

Guide to the High Holy Days - Yamim Noraim

“In the seventh month on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with the loud blast of horns. You shall not work at your occupations and you shall bring an offering by fire to Adonai.” *Leviticus 23: 24-25*

THE TWO THEMES OF THE *YAMIM NORA'IM*, (the Days of Awe or Reverance) are judgement and forgiveness. On *Rosh Hashanah* we focus on human responsibility and divine judgement. On *Yom Kippur* we consider human frailty and divine forgiveness. The *Yamim Nora'im* provide the opportunity for *cheshbon nefesh* (an account of one's soul) - i.e. taking the time to review the highs and lows of your life during the previous year.

Selichot

During the month of Elul, the month before the *Yamim Nora'im*, we are called to engage in *cheshbon nefesh*, an examination of our souls. The climax of this month is *Selichot*, a service which introduces many of the themes of the liturgy of the *Yamim Nora'im*. At *Selichot* we ask ourselves if we like who we have become, and consider how we (as a community and as individuals) can improve and grow. It is a time to reflect upon our contribution to each part of the created world, and to consider the possibility of doing more.

Traditions

The whole month of Elul is an opportunity to prepare for the *Yamim Nora'im*. During this time the Shofar is blown after the morning service, every day except Shabbat. Many people use this time to visit the graves of parents and loved ones who have died. The end of Elul is marked by *Selichot* - special penitential prayers- commencing on the Saturday night before *Rosh Hashanah*. During this time we wish each other *Shanah Tova*- a good year- in person and in writing. During the month of Elul traditional greetings include: *Shanah Tova* - “A good year”; *Le-shanah tova tikatevu* - “May you be inscribed for a good year (in the Book of Life); *Le-shanah tovah u metukah tikataivu*- “May you be inscribed for a good and sweet year”; or *Hatimah Tovah* - “A good inscription (in the Book of Life). The response to any of the above is: *Gam lecha* - “The same to you”. On *Yom Kippur* the greeting is *Gemar hatimah tovah* - “A good sealing (inscription) for you”.

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the Jewish year. At this time we celebrate the creation of the world and our place in it. *Rosh Hashanah* has two other names which reflect the nature of the day. It is called *Yom Hazikaron*, the Day of Remembrance, (not to be confused with the more contemporary Day of Remembrance for Israel's fallen, which was only initiated in 1948) for on that day God remembers us and we remember God and our actions of the previous year, as well as those who have entered and those who have gone from our lives.

It is also called *Yom Hadin*, (the Day of Judgment). It is a day of judgment because legend tells us that on this day God begins to write in the Book of Life, inscribing us for the year ahead. God weighs our deeds and considers our actions during the year that has passed.

Rosh Hashanah is an extraordinary opportunity to stop, reflect on the year and evaluate one's current position in life, within self and relationship.

Tashlich

Tashlich means "you will cast" and is a ceremony which takes place on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* or any day in the ten days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom*

Kippur, other than Shabbat. This ceremony has its origins in a saying by the prophet Micah, "You shall cast out your sins into the depths of the sea".

At this time of year when we attempt to wipe the slate clean and remove our sins, we symbolically cast our sins into a body of water and watch them disappear. There is a short prayer service conducted beside the water, followed by the symbolic throwing of

Traditions

Shofar - the blowing of the shofar is said to represent the wordless cries of the Children of Israel.

The Rabbis have determined that each set of blasts should include three blasts of *teru'ah* (9 short blasts), preceded and followed by *tekiah* (1 long blast). The full pattern of blasts includes *shevarim* (3 short blasts) and becomes *tekiah teru'ah tekiah, tekiah shevarim tekiah, tekiah shevarim teru'ah tekiah, tekiah shevarim teru'ah tekiah*.

Food- At *Rosh Hashanah* we eat sweet foods, especially apples dipped in honey, in hope of a sweet year ahead. We also eat round *challah* representing the cycle of the year and life and ensure that no salt (bitterness) is on it.

Prayer - as well as attending services, thanking God for the goodness of the year that has passed and asking for a good, sweet year ahead at home we light candles and make *kiddush*.

bread crumbs into the depths.

Just before the evening service on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* we will join together for *Tashlich* when we walk to the Park. Bring along some breadcrumbs to throw into the water. The short service includes time for reflection. Please check pgs. (or your ticket) for the exact times.

The Ten Days Of Repentance

The ten days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* are part of the process called *aseret yemei teshuvah* - the ten days of repentance. It was said that “the world is judged in accordance with the majority of its deeds, and the individual is judged in accordance with the majority of their deeds. Therefore, one person can tip the scales for humanity by performing a single act of kindness” (Rabbi Elazar)

This is seen as an important time for each of us as most people are a combination of good and bad, this is the time when a good deed can tip the balance. During this time we offer special prayers to be inscribed in the Book of Life and recite *selichot* each morning.

Shabbat Shuvah

The Shabbat between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* is known as *Shabbat Shuvah* - the Sabbath of Turning - named after the *haftarah* which opens *Shuvah Yisrael* (“Return Israel to the Lord”). It is also known as *Shabbat Teshuvah* - the Sabbath of Repentance.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar, marking the end of the ten day period of repentance which begins at *Rosh Hashanah*. On this day we spend our time in prayer and reflection, making right the wrongs that we have committed during the past year. We abstain from food, drink, sexual relations, bathing and anointing ourselves, from sunset until the stars come out the following day (25 hours later), so

that we think not of matters of the body, but rather matters of the soul. It is a time for reflection and contemplation. It is a tradition also to refrain from wearing leather shoes and to wear white.

We have an evening *Kol Nidre* service as well as a full day of prayer services, learning discussions and meditative reflective opportunities in which each person can participate during *Yom Kippur*. *Yom Kippur* is focused in the synagogue around 5 services:

Kol Nidre - the evening service named after the opening prayer

Shacharit - morning service

Musaf - the additional service

Mincha - afternoon service, including the Book of Jonah

Ne'ilah - the unique service that concludes Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur Evening/Kol Nidre

Kol Nidre means "all the vows" and refers to the introductory prayer of the evening service. The *Kol Nidre* prayer is chanted to a beautiful, haunting melody which brings

tears to the eyes of many people. The melody brings back memories of years past as well as providing an introduction to the solemnity of the festival.

This is the only evening service during the year where participants wear a *tallit*. *Kol Nidre*, written in Aramaic, is a legal formula renouncing vows unable to be kept.

Yom Kippur Morning/Shacharit

Traditions

On Yom Kippur we can achieve atonement for our sins between God and us. However, it does not help with atonement for sins against other people. Therefore, now is the time to seek forgiveness from those we have offended and to repair any damage and pain we have caused during the past year.

Kapparot - the tradition of killing a chicken and giving it away "with your sins" has been replaced by giving money as tzedakah and support to those in need - through programs like Mazon, social justice or other charitable funds in the synagogue .

Vidui - a 'confessional' prayer is said in each service, encouraging us to reflect deeply on our current situation and opportunities for healing.

The *Yom Kippur* morning service is filled with contemplation and reflection and includes the reading of the Torah. As at all the services of *Yom Kippur*, we recite *Selichot*, asking for God's forgiveness. *Vidui* (a confession of sins) and *Al Chet* which reminds us of all the sins we committed during the year. In the morning prayers are followed by *Yizkor*, the memorial service when we have the opportunity to remember those who have died and to honor them and their gifts to us (see below).

Additional/Musaf Service

Musaf is the additional service held on Shabbat and festivals. Some of the major prayers of *Yom Kippur* are found in *Musaf*, including *Unetaneh Tokef*, remembering our martyrs and re-living the original Temple *Yom Kippur* service.

Yom Kippur Afternoon/Mincha

During the afternoon of *Yom Kippur*, the service moves to a more introspective and reflective mood. To enhance our prayers during this time we have a number of alternatives from which to choose.

The afternoon prayer service contains a history of our people from biblical days until now. The paths of the Jewish people are traced in prayer, prose and song. At the conclusion of the journey we read the Torah and then the story of Jonah, the prophet who sought to flee from God's presence, and reflective prayers are recited.

Memorial/Yizkor Service

Yizkor is the service where we remember those who have died. *Yizkor* is recited at Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, the times when our ancestors made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as well as at *Yom Kippur*. The service is filled with psalms and beautiful music which leads us and guides our memories and reflection. At the end of the service we recite *Yizkor*, a personal prayer recalling our loved ones, *El Maleh Rachamim*, asking that their souls be at peace, and *Kaddish*, praising God for the gift of life.

We conduct *Yizkor* services during the morning of Yom Kippur and in the afternoon. *Yizkor* is also recited on the morning of *Shemini Atzeret*.

Concluding/Ne'ilah Service

Ne'ilah is the final service of *Yom Kippur* and it contains much of the most wonderful poetry and music of the day. This service speaks in imagery of the gates which have been thrown open to receive our prayers, beginning to close slowly as the day comes to an end. Our prayers move from "*zocharainu le chayyim*" ("remember us") to "*chotmainu le-chayyim*" ("seal us") in the Book of Life.

At the conclusion of the service the *shofar* is sounded to herald the end of another *Yom Kippur*. We end with a short *Havdalah* service which separates the holy day from the rest of the week.

Sukkot

Sukkot, translated as Tabernacles or 'the Festival of booths', is the festival which falls immediately after *Yom Kippur* for 7 days from 15 - 21 Tishrei.

It is the third pilgrimage festival - *Pesach* celebrates the Exodus from Egypt, *Shavuot* celebrates the giving of the Torah and *Sukkot* marks our 40 years wandering in the wilderness. *Sukkot* also celebrates the autumn harvest of wheat and is also known as *chag ha-asif* - "the festival of gathering".

In ancient days our people made a pilgrimage at this time of the year to Jerusalem to thank God for the harvest and to bring produce as offerings. Today we build booths, *Sukkot*, in our gardens to remind us of the dual nature of the holiday: the booths in which we dwelled during our desert wanderings and the booths in which we lived during the gathering of the harvest.

We decorate our *Sukkot* to make them beautiful and comfortable places in which to dwell. It is customary to eat at least one meal in the *sukkah* during the festival. We also wave a *lulav* and smell the *etrog* whilst reciting blessings and praising God.

Hoshanah Rabah

Hoshanah Rabah ("the many hosannas") is the seventh day of Sukkot. A special morning service is held with the recitation of *hoshanot*, songs of praise to God. Traditions for this day include circling the synagogue sanctuary carrying the *Sifrei Torah* and beating willow leaves on the ground as a symbol of casting away sins.

Shemini Atzeret

Shemini Atzeret is the concluding festival of the month of Tishrei (mentioned in the Torah) and the last day of Sukkot. About 1,000 years ago, the second day of *Shemini Atzeret* became *Simchat Torah*, literally, the celebration of the Torah.

Shemini Atzeret is a full festival day and it includes the rituals of *kiddush*, candlelighting and not working. *Yizkor* prayers are recited in addition to the festival liturgy and the service includes prayers for rain to assist the harvest in Israel.

Traditions

Ushpizin - seven mystical guests who are said to visit the sukkah each day: Can also refer to the custom of inviting guests for each day of the festival.

The lulav consists of 4 species- palm, willow and myrtle leaves tied together and with the etrog (a lemon-like citrus fruit) representing the 4 types of Jews, as well as displaying the fertility not present in the sukkah while wandering in the desert. It is traditional to wave it in six directions every day.

Simchat Torah

The celebration focuses on the completion and beginning of a new cycle of reading the Torah. It is a festival of great joy and merriment where we dance with the Torah and sing in celebration of the gift God gave to us.

In our *Simchat Torah* service we honor the Torah completing the traditional *hakkafot* - seven rounds of the sanctuary carrying the Torah and everyone who chooses may carry the Torah.

Sof Hadavar

Having completed the wonderful journey from seeking forgiveness and redemption through to the commencement of a new Jewish year we begin 5777 fresh, unencumbered and open to possibility.