the pace moving. During the minyan, don't do a lot of explanations, nor explain the meanings of every prayer. Give the overall structure of the tefillot (Now it's time for: Pseukei D'zimra, Barchu, Shema, Shemonah Esrei, etc.) and announce page numbers in the machzorim as you go along. Give a short explanation or insight on key prayers, the Torah reading, and of course the Shofar.

You can think of this as a sort of play-by-play: call pages, say what is next, present some short insights. Offer a short, ten-second overview of what's to come. Never tell the participants what to do. Just tell them what's happening, and invite them to join along if they want. For example, say, "We're about to take the Torah out of the Ark, and it's customary to stand."

Encourage as much participation as possible from the participants. That means using familiar tunes, not necessarily the traditional Yamim Noraim tunes (this will need to be prepared by the chazzan before the service). Try to have lots of collective singing rather than the chazzan dominating the service.

No matter what style of service you run, the Abridged Rosh HaShanah Prayer Service Companion will help add insight and inspiration to your services. Machzor commentaries, stories, and discussion ideas follow the order of the Rosh HaShanah services. The Companion references the corresponding pages in the standard English - Hebrew ArtScroll Machzor for each component of the tefillot and is indicated, for example, by AS: p. 118

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### Opening Remarks:

The opening remarks should focus on what is familiar to the participants, but with a twist that will show them that this isn't the same old High Holiday service they're used to.

These remarks may be made during the evening service of the first night or not until the beginning of programming the next morning. The point is to start the services in a way and at that time that will have the greatest impact.

**Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., Twerski on the Machzor, pp. 25-26 – The Jewish New Year is less about partying than it is about introspection and growth.**

How different Rosh HaShanah is from the secular New Year! We assemble in shul, and, in a solemn albeit festive manner, pray to Hashem, our King, for another year of life and good fortune. In contradistinction, on December 31, many people celebrate the end of the year by becoming intoxicated, and at midnight they exclaim, "Happy New Year!"

For many people, one day is like another, and in pursuing their frenetic lifestyle, they rarely pause to reflect on what their lives are all about, and on what are their goals and ultimate purpose. As the new year approaches and the calendar changes, they are aroused to think, What! Another year of my life is irretrievably gone! What do I have to show for it? Am I happier than I was a year ago?...Am I better off financially than I was a year ago?...Do I have reason to expect that in the new year I will be more successful?...These are depressing thoughts. One cannot declare, "Happy New Year!" when one is depressed. Therefore, they drink to intoxication to forget their depression. Only then can they say, "Happy New Year!" On the following morning, they may awaken with a pounding headache, with no recollection of the "glorious happiness" of the previous night.

In contrast, Rosh HaShanah is preceded by the month of Elul, a month of introspection and soul-searching. We recognize the errors we may have made, and we pray for forgiveness. At candle-lighting time or during Kiddush, we thank Hashem for sustaining us throughout the past year.

We then go to *shul* (synagogue) and find that the Rosh HaShanah *tefillah* (prayer) is spiritually uplifting. We look forward to God's blessing for the coming year. In this atmosphere, we turn to each other and say, "*L'Shanah tovah tikateivu* – May God inscribe you for a good year." Having utilized our time in shul wisely, we joyously go home for a festive Yom Tov meal with the family, and the following morning, we return to shul for solemn *tefillah*.

Yes, there is indeed a marked difference between Rosh HaShanah and New Year's Day.

**Aish UK's High Holy Day Q & A – Is the New Year about instant gratification or meaningful eternity?**

Every culture celebrates the New Year differently. For us it's about taking stock of the past, thinking deeply about the present, refocusing for a better, more fulfilling year to come...

And eating. Ideally with family and friends. Eating is an opportunity. We can just fill our stomachs, or we can charge ourselves up with the energy to achieve meaningful things.

When we make time to share ideas about deeper issues in life – like where we're going and who we're trying to become – we upgrade the meal into something memorable.

Rosh HaShanah is about celebrating the creation of the world and the unlimited potential of human endeavor. It's about who we really are. And it's about the Big Picture.

Rosh HaShanah, 'Day of Judgment,' commemorates the day man was created, and transports us back into the Garden of Eden. We become 'new beings' and have the same choice as Adam: instant gratification or meaningful eternity? Where are our priorities?

Adam 'hid' from God, who called out to him: "Where are you?" That question still reverberates within each one of us today. And we have the privilege of answering it again as every New Year begins.

Yes, there is some discomfort involved. But Jewish living challenges us to rise above our comfort zones to face the most important questions of our lives. What do we really value in life? How would we like to see the ideal world? Are we living for it? What are our dreams? Our playing small does not serve the world.

On Rosh HaShanah we dream...of what we really, truly want, and who we can become. It is on that basis that our year ahead is judged. Perhaps it touches our "deepest fears," but it can also be the greatest thrill as we come face-to-face with the self we could really be.

Rosh HaShanah is the opportunity to stop and evaluate, recalibrate and refocus. It's a precious gift to connect to our deepest selves. It is true re-creation – the ability to transform ourselves.

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## Section I. Simanim (AS: pp. 96-99)

From time immemorial, Jews have dipped apples in honey on Rosh HaShanah evening. However, the other simanim have taken the back seat in many Jewish homes. What is the significance of the other symbolic foods eaten on Rosh HaShanah? See Morasha Class Rosh HaShanah III, Section I for insights into the concept of the simanim and the symbolism of apples and honey. Below is a summary of ideas found there:

- The Talmud records the custom of bringing certain symbolic foods to the table on Rosh HaShanah as good omens. Shortly thereafter, in the period of the Geonim, the practice arose to recite specific benedictions over these foods; these short blessings connect the Hebrew name for a particular food with a wish for good tidings, based on an allusion to the blessing in the Hebrew names of the foods.
- These symbolic foods are a way of starting off the year on a positive note, and they serve the purpose of focusing our attention on the meaning of Rosh HaShanah even during the meal.
- The specific custom of eating apples and honey on Rosh HaShanah, besides being a portent for a sweet New Year, also alludes to the receiving of the Torah at Sinai and the blessing Yitzchak gave to Yaakov on Rosh HaShanah.

**Rabbi Menachem Meiri, Chibur HaTeshuvah, pp. 265-266 – Simanim serve to focus us on the meaning of the day even during the meal.**

In order to arouse themselves to focus on God and to place the awe of Him in their consciousness without sinning, they developed the practice of placing gourd, fenugreek, leek, cabbage, and dates on the table. This was done corresponding to that which was cited in Tractate Horiyot and Tractate Kritot: “Now that you have determined that omens are significant, at the beginning of every year every person should ...”

And in order not to mistake this practice for sorcery, God forbid, they would pronounce upon these things words that highlight forgiveness and awaken feelings of repentance. When they said that an omen is significant, they meant that it could affect a person just by him being aware of the omens placed before him, even without explicitly reciting prayers over them. That is why at first they would simply look at them during the meal. However, because the Sages were concerned that people might become preoccupied with satisfying their appetites and become distracted from focusing on the spiritual importance of the day and the awe of judgment, therefore they began to recite special prayers over these foods in order to raise people’s consciousness.

They began to say on the gourd that our merits should be mentioned, on the fenugreek that our merits should increase, on the leek that our enemies should be cut off ... and also on the beet (*silka*) that our sins should be removed (*yistalku*), and

on dates that our sins should be removed. The intent is, as we explained, that since engaging in eating makes one forget the meaning of the day, therefore one should see these foods and gain awareness by virtue of them. In that way the omens would strengthen a person's consciousness and be inspirational.

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## Section II. The Shacharit Service (AS: pp. 135-383)

The Shacharit service for the High Holidays shares some elements of a regular weekday or Shabbat prayer service, while other parts are unique to these days. It may be useful to offer some background about such concepts as the Shema and silent Amidah, even if they are standard to every prayer service. Additionally, changes to the Amidah that highlight the significance of the day should be pointed out. And finally, Avinu Malkeinu, since it may be known to the participants and is a meaningful prayer, is another good juncture to share insights.

### Part A. Shema (AS: pp. 290-293)

One cannot overstate the significance of the Shema in Judaism. In the words of the Shema, we find the most profound and forceful proclamation of belief in God and the Torah. The Shema is so fundamental to our world view that children learn to recite it as soon as they can speak. The following story is a dramatic illustration of this.

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky, Parshat Terumah, from [www.torah.org](http://www.torah.org) – The Shema is a rallying call for Jews.**

During World War II many young Jewish children were harbored by a myriad of monasteries throughout Europe. At the end of the war, the Vaad Hatzalah sent representatives to the monasteries to try and reclaim the orphaned children to their heritage. Many of the children who found refuge did so at a young age, and they had but a few recollections of their birthright.

When Rabbi Eliezer Silver, who was the Rabbi of Cincinnati, Ohio and a very influential member of the Vaad, came to a particular hermitage in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, he was met with hostility. "You can be sure, Rabbi, if we had Jews here we would surely hand them back to you immediately!" exclaimed the monk in charge. "However, unfortunately for you, we have no Jewish children here."

Rabbi Silver was given a list of refugees and was told that they were all Germans. The monk continued, "the Schwartzes are German Schwartzes, the Chandlers are German Chandlers and the Shimmers are German Shimmers."

Rabbi Silver had been told that there were definitely close to ten Jewish children in that hermitage and was not convinced. He asked if he could say a few words to the children as they went to sleep. The monk agreed. Rabbi Silver returned later that evening with two aides, and as the children were lying in their beds about to go to sleep, they entered the large dorm room.

He walked into the room and in the sing-song that is so familiar to hundreds of thousands of Jewish children across the globe he began to sing “Shema Yisrael Ado...” unexpectedly – in mid-sentence – he stopped. Suddenly from six beds in the room the ending to that most powerful verse resounded almost in unison. “Hashem Echad!”

He turned to the priest. “These are our children. We will take them now!” The children were redeemed, placed in Jewish homes, and raised as leaders of our community.

### **Part B. Amidah – Silent Prayer** (AS: pp. 296-305)

In the High Holiday Amidah we express our desire to see the world united in the recognition of the one God.

#### ***Uvchen Tein Pachdecha*** (AS: pp. 334-335)

**Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts on Rosh HaShanah, from [www.yutorah.org](http://www.yutorah.org) – We’re asking for recognition, not revenge.**

We pray to God: “*uvchen tein pachdecha Hashem Elokeinu...*” and so, too Lord, our God, instill Your awe upon all Your works; let all creatures prostrate themselves before You; let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker.” We hope and pray that the entire world comes to recognize God’s rule.

Any judgment God metes out to the enemies of Israel is not revenge for its own sake, rather a means by which “to perfect the universe through the Almighty’s Sovereignty.” The purpose of the judgment is to reveal in a clear manner, that only one Force created this world, runs it, and will bring about its redemption. When every living being arrives at this realization, the world will reach its ultimate state of perfection. *Veyeda kol pa’ul ki ata pe-alto veyavin kol yetzur ki ata yetzarto*: “Let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker, let everything that has been molded understand that You are its Molder.”

We pray not only for the Jews to recognize this, but for Germans, Arabs, and all other enemies of Israel that that they too should accept the Kingship of God. Accepting the Kingship of God does not imply that the evil people will die.

**Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, On Repentance – Why pray for fear? Because the fear of God, rooted in the recognition of His complete control over the world, frees us from all other fears.**

An eminent psychiatrist once told me:

“Had I the authority to do so, I would eliminate the High Holy Day prayer that begins with the words, ‘Place Your fear...’ Fear is the major cause of the various mental illnesses that beset mankind. In order to preserve one’s mental health, one



should be free of fears. There is certainly no reason why anyone should ever pray for fear," he confidently pronounced.

His words actually helped me understand the true nature of this prayer, and this is what I told him:

"Everyone seems to be beset with fears of all kinds. Some are afraid that they will not succeed in their careers; others fear that they will lose their wealth or status, or that they will fail to achieve sufficient status. Many people fear sickness and bodily weakness, as well as a host of other possible problems and difficulties. Man is constantly plagued with all sorts of often insignificant fears. I am not a psychiatrist, but I do know that there is one fear that can eradicate all others – it is the fear of God! That is what we request in this High Holiday prayer: We pray that this most significant 'fear' will free us of from all the others that adversely affect our lives."

### **Part C. Avinu Malkeinu** (AS: pp. 384-389)

Avinu Malkeinu is a widely known prayer, particularly for the last stanza which is sung in a tune familiar to most of those who attend High Holiday services. As such, attendees will be interested in hearing explanation and insight.

The origin of the Avinu Malkeinu prayer is from the following Talmudic story:

**Talmud Bavli, Ta'anit 25b – Rabbi Akiva was the first to use the formulation of "Avinu Malkeinu" as a prayer to God.**

It is related that Rabbi Eliezer once [during a drought] stepped down before the Ark [in synagogue] and recited the twenty-four blessings for fast days, but his prayer was not answered. Rabbi Akiva stepped down after him and exclaimed: "Our Father, our King, we have no King but You; our Father, our King, for Your sake have mercy upon us," and rain fell.

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Koren Rosh HaShanah Machzor, p. 448 – Avinu Malkeinu is a prayer that asks God to regard us with the compassion of a father before the justice of a king.**

It was the genius of Rabbi Akiva to juxtapose two ideas – God is our King and we are His subjects, yet God is also our Father and we are His children – and with utter simplicity pray that God see us with the love of a parent before considering our lives with the detachment of a king.

The Nobel Prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr, who devised complementarity theory in quantum physics, the principle that you cannot chart simultaneously the position and the velocity of a particle, said that the idea came to him when his son confessed to having stolen an item from a local shop. He found that he could think of him with love as a father, and with justice as a judge, but not both at the same time.



Rabbi Akiva's insight is two-fold: (a) God does see us simultaneously as both children and servants, and (b) our prayer is that He relate first and foremost to us as His children. The story of the physicist highlights the first insight because it is impossible for humans to relate to anything in two different ways simultaneously, whether it's a particle or a child (though certainly God has no trouble doing either). Bohr therefore applied the human perspective of parenting to his physics research. Rabbi Akiva teaches us that God is beyond this human limitation and thereby enables us to pray and appeal to God's sense of compassion as a father even at a time of judgment.

### ***Chatanu Lefanecha***

**Moshe Bogomilsky, "Who Sinned?" from [www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org) – We're all in the same boat.**

Our Father our King, we have sinned before You – Rosh HaShanah Confession.

Why does the individual say "we sinned" in plural?

A passenger on a boat once noticed another passenger drilling under his seat. In astonishment, he bellowed, "What are you doing?" The other responded, "Mind your own business. I'm drilling under my seat. I paid my fare, and this is my seat." The man said to him, "Fool, don't you realize that if water comes in under your seat, we are all doomed!"

The Talmud says that all Jews are responsible one for another. The reason for this is that the Jewish people are like one body. Thus, the Jew who transgresses affects the entire Jewish nation. Likewise, when a Jew does a good deed it has a good effect and benefits the entire Jewish people.

### ***Ki Ayn Banu Ma'asim***

**Rabbi Jacob ben Wolf Kranz (Maggid of Dubno), from Aaron Levine's *The New Rosh HaShanah Anthology*, p. 171 – We ask for much, knowing that we have little to offer in return.**

A retail merchant who dealt in fabrics made his way to his wholesale supplier to buy the goods he needed for his business. The wholesaler instructed his workers to wait on the merchant and to bring him all that he ordered. Standing in the middle of the warehouse, the merchant bellowed all sorts of orders and requests.

"I want 1,000 yards of that cloth, 2,000 yards of the blue velvet, 3,000 yards of that white silk," he shouted, and on and on he went, requesting many other items. When it came time to reckon up the price of the goods and to pay the bill, the merchant took the wholesaler to the side and, very embarrassed, whispered in his ear: "Listen, I can't give you any money for this right now. Please allow me credit until I can pay you."

So it is with us, said the Dubno Maggid. We shout out all sorts of requests to God in the Avinu Malkeinu prayer. We want forgiveness, health, a good life, wealth, redemption, and many other things. But when it comes down to the last verse (to

pay the bill, so to speak), we whisper: “Our Father, our King, be gracious to us and answer us, though we have no worthy deeds (with which to pay You for our large order); please grant us charity and kindness, and save us.”

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### Section III. Torah Reading (AS: pp. 402-411)

#### Part A. Day One: The Birth of Yitzchak

The Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashanah is taken from Bereishit (Genesis) 21 describing the event surrounding Sarah’s giving birth of Yitzchak (Isaac). The Haftara presents a similar theme in relaying the events surrounding Hannah’s giving birth of the prophet Shmuel (Samuel). The Talmud tells us that both women were “remembered” on Rosh Hashanah.

**Rabbi Moshe Zauderer, The High Holiday Handbook, Prayer Module 5 – The Torah reading for Rosh HaShanah highlights prayer as an expression of reliance on God.**

*God remembered Sarah as He had said He would . . . Sarah became pregnant, and she gave birth...* (Genesis 21:1-2)

Until the age of ninety, Sarah had been barren. Rebecca (wife of Isaac) and Rachel (wife of Jacob) were similarly barren. Clearly, these were not coincidences. Midrashic literature reveals one facet of God’s decision to delay their childbearing: Why were the Matriarchs barren? God desires to hear the prayers of righteous people. (Midrash to Genesis)

Rabbi Nissim (1290-1375, Spain) explains the intent of this Midrashic statement: By withholding a child from each of the Matriarchs, God brought them close to Him. Through their numerous prayers to God, they bound themselves to the Creator. Prayer is an expression of dependence on God.

Though the Matriarchs understood their total dependence on God, the real feeling of need evoked the tangible expression of this dependence, which would otherwise have remained theoretical. By withholding their needs, God provided a catalyst for greater devotion to Him. Sarah’s exuberant reaction to Isaac’s birth (“*God has made laughter for me...for I have born a son...*” Genesis 21:6-7) expressed her profound reliance on God.

The Rosh HaShanah prayers express our own reliance on God. By appealing to God to judge us favorably, we tangibly acknowledge that God determines the outcome of our endeavors.

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## Part B. Day Two: The Binding of Isaac

The Torah reading for the second day of Rosh Hashanah is about the Akeida, the binding of Isaac. The shofar that we blow on Rosh Hashanah is an allusion to these events.

**Rabbi Moshe Zauderer, The High Holiday Handbook, Prayer Module 6 – A test from God brings potential righteousness into actualization.**

*...God tested Abraham...Take your son, the only one you love – Isaac – and...bring him as an offering on the mountain I will designate to you... (Genesis, Ch. 22)*

Nachmanides (1195-1270, Spain - Israel) provides a fundamental perspective on God's purpose in testing man. The concept of God testing man is based on man's absolute free choice. God tests man in order to create an opportunity for him to actualize his potential to act righteously and thereby earn the greater reward for righteous actions, rather than for righteous thoughts alone. For this reason, Divine

tests are for the benefit of the person being tested, rather than for God, who knows the moral character of the individual being tested.

Divine tests are solely for man's benefit. Through them God creates opportunities for man to exercise his free will and actualize his potential to act righteously. What are the benefits of Divine tests? There is the obvious benefit of earning reward for effort. In general, our most precious possessions are those that we have worked for.

Nachmanides explores another benefit from Divine tests. Thoughts of moral improvement do not make us righteous people. Many people think of themselves as righteous, but until they act on these thoughts, their righteousness is elusive.

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### Section IV. Shofar (AS: pp. 430-439)

Before blowing the Shofar, create the mood by offering some insights that will add a whole new meaning to this familiar section of the Rosh Hashanah service. By explaining the different sounds that will be heard, describing the deeper meaning of the mitzvah, and stirring up the congregants with an inspiring story, the Shofar-blowing will be much more moving than any they have previously experienced.

**Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf, Survival Kit, p. 70 – Each of the three shofar sounds is designed to evoke a particular feeling.**

The blowing of the shofar consists of three sets of three different notes. Thus, the minimum number of shofar blasts one is required to hear is nine; however, the accepted manner of blowing actually results in many more sounds. Each of the

three notes (Tekiah, Teruah, Shevarim) is designed to evoke a particular idea and feeling.

**Tekiah (long note):**

This note calls us from the routines of day-to-day living, from a dissipation of our creative energies, to refocus on who it is we truly want to be. The Tekiah challenges us to feel the power and the potential of our innermost selves – a part of ourselves we may have lost touch with over the year – and then dares us to commit ourselves to the pursuit of our awesome potential.

**Teruah (short note):**

This note is more comforting. It softens us, allowing us to integrate the thoughts and feelings of the day. The Teruah says: before you rush headlong into the new year energized by your rekindled convictions, pause for a moment. Let the sense of inspiration settle in. Let it fill your soul.

**Shevarim (medium note):**

This is an anxious, longing note. Feel the tugging, the yearning to somehow start again, this time accomplishing what we want in life. On the simplest, most basic level the sound of the shofar is the muffled cry of an injured soul. A soul crying for freedom. Free to be its own uninhibited self. The homing signal in every Jewish heart.

**Rabbi Shmuel Hain, “Rosh HaShanah: The Call of the Shofar,” from Rosh HaShanah-to-Go 5770 – The most difficult obstacle to overcome is our own past.**

The shofar serves as the wake-up call to repent: “Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator.” Psychologically, perhaps the most difficult obstacle to overcome when embarking on the path of spiritual growth is one’s own past. During this initial stage, our minds are flooded with memories of past failings and iniquities casting self-doubt on our very capacity to change. Only by overlooking our flaws and previous sins during this precarious stage in the process of repentance can we succeed in improving our ways.

When we fulfill the commandment of shofar on Rosh HaShanah, signaling the start of the period of repentance, we must be excited by the prospects of a new year and not overwhelmed by our past transgressions. Perhaps that explains why the liturgy of Rosh HaShanah is bereft of vidui, selichot, etc. The Machzor discourages the confession and enumeration of sins, as well as the beseeching for forgiveness for those transgressions on Rosh HaShanah, because that would be self-defeating at this critical, initial stage of teshuva. Dwelling on past transgressions at the moment of inspiration to forge a new path can be demoralizing.

**Rabbi Eliezer of Komarno, Nachlei Binah p. 317 #632 Tehillim Ben Beiti, From the Depths of the Heart – Sometimes, a single note can say it all.**

I have heard from my father, the Holy Komarno: One time a Jewish peasant boy came to the big town to celebrate Rosh HaShanah. He didn't know how to pray. He could not even read the letter Alef. He only saw that everyone was traveling to the synagogues to participate in the holy prayers. He thought, "If everybody is going to town, I must go too!"

He arrived at the town synagogue with his father and watched the congregants crying and singing together, swaying to and fro. He turned to his father and asked, "Father, what is this all about?"

His father turned to him and said, "The Holy One blessed be He sits enthroned in the heavens, and we pray all year long to Him. We especially pray during these two days of Rosh HaShanah when the whole world is being judged, and each person is being judged for the rest of the year."

The son responded, "Father, what am I to do since I do not know how to pray?"

His father quickly said to him condescendingly, "All you have to do is be quiet and listen to the other Jews praying. That is enough for you."

"But Father, if I don't know what these people are saying, how is that going to affect God's decision? How is being silent going to help me?"

His father became unnerved and blurted out, "Listen, you should be quiet, so no one will know you're an ignorant peasant!"

The son stood still for a couple of minutes as his father and the rest of the congregation continued praying, and then the young boy stood up and spoke loudly.

"I am going to pray to God in the way I know best. I will whistle to God as I whistle to my flock of sheep."

He began whistling the sweet calling as most shepherds know. His father was enraged. The boy continued whistling with all his might, not caring what other people thought.

Now, it happened to be, that this particular Rosh HaShanah, all the heavenly gates were shut, and suddenly, because of this pure whistling of the heart, all the gates burst open. The prayers of Israel were finally heard.

So too, the shofar – we recognize that we lack the words to express our true heartfelt prayer. Instead, we "whistle" them through the sound of the shofar.

## Section V. The Mussaf Service (AS: pp. 444-593)

There are two sections to focus on in the repetition of the Mussaf service. The first is the powerful prayer of Unetaneh Tokef with its themes of Divine judgment and teshuva, tefillah, and tzedakah. Key phrases should be highlighted for their meaning, such as *kivnei maron* and *mi yichiye*.

The second section of Mussaf is the triple-headed theme of the Mussaf Amidah itself: *Malchiyot* (God's Kingship), *Zichronot* (God's Awareness), and *Shofarot* (the Shofar). This can be explained in general at the start of the Chazzan's repetition as well as expounded upon in more detail at the beginning of each section.

### Part A. Unetaneh Tokef (AS: pp. 480-485)

The story of Unetaneh Tokef's origin is found in many Machzorim. Here we will focus on the content of the prayer.

#### ***Introduction to Unetaneh Tokef***

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Rosh HaShanah Machzor*, pp. 564-567 – The four “movements” of Unetaneh Tokef: the scene, the stakes, the Jewish outburst of faith, and the fragility of life.**

No prayer more powerfully defines the image of the Days of Awe than does *Unetaneh Tokef*. The language is simple, the imagery strong, the rhythms insistent and the drama intense.

It is structured in four movements. The first sets the scene. The heavenly court is assembled. God sits in the seat of judgment. The angels tremble. Before Him is the book of all our deeds. In it our lives are written, bearing our signature, and we await the verdict.

The second defines what is at stake: Who will live, who will die? Who will flourish, who will suffer, who will be at ease, who will be in torment? Between now and Yom Kippur our fate is being decided on high.

Then comes the great outburst of faith that defines Judaism as a religion of hope. No fate is final. Repentance, prayer and charity can avert the evil decree. Life is not a script written by Aeschylus or Sophocles in which tragedy is inexorable. God forgives; God pardons; God exercises clemency – if we truly repent and pray and give to others.

Finally, there is a moving reflection on the fragility of human life and the eternity of God. We are no more than a fragment of pottery, a blade of grass, a flower that fades, a shadow, a cloud, a breath of wind. Dust we are, and to dust we return. But God is life forever. By attaching ourselves to Him we may [attach ourselves to Infinity].



## Part B. Teshuvah, Tefillah, Tzedakah (AS: pp. 482-483)

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “God’s Alarm Clock,” from aish.com – Relating to ourselves, others, and God.**

Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are when we number our days. Asking to be written in the book of life, we think about life and how we use it. In this context the three key words of the “*Unetaneh Tokef*” prayer are fundamental: *teshuvah* (repentance), *tefillah* (prayer) and *tzedakah* (charity). *Teshuvah* is (primarily) about our relationship with our self. *Tefillah* is about our relationship with God. *Tzedakah* is about our relationship with other people.

*Teshuvah* means not only “repentance” but also “returning” – to our roots, our faith, our people’s history and our vocation as heirs to those who stood at Sinai more than 3,000 years ago. *Teshuvah* asks us: Did we grow in the past year or did we stand still? Did we study the texts of our heritage? Did we keep one more mitzvah? Did we live fully and confidently as Jews? *Teshuvah* is our satellite navigation system giving us a direction in life.

*Tefillah* means prayer. It is our conversation with God. We speak, but if we are wise we also listen, to the voice of God as refracted through the prayers of a hundred generations of our ancestors. *Tefillah* is less about asking God for what we want, more about asking God to teach us what to want. A new car? A better job? An exotic holiday? Our prayers do not speak about these things because life is about more than these things. It is less about what we own than about what we do and who we aspire to be. We speak about forgiveness and about God’s presence in our lives. We remind ourselves that, short though our time on earth is, by connecting with God we touch eternity. *Tefillah* is our “mobile phone to heaven.”

*Tzedakah* is about the good we do for others. Sir Moses Montefiore was one of the great figures of Victorian Jewry. He was a wealthy man and devoted much of his long life to serving the Jewish people in Britain and worldwide (he built the windmill in Jerusalem, and the area of which it is a part – Yemin Moshe – is named after him). Someone once asked him how much he was worth, and he gave him a figure. “But,” said the questioner, “I know you own more than that.” “You didn’t ask me what I own but what I am worth. The figure I gave you was how much money I have given this year to charity, because we are worth what we are willing to share with others.” That is *tzedakah*.

## Part C. Malchiyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot (AS: pp. 500-521)

The Mussaf service is divided into three sections, Malchiyot (God’s Kingship), Zichronot (God’s Awareness), and Shofarot (the Shofar). Each of these sections contains an introduction followed by verses from Tanach and then a blessing in the form of a request.

**Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, The Book of Our Heritage, Vol. I, pp. 32-33 – How the sections of Mussaf are structured with their berachot and verses.**

In the *Mussaf* service recited year-round, the Men of the Great Assembly established an order of seven blessings, whereas in the *Mussaf* of Rosh HaShanah, nine blessings were established. The first three and last three follow the same pattern as *Mussaf* of the rest of the year with only minor textual variances...The middle three blessings recited on Rosh HaShanah are called *Malchiyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot*, as a reflection of their contents.

The theme of *Malchiyot* – the first special section inserted into the *Mussaf* – is included in the blessing that refers to the sanctity of the day. Since the sanctity of Rosh HaShanah is intrinsically connected to establishing God's sovereignty over all Creation, it was not deemed necessary to establish a separate blessing. *Zichronot* and *Shofarot*, however, are separate themes and as such, special blessings were added, bringing the total number of blessings in the Rosh HaShanah *Mussaf* service to nine.

These nine blessings correspond to the nine *azkarot* – mentions of God's Name – in the prayer of Chanah (Shmuel I:1-2:10), for the Talmud (Berachot 29a) records that both Sarah and Chanah were granted Divine remembrance on Rosh HaShanah. Thus, corresponding to the nine times that Chanah mentioned God's Name in her prophetic prayer of thanksgiving, we recite nine blessings containing God's Name.

In the section of *Malchiyot*, we acknowledge God's creation of all existence, His sovereignty over the entire world, and our eternal acceptance of His dominion.

In the section of *Zichronot*, we proclaim our faith that He is both Creator and One Who providentially and constantly cares for all that He has made, reviewing all of man's actions and rewarding and punishing man accordingly.

In the section of *Shofarot*, we express our acceptance of the yoke of Torah as if it were once again being given amidst thunder and lightning and mighty shofar blasts. We also express our anticipation of the final salvation that will be marked by the sounding of the shofar of *Mashiach*, praying that our *tekiot* (shofar blasts) should ascend before God and serve as a source of merit before Him.

The sections of *Malchiyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot* share a common form. Each opens with an introductory prayer, followed by ten Scriptural citations that are relevant to the theme, followed by a closing prayer and a blessing. The ten verses cited within each section also share a common form: three verses are cited from the Torah, three from the Prophets, and three from the Writings, concluding with another verse from the Torah.

### i. **Malchiyot** (AS: pp. 500-511)

**Rabbi Nosson Weisz, “Why Judgment?” from aish.com – Rosh HaShanah is our opportunity to tell God that we want the chance to grow spiritually in the coming year.**

Jewish tradition maintains that God informed us about Rosh HaShanah to allow us to have some input into how this new Kingdom is to be fashioned. The purpose of Creation is to allow man to actualize his spiritual potential. As I stand before God on Rosh HaShanah, He is waiting to hear from me about what I plan to do to actualize my spiritual potential in the coming year.

If all that issues from me is my desire to live on in prosperity and good health for another year, I am actually informing God that I do not require the renewal of His Kingdom at all. I am perfectly happy with the world just as it is. But God did not intend this world to be a comfortable place where I merely keep living on and on. He created the World to Come as the place of enjoyment and living the good life. The sole reason for the existence of this world is to provide man with a place in which he can work. If my main interest in being in this world is to live well and enjoy myself, I don't need to be here at all.

On the other hand, if I sincerely resolve to invest my energy [really the Divine Energy that I am asking God to renew, and out of which I am fashioned] in the coming year into developing my spiritual potential, not only do I need this world to be recreated, I also need it to assume the particular shape that will maximize my ability to work efficiently, and develop as much of my potential as possible.

### ii. **Zichronot** (AS: pp. 510-517)

In Zichronot, we impress upon ourselves the seriousness of the day by openly acknowledging God's creation and absolute mastery of the universe. God has complete knowledge of human events, thoughts, and actions. Since He remembers everything anyone has ever done or thought, the basis of His judgment is just. We affirm that God revealed His plan for the world from the earliest times.

It should be noted that Zichronot focuses on the positive aspects of God's memory, because, as the Talmud states, on Rosh HaShanah we are not only especially careful to act properly, we also avoid self-incrimination by not even mentioning anything about sin (Rosh HaShanah 32a). This is the source for the custom not to eat certain nuts on Rosh HaShanah for the numerical value of the word for nut, *egoz*, has the same numerical value as the word for sin, *chet*.

**Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts for Rosh HaShanah, pp. 204-5 – In calling upon God to remember certain events, we are asking Him to activate the merit of those events in His dealings with us.**

When referring to “remembrance” as applied to God, we must realize that we are merely borrowing a term from our own experience to aid our understanding.

Thus, when we mention reminding God of the covenant that He made with our forefathers, we realize that He always “remembers” it. Instead, we are referring to God’s presently activating this idea that is in His constant memory and putting it into action by applying the efforts of our ancestors’ meritorious acts in today’s world...

[In our prayers] we say, “For it is You...Who eternally remembers all forgotten things” and “There is no forgetfulness before Your throne of glory.” From this we understand that God always remembers everything, but we immediately add, “May You mercifully remember today the Akeidah (binding) of Yitzchak (Isaac) for the sake of his offspring.” This means that while God perpetually remembers everything, nevertheless on Rosh HaShanah He decides to act on the basis of this memory so that the Akeidah will be a mitigating factor enabling a favorable judgment for His children.

### iii. Shofarot (AS: pp. 516-521)

**Based on Ritva, Rosh HaShanah 16a – The verses relating to shofar serve the purpose of elevating our prayers.**

When the Talmud states, “With what shall you accomplish this? With the shofar,” it is not referring to the blowing of the shofar, rather to the verses cited in Mussaf. As the Tosefta states, the verses relating to shofar serve the purpose of elevating our prayers. These verses concretize the requests in Malchiyot and Zichronot.

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## VI. Tashlich (AS: pp. 630-645)

See Morasha Class Rosh HaShanah III, Section I for insights into the custom of Tashlich. Below is a summary of insights found there:

- The Tashlich prayer service performed next to a body of water is a symbolic act of casting our sins away. As such, it is also a statement to God that we are essentially good, that our sins are merely external trappings.
- Tashlich is yet another Rosh HaShanah custom that focuses us on the Akeidah.
- The preference to have fish in the water expresses our hopes for a blessed year and can serve to inspire us to do teshuvah.

**Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, The Book of Our Heritage, Vol. I, pp. 40-41 – Tashlich symbolizes the heart’s intention to cast away sin and also serves to recall the merit of the Patriarchs.**

After *Minchah*, the *Tashlich* prayer is recited [the “casting away” of sin]. It is customary to do this near a source of water - by the banks of a river or at the seashore. If there is no such source of water, Tashlich can be recited near a spring,

cistern, or reservoir that contains rainwater. The following verse (Michah/Micah 7:18) is recited: *Who is a God like You, Who bears iniquity and ignores transgression for the remnant of His chosen people! He does not retain His anger forever for He desires to be benevolent. He will again show compassion and will subdue our sins and cast all of their transgressions into the depths of the sea!*

This is followed by additional verses of compassion from Scripture. Some communities add a special prayer composed by R. Chaim David Azulai [the Chida]. It is then customary to shake out one's pockets and the folds in one's clothing three times so that they are emptied, symbolizing the heart's intention to cast away sin and to be totally cleansed of transgression. A Scriptural allusion for this practice can be drawn from the verse (Nehemiah 5:13) that states: *I too have shaken out my cloak, saying, Thus shall God shake out all those who shall fail to abide by this promise.*

Tashlich also serves to recall the merit of the Patriarchs; the Midrash teaches us that when Avraham took Yitzchak to be sacrificed [on the day of Rosh HaShanah], Satan appeared to them in the form of a wide river. Avraham and Yitzchak entered the water until it reached their necks, whereupon Avraham said: "Master of the world! The waters threaten to destroy us. If either I or Yitzchak dies, through whom will Your Name be unified?" God immediately scolded the river and they were saved (Yalkut Shimoni, Parashat Vayera). It is therefore customary to recite Tashlich near a source of water, to recount our forefathers' merit in having offered their lives to fulfill God's commandments.

If the first day of Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbat, in Ashkenazic communities, Tashlich is said after Minchah on the second day; among Sephardic communities, Tashlich is always recited on the first day.

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## Epilogue. You Don't Have to Wait for Rosh Hashanah

**Rabbi Moshe Bamberger, Great Jewish Speeches, *HaMelech: Rabbi Aharon Perlow of Karlin*, ArtScroll, pp. 195-196 – Approaching God in teshuvah can be done at any time.**

Rabbi Aharon Perlow (1802-1872), the Chassidic leader of Karlin, was named after his grandfather, Reb Aharon "the Great" (1736-1772), the founder of the Karliner dynasty. The second R' Aharon of Karlin was a master of prayer. As was the customary practice of the Karliner Rebbes, he prayed in a loud, thunderous voice and swayed back and forth.

R' Aharon would lead the prayers on Rosh Hashanah morning. One year, as he was about to shout the opening word, "HaMelech," the King, he fainted! He was revived by the Chassidim and continued the prayers. Following the service, his Chassidim asked him why he fainted. R' Aharon offered the following explanation for his behavior.



The Gemara in Gittin (56a) describes an incident that took place at the end of the Second Temple era. Jerusalem was under siege by the Romans, and the living conditions in the city were becoming increasingly intolerable. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, the most prominent sage in Jerusalem at the time, attempted to meet with the Roman general, Vespasian, and entreat him to spare the lives of the Jews. In order to get past the Roman guards, he arranged to have himself transported out of the city in a casket. When Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai saw Vespasian, he greeted him, "Peace upon you, king, peace upon you." Upon hearing this greeting, Vespasian responded angrily, "I should kill you for two reasons: First, because you addressed me as a king, which I am not; secondly, if you truly believe that I am the king, why have you not come until now to plead before me?"

[The Rebbe continued:] As I was about to recite "HaMelech," proclaiming God as the King of the Universe, I was reminded of this Gemara. I recalled the words of Vespasian, who, upon being called 'king,' expressed his wonder that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai did not visit him sooner. It occurred to me that God must wonder the same thing when we address Him as "HaMelech," the King, on Rosh Hashanah. If we are sincere, and really consider Him as our King, why have we waited so long to come before Him? Why have we not repented until today? When this question entered my mind, I was so frightened at the thought of not having a proper response, that I fainted!