



MAROM מרומ

How to make your own personal Rosh Hashanah experience



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Read time
5- 10 m

Level
1

Amount of people
1-4 recommended



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Let's get inspired

Rosh Hashanah is an island in time. We can see the last year looming behind us, with all its messy complications and proud achievements, and we can see the enormity of the year ahead, its challenges and gifts and its raw potential, waiting to be encountered. And Rosh Hashanah is an island, time flows around it but it isn't part of time. It's a safe space to reflect, to gather strength, to make good decisions - and also to celebrate just being there.

Instructions

The regularity of doing the same thing every year robbed Rosh Hashanah of its radical power, rethinking what it means can only make it more meaningful. In fact, who cares about synagogues? Rosh Hashanah has just as much right to be celebrated around the table, or in the mind. The dominance of the synagogues and professional rabbis and cantors and shofar-blowers has silenced the power of personal journeys - until this year. Nothing is stable, so let's be open to surprises.

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Before the meal:

- Journal

In the days before, take some time for yourself to write. Write whatever comes out. Write what happened to you in the last year, the important things, things you're proud of or regret, things that touched you. Write whatever comes to your mind, without censoring or thinking too much, and don't show the text to anybody.

Pendant les jours qui précèdent Rosh Hashana, prenez du temps pour vous-même pour écrire. Écrivez tout ce qui vous vient à l'esprit. Écrivez tout ce qui s'est passé pendant l'année, les choses importantes, les choses dont vous êtes fiers, celles que vous regrettez, les choses qui vous ont ému. Écrivez tout ce qui vous traverse l'esprit, sans vous autocensurer ou trop réfléchir, et ne montrez le texte à personne !

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- Give tzedaka

In the description of Rosh Hashanah in the Tanach, the people are told to “eat good food and drink sweet drinks, and send meals to whoever has nothing prepared”. Giving charitable gifts to others is as important as celebrating at home. This can be accomplished by supporting a social or food charity, preferably local.

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Before the meal:

- Say sorry

We're not so good at overcoming the awkwardness involved in asking for forgiveness, but it's almost always worth it in the end. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are a great excuse. Call or text the friend you haven't spoken to since that thing happened that has been easier to ignore than to talk about. Just say sorry, even if it wasn't all your fault. Be brave. The weight off your chest after doing this will be wonderful.

- Bless children

Some families do this every week, others less often. A nice tradition is to do it now, with the traditional blessing and/or a quiet wish that this year allows them to fulfil their beautiful potential.

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- Light candles

Before it gets dark, light the festival candles. They're accompanied by two blessings you can find in a siddur or online. One marks the beginning of the new year, and the other expresses thankfulness for being alive at this time.

- Forgive friends and family

Maybe you didn't make that call before, and maybe the person who should have called you didn't. Maybe something happened that neither of you really remember anymore. Take a moment in your mind, and just forgive, as much as you can; free the world of the weight of having hurt you. The world is so crazy now, maybe the old deeds and memories aren't as important as they seemed before.

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The Rosh Hashanah Meal

- Kiddush with a glass of wine

There's a special kiddush blessing for Rosh Hashanah, that you can find here. Try and get good wine for tonight.

- Wash Hands

After the recent hysteria around washing and disinfecting hands, feel the simplicity and weirdness of a ritual hand-washing that has no practical reason. Pour water three times on each hand, and say the blessing.

- Challah with honey

It's traditional to bake or buy round challah bread for Rosh Hashanah, symbolising the cycle of the year. Sometimes it's sweeter than usual, and it's often dipped in honey rather than in salt, a physical symbol of the sweet new year that we wish ourselves.

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The Rosh Hashanah Meal

- Apples + honey, etc.

There are many traditions to do with symbolic foods at the beginning of the meal. The most common Ashkenazi custom is to dip slices of apple in honey and wish ourselves a sweet new year. Other symbolic foods include pomegranates, leek, carrots, pumpkin and fish. You can find the list of foods and their blessings here. You can also invent your own, playing with the name of a food and turning it into a wish for the coming year.

- Yummy, delicious food

Not much to explain here! If you have guests, treat them. If you're celebrating alone, treat yourself. Maybe, if you're used to eating with someone specific and can't be with them this year, call them and ask for their recipes.

- Some serious conversation

As well as laughing and chatting, try to bring the conversation beyond small-talk. One idea is to ask everyone in advance to think of one Big Issue that they think we should be talking about this year. Then go around the table, sharing and discussing a bit. This is a way of framing Rosh Hashanah as a microcosm of the coming year.

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During the day.

- Avoid anger, and don't nap! - This is another form of setting the tone for the coming year, by being aware of emotions and choosing the ones we want: there is an old tradition to avoid anger or things that cause negative emotions on Rosh Hashanah. It's also traditional not to sleep on the day of Rosh Hashanah, in order not to have a sleepy year. (There's even a tradition of some Breslov Hassidim not to speak at all until noon on the second day of Rosh Hashanah.)
 - Tashlich - Another non-synagogue ceremony is Tashlich, which involves going to a river, lake, or any body of water, and throwing breadcrumbs in. This symbolises throwing away and getting rid of sins, regretted actions, and bad experiences from the last year. There are verses that can be said to accompany this, or personal reflections. The aim is to come out of the ceremony lighter and ready to enter the new year.
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During the day.

- Shofar - Most people don't have a shofar at home, although if you have time you could try and order one online and try to learn to blow it (easier than you think!) Some synagogues will also be doing Shofar blowing outside, or ask someone with a Shofar to meet you outside and blow it. The shofar blasts are a wake-up call to ourselves, to wake up from our sleep of habit and change something in our life. If you don't have an actual shofar this year, find other ways to wake up and shake out of habits.
 - Read something inspirational - Maybe it's going back to a good book that you miss, maybe borrowing from a friend.
 - Pray - The Rosh Hashanah liturgy is famous for being long and complex. It's full of beautiful poems and powerful language that we often miss really understanding when we're trying to get through it all in time. Outside the synagogue, you control what works for you. Maybe pick a piece that you know, or a new text that you want to explore. Or use your own words, speak out what needs to be said.
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