

3 ROSH HASHANAH: CLEANING THE SLATE

Student text: pages 16–31

ראש השנה



Learning Objectives

Students will:

- ✓ Deepen their understanding of Rosh Hashanah—the Jewish New Year—as a time of reflection and introspection.
- ✓ Reflect on the past year’s successes and mistakes, and on their strengths and weaknesses, in order to find opportunities for personal improvement.
- ✓ Identify opportunities to renew their commitment to nurture the goodness in themselves and in the world around them.
- ✓ Demonstrate increased knowledge of Rosh Hashanah tradition by developing their skills of forgiveness, of themselves and of others.



Vocabulary

Rosh Hashanah “Head (beginning) of the Year”; the Jewish New Year

Yom Hazikaron “Day of Remembering”; another name for Rosh Hashanah

teshuvah “returning”; acts of repentance

mahzor prayer book for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

tefillah prayer

tzedakah “righteousness”; a mitzvah that requires giving to those in need

b’tzelem Elohim “in the image of God”; the concept that all human beings are created this way

shofar a hollowed-out ram’s horn sounded on certain special occasions, most notably on the High Holidays. The three sounds used on Rosh Hashanah are: *tekiah*, *shvarim*, *truah*.

tashlich “to throw or cast off”; the symbolic ritual of discarding our sins into a body of water, performed on the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah

Ten Days of Repentance (also Days of Awe) the period from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, a time of self-assessment and *teshuvah*



Getting Started

Bring apples and honey to class to share with your students. Offer the traditional wish for *l’shanah tovah umetukah*—a good and sweet year. As the students eat, revisit the questions posed in the previous chapter’s “Looking Ahead”: How does Rosh Hashanah compare to the secular New Year? How is it different? How is it the same? (*Both are times for reflection and hope for a better year ahead; both may involve resolutions that include introspection and review of the year past as well as plans for the year ahead. While Jewish New Year celebrations may be joyous, they are not celebrated with parties at the stroke of midnight.*) Ask students for their opinions regarding these similarities and differences. Point out that as they study this chapter, they will find many other meanings to this holiday.

Note: Be aware of any food allergies or dietary restrictions whenever food is brought to class.



Q&A (page 17)

- Q:** According to Jewish tradition, how does God review our deeds from the past year?
- A:** God reviews our deeds in a book that has a page for each of us, written in our own hand. God considers all that we have done during the year—the good and the bad.
- Q:** According to the sages, does God judge us to punish us?
- A:** No. God’s purpose is to explore the goodness that is in each of us and to help it grow.
- Q:** Why do we want to assess our past actions?
- A:** Answers should focus on the idea that we should look at how we live our lives, and how well we nurture the goodness in ourselves, so that we may improve.

Self-Assessment: The Book of Life (page 17)

Rosh Hashanah is a time of reflection on the past year, and a time to look forward to a new one. On a sheet of paper, have students write five actions they have taken or choices they have made over the past year. Explain that these may be actions or choices that affected their lives in profound ways, such as the decision to cheat on a test, or in smaller ways, such as helping a younger sibling learn to ride a bicycle. Have them assess their actions and choices as good or bad. Point out that these are personal views and need not be shared with the class. Explain that some good actions are in fact things *not* done. For example, not returning the insult to someone who has insulted us. Similarly, some bad actions are times when we *failed* to take action that would

have helped another person. Have students discuss how they could handle similar situations in a better way in the year to come. Be careful not to push students too hard, or ask them to reveal thoughts or feelings that they wish to keep private.

Mistakes Are Part of the Game (page 18)

(Student answers should focus on the idea that athletes—in fact all people—learn from their mistakes. By examining our mistakes during the past year, we are able to look at why we did something and how we can improve our behavior in the coming year.)

Becoming the Best You Can Be (page 19)

Expand on the idea of becoming our best selves: Ask the students to build upon the second question by creating a list of goals for the coming year. Have them title the list, “Why were you not [insert name]?”



Make It Your Own

Review the quote from Micah 6:8 on page 21. Have students give examples from their own experience of how they have lived up to this ideal. Can they also identify examples in the actions of someone they know? *(Examples may include a family member returning a lost item to its rightful owner, a friend’s act of tzedakah, a stranger helping someone who is lost, or their rabbi visiting the sick.)*

The Three Steps to Forgiveness (pages 22–23)

Divide the class into three groups. Explain that each group will work on developing ways to demonstrate the three steps to forgiveness—

teshuvah, *tefillah*, and *tzedakah*. Randomly assign each group to one of the three steps. Then have them decide upon a way to portray their step. How they do this is up to them—it can be through a skit, a piece of artwork, or an action plan. For example, one group may show a skit of someone wronging someone else (perhaps gossiping about them), and later apologizing. Another group could develop a plan for a class *tzedakah* project. Encourage dramatic and artistic expression to accommodate the widest range of learning modalities.



Q&A (pages 25–28)

- Q:** When does the season of preparation for the Jewish New Year begin?
- A:** 30 days before Rosh Hashanah, on Rosh Hodesh Elul.
- Q:** What are Selihot?
- A:** Additional prayers added to the morning service during this 30-day period that speak of our sorrow for whatever wrongs we have done. Selihot is also the name of the midnight service held at many synagogues, usually the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah.
- Q:** What special foods do we eat on Rosh Hashanah?
- A:** Round *hallah* and apples dipped in honey. The roundness of the *hallah* symbolizes the cycle of the year; the honey our hope for a sweet new year.
- Q:** What are the voices of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah?
- A:** *Tekiah*, one long blast; *shvarim*, a series of three medium-length blasts; and *truah*, a series of nine short blasts.

Light Bulbs: Sharing Your Bright Ideas (page 27)

After students complete this activity in their textbook, have them share their ideas with the class. (*Ideas will vary, but may include: a demonstration on how to blow a shofar, a discussion group on the meaning of traditions, fundraiser ideas, preparation of a Rosh Hashanah seder.*) See if you can arrange to have the class combine their ideas and present them to your synagogue's ritual committee.

Using the Photograph: Sheheḥeyanu (page 29)

The wall hanging reads:

Top: *Baruch Atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam* (Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the world)

Middle: *Sheheḥeyanu* (who has given us life)

Bottom: *v'kiy'manu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh* (sustained us, and enabled us to reach this time).



Make It Your Own

Discuss the origin of the practice of *tashlich* as described on page 30. Ask the class how they might want to observe this ritual. For example, would they prefer to observe it privately, or in a group? Would they want to actually throw bread crumbs or would they prefer to discuss the behaviors or feelings that they want to “toss away”?



Build Your Own Calendar

Distribute the calendars that students started in Chapter 2 (see pages 13–14 of this Teacher's Guide). Have them fill in the dates for the month of Tishre and mark Rosh Hashanah on 1–2 Tishre. Have them decorate the page with

a shofar, apples and honey, and other symbols of the holiday.



Looking Ahead

Our tradition teaches that “on Rosh Hashanah it is written; on Yom Kippur it is sealed.” Yom Kippur is the culmination of the Days of Awe—our period of *teshuvah*, and of self-assessment. In looking ahead to the next chapter, have students think about why we fast on Yom Kippur. Ask: What effect can refraining from food for a day have on us psychologically and spiritually?



ROSH HASHANAH

Name _____

Dear Parent:

In class, we are exploring the meaning of Rosh Hashanah, which celebrates the Jewish New Year and is an opportunity for introspection. Rosh Hashanah is a time to reflect on past actions, to look ahead to the coming year, and to examine how we can become our best selves.

Part I

Have each family member identify one personal goal for the coming year. Then have other members of the family identify ways they can support or contribute to that goal. For example:

Personal goal: to help take care of the environment

Family action: recycle our bottles, cans, and newspapers

Personal goal: to become more involved in our congregation

Family action: invite a family from religious school to Shabbat dinner

<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Personal goal: _____</p> <p>Family actions: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Personal goal: _____</p> <p>Family actions: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Personal goal: _____</p> <p>Family actions: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Personal goal: _____</p> <p>Family actions: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

(Please use the back of this sheet if you need more space.)

Part II

Create a "Family Action Plan." Make specific plans (who, what, where, and when) for how your family will reach one of the personal goals above. Post your "Family Action Plan" in a place in your home where it will serve as a reminder throughout the year.

