

Things you might not know about Rosh Hashanah



Rosh Hashanah Fact:

Rosh Hashanah doesn't mean Happy New Year. It means "head of the new year."

But...Rosh Hashanah isn't the 1st month of the Hebrew Calendar. It's the 7th month. Passover (Nisan) is the 1st month. Which is why the holidays are either "early or late" based on when Passover falls in the year, not Rosh Hashanah.

Why do some of my friends read a different Torah portion on Rosh Hashanah?

The Torah commands us to celebrate Rosh Hashanah for one day. For Jews in the Diaspora, a second day was added to the holiday to make sure it is celebrated in the "right time." In Israel and for many Reform Jews, Rosh Hashanah is kept to the Biblical observance which is one day. That leaves a discrepancy between Torah portions.

For Reform Jews: The first day the Binding of Isaac (The Akedah) is read. (Genesis 22: 1-24) for those congregations that do observe a second day, they read from Creation (Bereshit 1:1)

For Conservative and Orthodox Jews: The portion is: The story of Sarah and Hagar. (Genesis 21:1-34) The second day is the Binding of Isaac. (Genesis 22: 1-24)

Is Rosh Hashanah the only Jewish New Year?

No, according to the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 1:1) there are four: Rosh Hashanah (Agriculture and Creation), the first of Elul (Tithing of Cattle), Tu B'shvat (Trees) and the 1st of Nissan (month of Passover) (Dating of Royal events).

Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?

According to tradition, on the first of Elul Moses climbed Mt. Sinai to receive the second set of tablets. He blew the shofar to remind the Israelites not to sin again this time... it was a reminder not to screw it up with a Golden Calf (again). Now it's a time to remind everyone each day for a month to take stock of themselves and prepare for Rosh Hashanah

Rabbi Yochanan teaches that three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 16b)

The Book of Life of the Wicked

The Book of Life of the Righteous

The Book of Life of Those In Between



How many blasts of Shofar do we hear?

100. But there are variations.

Why can't we blow the Shofar when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat?

Rabbi Yochanan said yes, we could.

Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi said yes because it's not work, rather it's art.

Most authorities – Say no because the person who blows shofar might accidentally carry it to synagogue on Shabbat and violate Shabbat.

What Days of the Week Can Rosh Hashanah Never Be On?

Wednesday, Friday or Sunday

No Wed – Then Yom Kippur is Friday. So, there wouldn't be time for Shabbat prep.

No Friday – Then Yom Kippur is Sunday. So, there wouldn't be prep for Yom Kippur.

No Sunday – Hoshanah Rabbah (last day of Sukkot) would be on a Saturday which is not desirable. (Because you couldn't beat willows to express guilt)



What is the Grand Aleinu?

Musaf on Rosh Hashanah. When cantor chants, he kneels and touches his (or her) forehead to ground. Practiced in Temple by Priests.

Why are breadcrumbs important on Rosh Hashanah?

On the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah day one we cast breadcrumbs into a body of water to cast off sins. It's called Tashlich.

What UNUSUAL foods are served on Rosh Hashanah?

- Round Challah – Has no end, which symbolizes our wish for a year of life and blessings without end.
- Volhynia (Russian Ukraine) – Challah in shape of bird
- Challah in shape of a ladder – so our prayers ascend upward
- Pomegranates – Have a large number of seeds – which some say is 613 the number of mitzvot
- Eastern Europe – Lekach – honey cake
- Switzerland - Fish sweetened with raisins and honey
- Jews of Iraq – won't eat fish. Dag sounds like da'agah – worry or anxiety
- Figs - Judges 9:1-11. Some say that Adam and Eve ate a fig in Garden of Eden (since they covered themselves with leaves from fig tree) so the fig was the forbidden fruit, not an apple!
- Some Jews won't eat nuts. Why? Egoz (Hebrew for nut) has the same numerical value as Chet (sin)
- Why Fish Heads on Rosh Hashanah – We eat from the head not the tail because we want to be like the head, not the tail in the new year



Why are Carrots a thing on Rosh Hashanah?



- Carrot Tzimmes – When carrots are sliced they are coin-shaped, and since golden covered are symbol of prosperity
- The Hebrew word for carrots is (*g'zarim*) which along with "decree" (*gezerah*) are homonyms, and so those consuming the orange veggie are asking for any evil decrees to be cast aside in the new year
- The Yiddish word for carrot—*mehren*—also sounds like the Yiddish for more—*mer*—so those who eat carrots are thus expressing "the hope that we see an abundance of success"

Final Food Fact for Rosh Hashanah:

It's traditional to eat a food on the 2nd night of Rosh Hashanah that you haven't eaten in a while (like within the year) so that you can say Shehecheyanu over it. Go look for exotic fruits!

Did you know, napping is not good for Rosh Hashanah?

If you nap you might waste a second of being good. The Talmud teaches ... that if one sleeps at the beginning of the year—i.e., on Rosh Hashanah—his good fortune also sleeps.

וגם נוהגים שלא לישן ביום ראש השנה (ירושלמי) ומנהג נכון הוא

“There are also those who do not sleep during Rosh Hashana during the day, and this is the correct thing to do.” (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 583)

Why do some people receive Rosh Hashanah cards in the mail?

The tradition to send Rosh Hashanah cards go back a while in history, though, it used to be sending telegrams that was popular. In 1927 Western Union reported that Jews sent more telegrams for the holiday than any other group. If Rosh Hashanah is the New Year, it's customary to send cards to wish someone a Happy New Year, or Shanah Tovah!



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