



## Rosh Hashana

### SECTION ONE

## Yom Kippur

### SECTION TWO



## Sukkos

### SECTION THREE

# High Holidays Guide

# Contents

Preface	4
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## SECTION ONE: ROSH HASHANA 5

### The Facts: The When and Why of Rosh Hashana

On the Calendar	6
In the Torah	7
Other Names and Meanings	7

### Rosh Hashana at Home

Lighting the Candles	8
At the Table	9

### Rosh Hashana at Synagogue

Special Torah Readings	10
Shofar Blowing	11
The Musaf Prayer	12
Unesaneh Tokef	13
Birkas Kohanim	14

### Special Customs

Greeting Others	14
Tashlich	15
Remaining Awake	15

### A Rosh Hashana Tale 15

## SECTION TWO: YOM KIPPUR 17

### The Facts: The When and Why of Yom Kippur

On the Calendar	18
Why This Day?	18
Mention in the Torah	19
Other Names for Yom Kippur	19

## Be Prepared

The Ten Days of Repentance	20
Kapparos	21
Mikvah	21
Tips for an Easier Fast	22
Pre-Fast Meals	22
Candle-lighting and Blessing the Children	23

## Like the Angels

Prohibitions on Yom Kippur	24
Those Who Cannot Fast	25

## Yom Kippur at Synagogue

Kol Nidrei: A Clean Slate	26
Vidui: Confession and Teshuva	26
Special Readings	28
Musaf's Special Features	29
Neilah: A Clean Slate	30

## SECTION THREE: SUKKOS 31

### The Facts: The When and Why of Sukkos

Dates	32
The Sukkah	33
In the Torah	34

### Sukkos at Home

Lighting the Candles	34
At the Table	35

### The Four Species 36

### Simchas Beis Hashoeiva 37

### Hoshana Rabba 38

### Shemini Atzeres 39

### Simchas Torah 39

### A Little Inspiration 40

## Preface

**Oorah's High Holidays Guide** is designed to help you "find your way around" the Yomim Tovim that mark the Jewish year. Our heritage is rich with traditions, rituals and special prayers that unite us with Jews throughout the centuries and throughout the world. Most importantly, they provide us with meaningful ways to become better connected to our own souls, our Torah, and of course, to G-d. We hope you will find the information provided within these pages to be helpful and enlightening. Use it to enhance your experience of the Jewish holidays, and to give your family a sweet, authentic taste of the beautiful tradition that is every Jewish person's birthright!



Rosh  
Hashana

# The Facts: The When and Why of Rosh Hashana

## ON THE CALENDAR

Rosh Hashana, which literally means “head of the year,” is celebrated on the first and second days of the month of Tishrei. Unlike other holidays that are observed for two days outside Israel and only one day within Israel, Rosh Hashana is observed for two days everywhere. To find out the corresponding dates on the solar calendar and for candlelighting times, consult a Jewish calendar or check a website such as [www.ou.org/holidays/calendar](http://www.ou.org/holidays/calendar).

Rosh Hashana marks the “birthday of the world.” The first day of Tishrei is not, however, the first day of Creation. Rather, it is the day in which man was created, which corresponds to the sixth day of Creation. The stage was set for man during the preceding five days, which are the last days of the Hebrew month of Elul. But because man was the ultimate purpose of G-d’s work, the day he was brought into existence is considered the birthday of the world. Only man has been given the mission to exercise his free will and bring awareness of G-d’s presence.

The artist sets up a studio. For five days, he is busy buying his paints, setting up his lighting, choosing a canvas and laying the paints out on the palette. On the sixth day, when he finishes all this preparation, he begins to paint. It is then that the work of the previous five days comes to fruition. The painting is the object of his labors. It is the means by which the artist’s creative powers can be communicated to the rest of the world.

Likewise, Hashem spent five days creating all the support systems that would be necessary for his “masterpiece,” – man – to come into the world. Man is the object of creation, for only man is capable of recognizing and proclaiming the existence of his Creator.

That theme carries over into Rosh Hashana’s designation as the Day of Judgment. It is G-d’s “annual review” of how well His crowning creation – man – is functioning. Jewish philosophy

teaches that every person born into the world is here for a purpose, and on Rosh Hashana, G-d assesses how well he or she is fulfilling that purpose. In view of that assessment, He grants us the health, wealth and life we need to continue our respective missions.

## IN THE TORAH

The command to observe Rosh Hashana is stated in the Torah. The verse that outlines the time and manner of observing the Yom Tov is Bamidbar (Numbers) 29:1 “In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no laborious work; it shall be a day of shofar-sounding for you.” The Torah then goes on to list the extensive types of offerings that are to be brought to the Temple on this day.

It may come as a surprise to see that Rosh Hashana is called the first day of the seventh month, which seems to contradict our idea of this Yom Tov as the “Jewish New Year.” However, for various purposes, the Jewish calendar has two starting points. In terms of Creation, Tishrei is the first month. The Torah gives Nissan a special place of honor so that we will remember the miracles of the Exodus as we use Nissan as a frame of reference for all the months. In that count, Tishrei is the seventh month of the year. But in the Torah, Nissan, the first month of spring (in which Passover falls) is called the first month.

## OTHER NAMES AND MEANINGS

As with many Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashana has other names, each of which encapsulates a theme of the Yom Tov:

**Yom HaDin:** Day of Judgment

**Yom HaZikoron:** Day of Remembrance

**Yom Teruah:** Day of Shofar Blowing

# Rosh Hashana at Home

## LIGHTING THE CANDLES

This mitzvah is usually performed by the woman of the house, although a man can perform it for his household if his wife is not available or present. The custom is for at least two candles to be lit. If possible, the candles should be lit in the dining room, where their light will add to the festive atmosphere.

On the first night, the candles are lit 18 minutes before shkiah (sunset). If this is a Friday night, the woman lights the candles and then covers her eyes and recites the blessing over the candles. This blessing includes mention of Shabbat and Yom Tov. She then recites a second blessing, “Shehechyanu,” which thanks G-d for keeping her alive to see this day. One does not recite the blessing and then light the candles, as the blessing customarily ushers in the holiness of Shabbat. It would be too late then to light the candles.

Some women have the custom of lighting differently on Yom Tov when it is not Shabbat. They first recite the blessing and then light the candles.

**Tip!** Once Yom Tov begins, one may not strike a match. Fire may be used on Yom Tov, but one may not create a new fire. Therefore, it is wise to leave a long-burning flame going (positioned safely) so that candles can be kindled on the second night. A small flame on a gas burner or a 24-hour candle will suffice for this purpose.

On the second night, candle lighting time is later. One must wait for the end of the first day to light candles for the second day of Rosh Hashana. One should wait after sundown the normal amount of time which one waits in order to perform work after Yom Tov.

The blessings recited over the candles are:

ברוך אתה אד-ני אלקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצוונו  
להדליק נר של (שבת ושל) יום טוב

Boruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech ha-olam, asher kidishanu  
b'mitzvosov vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel) Yom Tov.

*Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has*



*sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to kindle the light of (Sabbath and) the Festival.*

ברוך אתה אד-ני אלקינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו, וקיימנו, והגיענו לזמן הזה  
 Boruch Atah Adonoy, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, she-hechyanu,  
 v'kiyimanu, v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

*Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive and has sustained us, and has brought us to this season.*

**Question:** Since “Shehechyanu” is a blessing that thanks G-d for reaching certain milestones, should it be recited on the second night as well? There is some disagreement among the authorities. Since this blessing is also recited when a person eats a new fruit that he/she has yet to eat this year, the custom developed to say the blessing on the second night over a new fruit, while having in mind to include the occasion of Rosh Hashanah. One may not just recite the blessing out of doubt, because it is forbidden to recite a blessing in vain. According to many authorities the Shehechyanu blessing would be in vain.

## AT THE TABLE

### RECITING KIDDUSH

As on Shabbat and all other Yomim Tovim, the day is “sanctified” by reciting “Kiddush.” We verbally proclaim the holiness of the day. A cup of wine lends extra meaning to the proclamation. It must be performed at the meal to lend festivity to the ritual.

Both men and women are required to hear or recite Kiddush. One may participate by listening carefully, if both the reciter and the listener intended that the listener should achieve the mitzvah. The listener should say amen at the end of the blessing. The text for the Rosh Hashana Kiddush can be found in the Machzor, the Rosh Hashana prayer book.

### CHALLAH AND APPLES IN HONEY AND OTHER SPECIAL FOODS

In order to articulate our hopes for a sweet new year, most people have the custom of dipping their first piece of challah into honey. After the challah is eaten, everyone at the table dips a piece of apple into honey and recites a prayer (found in the Machzor) that asks

G-d for a new year that is good and sweet.

After that, many people follow the tradition of eating a selection of foods whose names evoke our hopes for the year to come. Eating such foods concretizes in our mind our hopes and prayers for these things. For instance, included on the menu of symbolic foods (simanim) are fenugreek or carrots: Fenugreek is eaten because its Hebrew name is similar to the Hebrew word for abundance. Carrots are used because their Yiddish name carries a similar connotation.

Other simanim include leeks or cabbage (for the destruction of those who hate us), beets (for the removal of our enemies), dates (that those who hate us should perish), gourd (for the tearing up of any bad decree against us), pomegranate (for the increase of our merits), fish (for our fruitfulness) and the head of a sheep or fish (so that we should be “as the head, not as the tail”).

Many families continue dipping challah in honey throughout the Yom Tov season, all the way until Simchas Torah. The other customs, however, are largely followed only on Rosh Hashana. Many people eat the simanim only on the first night, others eat them on both nights.

## Rosh Hashana at Synagogue

### SPECIAL TORAH READINGS

The selections read from the Torah and Prophets provide insight into the meaning of the holiday.

**Day One:** The Torah reader chants verses in Genesis 21 about the birth of Isaac. The Sages of the Talmud teach that Sarah, Isaac’s mother, conceived on Rosh Hashana after many decades of childlessness. She had prayed fervently throughout her life for a son, and, at last, Hashem answered her prayer. The story reminds us of the power of our own prayers, and is meant to inspire us to turn our hearts completely to G-d.

The Haftorah on this day tells of Hannah, who also prayed from the bottom of her heart for a child and was at last answered.

**Day Two:** The Torah reading comes from Genesis 22, and recounts Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac to G-d. The episode demonstrates Abraham's wholehearted devotion to G-d, in that he was willing – in compliance with G-d's will -- to part with his beloved son. The ram which G-d instructed Abraham to sacrifice in his son's place is symbolized by the ram's horn – the shofar – blown on Rosh Hashana. Abraham's unbending devotion created a bond between G-d and his children which was so strong that it maintains the Jewish people until this day.

The Haftorah of this day contains many passages ensuring G-d's promise to sustain and redeem the Jewish people.

## SHOFAR BLOWING

The shofar is an instrument that dates back to Biblical times. It is made of a ram's horn and it emits a sharp, clear sound. In the course of the Rosh Hashana services, the shofar emits 100 blasts. One should not speak while the shofar is being blown. Ideally, one should not speak at all between the blessings upon the shofar blowing and the end of the service.

There are several distinct sounds which are blown:

**Tekiah:** a long, straight blast

**Shevorim:** a series of three shorter blasts

**Teruah:** a series of at least nine very short blasts

There is a prescribed order in which these different blasts are sounded.

The sound of the shofar carries many meanings, including:

**A Call to Repentance:** Since Rosh Hashana initiates the Ten Days of Repentance leading to Yom Kippur, it is a time of solemn self-assessment. The pattern of broken sounds mimics the sound of crying. It stimulates us to feel regret for our mistakes and resolve to improve ourselves.

**Coronation of the King:** Recognizing G-d's sovereignty over all of Creation is one of the central themes of Rosh Hashana. The shofar in this context recalls the trumpets sounded at the coronation of the King, and places the Jewish people in the role of G-d's loyal subjects.

**Reminder:** Although it is not possible for G-d to forget, He sometimes chooses to allow certain memories to lie dormant, waiting for us to evoke them. The sounding of the ram's horn "reminds" Him of the binding of Isaac and activates the merit of our Forefathers in favor of us, their children.

**Revelation:** Shofar blasts accompanied the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai and they will usher in the coming of Moshiach.

## THE MUSAF PRAYER

The Musaf Prayer, the additional prayer recited after the morning prayer, Torah reading and shofar blowing, is divided into three distinct sections, each of which reflects the central themes of the Yom Tov. Each section is also marked by further blasts of the shofar.

### 1. MALCHIYOT - KINGSHIP

A person who emerges from Rosh Hashana convinced in the deepest recesses of his heart that Hashem is the King, that G-d rules the universe and everything that happens is an expression of Hashem's will is a person ready to approach the Ten Days of Repentance and Yom Kippur. From the firm belief in G-d's Kingship, all other aspects of Judaism flow.

In the first part of Musaf, we affirm to ourselves that we are G-d's subjects. Even though G-d's rule is absolute, He is not a despot. His rule is entirely just and incorruptible, and like a good, wise king, G-d protects His people and provides them with all they need.

### 2. ZICHRONOT - REMEMBRANCES

As mentioned previously, one cannot attribute forgetfulness to G-d. However, an entire section of Musaf is devoted to mentioning where various merits were evoked in the hope that we too will have our merits evoked. Some of the specific remembrances this section includes are:

**Noach's faith:** While the world ridiculed and taunted him, Noach spent 120 years building an ark and trying to impart its message to those around him. G-d saved him from the Flood and allowed him to enter the healing world after the Flood was over.

For the sake of the Jewish people as a whole, we recall Israel's willingness to follow G-d into the wilderness after leaving Egypt. The prophet Yirmiyahu compares this to the devotion of a young bride.

To arouse G-d's mercy, we recall Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham suppressed his love for his son and Isaac suppressed his will to live, all to fulfill G-d's command. In response, we pray that G-d will suppress his Attribute of Justice and temper it with mercy in His dealings with us. In the first part of Musaf, we affirm to ourselves that we are G-d's subjects.

### 3. SHOFAROT - SOUNDING THE SHOFAR

Although the shofar has been sounding throughout the shofar service and Mussaf, it is in this section that we recall the awe of hearing its blasts on Mount Sinai. The text describes how the "whole world trembled" at G-d's presence. These verses ignite hope for the future, when the blasts of the shofar will accompany the victory of the Jewish people over those who wish to destroy us, our return to our Land, the rebuilding of the Holy Temple and the coronation of Messiah (Moshiach). They describe various shofar blasts, past and future which herald revelation of G-d's glory.

### UNESANEH TOKEF

This moving prayer is recited during Musaf, only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It encapsulates the solemn business at hand, the determination of each person's fate in the year to come. The words paint an image of G-d as a shepherd who closely examines each of His sheep as it passes under His staff and decides what to do with each one. But ultimately, the prayer's message is one of hope, not fear. It concludes by urging that "Teshuvah (repentance), tefilla (prayer) and tzedakah (charity) reverses a harsh decree."

Unesaneh Tokef was written about a thousand years ago by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz. Tortured and gravely wounded for his refusal to convert to Christianity, he asked to be brought from his home to shul on Rosh Hashana, where he wished to praise G-d with the last of his strength. The words of this prayer are the words he said with his dying breath. Shortly after his death, he appeared in a dream to another

Torah scholar, Rabbi Klonymus ben Meshulam, and dictated to him the words of the prayer. He asked that his friend disseminate these words and that they be recited each Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

## BIRKAS KOHANIM

The Musaf Amidah contains a section in which the Priests (Kohanim) – men who are descendants of the family of priests – bless the congregation. Outside of Israel, in Ashkenazic congregations, this blessing is only recited in its complete form during Yomim Tovim. In Ashkenazic congregations within Israel, as well as in Sephardic congregations, it is recited every day.

During this ceremony, all of those in the congregation who are Kohanim (a designation passed from father to son since the times of Aaron, the first High Priest), gather in front of the congregation. They place their prayer shawls (tallesim) over their heads and outstretched arms, and pronounce a three-part blessing, usually enhanced by a chant in between each section. The interval of chanting is considered a particularly auspicious time to pray. A special prayer for the fulfillment of good dreams, and the altering of bad dreams is often recited quietly by the congregants. The Divine Presence is said to rest on the fingertips of the Kohanim as they offer their blessing.

# Special Customs

## GREETING OTHERS

There are many variations of the traditional Rosh Hashana greeting. One of the most common is “K’siva v’chasima tova,” which is a blessing that good things should be written down and sealed (in the Book of Life) for the person.

Another greeting, common among those with European backgrounds, is “a gut yor,” which is Yiddish for “a good year.”

Children often learn in school the greeting “Shana tova u’mesuka,” meaning “a good, sweet year” in Hebrew.

## TASHLICH

This ceremony is a symbolic “casting away” of sins, which most people perform before Mincha on the first day of Rosh Hashana. If the first day is Shabbos, it is done on the second day. However, it can be performed any time until Hoshana Raba, which is the seventh day of Sukkos.

Tashlich is done at the edge of a body of water. It can be a small pond or the shore of the ocean, or anything in between. Water that contains fish is preferred, but not mandatory. Some people have the custom of throwing bread crumbs into the water to symbolize throwing away their sins, however there are many rabbis who oppose this custom on the grounds that it crosses the boundaries of some activities that are prohibited on Yom Tov. For example, one may not feed wild creatures on Yom Tov; a rabbinical decree which safeguards the Torah prohibition of trapping on Yom Tov.

Obviously, if one does Tashlich after Yom Tov, there is no problem with using bread.

The Machzor contains the text of the words to recite. They speak of G-d’s forgiveness and state that, “He will be merciful to us, and He will conquer our iniquities, and He will cast them into the depths of the seas...”

## REMAINING AWAKE

For many people, one of the features that distinguishes Shabbat and Yom Tov from the frantic work-week is the opportunity to take a leisurely afternoon nap. However, on Rosh Hashana, the custom is to forego this pleasure in favor of starting the year off in a state of alertness and spiritual striving.

# *A Rosh Hashana Tale*

## A PARABLE FROM RABBI ISRAEL BAAL SHEM TOV

A King had an only son to whom he was deeply devoted. However, as the son grew older, the King realized that the prince needed to

experience life outside the palace. The King gave his son an ample endowment of gold and sent him into the world to acquire different fields of knowledge and discover other cultures.

Unfortunately, away from his father's eye, the son rapidly spent his fortune. He found himself penniless and unable to afford passage home, but he was determined to return. He worked and struggled for many years in foreign lands, until finally, he was able to make the journey.

By the time he arrived in the courtyard of his father's palace, the prince had nearly forgotten the language of the land. The guards, faced with an inarticulate, strangely dressed man, had no idea who he was. In despair, the prince began to cry out in a loud voice. The King heard and instantly recognized the voice of his son. He ran out to the courtyard and brought his son inside, hugging and kissing him and welcoming him home.

The parable is explained as follows: The King is G-d. The prince is the Jewish people, who are called "Children of G-d." The King sends a soul down to this world in order to fulfill its purpose. However, the soul becomes very busy and distracted by the physical world, even forgetting its own "language." Still, it longs to reconnect with its Father, and so it utters a simple cry. This is the blowing of the shofar, a cry from deep within the soul. The sound of it awakens G-d's unwavering love for His children and elicits His forgiveness.

*K'siva v'chasima tova!*





Yom  
Kippur

# The When and Why of Yom Kippur

## ON THE CALENDAR

Yom Kippur is the culmination of the period of time known as the “Ten Days of Repentance,” which start on Rosh Hashana. It arrives on the evening leading into the 10th of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, and is observed until after sundown the following evening. To find out the corresponding dates on the solar calendar and for candlelighting times, consult a Jewish calendar or check a website such as [www.ou.org/holidays/calendar](http://www.ou.org/holidays/calendar).

Yom Kippur is the Jewish people’s Day of Atonement. In the times of the Holy Temple, it was observed with an arduous set of rituals performed throughout the day by the High Priest (Kohen Gadol). When it was all over, however, the sense of solemnity was replaced by a sense of tremendous joy as the Jewish people reveled in their renewed closeness to G-d and freedom from the taint of sin.

Yom Kippur concludes the period of judgment that begins on Rosh Hashana. On Rosh Hashana, G-d judges everyone in the world and writes decrees regarding their fate. On Yom Kippur, He seals these decrees. In G-d’s great benevolence, He gives everyone an opportunity to cleanse his sins through this day of atonement in advance of the final sealing of their fate. The Sages warn, however, that the forgiveness obtained on Yom Kippur is not sufficient for sins committed against another person, unless one has made amends with that person. In other words, a person cannot steal his neighbor’s possession and then expect that Yom Kippur will wipe the slate clean. This will occur only if the person first sets the wrong right and obtains the victim’s forgiveness.

## WHY THIS DAY?

When G-d created the world, He not only created its physical characteristics, but He also created its time and seasons. The times of our holidays are imbued with special powers that are unique to

that holiday. The tenth of Tishrei was imbued with the power to bring G-d's forgiveness.

The first time this power is alluded to is when Moses ascended Mount Sinai a second time in order to receive the Ten Commandments. The first tablets, received amid much fanfare and a stark display of G-d's awesome glory, did not endure. They were smashed when Moses descended from the mountain only to find the Jewish people engaged in worship of a Golden Calf, which they had crafted out of the gold they had carried out of Egypt.

This lapse by the Jewish people, so soon after witnessing G-d's miracles and hearing His voice during the giving of the Ten Commandments, brought great Divine wrath down upon the Jews. Moses ascended up the mountain again, and G-d proposed to wipe out the Jewish people and start anew with Moses. But Moses, as the people's loyal leader, pleaded with G-d to forgive them. At last, G-d declared, "I have forgiven them, according to your words." The day on which this forgiveness was granted was the 10th day of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.

## MENTION IN THE TORAH

The day we celebrate as Yom Kippur is mentioned twice in the Torah, both times in the book of Leviticus (Vayikra): "For through this day, He will atone for you to cleanse you from all your sins. Before G-d you will be cleansed." (16:30) "But on the tenth day of this seventh month it is the Day of Atonement; it shall be a holy convocation unto you, and you shall afflict your souls, and you shall bring a fire-offering to the Lord. And you shall do no work on this very day for it is a day of atonement to atone for you before the Lord your G-d." (23:27-28)

## OTHER NAMES FOR YOM KIPPUR

**Shabbos Shabboson:** More than a festival, Yom Kippur is considered the holiest of all Sabbaths. Therefore, even if it falls on a Sabbath when people are normally not permitted to fast, we still observe the fast. All the restrictions that apply to Sabbath observance apply to Yom Kippur as well (in addition to others that apply only to this day).

# Be Prepared

## THE TEN DAYS OF REPENTANCE

As mentioned above, Yom Kippur is the final day of a ten-day period which starts on Rosh Hashana. It is a time to examine one's relationship with G-d and others and clear the static from the lines of communication. During this period, the Jewish people have an opportunity to closely examine their deeds. They should make a commitment to change negative habits.

During this time, a person should seek out others he has wronged and try to make amends. Jewish law teaches that a person should try three times to gain forgiveness from someone he has wronged. Every person should be generous in granting forgiveness to others, especially since our Sages teach that we are judged by G-d according to how we judge each other.

Most people consider acts like physically or financially harming others, lying, cheating and stealing to be the only type of acts which one must worry about. However, a look at the confession repeated several times on Yom Kippur reveals that G-d holds the Jews to a far higher standard of conduct. He is not just concerned about felonies. Most of the sins enumerated in this confession are easily stumbled upon in the course of normal human interaction: gossip, slander, disrespect to parents and teachers, scoffing and mocking, or overindulging in food and drink. In short, every human being can find areas in which they can and should try to improve.

The Ten Days of Repentance (or Aseres Yemei Teshuva in Hebrew) are not only a time to refrain from acting selfishly and impulsively. They are a time to try to actively increase the amount of good one does each day. People who look for ways they can help others, or give someone a boost of encouragement or a helping hand, are using the Ten Days of Repentance to their greatest advantage. One should also strengthen his relationship with G-d by increasing his commitment to prayer and Torah study.

### CHANGES IN PRAYERS

During these ten days, the prayer of Shemoneh Esrei is recited

with certain changes and additions (noted in your prayerbook) which highlight G-d's role as our King and Judge. These changes help us to move our prayers beyond rote repetition and focus our hearts on becoming closer to G-d.

In addition, beginning in Elul, the month before Rosh Hashana, and extending through to the end of Sukkos, we recite Chapter 27 of Psalms, which ends with the inspiring words "Hope in G-d. Be strong and let your heart be brave and hope in G-d."

## KAPPAROS

The Jews might be called the "People of the Book," but our religion is linked strongly to what we do and say, not just what we read or think. Physical actions have a unique power to transform a person. Think of the difference between telling a child "I love you" and giving that child a warm, affectionate hug. Think of the difference between feeling vaguely guilty and looking someone straight in the eye and asking for forgiveness. An action crystallizes a feeling and gives it power to change us.

Kapparos is a ritual that gives a physical manifestation to our desire to purge ourselves of sin during this time of year. The word "kapparos" is related to "kippur" of Yom Kippur, and means atonement.

Kapparos is performed on the day preceding Yom Kippur at any time during the day. It can be performed by circling a chicken or money that is allotted for charity, around our head three times while we express our hopes that if a decree of destruction looms over our heads we should be spared in the merit of the charity.

It is important to remember that the chicken is not a sacrifice, nor does it provide forgiveness for our own sins. It is rather a reminder that life is short, that it hangs on a slender string, and that there's no time like now for making important changes.

## MIKVAH

Another purifying ritual customarily observed by many men on the day of Erev Yom Kippur is immersion in a ritual bath - a mikvah. One can be found in proximity to every Orthodox neighborhood.

This immersion has nothing to do with bathing for the sake of physical cleanliness. In fact, a person must be already physically clean before immersing. The mikvah is a specially constructed pool that contains water that was not contained in a vessel. Once the pool has been established, ordinary water can be added if it is done properly. This immersion counteracts the forces of spiritual impurity, and helps prepare a person for the holy day ahead.

## TIPS FOR AN EASIER FAST

The rest of Erev Yom Kippur is dedicated to praying an extended Mincha (afternoon) prayer and eating in preparation for the fast. Here are some hints that can make the fast easier, preventing the headaches, dizziness and other symptoms that could interfere with this crucial day of prayer.

**Stay well hydrated** THE DAY BEFORE the eve of Yom Kippur, as well as on the eve of Yom Kippur itself. Make sure to drink throughout the day before Yom Kippur so that your body will retain the water. A few last-minute gulps won't help.

**If you are hooked on coffee**, wean yourself off of it starting the week before the fast. Cut down the amount you drink by a little each day, or just gradually mix more and more decaf in over the course of a few days. This will prevent a pounding headache on Yom Kippur afternoon.

Many people report that **Powerade**, drunk throughout the day before Yom Kippur, keeps up your energy during the fast.

**Avoid spicy, greasy, salty or dehydrating foods** in your pre-fast meal.

## PRE-FAST MEALS

The Sages taught that a person's pre-Yom Kippur meal is a mitzvah on par with fasting. It reflects our joy over the opportunity to find forgiveness and come closer to G-d on Yom Kippur. It is also, on a practical note, a means to ensure a more productive fast.

We are not permitted to get drunk at this meal, so that we will not undertake this extremely serious day with anything less than our full focus and concentration. Also, as mentioned above, a person

should steer away from very heavy or spicy foods. Many people eat two pre-fast meals – one earlier in the day and one closer to candle-lighting time. The meal should be finished about a half-hour before candle-lighting to provide enough time to recite the Grace After Meals and arrive at shul on time.

## CANDLE-LIGHTING AND BLESSING THE CHILDREN

This mitzvah is usually performed by the woman of the house, although a man can perform it for his household if his wife is not available or present. The custom is for at least two candles to be lit. The candles are lit 18 minutes before shkiah (sunset). The woman lights the candles and then covers her eyes and recites the blessing over the candles. If it is a Friday night, the blessing includes mention of Shabbat and Yom Tov. She then recites a second blessing, “Shehechyanu,” which thanks G-d for keeping her alive to see this day. One does not recite the blessing and then light the candles, as the blessing customarily ushers in the holiness of Yom Kippur. It would be too late then to light the candles.

The blessings recited over the candles are:

ברוך אתה אד-ני אלקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצוונו  
להדליק נר של (שבת ושל) יום הכפורים

Boruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech ha-olam, asher kidishanu b'mitzvosov vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel) Yom Tov.

*Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to kindle the light of (Sabbath and) the Festival.*

ברוך אתה אד-ני אלקינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו, וקיימנו, והגיענו לזמן הזה  
Boruch Atah Adonoy, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, she-hechyanu, v'kiyimanu, v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

*Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive and has sustained us, and has brought us to this season.*

Before leaving for synagogue, parents bless their children. See your Yom Kippur prayerbook for the exact text. It asks G-d to direct our children toward holiness, wisdom and good deeds, and to bless them with an ample livelihood, good children and a long and good life among the Jewish people. However, a parent may also speak from his or her own heart.



# Like the Angels

## PROHIBITIONS ON YOM KIPPUR

Fasting on Yom Kippur is a fulfillment of the commandment in the Torah that on that day, we should “afflict” ourselves. Fasting is meant to be a punishment that helps to compensate for whatever sins one may have committed during the course of the year.

However, fasting and other restrictions of the day are also a means to detach ourselves from our physical involvements to bring us, just for this day, into a more spiritual existence. Jewish philosophy recognizes a constant tug of war between a person’s spiritual core – his soul – and his physical body with its devotion to comfort and pleasure. Most holidays create a synthesis between these two facets of man, giving us the opportunity to use physical capacities for spiritual purposes. The eating and drinking on these festivals, if done properly, nourishes the soul as well.

But on Yom Kippur, G-d enables us to reach a level closer to that of the heavenly beings who need and desire nothing physical. There are several restrictions on Yom Kippur that permit us to approach this level:

### FASTING

No eating nor drinking from candle-lighting time until after sundown the next day.

### LEATHER SHOES

One is not allowed to wear leather shoes. At the synagogue, you will probably notice the unusual sight of people dressed in holiday clothing wearing canvas sneakers or slippers.

### ANOINTING

This refers to applying oils, creams, or ointments, and also includes spraying oneself with deodorant.

### MARITAL RELATIONS

Marital Relations are prohibited on Yom Kippur.



One may not refresh oneself with water. However, if one's hands are dirty he may wash them. Ritual washing (such as netilas yadayim in the morning) is performed, but one only washes one's fingers, not the palms.

### THOSE WHO CANNOT FAST

The Torah teaches that G-d's mitzvot are not meant to endanger our lives: "And he shall live by them, but not die by them." It also commands us to "take exceeding care of your lives." In view of those words, the Sages ruled that a person whose life would be endangered by fasting must eat.

If someone is in a weakened state or in a permanent condition that would make fasting dangerous, he should discuss the situation with both his doctor and a rabbi and find out if he is permitted to fast.

If someone becomes ill while fasting, he should contact his rabbi and find out how to proceed. In some cases, he will be able to eat or drink a small amount – enough to regain his strength – and then resume fasting. One cannot assume that if he's not feeling well, he can simply break the fast and eat as he would normally. However, if one thinks that his life may be in danger, he should eat without delay. A rabbi should be contacted but treatment should begin immediately. Expectant and nursing mothers are obligated to fast on Yom Kippur unless they have a specific medical problem endangering themselves or their baby. In such a case, they should consult a doctor and a rabbi.

Children under the age of nine should not be allowed to fast, even on a trial basis. Children who are approaching bar or bat mitzvah, if they are strong enough, can try to fast. Many communities have the custom that a child should try to complete the fast in the year before his or her bar/bat mitzvah.

# Yom Kippur at Synagogue

## KOL NIDREI: A CLEAN SLATE

In today's world, the words "I promise" or "I swear" are common currency, used with hardly a thought of their real meaning. In Judaism, however, a person's vow is inviolable. He needs to convene a special tribunal of three men to release him from vows he cannot keep. This is not a simple matter as there are many laws detailing who may make and who may annul a vow. In fact, upon Erev Rosh Hashanah, Annulments of Vows are performed. These however provide the barest minimum of relief from the issue of vows.

Thus, before a Jew comes before G-d on Yom Kippur to pray for his life, he must first resolve the problem of outstanding vows by announcing that all loosely tossed vows which he made during the previous year and which he will make in the coming year should carry no weight. Only certain solemn oaths will take effect by certain procedures. That is the purpose of Kol Nidrei ("All Vows")

This opening service of Yom Kippur is solemn and moving. Two Torah scrolls are removed from the ark, and those holding them stand next to the cantor for the duration of his recitation. Kol Nidrei is chanted three times. The first time it is said in a lower tone, with each succeeding repetition becoming louder. It is followed by several other verses, ending with the words G-d spoke to Moses when he ascended Mount Sinai for the second time to seek forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf: "I have forgiven according to your words."

## VIDUI: CONFESSION AND TESHUVA

Ten times throughout the night and day of Yom Kippur prayer, the congregation recites a communal confession of sins. This is called "vidui." As noted above (page 20), the list of sins in this confession goes far beyond the realm of activity most people think of as "sin." It encompasses not only dire acts like stealing and causing injury or death to others, but also, many sins that are no more than careless words. One who feels that he is a "basically good person" will find that he has probably fallen short of what G-d designed a person to be.

Reciting this list, done while gently striking one's heart with our

right fist, is meant to awaken a person to the impact of his words and actions and stir him to improve.

Although Judaism does not approve of public confession, Vidui is said in public. However, it is said in the plural, so that each Jew is reciting a confession for the entire Jewish people. Even if a person feels he definitely has not sinned in a particular manner listed in the text, his confession helps others who have.

### TESHUVA

This Hebrew word is translated as “repentance.” Its root, however, means ‘return’.

Someone who does teshuva turns away from the traits and motivations that have led him to sin, and returns to G-d. Even one who has not sinned can use the Teshuva process to become closer to G-d and make up for his shortfall in his service to G-d.

Teshuva is a tremendously powerful process. It can be motivated by our awe and love of G-d, but also, out of our fear of the consequences of our bad actions. A person who does complete teshuva brings forgiveness for his sins, erasing them from the record. He then starts over with a clean slate.

Jewish commentators explain that teshuva is more than fleeting remorse. It is a purposeful process. First, a person must recognize that he has sinned. Then, he must feel regret for it. He must then commit himself to never repeating the sin. The deeper the regret, the stronger the teshuva. The process is complete when the person encounters a situation similar to that which led him to sin, but this time, he responds correctly.

Everyone who tries gains some measure of cleansing, but often there is much room left for improvement. This is a process that pious people engage in throughout the year. However, on Yom Kippur, the entire Creation is invested with a strong dose of G-d’s forgiveness and mercy, making it a propitious time to sincerely try to change.

This special time of teshuva actually begins at the start of the month of Elul, the last month of the Hebrew calendar. It intensifies during the Ten Days of Repentance and finally closes on Hoshannah Rabba, which is the seventh day of Sukkos.

## THE BOOK OF JONAH

The entire story of Jonah is read to the congregation during the afternoon service of Yom Kippur. Jonah was a prophet who was told by G-d to travel to the city of Ninveh and warn its inhabitants to repent and change their ways or they would be destroyed. Jonah was hesitant; if Ninveh would repent, how would it look for the Jews who, after repeated admonitions by the prophets, had not yet repented. He therefore sought to somehow evade his mission. He went to the seaport and boarded a ship for Tarshish.

While at sea, the ship encountered a terrible storm. The sailors were in fear for their lives and began praying to their deities. Meanwhile, Jonah slept. When the sailors found him sleeping through the peril, they woke him up and begged him to pray to his G-d, too. Jonah knew the storm was G-d's message to him and urged the sailors to throw him overboard to save themselves. Although they did not want to follow his instructions, the increasing ferocity of the storm finally convinced them to do so. At once, the storm ceased.

Jonah was then swallowed whole by a large fish. For three days, he repented and committed himself to fulfilling the mission G-d had given him. The fish then expelled him onto dry land and he went to Ninveh to urge the inhabitants to change their ways. They heeded his message sincerely. Even the king removed his royal clothing and donned sackcloth, joining his subjects in sincere repentance. People even ripped stolen beams out of large buildings in a sincere effort to mend any wrongs. The city was saved.

While there is more to the story, and many layers of meaning in its details, the overriding message that makes the story appropriate for Yom Kippur is that one cannot hide from G-d, nor turn one's back on the purposes for which G-d has put him in this world. Not only prophets and great people, but every person alive in the world, has the potential and opportunity to bring G-dliness and goodness into the world. It is in order to fulfill this potential that G-d will hopefully seal our inscription, into the Book of Life on Yom Kippur.

## MUSAF'S SPECIAL FEATURES

29

After Shacharis (morning prayer), the Torah reading and Yizkor (memorial prayer for deceased relatives), Yom Kippur's mussaf (additional) prayer is recited. It is perhaps the most dramatic, mystical service in all of Jewish liturgy. One who lets himself become truly engaged in the proceedings comes as close as we can come in our days to experiencing the awesome majesty of the service of the Holy temple.

### ALEINU

Yom Kippur Musaf is distinguished first by the unique intensity of the prayer "Aleinu," which thanks G-d for making us His chosen people and bringing us to worship Him as opposed to false gods. During the chazan's repetition of mussaf on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur (in Ashkenazic custom), the prayer has a special feature. When the chazan pronounces the portion of this prayer stating "we kneel and bow down before the King of Kings" each man recites it too and kneels on the floor and prostrates himself. When the prayer is recited at other times, people bend at the knees and bow slightly. Makeshift mats are used because one may not prostrate or kneel on bare floors outside of the Bais Hamikdash.

### THE KOHEN GADOL'S SERVICE

The centerpiece of the Musaf prayer is the Shemoneh Esrei which details the service of the High Priest (kohen gadol) in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. To understand the intensity of this experience, one must first understand that the concentration of holiness in this chamber, which, during the First Temple, contained the actual tablets given to Moshe by G-d, was such that only one who was authorized by G-d to enter, who entered at the correct time and in a state of perfect purity, could emerge alive.

Therefore, the Kohen Gadol engaged in weeks of preparation before undertaking this mission on behalf of the Jewish people. The Order of the Kohen's service related in the Musaf prayer begins with his confession on behalf of himself and his household, for he could not obtain forgiveness for others if he himself was still tainted by sin. He offered a second confession on behalf of his fellow Kohanim, and finally, his confession on behalf of the Jewish

people. After each, he would emerge and the multitudes who were present in the Temple courtyard would prostrate themselves and proclaim “Blessed is the Name of His glorious Majesty forever...” This response is reenacted during the synagogue service by the congregation, evoking these moments of tremendous joy and relief that only the true Temple service can bring.

The Kohen Gadol’s day was an arduous one that required many changes of his elaborate ritual clothing and immersions in a ritual bath in between each confession as well as the preparation of several sacrifices. His body and mind had to remain utterly focused and pure in order to effectively perform his holy duties.

### THE “SCAPEGOAT”

Also on this day, the Kohen presided over the ceremony of the “scapegoat” involving two identical goats, one of which would symbolically bear the sins of the Jewish people. Jewish commentators point out that the goats had to be identical in appearance and value teaching that good and evil can look alike on the outside. It takes discernment to know which is which and to know which to reject.

### NE’ILAH

Unlike other holidays, Yom Kippur has five, rather than four prayer services. The additional service, Neilah, is the closing of the Yom Tov. It is usually recited with a particular intensity in light of the fact that it is our last chance to gain the forgiveness we seek.

*Have a meaningful fast!*



Sukkos



# The When and Why of Sukkos

To someone who is not familiar with Jewish tradition, a ride through an observant Jewish neighborhood this time of year would be a source of bewilderment. Why are all these otherwise sane people putting up little huts (Sukkot) in their yards? Why are they finishing the huts off with roofs made of bamboo sticks that are incapable of keeping out the rain? Sukkos, of all the Jewish holidays, is certainly among the most noticeable. It is rich in ritual and sensory experiences; but, most of all, it is the joyful culmination of the solemn month of Tishrei.

After the Day of Judgment, the Ten Days of Repentance and the Day of Atonement, the Jewish people have cast off the sins and burdens of the year gone by. Pure and clean, their feeling of closeness to G-d is at a peak, and for this reason, Sukkos alone is known as “z’man simchaseinu – the time of our rejoicing.”

## DATES

Sukkos takes place on the 15th of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. As on all Jewish holidays, candles are lit and the holiday is observed starting before sundown on the night before. To find out the corresponding dates on the solar calendar and for candlelighting times, consult a Jewish calendar or check a website such as [www.ou.org/holidays/calendar](http://www.ou.org/holidays/calendar).

The Torah designates seven days for the festival of Sukkos. The additional day of Shemini Atzeret extends the festival to eight days. In Israel, Sukkos is still celebrated for eight days, but in the Diaspora, it lasts nine days. The first two and last two days are considered full yomim tovim (holidays) during which observant Jews abstain from work in a manner similar to Shabbos. Only certain labors (mainly regarding preparation of food) are permitted.

In the Diaspora, the last two days are celebrated as separate holidays. The seventh day is Shemini Atzeres and the eighth day is



Simchas Torah. In Israel, the eighth day encompasses both of these holidays. The intervening days of the week are called chol hamoed. They are still part of the festival, but driving, using electricity, spending money and some other types of work are permitted. Many Jewish schools have that week as vacation.

## THE SUKKAH

The hut people build to celebrate Sukkos is known as a sukkah. It may be made of canvas, wood, fiberglass or whatever fits the parameters of Jewish law: it must be a temporary structure, yet sturdy enough to withstand the wind. The covering or schach must be made of plants that are neither food, nor fashioned into implements or building materials. It must be detached from the ground and it may not be nailed down. It should provide ample shade. Bamboo poles and evergreen branches are popular choices. Bamboo mats may be used too if they are manufactured with rabbinical supervision.

The sukkah embodies two concepts. The first is the protection that G-d provided the Jews in the desert. With no trees to shade them, they would surely have perished under the fierce sun had G-d not sheltered them. The Sages of the Talmud teach that this protection came in the form of “clouds of glory,” which provided a ceiling and walls around the Jewish people to protect them against the heat. The sukkah symbolizes these clouds.

When the Jewish people leave their sturdy houses to eat and sleep in the sukkah, they are strengthening their trust in G-d. With only the wobbly walls and the leaky roof to protect them, they are demonstrating that they understand that G-d is their real shelter. Sukkos is the time to take a little vacation from our belongings and “stuff,” and just live simply under G-d’s sky.

The second concept which the sukkah symbolizes is the gift of G-d’s bounty. Sukkos occurs at the end of the harvest season in Israel. In fact, one of the names of Sukkos is Chag Ha-assif, the Festival of Gathering. When the Jewish farmers harvested their crops, they would stay overnight in the fields in small booths, called sukkahs, so that they could complete the harvest quickly.

In the times of the Holy Temple, Sukkos was one of the three

pilgrimage festivals during which all of Israel would converge upon Jerusalem to bring sacrifices, thanking G-d for His many gifts.

## IN THE TORAH

Dwelling in a sukkah for seven days is a mitzvah whose source is in the Torah (Leviticus 23:42): “You shall dwell in sukkahs for seven days; every inhabitant of Israel shall dwell in sukkahs in order that your generation shall know that I caused the Jews to dwell in sukkahs when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your G-d.”

The word “dwell” is widely interpreted to mean eating and sleeping. The Torah does not require a person to stay in the sukkah if he is uncomfortable. The nighttime chill often absolves most people of the requirement to sleep in the sukkah. Most people, unless it’s raining, get to fulfill their obligation to eat their meals in a sukkah throughout the seven days. Women are not required to eat in the sukkah, but most eat their meals there on Yom Tov.

# Sukkos at Home

## LIGHTING THE CANDLES

This mitzvah is usually performed by the woman of the house, although a man can perform it for his household if his wife is not available or present. The custom is for at least two candles to be lit. Some light the candles in the Sukkah, and others in the house.

On the first night, the candles are lit 18 minutes before shkiah (sunset). If this is a Friday night, the woman lights the candles and then covers her eyes and recites the blessing over the candles. This blessing includes mention of Shabbat and Yom Tov. She then recites a second blessing, “Shehechyanu,” which thanks G-d for keeping her alive to see this day. One does not recite the blessing and then light the candles, as the blessing customarily ushers in the holiness of Shabbat. It would be too late then to light the candles.

Some women have the custom of lighting differently on Yom Tov

when it is not Shabbat. They first recite the blessing and then light the candles.

**Tip!** Once Yom Tov begins, one may not strike a match. Fire may be used on Yom Tov, but one may not create a new fire. Therefore, it is wise to leave a long-burning flame going (positioned safely) so that candles can be kindled on the second night. A small flame on a gas burner or a 24-hour candle will suffice for this purpose.

On the second night, candle lighting time is later. One must wait for the end of the first day to light candles for the second day of Rosh Hashana. One should wait after sundown the normal amount of time which one waits in order to perform work after Yom Tov.

The same applies for the second half of Sukkos. The candles are lit 18 minutes before shkiah (sunset) on the first night, and the second night one should wait after sundown the normal amount of time which one waits in order to perform work after Yom Tov.

The blessings recited over the candles are:

ברוך אתה אד-ני אלקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצוונו  
להדליק נר של (שבת ושל) יום טוב

Boruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech ha-olam, asher kidishanu b'mitzvosov vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel) Yom Tov.

*Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to kindle the light of (Sabbath and) the Festival.*

ברוך אתה אד-ני אלקינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו, וקיימנו, והגיענו לזמן הזה

Boruch Atah Adonoy, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, she-hechyanu, v'kiyimanu, v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

*Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive and has sustained us, and has brought us to this season.*

## AT THE TABLE

### RECITING KIDDUSH

As on Shabbat and all other Yomim Tovim, the day is “sanctified” by reciting “Kiddush.” We verbally proclaim the holiness of the day. A cup of wine lends extra meaning to the proclamation. It must be

performed at the meal to lend festivity to the ritual. Both men and women are required to hear or recite Kiddush. One may participate by listening carefully, if both the reciter and the listener intended that the listener should achieve the mitzvah. The listener should say amen at the end of the blessing. The text for the Sukkos Kiddush can be found in the Yom Tov prayers in the Siddur. On the first night of Sukkos we make an additional blessing, “Shehechyanu”, which thanks G-d for keeping us alive to see this day. At all meals in the sukkah, we make a blessing on dwelling in the Sukkah, “Lesheiv Basukkah”.

## *The Four Species*

The other hallmark of the Sukkos celebration is the “taking of the four species.” This is often called “lulav (palm branch) and esrog (citron),” even though there are two other species involved – the hadass (myrtle branch) and arava (willow branch). The three types of branches are bound together in a special binder, and held together in one’s right hand while the left holds the citron. A blessing is said, and the four species are lifted and waved in six directions – up, down, left, right, front, and back. The Torah’s commands of this ritual is contained in the words of Leviticus (23:40): “On the first day you shall take for yourselves a beautiful tree, fruit, branches of palm trees and boughs of thick-leaved trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord, your G-d, for seven days.”

The esrog gets the most attention of this mitzvah. People go to great expense and effort to procure an esrog that is particularly beautiful: even in shape and color, without spots or damage. While every mitzvah is enhanced by trying to do it in the most beautiful, dignified way possible, only in the case of the esrog is this enhancement part of the mitzvah itself.

The lulav is an immature branch of a date palm. It is selected for its color, freshness, straightness and the intact point of its tip.

The hadass has leaves that are shaped like a human eye. The leaves must be arranged in groups of three from the top to the bottom of the branch, and three branches are required.

The arava should have long, slender green leaves with fresh, straight branches. Two aravos are needed for the mitzvah. One must own the set to fulfill the mitzvah. Upon the first day, often people will give theirs as gifts to others when they finished with it. All the species should be fresh, if any of them are dried out it may disqualify the set. If the tip of one of the four is removed, it can disqualify the set as well.

A Medrash (commentary) on the mitzvah of the four species compares each element to a part of the human body. The esrog is the heart, the lulav is the spine, the hadass is the eye and the arava is the lips. These are all bound together to serve G-d.

In addition, these various species, which vary in their possession of taste and fragrance demonstrates the unity of the Jewish people. Taking them together represent different qualities of people. The esrog which provides both food and fragrance represent those who are both learned and accomplished in terms of mitzvos. The lulav provides dates but does not have a fragrance. It represents those who possess Torah knowledge, but not mitzvos. The fragrant but tasteless hadass represents those who perform mitzvos, but are poor in Torah knowledge. The aravos lack both food value and fragrance. They represent people empty of both Torah and mitzvos., All types – the wise and the ignorant, the kind-hearted and the selfish – are an essential part of one inseparable nation and must unite if they are all to merit continued existence.

The blessing of the four species is performed every day except for Shabbos. They are also taken to synagogue each day of Sukkos, where they are shaken before and during Hallel and are carried around the bimah in a procession, the extra yom tov service comprised of praises to G-d.

## *Simchas Beis HaShoeiva*

In the times of the Holy Temple, the Jewish people flocked to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage festivals: Sukkos, Pesach and Shavuos. During the week of Sukkos, a special ceremony accompanied the sacrifices; it was known as the “water libation,”

and it consisted of specially drawn water being poured on the altar.

The water for this ceremony was drawn from the stream called Siloam, where the Jewish kings were anointed. The drawing of this water was the occasion for festivities that lasted throughout the night until sunrise the next day. The most revered and dignified Torah scholars would dance, juggle torches and celebrate amid the throngs of people gathered in the Temple courtyard. The Leviim would sing and play instruments, and the event would culminate with the kohanim (priests) blowing shofars.

So exultant was this nightly event that it was said in the Talmud that one who has not seen the Simchas Beis Hashoeiva has never seen rejoicing in his life.

Today, many shuls, yeshivos and Jewish groups remember this special time of joy by having their own Simchas Beis Hashoeiva. Although the essential element of the Temple and the water drawing are not available to us in the present times, the singing, dancing, food and drink still succeed in rousing the season's joy in every Jewish heart.

## Hoshana Rabba

The seventh day of Sukkos is called Hoshana Rabba. This is the last day on which the lulav and esrog are used.

In synagogue, the lulav and esrog are carried around the bimah seven times. Afterwards, prayers called Hoshanos (asking for G-d's help) are recited, and each person beats willow branches against the floor five times. This is said to "sweeten" any severe judgment that may have been decreed. However, since this is just a custom, not a mitzvah, no blessing is recited.

There is also a sense of solemnity on Hoshana Rabba, because it is the day in which the final judgment for water and crops is sealed. Since human life and prosperity depend upon these gifts, there are special prayers and a theme of repentance in the prayers on this day.

# Shemini Atzeres

39

Although the Torah specifically commands us to dwell in the sukkah for seven days, there is an additional day added onto the end of the yom tov, which is called Shemini Atzeres (The Eighth Day of Assembly). The purpose of this day can be explained with the following parable: A man enjoyed the company of all his friends and family at the wedding banquet he made for his child. When it was over, he spent some time with his immediate family at a small meal where he could enjoy their intimate company. So, too, the Jews brought sacrifices over the entire Sukkos festival for all the gentile nations. After the festival, G-d longs for the company of the Jewish people on their own. A special sacrifice is brought which is on behalf of the Jewish people alone.

## Simchas Torah

The final climactic day of the Sukkos festival is Simchas Torah, which means “rejoicing with the Torah.” During the evening prayers at the outset of this holiday, people flock to synagogue to sing and dance with the Torah scrolls. Members of the congregation are given the honor of removing the scrolls from the ark and carrying them in a procession around the bimah (platform upon which the Torah is read).

As they circle around, the congregation recites verses asking G-d to help us and save us from troubles. Then, the rejoicing begins. The congregation spontaneously sings many songs celebrating the great gift of Torah and the blessing of being the people to whom G-d gave the Torah. Circles form around those who are holding Torah scrolls and everyone dances with them and around them. Children are carried on their fathers’ shoulders, and there is usually abundant candy and drinks to keep them going.

This procedure is repeated seven times. Each time is called a hakofah. The next morning, the hakofos are performed again. The

reason the Torah is shown such love on this day is because it is the time at which the final portion of the Torah is read. Then, the reader begins again with the first portion of Genesis (Bereishis), detailing G-d's creation of the world. By beginning again as soon as the last Torah reading is finished, the Jewish people demonstrate that the Torah is always on their tongues, and that they are never finished learning from it. It is a day for Jews to thank G-d for His most precious gift – the Torah – which makes us who we are.

## *A Little Inspiration*

The Grace After Meals recited on holidays contains various additions appropriate to each holiday. The addition for Sukkos adds the words “The Merciful One will raise for us the fallen Sukkah of David.” This refers to the Holy Temple and to the future redemption of the Jewish people.

Notably, though, the phrase does not refer to the “destroyed” sukkah of David, but rather, the “fallen” sukkah, even though we commonly describe the Temple as having been destroyed. One interpretation of this choice of words is that, like the sukkah, which is assembled and then taken down and stored away until the time arrives for its rebuilding, the Holy Temple, too, awaits its time. It is not destroyed, but merely “fallen.” All that is needed to rebuild it is at our disposal. We wait only for G-d to decide that the time is ripe to rebuild it.

## *Chag Sameach!*



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