

Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition
Hagim • Holidays



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

CEREMONY & CELEBRATION

Family Edition

חַגִּים • HOLIDAYS

The Rabbi Sacks Legacy
Maggid Books

Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition
Ḥagim • Holidays

First Edition, 2023

Maggid Books
An imprint of Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd.

POB 8531, New Milford, CT 06776-8531, USA
& POB 4044, Jerusalem 9104001, Israel
www.korenpub.com

© The Rabbi Sacks Legacy, 2023

Cover art: © Karin Foreman, *Shabbat 2022*, <https://karinfoorman.com>

The publication of this book was made possible
through the generous support of The Jewish Book Trust.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by
any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publisher, except in the case
of brief quotations embedded in critical articles or reviews.

ISBN 978-1-59264-615-9, *hardcover*

Printed and bound in Turkey

The Tabacinic Edition

CEREMONY & CELEBRATION *Family Edition*

pays tribute to the memory of

Mr. Manuel Tabacinic z"l

מנחם מנדל בן אברם שמואל ז"ל

Mrs. Sonia Tabacinic (née Lustgarten) z"l

שיינדל בת צבי הירש ז"ל

Mr. Sami Rohr z"l

שמואל בן יהושע אליהו ז"ל

Mrs. Charlotte Rohr (née Kastner) z"l

שרה בת יקותיאל יהודה ז"ל

Together they merited to see all their children build lives
enriched by faithful commitment
to the spreading of Torah and *ahavat Yisrael*.

Dedicated with love by their children

Moshe and Lillian Tabacinic

Miami, Florida 2023

Contents

Introduction ix

Rosh
HaShana 1

Tu
BiShvat 91

Yom
Kippur 13

Purim 103

Sukkot 27

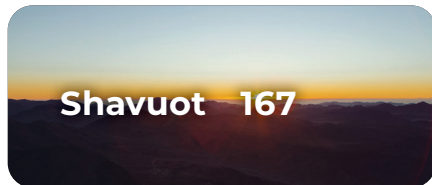
Pesah 113

Shemini Atzeret
Simhat Torah 41

Yom
HaShoah 141

Hanukka 55

Yom
HaZikaron 147



Introduction

The Israelites, slaves in Egypt for more than two hundred years, were about to go free... On the brink of their release, Moshe, the leader of the Jews, gathered them together and prepared to address them. He might have spoken about freedom. He could have given a stirring address about the promised land to which they were travelling, the “land flowing with milk and honey.” Or he might have prepared them for the journey that lay ahead, the long march across the wilderness.

*Instead, Moshe delivered a series of addresses that seemed to make no sense in the context of that particular moment. He presented a new idea, revolutionary in character, whose implications remain challenging even now. He spoke about children, and the distant future, and the duty to pass on memory to generations yet unborn... **About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators.***

Freedom, Moshe suggested, is won, not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a land, you need an army. But to defend freedom, you need education. You need families and schools to ensure that your ideals are passed on to the next generation, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. The citadels of liberty are houses of study. Its heroes are teachers, its passion is education and the life of the mind. Moshe realised that a people achieves immortality not by building temples or mausoleums, but by engraving their values on the hearts of their children, and they on theirs, and so on until the end of time.

*The Israelites built living monuments – monuments to life – and became a people dedicated to bringing new generations into being and handing on to them the heritage of the past. **Their great institutions were the family and education via the conversation between the generations.***¹

A Nation of Educators

Early on in *A Letter in the Scroll*,² arguably the book in which Rabbi Sacks *zt”l* most clearly articulated his philosophy of Judaism, he wrote about the value of education in Judaism and Jewish civilisation. This theme permeated his work across the many mediums through which he impacted the world, from books to *parasha*

¹ *A Letter in the Scroll*, 33–34.

² Published in the United Kingdom under the title *Radical Then, Radical Now*.

commentary, from his frequent articles and broadcasts in the media to his speeches in the House of Lords. It was clear to him that “for Jews, education is not just what we know. It’s *who we are*.”³

But if you look closely, you will notice how he places this responsibility not solely on teachers and schools. He did not believe in the outsourcing of the responsibility for education to professionals. For Rabbi Sacks, the primary institution of education in the life of a Jewish child is the family, and the foremost educator with the deepest impact is the parent.

To launch the first annual *Communities in Conversation* initiative, marking Rabbi Sacks’s *yahrzeit*, his daughter, Gila Sacks, said of her father:

Perhaps the most defining feature of my father’s life, one that I don’t think I fully appreciated until after he died, was that he learned and learned, and continued to learn every single day, until his last. He learned from books, from text, from laws. He learned from history and from world events. But, mainly, he learned from people. He would seek out people to learn from, from every possible path of life. And he would seek out what he could learn from everyone he met. And he would do this through conversation, through talking and listening. So for him, conversation was a defining and spiritual act, a way of opening ourselves up to something beyond ourselves, of being challenged, the only way we could really become more than we were before. A training, perhaps, for opening ourselves up to God.

This captures the pedagogical vision behind the *Family Editions* – a resource for parents and families (as well as schools and teachers) to enhance the “conversation between the generations.”

Overview

In 2007 Rabbi Sacks embarked on an ambitious new project – to write an essay on the weekly *parasha* every week, to be disseminated around the world. He called this *Covenant & Conversation*, and he continued the project through many more *parasha* cycles, until the end of his life. The brilliance of these essays was the way Rabbi Sacks found complex ideas of Jewish thought expressed in the week’s Torah reading, articulated them and made them relevant to our lives today, enriching our understanding of them through contemporary wisdom (what he would later come to term *hokhma* – science, including the social sciences, as well as popular culture). In writing these essays in beautiful and elegant language which was nevertheless accessible to all (including non-Jews), he elevated style to the level of substance. As an educator and a parent, for many years I believed that these simple yet sophisticated essays could be adapted for a younger audience, and on several occasions I used them in my own classroom with middle and high school students.

In 2016 Rabbi Sacks and his team intensified their investment in resources to help Jewish educators in their work. I was privileged to be part of this initiative, and one of the projects we worked on together was two cycles of *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition*, and thereafter a cycle based on a similar approach focusing on the festivals, which we called *Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition*. Rabbi Sacks passed away between the release of the Sukkot and Hanukka editions, on the twentieth of Marḥeshvan 5781. We completed the cycle, and the team at The Rabbi Sacks Legacy has been dedicated to bringing the Torah of Rabbi Sacks to as wide an audience as possible ever since.

³ Letter 4: Jewish Education, in *Letters to the Next Generation*.

Educational Vision Behind the Family Editions

Just as *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition* is designed to make the ideas contained in the main parasha essay written by Rabbi Sacks accessible for younger audiences and families of various ages sitting around the Shabbat table, *Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition* does the same for the writings of Rabbi Sacks on the festivals. By taking sources from various areas of his writings and presenting them in manageable segments with questions for reflection and discussion, *Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition* gives families the opportunity to explore the core themes of the festivals as they are found in the writings of Rabbi Sacks. Each chapter contains several types of supporting resources and educational elements for various ages.

The following educational elements can be found in *Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition*:



IN A NUTSHELL is a short summary of the core themes of the festival.



WHAT THE HAG SAYS TO US presents a key thought extracted from the writings of Rabbi Sacks, focusing on the relevance of the festival in our times.



DEEP DIVING INTO THE TEFILLA OF THE DAY presents a central liturgical text for that festival, a background to the prayer, and a deep analysis that explores the main themes and messages from the text.



IT ONCE HAPPENED is a story that illustrates or complements the ideas found the themes of the festival as presented in the writings of Rabbi Sacks.

These sections are all followed by **REFLECTION QUESTIONS** and **POINTS TO PONDER**, which are designed to be used for reflection and conversation around the texts and the ideas found in them. Suggested answers to these questions are found in the **EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS** at the end of each chapter.



TOP TEN FACTS and FUN FACT! provide fun and easy-to-understand facts on the festival.



HIDON ON THE HAG (A QUICK QUIZ) is a fun festival quiz for the whole family. The answers to these questions can be found in the **EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS** at the end of each chapter.



HANUKKA CHALLENGES and PURIM CHALLENGES are creative activities for children that connect to the festival. They include anagrams, riddles, scavenger hunts, spot the difference, wordsearches, and dingbats.

The chapter on Pesah has a slightly different structure, and functions as an educational companion to the Seder night. It contains ideas and thoughts on ten of the core texts from the Haggada and how Rabbi Sacks

understands them. These can be found in the **DEEP DIVE** and **FURTHER THOUGHTS** sections, which are accompanied by **REFLECTION QUESTIONS** and **QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER**. This Seder night companion also includes activities, stories, and reflection questions designed to engage everyone around the Seder table, young and old alike.



EXPERIENCING THE SEDER presents a central liturgical text for that festival, a background to the prayer, and a deep analysis that explores the main themes and messages from the text.

In the Words of Rabbi Sacks

When *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition* was launched for 5779 (in October 2018), and again when the *Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition* was launched for 5781 (September 2020), Rabbi Sacks made videos to explain the vision behind the projects. Here are excerpts from these transcripts:

I have called these essays Covenant & Conversation because this for me is the essence of what Torah learning is – throughout the ages and for us now. The text of the Torah is our covenant with God; the interpretation of this text has been the subject of an ongoing conversation that began at Sinai and has never ceased. Every age has added its commentaries, and so must ours. That is what I have tried to do each week through my Covenant & Conversation essays.

That is why I am so excited by the new Family Edition of Covenant & Conversation. The Family Edition is an accompanying resource which will take the core ideas from the main Covenant & Conversation essay for each parasha, and present them in a simpler fashion, as a way of engaging older children and teenagers.

We hope you'll find this a useful resource to deepen your understanding of the covenant of our Torah, but of equal importance to engage in a meaningful conversation about our Torah with our children and the next generation. Participating in that conversation, and encouraging your children to participate with you, is a major part of what it is to be a Jew, because we are the people who never stopped learning the Book of Life, our most precious gift from the God of Life. There is nothing more beautiful or life affirming than learning Torah with your children. Give them the space not only to be your students, but also to be your teachers, and they will grow tall. That's how we can truly secure the Jewish future.

A framework for engaging with these ideas and enhancing discussion around the Shabbat table. That is what the Shabbat table is really all about.

The Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition is a resource for families based around the ḥagim, which form such crucial aspects and key moments and educational opportunities throughout the year. This is a wonderful way of starting and sustaining a conversation with your children, and that is something through which you will grow and they will grow. Jewish education has always been based around three institutions: the school, the shul, and the home, and all three are important.

Acknowledgements

We are pleased to acknowledge and thank Lillian and Moshe Tabacnic for their critical support for this series of books. Lillian and Moshe are renowned for their support for Jewish education both in Florida and beyond and we are honoured that they have partnered with us on this exciting project. On behalf of all at Koren, and the families across the Jewish world that will learn from and enjoy these volumes, thank you.

Working for both Koren Jerusalem and The Rabbi Sacks Legacy has been a privilege and an honour and has given me the opportunity to collaborate with so many talented and creative people. Thanks to Joanna Benarroch, Dan Sacker, Debby Ifield, and Jonny Lipczer at The Rabbi Sacks Legacy, who, together with Rabbi Sacks, believed in the vision and possibilities for creating these educational resources, and gave me the opportunity of a lifetime to develop exciting projects such as this one. I would also like to thank the Sacks family for their belief in and support of this and all the educational projects I have been involved in on behalf of The Rabbi Sacks Legacy. Thank you for entrusting to us the holy work of continuing the legacy of Rabbi Sacks and bringing his ideas to a younger audience.

Thank you to our team at Koren whose professionalism, creativity, and expertise can be found on every page. These include Aryeh Grossman for being my educational soundboard, Tani Bayer for the creative design, Tomi Mager for typesetting what became a very complex project, and finally to Caryn Meltz who brings everything together in a way that defies description, as well as our proofreaders, Nechama Unterman and Tali Simon. Of course, thanks must always go to our boss, the publisher Matthew Miller, for his support, leadership, and vision.

Finally, to my family, for their love, support, and inspiration. Our Shabbat table was the first of many around the world to explore the ideas of Rabbi Sacks on the *parasha* as a family using this medium, and your input and inspiration can be found throughout these volumes.

The last word goes to my teacher and Rav, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt"l*. Not a day goes past without a sense of feeling bereft without you to lead and inspire us. Your commitment and passion to bring your ideas to young people and your belief in my ability to help you to do it gives me the strength to continue with this endeavour. The *Covenant & Conversation* essay that was sent around the world for the Shabbat that fell during the *shiva*, entitled *Beginning the Journey*, explored Avraham's faith in the covenant and the promises from God, despite only experiencing the very beginning of their fulfilment in his lifetime. The essay concludes with these words:

*Leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow a life with immortality.*⁴

It is my privilege to count myself among the many who are driven to continue your journey. It is my hope that these volumes will be a significant step in that journey.

Daniel Rose
Modiin
Elul 5783

⁴ “*Hayei Sara: Beginning the Journey*,” in *Lessons in Leadership*, 23.

Rosh HaShana



ROSH HASHANA IN A NUTSHELL

The ten days that begin on Rosh HaShana and end with Yom Kippur are an intense period of preparation that leads us to the holy of holies of Jewish time, Yom Kippur. On the *Yamim Nora'im*, the Days of Awe, we can almost feel God's presence and sense His closeness. For although we know that God is always close to us, we do not always feel close to Him. He is always to be found, but we do not always seek Him out. The atmosphere in the synagogue is intense and serious (and for those who are unable to experience Rosh HaShana *shul* services, it is our challenge to find the spiritual energy to replicate this atmosphere in our own homes).

On Rosh HaShana, God judges the whole world and decides its fate for the coming year. It is as if the world has become a courtroom. God Himself is the Judge. The shofar announces that the court is in session, and we are on trial, giving an account of our lives. If taken seriously, this is a potentially life-changing experience. It forces us to ask the most fateful questions we will ever ask:

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- How shall I live?
- How have I lived until now?
- How have I used God's greatest gift: time?
- Whom have I wronged, and how can I put it right?
- Where have I failed, and how shall I overcome my failures?
- What is broken in my life and needs mending?
- What chapter will I write in the Book of Life?

These are days of reflection and introspection when we stand in the presence of God and acknowledge how short and vulnerable life really is, and how little time we have here on earth.

There is no time to waste to become the very best people we can be!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. *Aren't these questions we should ask ourselves every day? Why especially now on Rosh HaShana?*
2. *Does the recognition that life is short help or hinder the way you live your life?*
3. *Ask yourself these nine questions now. Do you have answers?*



WHAT ROSH HASHANA SAYS TO US

The genius of Judaism was to take eternal truths and translate them into time, into lived experiences. Other cultures have constructed philosophies and theologies, elaborate systems of abstract thought. Judaism prefers truth lived to truth merely thought. Ancient Greece produced the logical imagination. Judaism produced the chronological imagination, truth transposed into the calendar.

Rosh HaShana, the anniversary of the creation of humanity, invites us to live and feel the human condition in graphic ways.

Here are ten messages from Rosh HaShana that speak directly to our lives today.

1. Life is short

However much life expectancy has risen, we will not, in one lifetime, be able to achieve everything we might wish to achieve. This life is all we have. How shall we use it well? We know that we will not finish the task, but neither are we free to stand aside from it.

REFLECT

What will you try to achieve today after reflecting on this?

2. Life is a gift from God

Life itself, each day, every breath we take, is the gift of God. Life is not something we may take for granted. If we do, we will fail to celebrate it. God gives us one gift above all others, said Rambam (Maimonides): life itself, beside which everything else is secondary. Other religions have sought God in heaven, or in the afterlife, the distant past or the distant future. Here there is suffering, there reward; here chaos, there order; here pain, there balm; here poverty, there plenty. Judaism has relentlessly sought God in the here-and-now of life on earth. Yes, we believe in life after death, but it is in life before death that we truly find human greatness.

REFLECT

How does understanding this change the way you are going to live?

3. We are free

Judaism is the religion of the free human being freely responding to the God of freedom. We are not in the grip of sin. We are not determined by economic forces or psychological drives or genetically encoded impulses that we are powerless to resist. The very fact that we can do *teshuva*, that we can act differently tomorrow than we did yesterday, tells us we are free. Philosophers have found this idea difficult. So have scientists. But Judaism insists on it, and our ancestors proved it by defying every law of history, surviving against the odds, refusing to accept defeat.

REFLECT

Where do we find this concept reflected in the prayers of Rosh HaShana?

4. Life is meaningful

We are not mere accidents of matter, generated by a universe that came into being for no reason and will one day, for no reason, cease to be. We are here because a loving God brought the universe, and life, and us, into existence – a God who knows our fears, hears our prayers, believes in us more than we believe in ourselves, forgives us when we fail, lifts us when we fall, and gives us the strength to overcome despair. The historian Paul Johnson once wrote: “No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny.” He concluded: “The Jews, therefore, stand right at the centre of the perennial attempt to give human life the dignity of a purpose.” This is one of the truths of Rosh HaShana.

REFLECT

Do you have a sense of the meaning of your life?

5. Life is not easy

Judaism does not see the world through rose-tinted lenses. The sufferings of our ancestors haunt our prayers. The world we live in is not the world as it ought to be. That is why, despite every temptation, Judaism has never been able to say the Messianic Age has come, even though we await it daily. But we are not bereft of hope because we are not alone. When Jews went into exile, the *Shekhina*, the Divine Presence, went with them. God is always there, “close to all who call on Him in truth” (Tehillim 145:18). He may hide His face, but He is there. He may be silent, but He is listening to us, hearing us and healing us in ways we may not understand at the time but which become clear in retrospect.

REFLECT

Does this message from Rosh HaShana resonate with you? Can you feel God’s closeness in times of difficulty?

6. Life is still sweet

Life may be hard, but it can still be sweet, the way the challah and the apple are on Rosh HaShana when we dip them in honey. Jews have never needed wealth to be rich, or power to be strong. To be a Jew is to live for simple things: the love between husband and wife, the sacred bond between parents and children, the gift of community where we help others and others help us and where we learn that joy is doubled and grief halved by being shared. To be a Jew is to give, whether in the form of *tzedaka* or *gemilut hasadim* (acts of loving-kindness). It is to learn and never stop seeking, to pray and never stop thanking, to do *teshuva* and never stop growing. In this lies the secret of joy. Throughout history there have been hedonistic cultures that worship pleasure and ascetic cultures that deny it, but Judaism has a different approach altogether: to sanctify pleasure by making it part of the worship of God. Life is sweet when touched by the Divine.

REFLECT

Where is the sweetness in your life?



7. Our life is a work of art

Our life is the single greatest work of art we will ever make. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, in one of his earliest works, spoke about *Ish HaHalakha*, the halakhic personality and its longing to create, to make something new, original. God, too, longs for us to create and thereby become His partner in the work of renewal. “The most fundamental principle of all is that man must create himself.” That is what *teshuva* is, an act of making ourselves anew. On Rosh HaShana we step back from our life like an artist stepping back from their canvas, seeing what needs changing for the painting to be complete.

REFLECT

If you were going to create an expression of your life using any medium (e.g., visual art, poetry, prose, music, etc.), how would you do it?

8. We are what we are because of those who came before us

Our lives are not disconnected particles. We are each a letter in God’s Book of Life. But single letters, though they are the vehicles of meaning, have no meaning when they stand alone. To have meaning they must be joined to other letters to make words, sentences, paragraphs, a story, and to be a Jew is to be part of the strangest, oldest, most unexpected and counter-intuitive story there has ever been: the story of a tiny people, never large and often homeless, who nonetheless outlived the greatest empires the world has ever known – the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans, the medieval empires of Christianity and Islam, all the way to the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Each in turn thought itself immortal. Each has gone. The Jewish people still lives. But we do not start with nothing. We have inherited wealth, not material but spiritual. We are heirs to our ancestors’ greatness.

REFLECT

Think of all the ways your life has been enriched by your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents (and beyond).



9. Judaism asks great things of us and by doing so makes us great

We walk as tall as the ideals for which we live, and those of the Torah are very high indeed. We are, said Moshe, God's children (Devarim 14:1). We are called on, said the prophet Yeshayahu, to be His witnesses, His ambassadors on earth (Yeshayahu 43:10).

Time and again Jews did things thought impossible. They battled against might in the name of right. They fought against slavery. They showed that it was possible to be a nation without a land, to have influence without power, to be branded the world's pariahs yet not lose self-respect. They believed with unshakeable conviction that they would one day return to their land, and though the hope seemed absurd, it happened.

Judaism sets the bar high, and though we may keep falling short, Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur allow us to begin anew, forgiven, cleansed, undaunted, ready for the next challenge, the next year.

REFLECT

What do you think Judaism is asking of you in your life?

10. We are dust of the earth but within us is the breath of God

And finally comes the sound of the shofar, piercing our defences, a wordless cry in a religion of words, a sound produced by breath as if to tell us that all life is a mere breath – yet breath is nothing less than the spirit of God within us: “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (Bereshit 2:7).

Whether the shofar is our cry to God or God's cry to us, somehow in that *tekia*, *shevarim*, *terua* – the call, the sob, the wail – is all the emotion of the Divine-human encounter as God asks us to take His gift, life itself, and make of it something holy by acting in a way that honours God and His image on earth, humankind.

For we defeat death, not by living forever but by living by values that live forever; by doing deeds and creating blessings that will live on after us; and by attaching ourselves in the midst of time to God who lives beyond time, “the King – the living, everlasting God.”

REFLECT

Close your eyes and hear the shofar. What is it saying to you? What do you want it to say to God on your behalf?

Adapted from the introduction to The Koren Rosh HaShana Mahzor with commentary and translation by Rabbi Sacks.

“We walk as tall as the ideals for which we live.”



DEEP DIVING INTO THE TEFILLA OF THE DAY: UNETANEH TOKEF

וּנְתַנֶּה תְּקֵף קְדוּשַׁת הַיּוֹם / כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאִים
וְבוֹ תִנְשֵׂא מְלֻכּוּתְךָ / וְיִכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד כְּסָאֵךָ / וְתִשָּׁב עָלָיו בְּאַמֶּת.
אָמֵת, כִּי אַתָּה הוּא דִין וּמוֹכִיחַ, וְיִוָּדַע וְעַד
וְכֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֵה
וְתִזְכֹּר כָּל הַנְּשָׁכָחוֹת / וְתִפְתַּח אֶת סֵפֶר הַזְּכוֹנוֹת
וְיִמְאֲלוּ יְקָרָא / וְחוֹתֵם יָד כָּל אָדָם בּוֹ.

וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע / וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה דְקָה יִשְׁמַע
וּמְלֵאכִים יִחְפוּזוּן / וְחִיל וּרְעָדָה יֵאֲחָזוּן
וְיֹאמְרוּ, הֵנָּה יוֹם הַדִּין / לְפָקוֹד עַל צָבָא מְרוֹם בְּדִין
כִּי לֹא יִזְכוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּדִין
וְכָל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבִירוּן לְפָנֶיךָ כִּבְנֵי מְרוֹן.

כְּבִקְרַת רוּעָה עָדוּ / מֵעֵבִיר צֹאנוּ תַּחַת שִׁבְטוֹ
כֵּן תַּעֲבִיר וְתִסְפֹּר וְתִמְנֶנֶה / וְתִפְקֹד נַפְשׁ כָּל חַי
וְתַחֲתֶיךָ קִצְבָה לְכָל בְּרִיָּה / וְתִכְתֹּב אֶת גּוֹר דֵּינָם.

בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן / וּבַיּוֹם צוֹם כְּפוּר יִחְתַּמּוּן.
כַּמָּה יַעֲבִירוּן וְכַמָּה יִבְרֹאוּן
מִי יִחְיֶה וּמִי יָמוּת / מִי בְּקָצוּ וּמִי לֹא בְּקָצוּ
מִי בְּמַיִם וּמִי בְּאֵשׁ / מִי בְּחַרְבַּ וּמִי בְּחַיָּה / מִי בְּרַעַב וּמִי בְּצָמָא
מִי בְּרַעַשׁ וּמִי בְּמַגָּפָה / מִי בְּחַנְיָקָה וּמִי בְּסַקִּילָה.
מִי יִנּוּחַ וּמִי יִנוּעַ / מִי יִשְׁקִיט וּמִי יִטָּרַף
מִי יִשְׁלֹוּ וּמִי יִתְיַסֵּר / מִי יַעֲנֶה וּמִי יַעֲשִׂיר / מִי יִשְׁפֹּל וּמִי יִרוֹם.

וּנְתַנֶּה תְּקֵף Let us voice the power of this day's sanctity –
it is awesome, terrible;
on this day Your kingship is raised, Your throne is founded upon love,
and You, with truth, sit upon it.
In truth, it is You: Judge and Accuser, Knowing One and Witness,
writing and sealing, counting, numbering,
remembering all forgotten things,
You open the book of memories –
it is read of itself, / and every man's name is signed there.

וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל A great shofar sounds,
and a still small voice is heard,
angels rush forward / and are held by trembling, shaking;
they say, "Here is the Day of Judgment
visiting all the heavenly host for judgment –"
for they are not cleared in Your eyes in judgment.
And all who have come into this world pass before You like sheep.

כְּבִקְרַת רוּעָה As a shepherd's searching gaze meets his flock,
as he passes every sheep beneath his rod, so You too pass Yours,
count and number, and regard the soul of every living thing;
and You rule off the limit of each creation's life,
and write down the verdict for each.

בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה On Rosh HaShana it is written / and on Yom Kippur it is
sealed: / how many will pass away and how many will be born; / who
will live and who will die; / who in his due time and who before; /
who by water and who by fire; / who by sword and who by beast; /
who of hunger and who of thirst; / who by earthquake and who by
plague; / who by strangling and who by stoning; / who will rest and
who will wander; / who will be calm and who will be harassed; /
who will be at ease and who will suffer; / who will become poor and
who will grow rich; / who cast down and who raised high.

וּתְשׁוּבָה וְתַפִּלָּה וְצַדִּיקָה / מֵעֲבִירוֹן אֶת רַע הַגְּזָרָה.

FASTING CRYING GIVING
But REPENTANCE, PRAYER, and CHARITY
avert the evil of the decree.

כִּי כְשִׁמְךָ כֵּן תִּהְיֶיךָ / קָשָׁה לְכַעַס וְנוֹחַ לְרִיצוֹת
כִּי לֹא תִחְפֹּץ בְּמוֹת הַיָּמָת / כִּי אִם בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדְּרָבוֹ, וְחַיָּה
וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תִּחְפֹּד לוֹ / אִם יָשׁוּב, מִיָּד תִּקְבְּלוּ.
אָמֵת, כִּי אַתָּה הוּא יוֹצֵרִם / וְיִוָּדַע יִצְרָם / כִּי הֵם בְּשָׂר וָדָם.

אָדָם יְסוּדוֹ מֵעֶפֶר / וְסוֹפוֹ לְעֶפֶר
בְּנַפְשׁוֹ יִבְיֵא לְחָמוֹ / מִשׁוּל כְּחָרָס הַנֶּשֶׁבֶר
כְּצִיר יֵבֶשׁ, וְכַצִּיץ נוֹבֵל / כְּצֶל עוֹבֵר, וְכַעֲנַן כְּלָה
וְכִרוּחַ נוֹשֶׁבֶת, וְכַאֲבָק פּוֹרֵחַ, וְכַחֲלוֹם יְעוּף.

וְאַתָּה הוּא מֶלֶךְ, אֵל חַי וְקַיִם.

כִּי כְשִׁמְךָ For as Your name is, so is Your renown:
hard to anger, and readily appeased.

For You do not desire the condemned man's death,
but that he may come back from his ways, and live.
To the very day he dies, You wait for him;
and if he comes back: You welcome him at once.

Truly, it was You who formed them,
You know the forces moving them: / they are but flesh and blood.

Man is founded in dust / and ends in dust.
He lays down his soul to bring home bread. / He is like a broken shard,
like grass dried up, like a faded flower,
like a fleeting shadow, like a passing cloud,
like a breath of wind, like whirling dust, like a dream that slips away.

AND YOU ARE KING –
THE LIVING, EVERLASTING GOD.

Background to the tefilla

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.

We do not know exactly who composed *Unetaneh Tokef* or when. A famous tradition dates it to the time when Jews in northern Europe were suffering brutal Christian persecution. It tells of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, how he was pressured by the bishop, who was also mayor of the town, to convert. Eventually, after repeated prevarication, the bishop subjected him to cruel punishment, inflicting on him wounds from which he would die. On Rosh HaShana, sensing that he was on the verge of death, Rabbi Amnon asked to be carried to the synagogue. As he entered, he found the congregation about to say the *Kedusha*, and asked for permission to say a prayer as his dying words. He then said *Unetaneh Tokef*, and died.

The discovery of ancient manuscripts in the Cairo Geniza suggests, however, that the prayer may be older than this. This and other factors suggest that, in its original form, it was composed in Israel several centuries before.

Analysis

It is structured in four movements.

The first sets the scene. The heavenly court is assembled. God sits in the seat of judgement. 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.

The third is 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.

The fourth 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.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. *What are the core themes of Rosh HaShana found in the text of this tefilla?*
2. *Why is it teshuva, tefilla, and tzedaka that can avert God's evil decree?*
3. *Do you think this is primarily a prayer of hope or despair?*

“No prayer more powerfully defines the image of the Days of Awe than does *Unetaneh Tokef*.”

Tefilla text and commentary taken from The Koren Rosh HaShana Maḥzor with commentary and translation by Rabbi Sacks.



TOP TEN ROSH HASHANA FACTS

1. Rosh HaShana is the anniversary of the creation of the world.
2. The name of the festival in the Torah is not Rosh HaShana, but rather *Yom Terua* (the Day of Blasting). The name Rosh HaShana comes from the Mishna.
3. There are actually four New Years mentioned in the Mishna: the new year for trees (fifteenth of Shvat); the new year for tithes (first of Elul); the new year for counting the reign of the king and for counting the months of the calendar (first of Nisan); and the new year for years (first of Tishrei).
4. Rosh HaShana is the only festival that is always two days long, even in Israel.
5. We blow the shofar one hundred times on each day of Rosh HaShana (unless it is Shabbat).
6. The shofar is generally a ram's horn (although it can be from other animals) to remind us of the ram that was caught in a bush that Avraham used as a sacrifice in place of his son Yitzhak.
7. There are various symbolic foods we eat on the evening of Rosh HaShana, called *simanim*, each one representing a blessing for the new year. The best-known example is dipping apples in honey for a sweet new year.
8. The traditional Rosh HaShana greeting is "*Leshana tova tikatev vetehatem*" (May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year).
9. Many people have the custom to do *Tashlikh* on the first afternoon of Rosh HaShana (unless it falls on Shabbat, in which case we move it to the second day). This involves saying a special prayer and symbolically casting away our sins at a body of fresh water. (Some people throw breadcrumbs into the water to represent the casting away of the sins.)
10. There is a custom not to sleep during the day of Rosh HaShana so that we start the year in the way that we mean to continue it – utilising every minute.





IT ONCE HAPPENED...

Once it happened in the days of Rav Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, the chief rabbi of pre-State Israel, that a group of workers, under pressure to complete a building in one of the neighbourhoods of Jerusalem, worked on Rosh HaShana.

People living in the area sent word to Rav Kook, expecting him to order them immediately to stop. Instead, he sent a representative to blow shofar for the workers.

They stopped working to listen. Some began to cry. When the blowing was completed, they decided of their own accord not to continue working on the holy day. Some ran home, changed their clothes, and joined Rav Kook at his yeshiva for the rest of Rosh HaShana.



POINTS TO PONDER

1. *Why do you think Rav Kook chose to approach these workers in this way rather than ordering them to stop working?*
2. *Why do you think the shofar had this impact on the workers?*
3. *What Rosh HaShana lessons can we learn from this story?*

“Rav Kook sent a representative to blow shofar for the workers. They stopped working to listen. Some began to cry.”



HIDON ON THE HAG (A QUICK QUIZ)

1. What do the words "Rosh HaShana" mean?
2. What date is Rosh HaShana?
3. How many names does Rosh HaShana have?
4. What are the names of the three kinds of notes we blow on the shofar?
5. How many notes do we blow on the shofar on each day of Rosh HaShana?
6. Name five of the *simanim* (symbolic foods) we eat on Rosh HaShana evening.
7. Why do we eat pomegranates on Rosh HaShana?
8. What kind of water is necessary to do *Tashlikh* on Rosh HaShana?
9. What are the three sections of the Rosh HaShana Musaf *Amida*?
10. Why do we have the custom to eat a new fruit on the second night of Rosh HaShana?

EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS

ROSH HASHANA IN A NUTSHELL

1. Anyone who wishes to live a life with meaning will find themselves asking these or similar questions. A thinking and reflective person will address them more often than once a year. Rosh HaShana ensures that even someone for whom introspection does not come naturally will still address these questions, and consider the answers to them, every year on the day that encourages the process of *heshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting/introspection), when we stand in the presence of God and consider our lives.

2. The fleeting nature of life can lead to depression and a sense of nihilism and emptiness, or conversely it can inspire a search for meaning, and an aspiration to make every minute and every day count. Rosh HaShana and Judaism in general encourage the second approach.

3. From a young child to an elderly person, these questions are the basic questions of a self-aware being who aspires to the betterment of their life. This is a natural wish even in young children. Having an adult to guide them in the asking and answering of these questions will be a good catalyst for the process.

DEEP DIVING INTO THE TEFILLA OF THE DAY

1. From the list of ten themes found above in “What Rosh HaShana Says to Us,” the following are clearly expressed in this *tefilla*:

- Life is short; life is a gift from God.
- We are free to act.
- Life is not easy.
- We are dust of the earth but within us is the breath of God.

Further Rosh HaShana themes also found here are:

- The awesome nature of the day

- God as King; God as a Judge and Rosh HaShana as a Day of Judgement
- The power of the sound of the shofar
- Our future is in the balance and is decided on this day.
- We can still affect the decision through acts of *teshuva*, *tefilla*, and *tzedaka*.
- God is a forgiving God.

2. These three mitzvot represent the best actions we can take to repair the three paradigm relationships a person can have: with ourselves (*teshuva* – repentance); with God (*tefilla* – prayer); and with other humans (*tzedaka* – charity). To make a change we must focus on improving these areas in our life.

3. While there are aspects of despair found in this prayer (such as the vulnerability and fleeting nature of human life), at its core there is a profound statement of hope and positivity. It declares that our fate is ultimately within our control, that we have the secret to averting the evil decree, and that God is a forgiving God.

IT ONCE HAPPENED ON ROSH HASHANA...

1. Rav Kook was famous for his love of all Jews. Rather than showing disapproval for their decision to work on Rosh HaShana, which may have alienated them further from Judaism, he offered them the chance to hear the shofar at their workplace. He showed that he cared, and this approach ultimately brought them closer to Judaism.

2. The sound of the shofar is a powerful sound that reflects the emotions of the soul. Perhaps the workers connected to its spiritual dimension, and it touched their souls. Perhaps it was a familiar sound from their youth and it spoke to them once more and woke them from the haze of the pressures of adult life. Or perhaps it represented the love of Rav Kook for his fellow Jew and it was this that moved them.

3. Some of the lessons we can learn are: the power of the sound of the shofar, if we are only open to hearing it; the power of acts of love and kindness, more important even than *teshuva* and repairing our relationship with God; and that fixing our human relationships comes first.

ḤIDON ON THE ḤAG (A QUICK QUIZ)

1. Head of the Year (not New Year!).
2. First and second of Tishrei.
3. Five: Rosh HaShana; *Yom Terua* (Day of Blasting); *Yom HaDin* (Day of Judgement); *Yom HaZikaron* (Day of Remembrance); *HaYom Harat Olam* (the Day of the Creation of the World).
4. *Tekia*; *shevarim*; *terua*.
5. One hundred.
6. Apples and honey; dates; pomegranates; carrots; leeks; beets; squash/gourds; fish; and the head of a fish or sheep. Your family may have additional traditions.
7. Because the many seeds are meant to represent the 613 mitzvot in the Torah.
8. “Flowing water,” preferably a stream with fish.
9. *Malkhuyot* (kingship); *Zikhronot* (remembrances); and *Shofarot* (shofar blasts).
10. Because there is a difference of opinion as to whether the second day of Rosh HaShana is a new festival or a continuation of the first day, we eat a fruit that we have not eaten for thirty days so that we can make a *Sheheḥeyanu* blessing to cover both the fruit and, if needed, the new festival of the second day.

