

Rosh Hashanah Day 1
September 12, 2026
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A Pause Before We Begin Again: When Rosh Hashanah Arrives on Shabbat

There is something particularly meaningful about Rosh Hashanah falling on Shabbat this year.

Rosh Hashanah is about beginning again. It invites us to imagine what is possible in the year ahead.

And Shabbat is about something different: stopping. Completing. Pausing long enough to notice what has already been created.

So today, we have the opportunity to hold both of these things together: **the ending and the beginning, the looking back and the looking forward, the creating and the resting.**

Today we will read a section from Genesis chapter 2.

Genesis actually contains two creation accounts, in chapters 1 and 2. And one of the fascinating things about these stories is that they use several different Hebrew verbs for “creating or making.”

In the first creation account, in chapter 1, God creates humanity using the verb **bara**—לברוא—from the root bet-resh-alef. The text says:

“Vayivra Elohim et ha’adam b’tzalmo, b’tzelem Elohim bara oto.”

“God created the human being in God’s image; in the image of God, God created them.”

You may recognize the verb *bara* from the blessing over wine, when we say, **borei** *p’ri hagafen*.

There are many different Hebrew verbs that can mean “to create,” but *bara* is distinctive because it is a verb used exclusively for God’s creating or

making – speaking it into being. It carries the sense of bringing something into being—of calling something forth.

But then, in Genesis chapter 2, when God creates the human being, the Torah uses a different verb: **yatzar**, from the root yud-tzadi-resh.

Vayyitzer Adonai Elohim et ha'adam afar min ha'adamah...

“The Eternal God formed a Human from the soil’s humus (the dark organic matter), blowing into the being’s nostrils the breath of life: the Human became a living being.”

The verb *yatzar* means to form, fashion, shape, or mold. It is physical and tactile. We might imagine a potter taking a piece of clay and shaping it with their hands.

And the Torah makes the physical connection explicit: **adam**, the human, is formed from **adamah**, mother earth.

God touches the earth. God shapes it. God breathes life into it.

These two creation stories offer us two different images of what it means to create.

Sometimes we create by imagining something, naming it, speaking it into being.

And sometimes creation is much more physical and tangible. We shape something slowly, with our hands, through effort, attention, and care.

I think Rosh Hashanah and Shabbat invite us to notice both kinds of creation in our own lives.

The Torah tells us that on the sixth day, “God saw all that had been made, and found it very good.”

And then, on the seventh day, God stopped.

God finished the work that had been undertaken, ceased from doing, blessed the seventh day, and declared it holy.

What if that is part of what Shabbat is teaching us today?

Before we rush into the next thing, we need to stop and notice what has already been created.

So as we enter this new year, I invite you to take a moment to look back at this past year—not only at what you accomplished, but at what you **made, built, shaped, nurtured, inspired, and brought into being.**

Some of these things may seem completely ordinary.

How many times did you make your bed, make breakfast, make lunch, make dinner, make plans, make arrangements?

Some things may have required enormous effort—a long project, a difficult transition, progress toward an important goal, building a home, moving, raising a child, helping someone through a milestone, or simply navigating the hurdles of everyday life.

And some of what you created may never have been visible to anyone else.

Perhaps you brought an idea to life. You inspired someone. You made something happen through your creativity, your wisdom, your care, your love, or your spirit.

Take a moment to acknowledge even one thing that you created, built, shaped, or made happen this past year.

And ask yourself: **What would it feel like to pause and simply recognize something that you have completed and really feel that sense of accomplishment, and know that it was good?**

Very good.

Perhaps pausing on Shabbat and pausing before heading into a new year to recognize what we have created is itself sacred.

And perhaps we need that pause precisely so that we can begin again.

Because Rosh Hashanah now asks us to look forward.

What will you create in this coming year?

What will you make happen simply by thinking about it, imagining it, or saying it out loud?

What will you shape with your hands, your body, your physical presence?

What will you bring forth through nourishing, tending, and guiding?

What will you give life to through your soul, your spirit, your intuition, or your inspiration?

We don't know what the coming year will bring. But we do know that we will have opportunities to create within it.

In her poem, *Thirty Two: A song of Endings and Beginnings*, Debbie Perlman z"l writes:

"Inside each completion,
We hear Your creation;
Inside our creations,
We resound with Your voice."

And later:

"Your hand hovers, blesses,
Bids us move to new beginnings.
Your hand moves us forward,
Toward unimagined completions."

Perhaps this is the invitation of Rosh Hashanah falling on Shabbat:

To pause before we begin.

To notice what has been created, to bless it and call it good.

And then, with the wisdom and experience of the past year—and with the breath of life still within us—to begin creating again.