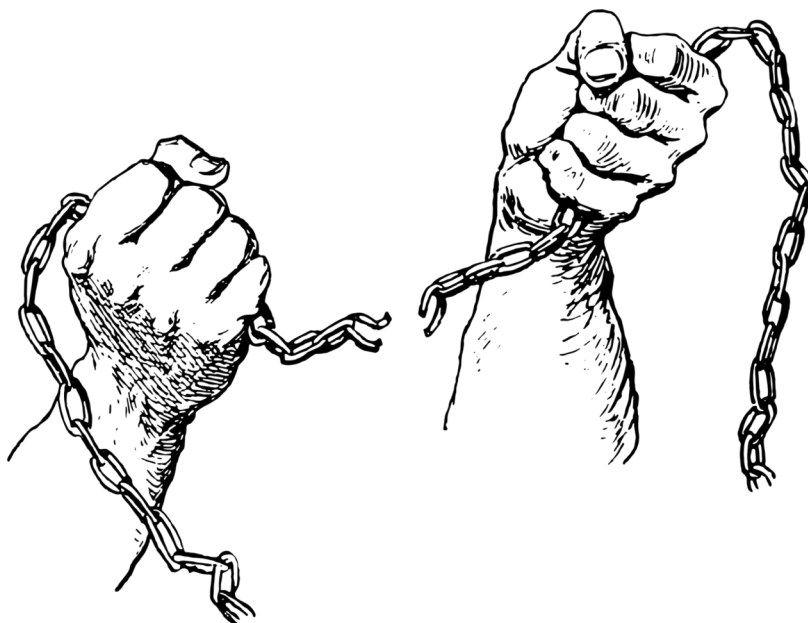


This is the kind of fast that I desire:  
Unlock the handcuffs put on by wicked power!  
Untie the ropes of the yoke!  
Let the oppressed go free,  
And break off every yoke!  
Share your bread with the hungry.  
Bring the poor, the outcasts, to your house.  
When you see them naked, clothe them;  
They are your flesh and blood;  
Don't hide yourself from them!

# BREAK EVERY CHAIN

A Tzedek Collective guide to the high holydays



Isaiah 58: 6-7, trans. [Arthur Waskow](#)

Image by [Colleen](#), Pixabay

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## Introduction

This brief guide is intended to help antizionist, anarchist, and decolonialist Jews engage with the high holydays. It is not a prayerbook, but a brief explanation of some of the practices and customs associated with this time of year. Consider it a quickstart guide, rather than an exhaustive list of practices, which aims to make Jewish practice more approachable as well as aligned with values. Jewish practices are diverse, and it would not be possible to list all variations here.

Throughout, suggestions for reflection (left side of the page) and DIY adaptations (right side of the page) are given as gemara (commentary). Resources cited and others are listed at the end of the document. Where possible, explicitly antizionist resources are used. Although customs are described and suggestions are provided, this guide is not intended to be prescriptive. Take what works, leave what doesn't; your Jewishness is not dependent on how you follow a script, even an antizionist one.

The name of this guide is drawn from the Yom Kippur Haftarah (literally parting; a segment of Nevi'im, or Prophets, recited after the Torah reading). In this section of Isaiah, God chastises the Jewish people for oppressing workers even as they fast. While God provides assurances of healing and forgiveness, God also exhorts the Jewish people to fight for justice, compassion, and universal rights and freedom. *This* is our Judaism, not the hypocrisy of Zionism. We hope that this guide helps you engage with Judaism and with other antizionist Jews, in whatever form you choose.

This guide was compiled on the stolen lands of multiple First Nations peoples. Its current iteration was developed on unceded Gadigal land. We acknowledge the spiritual wisdom of First Nations Elders and Ancestors throughout all spirals of time. Sovereignty was never ceded; always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

## Elul: a month of preparation

The month before Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) is called Elul. During this month, it is customary to begin a process of introspection and seeking forgiveness from others. A traditional Elul greeting is “Ketivah vachatimah tovah” (may you be written and sealed for good).

### Reflections

How can we relate to this metaphor as anarchists, decolonialists and feminists?

How can a sound spur us to action? What sounds have inspired you in the past?

What behaviour do you want to improve in the coming Jewish year? How can you commit to doing better without resorting to overly negative self-talk?

What cause do you want to support more?

What does it mean to use water in ritual when Palestinians are denied safe drinking water or access to the ocean for fishing? When colonial practices on this continent are disrupting First Nations sacred rivers? When climate change is making water unsafe in a multitude of ways?

Elul is often described with the metaphor of “the king is in the field” — God is more approachable and amenable to our supplications in this time.

In some communities, a shofar (ram’s horn) is sounded daily, except for Shabbat and Erev (the day before) Rosh Hashana, as preparation for the shofar blasts of Rosh Hashana.

Many communities read prayers for forgiveness, s’lichot or slichos ([Edot HaMizrach/Ashkenaz](#)), for all or part of Elul. Recited after midnight or early in the morning, these prayers draw from other liturgy and verses to appeal to God’s mercy as we soul search and commit to improving our behaviour in future.

It is customary to give additional tzedakah — not charity, but justice-work and mutual aid, during the month of Elul.

On Erev Rosh Hashana,\* some have the custom to immerse in a mikveh, or pool drawing from a natural spring. Originally relating to purity, this custom can also help set intentions for the day to come.

### DIY

Don’t have a ram’s horn handy? Use any instrument — or even your hands! Alternatively, take time just to consciously breathe.

Create your own slichos in any medium: writing, art, music, or craft.

Mutual aid can take many forms. If not money, can you donate your time to volunteer, or increase your activism in some other way?

Traditionally, mikveh is a structured and gendered activity ripe for [queering](#). If a mainstream mikveh is unsafe or unavailable, consider a natural body of water ungoverned by mainstream community, a bathtub, or even a bucket of water.

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\* Like most Jewish days, Rosh Hashana starts at sundown.

## Rosh Hashana

Rosh Hashana (literally, head of the year) or Jewish New Year is a two-day festival that falls on the first and second days of Tishrei (technically the seventh Jewish month). It is the first of the Yamim Nora'im (days of awe or High Holydays). According to the Torah (Hebrew Bible), it involves sacred rest and sounding a shofar; a new year, judgement and forgiveness are not mentioned. The festival evolved to be a day of crowning kings and the beginning of a 10-day period of judgement, culminating in Yom Kippur (the day of atonement). Common greetings include "Shana Tova" (have a good year), "Chag Sameach" or "Gut Yontiff/Yom Tov" (have a happy festival).

## Candlelighting

Two or more candles are lit in the home at sundown of the first night, and after twilight on the second night. Two blessings are recited on the first night, and one on the second night. The first blessing marks the beginning of a distinct time, and the second blessing celebrates the first instance of lighting candles in this Jewish year. Choose from the following options:

### Reflections

What do you want to make new this year?  
What can you see/do/feel for the first time, again?

What responsibilities do you value right now? Who do you make those commitments to, and how?

### Traditional

Barukh ata Adonoy, Elohenu Melekh HaOlam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Yom Tov.

Blessed are You, Adonoy our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the Festival light.

### First night:

Barukh ahtah Adonoy Eloheinu melekh ha'olam shehecheyanu v'ki'imanu v'higiyanu lizman hazeh

Blessed are You, Adonoy our God, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

## Feminine

Brukha at Shkhina Elotenu Ruah HaOlam, Asher  
Kidshatanu B'mitzvotaha l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat  
[Kodesh].

Blessed are you, Shkhina our Goddess, Spirit of the  
Universe, Who sanctified us with Her commandments  
and commanded us to kindle the Festival light.

### First night:

Brukha at Shekhina, Eloteinu Ruah HaOlam,  
shehecheyatanu, v'kiy'mtanu, v'higiytanu laz'man hazeh.

We praise You, Indwelling presence filling and  
surrounding the world, who has kept us alive, sustained  
us, and brought us to this season.

## Non-binary

N'varekh Yah, Elohenu M'kor HaHayim, l'Yom Tov  
v'Ner Yom Tov.

Let us bless Yah our God, the Source of Life, for the  
Festival and the Festival lights.

### First night:

N'varekh Yah, Elohenu M'kor HaHayim, l'hayim v'zman  
hazeh.

Let us bless Yah our God, the Source of Life, for life and  
this time.

## Humanist

N'varekh et ha'or ka-asher nikavets b'tzavta l'hadlik nerot  
shel Yom Tov. B'or n'varekh et ha-hayyim.

Let us bless the light as we gather together to kindle  
Festival candles. With light let us bless life. [[source](#)]

### First night:

Let us reflect with mindful gratitude on our current  
existence.

## Reflections

Much of the traditional liturgy has problematic themes and language. (How) can we simultaneously engage with our liturgy and our values ?

Akeidat Yitzchak is an intense and traumatising story. What can we draw from its themes of unquestioning obedience and sacrifice?

How can we grapple with the concept of sovereignty when we're living on stolen land?

How can you find strength when you fear failing your community? When do you intentionally ask for support?

Tashlich was originally discouraged by Rabbis, but has since become mainstream practice. What can this tell us about how we can shape Judaism and Jewishness?

## Prayers

Like most Jewish festivals, Rosh Hashana has four services per day: Maariv in the evening, Shacharit and Musaf in the morning, and Mincha in the afternoon. Because it involves many additional prayers, a special prayerbook known as the Rosh Hashana [Machzor](#) is used in place of the usual Siddur. To our knowledge, an antizionist Machzor is not available, although some prayers are available in the [Inclusive Siddur](#), and we recommend Arthur Waskow's [Mourner's Kaddish](#).

After Shacharit, Torah portions are read: God promising Sarah and Avraham a son on the first day and [Akeidat Yitzchak](#) (the binding of Isaac) on the second day.

On Rosh Hashana, Musaf is the main event as it involves the sounding of the shofar. (Fun fact: Rosh Hashana Musaf is the longest prayer in Jewish liturgy.) The Amidah, or standing prayer (recited alone in silence, then read aloud by a leader), is divided into three sections by Shofar blasts. The sections are themed around Malchiot (God's sovereignty), Zichronot (God's remembrance of our past deeds) and Shofarot (God's judgement for our future).

In synagogues, the shaliach tzibur, or prayer leader, begins Musaf by reciting the Hineni prayer. This prayer, meaning "I am here," is one of the only times in the Rosh Hashanah service that God is spoken to in the first person singular - "I" rather than "we". In the prayer, the shaliach tzibur asks for the strength to lead the service, and asks that the rest of the congregation not be judged for their faults or missteps.

## Tashlich

A ritual known as Tashlich (casting-off) is customary for the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashana, although it can be completed until the last day of Sukkot. This ritual involves reading some verses and symbolically casting our sins into water. Tashlich is ideally performed in sight of a body of water with fish, as water symbolises kindness and fish are believed to be exempt from the evil eye. Although some people throw bread into the water, this is not recommended due to potential ill effects for wildlife.

## DIY

Lengthy prayers and hours of sitting in a synagogue are not accessible to everyone. Can you honour your reflections and meaning-making in another format that better suits you?

## Reflections

Eating our hopes and prayers is an embodied practice that is common in Judaism. How is an embodied practice different from other ways of expressing our hopes?

## Meals

A festive meal with Kiddush (blessings over wine, grape juice, or another special beverage) and challah (blessings over bread) is served after Ma'ariv and Shacharit/Musaf. These blessings may be found in the Machzor.

Simanim (symbolic foods) are also customary on the first night of Rosh Hashana, with different communities using different foods for specific wishes of good fortune, many based on Hebrew or Aramaic puns. The most widely known of the Simanim is eating an apple dipped in honey, for a sweet new year. Different Machzorim will list different Simanim, and some of these may be uncomfortable to us anarchist, decolonial, and/or antiviolen Jewish. These queer [Simanim](#) offer some alternatives.

Some also avoid certain foods and dishes because of their negative symbology, including dishes that are otherwise celebratory throughout the rest of the year.

## DIY

What simanim can you come up with for your Rosh Hashana meal? Puns can be in any language.

## Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur (day of atonement) is the tenth day of the month of Tishrei. It is a solemn one-day festival; not without joy, but focused on begging forgiveness from God. Connection with physicality is reduced, most typically through abstaining from food and drink; sexual activity, wearing leather shoes, and bathing and anointing oneself are also traditionally forbidden. Common greetings include “shana tova” (have a good year), “gmar chatima tova” (may you be inscribed for good) or “tzom kal” (easy fast).

### Fasting and health

For those with health conditions (including mental health challenges) that preclude fasting, Yom Kippur can be challenging. It is important to remember that Judaism prioritises pikuach nefesh (saving lives) over almost every other principle. [A Mitzvah To Eat](#) offers guidance on how to make Yom Kippur meaningful if you aren't able to fast.

### Reflections

What is repentance, anyway? The Hebrew word for repentance, teshuva, literally means return. What are we returning to? Are there times when repentance and forgiveness aren't appropriate?

What does it mean to use water in ritual when Palestinians are denied safe drinking water or access to the ocean for fishing? When colonial practices on this continent are disrupting First Nations sacred waterways? When climate change is making water unsafe in a multitude of ways?

### Preparation

The ten days from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur (inclusive) are known as the Aseret Yamei Teshuva (the ten days of repentance). The greetings “shana tova” (have a good year) and “gmar chatima tova” (may you be inscribed for good) are still used. Some small modifications are made to the liturgy to emphasise the idea that while God judged our fates on Rosh Hashana, they are only inscribed or sealed on Yom Kippur, and therefore can still be improved by repentance and good deeds. The Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is similarly themed around repentance.

As on Erev Rosh Hashana, on Erev Yom Kippur some have the custom to immerse in a mikveh, or pool drawing from a natural spring. Originally relating to purity, this custom can also help set intentions for the day to come.

On Erev Yom Kippur, it is customary to eat a festive meal, whether one is fasting or not. Unlike most festivals, where candlelighting precedes feasting, the meal must be completed before Yom Kippur is initiated with candlelighting.

### DIY

Traditionally, mikveh is a structured and gendered activity ripe for [queering](#). If a mainstream mikveh is unsafe or unavailable, consider a natural body of water ungoverned by mainstream community, a bathtub, or even a bucket of water.

## Reflections

As anarchists, abolitionists and antizionists, how can we relate to the concepts of sin and punishment in the liturgy?

What do you need to let go of in the year to come? What do you want to commit to?

Read the book of [Jonah](#) (it's only 47 verses long!) and/or recall what you know of it. What do you think it has to teach us at this late stage of the Day of Atonement?

What does the concept of the "closing of the gates" mean to you? When have you encountered situations with no second chances, and what has this meant to you?

## Candlelighting

The blessings for Yom Kippur candlelighting can be found in a [machzor](#).

## Prayers

Like Rosh Hashana, the service can be found in a [Machzor](#). To our knowledge, an antizionist Machzor is not available, although some prayers are available in the [Inclusive Siddur](#), and we recommend Arthur Waskow's [Mourner's Kaddish](#). The Yom Kippur service focuses heavily on sin, guilt, punishment, and forgiveness.

Arguably the most famous Yom Kippur prayer is Kol Nidrei (literally, all vows). This annulment of vows precedes Maariv and involves repeated assurances by the prayer leader that the community's promises are all absolved. Like Tashlich, the rabbis originally opposed this tradition, which is now standard in many communities.

As noted in the introduction, the Torah reading of Yom Kippur Shacharit is followed by the Haftarah (literally parting; a segment of Nevi'im, or Prophets, recited after the Torah reading). In this section of [Isaiah](#), God chastises the Jewish people for oppressing workers even as they fast. While God provides assurances of healing and forgiveness, God also exhorts the Jewish people to fight for justice, compassion, and universal rights and freedom.

During the Mincha service, the Book of Jonah is read in its entirety. With themes of trying unsuccessfully to escape responsibility, and the power of prayer and forgiveness, this short book contains many depths, challenges and contradictions.

In addition to the usual Maariv, Shacharit, Musaf, and Mincha, Yom Kippur has one extra service, Neilah. Referred to as the "closing of the gates", Neilah is seen as the last chance (for this year) to change any ill decrees before our fates are sealed. For those who are fasting and/or attending services all day, this can be time of fatigue, despair, or simply distraction.

## DIY

If you prefer non-traditional text, why not try adapting the Rosh Hashana blessings for candlelighting, or make up your own?

If these prayers don't speak to you (or even if they do), create your own, in any medium.

## Resources

A Mitzvah to Eat: <https://www.amitzvahtoeat.org/>

Anti-Zionist/Diasporist Judaica Roundup:  
<https://myjewishlearningdisability.tumblr.com/post/710174942916902912/anti-zionistdiasporist-judaica-roundup>

Arthur Waskow's Mourner's Kaddish:  
<https://opensiddur.org/prayers/solilunar/everyday/kaddish/mourners-kaddish-in-time-of-war-and-violence/>

Ashkenazi Slichot:  
[https://www.sefaria.org/Selichot\\_Nusach\\_Lita\\_Linear?tab=contents](https://www.sefaria.org/Selichot_Nusach_Lita_Linear?tab=contents)

Binding of Isaac sources:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/topics/binding-of-isaac?sort=Relevance&tab=notable-sources>

Edot HaMizrach Slichot:  
[https://www.sefaria.org/Selichot\\_Edot\\_HaMizrach?tab=contents](https://www.sefaria.org/Selichot_Edot_HaMizrach?tab=contents)

Elul Unbound:  
<https://www.judaismunbound.com/elul2025>

Haftarah Reading for Yom Kippur morning (Isaiah 57:14-58:14), a slightly midrashic translation by Arthur O. Waskow: <https://opensiddur.org/readings-and-sourcetexts/readings/jewish-readings/yom-kippur-readings/haftarah-for-the-fast-of-yom-kippur-translated-by-r-arthur-o-waskow/>

Inclusive Siddur: <https://inclusivesiddur.com/>

Lighting Shabbat and Festival Candles: Humanist Liturgy: <https://ritualwell.org/ritual/lighting-shabbat-and-festival-candles-humanist-liturgy/>

Machzorim for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur (scroll down): <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Liturgy>

Queer Mikveh Project:  
<https://www.queermikvehproject.org/store/p/simple-queer-mikveh-guide-0>

Simanim / Ye'i Rasones for Rosh Hashanah:  
<https://www.keshetonline.org/resources/simanim/>