

Commentary on Our Liturgy

When we worship in public, we know that our life is part of a larger life, a wave of an ocean of being.

R. Mordecai M. Kaplan

ROSH HA-SHANAH

Before leaving the House of Prayer on the night of Rosh ha-Shanah, it is customary to bless one another with the benediction, “May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year!” Then it is customary to go home joyfully.

Seder ha-Yom

During our Rosh ha-Shanah morning prayers, we crown God as our sovereign. As Professor Yohanan Muffs has taught, the king symbolizes the benign uses of power.

R. David E. S. Stein

THE SHEMA AND ITS BLESSINGS

Pages 12–13 (evening); and 79–81 (morning). When we are fully aware of the divine love, we also recognize that infinite love can equally embrace all peoples of the world in their uniqueness.

R. David A. Teutsch

Pages 14–18 (evening); and 82–86 (morning). To proclaim God as ours and as one is to acknowledge fealty to the divine will—and the *Shema* is a time to listen. We listen in order to discover God’s will.

R. David A. Teutsch

Pages 17–18 (evening); and 85–86 (morning). The tassels (*tzitzit*) remind us that we voluntarily follow the way of God, who freed us from Egyptian slavery. It is, literally, a string tied around our finger.

R. Levi Weiman-Kelman

Pages 19–22 (evening); and 87–88 (morning). The ancient tale of wonder underscores the sense of daily miracle in our lives. Even those of us who cannot accept the literal meaning of the tale can nevertheless appreciate its human message.

R. Arthur Green (adapted)

AMIDAH (STANDING PRAYER)

The beating heart in the center of our daily worship service is the *Amidah*. If the *Shema* is about listening to God, then the *Amidah* is about speaking to God.

The words in our prayer book represent our Sages’ best guess as to what topics Jews most need to touch upon. But your own heartfelt prayers take priority. *What is it that you most need to say?*

R. David E. S. Stein

Know that all the liturgy’s pleading for “life” during the Days of Awe refers to *spiritual* life in eternity.

Nehora ha-Shalem

TORAH-STUDY SERVICE

Aliyah (ASCENT). Those who go up to the reading table for an *aliyah* (plural, *aliyot*) serve as witnesses to the Torah reading, on behalf of the community.

About half of our available *aliyot* will center on a particular theme in that Torah reading itself. Those adults who resonate with the theme will be invited to ascend. (Staying seated, to study the text, is also fine.) We will accept as few or as many as feel called to go up.

R. David E. S. Stein

SHOFAR (RAM’S HORN)

The blowing of the shofar is the only special biblical ritual for Rosh ha-Shanah. The shofar seems to express what we cannot find the right words to say.

The mitzvah of the shofar is to hear it being blown, not to actually blow it yourself, hence the benediction “to *hear* the sound of the shofar.”

Michael Strassfeld