

Rosh Hashanah and the 10 Days of Awe

Tishri, the seventh month in the Jewish calendar, contains three major holidays. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

Tishri begins sometime during the last three weeks of September or the first week of October. The first day of Tishri is the Jewish New Year or Rosh Hashanah which means "head of the year." If you read Exodus 12:2, you will discover that the Torah teaches that the month of Nisan when Passover is celebrated, is to be the first month.

How then did the first of Tishri come to be celebrated as New Year's day? Probably because the letters of the words "the first of Tishri" in Hebrew can be rearranged to form the words "in the beginning". This was probably understood as being a hidden indication that the world was created on the first of Tishri, according to a certain method of Rabbinic interpretation, and, therefore, the year begins on this day.

There is a biblical holiday, however, on this day, the Feast of Trumpets (see Leviticus 23:23 and Numbers 29:1-6).

Rosh Hashanah, also known as Yom ha-Din (Day of Judgement), begins the "Ten Days of Awe" (Yomin Noraim), the "Ten Days of Turning or Repentance" or "the High Holy Days" which conclude with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. During this period, it is customary to greet one another with the phrase, "L'Shanah Tovah Tikateyvu" meaning "May you be inscribed in the Book of Life."

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This holiday is both solemn and joyous since it is both the

Day of Repentance or Day of Judgement and the birthday of the world. It is celebrated for two days. On the first day, some Orthodox Jews practice a custom called “tashlich”, which involves going to a body of water and emptying one’s pockets or casting bread crumbs into the water.

This is symbolic of Micah 7:19 , “And you will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” A family meal is celebrated which includes honey cake, wine, and apples dipped in honey to symbolize hope for a sweet and happy year. On the second night, a fruit not yet eaten that season is served. Hallah bread, in a round loaf, symbolizing a crown, is another traditional food.

In the synagogue, the major focuses are introspection and repentance. It is a time for recognizing one’s sins and turning from them. The blowing of the shofar (trumpet) is a central feature and calls the worshippers to turn to God. It also announces that a great event is about to take place. Genesis 22, which tells of God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, is read on the second day.

The biblical holiday of the Feast of Trumpets is described most fully in Numbers 29:1-6. The central elements are the number 7 (7th month, 7 male lambs offered), the abstaining from regular work, the sounding of the ram’s horn trumpets, various burnt offerings, and the sin offering of one male goat to make atonement for sin.

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