

Aseret Yamei Teshuvah – Ten Days of Repentance

Germantown Jewish Centre | Rosh Hashanah Day 1 (5781) Text Study

Source Sheet by Rabbi Rebecca Richman

The ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are known as Aseret Yamei Teshuvah, the Ten Days of Repentance. This text study explores some of the laws, customs, and ritual opportunities of these days. How does the name of this set of days (and this unit of time) create a spiritual and relational opening for us to do some of the hard, holy work of the season?

Opening Questions to Consider

- Are there practices/rituals/traditions that you tend to participate in or take on between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? What are they? Why have you chosen those, and what significance do they provide for you?
- How might the period of time from the start of Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur provide a frame for you to tune in and focus, extra diligently, on some of your personal work?

Overview of Aseret Yamei Teshuvah

1. This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared, Rabbi Alan Lew (p. 160-162)

The Ten Days of Teshuvah are days of renewal, days when we are not only concerned with change and transformation, but also with reinvigorating, refreshing, and reimagining our lives, days when we are obliged to ask ourselves a number of difficult and unpleasant questions. What do we do when everything we do seems dull, when life seems barren and drained of color and taste, when the landscape that used to thrill us with its beauty now lies before us flat and dull, its radiance drained away? What do we do when we admit to ourselves, in the secret darkness of our heart, that we really don't care anymore about the things we used to care about?

2. Isaiah 55:6

Seek G!d while G!d can be found,
Call to G!d **while G!d is near**.

ישעיהו נ"ה:ו'

דַּרְשׁוּ ה' בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ קְרָאֵהוּ בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ קְרוֹב:

3. Rosh Hashanah 18a

The Gemara asks: With regard to **an individual, when** is God near to them? **Rabba bar Avuh said: These are the ten days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur.**

ראש השנה י"ח א

ביחיד אימת אמר רבה

בר אבואה אלו עשרה

ימים שבין ר"ה ליום"כ

4. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 130:1

The Ten Days of Repentance, as characterized by their name, are designated for repentance. During this time everyone is obligated to repent wholeheartedly before God, blessed is G!d's Name, before the coming of the great and awesome day, of *Yom Kippur*, as it is said, "Before God you will be cleansed" (Leviticus 16:30). It is also said, "Seek God when G!d may be found", (Isaiah 55:6) and our Rabbis of blessed memory said that this refers to the ten days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. Therefore, during these days you

קיצור שלחן ערוך ק"ל:א'

עֲשֵׂת יְמֵי תְּשׁוּבָה, שְׁמֵם מוֹרָה
עֲלֵיהֶם, שְׁהֵם מִיְּחָדִים לְתְּשׁוּבָה. וְכָל
אָדָם מְחִיב אֶז לְשׁוֹב בְּתְּשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה
לִפְנֵי ה', יִתְבָּרֵךְ שְׁמוֹ, קִדְּם בּוֹא
הַיּוֹם הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא יוֹם הַכְּפּוּרִים,
שְׁנֵאֲמַר לִפְנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ, וְנֵאֲמַר
דַּרְשׁוּ ה' בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ. וְאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ,
זְכוּרֵנָם לְבִרְכָּה, אֵלּוּ עֲשָׂרָה יָמִים
שְׁבִין רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְיוֹם הַכְּפּוּרִים.

must examine your conduct and repent of your bad deeds...During these days You should study more Torah, perform more *mitzvot*, give more charity, and spend less time on your business. It was written by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, of blessed memory, that you should consider these days as if they were *Chol Hamoed*, by performing only necessary work. Above all, you must set right the wrongs you committed against your fellow, for which there is no atonement unless you compensate them for any stolen articles or withheld funds in your possession, and patch things up and placate them so that they will forgive you.

לְכֹן צָרִיךְ הָאָדָם בְּיָמֵי הָאֵלּוּ
לְפַשְׁטַשׁ בְּמַעֲשָׂיו וּלְשׁוּב מִמַּעֲשָׂיו
הָרָעִים...וְיִרְכֶּה בַּתּוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת
וּבְצַדִּיקָה, וְיַמְעִיט בְּעִסְקָיו. וְכָתַב
הַרְמ"ק, זְכָרוֹנוֹ לְבִרְכָּה, שֶׁיְהִיו יָמֵי
אֵלּוּ כְּמוֹ חֹל הַמּוֹעֵד, שֶׁלֹּא יַעֲשֶׂה
בָּהֶם אֵלֶּא מְלָאכָה הַכְּרָחִית. וּבִיּוֹתֵר
צָרִיךְ הָאָדָם לְתַקֵּן דְּבָרִים שֶׁבִּינוּ
לְבֵינוּ חֲבֵרוֹ, אֲשֶׁר עָלִיהֶם אֵין כְּפָרָה
עַד שֶׁיַּחְזִיר אֶת הַגָּזֹל וְאֶת הָעֶשֶׂק,
וְיַפְסֹס שְׂמִיחָו לֹו.

5. Spiritual Guide to the High Holidays, Simon Jacobson, p. 97

According to the Ari, the seven days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (which will always include one Sunday, one Monday, etc. and correspond to the seven days of the week) repair and atone for all the days of the year. The Sunday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur repairs all Sundays of the year; the Monday repairs all Mondays, and so on. Shabbat *Teshuvah* is thus the archetypal Shabbat -- the juncture in time at which we are empowered to influence every Shabbat of our year.

What Do We Do During Aseret Yamei Teshuvah?

6. Mishneh Torah, Repentance 2:1

What is complete *teshuvah*? When a person has the opportunity to commit the same sin, and possess the ability to do it, but they separate and do not do it because of *teshuvah* and not out of fear or lack of strength.

משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ב'א'
אִי זֶה הוּא תְּשׁוּבָה גְּמוּרָה. זֶה שֶׁבָּא לִידֹו
דְּבַר שֶׁעָבַר בּוֹ וְאָפְשָׁר בְּיָדוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ
וּפְרָשׁ וְלֹא עָשָׂה מִפְּנֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה. לֹא
מִיָּרָא וְלֹא מִכְשָׁלוֹן כֹּחַ.

7. Mishneh Torah, Repentance 2:2

What is *teshuvah*? It is when a person abandons the sin that they sinned and removes it from their thoughts and commits in their heart that they will not do it again, as it says, *The wicked should abandon their path* etc. (Isaiah 55:7). And also that they regret sinning, as it says, *After I returned I regretted* (Jeremiah 31:18). And the One Who Knows Hidden Things testifies about that person that they will never return to this sin, as it says, *And we will no longer call the work of our hands "god"* etc. (Hosea 14:4). And that person must confess verbally and say these things that they have committed in their heart.

משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ב'ב'
(ב) וְמָה הִיא הַתְּשׁוּבָה. הוּא שֶׁיַּעֲזֹב
הַחוּטָא חָטָאוֹ וְיִסִּירוֹ מִמַּחְשַׁבְתּוֹ וְיִגְמַר
בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁלֹּא יַעֲשֶׂה עוֹד שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיה
נ"ה-ז) "יַעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דַּרְכּוֹ" וְגו'. וְכֵן
יִתְנַחֵם עַל שֶׁעָבַר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ירמיה
לא-יח) "כִּי אַחֲרַי שׁוּבִי נִחַמְתִּי". וְיַעֲדִיד
עָלָיו יוֹדֵעַ תַּעֲלוּמוֹת שֶׁלֹּא יָשׁוּב לְזֶה
הַחוּטָא לַעֲוֹלָם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (הושע יד-ד)
"וְלֹא נֹאמַר עוֹד אֱלֹקֵינוּ לְמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ"
וְגו'. וְצָרִיךְ לְהִתְוֹדֹת בְּשִׁפְתָיו וְלֹאמַר
עֲנִיּוֹת אֵלּוּ שֶׁגָּמַר בְּלִבּוֹ:

8. Orchot Tzadikim 26:77

Therefore, it is proper that everyone who reveres G'd should lessen their usual occupations and let their thoughts be calm, and let them fix hours, during the day and a night, when they can sit alone in their rooms and examine their ways and search them out, and arise even before the watches of the morning to occupy themselves with the paths of repentance. And

אורחות צדיקים כ"ו:ע"ז
לְכֹן רְאוּי לְכָל יִרְא שָׁמַיִם לַמַּעַט
עִסְקִי, וּלְהִיּוֹת רַעֲיוֹנָיו נְחִיתִים,
וּלְקַבּוֹעַ בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה עֵתִים,
לְהִתְבּוֹדַד בַּחֲדָרָיו וּלְחַפֵּשׁ דַּרְכּוֹ
וּלְחַקֹּר, וּלְקַדֵּם בְּאִשְׁמוּרַת
וּלְהִתְעַסֵּק בְּדַרְכֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה. וְלֹא

let them not do as in most cases where people fast, or rise early to pray, but they do not actually wage war against the sins in order to remove from themselves every ugly thing. For if a person prays and fasts, and confesses, and still clings to their former ways — this is not the path of repentance...Scripture has warned us that we should repent and make ourselves pure before God, Blessed be G!d, in our ways of repentance. As it is said, "From all your sins shall ye be clean before the Lord" (Lev. 16:30). And then G!d will atone for us with this day, to purify us (Yoma 85b).

שיעשה כענייני העולם, שמתענין ומקדימין להתפלל, אבל אינן עורכין מערכות נגד העוונות לסלק מהן כל דבר מכוער. כי כל איש שמתפלל ומתענה ומתוודה, ואחז דרכיו הראשונים – אין זה דרך התשובה... הזהירנו הכתוב שנשוב ונטהר לפני השם ברוך הוא בתשובותינו, ויכפר עלינו ביום הזה לטהר אותנו.

9. Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 606:1 To Reconcile with Your Friend on Erev Yom Kippur, 4 Seifim

Transgressions between people are not subject to atonement on Yom Kippur unless the offender appeases the offended party. Even if one aggrieved another with words alone, this appeasement is necessary.

אורח חיים תר"ו:א'
שיפייס אדם חברו בערב יום כפור ובו ד"ס:
עבירות שבין אדם לחברו אין יום הכפורים מכפר עד שיפייסנו ואפילו לא הקניטו אלא בדברים צריך לפייסו.

10. Rabbi Jonathan Saks: Commentary to Tashlikh from pp. 936-947 of Koren-Sacks Machzor for Rosh HaShana

It is a custom, on the afternoon of the first day of Rosh HaShana (or second, if the first is Shabbat) to go to the shore of the sea, the bank of a river, or other running stream of water, as a symbolic enactment of the words of the prophet Micah: "God will cast into the depths of the sea all their sins" (Micah 7:19).

11. The Ten Days of Repentance: The Aseret Yemay Teshuvah

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1620809/jewish/The-Ten-Days-of-Repentance-The-Aseret-Yemay-Teshuvah.htm

The day following Rosh Hashanah is the **Fast of Gedalia**, when we mourn the death of Gedaliah, the leader of the Jewish people in the Holy Land following the destruction of the First Temple in 3338 (423 BCE).

12. The Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is called **Shabbat Shuvah**, "Shabbat of Return." The name derives from the Haftarah (reading from the prophets) for [that] Shabbat, which opens with the words, "Return O Israel unto the L-rd your G-d."

13. The **day before Yom Kippur** is one of the busiest days of the Jewish year. In the wee hours of the morning, it is customary to perform the **Kaparot** ceremony with a live chicken or money, during which we say, "This is my replacement, this is my exchange, this is my atonement; this fowl shall go to its death, and I shall go to a long, good and peaceful life." Already in a holiday mood, Tachanun is omitted from prayers, and we eat two festive meals, one at midday, and one just before the fast, which begins at sunset.

Rituals, Customs, and Liturgical Changes, and Greetings

14. Tur, Orach Chaim 581:1

And there are those who multiply to say Selichot and

טור, אורח חיים תקפ"א:א'
(א) הלכות ראש השנה ויש מי שמרבין

supplications from Rosh Chodesh Elul and later.

לומר סליחות ותחנונים מ"ח אלול ואילך.

15. Likutei Moharan, Part II 73:3:1

Thus we see empirically that during the days of repentance...It is therefore a very great thing to constantly recite psalms, for the Psalms are a very, very great awakening to God.

ליקוטי מוהר"ן, תנינא ע"ג:ג'א'
וזה שאנו רואין, שבימי תשובה...ועל-כן
הוא דבר גדול מאד לעסוק תמיד באמירת
תהלים, כי תהלים הוא התעוררות גדול
מאד מאד להשם יתברך...

16. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 130:2

It is proper to observe stringencies during these days that you do not observe the rest of the year, for we also ask of God, blessed is G'd's Name, that G'd deal with us with exceptional kindness.

קיצור שלחן ערוך ק"ל:ב'
ראוי לאדם שיתנהג בימים האלו גם
בחמרות שאינו נוהג בהם כל השנה, כי גם
אנו מבקשים מאת ה', יתברך שמו, שיתנהג
עמנו בחסדיות.

17. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 130:4

It is customary not to get married during these days.

קיצור שלחן ערוך ק"ל:ד'
נוהגין שלא לעשות נשואין בימים האלו

18. Peninei Halakhah, Prayer 18:2:7

During the Ten Days of Repentance, which are days of judgment, for during that time Hashem's Kingdom is revealed in the world, we conclude the third berachah with the words, "HaMelech HaKadosh," and conclude Birkat Hashivah Shofteinu with the words, "HaMelech HaMishpat."

פניני הלכה, תפילה י"ח:ב'ז'
בעשרת ימי תשובה, שהם ימי דין,
שבהם מתגלה מלכותו בעולם,
חותמים בברכה השלישית 'המלך
הקדוש', ובברכת 'השיבה שופטינו'
– "המלך המשפט".

19. Peninei Halakhah, Prayer 18:2:8

There are four other additions made during the Ten Days of Repentance: "Zochreinu," "Mi Kamocha," "U'chetov," and "B'Sefer Chaim."

פניני הלכה, תפילה י"ח:ב'ח'
עוד מוסיפים בעשרת ימי תשובה ארבע
תוספות: "זכרנו", "מי כמוך", "וכתוב"
ו"בספר חיים"...

20. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 129:1

In all the *kaddish* prayers recited from *Rosh Hashanah* through *Yom Kippur*, you should repeat the word *le'eila* [G'd is higher]; thus you should say *le'eila le'eila*, [G'd is exceedingly higher].

קיצור שלחן ערוך קכ"ט:א'
בכל הקדישים שאומרים מראש
השנה עד יום הכפורים, כופלין תבת
לעלא, הננו שאומרים לעלא לעלא.

21. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 129:9

At the evening meal it is customary to prepare symbolic dishes [as auspicious omens] for a good year: you dip the piece of *challah* of *Hamotzi* in honey...you should say: *Yehi ratzon shetechadeish aleinu. You should say: יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקי ואלקי* "May it be Your will Almighty, my G-d, and G-d of my fathers" etc. (Ibid 583:21) *shanah tovah umesukah* [May it be Your will to renew for us a good and sweet year]. After this you should dip a piece of apple in honey, say the berachah, *Borei peri ha'eitz*, and eat it. Then you say again *Yehi ratzon etc.*...You should eat choice meats and all kinds of sweets. It is also customary not to eat nuts and almonds,¹⁰ *Mishnah Berurah* quotes form *Maaseh Rav* that the *Vilna Gaon* did not eat

קיצור שלחן ערוך קכ"ט:ט'
בסעודת הלילה, נוהגין לעשות
סימנים לשנה טובה. טובלין
פרוסת המוציא בדבש...אומר,
יהי רצון שתחדש עלינו שנה
טובה ומתוקה. ואחר כך טובל
קצת תפוח מתוך הדבש ומברך
עליו בורא פרי העץ ואוכלו,
ואחר כך אומר גם כן יהי רצון
וכו'...ואוכלין בשר שמן וכל
מיני מתוקה. גם נוהגין שלא
לאכל אגוזים ולוזים, כי אגוז
בגמטרא ח"ט, וגם מרבים

grapes on Rosh Hashanah. (Ibid 600:4) because the numerical value of *egoz* (nut) is 17, the same as *cheit*, which means sin. Also, nuts increase phlegm and mucus which interferes with praying. It is proper to study Torah during the meal. Some have the custom of studying the *Mishnah, Maseches Rosh Hashanah*.

פִּיחָה וְנִיעָה הַמְבַטְלִים אֶת
הַתְּפִלָּה (תקפג). וַיֵּשׁ לְלַמֵּד עַל
הַשְׁלָחַן תּוֹרָה. וְנוֹהֲגִין קֶצֶת
לְלַמֵּד מִשְׁנֵי מִסְכַּת רֹאשׁ
הַשָּׁנָה (חיי"א).

22. A Guide to Greetings - Rabbi Michael Strassfeld

During the month of Elul, the traditional greetings are *Shanah tovah* ("A good year"); or *Leshanah tovah tikatevu* ("May you be inscribed for a good year [in the Book of Life]"); or *Leshanah tovah umetukah tikatevu* ("May you be inscribed for a good and sweet year"); or --less common-- *Ketivah tovah* ("A good inscription [in the Book of Life]"). The appropriate response: *Gam leha* (feminine *lakh*) -- "The same to you." Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, some people add to the above: *Leshanah tovah tikatevu vetehatemu* ("May you be inscribed and sealed for a good life"). Others use these greetings only through the first night of Rosh Hashanah; after that, it would be indelicate to suggest that a person is not already inscribed in the Book of life, for on Rosh Hashanah all the righteous are so inscribed -- only those whose records are closely balanced between good and bad have their fate postponed until Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur (and until *Hoshanah Rabah*) the greeting is *Gemar hatimah tovah* ("A good final sealing [to you]!") or *Hatimah tovah* ("A sealing for good!").

The Spiritual Call of Aseret Yamei Teshuvah

23. Mishneh Torah, Repentance 3:4

Notwithstanding that the blowing of the ram's horn trumpet on Rosh ha-Shanah is a Scriptural statute, its blast is symbolic, as if saying: "Ye that sleep, bestir yourselves from your sleep, and ye slumbering, emerge from your slumber, examine your conduct, turn in repentance, and remember your Creator!"

מִשְׁנֵה תּוֹרָה, הַלְכוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה ג':ד'
אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁתִּקְיַעַת שׁוֹפָר בְּרֹאשׁ
הַשָּׁנָה גִּזְרַת הַכְּתוּב רָמַז יֵשׁ בּוֹ
כְּלוּמָר עוֹרוּ יֹשְׁנִים מִשְׁנֵתְכֶם
וְנִרְדְּמִים הִקְיִצוּ מִתְרַדְּמֵיכֶם וְחַפְּשׁוּ
בְּמַעֲשֵׂיכֶם וְחִזְרוּ בְּתִשְׁבָּה וְזָכְרוּ
בּוֹרְאֵכֶם.

24. This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared, Rabbi Alan Lew (p. 151-152)

For ten days, the gates are open and the world is fluid...For ten days, transformation is within our grasp. For ten days, we can imagine ourselves not as fixed and immutable beings, but rather as a limitless field upon which qualities and impulses rise up and fall away again like waves on the sea. Some of these impulses rise up with particular intensity. We may even experience them as afflictions, but they can be the keys to our transformation. Their intensity points to the disequilibrium and dysfunction in us that is in need of transformation.

For ten days...we have the sense that we can shape our lives by choosing where to invest our focus and intention, by choosing which forms to follow and which to let go.

This is not a linear process, not something that takes a clear nor even discernible path. Rather it happens in fits and starts. Sometimes it may not even seem to be happening at all. But the gates are in fact open, and if our intention is aligned with this spiritual reality, then transformation also opens as a real possibility, even if it doesn't manifest itself right away.