Rosh Hashanah Questions

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashanah?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of Tanach does the beginning of the Tashlich prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were “remembered” by Hashem on Rosh Hashanah?
7. A person’s yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashanah, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: “Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah…” What was Abraham’s prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashanah, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the shehechiyanu blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashanah which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

Answers

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah. (Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581)
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it “a day of shofar blowing.” (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai). (Bamidbar 29:1)
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: “The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed…” (Bereishis 27:27). The Talmud identifies this “field” as an apple orchard. (Ta’anis 29b, Biyur Hagra)
4. “Blessed are You… who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar,” and the shehechiyanu blessing. (Orach Chaim 581:2)
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashanah it was decreed that these barren women would bear children. (Tractate Rosh Hashanah 10b)
7. Expenses for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and the cost of one’s children’s Torah education. (Ba’er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1)
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (Onkelos 22:14). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac. (Rashi 22:13)
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The “two-day festival” arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashanah. Since Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashanah it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the shehechiyanu blessing. Thus, the shehechiyanu blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no shehechiyanu blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashanah.) (Taz 600:2)