

The Sephardic Guide to Rosh Ha-Shannah



Frequently
Asked
Questions



Rosh ha-Shannah During the COVID Pandemic:

This *Rosh ha-Shannah* is going to be different than any previous *Rosh ha-Shannah*'s. What are we doing differently this year because of the pandemic?

The essential mitzvot of *Rosh Ha-Shannah* are all still in effect. That said, we are working within the guidelines to create a meaningful, inspirational, and safe tefilah environment.

- **Everybody is required to wear a mask in BRS at all times.** A mask must cover both the nose and mouth. Wearing a mask protects everybody around you from potentially becoming infected. It's a way to demonstrate that we care about each other. Normally, we can say that we care and think that we care, but this year, we can all do something to physically demonstrate that we love and care about our fellow community members. May Hashem look upon us taking care of each other and may He have mercy on us and take care of all of us!
- **Social distancing will be maintained during tefilah.** The seats are arranged in a deliberate way to maintain distance between people from different households. This will mean that some people will be sitting in a double-seat by themselves. Please do not move or rearrange any of the seats. A lot of thought and effort has been put into their placement.
- **Everybody is asked to stay in their place during tefilah.** Naturally, many of us walk toward the *Heikhal* when the Torah is taken out or to offer good wishes to our friends. Because we are expecting a lot of people, we are stressing the importance of staying in place so as to maintain safety and health.
- **Access to the campus will be limited to those who registered in advance and received bracelets.** Because we can only fit a limited number of people at each *minyan*, unfortunately, we cannot allow people to just walk in as it may create crowding and an unsafe environment. If you have registered for *minyanim*, please contact Rabbi Shabtai or Yoram Zuviv to obtain the proper bracelet (they are color coded for each *minyan*).
- There are various sections of *tefilah* that will be shortened. Our goal is to make sure to say all of the essential components and to enable having *kavannah* when they are said. We will be omitting all the morning piyutim normally recited after *Hazarat Ha-Shatz*, as well as ה' שמעתי שמערך, as well as some others. Please be understanding as we will be running multiple consecutive *minyanim* and need to make sure we can get as many people in as possible in a safe way.
- For those who will not or cannot attend shul, there are multiple opportunities to hear shofar throughout the community. In each development on Montoya Circle, we have arranged for shofar blowing at 3pm and 5pm. There is a flyer in the weekly listing all of the various locations.



Erev Rosh ha-Shannah

Rosh ha-Shannah is supposed to be a day of judgment. How is it also a Yom Tov? Aren't those contradictory notions?

Rosh ha-Shannah is a complex and complicated day. It does indeed incorporate both elements. We are being judged, but we simultaneously express our confidence in Hashem judging us mercifully in that we celebrate it as a *Yom Tov*. It's important to incorporate both elements, as we read in *Tehillim*, וגילו ברעדה.

How does the התרת נדרים (annulment of vows) work? Why does standing in front of a bunch of people get rid of any commitments I may have made last year?

Halakhah takes a person's word very seriously and expects a person to be punctilious in fulfilling that which he said he would do. It goes even so far as to consider non-verbal commitments as seriously, such that good habits may also be considered quasi-commitments.

The mechanism of התרת נדרים has the halakhic power to 'undo' a commitment in two different ways: חרטה and פתח. When a person regrets having made a commitment (whether verbal or otherwise) and concludes that had he initially realized that he would later come to regret making that commitment – a *Beit Din* has the power to 'uproot' (לעקור) the original commitment. It becomes as if it never existed.

We all perform this ritual prior to *Rosh ha-Shannah*, whether we recall having made such commitments or not because *Hazal* describe the punishment of one who violates his or her commitment quite harshly. As such, we do not want to enter the *Yemei ha-Din* with such a judgment hanging over us.

Additionally, there is an important symbolic message that we are sending. Verbal commitments tie us to the past, they do not allow us to move forward or correct for past mistakes. *Rosh ha-Shannah* and *Yom ha-Kippurim* are not just about atoning for previous sins but also for committing to improving ourselves for the future. התרת נדרים is a way of symbolically declaring that we want to free ourselves from previous mistakes through our *teshuvah* and commit ourselves to improving for the future.

Importantly, if there is a specific promise, oath, or commitment that a person specifically recalls having taken upon themselves, it is vital to explicitly include it in the התרת נדרים. For guidance on how to properly do so, please speak to one of the rabbis.

The leading Poskim have all ruled that התרת נדרים may be performed via Zoom. Unfortunately, we do not have enough room in shul to host everybody who may want to attend. Please join us via Zoom on Friday morning at 6:15 am – www.brsonline.org/selihot (Selihot begin at the same link at 5:30 am).



What kind of *tefilah* is התרת נדרים and why sometimes are there 3 and sometimes 10 דיינים (judges)?

It is in fact not a *tefilah* at all. It's simply a declaration of regret for prior commitments and attesting that we would never have committed to doing these things in the first place if we would have realized that we would later come to regret them. There is no קדושה to the text itself and it need not be recited in Hebrew. In fact, if a person does not understand Hebrew, it is better that they recite the התרת נדרים in a language they do understand. The *Mahazorim* that we use in shul have the text in both Hebrew and English.

In addition to the 'standard' התרת נדרים, there is also something called התרת קללות (nullification of curses). This refers to a more mystical notion that there can be 'curses' or other decrees on a person's *neshamah* that may have an effect on their judgment on *Rosh ha-Shannah*. Even these decrees may be annulled by a *Beit Din*, but only by a more significant *Beit Din* of 10 judges. The *Ben Ish Hai* and the *Hida* recommend reciting this 'enhanced' התרת on *Erev Rosh ha-Shannah*, which is the practice in our *minyán*.

Rosh ha-Shannah Night

What is the order for *Kiddush* on the first night of *Rosh ha-Shannah*?

Kiddush is for both Shabbat and Yom Tov. It should be recited as appears in the *mahazor*: It begins with יום השמיים ויכולו השמים, followed by אלא מועדי ה' מקראי קודש, then בורא פרי הגפן, then אשר בחר בנו, and finishing with מקדש השבת וישראל והזמנים. The final *berakhah* in the *Kiddush* is שהחיינו. After drinking from the *Kiddush*, hands should be washed and המוציא should be recited. (See the next page regarding שהחיינו on the second night of *Rosh ha-Shannah*.)

Only **after** each person tastes from the bread, do we begin eating the special foods for *Rosh ha-Shannah* night and recite the special blessings as appear in the *mahazor*.

What's the deal with the various foods that we eat on *Rosh ha-Shannah* night?

The Gemara says that the names of these various foods are similar to or remind us of words of blessings and good fortune. We therefore ask Hashem to grant us a successful and productive year at this opportune moment. In addition to reciting these special prayers, we eat the various fruits as a way of enhancing the *berakhah*.

Is there a certain order to follow when eating these foods?



Yes. Specifically, they should be eaten as part of the meal, which practically means that we may eat them only **after** *kiddush* and *ha-motzi* and after each person has eaten some bread. Additionally, when presented with a variety of fruits and vegetables, there is a particular order of *berakhot* to keep in mind.

The first food that should be eaten is dates. (This is a general rule that applies when eating a number of fruits and is not unique to *Rosh ha-Shannah*.) **The special יהי רצון should be recited first, followed by the berakhah of בורא פרי העץ.** Before making the *berakhah* of בורא פרי העץ, it is appropriate to have in mind all of the various fruits that will be eaten that night. It is often helpful for the person reciting the *berakhah* to remind those joining him to have this in mind as well before reciting the *berakhah*. **After eating the dates, no other berakhot should be recited for any of the other fruits and vegetables.** Before eating each subsequent fruit of vegetable, **only** the appropriate יהי רצון should be recited, but **no בורא פרי האדמה זס בורא פרי העץ.**

Some people try to eat a new fruit on the night of *Rosh ha-Shannah*. It is a symbolic way of starting the new year with extra dose of gratitude for that which is new through an additional שהחיינו; **it is not a requirement.**

If you have a new fruit and would like to recite a שהחיינו before eating it, it must meet the following requirements:

1. It must be a **seasonal fruit** – meaning, that it is not available all year round in South Florida and that you have not yet eaten it this season. This excludes many of the more common ‘exotic’ fruits (such as papayas and pomegranates) since the vast majority are in fact available all year round. Some suggested fruits include persimmons and passion fruit, which are usually not available all year round.
2. The fruit should **not** be on the table during *Kiddush* (since we recite the *berakhah* of שהחיינו during *Kiddush*, if the fruit were on the table, the שהחיינו of *Kiddush* would qualify for the new fruit as well and we then couldn’t then make a separate שהחיינו on the fruit).

If you only have one new fruit, save it for the second night.

What is the order for *Kiddush* on the second night of *Rosh ha-Shannah*?

Kiddush for the second night includes a section of Havdalah, considering that we are transitioning for a day of joint Shabbat-Yom Tov to one of just Yom Tov. It begins with מוקראי קודש ה' אלא מועדי ה' מוקראי קודש ה' מוקראי קודש ה' מוקראי קודש ה', then בורא פרי הגפן, then אשר בחר בנו, and finishing with ומקדש השבת וישראל והזמנים. We then recite the ‘standard’ Motza’ei Shabbat *berakhah* of בורא מאורי האש, and then conclude with a special section



that seems similar to the standard *Havdalah* (with some differences) and ends with ברוך אתה ה' המבדיל בין קודש לקודש.

For the *berakhah* of בורא מאורי האש **do not** light a separate candle. Instead, use the candles that were already lit for *Yom Tov*. There is a debate among the *Poskim* if it's proper to bring two candles together to recite the *berakhah* or if it's preferable to leave them where they are. The general practice is to leave the candles as they are and recite the *berakhah* while looking at them all.

Even though it is the second night of *Yom Tov*, we nonetheless recite the *berakhah* of שהחיינו. However, since there is some dispute about this issue, some *Poskim* suggest placing a new fruit (that meets the criteria above) on the table during *Kiddush*, so that the שהחיינו can qualify for both *Kiddush* as well as the new fruit.

No *berakhah* of שהחיינו should be recited on this fruit subsequently during the meal.

Do I have to eat a new fruit on *Rosh ha-Shannah*?

No. It is a beautiful *minhag*. As mentioned previously, when possible, on the second night it is best to have a new fruit on the table during *Kiddush*.

I remember something about not eating nuts. Are there any foods that we should avoid on *Rosh ha-Shannah*?

The *Shulhan Arukh* recommends avoiding eating walnuts and red grapes. These are matters of stringency and are not strictly prohibited.

I don't really like honey. Is it really a mitzvah to dip an apple in it?

There is no requirement to eat any of these particular foods on *Rosh ha-Shannah*. Rather, these are beautiful customs that have become quite prevalent (perhaps because of a song many of our children learn in kindergarten). If you particularly don't like one of the foods, you certainly don't have to eat it.

On *Rosh ha-Shannah*, do I have to dip the bread from *ha-motzi* in honey as well? What happened to the salt?

The *Kaf ha-Hayyim* notes that the common Sephardic practice is to dip the bread in salt on *Rosh ha-Shannah*, just as we do during the rest of the year. Some Sephardim also dip the bread in honey (and some continue the practice through *Sukkot*), but the *Kaf ha-Hayyim* recommends that for Kabbalistic reasons, they dip it in salt first.



Shofar

Do women have to hear the *shofar* on *Rosh ha-Shannah*?

The mitzvah to hear the *shofar* is a time bound positive mitzvah (מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא) and therefore women are exempt.

Many women, however, have the custom of coming to shul to hear the *shofar*. Women who cannot make it to shul for whatever reason, may even request that somebody come to their house to blow the *shofar* for them. **This is not a requirement**, but rather an additional stringency. If you know of anybody (man or woman) who does not anticipate making it to shul and would like to have somebody blow *shofar* in their home, please let one of the rabbis know.

Since women are not technically obligated to hear the *shofar* (although they may opt in), if a woman chooses to hear *shofar* on her own (not in the context of *tefilah*), she does not recite a *berakhah*.

How many sounds of the *shofar* do I really have to hear?

The universal practice is to blow a total of 100 sounds of the *shofar* in shul. It is important to hear all of them and therefore we ask for silence while the *shofar* is being blown so that everybody can hear all of the sounds.

These 100 sounds are spread out throughout much of the *tefilah*. However, the absolute minimum is 30 sounds. Therefore, when blowing *shofar* for somebody who was unable to attend *tefilah* in Shul, we blow only 30 sounds.

Do I really have to not speak the entire time from the first *shofar* sound until the last?

We all know that it is forbidden to speak from the time we recite a *berakhah* until the time that we fulfill the action or mitzvah that the *berakhah* refers to. For example, after reciting פרי העץ בורא, we may not speak until taking a bite of the apple. The same rule applies to *shofar*. Before we blow the *shofar*, the *ba'al toke'a* (בעל תוקע) makes *berakhot* on behalf of everybody, to which we respond אמן. Since all 100 sounds of the *shofar* are part of the mitzvah – beginning with those immediately after the *berakhah* all the way through the final *kaddish* at the end of *mussaf* – the mitzvah of hearing the sound of the *shofar* is not complete until the very last sound is heard. Therefore, **it is forbidden to speak from the time that the initial *berakhah* is recited until after the very last sound is heard.**



Rosh ha-Shannah Daytime Practices

I've heard that if I can't make it to *Tashlikh* (תשל"ך) on the first day of *Yom Tov* that I can make it up at a later point. Is that true?

The *minhag* of *Tashlikh* (תשל"ך) is to go to a body of water on the first day of *Rosh ha-Shannah* and say special *tefilot* requesting forgiveness from Hashem. The Kabbalists write that it is appropriate to shake out the bottom of one's garments or one's pockets at a specific point during that *tefilah*. It is most appropriate to participate in *Tashlikh* (תשל"ך) on the first day of *Rosh ha-Shannah*, but when that isn't possible, then to do so on the second day of *Rosh ha-Shannah*. While there are different customs regarding optimal and suboptimal timing, it seems most appropriate to perform the ritual on *Rosh ha-Shannah* and if unable to do so, to wait until next year to try again.

The Sephardic practice is to perform *Tashlikh* on the first day of *Rosh ha-Shannah* even when it is Shabbat, in areas that have an *eruv*, such as Montoya Circle. Those who cannot do so on Shabbat, may do so on Sunday.

So as to maintain safe distancing, we will not be having a communal *Tashlikh* this year. Each person should do it on their own.

We will be having *Minhah* just before sunset on Shabbat. There will not be time to perform *Tashlikh* after *Minhah* and it should be done earlier in the day.

How much bread do I have to throw into the water for *Tashlikh* (תשל"ך)?

None. Not only is it not necessary to throw bread into the water, it is in fact **forbidden** to do so for several reasons. As noted above, the Kabbalists write that it is appropriate to shake out the bottoms of one's garments or one's pockets at a specific point during that *tefilah*, but **not throw anything into the water**.

Is it true that I really can't nap on *Rosh ha-Shannah*? It's my day off!

The Gemara writes that it is a bad omen to sleep on *Rosh ha-Shannah*, such that one who sleeps on *Rosh ha-Shannah* may have a 'sleepy' year. However, the *Poskim* write that the Arizal would customarily nap during the afternoon of *Rosh ha-Shannah* and recommend that if a person needs to sleep so as to have more energy for *tefilah*, then it is permissible to do so. The *Poskim* highlight that the goal is to spend the day of *Rosh ha-Shannah* engaged in activities that are appropriate for the day, including *tefilah*, enjoying a meal with family, and learning Torah.



The day of *Rosh ha-Shannah* should be one where we model behavior that we wish to aspire to for the upcoming year – including refraining from any anger, spending time meaningfully, interacting positively with our friends and family, and avoiding *lashon ha-ra* under any and all circumstances.

Rosh Ha-Shannah on Shabbat:

This year, the first day of Rosh Ha-Shannah coincides with Shabbat, which raises a number of issues to consider:

Tefilah: We refer to *Rosh Ha-Shannah* as זכרון תרועה (instead of יום תרועה) as well as add several additions for Shabbat in the *Shemoneh Esreh*.

Shofar: We do not blow Shofar on Shabbat. We will only do so on Sunday, the second day of *Rosh Ha-Shannah*. Several of the sections of *tefilah* that specifically relate to blowing the shofar are omitted. Unlike in other years, we recite שהחיינו after the *berakhah* on Shofar on the second day (since it's the first day with regard to Shofar blowing).

Tashlikh: In places where there is an eruv, such as Montoya Circle, *Tashlikh* may be performed on Shabbat. Those who are unable to do so, can do so on Sunday.

Food preparation: Although *Rosh Ha-Shannah* is a *Yom Tov*, because the first day is Shabbat, we follow the stricter Shabbat protocols for food preparation on the first day.

Seudah Shelishit: As on all *Shabbatot*, we must eat a third meal on Shabbat afternoon. However, because *Motza'ei Shabbat* is *Yom Tov*, we may not eat a significant meal too late in the afternoon. As such, *Seudah Shelishit* must be completed by 4:47 pm.

Motza'ei Shabbat: Because Shabbat has stricter rules than *Yom Tov*, nothing may be prepared from Shabbat for *Yom Tov*. This means that on Saturday night, it's necessary to wait until Shabbat has ended (7:55pm) to prepare for *Yom Tov*. Preparations include setting the table, warming food, or lighting candles. Those who normally wait until זמן רבנו תם on every *Motza'ei Shabbat*, should wait until 8:29 pm to begin any preparations. (Even those who normally do not wait this extra time, but wish to take upon themselves this stringency for the עשרת ימי תשובה, are encouraged to wait until 8:29 pm to begin preparations.)

Rosh ha-Shannah as a Yom Tov

If I am allowed to heat water on Yom Tov, can I take a shower?

In many homes, a hot water heater provides a supply of hot water for any variety of uses, including bathing. When a hot water faucet is opened, water drains from the water heater and [eventually] cold water rushes into the heater to replace the water that was taken out. The cold water is heated



The Sephardic Kehillah of Boca Raton Synagogue

הקהילה הספרדית של ק"ק בוקה רטון

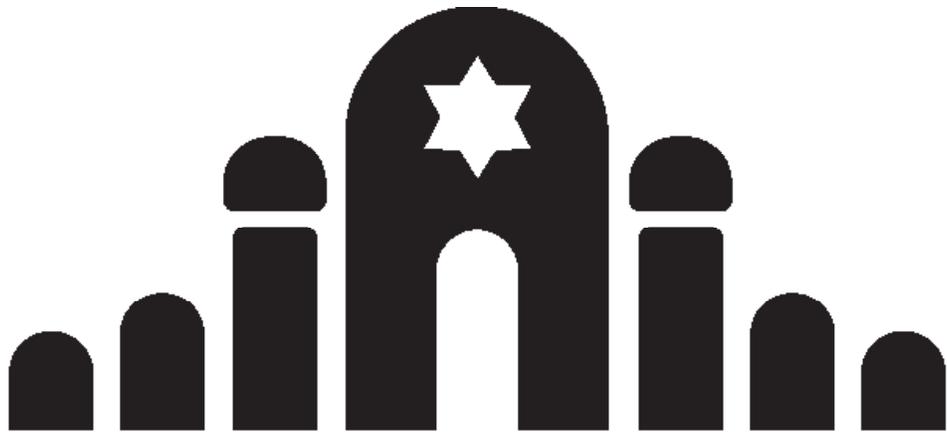
and ready for additional use. This is the reason that using the hot water faucet on Shabbat is not allowed – since the cold water that rushes into the water heater is subsequently heated.

The issue on *Yom Tov* is more complicated, given that it is permissible to heat water for cooking or other activities that qualify as *okhel nefesh*. There are several additional considerations as well, leading to various *Poskim* arriving at different conclusions. The *Rishon le-Tziyyon*, Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef has specifically ruled that it is permissible to shower on *Yom Tov* even when the water is heated in a ‘standard’ water heater.

That said, there are some other issues to be careful about while showering on *Yom Tov*:

Squeezing hair to remove water is strictly forbidden as is wringing out a towel. It is permissible to place a towel over one’s head and allow the hair to dry on its own. As such, it is worthwhile to consider whether or not it makes sense to wash one’s hair on *Yom Tov*. It is preferable when possible to use liquid soap on Shabbat (when washing with cold water) and *Yom Tov*. When not possible, it is permissible to use bar soap as well.

כתיבה וזדתימה טובה



THE SEPHARDIC KEHILLAH
of
BOCA RATON SYNAGOGUE

תזכו לשנים רבות,
זעיימות, וטובות