

Tractate Rosh Hashanah

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Introduction

Overview

Rosh Hashanah, the eighth tractate in the order *Mo'ed*, comprises four chapters. Its name literally means “head of the year,” and denotes the Jewish New Year; this falls on the first day of the month of Tishre, the seventh month according to the biblical practice of counting the months from Nisan in the spring (Exodus 12:2; Leviticus 23:24–25; Numbers 29:1–6; Nehemiah 8:2). However, as the Mishnah immediately specifies, there are not one but four New Years in the Jewish calendar, that is, four dates with which annual reckonings begin for different purposes.

That being said, it is the New Year beginning in Tishre with which the remainder of the tractate deals, with particular attention to the intercalation of the preceding month of Elul, which could be twenty-nine or thirty days in length. The tractate also deals with the festival’s significance as a day of divine judgment, the rules for blowing the *shofar* (ram’s horn), which is uniquely associated with this festival, and other liturgical aspects of the festival.

In Mishnaic times, the determination of which day commenced the month of Tishre was based on the testimony of witnesses who had directly seen the new moon on the thirtieth or thirty-first day of the preceding month; this determined whether that month would last twenty-nine or thirty days (a full lunar month lasts about 29.5 days). This determination of the length of the month of Elul would, in turn, determine not only the day on which Rosh Hashanah would be celebrated, but also that of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), with even greater consequences due to the supreme sanctity of that day and its attendant practices of fasting and other forms of self-denial.

Structure and Organization of the Tractate

It is this procedure, especially with respect to the validation of witnesses and their testimony, and the manner of publicly announcing and disseminating via messengers the correct day of Rosh Hashanah, that occupies most of the laws and narratives of the first two chapters of the tractate. The second chapter concludes with a dramatic story of a confrontation between Rabban Gamaliel and R. Joshua over the correct determination one year of the beginning of the month of Tishre; this bore more importantly on the relation between patriarchal authority and rabbinic autonomy, reflecting the idea that patriarchal (and judicial) authority is divinely vested (Leviticus 23:2) in the rabbinic courts, especially those which determine the calendar.

The third chapter continues with courts and witnesses, but turns to rules for the blowing of the ram's horn (*shofar*: Numbers 29:1; Psalms 81:4), and the importance of proper intention in doing so. The fourth chapter continues with matters regarding the *shofar*, especially innovative enactments by Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai regarding the blowing of the *shofar*, as well as other festival observances, in response to the loss of the Temple. In this regard this tractate is particularly expressive of the differences between the time when the Temple existed and the time after its destruction: see 1:4; 4:1, 3, 4. The remainder of the fourth chapter deals with the order of blessings and special readings of verses from Scripture appropriate to the themes of Rosh Hashanah: (Divine) Sovereignty, Divine Remembrance, and *Shofar*. The chapter concludes with additional rules for the proper procedures for blowing the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah.

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Tractate Rosh Hashanah

Chapter One

1:1–3 *New Years, New Moons, and Festivals*

I There are four New Years:
on the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings and for festivals.
On the first of Elul is the New Year for the tithe of cattle.
R. Eleazar and R. Simeon say:
On the first of Tishre.
On the first of Tishre is the New Year for years,
for Years of Release,
for Jubilees,
for planting,
and for vegetables.
On the first of Shevat is the New Year for trees,
according to the words of the House of Shammai.
The House of Hillel say:
On the fifteenth thereof.

1:1 *Nisan*: The first month, the spring month.

New Year for kings: That is, for the count of regnal years.

festivals: The annual cycle of festivals is held to begin with Passover in Nisan; see Exodus 12:1.

Elul: The sixth month.

tithe of cattle: Each year's crop of newborn cattle must be tithed separately.

Tishre: The seventh month, in the fall, on the first day of which is Rosh Hashanah.

for years: Commentators vary as to what this means; perhaps the reference is to the regnal years of gentile kings or to the start of year-long contracts.

Years of Release... Jubilees: See Leviticus 25 and *Shevi'it*.

planting: That is, of trees, to count off the first three and then the fourth year of their production; see Leviticus 19:23–25.

vegetables... trees: To determine liability to tithes.

Shevat: The eleventh month.

2 At four times of the year
the world is judged:
at Passover with respect to grain;
at the Festival of Weeks with respect to the fruits of trees;
at Rosh Hashanah all that enter the world pass before him like legions of soldiers,¹
as it is said: *He who fashions the hearts of them all, who discerns all their doings*;
and at the Festival [of Sukkot] they are judged with respect to water.

3 With respect to six New Moons messengers go forth:
with respect to Nisan because of Passover;
with respect to Av because of the Fast;
with respect to Elul because of Rosh Hashanah;
with respect to Tishre because of regulating the Festivals;
with respect to Kislev because of Hanukkah;
and with respect to Adar because of Purim.
And when the Temple existed,
one would go forth also with respect to Iyyar
because of [the need to set] the Second Passover.

1:4-9 *Witnesses to the New Moon*

4 With respect to two New Moons
one may profane the Sabbath:
with respect to Nisan and with respect to Tishre.
Because on them messengers go forth to Syria
and on them the festivals were regulated.
And when the Temple existed,

¹ Alt. "like flocks of sheep."

1:2 *Festival of Weeks: Shavu'ot* in post-Mishnaic texts, *atseret* ("Assembly") in the Mishnah.

He who fashions the hearts of them all...: Psalms 33:15.

with respect to water: Rainfall.

1:3 *messengers go forth*: To proclaim the New Moon. In these particular months an important holiday would fall, and it was necessary to inform distant communities of its proper date.

Passover: Commencing on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan.

the Fast: The ninth day of Av, the fifth month.

Rosh Hashanah: The first of Tishre.

regulating the Festivals: Establishing the proper dates for the Day of Atonement and Sukkot; see 1:4 below.

Hanukkah: The twenty-fifth day of Kislev, the ninth month.

Purim: The fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, the twelfth month.

Second Passover: The fifteenth day of Iyyar, the second month. See Numbers 9:6-13.

1:4 *profane the Sabbath*: To bring testimony regarding the New Moon, since major festivals occurred in those months.

one would profane [the Sabbath] with respect to all of them, because of regulating the sacrifice.

5 Whether [the New Moon] was seen clearly or not seen clearly, one may profane the Sabbath for its sake.

R. Yose says:

If it was seen clearly, one does not profane the Sabbath for its sake.

6 It once happened that more than forty pairs [of witnesses] passed through [on the Sabbath], but R. Aqiva detained them in Lod.

Rabban Gamaliel sent to him:

If you detain the multitude, you will put a stumbling block before them for the future.

7 A father and son who saw the New Moon [may] go [to bear witness], not because they can join together [as two witnesses], but rather,

if one of them is disqualified, the other can join with another [witness].

R. Simeon says:

A father and his son, or all [other] relatives, are fit to bear witness about the New Moon.

R. Yose said:

It once happened that Tobiah the Physician saw the New Moon in Jerusalem, he and his son and his freed slave, and the priests accepted him and his son [as witnesses], but disqualified his slave.²

But when they came before the court,

² From here to the end of this mishnah missing in **K** and inserted in the margin.

all of them: All twelve months, since the special sacrifice for the New Moon (Numbers 28:11–15) had to be offered (“regulated”) on the proper day.

1:5 *R. Yose says*: The court would expect a greater number of witnesses, some of whom could arrive without violating the Sabbath.

1:6 *put a stumbling block before them for the future*: They will not bother to bring forth testimony lest they be blocked from doing so.

1:7 *join together [as two witnesses]*: Being close relatives, their testimonies cannot be presumed to be independent of one another.

join with another [witness]: To constitute a valid pair of witnesses.

fit to bear witness about the New Moon: In contrast to other kinds of legal testimony, where close relatives would be disqualified.

But when they came before the court: The Mishnah distinguishes between “the priests” and “the court” as two distinct authoritative bodies for judging such calendrical matters. Earlier sources generally presume more

they accepted him and his slave,
but disqualified his son.

8 These are disqualified [from bearing witness]:
a dice player, and those who loan on interest, and pigeon flyers,
and those who sell Seventh-Year produce, and slaves.

This is the general rule:

[With respect to] any evidence which a woman is disqualified [from bringing],
these too are disqualified.

9 If one saw the New Moon but cannot walk,
they [may] bring him [on the Sabbath] on a donkey,
even on a bed.

If any lie in ambush for them,
they [may] carry staves.

And if it was a long way, they [may] carry food.
For with respect to a journey of a night and a day
one [may] profane the Sabbath
and go forth to bring evidence of the New Moon,
as it is said:

These are the set times of the Lord... which you shall declare each at its appointed time.

Chapter Two

2:1–4 *Interference of Heretics and the Lighting of Flares*

2 If [the judges] do not recognize [the witness],
one sends another [witness] with him
to testify regarding him.
In former times,
they accepted testimony regarding the New Moon from anyone.

overlap between priests and the courts. Here the two bodies disagree whether a close relative or a slave is preferable as a second witness.

1:8 *These are disqualified*: At *Sanhedrin* 3:3 a similar list of disqualified witnesses in property cases does not disqualify slaves.

1:9 *a night and a day*: If the trip is any longer than that, there would be no gain from profaning the Sabbath since they would arrive after the New Moon had been declared.

which you shall declare ...: *Leviticus* 23:4. Since the preceding verse proscribes work on the Sabbath, this verse may be understood to say that the setting of the proper time for the festivals, through the setting of the length of the month, may override the Sabbath restrictions.

2:1 *do not recognize [the witness]*: And cannot be certain of his fitness.

they: Presumably a court or officials of his own town.

When the sectarians became corrupt,
they enacted
that they would only accept [testimony]
from those whom they recognized.

2 In former times,
they kindled flares.

When the Samaritans became corrupt,
they enacted that messengers would go forth.

3 How did³ they kindle flares?
They bring long sticks of cedar and reeds and oleaster wood and flax yarn,
and [someone] ties them together with rope
and ascends to the top of the hill
and sets them aflame.

And he moves [them] back and forth
and up and down
until he sees his fellow doing likewise on the second hilltop,
and likewise on the third hilltop.

4 And whence did they kindle flares?
From the Mount of Olives to Sarteba,
and from Sarteba to Agrippina,
and from Agrippina to Hauran,
and from Hauran to Beth Baltin.
They did not go beyond Beth Baltin,
but he would move [the flare] back and forth
and up and down
until he would see all of the Exile before him
like an expanse of fire.

2:5–6 *Assembling and Examining the Witnesses*

5 There was a large courtyard in Jerusalem
that was called Beth Ya'azeq,

³ K: “do.”

sectarians: Also translated “heretics,” Heb. *minim*, whose exact identity is often difficult to discern. For other mishnaic passages that allude to polemical calendrical disputes, perhaps with Sadducees or related groups, and specifically with respect to the dating of the Feast of Weeks (cf. Leviticus 23:11, 15), see *Hagigah* 2:4 and *Menahot* 10:3.

2:2 *flares*: To announce the New Moon. See 2:3 below.

Samaritans: The Samaritans rejected rabbinic calendrical authority.

corrupt: Lighting misleading flares of their own to announce the New Moon, even if not sighted.

messengers would go forth: To announce the New Moon, without relying on flares.

2:3 *oleaster wood*: Lit. “oil-wood.”

2:4 *all of the Exile*: That is so say, Babylonia.

at which all of the witnesses were assembled,
 and the court examined them there.
 And they prepared large meals for them
 so that they would be accustomed to coming.
 In former times,
 they did not move from there the whole [Sabbath] day.
 Rabban Gamaliel the Elder enacted
 that they might move two thousand cubits in any direction.
 And not these alone,
 but also the midwife that comes to deliver a child,
 and one who comes to rescue from a burning [building],
 or from an [enemy] army,
 or from a [flooding] river,
 or from a fallen house.
 These are considered to be like the people of the city,
 being able to move⁴ two thousand cubits in any direction.

6 How do they examine the witnesses?

They first examine the first pair [that arrives],
 and they bring in the elder of them and say to him:

Tell, how did you see the moon,
 ahead of the sun or behind the sun?

To its north or to its south?

How high was it and to which side⁵ was it leaning?

And how wide was it?

If he said:

“Ahead of the sun,”

he has said nothing.

Afterward they would bring in the second [witness]
 and examine him.

If their words are found to be in agreement,
 their testimony is valid.

They inquire of all the remaining pairs [of witnesses]
 only regarding the major points.

Not because they needed them,
 but in order that they not depart in disappointment,
 so that they would be accustomed to coming.

⁴ Lit. “they have.”

⁵ Lit. “where.”

2:5 *Rabban Gamaliel the Elder*: Early first century CE. Unless “the Elder” is specified, “Rabban Gamaliel” is his grandson.

in any direction: For Sabbath limit, see *Eruvin* 4:1–3; 8:1.

2:6 *examine the witnesses*: See *Sanhedrin* 3:6.

he has said nothing: It would have been the old moon or not the moon at all. He cannot be relied upon as a witness.

2:7 *Proclaiming the New Moon*

7 The head of the court says:
 “It is sanctified!”
 And all of the people respond after him:
 “It is sanctified! It is sanctified!”
 Whether it appeared at its proper time
 or did not appear at its proper time,
 they sanctify it.
 R Eleazar b. Zadok says:
 If it did not appear at its proper time
 they do not sanctify it,
 for Heaven has already sanctified it.

2:8–9 *False Witnesses and a Story of Judicial Authority*

8 Rabban Gamaliel had a likeness of the shapes of the moon on a tablet
 and on the wall of his upper room,
 which he would show nonexpert [witnesses], saying:
 Did you see it like this or like that?
 It once happened that two [witnesses] came and said:
 We saw it at dawn in the east and at evening in the west.
 Said R. Yohanan b. Nuri:
 They are false witnesses!
 When they came to Yavneh,
 Rabban Gamaliel accepted them.
 Another two came and said:
 We saw it at its proper time,

2:7 *at its proper time*: On the eve of the thirtieth day of the concluding month, meaning that the concluding month had twenty-nine days.

did not appear at its proper time: If the moon is not seen on the eve of the thirtieth day, it can be presumed that the concluding month had thirty days; this is the maximum length of a lunar month. There is no need to wait for it to be seen on what would be the thirty-first day of the concluding month.

for Heaven has already sanctified it: It is only humanly sanctified on the testimony of witnesses, in the absence of which the new month is presumed to begin on the thirty-first day of the concluding month, without the need for the court to declare it sanctified.

2:8 *We saw it at dawn*: On the morning of the twenty-ninth day of the concluding month.

They are false witnesses: For the moon to appear like this twice in the same day is impossible.

When they came to Yavneh: Having previously testified before another court.

accepted them: Their testimony. Even if they erred in what they saw in the morning, their sighting of the moon the following evening could be accepted as valid in its own right.

at its proper time: On the eve of the thirtieth day of the concluding month, rendering it a month of twenty-nine days, with the thirtieth day being declared the first day of the new month.

but on the night of the added day
 it did not appear,
 and Rabban Gamaliel accepted them.
 Said R. Dosa b. Harqinas:
 They are false witnesses.
 How can they testify that a woman has given birth,
 when on the very next day
 her stomach is between her teeth?
 R. Joshua said to him:
 I see your point.⁶

9 Rabban Gamaliel sent to [R. Joshua]:
 I decree upon you that you come to me with your staff and your purse
 on the Day of Atonement as determined by your calculation.

R. Aqiva went and found [R. Joshua] troubled.

He said to him:

I can infer [from Scripture]
 that whatever Rabban Gamaliel has done is [validly] done,
 as it is said:

These are the appointed times of the Lord, the sacred occasions, which you shall proclaim.

Whether they are in their proper time

or not in their proper time

I have no other appointed times but these.

[Rabbi Joshua] came to R. Dosa b. Harqinas.

He said to him:

If we come to take issue with the court of Rabban Gamaliel,
 we need to take issue with every single court

⁶ Lit. "your words."

the night of the added day: The night following the thirtieth day of the concluding month, being the eve of the thirty-first day.

accepted them: And declared the thirtieth day of the concluding month to be the first day of the new month, with the preceding month having been one of twenty-nine days.

between her teeth: That is, their first sighting of the moon was false and the concluding month would have to have been one of thirty days, delaying the new month by one day from the determination of Rabban Gamaliel.

I see your point: That is, I endorse your words, contrary to the position of Rabban Gamaliel, and consider the concluding month to have been one of thirty days.

2:9 *by your calculation:* A day later than by Rabban Gamaliel's reckoning, that is, a sacred day (no work or travel) for R. Joshua, but not for Rabban Gamaliel. R. Joshua must violate the sanctity of the most solemn day of the year.

These are the appointed times...: Leviticus 23:4.

no other appointed times but these: Whose times you, through your human courts and witnesses, shall determine, and with which I will comply.

He said to him: In the first appearance of this phrase, R. Aqiva to R. Joshua; in the second, R. Dosa to R. Joshua.

that has served⁷ from the days of Moses until now,
as it is said:

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended.

And why were the names of the elders not specified?

To teach that every group of three [elders] who have served⁸ as a court of Israel,
indeed they are as the court of Moses.

[R. Joshua] took his staff and his purse in his hand
and went to Yavneh,
to Rabban Gamaliel,

on the Day of Atonement
as determined by [R. Joshua's] calculation.

Rabban Gamaliel stood up and kissed him on his head
and said to him:

Come in peace,
my master and my disciple!—

My master in wisdom
and my disciple for having accepted my words.

Chapter Three

3:1 *More on Court Procedures*

3 If the court and all of Israel had seen [the New Moon],
and the witnesses had been examined,
but they did not have sufficient time to declare
“It is sanctified!”
before nightfall,
in such a case it is intercalated.
If the court alone saw it,

⁷ Lit. “stood.” ⁸ Lit. “stood.”

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu...: Exodus 24:9.

as the court of Moses: Even if their names (and qualifications) have not been transmitted, their legitimacy and authority is the same as that of those named.

3:1 Thematically, this should follow after 2:7.

had seen [the New Moon]: On the thirtieth day of the concluding month, which would normally render that day the first day of the new month.

before nightfall: All court proceedings, including sanctification of the month, must take place by day.

in such a case it is intercalated: The concluding month contains thirty days and the next day is the first day of the new month, even though the concluding month should have contained twenty-nine days.

two [of its members] should stand
 and testify before them,
 and then they [the court] say
 “It is sanctified! It is sanctified!”
 If three [judges] saw it,
 and they constitute a court [for such purposes],
 two of them stand,
 appoint two of their colleagues to join the remaining one,
 and [the witnesses] testify before them,
 and they say
 “It is sanctified! It is sanctified!”
 For no individual is [considered] trustworthy in himself.

3:2-7 *Valid Shofar and Proper Intention*

2 All [kinds of] *shofar* are valid
 except for that of a cow,
 since it is a “horn.”
 R. Yose said:
 Are not all [kinds of] *shofar* called “horn,”
 as it is said:

When a long blast is sounded on the horn.

3 The *shofar* [blown in the Temple] on Rosh Hashanah is of a wild goat,
 straight,
 with its mouthpiece overlaid with gold.
 And two trumpets [are blown] at either side.
 The *shofar* blows long
 and the trumpets blow short,
 for the obligation of the day
 is [fulfilled] through the *shofar*.

4 On [public] fast days [the *shofar*] are of rams,
 rounded,
 with their mouthpieces overlaid with silver.

trustworthy in himself: A minimum of two witnesses is required to give testimony before a court consisting of a minimum of three judges. The sole remaining judge of the original panel cannot sanctify the New Moon on his own.

3:2 *shofar*: Ram’s horns.

it is a “horn” and is not considered a *shofar*. According to rabbinic teaching a cow’s horn cannot be used because it is reminiscent of the Golden Calf.

When a long blast is sounded on the horn: Joshua 6:5. Elsewhere in this same verse the “horn” is called a *shofar*.

3:3 *The shofar [blown in the Temple]*: While the commentaries place this mishnah in the Temple, in fact the text does not specify this.

And two trumpets [are blown] in the middle.
 The *shofar* blows short.
 and the trumpets blow long,
 for the obligation of the day
 is [fulfilled] through the trumpets.

5 The Jubilee is like Rosh Hashanah
 with respect to the blowing [of the *shofar*]
 and the Blessings.

R. Judah says:

On Rosh Hashanah they blow [*shofar* of] rams,
 while on the Jubilee they blow [*shofar* of] of wild goats.

6 A *shofar* which was split and stuck together
 is not valid.

If its shattered pieces were stuck together,
 it is not valid.

If it had developed a hole and was stopped up,
 if it hinders the blowing,
 it is not valid;

and if not,
 it is valid.

7 One who blows [the *shofar*] into a cistern
 or into a cellar,
 or into a large jar:

if he hears the sound of the *shofar*,
 he has fulfilled [his obligation];

if he hears a muffled sound,
 he has not fulfilled [his obligation].

Similarly,

one who passes behind a synagogue,
 or whose house is next to a synagogue,
 and he heard the sound of the *shofar*

or the sound of the Scroll [of Esther being read on Purim],
 if he directed his heart,

he has fulfilled [his obligation];

if not,

he has not fulfilled [his obligation].

Even though this one heard

and that one heard,

this one directed his heart

and that one did not direct his heart.

3:4 *in the middle*: That is, two *shofars* are blown at either side, and between them are blown two trumpets.

3:5 *and the Blessings*: See 4:5-6.

3:7 *has not fulfilled [his obligation]*: To hear the "voice of the *shofar*."

directed his heart: Listened with the intent of fulfilling thereby the commandment to hear the sound of the *shofar* or the reading of the Scroll of Esther.

3:8 *Interpretive Narratives on Proper Intention*

8 *Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, etc.*

Can it be

that the hands of Moses
could advance a battle
or hinder a battle?

Rather [it comes to] say to you:
So long as Israel looked upward
and subjected⁹ their hearts
to their Father in heaven,
they would be victorious.

But if not,
they would fall.

Similarly you might say:
Make a serpent figure and mount it on a standard.

And if anyone who is bitten look at it, he shall recover.

Can it be that a serpent kills
or that a serpent gives life?

Rather,
whenever Israel looks upward
and subjects¹⁰ their hearts
to their Father in heaven,
they are healed.

But if not,
they are squashed.

A deaf-mute, one who is legally incompetent, and a minor
cannot enable the public¹¹ to fulfill their obligation.

This is the general rule:

Whoever is not obligated in a matter,
cannot enable the public¹² to fulfill their obligation.

⁹ K: "directed."

¹⁰ P: "directs."

¹¹ Lit. "many."

¹² Lit. "many."

3:8 This mishnah continues the theme of proper intention.

Then, whenever Moses held up his hand...: Exodus 17:11. The verse continues: "but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed."

Make a serpent figure...: Numbers 21:8.

Can it be that a serpent kills...: The reference is to the bronze serpent that Moses prepared.

their Father in heaven: For a similar understanding, see Wisdom of Solomon 16:7.

A deaf-mute, one who is legally incompetent, and a minor: These three are often considered together in the Mishnah.

to fulfill their obligation: e.g. to hear the *shofar*. The first two cannot do so with the proper intent due to their inability either to hear the *shofar* or to understand the obligation, while the minor, not being obligated himself, cannot enable those who are obligated to fulfill their obligation.

Chapter Four

4:1–3 *Festival Rituals and the Memory of the Temple*

4 When the festival day of Rosh Hashanah fell on the Sabbath, they would blow the *shofar* in the Temple, but not in the provinces.

When the Temple was destroyed, Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai enacted that they would blow the *shofar* in every locale in which there was a court.

Said R. Eleazar:

Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai enacted only with respect to Yavneh alone.

They said to him:

Both Yavneh and every locale in which there is a court.

2 And in this regard also did Jerusalem exceed Yavneh:

In every town within sight and sound [of Jerusalem] and nearby, and able to come up [by foot] to Jerusalem, they blow the *shofar*.

But as to Yavneh,

they blow the *shofar* in the court alone.

3 In former times,

the *lulav* was taken up in the Temple for seven days, and in the provinces for one day.

When the Temple was destroyed,

Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai enacted

that in the provinces the *lulav* be taken up for seven days,

4:1 *in the Temple*: According to some, in the whole city of Jerusalem.

Yavneh alone: Yavneh (Jamnia in Greek) is a town west by northwest of Jerusalem near the Mediterranean coast, where the first two generations of rabbinic Sages are said to have gathered following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Other texts express the view that such prerogatives will again be restricted to the Temple (and Jerusalem) upon its being rebuilt.

4:2 *they blow the shofar*: Jerusalem's status exceeds that of Yavneh in that its status, at least in this regard, extends to its surrounding areas, and is not limited to its court. It is not clear whether all of the stated conditions must apply to areas outside of Jerusalem, or any of them.

4:3 *lulav*: palm branch and accompanying species (citron fruit, myrtle branches, and willow branches) used in the Festival of Sukkot; see Leviticus 23:40. This mishnah is also found in *Sukkah* 3:12.

for one day: The first day of the festival.

in memory of the Temple: The *lulav* is frequently depicted with other objects associated with the Temple (*menorah*, *shofar*, and incense shovel) in late antique and Byzantine Jewish iconography, especially in synagogue remains, often in close proximity to the depiction of the Holy Ark.

the day of waving: That is, waving of the *omer* or ceremonial sheaf on the sixteenth of Nisan according to rabbinic practice. See Leviticus 23:10–11.

in memory of the Temple;
and that the day of waving should be wholly prohibited.

4:4 *Before and After the Destruction of the Temple*

4 In former times,
they would receive testimony to the New Moon throughout the day.
Once the witnesses were so delayed in coming
that the Levites were disordered in the song.
They enacted
that testimony could only be brought
until the time of the afternoon daily sacrifice.
And if witnesses came from the afternoon sacrifice and onward,
they would treat that day as holy
and the following day as holy.
When the Temple was destroyed,
Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai enacted
that they would accept testimony to the New Moon
throughout the day.
R. Joshua b. Qorhah said:
And Rabban Ben Zakkai enacted this too:
Regardless of where the head of the court might be,
the witnesses [to the New Moon] come only
to the place of assembly.

wholly prohibited: With regard to the eating of new produce. That is, new produce could only be eaten after nightfall, whereas previously it could be immediately eaten after the waving of the *omer*. See Leviticus 23:14.

4:4 *throughout the day:* Most commentators interpret this mishnah with respect to the last day of Elul, the day before Rosh Hashanah. The reference to the day being “holy” supports this reading, but the same difficulty might have arisen at the end of any other month as well. According to the dominant interpretation, if witnesses came and their testimony was accepted by the court, that day would then become the first of Tishre, Rosh Hashanah.

the song: The Levites would sing a different psalm, depending on whether or not a New Moon was declared on that day. Since the decision had to be made by midafternoon so as to know with which song to accompany the late-day whole burnt offering, it would be impossible to wait beyond that for the arrival of witnesses.

that day as holy: That is, what remained of it, being retroactively considered the first of the new month of Tishre.

the following day: Now understood to be the second day of Tishre, but the first full day observed as Rosh Hashanah.

When the Temple was destroyed: And sacrifices ceased, there no longer being a risk of confusing the Levite singers.

the place of assembly: That is, of the court; if necessary, they would hear testimony and decide without the head of the court.

4:5-6 *The Order of Blessings*

5 The order of blessings:
 [The prayer leader] recites the “Fathers,” “Powers,” and the “Sanctifying of the Name,” incorporating the Sovereignty verses with them, but he does not blow [the *shofar*]; the “Sanctifying of the Day” and blows; the Remembrance [verses] and blows; the *Shofar* [verses] and blows; and he recites the “[Temple] Service,” and the “Thanksgiving,” and the “Priestly Blessing”— the words of R. Yohanan b. Nuri.
 R. Aqiva said to him: If he doesn’t blow for the Sovereignty [verses], why does he mention [them]? Rather, he recites the “Fathers,” “Powers,” and the “Sanctifying of the Name,” and combines the Sovereignty [verses] with the “Sanctifying of the Day” and blows; the Remembrance [verses] and blows; the *Shofar* verses and blows; and he recites the “[Temple] Service,” and the “Thanksgiving,” and the “Priestly Blessing.”

6 One does not recite fewer than ten Sovereignty [verses], ten Remembrance [verses], or ten *Shofar* [verses].
 R. Yohanan b. Nuri says: If one said three from each he has fulfilled [his obligation]. One does not recite [a verse of] Remembrance, Sovereignty, or *Shofar* that makes mention of [divine] punishment. One begins with the Torah and finishes with the Prophets.
 R. Yose says: If he finished with the Torah, he has fulfilled [his obligation].

4:5 *order of blessings*: By tradition, the additional prayer on Rosh Hashanah must include series of biblical passages on the themes of God’s sovereignty, God’s recollection, and the sound of the *shofar*. The present mishnah specifies how these verses are to be included in the normal blessings of the festival prayer.

“Fathers,” etc.: These are standard designations for the seven blessings that constitute the usual festival prayer.

mention [them]: What is their purpose if not to introduce the blowing of the *shofar*?

4:6 *fewer than ten . . . [verses]*: It would appear that the specific verses to be recited for each of these had not yet been set.

One begins . . . and finishes: That is, one chooses verses in this order from the indicated divisions of Scripture and includes verses from the Writings between those of the Torah and the Prophets.

4:7-9 *Additional Rules for Blowing the Shofar*

7 The one who passes before the Ark
on the festival day of Rosh Hashanah [does not blow the *shofar*],
[but] the second one does so.
But when it is time to recite *Hallel*,
the first one leads the recitation of the *Hallel*.

8 One may not pass beyond the [Sabbath] limit
for the sake of a *shofar* of Rosh Hashanah,
nor clear away a pile [of stones] for its sake.
One may not climb a tree,
nor ride on the back of cattle,
nor swim on the surface of water,
nor cut [the *shofar*],
whether by a means that [transgresses the rabbinic rules of] Sabbath rest
or that [transgresses] an [explicit] negative commandment [of the Torah].
But if he wanted to put into it water or wine,
he may do so.

One does not hinder children from blowing [the *shofar*],
but [may] engage¹³ with them until they learn [how to do so].
And one who is engaged
does not fulfill [his obligation].
And one who hears from one who is engaged
does not fulfill [his obligation].

9 The order of blowing [the *shofar*]
is three [blasts] of three apiece.
The length of the sustained blast
is three times that of a quavering blast.
If one blew the first blast,
and extended the second blast as long as two,

¹³ Or "practice."

4:7 *passes before the Ark*: To lead the first part of the service.

[blow the shofar]: Or, prompt the one who does so.

the second one: Probably the prayer leader for the Additional service.

Hallel: Psalms 113-118.

4:8 *[Sabbath] limit*: Two thousand cubits beyond the city or town limit.

for the sake of a shofar: One may engage in these acts neither to deliver a *shofar* to a distant location nor to travel there in order to hear it.

Sabbath rest: Heb. *shevut*; see *Betsah* 5:2.

engaged: In teaching or practicing.

4:9 *three [blasts] of three*: These are the blasts he should properly have attached to the three sets of verses (Sovereignty, Remembrance, and *Shofar*) during the prayer when he had no *shofar*.

[the second] is only accounted to him as one.
 One who recited the blessings
 and afterward was provided with a *shofar*,
 must blow sustained, quavering, and sustained three times.
 Just as the public agent is obligated,
 so too is each and every individual obligated.
 Rabban Gamaliel says:
 The public agent [in prayer]
 enables the many to fulfill their obligation.

is only accounted to him as one: The lengthened blast was intended to serve as the third note of one set of sounds and also the first note of the next, but the mishnah rules that this is unacceptable.

recited the blessings: That is, recited the additional New Year prayer without having a *shofar* at his disposal.

and afterward: After reciting the prayer he obtained a *shofar*.

and sustained three times: Each set consists of three blasts (long, quavering, long), one set each for Sovereignty, Remembrance, and *Shofar*.

public agent, or prayer leader, *is obligated* to say the designated prayers on behalf of the congregation.

each and every individual...: Individuals who are capable of praying are not freed from their obligation to pray by the prayer leader, who prays on behalf of those incapable of doing so. The same is true for hearing the *shofar* blasts. Rabban Gamaliel disagrees.

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