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A Summarization of Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah Traditions

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Yom Teruah (יום תְּרוּעָה) or *Rosh HaShanah* (רֵאשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה) is the first of the Fall appointed times, and it begins a very serious season of personal reflection and repentance for the individual, leading up to *Yom Kippur*. It occurs on the first of Tishri on the Hebrew calendar, and along with *Yom Kippur*, constitutes one of the most sacred times for the Jewish community. The instruction for this day appears twice in the Torah, in Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6:

“Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD”” (Leviticus 23:23-25).

“Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for blowing trumpets. You shall offer a burnt offering as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, and seven male lambs one year old without defect; also their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. Offer one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you, besides the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD” (Numbers 29:1-6).

There is a great deal of significance attached to this day in Jewish theology, as it is most often emphasized as a time when God looks down from Heaven and reconsiders where He stands with people. It is a time where we are to rejoice and celebrate, remembering His goodness to us, but also begin a sober examination of our humanity, and consider faults and sins that must be rectified. Deuteronomy 11:12 explains, “the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning

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even to the end of the year,” and this has been interpreted as meaning that at this time of year, when crops are gathered and the final harvest begins to come in, that the Lord considers where He stands with the people. The Talmud explains the severity of this concept in Jewish thought:

“Said R. Kruspedai said R. Yohanah, ‘Three books are opened [by God] on the New Year: one for the thoroughly wicked, one for the thoroughly righteous, and one for middling [people]. The thoroughly righteous immediately are inscribed and sealed for [continued] life. The thoroughly wicked immediately are inscribed and sealed for death. Middling [people] are left hanging from New Year until the Day of Atonement. If they [are found to have] merit, they are inscribed for life. If they [are found] not [to have] merit, they are inscribed for death” (b.*Rosh HaShanah* 16b).¹

Of course, how God exactly considers or reckons our relationship to Him as human beings is something that we cannot fully know. What thoughts like this should convey to us, though, is that we are very mortal, we need to be in awe of God’s holiness, and as the Apostle Paul reminds us, “each one of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). He further says, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

The need for us to reflect on ourselves, and maintain an active and vibrant relationship with God, is a key theme of the teachings of Yeshua and the Apostles. While this is to be happening every day of the year through prayer, meditation, and study of the Bible—this is a particular season where we have the **opportunity to overhaul** where we might stand with our Heavenly Father and with one another. Each year at this time religious Jews are forced to consider where they stand with the Almighty. Even though as Believers we have experienced the salvation available in Yeshua, we still commit sin and we still need a yearly reexamination of where we are in our spiritual walk. This reexamination begins on *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah*. We get to improve where we are with Him, and remember that He is the One who will provide for us in the coming year.²

The Day of Blowing

The specific command which dominates *Yom Teruah* is the command to blow the trumpet, or *shofar* (שׁוֹפָר), seen in Leviticus 23:23-24:

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the Israelites, saying: ‘In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a sabbath, a commemoration with horn blast, a sacred convocation’” (*Alter*).

The term used for “trumpet blasts” (NIV) or “loud blasts” (NJPS) is *teruah* (תְּרוּעָה), meaning “shout or blast of war, alarm, or joy,” applied in various contexts, including: “battle-cry of king,” “blast for march,” and “shout of joy with religious impulse” (*BDB*).³ While various emotions are involved in “blowing,” or even “blasting out,” to the Lord, the idea conveyed is that one is not only to blow the *shofar* for recognizing His holiness and awesomeness, but also that others can be

¹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

² b.*Beitzah* 16a explains, “A person’s entire allotment [for the year] is determined [by God] between New Year’s Day and the Day of Atonement” (Ibid.).

³ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 929.

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drawn to Him. As a consequence, Israel as God's people will be shown His mercy and will experience spiritual fulfillment. *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:4 in the Midrash explains this concept well:

“Do not the nations of the world know how to sound the trumpet? They have numerous horns, sirens and trumpets, and yet it is said: ‘Happy is the people that know the sound of the trumpet.’ This means that Israel is the people which knows how to win over their Creator with the blasts of the *shofar* so that He rises from His throne of judgment to His throne of mercy and is filled with compassion for them and turns His quality of judgment into the quality of compassion.”⁴

A picture of the types of sounds that are to be blown on the Day of Trumpets is seen in Numbers 10:5-8:

“But when you blow an alarm, the camps that are pitched on the east side shall set out. When you blow an alarm the second time, the camps that are pitched on the south side shall set out; an alarm is to be blown for them to set out. When convening the assembly, however, you shall blow without sounding an alarm. The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations.”

There was some debate in post-Temple Judaism as to how these commands were to be followed, and specifically regarding the types of sounds that were to be blown. In the *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, Ronald L. Eisenberg explains, “The talmudic sages disagreed as to whether the *teruah* should be a wailing, moaning, undulating sound (*shevarim*) of three broken notes or a series of quick sobs (*teruah*) in at least nine staccato notes. Since a crying person may make both of these sounds, it was unclear what God wanted. The final decision was to use all three possible combinations.”⁵ The three sounds that are made today by the *shofar* in the synagogue service are *tekiah* (תְּקִיעָה)—a long blast, *shevarim* (שְׁבָרִים)—a moaning sound, and *teruah* (תְּרוּעָה)—a crying sound. The order in which they are blown is

Tekiah, shevarim teruah, tekiah

Tekiah, shevarim, tekiah

Tekiah, teruah, tekiah

This is followed by a long great blast or *tekiah gedolah* (תְּקִיעָה גְּדוֹלָה). This series of blowings is usually offered only twice in the service. “The sounding of the *shofar* in the synagogue is an occasion of great solemnity at which God is entreated to show mercy to His creatures” (*EJ*).⁶ Most Messianic Jewish congregations follow very closely with the custom of blowing the *shofar* blasts only at these designated times, although it does vary. It can easily be said, though, that the Jewish community blows the *shofar* far less than does the broad Messianic movement,

⁴ Cited in Louis Jacobs, “Rosh Ha-Shanah,” in [Encyclopaedia Judaica. MS Windows ox](#). Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

⁵ Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 192.

⁶ Jacobs, “Rosh Ha-Shanah,” in *EJ*.

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primarily employing—if not *only* employing it—during the Fall high holidays, and not for its standard worship throughout the year.⁷

In Jewish thought the sound of the *shofar* is to be one of awe and reverence, and not always rejoicing. A customary *Musaf* service, often held late in the later afternoon on this day, is conducted so that members of the Jewish community can remember the sobs of their people, with as many as 100 *shofar* blasts offered.⁸ Furthermore, on this holy occasion it is held that “The shofar may be sounded only in the daytime”⁹ and will not be blown on the evening following.

The regulations concerning the *shofar* and its composition are very important for us to note, because of its significance for both members of the Jewish community and for us as Believers. The Mishnah specifies that a *shofar* can be made from the horns of a sheep, goat, or antelope, but not from a cow because of the incident of the Israelites worshipping the golden calf (m.*Rosh HaShanah* 3:2-3; b.*Rosh HaShanah* 26a; cf. Exodus 32). The ram’s horn is preferred, so we can remember the substitution of a ram in place of the sacrifice of Isaac (b.*Rosh HaShanah* 16a; cf. Genesis 22:13). A curved ram’s horn is especially preferred, as it is used to symbolize man’s required submission to God, bending to His will (b.*Rosh HaShanah* 26b).

While sounding the *shofar* is the dominant theme of the Day of Trumpets,¹⁰ some particular reasons are often given in Jewish theology for why it is blown on this day. These reasons bear significance for us as Messianic Believers as well,

⁷ As a point of reference, Jewish tradition holds that “the shofar should not be blown on the Sabbath,” as Eisenberg explains “all we do is *remember* the sound of the shofar and not blow it” (Eisenberg, 194). Many Messianics, contrary to this, blow the *shofar* on *Shabbat*.

For a further discussion, consult the McHuey Blog post by J.K. McKee, from 29 September, 2008, “The Day of Blowing,” available for access at <<http://mchuey.wordpress.com>>.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

For a review of this liturgy, consult J.H. Hertz, ed., *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, revised (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1960), pp 866-887; Jules Harlow, ed., *Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1992); Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Complete ArtScroll Siddur, Nusach Ashkenaz* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984), pp 462-489; Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *Seif Edition of the ArtScroll Transliterated Siddur: Sabbath and Festival* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1998), pp 433-497.

⁹ Eisenberg, 194.

¹⁰ It is notable that there are many in the independent Messianic community who do not blow the *shofar* on this day, but instead blow silver trumpets (Heb. sing. *chatzotzrah*, חַצְצֹרָה). This is primarily based on Numbers 10:2: “Make yourself two trumpets of silver, of hammered work you shall make them; and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for having the camps set out.” A secondary Scripture considered may be Psalm 81:3-4: “Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob,” even though *shofar* is used in this text and not *chatzotzrah*.

Silver trumpets are not used by either the Jewish community or Messianic Jewish community on the Feast of Trumpets. This is likely because the Eleventh Century Sage Rashi, commenting on Numbers 10:2, held to the opinion that “These trumpets were for Moses’ exclusive use; he had the status of a king in whose honor trumpets are sounded. The trumpets were hidden just before Moses’ death; even Joshua, his successor, was not permitted to use them” (Nosson Scherman, ed., et al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000], 783). Whether or not this is actually the case cannot be fully determined, although there is a long-standing Jewish custom that since the destruction of the Temple, vessels and furniture used in the Tabernacle/Temple were not to be reproduced for worship in the Synagogue. This would extend to the silver trumpets, leaving only the *shofar* to be blown. It is notable though, that the Temple Institute in Jerusalem has reproduced silver trumpets for usage in a rebuilt Temple.

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especially as we desire to be reconnected to our Hebraic Roots and understand how the Tanach is connected to the Apostolic Writings:

- To announce the beginning of the period of repentance and to warn people against transgressing.
- To remind us of the warnings of the prophets, who raised their voices like the shofar to touch our consciences.
- To remind us of the alarms of battle that accompanied the destruction of the Temple.
- To cause us to be in awe and do the will of God, for as Amos (3:6) asked, "When a ram's horn is sounded in a town, do the people not tremble?"
- To remind us of the great Day of Judgment, when the horn will be sounded as a summons to the heavenly court (Zeph. 1:16).
- To remind us that the shofar will herald the ingathering of Israel's scattered remnants to return to the Holy Land in the Messianic Age (Isa. 27:13).
- To remind us of the revival of the dead."

These are all sobering themes that we need to be reminded of as we contemplate the varied themes present on *Rosh HaShanah*. Many in the Messianic community connect the theme of blowing the trumpet to the return of Yeshua the Messiah, as seen in some critical passages:

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET AND THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:29-31).¹²

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

"Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

While the gathering of the saints to Yeshua is going to be a wonderful event, it is also quite serious. It involves the resurrection and transformation of the bodies of those who have died in the faith, and the transformation of living Believers at this

¹² Eisenberg, pp 195-196.

¹³ Cf. Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15.

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time.¹³ But at the same time, Yeshua's gathering of the saints is a *post-tribulational* event; it occurs after a great deal of suffering and pain has been experienced in the world.¹⁴ It occurs only after billions of people have died and the faithful have endured through God's judgment on Earth. The Believers living through this time have experienced any number of destinies, including being protected by the Lord, but also including persecution and martyrdom. When Yeshua finally appears in the clouds, He can then come to claim the Earth as His own:

"Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Messiah; and He will reign forever and ever'" (Revelation 11:15).

The return of Yeshua is something for us to seriously consider on this day, but it is also something that is to make us be very reverent of who we are in the eyes of a holy and righteous God. While this is to be a time that we blow the *shofar*—is it a time to blow the *shofar* and "party"? Not at all. It is a time for us to hear the blast of the trumpet, so that we might be called to gather and consider the Lord's place in our lives. While we are to rejoice in the Lord and enjoy His presence, we are **also to be very serious**. The Jewish community takes this time very seriously, as many wish to reconcile any differences they have with God and with others. How much more important is it for us as Believers if we contemplate the return of the Messiah and God's judgment on Earth?

The Head of the Year

In the Jewish community the holiday that is specified by the Torah as being called *Yom Teruah* (Numbers 29:1) is called *Rosh HaShanah* (ראש השנה) or the Head of the Year. The Pentateuch actually counts the months of the year beginning with the month of Aviv/Nisan (Exodus 13:4), or the month of Passover, and what is commonly called *Rosh HaShanah* in Judaism actually begins in the seventh month, Tishri. The reason for the designation of this day as *Rosh HaShanah* can only be understood by an examination of history, and the varied Jewish opinions on this subject.

The Mishnah tractate *Rosh HaShanah* actually lists four different new years, with *Yom Teruah* being listed as one of them:

"There are four new years: the first day of Nisan is the new year for kings and festivals; the first day of Elul is the new year for tithing cattle. **R. Eleazar and R. Simeon say, 'It is on the first day of Tishre.'** The first day of Tishre is the new year for the reckoning of years, for Sabbatical years, and for Jubilees, for planting [trees] and for vegetables; the first day of Shebat is the new year for trees, in accord with the opinion of the House of Shammai. The House of Hillel say, 'On the fifteenth day of that month [is the new year for trees]'" (*m.Rosh HaShanah* 1:1).¹⁵

¹³ For a discussion on the intermediate state and resurrection, consult the article "To Be Absent From the Body" by J.K. McKee.

¹⁴ Consult the theological report *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism* by J.K. McKee for detailed answer to many of the reasons commonly given in support of the popular pre-tribulation rapture.

¹⁵ Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 299.

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Following these opinions, the Jewish community of the late Biblical period began recognizing the first of Tishri as their civil new year.¹⁶ Concurrent with this point of view was the opinion that the world was created on the first of Tishri:

“Said Rab Samuel bar Isaac, ‘Nowadays, on whose [authority] do we pray [on New Year]: “Today is the beginning of your works, the commemoration of the first day”? On whose [authority]? On [the authority of] Eliezer, who said, “In Tishré, the world was created”’” (b.*Rosh HaShanah* 27a).¹⁷

The logic behind considering this day *Rosh HaShanah* is that since the world is going to be judged at this time, and that it will usher in the Messianic Age, it is only logical to assume that the world was created at this time as well,¹⁸ and God has brought His Creation “full circle.” Some, such as Eisenberg, offer a secondary reason, which is that “the Hebrew word ‘*b'reishit*’ [בְּרֵאשִׁית] (when God began to create [the heaven and earth]) can be rearranged to spell *alef b'Tishrei* [א בְּתִשְׁרֵי] (the First of Tishrei).”¹⁹ **The overwhelming reason that we must consider is the awe and holiness attached to this appointed time, and referring to it as the Head of the Year was likely designed to enhance that holiness.**

For those of us in the Messianic community, we are forced to observe that the Apostolic Scriptures are totally mute on the subject of how Yeshua the Messiah and His Apostles observed this holiday. While many Christians would take this silence as evidence meaning that the Apostles no longer observed the Fall festivals, Jewish studies in the New Testament are forcing many theologians to admit that they did continue to observe the appointed times, and this would logically include the Fall high holy days. The issue for us is *how the Apostles observed these festivals*. If we have no direct record about how they did it, we have to make some assumptions from the contemporary history of the period. And, we have to make some extrapolations as to what we think they would do were they living among us today.

Some in the independent Messianic community may claim that the Apostles did not keep “*Rosh HaShanah*,” as the Pentateuch itself only says that the “new year” begins in the Spring and they must have followed it in its strict written sense. Our answer to how to properly handle this holiday is going to be found in the extant literature of the First and Second Centuries, and the evidence which points to what the larger Jewish community was doing. Consider the fact that the Apostle Paul attests, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today...I have committed **no offense either against the Law of the Jews** or against the temple or against Caesar” (Acts 22:3; 25:8). His reference to Rabban Gamaliel and “the Jewish law” (HCSB)²⁰ gives us some important clues that he followed the orthopraxy delivered by the Pharisaic School of Hillel, and followed the mainline Jewish customs of his time.²¹

¹⁶ Eisenberg, 185.

¹⁷ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

¹⁸ Or, as the authors of this article would specify, the world of humans. Consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website “Creationism.”

¹⁹ Eisenberg, 187.

²⁰ Grk. *ton nomon tōn Ioudaiōn* (τὸν νόμον τῶν Ἰουδαίων).

²¹ It is notable that there is some significant difference between the First Century Pharisaic customs of the School of Hillel, which was considered rather progressive at the time, and the *halachah* followed in Orthodox Judaism today. We do not particularly agree with the statement that Paul would

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Rabban Gamaliel is a major figure in First Century Judaism, and notably in the Mishnah tractate *Rosh HaShanah*. Arnost Zvi Ehrman comments, “Chapter 2 [discusses] the subject of the determination of the New Moon, and concludes with the dramatic account of how Rabban Gamaliel asserted his patriarchal authority to make R. Joshua yield to his ruling.”²² It summarizes the tradition laid down by the Pharisees in Second Temple times regarding how the New Moon was to be determined, specifically how “A picture of the shapes of the moon did Rabban Gamaliel have on a tablet and on the wall of his upper room, which he would show ordinary folk, saying, ‘Did you see it like this or that?’” (m.*Rosh HaShanah* 2:8ff; cf. 3:1).²³

Following the destruction of the Second Temple, a pre-calculated system of determining the months was developed to ensure unity among a scattered people, forming the basis of the current Jewish calendar, something that today is followed by all the major branches of Judaism and most of the Messianic movement. Recall how Paul’s defense was “I have in no way committed an offense against the law of the Jews” (NLT), which would have included the calendar he followed for the appointed times. If the Apostle Paul were living today, would he not similarly follow the religious calendar of mainline Judaism, not offending his Jewish brethren on such an issue that bound the wider Synagogue together? Today’s Messianic Believers should emulate such an example, and not only observe *Rosh HaShanah* with the Jewish community—but all of the appointed times on the same dates as the mainline Synagogue.

Rosh HaShanah to Jews all over the world is the beginning of the Civil New Year, and it is not celebrated like the January 1 New Year on the Roman calendar with parties, drinking, and frivolity. It is to be a time of blowing the *shofar*, turning to God, and considering where one stands with Him. These are all themes that we as Believers in Yeshua need to seriously consider. We need to continually reevaluate our state with the Almighty. We need to shed ourselves of sinful attitudes and behaviors, so that we might be rededicated to His service for the next year. We need to remember the justice of our God and how He is going to judge the world, calling His people to attention.

Customs and Traditional Foods

There are some very compelling traditions that are followed during this season, most notably the customary greeting, “May you be inscribed (in the book of life) for a good year” (*EJ*),²⁴ and *l’shanah tovah* (לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה), “to/for a good year.” Those who gather to worship the Lord in corporate worship in prayer say things like this, so that people will focus on doing good deeds for the year ahead.

A ceremony that is practiced by many Jews, on the first day of *Rosh HaShanah* for those in the Diaspora, is *Tashlikh* (תַּשְׁלִיחַ).²⁵ It is particularly

have been an “Orthodox Jew” if he were living today, but instead are of the opinion that his *halachah* would be closer to Conservative Judaism (Center), sitting between the sectors of Orthodox (Right) and Reform (Left) Judaism.

²² Arnost Zvi Ehrman, “Rosh Ha-Shanah (tal. tract.),” in *EJ*.

²³ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 302.

²⁴ Ehrman, “Rosh Ha-Shanah (tal. tract.),” in *EJ*.

²⁵ For a review of its liturgy, consult Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, pp 888-889; Scherman, *ArtScroll Siddur Ashkenaz*, pp 770-771.

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observed by those of Ashkenazic extraction, as it was developed in Medieval Europe. Jews would throw crumbs or small pieces of bread into a body of water to symbolically “cast away” their sins. The name *Tashlikh* derives from the Hebrew in Micah 7:19, which says God “will cast²⁶ all their sins into the depths of the sea.” Eisenberg notes, “According to tradition, the body of water into which Jews symbolically cast their sins should preferably have fish within it. Fish were the first witnesses of the work of Creation, which began on Rosh Hashanah. Because fish never close their eyes, the ceremony may reflect that the ever-vigilant eyes of God see all our sins.”²⁷ An interesting Scriptural reason for this is given from Ecclesiastes 9:12:

“Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.”

The observation that is made is that fish who see “sins” cast into the water during *Tashlikh* cannot speak and thus cannot gossip about them. So, those who cast off sins are likewise to not talk about them once they are remitted.

Interesting derivations of the *Tashlikh* ceremony include people actually jumping into bodies of water themselves, swimming like fish, or people lighting small rafts in water to represent their sins not only floating away, but also being “burned up.”²⁸ It is notable that today the observation of *Tashlikh* is principally limited to those in Orthodox Judaism, and Conservative and Reform Jews do not often practice it. Likewise, there are only a handful of Messianic Jews who observe this custom, and non-Jewish Messianics probably observe it the least.

What is consistent with all major branches of Judaism, and likewise with us in the Messianic community, is the focus on somber liturgies dealing with the holiness of God, His kingship, His righteousness, and our general fallen state. Common prayers to hear on *Rosh HaShanah* include: *Avinu Malkeinu* (Our Father, Our King), where we call upon God to show us His mercy; *Hineini* (Here I stand), where we recall our sins and misdeeds of the previous year; *Malchuyot*, which expresses the universal sovereignty of God and His future reign over the whole world; and the *Zichronot* prayers which appeal to God’s justice and Him rightly redeeming Israel and the Earth from its suffering.²⁹ Also common is the *Kaddish*, or praise to God that is often canted in remembrance of deceased loved ones.³⁰

Rosh HaShanah is not a day of fasting, and there are some traditional foods that are eaten at this time to recall the sweetness of God toward us as His people. Most commonly eaten are pieces of *challah* (חלה) bread and sliced apples dipped in honey. The traditional prayer *she-techadesh aleinu shanah tovah u'metukah*, “May it be Your will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, to renew unto us a good and sweet year,” is recited after eating. The *challah* that is baked at this time is

²⁶ The Hebrew verb here is *shalak* (שָׁלַךְ), appearing in the Hifil stem (casual action, active voice), meaning “throw, fling, cast” (*BDB*, 1020); *tashlikh* (תְּשַׁלַּח); also transliterated as *tashlich*) is the second person, masculine imperfect form.

²⁷ Eisenberg, 204.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ For a summary of the different *Rosh HaShanah* liturgies, consult Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, pp 842-889; Scherman, *ArtScroll Siddur Ashkenaz*, pp 762-771.

³⁰ For a review of the *Kaddish* liturgy, consult Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, pp 398-399; Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2007), pp 184-185; Scherman, *ArtScroll Siddur Ashkenaz*, pp 1048-1050.

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customarily round, recalling “the cyclical and eternal nature of life, expressing the hope that the coming year will be complete and unbroken by tragedy.”³¹ Some *challahs* are decorated in the form of a ladder to recall the story of Jacob’s dream (Genesis 28:10-22) and how all humans are undoubtedly connected to the Divine in Heaven.

As *Rosh HaShanah* ends, a ten-day period, known either as the Ten Days of Awe or Ten Days of Repentance, begins. It ends at *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement, the most holy of all of the appointed times. In the Jewish community, this is a specific time for people to encounter others and finish any unresolved conflicts. Some Jews will even visit cemeteries and visit the graves of their deceased loved ones, using it as a time to reflect on their own mortality and where they stand with God.³² For us as Believers in Yeshua, this too can be an important time of reflection where we forgive others for wrongs done to us, and ask for forgiveness for sins that we have committed. We have a great opportunity every year to improve upon our relationship with the Lord, and be sanctified at this season as we are conformed more and more into the image of Yeshua (Romans 8:29). It is a time when we can consider what it means to truly be His representatives in this fallen, sinful world—and *how all need salvation*.

A Call to Repentance

The overwhelming theme that one is confronted with on *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah* is that the God of Israel calls all of His people to holiness. He wants them to assemble in corporate worship and to rejoice, but our rejoicing must be tempered not with enthusiasm, but rather solemnity. As you remember the Feast of Trumpets this year, this is surely a time to go to the Lord in worship, but it also needs to be a time when we consider who He is as our Supreme Creator. Fortunately, God does not just call us to *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement without some prior preparation. He knows that as human beings we cannot go from our daily routines immediately to a time of total concentration on Him and our mortality and sin. **The transitional period toward *Yom Kippur* begins now.**

As you assemble with your Messianic congregation or fellowship, your family, or even just you and God, we would urge you to consider the supreme concept of the Lord being the King of the Universe. This is certainly something to rejoice about, but is also something that we as humans must be in awe about. The *shofar* blast calls us to the severe scene of Mount Sinai in fire and smoke—but for us as Believers also calls us to consider Mount Zion and the Heavenly Jerusalem, where the angels, and the redeemed saints who have passed on before us, *presently worship* the Lord. This is a scene that should cause us to praise God for His mercy on us, and also make us to be thankful that He has indeed sent His Son:

“For you have not come to a *mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, ‘IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED.’ And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, ‘I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling.’ But you have come to Mount

³¹ Eisenberg, 189.

³² *Ibid.*, 205.

A Summarization of Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah Traditions

Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and [congregation] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, and to Yeshua, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel" (Hebrews 12:18-24; cf. Exodus 19:12; Deuteronomy 9:19).