

# Reflection for all Faiths & Backgrounds

Sit in a quiet place and contemplate the following questions:

- What's a significant experience that has affected you over the past year? How did it affect you?
- Write down three things that you wish you had done differently this past year and three things that you're especially proud of.
- Describe one thing you'd like to achieve by this time next year? Why is this important to you?

Write down your answers and thoughts and save them to read next year.



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# A Guide to the High Holidays

## Reflection, Renewal, and Reconnection



**Rosh Hashanah (The Jewish New Year)**

Sundown, September 22 – Nightfall, September 24, 2025

**Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement & Forgiveness)**

Sundown, October 1 – Nightfall, October 2, 2025



# The High Holidays

The Jewish High Holidays are the peak spiritual season of the Jewish calendar. *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* serve as bookends to an intense, reflective time known as the 10 Days of Repentance. During this period, we engage in the inner work of change, of returning to our essence and our highest potential as holy human beings.

## Rosh Hashanah (The Jewish New Year)

The Jewish New Year is called Rosh Hashanah, translated as “the head of the year.” It begins on the first day of the month of *Tishrei* in the Hebrew calendar. This date typically occurs during September or early October. On Rosh Hashanah, we look forward with hope and joy to a year full of blessings. *Shanah* (year) is derived from the Hebrew words for “change” and “repetition.” As we look back on our actions, words and relationships from the past year, we try to notice patterns and habits that need to change to better support our relationships and our greater world.

## Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement & Forgiveness)

The Day of Repentance is called Yom Kippur. Taking place 10 days after Rosh Hashanah, it is considered the most important holy day of the Jewish year. From lighting candles at sundown until seeing a dark sky the following night, this is a time for prayer and contemplation of the most vulnerable and courageous variety. By refraining from eating and drinking, work responsibilities, media consumption, and other activities that turn our attention to the transactional world, we give ourselves the gift of truly focusing on a personal moral inventory. Jewish tradition requires that we ask for forgiveness from those we have hurt and offer it to others who have hurt us. We acknowledge the hurts we have caused in our relationships, the ways in which we have caused ourselves to stumble, and the large and small behaviors that have hurt our community and our planet. If we have done this work of repair, of *Teshuvah* (repentance or return), by Yom Kippur, then we can honestly ask to be written in the proverbial “Book of Life” for another year.



# Customs and Traditions

## Blowing of the Shofar

The *shofar*, or ram’s horn, is sounded every day during the month preceding Rosh Hashanah, 100 times during the Rosh Hashanah prayer services, and again to end the Yom Kippur fast. Its sound has been compared to a wailing trumpet, a mother’s cry, and even a call to battle. The shofar has been called a “spiritual alarm clock,” a wake-up call that says: Pay attention and make things better!

## Tashlich

Rosh Hashanah has a special cleansing ceremony called *tashlich*, which means to “cast” or “throw away.” It is a chance to symbolically get rid of our mistakes and missteps by throwing breadcrumbs into a body of moving water, as another step toward reconciliation and renewal. By invoking the cleansing power of water, we feel a fresh and clean start to the new year. We can participate in Tashlich any time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

## Foods

Many cultures and religions embrace special foods to symbolize and serve as a reminder of important aspects of a holiday. During the High Holidays, these foods include apples dipped in honey for a sweet year, round challah for the interwoven, ever-continuing cycle of life, and pomegranates for the bright jewels of positive actions that make our world a better place.

## Asking Forgiveness

A critical part of this season is engaging in the process of *Teshuvah*, repairing relationships through our words and acknowledging the impact of our speech. The 10 Days of Repair (in Hebrew, *Aseret Y’mei Teshuvah*) offer inspiration and encouragement to all of us to acknowledge the impact of our speech. We can tell ourselves the truth, stop making excuses, take responsibility for our behavior, and then decide with commitment that we will make different choices going forward. To say the words “I’m sorry” is to take a step of responsibility and reconciliation and healing that will rebuild trust and love in our relationships.

## Greetings

During the High Holiday season, it is customary to offer meaningful greetings that express our caring connection and hopes for a joyful and blessed new year. You can greet Jewish friends with any of these suggested phrases:

- *Shanah Tovah*: A good new year!
- *Shanah Tovah u’metukah*: A good and sweet new year!
- *G’mar Chatimah Tovah*: May you be sealed in the Book of Life!

