

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah (Hebrew: **רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה**), literally meaning "head [of] the year", is the Jewish New Year. The biblical name for this holiday is **Yom Teruah** (**יוֹם תְּרוּעָה**), literally "day of shouting or blasting". It is the first of the Jewish High Holy Days (**יָמֵי נוֹרָאִים** *Yamim Nora'im*. "Days of Awe") specified by Leviticus 23:23–32 that occur in the early autumn of the Northern Hemisphere.

Rosh Hashanah is a two-day celebration that begins on the first day of Tishrei, which is the seventh month of the ecclesiastical year. In contrast to the ecclesiastical year, where the first month Nisan, the Passover month, marks Israel's exodus from Egypt, Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the civil year, according to the teachings of Judaism, and is the traditional anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, the first man and woman according to the Hebrew Bible, and the inauguration of humanity's role in God's world.

Rosh Hashanah customs include sounding the shofar (a cleaned-out ram's horn), as prescribed in the Torah, following the prescription of the Hebrew Bible to "raise a noise" on *Yom Teruah*. Its rabbinical customs include attending synagogue services and reciting special liturgy about teshuva, as well as enjoying festive meals. Eating symbolic foods is now a tradition, such as apples dipped in honey, hoping to evoke a sweet new year.

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Rosh Hashanah



A shofar, symbol of the Rosh Hashanah holiday

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| Official name | רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה |
| Also called | Jewish New Year |
| Observed by | <u>Jews</u> |
| Type | Jewish |
| Observances | Praying in synagogue, personal reflection, and hearing the <i>shofar</i> . |
| Begins | Start of first day of <u>Tishrei</u> |
| Ends | End of second day of <u>Tishrei</u> |
| Date | 1 Tishrei, 2 Tishrei |
| 2019 date | Sunset, 29 September – nightfall, 1 October ^[1] |
| 2020 date | Sunset, 18 September – nightfall, 20 September ^[1] |
| 2021 date | Sunset, 6 September – nightfall, 8 September ^[1] |
| 2022 date | Sunset, 25 September – |

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Etymology

"Rosh" is the Hebrew word for "head", "ha" is the definite article ("the"), and "shanah" means year. Thus "Rosh HaShanah" means 'head [of] the year', referring to the Jewish day of new year.^{[2][3]}

The term "Rosh Hashanah" in its current meaning does not appear in the Torah. Leviticus 23:24 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0323.htm#24>) refers to the festival of the first day of the seventh month as *zikhron teru'ah* ("a memorial of blowing [of horns]"); it is also referred to in the same part of Leviticus as 'שַׁבַּת שְׁבֻתוֹן' (*shabbat shabbaton*) or ultimate Sabbath or meditative rest day, and a "holy day to God". These same words are commonly used in the Psalms to refer to the anointed days. Numbers 29:1 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0429.htm#1>) calls the festival *yom teru'ah* ("day of blowing [the horn]"). The term *rosh hashanah* appears once in the Bible (Ezekiel 40:1 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt1240.htm#1>)), where it has a different meaning: either generally the time of the "beginning of the year", or possibly a reference to Yom Kippur,^[4] or to the month of Nisan.^{[5][6]}

In the Jewish prayer-books (i.e., the Siddur and Machzor), Rosh Hashanah is also called *Yom Hazikaron* (the day of remembrance),^[3] not to be confused with the modern Israeli remembrance day of the same name.

Rosh Hashanah marks the start of a new year in the Hebrew calendar (one of four "new year" observances that define various legal "years" for different purposes as explained in the Mishnah and Talmud).^[3] It is the new year for people, animals, and legal contracts. The Mishnah also sets this day aside as the new year for calculating calendar years, shmita and yovel years. Rosh Hashanah commemorates the creation of Man.^[7]

Origin

The origin of the Hebrew New Year is connected to the beginning of the economic year in the agricultural societies of the ancient Near East.^[8] The New Year was the beginning of the cycle of sowing, growth, and harvest; the harvest was marked by its own set of major agricultural festivals.^[8] The Semites generally set the beginning of the new year in autumn, while other ancient civilizations chose spring for that purpose, such as the Persians or Greeks; the primary reason was agricultural in both cases, the time of sowing the seed and bringing in the harvest.^[8]

In Jewish law, four major New Years are observed, each one marking a beginning of sorts. The lunar month Nisan (usually corresponding to the months March–April in the Gregorian calendar) is when a new year is added to the reign of Jewish kings, and it marks the start of the year for the three Jewish pilgrimages.^[9] Its injunction is expressly stated in the Hebrew Bible: "This month shall be unto you *the beginning* of months" (Exo. 12:2). However, ordinary years, Sabbatical years, Jubilees, and dates inscribed on legal deeds and contracts are reckoned differently; such years begin on the first day of the lunar month Tishri (usually corresponding to the months September–October in the Gregorian calendar). Their injunction is expressly

stated in the Hebrew Bible: "Three times in the year you shall keep a feast unto me... the feast of unleavened bread (Passover)... the feast of harvest (Shavuot)... and the feast of ingathering (Sukkot) which is *at the departing of the year*" (Exo. 23:14–16). "At the departing of the year" implies that the new year begins here.^[10]

The reckoning of Tishri as the beginning of the Jewish year began with the early Egyptians and was preserved by the Hebrew nation,^[11] being also alluded to in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 7:11) when describing the Great Deluge at the time of Noah. This began during the "second month" (Marheshvan) counting from Tishri, a view that has largely been accepted by the Sages of Israel.^[12]

Religious significance

The Mishnah contains the second known reference to Rosh Hashanah as the "day of judgment" (*Yom haDin*).^[13] In the Talmud tractate on Rosh Hashanah, it states that three books of account are opened on Rosh Hashanah, wherein the fate of the wicked, the righteous, and those of the intermediate class are recorded. The names of the righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life and they are sealed "to live". The intermediate class is allowed a respite of ten days, until Yom Kippur, to reflect, repent and become righteous;^[14] the wicked are "blotted out of the book of the living forever".^[15]

Some midrashic descriptions depict God as sitting upon a throne, while books containing the deeds of all humanity are opened for review, and each person passes in front of Him for evaluation of his or her deeds.^[16]

"The Holy One said, 'on Rosh Hashanah recite before Me [verses of] Sovereignty, Remembrance, and Shofar blasts (*malchiyot, zichronot, shofrot*): Sovereignty so that you should make Me your King; Remembrance so that your remembrance should rise up before Me. And through what? Through the Shofar.' (Rosh Hashanah 16a, 34b)"^[17]

This is reflected in the prayers composed by classical rabbinic sages for Rosh Hashanah found in traditional Ashkenazi machzorim where the theme of the prayers is the "coronation" of God as King of the universe, in preparation for the acceptance of judgments that will follow on that day.

Shofar blowing

The best-known ritual of Rosh Hashanah is the blowing of the shofar, a musical instrument made from an animal horn. The shofar is blown at various instances during the Rosh Hashanah prayers, with a total of 100 blasts over the day.^[18]

While the blowing of the shofar is a Biblical statute, it is also a symbolic "wake-up call," stirring Jews to mend their ways and repent. The shofar blasts call out: "Sleepers, wake up from your slumber! Examine your ways and repent and remember your Creator."^[19]



Yemenite-style shofar



Shofar blowing for Rosh Hashana, Ashkenaz version

Prayer service

On Rosh Hashanah day, religious poems, called *piyyutim*, are added to the regular services. A special prayer book, the mahzor (plural *mahzorim*), is used on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.^[20] A number of additions are made to the regular service, most notably an extended repetition of the Amidah prayer for both Shacharit and Mussaf. The Shofar is blown during Mussaf at several intervals.^[21] (In many synagogues, even little children come and hear the Shofar being blown.) Biblical verses are recited at each point. According to the

Mishnah, 10 verses (each) are said regarding kingship, remembrance, and the shofar itself, each accompanied by the blowing of the shofar. A variety of *piyyutim*, medieval penitential prayers, are recited regarding themes of repentance. The *Alenu* prayer is recited during the repetition of the Mussaf Amidah.

The Mussaf Amidah prayer on Rosh Hashanah is unique in that apart from the first and last 3 blessings, it contains 3 central blessings making a total of 9. These blessings are entitled "Malchuyot" (Kingship, and also includes the blessing for the holiness of the day as is in a normal Mussaf), "Zichronot" (Remembrance) and "Shofarot" (concerning the Shofar). Each section contains an introductory paragraph followed by selections of verses about the "topic". The verses are 3 from the Torah, 3 from the Ketuvim, 3 from the Nevi'im, and one more from the Torah. During the repetition of the Amidah, the Shofar is sounded (except on Shabbat) after the blessing that ends each section.^[22] Recitation of these three blessings is first recorded in the Mishna,^[23] though writings by Philo and possibly even Psalms 81 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2681.htm#1>) suggest that the blessings may have been recited on Rosh Hashanah even centuries earlier.^[24]

Customs

The days before Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is preceded by the month of Elul, during which Jews are supposed to begin a self-examination and repentance, a process that culminates in the ten days of the *Yamim Nora'im*, the Days of Awe, beginning with Rosh Hashanah and ending with the holiday of Yom Kippur.^{[25][26]}

The *shofar* is traditionally blown each morning for the entire month of Elul, the month preceding Rosh Hashanah. The sound of the *shofar* is intended to awaken the listeners from their "slumbers" and alert them to the coming judgment.^{[27][25]} The shofar is not blown on Shabbat.^[28]

In the period leading up to Rosh Hashanah, penitential prayers, called *selichot*, are recited. The Sephardic tradition is to start at the beginning of Elul, while the Ashkenazi practice is to start a few days before Rosh Hashanah.^[25]

The day before Rosh Hashanah day is known as *Erev Rosh Hashanah* ("Rosh Hashanah eve").^[29] It is the 29th day of the Hebrew month of Elul, ending at sundown, when Rosh Hashanah commences. Some communities perform Hatarat nedarim (a nullification of vows) after the morning prayer services.^[30] Many Orthodox men immerse in a mikveh in honor of the coming day.^[31]

Symbolic foods



Rosh Hashanah jams prepared by Libyan Jews

Rosh Hashanah meals usually include apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet new year.^[32] Other foods with a symbolic meaning may be served, depending on local *minhag* ("custom"), such as the head of a fish (to symbolize the prayer "let us be the head and not the tail").^[33]

Many communities hold a "Rosh Hashanah seder" during which blessings are recited over a variety of symbolic dishes.^{[34][35][36]} The blessings have the incipit "*Yehi ratzon*", meaning "May it be Thy will." In many cases, the name of the food in Hebrew or Aramaic represents a play on words (a pun). The Yehi Ratzon platter may include apples (dipped in honey, baked or cooked as a compote called *mansanada*); dates; pomegranates; black-

eyed peas; pumpkin-filled pastries called *rodanchas*; leek fritters called *keftedes de prasa*; beets; and a whole fish with the head intact. It is also common to eat stuffed vegetables called *legumbres yaprakes*.^[37]

Some of the symbolic foods eaten are dates, black-eyed peas, leek, spinach and gourd, all of which are mentioned in the Talmud:^[38] "Let a man be accustomed to eat on New Year's Day gourds (קרא), and fenugreek (רוביא),^[39] leeks (כרתית), beet [leaves] (סילקא), and dates (תמרי)."

Pomegranates are used in many traditions, to symbolize being fruitful like the pomegranate with its many seeds.^[40] The use of apples dipped in honey, symbolizing a sweet year, is a late medieval Ashkenazi addition, though it is now almost universally accepted. Typically, round challah bread is served, to symbolize the cycle of the year.^{[40][32]} From ancient to quite modern age, lamb head or fish head were served. Nowadays, gefilte fish and lekach are commonly served by Ashkenazic Jews on this holiday. On the second night, new fruits are served to warrant inclusion of the shehecheyanu blessing.^[33]



Traditional Rosh Hashanah foods: Apples dipped in honey, pomegranates, wine for kiddush

Tashlikh

The ritual of tashlikh is performed on the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah by Ashkenazic and most Sephardic Jews (but not by Spanish & Portuguese Jews or some Yemenites). Prayers are recited near natural flowing water, and one's sins are symbolically cast into the water. Many also have the custom to throw bread or pebbles into the water, to symbolize the "casting off" of sins. In some communities, if the first day of Rosh Hashanah occurs on Shabbat, *tashlikh* is postponed until the second day. The traditional service for *tashlikh* is recited individually and includes the prayer "Who is like unto you, O God...And You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea", and Biblical passages including Isaiah 11:9 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt1011.htm#9>) ("They will not injure nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea") and Psalms 118:5–9 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt26b8.htm#5>), Psalms 121 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt26c1.htm#1>) and Psalms 130 (<https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt26d0.htm#1>), as well as personal prayers. Though once considered a solemn individual tradition, it has become an increasingly social ceremony practiced in groups. Tashlikh can be performed any time until Hoshana Rabba, and some Hasidic communities perform Tashlikh on the day before Yom Kippur.^[41]



Hasidic Jews performing tashlikh on Rosh Hashanah, painting by Aleksander Gierymski, 1884

Greetings

The Hebrew common greeting on Rosh Hashanah is *Shanah Tovah* (Hebrew: שנה טובה; pronounced [ʃaˈna toˈva]), which translated from Hebrew means "[have a] good year".^[42] Often *Shanah Tovah Umetukah* (Hebrew: שנה טובה ומתוקה), meaning "[have a] Good and Sweet Year", is used.^[43] In Yiddish the greeting is אַ גוט יאָר "a gut yor" ("a good year") or אַ גוט געבענטשט יאָר "a gut gebentsht yor" ("a good blessed year").^[42] The formal Sephardic greeting is *Tizku Leshanim Rabbot* ("may you merit many years"),^[44] to which the answer is *Ne'imot VeTovot* ("pleasant and good ones").

A more formal greeting commonly used among religiously observant Jews is *Ketivah VaChatimah Tovah* (Hebrew: כְּתִיבָה וְחַתִּימָה טוֹבָה), which translates as "A good inscription and sealing [in the Book of Life]",^[42] or *L'shanah tovah tikatevu v'tichatemu* meaning "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year".^{[43][45]} After Rosh Hashanah ends, the greeting is changed to *G'mar chatimah tovah* (Hebrew: גִּמְרַר חַתִּימָה טוֹבָה) meaning "A good final sealing", until Yom Kippur.^[42] After Yom Kippur is over, until Hoshana Rabbah, as Sukkot ends, the greeting is *Gmar Tov* (Hebrew: גִּמְרַר טוֹב), "a good conclusion".

In Karaite Judaism

Unlike the denominations of Rabbinical Judaism, Karaite Judaism believes the Jewish New Year starts with the first month and celebrate this holiday only as it is mentioned in the Torah, that is as a day of rejoicing and shouting.^[46] Additionally, Karaites believe the adoption of the name "Rosh Hashanah" in place of Yom Teruah "is the result of pagan Babylonian influence upon the Jewish nation,^[46] that began during the Babylonian exile with the adoption of the Babylonian month names instead of the numbering present in the Torah (Leviticus 23; Numbers 28).^[46] Karaites allow no work on the day except what is needed to prepare food (Leviticus 23:23, 24).^[47]

In Samaritanism

Samaritans preserve the biblical name of the holiday, *Yom Teruah*, and do not consider the day to be a New Year's day.^[48]

Duration and timing

The Torah defines Rosh Hashanah as a one-day celebration, and since days in the Hebrew calendar begin at sundown, the beginning of Rosh Hashanah is at sundown at the end of 29 Elul. Since the time of the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the time of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, normative Jewish law appears to be that Rosh Hashanah is to be celebrated for two days, because of the difficulty of determining the date of the new moon.^[4] Nonetheless, there is some evidence that Rosh Hashanah was celebrated on a single day in Israel as late as the thirteenth century CE.^[49]

Orthodox and Conservative Judaism now generally observe Rosh Hashanah for the first two days of Tishrei, even in Israel where all other Jewish holidays dated from the new moon last only one day. The two days of Rosh Hashanah are said to constitute "*Yoma Arichtah*" (Aramaic: "one long day"). In Reform Judaism, while most congregations in North America observe only the first day of Rosh Hashanah, some follow the traditional two-day observance as a sign of solidarity with other Jews worldwide.^[50] Karaite Jews, who do not recognize Rabbinic Jewish oral law and rely on their own understanding of the Torah, observe only one day on the first of Tishrei, since the second day is not mentioned in the Written Torah.

Date

Originally, the date of Rosh Hashanah was determined based on observation of the new moon ("molad"), and thus could fall out on any day of the week. However, around the third century CE, the Hebrew calendar was fixed, such that the first day of Rosh Hashanah never falls out on Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday.^{[51][52]}

Rosh Hashanah occurs 163 days after the first day of Passover, and thus is usually (but not always) determined by the new moon closest to the autumnal equinox.

In terms of the Gregorian calendar, the earliest date on which Rosh Hashanah can fall is September 5, as happened in 1842, 1861, 1899 and 2013. The latest Gregorian date that Rosh Hashanah can occur is October 5, as happened in 1815, 1929 and 1967, and will happen again in 2043. After 2089, the differences between the Hebrew calendar and the Gregorian calendar will result in Rosh Hashanah falling no earlier than September 6. Starting in 2214, the new latest date will be October 6.^[53]

Rosh Hashanah postponement rules

To calculate the day on which Rosh Hashanah of a given year will fall, it is necessary first to calculate the expected moment of the new moon of Tishrei in that year, and then to apply a set of rules to determine whether the first day (Rosh Chodesh) of the year must be postponed. The molad, or new moon, can be calculated by multiplying the number of months that will have elapsed since some (preceding) molad whose weekday is known by the mean length of a (synodic) lunar month, which is 29.530594 days.

| Day of week | Number of days | | | | | |
|-------------|----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Monday | 353 | | 355 | 383 | | 385 |
| Tuesday | | 354 | | | 384 | |
| Thursday | | 354 | 355 | 383 | | 385 |
| Saturday | 353 | | 355 | 383 | | 385 |

In calculating the number of months that will have passed since the known molad that one uses as the starting point, one must remember to include any leap months that falls within the elapsed interval, according to the cycle of leap years. A 19-year cycle of 235 synodic months has 991 weeks 2 days 16 hours 33 seconds, a common year of 12 synodic months has 50 weeks 4 days 8 hours 49 seconds, while a leap year of 13 synodic months has 54 weeks 5 days 21 hours 33 seconds.

The two months whose numbers of days may be adjusted, Marcheshvan and Kislev, are the eighth and ninth months of the Hebrew year, whereas Tishrei is the seventh month (in the traditional counting of the months, even though it is the first month of a new calendar year). Any adjustments needed to postpone Rosh Hashanah must be made to the adjustable months in the year that precedes the year of which the Rosh Hashanah will be the first day.

Just four potential conditions are considered to determine whether the date of Rosh Hashanah must be postponed. These are called the Rosh Hashanah postponement rules, or *deḥiyyot*:^{[54][55][56][57][58]}

- If the molad occurs at or later than noon, Rosh Hashanah is postponed a day. This is called *deḥiyyat molad zaken* (דְּחִיַּת מוֹלַד זָקֵן, literally, "old birth", i.e., late new moon).
- If the molad occurs on a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday, Rosh Hashanah is postponed a day. If the application of *deḥiyyat molad zaken* would place Rosh Hashanah on one of these days, then it must be postponed a second day. This is called *deḥiyyat lo ADU* (דְּחִיַּת לֹא אֲד"ו), an acronym that means "not [weekday] one, four, or six."

The first of these rules (*deḥiyyat molad zaken*) is referred to in the Talmud.^[59] Nowadays, molad zaken is used as a device to prevent the molad falling on the second day of the month.^[60] The second rule, (*deḥiyyat lo ADU*), is applied for religious reasons.

Another two rules are applied much less frequently and serve to prevent impermissible year lengths. Their names are Hebrew acronyms that refer to the ways they are calculated:

- If the molad in a common year falls on a Tuesday after 9 hours and 204 parts, Rosh Hashanah is postponed to Thursday. This is *deḥiyyat GaTaRaD* (דְּחִיַּת גַּטְרָא, where the acronym stands for "3 [Tuesday], 9, 204."

- If the molad following a leap year falls on a Monday, more than 15 hours and 589 parts after the Hebrew day began (for calculation purposes, this is taken to be 6 pm Sunday), Rosh Hashanah is postponed to Tuesday. This is *deḥiyyat BeTUTeKaPoT* (דְּחִיַּת בֵּי"וֹ תַקְפ"ט), where the acronym stands for "2 [Monday], 15, 589."

At the innovation of the sages, the calendar was arranged to ensure that Yom Kippur would not fall on a Friday or Sunday, and Hoshana Rabbah would not fall on Shabbat.^[61] These rules have been instituted because Shabbat restrictions also apply to Yom Kippur, so that if Yom Kippur were to fall on Friday, it would not be possible to make necessary preparations for Shabbat (such as candle lighting). Similarly, if Yom Kippur fell on a Sunday, it would not be possible to make preparations for Yom Kippur because the preceding day is Shabbat.^[62] Additionally, the laws of Shabbat override those of Hoshana Rabbah, so that if Hoshana Rabbah were to fall on Shabbat certain rituals that are a part of the Hoshana Rabbah service (such as carrying willows, which is a form of work) could not be performed.^[63]

To prevent Yom Kippur (10 Tishrei) from falling on a Friday or Sunday, Rosh Hashanah (1 Tishrei) cannot fall on Wednesday or Friday. Likewise, to prevent Hoshana Rabbah (21 Tishrei) from falling on a Saturday, Rosh Hashanah cannot fall on a Sunday. This leaves only four days on which Rosh Hashanah can fall: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, which are referred to as the "four gates". Each day is associated with a number (its order in the week, beginning with Sunday as day 1). Numbers in Hebrew have been traditionally denominated by Hebrew letters. Thus the *keviyah* uses the letters ב, ג, ה and ז (representing 2, 3, 5, and 7, for Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) to denote the starting day of the year.

Gallery of Rosh Hashanah greeting cards
