

A ROSH HASHANAH SERVICE

For The Family

by

Alvin J. Reines

Institute of Creative Judaism

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(Music)

Reader

This morning you and I did something very important. Yet we did not stop to give it thought. We passed it by without noticing. What was this important act? When we think about it together, you will see what it was. This morning we started something. We enjoyed a "beginning." What was that beginning, -- it was a new day. This morning we began a new day.

Reader and Group

There are many beginnings: To stories and journeys, to play and work, - to life itself. If we look carefully, we can see beginnings all about us. These beginnings can be very important, and some are exciting.

Reader

We are talking about beginnings because today is a very special time. It is Rosh Hashanah, the first day of a new year for the Jews. As the first day of the year, the Rosh Hashanah is a holiday, a serious and interesting holiday. It is a holiday of beginnings.

Reader and Group

There are many beginnings. The Rosh Hashanah celebrates more than the beginning of the new year. It teaches us to think about the many special beginnings that take place in our lives and the world about us. On the Rosh Hashanah, we are filled with wonder at the many beginnings.

(Music--song)

Reader

Of all beginnings, the greatest is the birth of the universe, the creation of our world. The power of creation, of birth and growth, is marvelous and mighty. People have wondered about the beginning of the world since the earliest times. Still, the creation of the universe is a great mystery.

Reader and Group

The Jews have wondered about the beginning of the world for a very long time. The first ideas of the Jews about how the world began are written in the Torah, the scroll we keep in our ark, in which are written the great thoughts of the Jews who lived long ago.

Reader

Let us take the Torah scroll from the ark, and read the story of creation as Jews have done since the earliest times.

Let us rise as we take the Torah scroll from the ark.

(Scroll is taken from ark; and group
is then seated. Appropriate music and
song as desired.)

Reader

(The reader reads in Hebrew, Genesis 1:1-5. The reader does not translate. When the reading from the Torah is completed, the reader gives the scroll to someone to hold, or places it in a visible position, to serve as a symbol through the following section. As desired, song or music may be played while the scroll is set as a visible symbol.)

What do the Hebrew words mean that we have just read in the Torah? It is not so important what these words mean as what they teach us to do. They teach us to try to understand how the world began.

Reader and Group

In different times and different places, the Jews have understood the beginning of the world in many different ways. Each of us, everyone in his own time, must seek to discover the meaning of creation for himself. Let us, then, tell the story of the beginning of the world as you and I would understand it today.

Reader

In the beginning, -- before there were heaven and earth, the oceans or mountains, -- the universe, our world, was a great fireball. With a big bang, a hot big bang, the fireball exploded. It grew bigger and bigger, greater and greater. From this fireball, our world was born. How beautiful the world was!

Reader and Group

Great is the power of creation. Once no star shone and no moon glowed. Neither were there sun and planets. Now the great fireball had become heaven and earth, the oceans and mountains. How beautiful our world is!

(Group rises. Torah is returned to ark.)*

*If Torah has been left in open ark as a visible symbol, ark is now closed.

Reader

We look upon the birth of the world and see that it is good.
On Rosh Hashanah we rejoice in the beauty and goodness of
creation.

Reader

ברכו את-י"י המברך:

Reader and Group

ברוך י"י המברך לעולם ועד:

(Group is seated)

Reader

Creation did not stop with earth and its oceans. They were
empty of life; living things were yet to be born. There were
no people and animals, no trees or grass. Yet life was a
promise deep within the creative power.

Reader and Group

Creation continued. The air we breathe that surrounds our
earth was formed. Pierced by light and lightning, heated by
volcanos and shocked by thunder, the air formed tiny building
blocks of life. These blocks fell to the ocean and there joined
together to become living things. From the oceans life arose.
First came the smallest creatures, then plants and animals, and
finally people, you and I, came to be.

(Group rises)

Reader

Great is the power of creation. We look upon the birth of life and see that it is good. On Rosh Hashanah we celebrate the power of creation and rejoice in the unity of all life.

Reader

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד:

Reader and Group

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד:

(Group is seated)

Reader

Rosh Hashanah teaches that creation does not end; new happenings are everywhere. In nature, the season of Rosh Hashanah shows a wondrous change. The center of our sun, -- source of light and day, summer and warmth, -- crosses the great equator that divides the earth in two.

Group

Night and day then are equal, and autumn arrives. Leaves soon turn to many colors, and fall from the trees. The harvest nears, and the reapers will soon end earth's sweet growth. The time is coming for earth to rest.

(SONG)

Reader

Rosh Hashanah is a holiday of time. On the New Year we think of time that has passed and time still to come. Rosh Hashanah celebrates the passage of time as a gift that brings new beginnings.

Group

In the year that has passed, our bodies have become stronger and our minds older. With new strength and wisdom, we have the power to change. We need no longer act in the young ways of the past. We can make new beginnings, find new pleasures, enjoy new happiness.

Reader

When our bodies are stronger and our minds older, we have more to give to others.

Reader and Group

We can better work and care;
We can better help and share.

Reader

When our bodies are stronger and our minds older, we have more to give ourselves.

Reader and Group

In our studies, we can learn more;
In our play, we can do more.
How great our pleasure in the passing of time.

(Music interlude)

(SERMON)
(Music as desired)

SHOFAR SERVICE

Reader

This is the shofar, a trumpet made of the horn of a ram. From earliest times, in their most ancient communities, the Jews have used the shofar to announce the New Year.

Group

In the sounding of the shofar to declare our New Year, we link ourselves as Jews to the long centuries of time: to the distant years of the past, and the rushing days of the future.

Reader

T'keeah; Sh'vareem; T'ruah; and T'keeah G'dolah are the sounds of the shofar. Let us stand together as we listen to these sounds, quietly reflecting on the many thoughts they bring us.

Reader and Group

T'keeah (shofar is sounded): We remember the good and beautiful happenings that we enjoyed in the past year.

Sh'vareem (shofar is sounded): We remember the moments of sadness and tears in the past year.

T'ruah (shofar is sounded): We think now of the year to come, of the new beginnings we will make, and all the new pleasures we will enjoy.

T'keeah G'dolah (shofar is sounded): The great long blast has announced the Rosh Hashanah. May we enter the new year with courage and strength, with wisdom and love.

(SONG)

Reader

The moments we have shared together on this Rosh Hashanah have now come to an end. The shofar has announced the New Year. It says many things to the heart of the Jew. Your parents, teachers, and rabbis would like the shofar to speak for them too. We want you to know of our confidence in you, our love for you, and of our desire that each of you shall continue to grow, and make new and better beginnings every year. You are all very important to us. Rosh Hashanah teaches how very precious beginnings are, and you children, for your parents and the entire community, are the most precious beginnings of all.

(MUSIC OR SONG)

Reader and Group

(standing)

Let us rejoice in the everliving creation, and give praise to the greatness that is manifest throughout the world. In the heavens above and the earth below, the divine glory stands revealed. Yet creation is never ended and the universe never full. Potentialities remain unrealized and promises unfulfilled. Thus even as we affirm the present, we commit ourselves to the future, to the idea of ever higher being, and to the richness of the coming life.

Va-a-nach-nu ko-re-im u-mish-ta-cha-vim u-mo-dim lif-ne me-lech
mal-che ha-me-la-chim ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.

(Closing meditation)