

# THE HALACHAH SHEET

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## Rosh Hashanah

### Erev Rosh Hashanah

- **Fasting.** There is a widespread minhag to fast on Erev Rosh Hashanah.<sup>1</sup> Most people fast only until *minchah gedolah* (a half hour after *chatzos*). If one davens *minchah* before breaking his fast, he should insert ענונו into his Shemoneh Esrei.<sup>2</sup>
- **Hataras Nedarim.** After *shacharis* on Erev Rosh Hashanah we do *hataras nedarim* to free ourselves of any vows before we stand in judgment. If you don't understand the Hebrew text, you should say it in English so your request for annulment can take effect.<sup>3</sup>
- **Mikveh.** It is customary for men to go to the mikveh on Erev Rosh Hashanah.<sup>4</sup> The ideal time to go is from one hour before *chatzos*.<sup>5</sup>
- **Haircut.** One should get a haircut and shave before Rosh Hashanah in a display of confidence that Hashem will act with *chesed* when judging him.<sup>6</sup> Ideally this should be done before *chatzos*.
- **Minchah.** You should daven *minchah* on Erev Rosh Hashanah with great concentration, as it is the last *tefillah* of the year and thus holds a special power.<sup>7</sup>

### Simanim

- The start of the new year is compared to the conception of a baby. In both instances, the smallest of details can leave lasting effects. Everything we do on Rosh Hashanah has an impact and is a "*siman*" for the year to come. Therefore, we do many specific things and avoid others in order to start our year in the best and most positive way.

### Food

- Chazal<sup>8</sup> tell us to eat certain foods on Rosh Hashanah as a *siman* for a good year. These foods' taste, name, and even gematria were taken into account when determining whether they are appropriate to eat on Rosh Hashanah.
- **When.** *Simanim* should be eaten on the first night. There are different minhagim regarding the second night.
- **Berachos.** Many of the foods eaten for the *simanim* require a berachah of *ha'eitz* or *ha'adamah*, a *shehecheyanu*, and an accompanying *yehi ratzon* (printed in the machzor).
  - **Ha'eitz** — The fruits that are included in the *simanim* are considered "non-meal type foods" and therefore require their own berachah (just one will exempt all of them) despite their being eaten during a bread meal.<sup>9</sup> The berachah of *ha'eitz* takes precedence over the berachah of *ha'adamah*. A fruit from the *Shivas Ha'minim* takes precedence over all other fruit, and the date should be eaten first. The apple with honey should be eaten second.<sup>10</sup>
  - **Ha'adamah** — The *poskim* debate whether the *simanim* that require the berachah of *ha'adamah* qualify as "non-

meal type foods" and thus require their own berachah during a bread meal. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach holds that you can make a *ha'adamah* on the gourd;<sup>11</sup> however, others disagree.

- **Shehecheyanu** — If one of the *simanim* is a fruit that you haven't yet eaten in its new season (usually the fresh date or pomegranate), the berachah of *shehecheyanu* is required. The new fruit should **not** be on the table during Kiddush on the first night because Kiddush contains the berachah of *shehecheyanu*, and we want to avoid a *safek* of whether to recite the berachah again on the new fruit.<sup>12</sup> On the second night, however, a new fruit should specifically be in front of the one making Kiddush. We do this because there are *poskim* who hold that the second day of Rosh Hashanah doesn't require its own independent *shehecheyanu*. Therefore, out of concern for those opinions, we make our *shehecheyanu* also cover the fruit.<sup>13</sup>
- **Yehi Razton-** A *yehi razton* is recited over each *siman*. As you recite each one, it is a time to be מעורר בתשובה.<sup>14</sup> You should answer amen after someone else says a *yehi ratzon*.<sup>15</sup> If you don't want to eat a specific *siman* (for example, the fish head), you can still say the *yehi ratzon*, as there is an alternative text in the Gemara that only requires one to **see** the *siman* and not necessarily eat it.
  - **Procedure.** Take one *siman*, make the berachah (followed by a *shehecheyanu* when applicable), taste a bit of the fruit, say the *yehi ratzon*, and then eat more of the *siman*.<sup>16</sup> When the *siman* doesn't require a berachah, say the *yehi ratzon* and then eat it.<sup>17</sup>

- **Dessert.** The berachos that you made on the *simanim* cover any foods of the same berachah that you may eat for dessert.<sup>18</sup>
- **Sour and Bitter.** Foods that have a sour or bitter taste should not be eaten on Rosh Hashanah. Some examples are pickles, horseradish, grapefruit, and sour sticks.<sup>19</sup>
- **Nuts.** The minhag is not to eat **tree** nuts on Rosh Hashanah (peanuts, therefore, are permitted). The *poskim* give two reasons for avoiding nuts: 1) Nuts cause an increase in saliva that could interfere with one's davening; and 2) אגוז (nut) has the same gematria as טח (sin).<sup>20</sup>

### Behavior

- It is very important not to get angry on Rosh Hashanah. Rather, you should be in a state of *simchah* as a good *siman* for the new year.<sup>21</sup>

1. שו"ע (תקפא:ב) 2. מ"ב (שם סקט"ו) 3. ח"א כלל קלח סע' ח' 4. רמ"א (תקפא:ד) 5. מ"ב (שם סקט"ו) 6. מ"ב (שם סקט"ה) 7. מט"א (תקפא סע' נ"ז) 8. כריתות (ו.) 9. מ"ב (תקפא:סק"ג) 10. לוח א"י בשם הגרי"ח זנפולד 11. הליכות שלמה פ"א אות י"ח ע' שש"כ פ' מ"ז סע' מ"ד 12. מט"א (תר סע' ה', י"ג) 14. מ"ב (תקפא:סק"ב) 15. כף החיים סק"ו 16. תקפא:סק"ד 17. הגרצ"פ פראנק מקראי קודש ימים נוראים ס' ז 18. פסקי תשובות תקפ"ג אות ב' 19. מ"ב (תקפא:סק"ה). מט"א ס"ג 20. רמ"א (תקפא:ב) 21. מ"ב (תקפא:סק"ה)

**Sleep**

- It is customary to refrain from sleeping (in a bed) during the days of Rosh Hashanah.<sup>22</sup> This is based on a Gemara *Yerushalmi* that says that if one sleeps on Rosh Hashanah, his mazel sleeps. Sitting idly is equivalent to sleeping, so you should try to fill your day with learning and saying *Tehillim*.<sup>23</sup>
  - **Leniencies.** If tiredness is interfering with your ability to daven or learn properly, it is permitted to sleep in order to get more strength.<sup>24</sup> After *chatzos* on the first day and on the entire second day of Rosh Hashanah, the custom is to be more lenient.<sup>25</sup>

**Tefillah**

**Shemoneh Esrei**

- **Requests.** On a regular Shabbos or yom tov, it is forbidden to verbally make בקשות for physical needs (health, livelihood, etc.). However, requests pertaining to *ruchniyus* are always permitted.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, on Rosh Hashanah you can daven even for things related to *gashmiyus*.<sup>27</sup> (These requests should be added to Elokai Netzor). The appropriate way to express a *gashmiyus* request is to ask for the desired thing as a means to better help you in your *avodas Hashem* ("למעןך").
- **ותן פחדך.** If you mistakenly concluded the third berachah of Shemoneh Esrei (אתה קדוש) without inserting the lengthy Rosh Hashanah additions (... ותן פחדך...), you must skip over them and continue with "אתה בחרתנו".<sup>28</sup>

**Bowing**

- **Kneeling on the Floor.** On Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to bow in a kneeling position on the floor during Aleinu. However, it is an *issur d'rabbanan* to kneel with one's head on a stone floor, and the minhag has extended this to any type of floor.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, place a separation between your head and the floor to avoid this.<sup>30</sup> Many also put paper towels under their knees. This is for a practical reason (so their pants don't get dirty), and not for a halachic reason.
- **Aleinu.** During one's silent Shemoneh Esrei one should bow slightly when saying "ואנחנו כורעים".<sup>31</sup>

**Shofar**

**The Mitzvah**

- **Reason.** Hearing the shofar being blown is *the* mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah (the Torah calls the day "יום תרועה"). The blasts serve as a spiritual alarm clock meant to awaken us to do *teshuvah*.
- **Breakdown.** The Gemara<sup>32</sup> derives from *pesukim* that we must blow three sets of "*teruah*," each preceded and followed by a *tekiyah*, totaling nine sounds. However, opinions differ as to what a *teruah* is: three medium sounds, nine short sounds, or both together. Chazal instituted that we fulfill all the opinions, which yields thirty sounds (nine, nine, and twelve). In order to "confuse the Satan," an additional thirty blasts are blown before *mussaf*. It's customary to blow another forty blasts after *mussaf* to reach a total of one hundred blasts. In some places additional blasts are blown as

a *chumrah* to fulfill other opinions of how the blasts are supposed to sound.

- **Hearing.** The entire length of the blast must be heard.<sup>33</sup> If you heard another sound simultaneously (for example, someone coughing or dragging their chair), it is considered as though you heard the shofar, unless the other sound completely drowned out the sound of the shofar.<sup>34</sup> You should try to focus on hearing the sounds and avoid spacing out.
- **Standing.** The minhag is to stand whenever the shofar is blown. The *requirement* to stand only applies to the thirty blasts blown during *mussaf*. Therefore, during those blasts you should avoid leaning on anything (to the extent that if the item you're leaning on would be pulled away, you would fall), as that is not considered standing.<sup>35</sup>
- **Kavanah.** You must have *kavanah* to be *yotzei* the mitzvah of hearing the shofar. In addition, you should have thoughts of *teshuvah* and willingness to improve.
- **Talking.** It is forbidden to talk from when you hear the berachos over the shofar until the final blast.<sup>36</sup> However, during that span of time you **can** sing along to the *tefillos* and say Asher Yatzar after using the bathroom.<sup>37</sup> You can learn during this time, but it should be done by reading with your eyes and not verbally.
- **Eating.** You should not eat more than a *k'beitzah* of *mezonos* foods before fulfilling the mitzvah of hearing the shofar.<sup>38</sup>

**Minhagim**

**Greetings**

- **How.** The minhag is to greet and bless everyone on the nights of Rosh Hashanah.<sup>39</sup>
  - On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to say: "לשנה טובה תכתב ותחתם לאלתר לחיים טובים ושלום"
  - On the second night: "גמר חתימה טובה".

**Tashlich**

- It is customary to say the last three *pesukim* of *sefer Michah* at a body of water on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>40</sup> This is known as Tashlich. Many say the additional *tefillos* that are printed in the *machzor*, but there is no obligation to do so.
- **Reason.** There are numerous reasons given for Tashlich. Some say it is as a *zecher* for Akeidas Yitzchak. When Avraham was on his way to the Akeidah, the Satan tried to stop him by blocking his way with a river. Avraham entered the river until the water reached his neck, and then he cried out to Hashem, whereupon the Satan disappeared.<sup>41</sup>
- **When.** The time to do Tashlich is after *minchah* on the first day of Rosh Hashanah.<sup>42</sup> If you didn't do it then, you can do it until Hoshana Rabbah.
- **Where.** The ideal place to do Tashlich is at a natural body of water (an ocean, lake, river). When this is too difficult, it can be done at a water pit, a fish tank, or a *keilim mikveh*.
- **Fish.** Preferably, there should be fish in the water as a *siman* that just as *ayin hara* doesn't affect fish, so too it shouldn't affect us. It is forbidden to feed the fish on yom tov.<sup>43</sup>

22.רמ"א (תקפ"ג:ב) מ"ב (שם:סק"ט) 24.הליכות שלמה פ"א אות כ"ד מ"ב (שם) 26.הליכות שלמה הפילה ידי: 27.הליכות שלמה פ"א אות ט"ו מ"ב (תקפ"ב:סק"ט) 28.מ"ב (תקפ"ב:סק"ט) 29.מ"ב (קלא:סק"מ) 30.רמב"ם (ה"ל ע"ז נז): 31.הרב נבנצל 32.ר"ה (לג:לד.) מ"ב (תקפ"ב:סק"ט) 33.מ"ב (תקפ"ב:סק"ט) 34.מ"ב (תקפ"ב:סק"ט) 35.מ"ב (תקפ"ב:סק"ט) 36.שו"ע (תקפ"ב:ג) 37.הליכות שלמה פ"ב אות ט"ז ע"ג. 38.אשי ישראל עמ' תקמ"ד מ"ב (תקפ"ב:סק"ה) 40.מ"ב (תקפ"ב:סק"ט) 41.מ"ב (שם) 42.מ"ב (שם) 43.שו"ע (תצ"ב)