



Ziegler School of
Rabbinic Studies

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY



A Resolution Revolution: The Jewish Way

By: Rabbi Sherre Hirsch

According to US News, 80% of people give up on their New Year's resolutions by the second week of February. According to OnePoll it takes the average person 32 days or less to break their resolution. Spoiler alert: This custom of "New Year's resolutions" to lose weight, exercise more, save money, or eat better is highly likely to fail. You are not at fault. The truth is, keeping our resolutions, changing our behavior, creating new habits is really hard. We need support, progress trackers, realistic goals, and constant reminders.

What is curious is that long before New Year's Day was even established, Jewish tradition already knew this truth about humanity. Jewish tradition already understood that to keep our vows, our promises, and resolutions to do better and to be better required much more than an annual promise. Thus, unlike the Gregorian calendar which marks only one new year, we benchmark four new years and Rosh Chodesh, the new month for twelve months in order to ensure that we make progress.

The question now becomes, are we using these built-in benchmarks from our tradition to help us stay on track?

I am confident that Jews around the world use Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishrei, which usually falls at the beginning of September if they are early, and at the end of September if they are late, as regular markers. But I would argue that we have missed the opportunity to use these other days to reset our priorities.

This year on New Year's Day, instead of making a resolution, make a Jewish plan. Create a Jewish calendar, mark the months and each new year. Determine how on each of those days you will track your progress, assess how far you have come, and motivate yourself to go forth. Determine how you will celebrate your small wins, course correct your missteps, and remind yourself to continue the journey. This year use the Jewish calendar to help you maintain your rituals and your routine. Use our sacred days to help you keep the promises and the vows that you made to yourself and others.

Perhaps then you will come to Rosh Hashanah, nine months from now, on your way to change, deeply transformed, and ready for God to celebrate you anew.



Rabbi Sherre Hirsch is the Chief Innovation Officer at American Jewish University. She made headlines as the first female rabbi at Sinai Temple, the largest Conservative congregation on the west coast. She served as Senior Rabbinic Scholar at Hillel International, where she created and developed Hillelwell, an initiative for Hillels worldwide to become the recognized address for preventative mental health. A thought leader and author on spirituality and religion, Rabbi Hirsch has appeared on the Today Show, ABC News, Extra, and PBS, among other outlets, and has been a contributor to Time.com, Oprah Magazine, the Jewish Journal, the Hollywood Journal, and more.



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