

Forty Days of Repentance

We are quickly coming into the time of year when things begin to change. Although the weather tells us that it is definitely still summer, there are subtle changes in the air which signal something to come. It's a transitional period. Of course, the exact timing of these shifts in weather may vary from year to year. However, one thing that remains annually consistent is the beginning of the Fall Feasts. The first day of the seventh month, according to the Biblical calendar, is called Rosh Hashana. It is the new year, and thus it is a time of new beginnings. As the old year fades into the past, it is the hope that the negative aspects of our old self will not be carried with us into the new year. This attitude is carried forward and intensified as we prepare for the next Appointed Time ten days later, Yom Kippur: the holiest day of the year. Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement—the day when God convenes His heavenly courtroom and opens the books in which are written our deeds. It is a yearly prefiguration of the final judgment, when our eternal fate will rest on whether our names have been written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

As a means of seeking to attain this goal of changing for the better in the new year, and additionally in order to spiritually prepare for the Day of Atonement, it is traditional in Judaism to devote the preceding forty days to a special period of contemplation and prayer. The period between the first day of the sixth month and Yom Kippur is thus known as the Forty Days of Repentance. It is a time to consider one's deeds and make a concentrated effort to awake from spiritual complacency.

This call to awakening is symbolized by the daily blowing of a ram's horn trumpet, called a *shofar*. After the horn is blown, the following prayer is said:

Awake, you that are sleepy, and ponder your deeds; remember your Creator and go to Him for forgiveness. Don't be like those who miss reality in their hunt after shadows and waste your years in seeking after vain things which can neither profit nor deliver. Look well to your souls and consider your deeds; let each one of you forsake his evil ways and thoughts, and return unto the Lord so that He may have mercy on you.

You may not own a shofar yourself, but you can still participate. You can find audio of shofar calls on YouTube or elsewhere online. In a pinch, any other kind of trumpet will suffice, or use your imagination. Once every day from now until Yom Kippur (September 28, 2020), listen to the sound of the *shofar* and recognize it as a call to attention, an awakening from spiritual slothfulness. Then say the prayer above and do what it says, considering your deeds and repenting in each of those specific areas the Holy Spirit brings to your mind. We believe that you will find this to be a blessed and transformative experience.

During these days, you may find it helpful to meditate on a few of these Scripture verses:

"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Messiah will shine on you.' Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:11-16)

"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." (Romans 13:11-12)

"For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation." (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8)

"Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!" (Revelation 16:15)