



ROSH HASHANAH: The Jewish New Year

Rosh Hashanah is a time when Jews reflect on their actions and try to make amends with each other and God. In synagogue, the *shofar* is sounded. At home, munching on apples and honey is an expression of hope for a new year - pure, happy, and free from past transgressions. According to Jewish Tradition, Rosh Hashanah, celebrates the birthday of the world.

The *shofar* is a ram's horn which is blown in the synagogue during the *Rosh Hashanah* service. It was an instrument used in biblical times to signal battle, as exemplified in the story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho. Today it serves as a wake up call to all Jews to reflect on the past year and look towards the new one. If a person cannot be present at synagogue, the *shofar* can be blown for them at their home. It is a *mitzvah*, a commandment, to hear the sound of the *shofar*.

As with most Jewish holidays, food is the focus of home celebrations of *Rosh Hashanah*. Families and friends gather for extended meals, which include traditional foods, such as apples and *challah* dipped in honey, a symbol of the wish for a sweet new year. The *challah*, normally braided, is round, as a reminder of the never-ending cycle of life.

On the second night of *Rosh Hashanah*, it is common to eat a "new fruit"--a fruit that participants have not tasted for a long time. This tradition has become a way literally to taste the newness of the year, by enjoying an unfamiliar food. Often, a pomegranate is used as the new fruit, as the pomegranate is said to have 613 seeds, corresponding to the 613 *mitzvot*. The pomegranate has also long been a symbol of fertility, and thus of the unlimited possibilities for the New Year.

Preparation for *Rosh Hashanah* can also include discussions of the meaning of *teshuvah* [repentance] and family resolutions for the New Year. Many people have the custom of sending *Rosh Hashanah* cards to loved ones.

The first day of *Rosh Hashanah* (or the second day if the holiday begins on *Shabbat*) includes the *tashlikh* ceremony, in which we symbolically toss away our sins by throwing bread crumbs into a body of running water.

Rosh Hashanah can be an opportunity for reflecting on the year that has passed and setting goals for the year to come. Taking time for such reflection can make the themes of the holiday come alive for the entire family.

YOM KIPPUR: The Day of Atonement

Yom Kippur is often considered the holiest day of the Jewish year. This day of fasting, prayer, and introspection begins with *Kol Nidre*, a prayer that asks for absolution from vows, and ends with the *Neilah* prayer. In between is a liturgy that runs the emotional gamut, from the solemn to the celebratory.

For many Jews, the essence of the *Yom Kippur* service takes place at the very beginning of the holiday, at the evening service that ushers in *Yom Kippur*. It is called *Kol Nidre*, the name derived from the first major piece of the *Yom Kippur* prayers, dramatically chanted at the evening service. All the *Torahs* are taken out, the entire congregation stands, and the cantor chants this formula three times.

The main observance on *Yom Kippur* is to fast. Females over the age of 12 and males over the age of 13 are to abstain from food or beverage for the duration of the holiday. If a doctor asserts that fasting could endanger your health, you need not fast. The fast begins at sundown and continues until an hour after sundown the following day.

It is customary to break the fast with family and friends in someone's home. Usually people serve dairy products like bagels, cream cheese, blintzes, tuna fish and the like.

On both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is some people's custom to not work, watch TV, drive and turn on and off lights.

SUKKOT: The Festival of Booths

Sukkot is one of the three pilgrimage holidays mentioned in the *Torah* and is a week-long fall festival that falls five days after *Yom Kippur*. The *sukkah*, the non-permanent outdoor hut, is meant to recall the time the Israelites spent wandering in the desert. Today many families build their own *sukkah* and dwell in it for the week of the holiday.

A *sukkah* must have at least two and a half walls covered with a material that will not blow away in the wind. The "walls" of the *sukkah* do not have to be solid; canvas covering tied or nailed down is acceptable and quite common. The roof of the *sukkah* must be made of material referred to as *sekhakh* (literally, covering), something that grew from the ground and was cut off, such as tree branches, corn stalks, bamboo reeds, sticks, or two-by-fours. *Sekhakh* must be left loose, not tied together or tied down. *Sekhakh* must be placed sparsely enough that rain can get in, and preferably sparsely enough that the stars can be seen, but not so sparsely that more than ten inches is open at any point or that there is more light than shade. The *sekhakh* must be put on last. It is common practice, and highly commendable, to decorate the *sukkah*.

Another observance during *Sukkot* involves what are known as the Four Species or the *lulav* and *etrog*. The *lulav* is a single palm branch and occupies the central position in the grouping. It comes with a holder-like contraption (made from its own leaves) which has two extensions. With the backbone (the solid spine) of the *lulav* facing you and this holder in place near the bottom, two willow branches are placed in the left extension and three myrtle branches are placed in the right. This whole cluster is held in the right hand, the *etrog*, lemon-like fruit, is held in the left, and the two should be touching one another. It is a *mitzvah*, commandment, to wave the *lulav* on each of the first seven days of *Sukkot*.

Simchat Torah: Rejoicing the Torah

This holiday marks the completion of the annual cycle of weekly Torah readings. Each week in synagogue we publicly read a few chapters from the Torah, starting with Genesis Ch. 1 and working our way around to Deuteronomy 34. On *Simchat Torah*, we read the last Torah portion, then proceed immediately to the first chapter of Genesis, reminding us that the Torah is a circle, and never ends.

What you can do around your center ...

1. Apples and Honey: Have a table with apples and honey available for those residents who would like to partake.
2. Rosh Hashanah Seder: Invite someone from one of the local synagogues (Rabbi, Cantor, Jewish educator or knowledgeable lay person) to come and run a *Rosh Hashanah seder*. It does not need to be on *Rosh Hashanah*.
3. Rosh Hashanah cards: Send New Year greetings to your Jewish residents. Host an art evening for the residents to create their own *Rosh Hashanah* cards.
4. Break fast: Sponsor a break fast on Wednesday night October 9, one hour after sundown. Even if some residents don't fast it is a nice way for people to meet and socialize.
5. Build a Sukkah: Ask a Jewish professional to help build a *Sukkah* on the premises.
6. Have a lulav and etrog available: Leave a *lulav* and *etrog* on a table with a copy of the blessing.

The information above was taken from www.myjewishlearning.com

For more information on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, please visit:

www.Jewfaq.org

www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/holidaya.html