

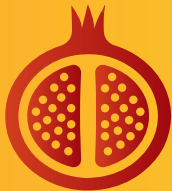


ROSH HASHANA

POCKET TORAH



Inspiring the Jewish Future



SIMANIM, SYMBOLS, AND STARTING ANEW

Can I offer you a bit of gourd? How about a bite of fenugreek? On the nights of Rosh HaShana, many families have the custom to eat different “Simanim” - exotic or unfamiliar foods. Each food is accompanied by a **special prayer** asking G-d for something related to the food, or the food's Hebrew or Aramaic name.

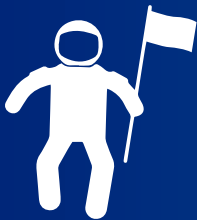
For example, we have the custom to eat an apple dipped in honey, after which we ask G-d to grant us a “sweet” new year.

Where did this custom come from?

The start of a new year is a powerful time for a fresh start. As the trees turn Fall colors and shed their leaves, we, too, try to turn over a new leaf. G-d gives us the chance to **forget our past and build a new future.**

This opportunity can only be utilized if we think about the specific areas of our lives that we want to revitalize.

Building our prayers around unfamiliar foods is a surefire way to make everyone stop and think about the subject of the food's prayer, and what changes they want to make in the coming year. So if you're hoping for a raise in salary, serve up that “raisin-celery” salad and ask Hashem for a little help!



THAT'S ONE **SMALL**
STEP FOR A MAN, ONE
GIANT LEAP FOR OUR
RELATIONSHIP

During the days surrounding Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we try extra hard to do our best. Some Jews even have the custom to take on extra stringencies like eating only Pas Yisrael, which they don't normally keep during the rest of the year.

How do these little actions make any difference? Aren't they just like a tiny drop in the bucket of all we need to do to improve?

The answer is that Rosh Hashana is not just about counting how many things we did right or wrong and adding up the points. Rather, it's about **defining our relationship with G-d.**

Every relationship goes through ups and down. It's unfortunate, but it's the reality. We can't be perfect all the time, and inevitably we're going to mess up. But the question is: **What is our overarching desire?** Are we interested in having a close relationship with Hashem, or not?

When we perform tiny acts of improvement around the High Holidays, **we are showing G-d that we CARE about our relationship with Him.** We WANT to be closer to Him. Even if we mess up later, we can still point back to those times and say: "See? I do care about You and I want to be better. Sometimes I mess up, but I want to be better and I care about our relationship."



BE SMART.
BUILD A **FENCE.**

Year after year, many of us find ourselves making the **same resolutions**. I'll stick to my diet. I'll never scream at my family again. I won't speak gossip any more.

When we made these commitments last year, we were so sincere! What went wrong? Why do we keep falling into the same traps?

As much as we're committed to change, there's one thing we tend to forget: **Humans are creatures of habit**. And habits are very hard to change.

If you weren't able to resist the cookies last week, how do you know you'll be able to resist them next time? Yes, there are times when we're inspired, but those **feelings of inspiration are hard to maintain**. We can't count on our feelings of inspiration to be with us 24/7, every time we're faced with a struggle.

When we're trying to change a habit, we have to be smart. **Will power alone is not enough**. We need to come up with creative techniques and build fences to keep ourselves far away from falling into the same traps.

If you find yourself eating too many cookies, don't leave the cookie jar on the counter. Put it in a cabinet so it's out of your view.

Next time you want to change a habit, be smart about it. Plan ahead.



MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL

Max is a homeless man who lives on the corner of 23rd and 7th Ave. Jeff is a high-powered CEO who runs a successful diamond business. Who do you think looks in the mirror more times each day?

You only look in the mirror if you believe that you're beautiful.

When you buy a mirror, you'll want to buy one that lets you zoom and show your tiniest blemishes and imperfections.

Not because you hate yourself and want to find flaws. Rather, because you believe you are beautiful and want to make just a few touch-ups. You only try to notice and fix your flaws if you realize that ultimately, you can look beautiful.

This should be our attitude on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Yes, they are serious days where we scrutinize our past mistakes and try to stir up feelings of regret.

But throughout it all, we have to remember that the purpose of all this scrutiny is just **so that we can become more beautiful**. We are always on the path to becoming better and more beautiful people, inside and out.



YOU'RE NEVER
ALONE IN
THE **BATTLE**

“When you go out to wage war against your enemies... Do not fear them! Because Hashem your G-d is with you.” (Devarim 21:10)

The Ohr HaChaim explains that this verse is not just speaking about a regular battle between countries; on a deeper level, it's referring to the **internal wars** we fight against the Yetzer Hara, our evil inclination.

When we go out to wage war against our evil inclination, the Torah is telling us to remember an important fact: **“Hashem, your G-d, is with you!”** You're not doing this alone.

Sometimes it feels like we are trying very hard to improve, but we just can't seem to reach success. Maybe our methods are wrong and maybe we need to try something else. We try and try and then we don't know what else to do.

The solution in this situation is very simple: **Ask G-d for help!**

G-d is on your side, and He believes in you. He is ready and eager to come to your aid if you just ask for his help. You're not in this battle alone.



TOOOOOT....
SENDING IT **BACK**
TO WHERE WE
CAME FROM

Blowing a shofar takes a lot of energy. A person has to take in a deeeeeep breath, gather up as much air as he can, and then slowly blow it back out through the shofar. What does this deep breath represent?

The Torah tells us that when G-d created Adam - the first human being - He gave him life by **“blowing” a soul into Adam’s body**. When we blow the shofar, we are taking that soul from deep within our bodies, and **blowing it back to G-d**.

What does it mean to “blow” your soul back to G-d?

It means taking everything that G-d gave you - your skills, your good looks, your talents, and your energy - and using them to make Him happy.

If you were given a bright smile, use it to cheer up your friends and family when they’ve had a hard day. If you were given a lot of physical stamina, use it to bring bringing meals to the sick or elderly. If you were given a talent for explaining things well, use it for teaching Torah.

Blowing the shofar reminds us to use all of our energies for a higher purpose. As we hear the shofar on Rosh Hashana, let’s think about what we can do to use our strengths and energies for the things G-d would want us to do.