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Learning - Charity - Community



Jewish Festivals at King Solomon High School

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is one of Judaism's holiest days. Meaning "head of the year" or "first of the year," the festival begins on the first day of Tishrei, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, which falls during September or October. Rosh Hashanah commemorates the creation of the world and marks the beginning of the Days of Awe, a 10-day period of introspection and repentance that culminates in the Yom Kippur holiday, also known as the Day of Atonement. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the two "High Holy Days" in the Jewish religion.



According to tradition, G-d judges all creatures during the 10 Days of Awe between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, deciding whether they will live or die in the coming year. Jewish law teaches that G-d inscribes the names of the righteous in the "book of life" and condemns the wicked to death on Rosh Hashanah; people who fall between the two categories have until Yom Kippur to perform "teshuvah," or repentance. As a result, observant Jews consider Rosh Hashanah and the days surrounding it a time for prayer, good deeds, reflecting on past mistakes and making amends with others.

Celebrating Rosh Hashanah

Unlike modern New Year's celebrations, which are often raucous parties, Rosh Hashanah is a subdued and contemplative holiday. Because Jewish texts differ on the festival's length, Rosh Hashanah is observed for a single day by some denominations and for two days by others. Work is prohibited, and religious Jews spend much of the holiday attending synagogue.

The sounding of the shofar - a trumpet made from a ram's horn - is an essential and emblematic part of both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The ancient instrument's sorrowful cry serves as a call to repentance and a reminder to Jews that G-d is their king. Tradition requires the shofar blower to play four sets of notes on Rosh Hashanah: tekiah, a long blast; shevarim, three short blasts; teruah, nine staccato blasts; and tekiah gedolah, a very long blast. Because of this ritual's close association with Rosh Hashanah, the holiday is also known as Yom Teruah - the day of the sounding of the shofar.



Customs and Symbols of Rosh Hashana

Apples and honey: One of the most popular Rosh Hashanah customs involves eating apple slices dipped in honey, sometimes after saying a special prayer. Ancient Jews believed apples had healing properties, and honey signifies the hope that the new year will be sweet. Rosh Hashanah meals usually include an assortment of sweet treats for the same reason.

Round challah: On Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) and other holidays, Jews eat loaves of the traditional braided bread known as challah. On the Jewish new year, the challah is often baked in a round shape to symbolize either the cyclical nature of life or the crown of G-d. Raisins are sometimes added to the dough for a sweet new year.

Tashlich: On Rosh Hashanah, some Jews practice a custom known as tashlich ("casting off"), in which they throw pieces of bread into a flowing body of water while reciting prayers. As the bread, which symbolizes the sins of the past year, is swept away, those who embrace this tradition are spiritually cleansed and renewed.

Rosh Hashanah Greetings

“L’shana tovah”: Jews greet each other on Rosh Hashanah with the Hebrew phrase “L’shana tovah,” which translates to “for a good year.”



Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement - is considered the most important holiday in the Jewish faith. Falling in the month of Tishrei (September or October in the Gregorian calendar), it marks the culmination of the 10 Days of Awe, a period of introspection and repentance that follows Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. According to tradition, it is on Yom Kippur that G-d decides each person's fate, so Jews are encouraged to make amends and ask forgiveness for sins committed during the past year. The holiday is observed with a 25-hour fast and a special religious service.

According to tradition, the first Yom Kippur took place after the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and arrival at Mount Sinai, where G-d gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Descending from the mountain, Moses caught his people worshipping a golden calf and shattered the sacred tablets in anger. Because the Israelites atoned for their idolatry, G-d forgave their sins and offered Moses a second set of tablets.



Observing Yom Kippur

As Yom Kippur is considered Judaism's most sacred day of the year; it is sometimes referred to as the “Sabbath of Sabbaths.” For this reason, even Jews who do not observe other traditions refrain from work, which is forbidden during the holiday, and participate in religious services on Yom Kippur.

The Torah commands all Jewish adults (apart from the sick, the elderly and women who have just given birth) to abstain from eating and drinking between sundown on the evening before Yom Kippur and nightfall the next day. The fast is believed to cleanse the body and spirit, not to serve as a punishment. Religious Jews heed additional restrictions on bathing, washing, using cosmetics and wearing leather shoes. These prohibitions are intended to prevent worshippers from focusing on material possessions and superficial comforts.

Because the High Holy Day prayer services include special texts, songs and customs, rabbis and their congregations read from a special prayer book known as the machzor during both Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Five distinct prayer services take place on Yom Kippur, the first on the eve of the holiday and the last before sunset on the following day. One of the most important prayers specific to Yom Kippur describes the atonement ritual performed by high priests during ancient times. The blowing of the shofar is an essential and symbolic part of both High Holy Days. On Yom Kippur, a single long blast is sounded at the end of the final service to mark the conclusion of the fast.



Traditions and Symbols of Yom Kippur

Pre-Yom Kippur feast: On the eve of Yom Kippur, families and friends gather for a bountiful feast that must be finished before sunset. The idea is to gather strength for 25 hours of fasting.

Breaking of the fast: After the final Yom Kippur service, many people return home for a festive meal. It traditionally consists of breakfast-like comfort foods such as blintzes, noodle pudding and baked goods.

Wearing white: It is customary for religious Jews to dress in white - a symbol of purity - on Yom Kippur. Some married men wear kittels, which are white burial shrouds, to signify repentance.

Charity: Some Jews make donations or volunteer their time in the days leading up to Yom Kippur. This is seen as a way to atone and seek God's forgiveness. One ancient custom known as kapparot involves holding a live chicken or bundle of coins and circling it over one's head while reciting a prayer. The chicken or money is then given to the poor.

Sukkot

Sukkot, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths, is a Torah-commanded holiday celebrated for seven days, beginning on the 15th day of the month of Tishrei.

Sukkot commemorates the years that the Jews spent in the desert on their way to the Promised Land and celebrates the way in which G-d protected them under difficult desert conditions.



Observing Sukkot

The word **sukkot** means huts (some translations of the bible use the word booths), and building a hut is the most obvious way in which Jews celebrate the festival.

Every Jewish family will build an open-air structure in which to live during the holiday. The essential thing about the hut is that it should have a roof of branches and leaves, through which those inside can see the sky, and that it should be a temporary and flimsy thing.

The Sukkot ritual is to take four types of plant material: an etrog (a citron fruit), a palm branch, a myrtle branch, and a willow branch, and rejoice with them. (Leviticus 23: 39-40.)

People rejoice with them by waving them or shaking them about.

Meaning

Most people nowadays live in houses or flats with strong walls and a decent roof. Spending time in a fragile hut in the garden, or under a roof of leaves rigged up on a balcony gives them the experience of living exposed to the world, without a nice comfy shell around them. It reminds them that there is only one real source of security and protection, and that is G-d.

Similarly, the holes in the roof reveal the sky, and metaphorically, God's heaven, the only source of security. Another meaning goes along with this: a Jew can be in G-d's presence anywhere. The idea here is that the person, having abandoned all the non-natural protections from the elements has only G-d to protect them - and since God does protect them this shows that G-d is there.

A sukkah must also have at least two walls and part of a third wall. The roof must be made of plant materials (but they must have been cut from the plant, so you can't use a tree as the roof).

