

# Halachot of Rosh Hashanah (5779)



Rabbi Daniel Kasdan  
OU-JLIC at Cornell University  
[dgk65@cornell.edu](mailto:dgk65@cornell.edu)

## The month of Elul

The Hebrew month of Elul is considered an auspicious time for *teshuva* (repentance). Many point to the verse (שיר השירים ו:ג) “אני לדודי ודודי לי” (“I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine”) as referring to the special bond between the Jewish people and G-d during the month of Elul, as the first letters of each word in the verse form the acronym Elul.

Also coinciding with the beginning of the academic year, the month of Elul is an ideal time for self-reflection and renewing our commitments to G-d, one another, the world, and ourselves. Before the stresses of the semester hit us with full force, the *teshuva* season gives us the opportunity to start the year on the right foot.

Liturgical changes during the month of Elul:

- Starting on the second day of Rosh Chodesh Elul, we recite the 27th chapter of Psalms (“לדוד ה' אורי וישעי”) twice a day- at the conclusion of Shacharit and at the conclusion of Maariv. We continue to recite this paragraph through Shmini Atzeret.
- We blow the shofar after davening each morning (just before “לדוד ה' אורי וישעי”) from the second day of Rosh Chodesh Elul until two days before Rosh Hashanah. We do not blow the shofar on Erev Rosh Hashanah (Sunday, September 9), so as to distinguish between the rabbinic institution of blowing the shofar during the month of Elul and the Biblical mitzvah of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah.
- In the days leading up to Rosh Hashanah, we recite Selichot, special penitential prayers in which we seek G-d’s forgiveness of our sins. This year, Ashkenazim begin reciting Selichot on Saturday night, September 1; Sefardim begin reciting Selichot at the beginning of the month of Elul. We continue to recite Selichot each day (other than Shabbos) through Yom Kippur. In order to enable as many students as possible to attend, we will be reciting Selichot each night at 10pm in the CJL Shul in 104 West.

## **Erev Rosh Hashanah (Sunday, September 9)**

### **התרת נדרים:**

There is a widespread *minhag* to do התרת נדרים (annulment of vows) on Erev Rosh Hashanah, in the presence of three adult Jewish men. If one plans on doing התרת נדרים, they must be present for the annulment; one cannot appoint a שליח (representative) to annul vows on their behalf. We will be having a group התרת נדרים after Shacharit (which begins at **8:30am**). Even if one cannot attend our post-Shacharit gathering, one can (and should) still recite התרת נדרים on Erev Rosh Hashanah in the presence of three adult Jewish men.

### **Mikveh:**

There is also a widespread *minhag* for men to go to the mikveh on Erev Rosh Hashanah.

Liturgical changes on Erev Rosh Hashanah:

- As is the case with all ימים טובים, we do not recite תחנון on Erev Rosh Hashanah, even during Shacharit.
- We do not blow the shofar on Erev Rosh Hashanah, so as to distinguish between the rabbinic institution of blowing the shofar during the month of Elul and the Biblical mitzvah of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah.

## **Candle lighting**

While extending a flame on Yom Tov is permissible, one may not ignite a “new flame.” Thus, in order to light Yom Tov candles on Monday evening (the second night of the holiday), we must be sure to use an already existing flame. The simplest way to do this is to purchase a *yahrzeit* candle to use for candle lighting on the first night of Rosh Hashanah (Sunday evening), which will last long enough to use for candle lighting on the second night (Monday evening).

I have been told that Wegman’s sells *yahrzeit* candles. While 24-hour candles should work, sometimes they extinguish a tad too early, so I’d recommend buying 72-hour candles.

If one finds it hard to obtain a *yahrzeit* candle, or if one’s *yahrzeit* candle extinguishes too early, any pre-existing flame may be used to light candles on the second night of Rosh Hashanah. If one has a gas stove with a pilot light, feel free to use this flame.

For all students eating at 104 West, there will be candle lighting options available in the dining hall on Sunday evening and Monday night.

For candle lighting times at Cornell, please see below in this document (section entitled “Important times for Rosh Hashanah”).

Please remember to recite שהחיינו (*Shehecheyanu*) at both candle lighting and kiddush (see page 4 of this document for a more detailed analysis of the blessing as it pertains to this holiday).

## Rosh Hashanah

### Simanim / Special Foods:

On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, there is a common custom to eat certain food items which are a “good sign” for the upcoming year. These include (but are not limited to) fenugreek, leek, beets, dates, pomegranates, and squash.

Perhaps the most famous example of such a food is an apple dipped in honey. If one has the custom to eat an apple dipped in honey (or would like to take up the custom), please remember to make the blessing “בורא פרי העץ,” even though one is eating the apple during the meal (i.e. AFTER making the blessing “המוציא” and eating challah). After taking a bite from the apple, we recite the following:

“יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו שתחדש עלינו שנה טובה ומתוקה”

*May it be Your will, Lord our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, that You bless us with a good and sweet new year.*

While all of the above foods have their symbolism, we should keep in mind the observation of R' Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (the Kotzker Rebbe): Many refrain from eating nuts on Rosh Hashanah because the Hebrew word אגוז (nut) has the same *gematria* as the word חטא (sin). But you know what else has the same *gematria* as the word חטא? The word חטא! Now, if only we were as meticulous about avoiding sins as we are about avoiding nuts... (For those of you who did the math, *gematrias* are allowed to be off by one.)

### Shofar:

Listening to the sound of the Shofar on the first day of Rosh Hashanah is a Biblical obligation (see במדבר כט:א). The Sages instituted a second day of Rosh Hashanah, so the obligation on the second day is rabbinic.

As blowing the Shofar is a מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא (positive time-bound mitzvah), women are technically exempt from the mitzvah. However, women who choose to observe this mitzvah are certainly rewarded, and it is the common custom in our communities for women to make every effort to hear the Shofar on both days of the holiday.

At our Orthodox davening in the One World Room (Anabel Taylor Hall), Shofar blowing will not be before **10:30am** for both days of the holiday.

### Napping:

There is a common practice to abstain from napping on Rosh Hashanah. Two reasons are given for this custom: on the Day of Judgement, it is inappropriate to be napping while our fate may be up in the air; and napping may be viewed as a sign of a “sleepy year.” A significant number of modern *poskim* maintain that if napping would help energize one for a more meaningful holiday (both for davening and even more broadly), then one need not follow this practice.

### Tashlich:

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we have the custom to say *Tashlich*, a group of Biblical passages from the books of Micah, Psalms, and Isaiah. A number of reasons are given for this custom, the most common being to express the desire stated explicitly in one of the verses: “And cast into the depths of the sea all their sins” (Micah 7:19).

It should be said by a live, flowing body of water which preferably has fish living in it. There is a dispute among *poskim* as to whether one may throw pieces of bread into the water-- some feel that one should not do so, as this might create a halachic problem of feeding the fish on Yom Tov; others, however, justify this practice, claiming that throwing bread is really for us and not for the fish, and thus if the fish choose to eat it we do not need to worry about it.

For those who are interested, we will be doing *Tashlich* together as a group at 4:30pm on Monday, September 10 at two different locations on campus:

- **Beebe Lake** (behind the Welcome Center) with R' Kasdan. A walking group will leave 104 West at 4:05pm (or you can meet us at the lake!).
- **Cascadilla Gorge** with Sarah Kasdan and Dana Blumenfeld. A walking group will meet in front of Anabel Taylor Hall at 4:30pm.

If one is unable to do *Tashlich* on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, one may do *Tashlich* at any point before Yom Kippur.

### *Shehecheyanu* and a new fruit / garment:

The Sages of the Talmud instituted a second day of Rosh Hashanah, and in doing so labeled the entire two-day holiday “one long day.” As such, there is a dispute among medieval halachic authorities as to whether or not one should recite another *Shehecheyanu* on the second night of Rosh Hashanah. Some argue that one should indeed recite the blessing on the second night, as one would on any two-day Yom Tov; others, however, argue that one should not recite the blessing a second time, as the Sages viewed the two-day holiday as “one long day.” In order to accommodate both positions, the common practice is to have a new fruit / wear a new article of clothing for both candle lighting and kiddush on the second night of the holiday. However, even in the absence of a new fruit or a new article of clothing, one should still recite the blessing on the second night as well, as in practice we really do side with that position.

tl;dr- Remember to say *Shehecheyanu* on the second night of Rosh Hashanah as well, even if you do not have a new fruit or a new article of clothing.

### **Cooking / carrying on Yom Tov**

Unlike Shabbos (and Yom Kippur), one is permitted to cook and carry (even without an eruv) on Yom Tov.

While cooking itself is permitted, there are a number of ancillary issues which need to be stressed:

- One is not permitted to ignite a new flame on Yom Tov. One may only extend an existing flame. This means the following:
  - A) If one owns a **traditional gas stove / oven with a pilot light and a knob**, one is generally permitted to “turn on” the stovetop / oven (as doing so is only extending the flame from the pilot light), raise the temperature, and even lower the temperature, provided that one’s actions are for the benefit of the food or oneself (say, if it’s too cold in your apartment). One would typically be forbidden to turn off even a traditional gas stove / oven.
  - B) If one owns a **modern stove / oven which does not have a pilot light** (such as an electric stovetop, or a gas one with an electric igniter), it cannot be turned on or off during Yom Tov. If the device is electric (i.e. it does not run on gas), then it cannot be adjusted at all on Yom Tov; one should set it to the appropriate temperature before the onset of the holiday, at which temperature it will remain for the duration of Yom Tov. If the device runs on gas (and merely has an electric igniter), then it should be lit before Yom Tov, but the temperature knob may be adjusted on the holiday, provided that (as above) one’s actions are for the benefit of the food or oneself.
- Any oven or stovetop with a **digital readout** (even if it operates on a gas pilot light) should not be adjusted on Yom Tov. If you own such an oven, you must leave it on one temperature for the duration of Yom Tov.
- Many people are unaware that their ovens / stoves have an automatic shut-off. This means that after, say, twelve hours, your oven will turn off automatically, thus preventing you from using it for the remainder of Yom Tov. I would recommend checking your particular model to see if it has this problem. If your oven / stove contains a “Shabbos mode” setting, you do not have to worry about this-- just make sure to set it to “Shabbos mode” before the onset of the holiday.
- Many modern day ovens have an automatic electronic sensor inside which raises the temperature after the oven door is opened. If your oven contains a “Shabbos mode” setting, it is best to activate that setting before Yom Tov, as doing so disables the automatic sensor and thus avoids this halachic question entirely. However, even if your oven does not have a “Shabbos mode” setting, you would still be permitted to open and close the door to the oven (on Yom Tov) for the purposes of your Yom Tov meals.
- **All of the above are general guidelines. In 2018, the models and makes of ovens / stoves vary dramatically, with new technology hitting the market frequently. Feel free to reach out to me with specific questions.**

## **Showering on Yom Tov**

One of the most commonly asked questions is whether it is permitted to take a shower on Yom Tov. The short answer is yes, BUT one must make sure to observe the following guidelines:

- Use lukewarm water (the same approximate temperature you would use during the Nine Days)
- Use either liquid soap or body wash (do NOT use a bar of soap).
- Do NOT use a washcloth (a towel to dry afterwards is fine)
- Similarly, if you have very long hair, do NOT squeeze out your hair
- Do NOT apply creams (such as moisturizer) to one's body afterwards

## **Important times for Rosh Hashanah**

Please note that, aside from mincha / maariv on Tuesday, **all** Orthodox services will be held in the One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall. For mincha / maariv on Tuesday, Orthodox minyan will be in the CJL Shul in 104 West.

All times below are for Ithaca only. If you are going home for the holiday, please consult myzmanim.com and your shul bulletin for relevant times.

### Sunday, September 9 (Erev Rosh Hashanah):

Candle lighting- 7:08pm

Mincha / Maariv- 7:10pm, One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall

Annual Cornell RH Dinner- 7:45pm check-in, 8:30pm meal starts, Trillium, Kennedy Hall

### Monday, September 10 (Rosh Hashanah day #1):

Shacharit- 8:30am, One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall

Lunch- check-in 1:00pm, 1:30-3pm meal served, 104 West

Tashlich- 4:30pm at Beebe Lake / Cascadilla Gorge (see pg 4 of this packet for more info)

Mincha followed by Shiur- 7:00pm, One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall

Maariv- 8:05pm, One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall

Candle lighting will be in 104 West following Maariv. One should **not** light candles prior to 8:06pm.

RH Dinner- 8:30pm check-in, 9:00-10:15pm meal, 104 West

### Tuesday, September 11 (Rosh Hashanah day #2):

Shacharit - 8:30am, One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall

Lunch- check-in 1:00pm, 1:30-3pm meal served, 104 West

Dinner- 6:00-8pm, 104 West

Mincha- 7:00pm, CJL Shul in 104 West

Maariv (followed by *havdalah*)- 8:05pm, CJL Shul in 104 West

### **Aseret Yemei Teshuva (The Ten Days of Repentance)**

The time period from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur is known as *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* (the Ten Days of Repentance). During these days, we place extra emphasis on repentance, enhancing our religious observance, and working on our interpersonal relationships.

Liturgical changes during Aseret Yemei Teshuva:

- During every Kaddish, we say “לעילא ולעילא מכל ברכתא” (rather than the usual “לעילא מן כל” “ברכתא”).
- Some have the custom to recite “עושה שלום” (instead of the usual “עושה שלום”) at the end of Kaddish and in the last two paragraphs of the עמידה.
- We add the following four lines to our עמידה:
  - a) In the first blessing (אבות), we add: “זכרינו לחיים...”
  - b) In the second blessing (גבורות), we add: “מי כמוך אב הרחמים...”
  - c) In the third blessing (מודים), we add: “וכתוב לחיים טובים...”
  - d) In the fourth blessing (שלום רב / שלום שים), we add: “בספר חיים ברכה ושלום...”

**If one forgot to recite any of these four lines, one should NOT go back and say the עמידה again.** (However, if one is still in the middle of the specific bracha in which a particular line is added, and has not yet said G-d's name at the end of the blessing, one may go back and insert the line at the appropriate spot.)

- We say “המלך הקדוש” instead of “הא-ל הקדוש” in our עמידה. If one mistakenly says “הא-ל הקדוש” and is able to correct their mistake instantly, it's fine. **If not, one must go back and restart the עמידה from the beginning.**
- We say “המלך המשפט” instead of “מלך אוהב צדקה ומשפט” in our שמונה עשרה. **If one mistakenly said “מלך אוהב צדקה ומשפט”, one should NOT go back and say שמונה עשרה again.**
- We recite מלינו every day during Shacharit and Mincha (except for Shabbos and Friday Mincha).