

OLAMI MENTORSHIP



ROSH HASHANA & YOM KIPPUR UNPACKED

A TWO-PART SESSION FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES



PART ONE: THE ANNUAL AUDIT

Imagine that you work for a company that, once a year, conducts a complete audit of the organization. This isn't simply a review of its finances. It is a deep dive into every aspect of the business. The leadership looks at the company's overall health and productivity, examines every department, and evaluates every employee, from the CEO to the person who cleans the building. They ask: Is this person contributing? Is this department fulfilling its purpose? What is working, what isn't, and what needs to change? Ultimately, they have to make decisions about the future. Who will continue in their role? Who needs to grow? Who needs more resources? And who may no longer have a place in the organization?

**NOW IMAGINE THAT THIS HAPPENS EVERY YEAR, ON
THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMPANY'S FOUNDING.
IN A SENSE, THAT IS THE IDEA BEHIND ROSH HASHANAH.**



Rosh Hashanah marks the creation of Adam HaRishon, the first human being. Each year, on this anniversary, Judaism teaches that The Almighty takes a fresh look at His creation and, in particular, at humanity. The Gemara in Masechet Rosh Hashanah describes kol ba'ei olam, all of humanity, passing before The Almighty individually. Each person is examined on his or her own.

The question is not simply, “Is the world functioning?” It is: **“What about me? Am I fulfilling the purpose for which I was created? Am I contributing what I am capable of contributing? What have I accomplished with the year I was given, and what should my role be in the year ahead?”**

That changes the way we look at Rosh Hashanah. It is not simply the Jewish New Year, a holiday with special foods, prayers, and a shofar. It is the day when we stop the ordinary routine of life and recognize that our lives themselves are being evaluated.

If you knew that you were about to walk into that meeting, you would probably want to prepare.





SO HOW DOES AN EMPLOYEE PREPARE FOR AN AUDIT?

PREPARING FOR THE AUDIT: ELUL

You wouldn't wait until the morning of the meeting. You would start looking at your year in advance. You would review your performance, think about what you accomplished and where you fell short, and look honestly at what worked and what didn't. You might even ask someone you trust for an honest assessment: How am I doing? What am I missing? Where could I be better?

Most importantly, you would want to walk into that meeting knowing yourself.

That is one of the ideas behind the Jewish month of Elul, the month leading up to Rosh Hashanah. Elul is a time to step back from the rush of everyday life and make time for honest self-reflection.

What did I do with the year I was given? What am I proud of? Where did I make mistakes? Which relationships became stronger, and which ones did I neglect? What kind of person have I become? And perhaps most importantly:

IS THAT THE PERSON I WANT TO BE?

The goal isn't to beat ourselves up. The goal is to be honest, because you can't improve something you aren't willing to examine.

That is why Jewish tradition gives us a period of preparation before Rosh Hashanah. We identify the areas that need attention, think about the changes we want to make, and begin the process of teshuvah, which literally means “return”: returning to the person we were meant to be and to the relationship with The Almighty that we want to have.

And then, after weeks of preparation, Rosh Hashanah arrives.

*THE AUDIT IS NO LONGER SOMETHING WE ARE ANTICIPATING.
IT IS HERE.*





ROSH HASHANAH: THE AUDIT BEGINS

Interestingly enough, another name for Rosh Hashanah is Yom Teruah, the Day of Shofar Blowing. The shofar is so central to the day that the Torah itself refers to Rosh Hashanah by this name. The shofar is a ram's horn, and it is sounded during the Rosh Hashanah service each day of the holiday, except when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat. The shofar is at the heart of the Rosh Hashanah service. During the prayers, we blow the shofar in connection with three central themes: Malchuyot — Kingship/God's sovereignty, Zichronot — Remembrances, and Shofarot — Shofar blasts.

MALCHUYOT: WHO IS THE CEO?

Imagine walking into your annual performance review. Before discussing your accomplishments, you need to know who you're working for and what the organization is actually trying to accomplish. That's Malchuyot.

We begin Rosh Hashanah by recognizing that The Almighty is King. He created the world, gives our lives purpose, and determines what that purpose is. We don't get to decide for ourselves what makes a successful life. Before evaluating how well we are doing, we first have to understand what we were created to do.

The first question of Rosh Hashanah is therefore not, "How did I do?" It is:

"WHO AM I WORKING FOR, AND WHAT DOES HE EXPECT FROM ME?"

ZICHRONOT: WHAT DOES THE AUDIT SHOW?

Then comes Zichronot, remembrance.

Now we get to the actual review. The year we've just lived doesn't simply disappear. Our choices matter. Our actions matter. The people we've helped matter. The opportunities we've taken and those we've missed matter.

It's almost as if The Almighty is playing back the tapes of a camera that has been recording us all year long. He sees not only what we did, but our thoughts, our choices, and even our motives. Nothing is lost. Nothing is forgotten.

The Gemara describes every person passing before The Almighty individually. This isn't simply a review of humanity as a whole.

It is personal.

Zichronot asks us to consider: **As The Almighty plays back the tapes of my year, what does He see? How did I do?**



SHOFAROT: WHAT AM I PART OF?

And then comes Shofarot. After looking honestly at our year, we have to respond. And the shofar gives us a language for that response. There are several powerful ideas contained in the sound of the shofar.

First, the shofar is an alarm clock.

The Rambam describes the shofar as a wake-up call. He says it is as if the shofar is saying: "Wake up, you sleepers, from your sleep. Arise from your slumber. Examine your actions, return in teshuvah, and remember your Creator."

That is such a powerful message for Rosh Hashanah. Because it is so easy to sleepwalk through life. We get caught up in our routines, our schedules, our work, our distractions. We spend an entire year moving from one thing to the next without stopping to ask whether we are actually living the life we want to live.

And then, on Rosh Hashanah, the shofar blasts. Wake up. Stop. Look around. Break out of the monotony. Don't let another year pass on autopilot.

The shofar is telling us: Do something. Change something. Become something.



Second, the shofar takes us back to Sinai.

The shofar was sounding when The Almighty revealed Himself to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and gave us the Torah. That was the moment our relationship with The Almighty became a covenant. We weren't simply given a set of laws. We entered into a relationship and accepted a mission.

So when we hear the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, we are reminded of the moment when our people stood at Sinai and said, in essence, “We are in. We accept this relationship. We accept this mission.” The shofar connects us to that moment.

Third, the shofar points us toward the future.

The prophets describe a future time when a great shofar will be sounded, heralding the ultimate redemption and the gathering of the Jewish people.

So the shofar connects us to the entire story.

It reminds us where we came from. It reminds us of the covenant we entered into. And it reminds us where we are ultimately going.

We are not just individuals living isolated lives. We are part of a story that began thousands of years ago and is still unfolding.



And fourth, the shofar is a cry.

There are moments when words aren't enough. When we are overwhelmed, frightened, broken, or simply don't know what to say, we cry out.

The broken sounds of the shofar can feel like that kind of cry.

And perhaps that is one of the most profound things about the shofar. It allows us to stand before The Almighty without pretending that we have everything figured out.

“The Almighty, I am here. I need You. I can't do this alone.”

We have looked at our year. We have seen where we succeeded and where we fell short.

Now the shofar reminds us: we don't have to do it alone.

We can turn to The Almighty. We can cry out to Him. We can ask Him to help us change.





That is the message of Shofarot:

**WAKE UP. REMEMBER WHERE YOU CAME FROM.
LOOK TOWARD WHERE YOU'RE GOING. AND CRY
OUT TO THE ALMIGHTY FOR HELP GETTING THERE.**

The three themes of Rosh Hashanah now come together:

Malchuyot: Who is my King, and what am I here to accomplish?

Zichronot: What does the review of my year reveal?

Shofarot: Having seen where I am, how will I respond? Will I hear the call and answer it?

And that brings us to the next question:

NOW THAT I'VE SEEN WHERE I AM, WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

WHAT DOES ROSH HASHANAH ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?

If Rosh Hashanah is the day of the audit, Judaism gives us practices that help us enter the day with the right mindset.

Prayer

Rosh Hashanah is filled with prayer. We use a special prayer book called a machzor, which contains the prayers and themes unique to Rosh Hashanah.

Much of the service focuses on Malchuyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot: recognizing The Almighty as King, reflecting on our lives and actions, and thinking about our relationship with The Almighty and our larger mission.

Rosh Hashanah is also an opportunity to speak to The Almighty in our own words. If you were sitting across from the CEO of the universe, This is a time for self-reflection, asking for your year to be renewed, for a good year of health, happiness, success, and of course any personal requests?

Festive Meals and Symbolic Foods

Rosh Hashanah is not only a serious day. It is also a Yom Tov, a holiday, and we celebrate with festive meals, Kiddush, and challah. Even the food carries a message.

We dip the challah in honey and traditionally eat apples dipped in honey, asking for a sweet year. We also eat various simanim, symbolic foods that express our hopes for the coming year. We may eat pomegranate and ask that our merits increase like its many seeds, or eat the head of a fish and express the hope that we should be a “head and not a tail,” leaders rather than followers. Different communities have additional *simanim* and traditions.

Even eating can become an opportunity to be intentional about the year we hope to create.



Rosh Hashanah Greetings

On Rosh Hashanah, even the way we greet one another reflects the meaning of the day. Jews traditionally wish each other Ketivah v'Chatimah Tovah, expressing the hope that the person will be inscribed and sealed for a good year.

We're not simply wishing someone a nice holiday. We're reminding each other what this day is really about.

Tashlich

Traditionally, Rosh Hashana is also the time to participate in Tashlich, walking to a body of water and reciting special prayers that symbolically express our desire to cast away the sins of the previous year.

It gives physical expression to an important idea: We don't have to remain trapped by the person we were yesterday. We can let go of the past and move forward.

The prayers, shofar, food, greetings, and other traditions work together to create an experience in which we step out of ordinary life, reflect on the year we've lived, and think about the year we want to live.

But the audit doesn't end on Rosh Hashanah.





PART TWO: FROM THE AUDIT TO A GAME PLAN



THE TEN DAYS OF TESHUVAH

So you've had the audit. You've sat down with the CEO. You've looked honestly at your year, seen where you've succeeded, and recognized where you need to improve.

And now imagine that the CEO says something unexpected: "I'm not firing you. I'm giving you time."

You have the next ten days to come up with a game plan. What are you going to change? What are you going to do differently? What do you need to work on so that you can become the employee you need to become and the resource to the company that you were created to be?

That's essentially the opportunity of the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah, the Ten Days of Repentance from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur.

Rosh Hashanah gives us the audit. The Aseret Yemei Teshuvah give us the opportunity to respond.

Maybe we have a relationship to repair. Maybe we owe someone an apology. Maybe we need to break a habit. Maybe we have neglected our relationship with The Almighty.

The question isn't simply, "What did I do wrong?" It is:

I "WHAT AM I GOING TO DO DIFFERENTLY?"

This is what teshuvah is about. It means "returning": recognizing the gap between the person I am and the person I can become, and taking concrete steps to close that gap.

TAKING THE PERIOD SERIOUSLY

The seriousness of these days is reflected in Jewish practice. During this period, we add special Selichot, prayers asking The Almighty for forgiveness and mercy. We become more careful and deliberate in our mitzvah observance and try to be more meticulous about things we may take for granted during the rest of the year.

There are also changes in our daily prayers that reflect the holiness of this period. We add special passages to the Amidah, the silent devotion, and recite Avinu Malkeinu, “Our Father, Our King.”

That name captures something profound about these days. The Almighty is both Avinu, our Father, who loves us and wants us to succeed, and Malkeinu, our King, before whom we are accountable.

The combination of closeness and judgment is at the heart of the High Holidays. We are being evaluated, but we are not standing before a distant judge. We are standing before a Father who wants us to return to Him and become the people we are capable of becoming.

The Aseret Yemei Teshuvah are our opportunity to demonstrate that we are taking the audit seriously and to put our game plan into action.

And then we arrive at Yom Kippur.





YOM KIPPUR: THE FINAL MEETING

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish year. It is a day when virtually everything stops. Businesses close, people step away from their normal routines, and Jewish communities around the world gather in synagogues for an extended day of prayer. Even Jews who may not be as connected to Jewish life throughout the year make an effort to attend synagogue on Yom Kippur. There is something about this day that reaches people on a very deep level.

If Rosh Hashanah was the audit and the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah were the days we were given to develop our game plan, Yom Kippur is the final meeting.

Teshuvah: Making the Change Real.

The central idea of Yom Kippur is teshuvah, returning. Teshuvah involves recognizing where we went wrong and deciding to change. Our tradition identifies several components:

1. Recognize where we went wrong and regret our actions.
2. Stop the harmful behavior.
3. Confess our mistakes to The Almighty.
4. Ask forgiveness when we have hurt another person.
5. Resolve not to repeat the mistake.

There is an important distinction here. Yom Kippur can atone for wrongs between a person and The Almighty, but it does not automatically erase wrongs committed against another person. If we hurt someone, we need to make the effort to apologize and seek forgiveness.

The Day We Become More Spiritual.

For approximately 25 hours, we step away from many of our physical needs:

- Eating and drinking
- Washing
- Applying lotions or oils
- Marital relations
- Wearing leather shoes

The purpose is not to punish ourselves. It is to create space to focus on something deeper. Throughout the year, our attention is often consumed by work, food, comfort, possessions, entertainment, and the physical demands of life. On Yom Kippur, we deliberately step away from those things and focus on our spiritual selves.



In this sense, Yom Kippur gives us an opportunity to experience what it might mean to live, for one day, with our physical distractions pushed aside and our relationship with The Almighty at the center.

The Day of Forgiveness.

There is also a powerful historical reason Yom Kippur became the day of forgiveness.

After the Jewish people left Egypt, they received the Torah at Mount Sinai. Shortly afterward, they committed the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe descended from the mountain, saw what had happened, and shattered the first set of tablets.

Moshe then returned to The Almighty and pleaded on behalf of the Jewish people. He spent another forty days on the mountain, asking The Almighty to forgive them. On Yom Kippur, The Almighty accepted that plea and told Moshe, “Salachti kidvarecha”, “I have forgiven, as you have asked.”

Yom Kippur therefore became more than simply a day of judgment. It became the day that represents the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation.

WE CAN COME BACK. WE CAN REPAIR. WE CAN BEGIN AGAIN.



The Prayers of Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur contains more prayer than any other day of the Jewish year. Guided by the special machzor, prayer book, we focus on examining our actions, confessing our mistakes, asking for forgiveness and an opportunity to change our ways.

The day begins with the haunting prayer of Kol Nidrei. Kol Nidrei is a powerful declaration in which we release ourselves from vows and commitments we made, creating a sense of freedom to enter Yom Kippur with a clean slate before The Almighty.

During the services, we recite Al Chet, a long confession of the different ways we may have sinned. We also hear the Torah, say Yizkor in memory of loved ones who have passed away, and recount the Yom Kippur service that took place in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

Yom Kippur is also the only day of the year with five prayer services. The final one is called Ne'ilah, which means "closing" or "locking." It is the final opportunity of the day to stand before The Almighty and ask that our prayers be accepted. At the conclusion of Ne'ilah, the shofar is sounded one final time.





AND THEN THE MEETING IS OVER.

LEAVING THE MEETING

We have spent weeks preparing. We stood before The Almighty on Rosh Hashanah. We looked honestly at our year. We spent the Aseret Yimei Teshuvah thinking about what needs to change and developing a game plan. On Yom Kippur, we spent an entire day stepping away from the physical world, praying, asking for forgiveness, and committing ourselves to do better.

And when Yom Kippur ends, we don't walk away defeated. We walk away with a sense of inner joy and peace.

We know that we showed up. We were honest. We acknowledged where we fell short. We asked for forgiveness. We committed ourselves to change. We did what we could.

Note: There is an important idea to keep in mind. The Almighty is not simply the CEO evaluating our performance. He is our Father. He wants us to succeed. He gives us the opportunity to return. He gives us another year, another chance, another opportunity to become the people we were created to be.

So when the final shofar sounds, there is a sense of relief. We have put in the effort. We have presented our case. We have created our game plan. And we trust that The Almighty, in His kindness and compassion, has heard our prayers and accepted our sincere desire to change.

And perhaps that is why the Jewish calendar doesn't leave us sitting in the seriousness of Yom Kippur.

JUST FIVE DAYS LATER, WE CELEBRATE SUKKOT.

We leave the seriousness of Yom Kippur and enter a holiday of joy. We build a sukkah, a small hut, invite people in, eat together, and celebrate.

Because after spending these weeks confronting who we are and where we need to grow, Judaism wants us to experience something profound:

**TESHUVAH DOESN'T END IN SADNESS.
IT ENDS IN JOY.
WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN ANOTHER CHANCE.
AND NOW, IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE IT.**



OLAMI MENTORSHIP