



# THE ALEPH INSTITUTE

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Report No. 402

## Jewish High Holy Days

**Reference should be made to Report No. 401, “Religious Laws Generally Applicable to Biblically-Mandated Jewish Holy Days,” and Report 401A, “Ritual Items Generally Required for All Biblically-Mandated Jewish Holy Days,” for information concerning religious laws applicable to, and ritual items required for, all Biblically-mandated Jewish Holy Days, including the High Holy Days):**

### Rosh Hashanah - Tishrei 1-2

Additional Ritual Items: “*Machzor*” (special prayer book); “*Shofar*” (ram’s horn blown at and throughout the afternoon prayer services); Apples and Honey

This holiday, the Jewish spiritual New Year, is characterized by prayer, repentance and the blowing of a complicated series of blasts on the shofar at and throughout the morning/afternoon prayer service. CODE OF JEWISH LAW (“C.J.L.”) ch. 129 §§13-20. The primary purpose of blowing the shofar is to exhort people to repentance. *Id.* §15.

Substantial prayers for this holiday not commonly found in the regular prayer book are contained in a special prayer book called a “machzor.” Special sections of the Torah are read at morning and late-afternoon services. Indeed, the Rosh Hashanah prayer service is one of the longest of the year.

### 30-Day Period Leading Up to Rosh Hashanah

It is customary to blow a short series of blasts on the Shofar daily during this period, beginning the second day of *Rosh Chodesh* (the beginning of the Hebrew month) of the month of Elul and continuing daily after the morning service until the day before Rosh Hashanah. The sound of the Shofar has the quality to stir the heart and inspire love of G-d. C.J.L. ch. 128 §2.

Beginning on the Saturday evening before Rosh Hashanah, many observant Jews rise early for the daily prayer services of “*Selichos*” (supplications for forgiveness). The Selichos prayers are said early on each morning, except the first, when they are generally recited Saturday evening after midnight. If Rosh Hashanah occurs on a Monday or Tuesday, one begins saying the Selichos from the Sunday (actually, Saturday night after midnight) of the preceding week. C.J.L. ch. 128 §5.

### Rosh Hashanah Itself

At the meal on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to perform certain rituals as omens for a good year. For example, portions of Challah and sweet apple are dipped into honey (in hopes of a “sweet” year). It is also customary to eat the head of some animal or fish, preferably the head of a sheep (which also serves as a reminder of the ram substituted for the sacrifice of Isaac, *see* Genesis 22:13). Certain vegetables are eaten, the names of which have the connotation of good fortune, like carrots, (called “*meren*” in Yiddish (meaning “increase”)). It is also meritorious to procure fish for this occasion, which symbolizes



### About the Aleph Institute

In 1978, and on many additional occasions, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of blessed memory, called for attention to the Jewish population in prisons. Rabbi Schneerson, who was the first religious leader in history honored with the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, spoke publicly and published entire treatises dedicated to the moral, ethical, spiritual and educational needs for men and women in those and other institutional environments. For example, a person going through prison with meaning and growth—though very difficult—leaves as a better, more productive and balanced citizen. Thus, the creation of the Aleph Institute.

Since 1981, the Aleph Institute, under the direction of Rabbi Sholom D. Lipskar, has provided valuable services to assist chaplains and institutional staff in meeting the legitimate religious needs of Jewish men and women in their care. The Aleph Institute provides answers to questions about mandated religious practices and ritual materials for daily and holiday observances. Aleph’s staff, affiliated Rabbis and rabbinical students provide visitations to Jews in institutional environments around the country and to military bases around the world. Over the years, Aleph has also supplied hundreds of thousands of religious texts and ritual items for use by individuals and chapels.

fertility. C.J.L. ch. 129 §9.



During the morning prayers all Jews must hear the blowing of a series of blasts on the shofar, C.J.L. ch. 129 §§13-20. The primary purpose of blowing the shofar is to exhort people to repentance. *Id.* §15. After the afternoon Mincha service on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to go to a body of living water (*e.g.*, stream, lake, ocean, or river) for a prayer service called “*Tashlich*,” (the casting away of our transgressions). Preferably, such river should be outside the city limits, and should contain fish as a reminder that we are compared to the fish who are caught in a net. We, too, are caught in the net of negative urges and judgment, and thus one will be moved to think of repentance. If, however, there is no stream containing fish available, one must go to any river or to a well. If the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on the Sabbath, Jews perform the Tashlich prayer service on the second day of Rosh Hashanah (Sunday). C.J.L. ch. 129 §31.

## Yom Kippur - Tishrei 10

Additional Ritual Items: “*Machzor*” (special prayer book); “*Shofar*” (ram’s horn); “*Kittel*” (white robes worn during prayer)

The day of atonement. The holiest and most solemn day of the Jewish year, it is the only Biblically-mandated holiday that is also a fast day. Its central theme is repentance, atonement and reconciliation, and the day customarily is fully occupied with prayer. One must not only settle one’s affairs with G-d; one must also ask forgiveness from those people one has wronged or hurt over the year, and, in turn, grant forgiveness to all those people who have committed wrongs.

### Preparing For Yom Kippur

On the day before Yom Kippur, it is customary to perform the ceremony of “*Kapparot*” at dawn, for the attribute of mercy is considered predominant at that time. Men select roosters and women select hens, while a pregnant woman takes both a rooster and two hens. C.J.L. ch. 131 §1. The animal is held over one’s head, and a prayer recited to the effect that the animal should go to the slaughter while the supplicant should be blessed with a healthy year. If live animals are not available, one may perform the ceremony with money, which is then given to charity.

It is mandatory to feast sumptuously on the day before Yom Kippur, and it is customary to eat fish at the first meal that day. C.J.L. ch. 131 §3.

Observant Jewish males immerse themselves in a ritual bath (the “*Mikvah*”) on the day before Yom Kippur, to cleanse themselves spiritually and as a prerequisite to repentance, just as one who is naturalized to Judaism is required to immerse in that ritual bath, symbolizing the starting of life in a renewed manner. C.J.L. ch. 131 §6.

It is customary for every householder to prepare one or two 24-hour candles: One candle for the living (symbolizing the Torah and the light of the soul), and, if necessary, a second candle for the souls of a departed father or mother. The candle(s) lit should burn until the following night, and are used for the Havdalah light at the conclusion of Yom Kippur. C.J.L. ch. 131 §7.

Towards late afternoon—well before sunset—the final meal before the fast is eaten, at which it is customary to dip a piece of Challah in honey and to consume it together with some fish and chicken. Only food that is easily digestible should be eaten at this meal. C.J.L. ch. 131 §12.



### General Prohibitions On Yom Kippur

Eating, drinking, smoking, bathing, shaving, the wearing of leather shoes, conjugal relations and any form of labor are all prohibited. C.J.L. ch. 133 §1. It is also forbidden to do any sort of manual labor, nor should one carry anything from one place to another, just as on the Sabbath (*see* Report No. 301, “The Jewish Sabbath”). Inasmuch as it is necessary to add from the profane to the sacred, all of the above are forbidden on the day before Yom Kippur while it is still day, a short time before twilight, until the end of Yom Kippur, a short time after the stars become visible. C.J.L. ch. 133 §1.

Fasting begins at sundown the eve before, and ends after nightfall the following day (a total of approximately 26 hours). C.J.L. ch. 133 §1. No food or liquids are consumed.

Substantial prayers for this holiday not commonly found in the regular prayer book are contained in a special prayer book called a “*Machzor*.” Special sections of the Torah are read at morning and late-afternoon services.

It is customary for men to wear a white robe (the “*Kittel*”), which resembles a shroud, during all of the day’s prayers. It is calculated to humble the arrogant heart. C.J.L. ch. 131 §15. On Yom Kippur eve, it is customary to put on the *Tallit* prayer shawl for the evening services, too. C.J.L. ch. 131 §17.

Yom Kippur comes to an end with the blowing of a single blast on the shofar, which marks the conclusion of the fast. *Id.* §26. The “*Havdalah*” service is recited as at the conclusion of the Sabbath and other Biblically-mandated holidays. In the Havdalah

service of Yom Kippur night, the benediction for light must be said over a candle that had been kindled *before* Yom Kippur. C.J.L. ch. 133 §28.

It is customary to recite the prayer service sanctifying the New Moon after the evening prayers at the conclusion of the fast.

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#### Citations to Jewish Law

Citations to Jewish law throughout this report are to Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, CODE OF JEWISH LAW: KITZUR [ABRIDGED] SHULHAN ARUKH, A COMPILATION OF JEWISH LAWS AND CUSTOMS (translated by Hyman E. Goldin, LL.B., annotated revised edition, Hebrew Publishing Company 1993) (“C.J.L.”), a copy of which can be ordered through the Aleph Institute or from any Jewish Bookstore. Jewish law frowns upon the use of the actual word representing the Creator’s name. Accordingly, references in this report to the Creator are indicated as “G-d.”

Information in this report is excerpted from the INSTITUTIONAL HANDBOOK OF JEWISH PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE, published by the Aleph Institute and highly recommended to chaplains and institutional staff working with Jewish men and women. Copyright © 1994 The Aleph Institute. All rights reserved.