

# Fearsome Days or Happy Days?

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There was a TV program called HAPPY DAYS. Are Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur Happy Days or Fearsome Days? The Mishna in Tanit states that our most joyous and most happy Yom Tov is Yom Kippur. But Yom Kippur is the final seal of Judgement Day! So which is it?

These days are called YAMIM NORA'IM. In English it's translated as DAYS OF AWE. Where does the word NORA'IM come from? The first time that the word NORA is used in the Torah is in the story of Yaakov's dream. When he awakes after seeing G-d, he is filled with awe and says, "How awesome - MA NORA - is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d, and this is the gateway to heaven." Yaakov is not really afraid. He has no reason to be, since G-d has promised to watch over him and care for him.

Yeshayahu also had an experience of seeing G-d. In that vision, he hears the angels proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy! The Lord of Hosts" (6:3). Those two words - NORA - awesome - and KADOSH - holy - often appear together and seem to have a similar meaning. For example, "His name is holy and awesome" (T'hilim 111:10) and in the prayers of the Days of Awe we say, "Holy are You and awesome

is Your name." The Torah defines G-d as "the great, the mighty and the awesome G-d" (D'varim 10:17). This description has become an important part of our prayers, appearing among other places toward the beginning of every Amida.

These days are also YAMIM NORA'IM in the sense of days of fear, because they are days of judgment. This idea of God sitting in judgment at this time on all humanity is found in the Mishna Rosh Hashana (1:2) when it describes God as a commander who reviews all of his troops as they parade before Him and as sheep passing single file before the Shepherd.

The Mishna's description does not elaborate and does not speak of fear. That element was brought into our liturgy by the Talmudic sage Rav, in his introduction to the Remembrance verses (Zichronot) of the Musaf Rosh Hashana Amida. "All creatures will be visited on this day, to remember them for life or death" and the destiny of all nations is then determined, "which for the sword and which for peace, which for hunger and which for plenty."

But the truly terrifying description is found in the piyut, Unetaneh Tokef. The poet made use of the Mishna and Rav's prayer and borrowed from various Biblical works describing the great day of Final Judgment, and the yearly Day of Judgment of Rosh Hashana.

The prophet Malachi had called that day, "the great and awesome -

HAGADOL V'HANORA - Day of G-d" (3:23). Unetaneh Tokef states, "We shall ascribe holiness to this day, for it is awesome - NORA - and fearsome - AYOM." The poet has defined "awesome" to truly mean something fearful, and describes how all creatures, including the angels, are filled with fear and trembling on this Judgment Day. Because on it is determined "who shall live and who shall die." Kabbala describes this feeling and emotion as YIR'A SHEL AHAVA (loving fear).

Thus, the Days of Awe also means "Fearsome Days". However, we should remember that the main designation of Rosh Hashana according to the Sages is Yom HaZikaron - The Day of Remembrance. This is based on the phrase in Vayikra 23:24 - ZICHRON TRU'A - translated as "a reminder by blowing the Shofar". The sounding the Shofar causes G-d to remember us for good and to fulfill all of His promises to us.

We pray that G-d should remember us for good and for blessing on these YAMIM NORA'IM - Awesome Days.  
AMEIN! 🌸