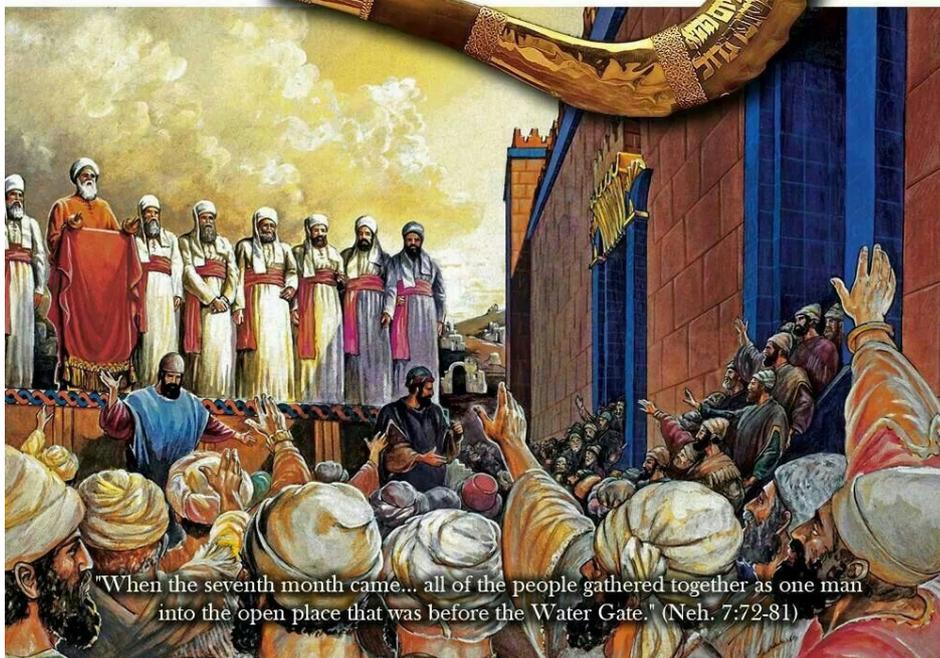


Rosh HaShana



"When the seventh month came... all of the people gathered together as one man into the open place that was before the Water Gate." (Neh. 7:72-81)

FALL FEASTS
OVERVIEW -
2017 / 5778

The 7th Hebrew month of TISHREI contains what often are called the High Holy Days. *Rosh HaShana* (the Day of Trumpets) falls on the 1st day of Tishrei, and is followed by 10 days that conclude with the holiest day of the year on the Hebrew calendar, the Day of Atonement - *Yom Kippur*.

In anticipation of these awe-filled days, the previous month of Elul is taken as a time of preparation. A month of doing a spiritual accounting and meeting with the Lord in an even closer and more personal way than usual. It's a time of repentance of any transgressions during the year, of forgiving others and trying to put things right as far as we are able. Tishrei is the threshold of the new Hebrew calendar year, a new cycle of time, and we hope to make a new, fresh beginning and to move ahead and rise higher in our spiritual growth and in every area of our lives.

Rosh HaShana, therefore, offers a special opportunity to review and respond to our Divine calling. To seek God's will for our lives afresh and to recommit to our life's mission in His Kingdom. Yom Kippur is the day we can stand, like the angels, before the Throne of Grace as the books of Judgment are read in the Court of Heaven. Praise God we have our High Priest and Advocate, Messiah Yeshua, who intercedes for us before the Throne of Mercy!

The symbol for this powerful and holy month is the shofar. It is sounded at the morning and evening services in synagogues throughout the month of Elul (not on Shabbats!). Thereby serving as a "wake-up call" to any who may still be slumbering in their sin and not prepared to meet with the King. The new Hebrew year starts on the 1st of Tishrei with the Day of Trumpets/ or Sounding the Shofar! This year, by the way, is 5778...8 indicates new beginnings, so may we be prepared for any new beginnings our Father G-d has in mind for us this year!

SHOFAR:

Where does the shofar first appear in the Bible? We're taken right back to the beginning - the first book of the Torah - *B'reisheet* / Genesis. In chapter 22, we read the account of the sacrifice of Isaac and how God provided a ram that was caught by its horns in a thicket to be sacrificed in his place. We know that God did not intend for Abraham to kill Isaac - the sacrifice was one of the heart - would he have enough faith and trust in God to obey even that so-unlike-God command?

The ram's horn, the shofar, has become the symbol of this extreme test of faith and one of repentance and redemption. The next pivotal event where we see, or hear, the shofar is in the next book *Shemot* / Exodus, 19:16 - "*The voice of the shofar was extremely loud so that all the people trembled.*"

Until today the sound of the shofar reaches deep into the spiritual memory of every Jewish heart and stirs the soul of every believer in the God of Israel. It calls us to reach out for a closer connection with our Creator and for the higher purpose for which we were created. During the Fall Feast season the shofar is blown morning and evening during the preparatory month of Elul and then 100 times during the Rosh HaShannah, the Day of Trumpets services.

There are three types of Shofar blasts:

1. TEKIYAH - one long blast. There are many layers of meaning to the sounds and their order but, in this context, the connection is that the long, unbroken blast of the *tekiyah* is the sound of Redemption. It echoes the cry of our hearts for wholeness and for all to be healed and restored to the original beauty that God intended at Creation.
2. SHEVARIM - 3 shorter broken sounds. This signifies a sighing sound for the brokenness that we and the world still experience and the yearning to cleave to our Father God.
3. TERUAH - A series of 3 x 3 short staccato sounds. These symbolize the small steps of return that God helps us make, that enable us to return to Him. It is also a battle sound, summoning the troops, as it were - God's messengers - the angelic hosts that help us to break the chains that separate us from Him.
4. Finally, at the end of the great Day of Atonement, at the close of the final service of Yom Kippur, we hear, as it were, God's triumphant call of Redemption as one long, extended, *tekiyah* blast is sounded...for as long as the shofar blower can hold it! After the 100 blasts on the Day of Trumpets, the shofar is silent during the 10 Days of Awe leading up to Yom Kippur. One listens intently for "the still, small voice of God." Yom Kippur itself is a quiet, prayerful day. The evening service concludes with proclaiming the Shemah with all the strength one can muster and then "*HaShem Hu Elohim!* The LORD He is G-d!" is declared loudly 7 times. Then comes a profound silence before the final Tekiyah blast of the shofar is sounded.

It is a seal, as it were, a promise of His full and faithful Forgiveness and Love as the books of judgment close and the gates open to the Festival of our Joy - *Sukkot*, The Feast of Tabernacles. We have entered and tasted the awe and splendor of the Heavenly Throne Room and experienced the enormous power of repentance and forgiveness, now is the time to move forward, to begin again. To rejoice, after months of hard work during the heat of summer, in the final harvest. Deut. 16:15 tells us:

For seven days you shall keep the feast to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.

Looking back at what we may have accomplished, it can be easy to be proud of one's own efforts and to forget that God is the ultimate source of success, achievement, and blessing. To remind us of our own fragile lives and our real dependence on Him, we move out of our strong houses of bricks and mortar and enter a shaky, little sukkah made of branches and flimsy materials. Certainly not a secure dwelling if the wind blows or rain falls! A Jewish source comments: "He who sits in a sukkah is in the shade of faith and no one can harm him because G-d is spreading His wings over him, like a mother protects her children!"

Although the sukkah only stands for 7 days, no effort is spared to make it look beautiful. It reminds us that our life is similar to a sukkah. The time we are given is limited, so we need to fill it with as much meaning, beauty, and holiness as we can. The fragile sukkah also reminds us that, just as the Israelites experienced in the journey through the wilderness, when we feel vulnerable during challenging times in our lives, we need always remember the clouds of God's glory that cover us. His hand of protection is over us and will give us the courage and ability to press forward until the time comes when we will see all things clearly in His Divine light and will understand all that is to be understood. On that great Day - the Day that is All Shabbat! Until then we rejoice in our present appointed times with God.

CONCLUSION:

The day after the joyful intimacy of Sukkot, on the eighth day, of *Shemini Atzeret*, it's as if God is saying: "Stay with Me just one more day, for your departure is hard for Me to bear!"

Here in Israel, we also celebrate *Simchat Torah* on this day. Meaning "Rejoicing in the Torah" it's a celebration that marks the conclusion of the Annual Cycle of Torah Reading and the beginning of the new cycle. In synagogues, the Torah scrolls are removed from the Ark and paraded around with much love, singing, and joy. Everyone touches, and hugs, and kisses the beautiful covers that decorate the scrolls that carry the Word of God.

In the Bible, the festivals are also called, *mikrei kodesh* - callings of holiness. Each is a gateway in the passage of time. When we hear the call and enter in we discover the meaning and beauty of each appointed time. We experience the life-changing, transformative power that enables us to grow spiritually and move higher and nearer to our Father in Heaven. That's why a prayer is said at each festival: "Open for me the gates of Righteousness; I shall enter them and thank God. This is HaShem's gate; the righteous will enter through it." (Psalm 118:19-20)

We have a month filled with festivals - truly the Rosh, the "head of the year." It is in the head or mind that ideas are born, that plans are made, we find our meaning and purpose. Let us be mindful this Tishrei that we are 'setting the stage,' as it were, for the year ahead.

SO...SHANAH TOVAH, may it be a good year, and in accord with Psalm 100:4-5, as we enter His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise; let us give thanks to Him, and bless His Name. For the LORD is good, His steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations. Amen!