

CREATE A NEW YEAR'S DAY FOR THE ANIMALS FOR YOUR FAMILY & CONGREGATION – Rosh Hashana LaBehemot

When? The first of Elul – this year (2016), that's September 4th! What you'll need: Shofar, this sheet of paper, for additional resources, songs, liturgy, and fun roleplaying see <http://opensiddur.org/la-beheimot/> (CC BY-SA)

OPTIONAL: Begin by singing a Jewish song that recognizes that humankind and animals praise God together (e.g. *Nishmat Kol Chai Tivarech et Shimcha, YHVH Eloheinu...*). *If meeting in front of a working farm or garden with grazing animals, introduce the animals and the purpose of the farm to guests, visitors, and staff. Invite participants to bring their animals*

Introduce Rosh Hashanah La'Behemot with the following intention:

☞ The first day of the new moon of Elul is the Rosh Hashanah La'Behemot – the New Year's Day for Tithing Domesticated Animals, as described in the Mishnah Moed 1:1 – באחד באלול ראש השנה למעשר בהמה.

The first of *Elul* is the Rosh HaShanah for tithing domesticated animals. On the day intended to *count* one's animals for sacrificial temple offerings, *take into account* and consider how domesticated animals rely on humankind for their health and well-being and in what ways our lives rely upon those of domesticated animals.

☞ On Rosh Hodesh Elul, the first day of the new moon of Elul, we begin an *accounting* for all the souls with whom we are in a relationship. On a day dedicated to *counting*, this is an *accounting* (a *heshbon nefesh*) for all of our souls. Before we can expect to be forgiven our transgressions, we must examine them thoroughly, and wherever possible, correct and heal them.

☞ On Rosh Hashanah La'Behemot, the New Years Day for Domesticated Animals, we specifically take into account all those souls which we depend upon for our diet and lifestyle choices and which, in turn, depend upon us for their well-being – all the creatures that we (our society, and our ancestors before us) have brought from the category of *hayot* (wild animals that can make their own living) into the category of *behemot* (domesticated animals which depend upon us for their living).

☞ Just as we depend on the Compassionate One (*haRaḥaman*) for our sustenance, so too has humankind made many creatures dependent upon our welfare, directly through our need for them, and indirectly through our disruption of their ecosystem.

☞ On the first day of Rosh Hodesh Elul when the shofar is blown to remind us to begin our preparation for *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe,

- consider all the animals that were once domesticated and now live as homeless scavengers in our communities,
- all the animals being used for experiments intended to improve human life,
- all the animals kept captive to satisfy appetites for flesh and clothing made from their bodies.

☞ The *mitsvah* in the Torah that demands our mindful awareness of the suffering of all living creatures is called *tsa'ar balei hayim*. We are forbidden to cause other creatures unnecessary suffering, and we are obligated not to turn away from, pass by, or neglect other creatures that have fallen under the burden our fellow human beings have placed upon them.

☞ Before we ask the blessed Holy One, our Shepherd, to take responsibility with care and compassion for their flock, we must show that we are taking care and responsibility for the flock that depends on us. For *Elohim* gave us dominion – the power to domesticate other creatures – to cultivate and preserve the Garden of Eden with them. We are liable for their care and we are liable for our impact together on Adamah, which *Elohim* loves.

The Tithing:

Take a personal census of all the creatures you are directly and indirectly in relationship with. In what way can you take responsibility for the animals on whom your lifestyle and diet depends?

Take a moment, consider, and share your your thoughts with a friend or someone next to you, then pause and **listen for the voice of the animals in the sound of the shofar**.

Take a moment for people to coalesce, share thoughts.

**On the first day of the month of Elul,
on the New Year's Day for all animals
that depend on us for their welfare,
when our thoughts turn inwards towards
correcting and healing all of our relationships,
listen for the voice of the animals in the sound of the shofar.**

(The shofar is blown once, a single tekiyah/blast.)

OPTIONAL: *Open the gates to the animal pen and let any shepherded animals (e.g. goats) run free. Bring forth any animals*

☞ We have become as the Giants in the Generation of the Flood: tyrants on this planet, using its resources for ourselves and chasing its animals into the corners of the earth. The more our lifestyles and dietary choices disrupt the capability of *hayot* (wild animals) to make their own living, the more we incur liability for their lives as creatures now depending upon us for their welfare.

☞ Before we can make amends to one another this *Elul Zman*, we must first make amends to the vulnerable creatures who live among us. As we hear the cry of the shofar for the second time, may we hear in it the cry of all animals, *behemot* and *hayot*, together with all our interconnected ecosystems supporting life on earth.

May the One who is the breath of life guide us to protect the earth and make room in it for other creatures to thrive.

(The shofar is blown a second time.)

☞ We are grateful for all the good we receive from *behemot*, from domesticated animals.

- Some of us eat them,
- some wear their skins,
- some eat eggs and cheese,
- some use medicines and even organs that come from animals,
- some wear wool and silk,
- some write on Torah scrolls, wear *tefillin*, and blow *shofarot* that come from animal's bodies.
- Some of us do none of these things, but we benefit from the bee that pollinates the flowers and the worm that softens the earth.

May the One who is the breath of life cause us to be mindful of these gifts and never to waste them or take them for granted.

(The shofar is blown a third time.)

☞ We bless all the creatures, *behemot* and *hayot* we are privileged to live with on the earth:

- the loving companion animals who live in our houses,
- the birds at our windows and in the forests,
- the burrowing creatures under our feet,
- the fish in the waters of our streams and oceans.

We bless all the spirits, all the *nefashot* we are privileged to live with on the earth, the known and the unknown.

May the One who is the breath of life bless all living things that we love and strengthen them.

(The shofar is blown a fourth and final time.)