



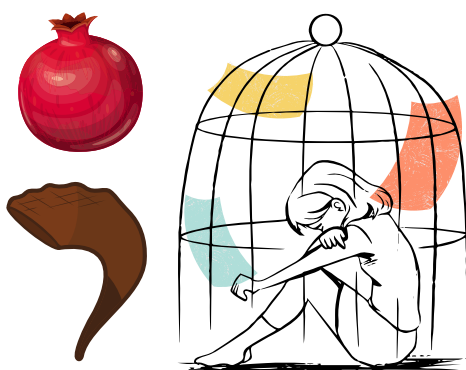
SHOFARS AND SEMICOLONS: STRUGGLING WITH SUICIDAL IDEATION ON THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

Rosh Hashanah is an exciting time of year. It's a chance to reflect on our past and set our intentions and goals for our future. This opportunity for growth and achievement can be thrilling. But for people who didn't think they would make it to the new year — because they were struggling with suicidal ideation, survived an attempted suicide, or went through a traumatic experience that left them emotionally drained — entering the synagogue and facing the prospect of a new year can be overwhelming. In those moments that feel daunting, we need to reorient ourselves, breathe, and pause. In other words, we need Rosh Hashanah.

Jewish prayer is intended to bring participants into the present moment with contemplative liturgy and silent personal meditations. Yet Rosh Hashanah services, and the shofar blasts in particular, stand apart.

The blast of the shofar is a loud piercing sound meant to shut out the “noise” of the outside world. It creates a stillness that should inspire us to close our eyes, pause, and be fully present. Only within that pause can we begin to accept past mistakes, express gratitude for the blessings in our lives that helped us reach this moment, and move forward toward a new year. In many ways, this understanding of Rosh Hashanah can be seen as a “semicolon.”

The semicolon (;) indicates a pause between two main clauses, more pronounced than the pause indicated by a comma. A writer uses a semicolon to separate different parts of a sentence or a list or to indicate a pause.





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This punctuation mark is reserved for important pauses — those that are more than our everyday “stop to look around” or to “take a breath” pauses. Through the work of Project Semicolon, it has also become a symbol of strength and survival for people struggling with suicide and general mental illness. “A semicolon is used when an author could’ve chosen to end their sentence but chose not to. The author is you, and the sentence is your life,” explains [Project Semicolon’s website](#). On Rosh Hashanah, we similarly pause and make a conscious choice to move forward.

In Jewish tradition, turning points in our lives — moments of pause and renewed intention, moments of a semicolon — are holy and are marked by a prayer thanking God for giving us life, sustaining us, and helping us get to this very moment. Most notably, this prayer is said at the beginning of Jewish holidays and before the performance of yearly mitzvot (commandments) such as blowing the shofar.



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ-הו-ה, אֱלֹ-הֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְמַן הַזֶּה

Blessed are You, Ado-nai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion.

“This blessing is an opportunity to do teshuvah, to return, and in returning, to bring attention back to the miracle of this moment, to the realization of the blessing of being alive, conscious, and receptive,” says Rabbi Shefa Gold of My Jewish Learning.



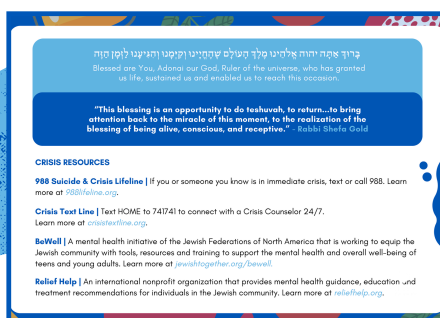
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This year, as you recite this prayer and listen to the shofar, allow the stillness of its blast to wash over you. “The blessing over the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah refers to the mitzvah as ‘hearing the voice of the Shofar,’ but since that voice speaks without words, the message that is heard depends a great deal on who is doing the listening,” says Douglas Aronin.

While listening to the voice of the shofar, contemplate the ways that you, your loved ones, and God sustained you, and helped you get to your present moment. Be proud of the fact that you are still standing despite the enormous obstacles that stood in your way. As the book of Proverbs states,

A righteous person falls down seven times and gets up. (Proverbs 24:16)

Recognize and be proud of the fact that you got up. And recognize that in order to become the best version of ourselves and move forward, sometimes all we need is a pause.



Download Our Crisis/Flyer Card, Along with Printing Instructions



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About Project Semicolon

Project Semicolon is a compassionate online community that centers around mental health awareness and suicide prevention. Our platform serves as a safe haven for individuals to share their stories, find support, and contribute to breaking the stigma surrounding mental health challenges.

Crisis Resources

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline | If you or someone you know is in immediate crisis, text or call 988. Learn more at 988lifeline.org.

Crisis Text Line | Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor 24/7. Learn more at crisistextline.org.

BeWell | A mental health initiative of the Jewish Federations of North America that is working to equip the Jewish community with tools, resources and training to support the mental health and overall well-being of teens and young adults. Learn more at jewishtgether.org/bewell.

Relief Help | An international nonprofit organization that provides mental health guidance, education and treatment recommendations for individuals in the Jewish community. Learn more at reliefhelp.org.

Every Life Counts | A Suicide Prevention Toolkit from the Blue Dove Foundation. Learn more at <https://thebluedovefoundation.org/every-life-counts/>