

This is the learning Schedule for the *Yamim Nora'im*, or Days of Awe. It picks up the day before Erev Rosh Hashanah and ends with Yom Kippur.

If you want to share your writing, discuss a topic, or get feedback on a reflection, I am available over email: msnider@rrc.edu and happy to discuss all thing High Holy Days!

Shanah Tovah u'metukah leKulam! A sweet new year to everyone!

Date	Topic	Merritt Explainer	Link / Page Number	Learning Activity
Sept 10th	Primer	I thought you should have some baseline familiarity with the services.	Rosh HaShanah: Guide to the Morning Service Unetanneh Tokef - Wikipedia	How is this different from the usual Shabbat service that you've experienced?
Sept 11th Erev Rosh Hashanah	What is Rosh Hashanah?	Erev RH has to do with the Gates of Righteousness / Gates of Heaven opening. The Liturgy points us towards images of entering a King's Palace. Time begins to come out of joint, as the 'circles' on the 'spiral' of time condense into one point - now.	Rosh Hashanah Sefaria Primer	Write a small reflection about which sources are most meaningful to you and why. Write a similarly-sized paragraph about which sources DIDN'T resonate with you and why. Consider if there is a way that these two points still work together.
12 Rosh Hashanah 1	How does Time work? Why is Rosh Hashanah NOW? What does it mean to us <i>in now</i> that RH is happening <i>now</i> .	The Ten Days of Awe are a metaphysically unique time on the Jewish calendar.	HHD Machzor pg 102 ש.נ.ה. Shores My Jewish Time Article Akedah D'var	Shores / Time Spiral connections.

13 RH 2	Metaphorical Literalism / Material Studies.	The meaning is in the Meaning Making.	Honey Imagery Olive Oil Imagery	Consider how various foods function as imagery
14	What is Teshuvah?	Teshuvah implies both a turning and an “again”. It is a second attempt, a do over, a turning away from what we know is wrong towards what we hope is right.	Rambam’s Misheh Torah Repentance Mishneh Torah, Repentance Sefaria Library	
15	What is Yom Kippur?		A Guide to Yom Kippur Prayers My Jewish Learning Yom Kippur Texts from the Sefaria Library Read Leviticus 23:26-32	Write a small reflection about which sources are most meaningful to you and why. Write a similarly-sized paragraph about which sources DIDN’T resonate with you and why. Consider if there is a way that these two points still work together. What do you think it means for Yom Kippur to be “Shabbat shabbaton?”
16	Chesbon HaNefesh	The Vidu’ii is the quintessential Jewish penitential prayer. It’s also an alphabetical acrostic.	Vidu’ii (HHD Machzor pgs. 817, 957, 1093, 1167)	Described on packet page 6

17	Shofar	The Shofar has deep spiritual implications and metaphysical abilities. But it's also a ram's horn. Consider how rams use their horns with the sound of the shofar.	Barthes' punctum. : languagehat.com Shofar sources Laws of the Shofar sources BDB שֹׁפָר	Described on packet page 7
18	Self Guided Learning / Self reflection	What are you interested in knowing? What do you feel I've left out? Are there any topics from the past few days you'd like to learn more about or do a deeper dive on? Are there any prompts I've given you where your opinion has changed?	Navigating Sefaria on your own, try to find resources around meditations, prayer, and brachot.	What are the differences between meditations, fixed vs spontaneous prayer, and brachot? How are these different ways of interacting with god/ metaphysics/ doing magic like the different ways of relating to and transforming the self?
19	Doing Teshuvah + Tokhehah.	Torah is nothing without good deeds	Read Pirkei Avot chapters 2 and 3 Pirkei Avot 2 The Sefaria Library Tokhehah Info	I want you to do Teshuvah. If you have wronged anyone, apologize. For transgressions not involving people, come up with ways to make amends there too.
20 Erev Yom Kippur	Self Reflection	I want to close by discussing Temporality, and what it means that "Now is a time of teshuvah"	Time Sources	What do you think 'the time for teshuvah' means? Consider practical, metaphysical, and metaphorical reads.
21 Yom Kippur	Zoom Services	Sit with me for BAS zoom services !	I dont have the link yet	Think about everything you've learned and experience the service!

Sept 10th - Setting the Scene

I thought you should have some baseline familiarity with the services.	Rosh HaShanah: Guide to the Morning Service Unetanneh Tokef - Wikipedia	How is this different from the usual Shabbat service that you've experienced?
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Sept 11th Erev Rosh Hashanah

What is Rosh Hashanah?	Erev RH has to do with the Gates of Righteousness / Gates of Heaven opening. The Liturgy points us towards images of entering a King's Palace. Time begins to come out of joint, as the 'circles' on the 'spiral' of time condense into one point - now.	https://www.sefaria.org/topics/rosh-hashana-h?tab=notable-sources	Write a small reflection about which sources are most meaningful to you and why. Write a similarly-sized paragraph about which sources DIDN'T resonate with you and why. Consider if there is a way that these two points still work together.
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On Sefaria, you can click to expand each source and put it back in its original setting. If you want any further information about anything, try clicking! I'm always happy to help you if you get lost or confused!

Now that you have a primer from the Sefaria source sheet yesterday. I'm going to tell you some Stuff. To quickly break down the name of the holiday - Rosh Hashanah. Rosh has many meanings in English. The most common is "head" - some people put a fish head on their RH table for luck. Roshei Yeshiva - head of school / school president. Rosh also means "start". Think about how you'd use the word 'head' in a less literal sense. The Top. The beginning. The start. Toy around with the idea. Come up with some alternate translations! "Ha" here means the. And Shanah is year.

☐ [BDB link](#)

This is a link to the biblical Hebrew dictionary we use at RRC. I've already found Shanah's shoresh for you. That's what the link opens to. This is where I want you to consider the scope, and how translation is inherently interpretive. (spend at least ten minutes doing this)

☐ [Jewish Time Article](#)

Read my substack article that explains the differences between JCT and JRT. This article is focused on Pesah, BUT! The point holds true to RH. Part of the point my article makes is that the ancient rabbis rigged both calendars deliberately, to create meaningful moments throughout time (picture a needle with some thread piercing through the same point on various circles of the spiral). That's what the temporality is doing on Jewish holidays.

☐ Merritt's Akedah d'var (printed at end of this packet) + Akedah (Gen 22) (read the chapter)

I'm making you read my d'var partially because the Akedah is one of the readings assigned to the first day of RH, but also because I want you to analyze the drash with reference to what you've learned today about the kinds of Jewish time, time circle vs spiral, and why the rabbis would choose the Akedah to be read now.

☐ [Honey Imagery](#)

What, in your opinion, are the key “features” of honey? If you were to ascribe it a personality, what would that be? Now try thinking like an alchemist. What would you make of it then?

☐ [Pomegranate Imagery](#)

What, in your opinion, are the key “features” of pomegranates? If you were to ascribe it a personality, what would that be? Now try thinking like an alchemist. What would you make of it then?

☐ [Olive Oil Imagery](#)

What, in your opinion, are the key “features” of olive oil? If you were to ascribe it a personality, what would that be? Now try thinking like an alchemist. What would you make of it then? Remember that fresh olive oil (i.e. was an olive less than 24 hrs ago) have the same anti-inflammatory effect that advil does. Olive trees often take three years to form fruit, around 7-8 years to be fully grown, reach peak maturity at 13-20.

☐ Food and Us

Now if I tell you a baby can't get its hair cut for the first 3 years of its life, and the B-mitzvah happens around age 12-13, and a 20 year old is recognized as a full legal adult. Now (with reference to the above question) what do you think of the Olive?

☐ Spend some time clicking around on Sefaria Topics Page, <https://www.sefaria.org/topics> , and look at other foods.

Why do you think we eat the foods we do? How do the foods interact with the web of metaphorical literalism?

Is metaphorical literalism different from materials testing (in the sense of rubbermaid makes a new rubber and then has to test it)

Sept 14th - Teshuvah

What is Teshuvah? Before reading, write a small paragraph describing what you think Teshuvah means and consists of.

☐ Rambam's Mishneh Torah Repentance [Mishneh Torah, Repentance | Sefaria Library](#)

How does Rambam describe the process of Teshuvah? What does that mean both practically and metaphysically? What do you make of Ba'al Teshuvah? Write a small paragraph describing what you think Teshuvah means and consists of. Then, how does that paragraph compare to what you wrote before? Does anything surprise you? Does anything disappoint you?

☐ To me, Teshuvah implies both a turning and an “again”. It is a second attempt, a do over, a turning away from what we know is wrong towards what we hope is right. What do you make of this? Do you agree or disagree and to what extent (either option is fine).

Sept 15th - Shabbat Shabbaton

☐ [A Guide to Yom Kippur Prayers | My Jewish Learning](#)

What are the key points of the service? Why do you think they're the key points? What are the metaphysical underpinnings? What imagery is being invoked and why?

☐ [Yom Kippur | Texts from the Sefaria Library](#)

Write a small reflection about which sources are most meaningful to you and why. Then, write a similarly-sized paragraph about which sources DIDN'T resonate with you and why. Finally, consider if there is a way that these two points still work together.

☐ Read Leviticus 23:26-32

What do you think it means for Yom Kippur to be "Shabbat shabbaton?" Commonly translated as a "shabbat of complete rest." To help with your writing: consider imagery around Shabbat, what you do or don't do on Shabbat, what the somatic/sensory experience of Shabbat is supposed to be. Then compare that with what you've learned about Yom Kippur.

[Shabbat topic](#)

Sept 16th - Chesbon HaNefesh

- ☐ Chesbon HaNefesh translates most commonly to “an accounting of the soul”. Chesbon in modern Hebrew means a receipt. Nefesh meanwhile is tricky in English.

Ruah (רוח): Means wind, breath, or spirit. It represents the dynamic, shifting, moving spirit, emotional state, or the vital life force of God moving through creation. It also is connected to the ability to ‘speak’ into being.

Nishama (נִשְׁמָה): Comes from the root word for breathing. It usually refers to the higher soul, the divine breath or intellect imparted to human beings by God. The other half of the ‘speaking’ into being coin.

Nefesh (נֶפֶשׁ): Often translated as soul, life, or being. It refers to the physical life force, or the physical body's blood and interiority that makes a person or a living creature.

Write a ‘receipt’ of your actions, both good and bad / positive and negative, for this past year. Write down any action you think has any sort of metaphysical implications.

- ☐ Read the Vidu’ii (HHD Machzor pgs. 817, 957, 1093, 1167)
- ☐ [machzor link](#)

After reading the Vidu’ii, look at the table of contents in the machzor. Does the Vidu’ii change based on when it occurs in the service? What does that mean either way? Also, consider that the Vidu’ii is in second person. The whole thing is in “we”. What does that mean that we confess as a community, even for transgressions we have not personally done?

- ☐ Return to your receipt from before

Separate your receipt into categories based on the vidu’ii. What do you need to do Teshuvah for? Does anything surprise you? Do you feel the need to do Teshuvah for something not described in the Vidu’ii? If so, why?

Sept 17th - Shofar

- ☐ Skim through the Akedah D'var (printed at the end of this packet)

What do you think a punctus point is? Describe it. What sort of things are punctum for you, and where do they transport you? (Recall from a few days ago my imagery of a needle and thread piercing through the same point on various circles in the time spiral and connecting them together)

- ☐ Skim through Barthes' punctum. : languagehat.com
write a few more sentences on what you think punctum are

- ☐ [Shofar sources](#)
- ☐ [Shofar Broken Heart](#)
- ☐ [Laws of the Shofar sources](#)
- ☐ [BDB שֹׁפָר](#)

After reading through the information about the shofar, put that in conversation with what you have learned of punctum. Consider the sensory elements. Consider the metaphorical literalism. Consider the scapegoat. What does it mean that we blow the shofar?

Sept 18th - Self Guided Learning / Self reflection

What are you interested in knowing? What do you feel I've left out? Are there any topics from the past few days you'd like to learn more about or do a deeper dive on? Are there any prompts I've given you where your opinion has changed? Revisit those. Re-write those.

☐ Navigating Sefaria on your own, try to find resources around meditations, prayer, and brachot.

What are the differences between meditations, fixed vs spontaneous prayer, and brachot? Make a chart explaining the differences.

After completing your chart: How are these different ways of interacting with god/ metaphysics/ doing magic like the different ways of relating to and transforming the self?

Sept 19th - Doing Teshuvah + Tokhehah.

Torah is nothing without good deeds

- ☐ Read Pirkei Avot chapters 2 and 3 [Pirkei Avot 2 | The Sefaria Library](#)

What are some things from these chapters that resonated with you? What didn't resonate? Consider why what resonated did, and write a reflection.

- ☐ [Tokhehah Info](#)

Vayikra 19:17

You shall not hate your brother in your heart.
You shall surely rebuke your friend,
and you shall not bear a sin because of them.

ויקרא יט:יז

לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְךָ
הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ
וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלֶיךָ חֵטְא:

All tokhahah has to be given in a healthy and constructive way!

Based on the final line of the pasuk, the Gemara teaches that you are only allowed to give tokhahah that will help the other person, and your rebuke can't embarrass them or make them feel bad. Tokhahah is meant to increase love and peace; if your words of warning will not generate love, don't say them (Arakhin 16b).

The Hazon Ish teaches that in today's day and age, words of love and support are more effective than harsh criticism (Yoreh Deah 2 n. 16). Here are some tokhahah tips:

- ◆ Speak softly and gently. Tone matters.
- ◆ Ask questions and don't be too confident that you know the whole story.
- ◆ Make your comment about the specific behavior, never about the person.
- ◆ Make eye contact and do anything else you can to show that you really care about and respect the person you are speaking to.
- ◆ Before doing anything, ask yourself if you are going to have a positive impact with your words.

Hadar Devash Magazine, Acherai-Mot Kedoshim

Describe what you think Tokhehah means. Why would you do this?

- ☐ What are the connections between Tokhehah and Teshuvah? How are they different and how are they similar? How do the concepts relate to one another?

Write a small paragraph answering the above questions, then consider:

- ☐ Why does it matter to do Tokhehah (And by extension Teshuvah) before Yom Kippur?

Finally,

I want you to do Teshuvah. If you have wronged anyone, apologize.

For transgressions not involving people, come up with ways to make amends there too.

Erev Yom Kippur - Self Reflection

I want to close by discussing Temporality, and what it means that “Now is a time of Teshuvah”. Before getting into the reading, consider what it means.

☐ [Time Sources](#)

After having done the reading - what do you think ‘the time for teshuvah’ means? Consider practical, metaphysical, and metaphorical reads

Yom Kippur

On this day of Atonement, I want you to reflect on how far you’ve come and how much you’ve learned over this short amount of time. Write a reflection about how through this learning you’ve atoned, either with yourself, the material, or something else. It’s also alright if you feel you haven’t atoned through the learning, but elaborate on why.

High Holy Day Reader Supplement

Akedah D'var by rabbinical student Merritt Snider

The Akedah begins with Abraham and Sarah's inability to conceive. They've been promised [by God specifically] that they will have descendants more numerous than the stars, and yet they've been having...issues. Then finally, after much strife, and a tense encounter with possibly an angel, Isaac is born. Like all of us; he grows up, he begins to understand his place in the world, and what is expected of him. Given the Time and Place our narrative is set in, to some extent Isaac would've been raised understanding his purpose was to replace his father. Our story has a radically different cultural, interpersonal backdrop - this isn't to say that Isaac was *incapable* or *disempowered* to be his own person and make his own choices, he probably could.

As long as he ultimately did what was expected of him : what his father, his elders, his communal leaders, told him to do. His father, Abraham, told him they were going up the mountain - and so they went. This is expected behavior for Isaac's time and place. Readers like us are temporally removed from this normalcy , so Isaac's behavior can read as *passive* or *accepting*. Our interpretation of his behavior, as my Hopkins professors keep telling us, is the result of a refraction in time. However, to empathize with Isaac, he's expected to take on all of the responsibilities currently held by his father. Isaac is looking to Abraham as a behavioral model, trying to mirror his father's mannerisms.

The Akedah is a process, within which there are, to me, Three key moments. They are: when God asks Abraham to sacrifice his favored son, when Isaac calls to his father and asks where the Ram is for the sacrifice, and the moment the messenger distracts Abraham. Tuck these in your mind for a moment.

What if I told you that these moments, separated by timing and location, were actually the same. Not the same literally, we can see that they're different - they are the same somatically, sensorially.

Each of these moments are Punctus points. But what *is* a Punctus?

The word "Punctus" or "Punctum", for our purposes, comes from Roland Barthes' book *Camera Lucida* and describes the deeply personal and emotionally affective details within a photograph. Details which "prick" or "wound" the viewer, creating an emotional connection, and allowing the viewer a 'way in' to the photograph. But this concept applies to more than just photography.

Encountering a smell which brings you back to a childhood memory while on a walk - the smell is a punctus. Seeing the name of an old friend pop up on Facebook and having memories come rushing back - the pop up was a punctus. Rocking upward on our toes saying "Kadosh" during the *Kedushah* mimicking the angelic choir, Hearing the shofar blown.....all punctus points.

The sensation, which is generated by the punctus, is what transports us. It's 'the way in.' When I first heard of this concept - the Punctus Point - in undergrad, a paragraph from Heschel floated into my mind.

Heschel writes: “*The higher goal of spiritual living is [...] to face sacred moments. [...] It is not a thing that imposes itself on man but a spiritual presence. What is retained in the soul is the moment of insight rather than the place where the act came to pass. [...] Spiritual life begins to decay when we fail to sense the grandeur of what is eternal in time.*”

This “moment of insight” which causes the experiencer to only “retain” the insight itself, rather than the *place* where it occurred, creates an embodied experience of a *Placeless Moment*. A Placeless Moment is not a *somewhere*, it's a *somewhen*. A place, not in the sense of a physical location, but a place in the sense of a *location in Time*.

The Akedah is an example of where these two distinct strands of Time intersect. Where human time overlaps and overlays with Religious Time. Placeless moments can literally blur temporal boundaries. It isn't a ‘real’ moment per se - at least not in the way that we as humans with weekly schedules, are used to *encountering* moments as fleshy, physical bodies that can only be at one place at a time.

The three moments I mentioned at the beginning, on the Religious timescale are the same moment - the same metaphysical instant - blurred and scraped across different physical and temporal locations to be experienced by the individuals in our narrative; three sides of a triangle creating the ‘big moment’ of the Akedah.

Religious Time, and Heschel, state that Time exists *outside* of humanity. They argue that there is an immutable Holiness in Time; that God created Time and instilled Holiness within it. Spiritual Grandeur, a moment of Awe, *Yirah* (ירא) , *Hineini*, however you want to phrase it, creates this sort of Placeless Moment. The sensation of *Yirah* that we are left with *is a punctus point*.

This triangular moment, the three moments I mentioned at the beginning, are moments of *Yirah*. This subtextually, and sensorily links them together, which in turn tightens their connection as *one* moment, experienced through three instances. This ‘timeless’ quality is what makes a punctus point or placeless moment so distinct and powerful.

Jewish Religious Time is filled with these engineered punctus points which facilitate ‘moments of spiritual grandeur’ ; these Placeless moments; these punctus points. Each holiday has its own embodied rituals and practices through which we are able to reach backwards in time, to stand where our ancestors stood, and to feel what they might have felt.

With all of that in mind, I want to know why we read this story now? Today? On the second day of Rosh Hashanah?

We don’t have to search far to encounter the body of metaphorical imagery around Rosh Hashanah. These days are the ‘Gates’ of the year - we are back at the start of our circular religious year. Page 102 of our Machzor contains an elegantly drawn spiral, which the footnote on the bottom of page 104 expounds upon. And I’d like us all to read it together (omitting the last sentence):

“On Rosh Hashanah we celebrate renewal, but we hope to live our lives without endlessly repeating ourselves. Instead, through the process of *teshuvah*/ turning, we attempt to change a bit each year. We pray that when we return to the beginning in the cycle of the year, we will stand at a higher point, our lives an ascending spiral over our years.”

‘Our lives an ascending spiral over our years’. We’re crossing over from the old year into the new year, into the Days of Awe, or Days of Repentance, before Yom Kippur. The possibility for change in this time period is uniquely tangible - tactile almost. We’re apologizing, thinking about our past behaviors and actions, seeing relatives from all over, organizing get-togethers. While crossing metaphysical, metaphorical boundaries in Time, we are actively together, repairing crossed *interpersonal* boundaries. In a very literal way, this makes Rosh Hashanah a time of renewal and rebirth to us, in its own way, in our own time. We are present, but we are also remembering.

When we hear the Shofar we are moved to be intensely present. Right here, in this *now*, together. Via the physics of sound we are pierced by the Shofar, and moved to remember that we are here, now, together. Present and Alive. We are all right now capable of change. A Placeless Moment is the conduit through which the sensation arrives to you - they’re an elevator or ladder in this way, functionally a mode of travel. This is how they facilitate transformation, remind us that we are mouldable, moveable - that experiences warp and change us.

But let’s return to Isaac (he’s a little tied up right now). Given the combined weight of all the metaphors around transformation, I think this is *the* moment that Isaac becomes the Patriarch. The Placeless moment the cycle begins anew. To my eye, the discussion always seems to center Abraham, but it’s the binding of *Isaac*. The Patriarch cycle has completed its course, we are back at the start of the circle, standing at a higher point than before. It’s Isaac’s turn now.

To paraphrase from David Sterne's chabad dot org article based on parts of *Shem miShmuel*:

“[when] Abraham offered [Isaac] in sacrifice on Mt. Moriah, Isaac's soul – the soul from the ['passive'] "feminine world" – fled his body, and G-d replaced it with a soul from the ['active'] "masculine world." [...] Up to that time, Isaac's service was characterized by passivity: it only reflected his own desire to get closer to G-d and to receive whatever [G-d would grant] to him.”

The moment of the Akedah fundamentally and metaphysically alters Isaac, he moves from a passive, accepting posture to a more active and involved one. The Akedah, the triangular Placeless Moment composing it, is Isaac's punctus point. This is his moment of *Yirah* - and with this story's placement on today's holiday I'd hazard to guess it's supposed to be *ours*, annually, too. So we can, like Isaac, step into our own Becoming and move through the, at times agonizing, internal work of growth, of repair and repentance and recalling. Like Isaac, we too are capable of great change when the path forward is broken down into individual steps, one moment composed of several individual instances, rather than a large line-item goal.

Teshuvah, means more than just 'repentance.'

The very word implies a *turning*. An attunement. An adjustment of our internal moral and behavioral dials. This is also, to some extent, what the Shofar does, we are all hearing it, our eardrums physically resonating *with* it. An engineered punctus point for all of us to be together. To really be present with and for one another.

Hineini

I am *here*

A moment of profound identification with Place and Time. The seconds either side of each *Hineini* in the narrative (when God talks to Abraham, when Isaac calls out to his father, when the messenger interrupts Abraham) are both punctus points for the narrative and also for the individuals involved. They are changed through these moments of awareness. So are we. When we become aware of behaviors, when we do *Teshuvah*, we can have this Placeless Moment of awareness with ourselves, our actions, and our participation in systems far larger than us.

Today is the metaphorical gate of the year. Where we are metaphysically, spiritually transformed, back at the same place, uniquely aware of the time that's passed. We are capable of seeing new possibilities as long as we remember to pause, and look up, to say *Hineini*.

This is what the call of the *Shofar* is for, to *be* that point of focus, to remind us that change and transformation are possible when we stop and pause - and become aware that *now* is the time to start.