

# Rosh Hashana

## Secular Humanistic Ceremony



adapted for the I.L. Peretz Secular Jewish Community from the  
Machar Service for Rosh Hashana -The Washington Society for Humanistic Judaism

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**I.L. Peretz Secular Jewish Community**

**Leader:** We have come together--family, friends and neighbors, to share with Jews throughout the world the celebration of Rosh Hashana.

Let us sing together *Heh-vay-nu shalom aleikhem* which means "May we greet each other with peace and good will."

**Song:** *HEH-VAY-NU SHALOM ALEIKHEM*

*Heh-vay-nu shalom aleikhem  
Heh-vay-nu shalom aleikhem  
Heh-vay-nu shalom aleikhem  
Heh-vay-nu shalom, shalom, shalom  
aleikhem*

**Leader:** In all other festivals, the spirit is one of exalted joy; Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, however, are imbued with a seriousness born of the sense of responsibility that each of us bears for our own life and ethical choices. These days are also different in that they are not nature festivals, nor do they commemorate an historical event. They are observed only as a time for reflection, resolution and renewal. Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year but, in contrast with the new years of other peoples, it is greeted with solemnity as well as revelry.

**Reader:** As we light these candles, let us create a peaceful interlude.  
This is a moment to set aside the events of today and to reflect on the past year.

## LIGHT CANDLES

**Community:** We remember the times that we came together during the year. The remembrance of countless candle lightings in years past forms a link with our Jewish heritage.

**Reader:** Since ancient times, Jews have gathered together on this day.

**Reader:** In ancient days, Jews gathered on this day to have God judge their actions as a nation.

**Reader:** Today, we reflect on our actions as members of a community, a nation, a world community.

**Leader:** Since ancient times, Jews have expressed apprehensions about the new year, a feeling of impotence in the face of arbitrary death. Believing that their fate was preordained, they chanted, as many continue to chant, the following liturgy:

On Rosh Hashana it is written  
and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.

**Reader:** In traditional observance, on Rosh Hashana it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: "How many shall leave this world and how many shall be born into it,

**Reader:** Who shall live and who shall die,  
who shall live out the limit of his days and  
who shall not,

**Reader:** Who shall perish by fire and who  
by water, who by the sword and who by  
beast,

**Reader:** Who by hunger and who by thirst,  
who by earthquake and who by plague,

**Reader:** Who by strangling and who by stoning,

**Reader:** Who shall rest and who shall wander,

**Reader:** Who shall be at peace and who  
shall be tormented,

**Reader:** Who shall be poor and who shall be  
rich,

**Reader:** Who shall be humble and who shall be exalted."

**Reader:** Today's world also presents uncertainties.

**Reader:** This year some will go hungry and some will be fed,

**Reader:** Some will suffer the horrors of war and violence and some will know peace,

**Reader:** Some will know tyranny and injustice and others will enjoy the blessings of freedom,

**Reader:** Some will be healthy and some will fall ill,

**Reader:** Some will suffer loneliness and bereavement and others the comfort of family and friends,

**Reader:** Some will be indifferent to suffering and some will strive to lessen the suffering of others.

**Reader:** It is in the spirit of recognition of our shared vulnerability that we come here today to reaffirm another notion of the days of awe.

**Reader:** This day marks the beginning of a season of renewal in which we reflect on our errors and failures, successes and achievements of the past year, so that we can move on with greater wisdom in the year ahead.

**Reader:** This day which links past and future summons us to this place to account for the gift of life.

**Reader:** We come with resolve in our hearts that compassion be reflected in our deeds.

**Reader:** We seek forgiveness from ourselves and from others, to be at one with ourselves and with others.

**Community:** We seek wholeness and truth as we enter a new year.

**Leader:** In Jewish tradition, this day has many names.

**Reader:** *Yom Ha-Zeekaron...* "Day of Remembrance." On Rosh Hashana God is supposed to remember all the good and evil deeds of people.

Today we take responsibility to remember and think about our own deeds.

**Reader:** *Yom Ha-Deen...* "Day of Judgment." According to tradition, Rosh Hashana is the day on which God judges each human being by his or her deeds during the year just ended and inscribes his fate in the heavenly record book for the year to come.

**Reader:** Today, it is a time to judge oneself, relying not on supernatural forces to determine human destiny, but on our own powers to make our lives what we will.

**Reader:** *Yom T'ruah...* "The Day of Sounding the Shofar." In the past, the sound of the Shofar called upon each Jew to repent his or her sins, to forsake evil and to pursue goodness and mercy. We affirm that individual morality can bring us closer to universal peace and friendship.

**Reader:** Rosh Hashana..."The Head of the Year," the beginning of beginnings.

**Community:** We are beginning a new year that is one more step in a history thousands of years long. We strive to understand the

values of our forebears. We build on what has gone before.

**Reader:** Live with integrity. Speak without deceit.

**Reader:** Have no slander upon your tongue, do no harm to others, do not mistreat your neighbor.

**Community:** Make these values your own; then shall you stand firm forever.

**Leader:** The long history of the Jewish people is illuminated by prophets and sages who taught a commitment to ethical concerns. Their words span the millennia, stimulating our thoughts and enriching our convictions. We reflect on the words of an ancient prophet:

**Community:** Wash you, make you clean  
Put away the evil of your doings  
from before mine eyes  
Cease to do evil  
Learn to do good  
Seek justice  
Relieve the oppressed  
Guide the orphan  
Plead for the widow.

**Isaiah, 1:11-17**

**Leader:** Several thousand years ago, a prayer central to the meaning of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur was written. It is called *Un'taneh Tokef*.

"On Rosh Hashana it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed,  
how many shall leave the world and how many shall be born,  
who shall live and who shall die,  
who shall rest and who shall wander,  
who shall be humbled and who exalted...."

**Reader:** But *T'shuva*, *T'filla*, *Tsedakah* can remove the severity of the decree. *Un'taneh Tokef* tells us that we will become what we already are.

**Reader:** The child is father to the man and mother to the woman. It also says that we are capable of changing the outcome by *T'filla*, *T'shuva*, and *Tsedakah*.

**Reader:** *T'filla*, commonly translated as prayer, is really derived from the word for honest self-judgment.

**Reader:** *Tsedakah*, commonly translated as "charity" is derived from the work *Tsadik*--a righteous person--one whose daily actions go far beyond charity and who is constantly seeking the path of justice and searching out ways to enrich the lives of others.

**Reader:** *T'shuva*. Before we discuss *T'shuva* we have to know the meaning of the word *khet*, usually translated into English as sin. *Khet* has its origins in archery, and the term was used to indicate missing the mark. Such is the Jewish concept of sin -- missing one's goal, losing sight of the important things in life.

**Reader:** Finally, then, *T'shuva*, commonly translated as repentance, really means "turning," turning to hit the mark. These images--honest self-judgment, justice to others, and turning--form the central theme of our service today.

**Leader:** In keeping with Jewish tradition on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we ask ourselves if we have hit the mark, as people, as families, and as a community. Whether we look for answers through prayer as our theistic brethren do, or as members of a secular and humanistic Jewish community,

the questions remain important and relevant. By coming together today, different people, different families, different generations, we embrace a tradition over 3000 years old and benefit from a conviction that the new year can be a creative moment. Together we help each other find the courage and time to turn.

**Community:** On this Rosh Hashana we recognize that each of us must strive to create a better world for all humanity. Each of us must strive to make our own lives a moral example for those around us and for those who will come after us. Each of us must strive to remain committed to the idea of a just social order and to the actions necessary to achieve social justice.

**Leader:** The shofar sounds a beckoning call out of our past.

**The Call:** *TEKIAH*

**Reader:** The Shofar calls and we come. In every corner of the world, throughout millennia past, the families of the people of Israel have gathered together for the New Year.

**Community:** Together on this Rosh Hashana, together with friends and newcomers, united as Jews, we find comfort in our Jewish community.

**The Call:** *SHEVAREEM*

**Reader:** We partake today of the bounty of tradition, and we create anew from our personal experience and humanistic views.

**Community:** In ancient days our ancestors looked to God for the wisdom to guide them to a new and better year. Today we look for wisdom within ourselves, we call upon our

knowledge, our own abilities, our own humanity.

**The Call:** *T'RUAH*

**Reader:** Lift up your voices like a Shofar.

**Community:** We are aroused this day and with the Shofar, we cry out.

**The Call:**

*TEKIAH  
SHEVAREEM  
T'RUAH*

*T'KEE-AH G'-DO-LAH*

**Reader:** The Shofar is piercing and compelling.

**Community:** Awake our senses, O Shofar. This is the time to renew commitments. This is a day to begin.

**Community Sharing:**

**Leader:** Our services continue with a plea for peace.

**Reader:** May we see the day when war and bloodshed cease, when a great peace will embrace the world.

**Reader:** Then nation will not threaten nation, and humankind will not again know war.

**Leader:** Let us all sing together *Loh Yeesah Goy*. The words come from Isaiah.

**Community:** Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, They shall never again know war.

**Song:** *LOH YEESAH GOY*

*Loh yee-sah goy el goy khe-rev  
V'-loh yeel'-m'-doo ohd meel'-kha-mah.*

**Repeat**

**Community:** For all who live on earth shall realize we have not come into being to hate or to destroy.

**Reader:** We have come into being to labor and to love.

**Reader:** Enlighten the leaders of all nations with the power of compassion.

**Community:** Let love and justice flow like a mighty stream. Let peace fill the earth as the waters fill the sea.

**- adapted from Nathan Sternhart**

**Leader:** Standing on the threshold of a new year we become aware of the speeding of time and the ebbing of years.

**Community:** And remember that the companionship of time is but of short duration. It flies more quickly than the shades of evening. We are like children who grasp in their hands a sunbeam. We open our hands soon again, but, to our amazement, they are empty and the brightness is gone.

**-Yedaya Penini**

**Leader:** Let us consider the limited time we have on earth and use it wisely. Let us create value in each of our days.

**Community:** May we use with diligence and foresight our span of time.

**Leader:** We resolve to avoid the desolating loneliness to which we could condemn ourselves by self-centered aims.

**Community:** We open our eyes to the great value of friends and community.

**Leader:** Let us carefully select the treasures of past generations, and use them to enrich our understanding of our selves.

**Community:** And let us pass those treasures on to future generations, enhanced by worthy deeds of our own achieving.

**Leader:** May we have the wisdom to dispel from our hearts the restless urge to outrun our fellow men and women in the race for self and power.

**Community:** Rather, let us outdo ourselves by awakening to the virtues that lie within ourselves.

**MEMORIAL**

**Leader:** At this time, let us all stand for a moment of silence to remember those we have known, and to memorialize those who were taken from us whom we will never know.

**Please remain standing.**

**Reader:** "Remember on this Day of Judgment, that we are incomplete. Remember that we are a body mutilated.

**Reader:** "Remember the chimneys, the ingenious habitations of death where part of Israel's body drifted as smoke through the air.

**Reader:** "We lament the fields of loneliness  
for six million of our number torn away.  
Forget them not.

**Reader:** "There are some who have no  
memorial. They are perished as though they  
had never been. Remember them.

**Reader:** "Remember the landscape of  
screams engraved at the entrance gates to death.  
Remember the yet unborn dreams.  
Remember the terror of children, whose  
tears were burned.

**Reader:** "Remember the agony of parents,  
whose hopes were broken. Remember.  
We have not forgotten though all this has  
befallen us.

**Reader:** Remember, and help us to  
obliterate terror. Remember, and help us  
obliterate agony."

***Mahzor for Rosh Hashana by Rabbi Jules  
Harlow.***

**Leader: Please be seated.**

**Leader:** Let us consider our good fortune  
for having been spared the terrors of  
totalitarianism and for being able to live  
with dignity in a democratic land.

**Community:** May we continue to work to  
protect and strengthen the values of our  
pluralistic society.

**Leader:** What is good has been explained,  
This is what we ask of ourselves:  
To act justly,  
To love mercy,  
And to walk proudly with one another.

**Reader:** Cultivate these in yourself,  
And they will be real.

**Reader:** Cultivate these in the family  
And they will abound.

**Reader:** Cultivate these in the community,  
And they will grow.

**Reader:** Cultivate these in the nation,  
And they will be abundant.

**Community:** Cultivate these throughout the  
world,  
And they will be everywhere.

**-Institute of Creative Judaism**

**Reader:** That life is both fleeting and  
uncertain is a truth that presses upon the  
mind with special force as the old year ends  
and the new begins.

**Reader:** Time speeds on and we go with it,  
and though we have seen the year close, we  
can never be sure of seeing the end of the new.

**Reader:** Since life is so fleeting and frail,  
we must begin the serious use of it at once,  
and begin it by entering upon the task of  
self-examination and self-ennoblement  
which is its essential preliminary.  
A new year, say the rabbis, should  
inaugurate new life.

**Rabbi Morris Joseph (1848-1930)**  
England

**Song:** TURN! TURN! TURN!

**CHORUS:**

To every thing  
(Turn, Turn, Turn)  
There is a season  
(Turn, Turn, Turn)  
And a time for every purpose under heaven.

A time to be born, a time to die;  
A time to plant, a time to reap;  
A time to kill, a time to heal;  
A time to laugh, a time to weep.

**CHORUS**

A time to build up, a time to break down;  
A time to dance, a time to mourn.  
A time to cast away stones,  
A time to gather stones together.

**CHORUS**

A time of love, a time of hate;  
A time of war, a time of peace;  
A time when you may embrace;  
A time to refrain from embracing.

**CHORUS**

A time to gain, a time to lose;  
A time to rend, a time to sew;  
A time to love, a time to hate;  
A time for peace, I swear it's not too late!

**CHORUS**

**Reader:** We must begin with ourselves, but not end with ourselves. Turning (*t'shuvah*) means something greater than repentance and acts of penance.

**Reader:** It means that by the reversal of each person's whole being, those who had been

lost in a maze of selfishness, find a way to the fulfillment of the particular task for which they are destined. Repentance can only be an incentive to such active reversal.

**Reader:** Those who go on fretting about repentance, torturing themselves with the idea that acts of penance are not sufficient, withhold their best energies from the work of reversal.

**Reader:** It is written: "Turn from evil and do good". **Psalms 34:15**  
If you have done wrong, counteract it by doing right.  
**-Martin Buber**

**Leader:** We have come together--all of us. Family, friends, neighbors. We are united by a common bond, a sharing of our thoughts, a desire to gather today to celebrate an ancient ritual in a special way.

Together we have looked back and honored an ancient culture that has meaning for us. Together we look forward to the coming year. Today we begin the newest chapter of a story that started thousands of years ago, with the hope that the new year would be good to us, for all humanity. May we respond to the challenge of the new year, its promise of new growth and its hope for love and peace.

Let us say together the words to *Heenay Ma Tov*:

**Community:** How good and pleasant it is  
For people to live together in unity.

**Song:** *HEENAY MA TOV*

*Hee-nay ma-tov oo-ma na-a-yeem*  
*She-vet a-kheem gahm ya-khad.*