



*Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year, is the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance that culminates with *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. This period, known as the High Holidays and Days of Awe, is filled with abundant opportunities for personal growth.

# Rosh Hashanah

One catalyst for that growth, and perhaps the most famous tradition of *Rosh Hashanah*, is the sounding of the *shofar* (ram's horn). The following is a paraphrase of what one great thinker, Maimonides, suggests is the purpose of hearing the *shofar's* piercing blast:

“Wake up! Think about your priorities, how you spend your time, energy, and resources, how you talk with and act toward your family, friends, and the people with whom we have only limited or superficial contact. Then take action to make meaningful changes.”

The *shofar* is meant to shake us out of routines and rationalizations; one of its goals is to inspire us to improve ourselves and be G-d's active partner in healing a fractured world. We need to believe that everything we do makes a difference. We need to act as if our actions change the world around us at least a little.

The High Holidays offer the reminder that life is fragile, the promise of new beginnings, and the awareness that change is always possible. Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach suggests a challenging – and inspiring – mindset as *Rosh Hashanah* approaches: “Let this year be a *real* new beginning. Let every breath we take feel like we never breathed before.” In Judaism, the essence of vibrant living is the constant renewal of life through ongoing self-examination and rebirth. *Rosh Hashanah* enables us to take fresh, new steps to ensure vitality and meaning in our life's journey.

Some of the ideas in this article are from Rabbi Irving Greenberg's *The Jewish Way* and Shimon Apisdorf's *Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur Survival Kit*.



## Questions to Consider:

- ▶ What are three achievements during the past year I am most proud of?
- ▶ What are three big mistakes I made during the past year?
- ▶ What will I most regret next *Rosh Hashanah* if I do not work on it in the year ahead?
- ▶ What can I do in the coming year to nurture the relationships that mean the most to me?
- ▶ As we bless one another with a sweet new year, how can I sweeten the lives of people whose world is dark with loneliness, disease, poverty, or despair?



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