



# Rosh Hashanah

*O God, create for me a pure heart,  
and renew within me a just spirit.*

## Spiritual Message



Rosh Hashanah, Hebrew for “the head of the year,” is the beginning of the ten-day period of prayer, self-examination, fasting, and repentance that culminates in Yom Kippur.

Both of these holidays are opportunities to think about the past and the future, about how we can move on and make the coming year a better one. Tradition tells us that God sits as a judge during this period, looking at each person’s life to determine what will happen to him or her in the next year. This image is a powerful one that may help us to examine our own choices and actions so we can better determine how we want to be in the coming year.

Yet Rosh Hashanah is not only about judgment, it’s about compassion as well.

This is a time not only for self-criticism but for seeing ourselves and the people in our lives through the perspective of understanding and acceptance.

## Family Discussion Topics

- What do we remember about the past year?
- What do we think will happen in the coming year?
- What are my New Year’s resolutions?
- What do we know about our ancestors? What did they hope for?
- What did they accomplish? What do we want to learn from their lives?
- What have we done in the last year that we wished we had done differently?
- What have we done that we feel good about?

## Family Activities

- Bake or buy a round challah or other round foods that represent the cycle of life.
- Wish each other a good year in Hebrew: “L’shanah tovah teekateyvu” or in English: “May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a good year!”
- Send out New Year’s cards to family and friends, or call people to wish them a good year.
- Go apple-picking.
- Make applesauce.

## Festive elements

- Get a haircut or wear a new item of clothing to create a feeling of newness.
- Celebrate the first night of Rosh Hashanah with a special dinner.
- Dip apples (or challah) in honey to symbolize the wish for a sweet New Year. (Page 378)

## Ritual/Spiritual elements

- Visit a river or stream. Toss in some bread crumbs, watch the water carry them away, and imagine that your bad feelings or choices are being swept away, allowing a fresh start.
- Do the Tashlich ceremony, a more formal version of the above activity, with friends, a synagogue group, or your family. (Page 64)
- Begin the New Year by helping others: Collect canned goods for a food pantry or begin collecting them now and plan to donate them when Yom Kippur arrives.

## Personal Experiences

“You can feel the excitement in the air; the New Year beginning. Everyone is greeting one another after the summer break. After my divorce, I joined a synagogue and the kids really enjoy it. Seeing their Rabbi, religious school teachers, and synagogue friends reminds them that they have more people to rely on.”

## Blessing:

*May it be your will, Lord our God, to renew  
this year for us with sweetness and happiness.*

# Yom Kippur

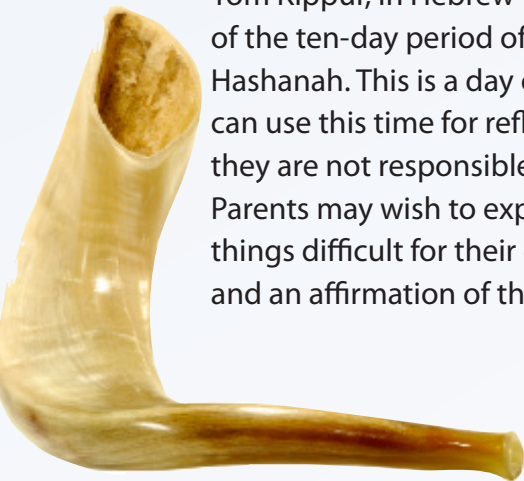
*Let that which cleaves unto me, makes me whole,  
be my obligation.*

*Let that which dishonors me, fragments me,  
drop from me.*

*Bringing Home the Light, E.M. Broner, p. 13*

## Spiritual Message

Yom Kippur, in Hebrew the “Day of Atonement” is the end of the ten-day period of repentance that began on Rosh Hashanah. This is a day of somber self-reflection. Families can use this time for reflection and to remind children that they are not responsible for the actions of their parents. Parents may wish to express their regret at having made things difficult for their children. The day ends with hope and an affirmation of the life that is to come.



## Family Discussion Topics

- What did I do well this year?
- What would I like to improve about myself this year?
- What does it mean to be sorry for some thing you've done?
- What does it mean to forgive people?
- Does forgiving mean that what they did was okay?

## Family Activities

- Read the book of Jonah together.
- Wear white clothing to represent the purity of soul we hope to attain this year.
- Make a Jonah sun catcher or draw a picture of Jonah inside the fish.
- Spend the day in the park admiring nature.
- Take a long walk.
- Break the fast with friends (traditionally with a light meal).

## Ritual/Spiritual Elements

- Go to services in synagogue (either at night for the “Kol Nidre” service or at some point during the following day until sundown).
- Fast (children under 13 may choose to skip dessert or snacks).
- Light a memorial candle to remember family members or friends who have died (page 97).

## Personal Experiences

*“During our first Yom Kippur after the divorce, we talked about all that had happened to us that year. It gave me a chance to let the kids know how much I loved them and how sorry I was that we were no longer living with their dad. I told them that I prayed that day for God to help me take good care of them and to keep them safe and happy. It gave me a chance to put my feelings into words.”*

## Blessing:

***I forgive all who have hurt me whether  
by word or by deed.  
May no one be punished on my  
account.***

# Sukkot



## Family Activities

- Build your own Sukkah.
- Decorate your kitchen with cutouts of fruits and vegetables, paper chains, or pictures of Jerusalem.
- Stick a lemon or orange with cloves and hang it on the wall.
- Make a lulav and etrog out of construction paper.
- Make etrog jam. (Page 368)

## Festive Elements

- Welcome “ushpizin” (“honored guests”) into your home or Sukkah, either by inviting actual friends to come over or by symbolically inviting historical figures.
- Eat a meal at a local Sukkah in a synagogue, JCC, or friend’s house.

## Ritual Elements

- Buy a lulav and etrog and say the blessings over them. (Page 67; Page 70)
- Say or sing some or all of the Psalms of the Hallel service.

## Personal Experiences

*“The experience was magical and better than a summer picnic. The decorations and lights set the mood for the ancient story. We imagined that we were eating in huts the way our ancestors did. We dined with other families and it gave us a sense of community. We rejoiced in the time of harvest, reflecting on the summer and thinking of the winter to come.”*

## Blessing:

***We ask that the sheltering protection of Your wings reach out to enfold us. May we continue to find ourselves covered by your canopy of... Peace.***



RITA J. KAPLAN  
JEWISH  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICES

*This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous will enter into it. I will give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and have saved me.*

*Psalms 118:20-24*

## Spiritual Message

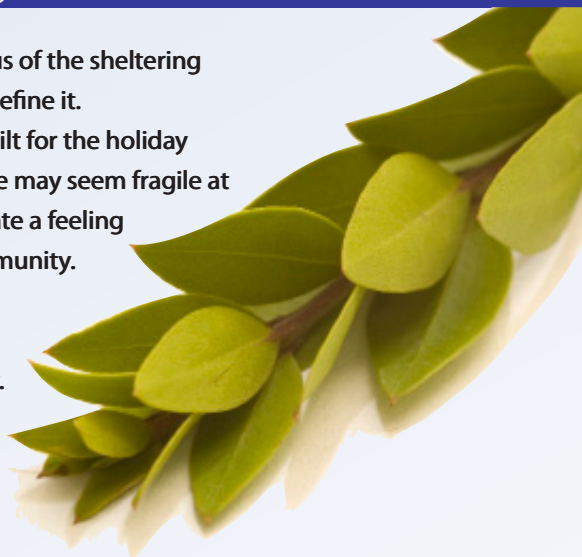
Sukkot, Hebrew for “booths,” reminds us of the sheltering protection of our home, however we define it.

The special Sukkah (“booth”) that is built for the holiday reminds us that even though our home may seem fragile at times, we do have the ability to re-create a feeling of protection through family and community.

We invite real or imagined guests to visit us in the Sukkah, as a way of experiencing that sense of community.

The holiday also carries a bittersweet message as we appreciate being outside in the fall, enjoy the harvest, and anticipate the winter.

We celebrate the present, anticipate the future, and honor the changes.



## Family Discussion Topics

- If you could invite a group of people to join you for dinner, who would you invite? (Your list may include real people, fictional characters, or figures from history.)
- In what ways do you feel that G-d protects you or your family?
- What is a place that makes you feel safe and why?

# Hanukkah

*Light one candle for the strength that we need to never become our own foe*

*And light one candle for those who are suffering, pain we learned so long ago.*

*Light one candle for all we believe in, that anger not tear us apart*

*And light one candle to find us together, with peace as the song in our hearts.*

*“Don’t Let the Light Go Out,” Peter Yarrow*

## Spiritual Message



Hanukkah, Hebrew for “dedication,” celebrates miracles, both those that we create and those that happen to us.

We use the lights of the menorah to remember that there is always a way to bring light into our lives, even during periods of deepest darkness.

## Family Discussion Topics

- What miracles have happened to us?
- When have we felt brave?
- How do the candles make us feel in the Winter darkness?
- How do we keep courage and hope in difficult times?

## Family Activities

- Make latkes (potato pancakes)
- Play dreidel
- Make a Hanukkiah (Hanukkah menorah)

## Festive Elements

- Give children *gelt* (real money or chocolate coins)
- Eat latkes and *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts)
- Play a CD of Hanukkah music (maybe during dinner)
- Sing Hanukkah songs



## Ritual/Spiritual Elements

- Light the menorah and say the blessings

## Personal Experiences

*“We cooked, sang, and played dreidel games together. The Hanukkah music gave our home a festive feeling, as did the shining menorah.”*



## Blessing

*May the light of these candles inspire us.*

*May love and devotion bind us closer together.*

*May we recognize the miracles that sustain us at this time and at all times.*

# Purim

*And in every province and in every city,  
when the king's command and decree arrived,  
there was gladness and joy among the Jews,  
a feast and a holiday.*

*Esther 8:17*

## *Family Activities*

- Bake hamantaschen (three-cornered cookies with fruit filling). (Page 366)
- Make mishloach manot (special gifts of food) for your friends and deliver them (either by hand, or by leaving them on the doorstep).
- Read the Book of Esther out loud together.  
Act out scenes from the story.

## *Festive Elements*

- Wear costumes or masks
- Make it "opposite day" and have each person pick something that he or she will do differently
- Write a funny skit and perform it

## *Ritual/Spiritual Elements*

- Go to the Megillah reading at synagogue at night or in the morning

## *Personal Experiences*

*"We all baked together and made baskets to give to our friends and to charity. We talked as we filled the baskets. It was a warm and happy family time."*

## *Spiritual Message*

Purim, Hebrew for "lots," is a holiday of opposites. We celebrate the victory of the Jews in the face of destruction. Our relief at surviving difficult times is observed through silliness, costumes, jokes, loud noises, and songs. This is a day to blur the lines between what is and what is not as a way to remind ourselves of the good in what we have.



## *Family Discussion Topics*

- If you could be someone else, who would that be?
- What does it mean to take a risk for someone you care about?
- Have you ever had to hide your feelings?

## *Blessing*

*Grant us the blessings of light, gladness, and honor that the miracle of deliverance brought to our ancestors.*



# Passover

*Each person has an obligation to see himself or herself as if he or she personally went forth from Egypt.*

*Pesach Haggadah*

## *Spiritual Message*

Passover, or Pesach, commemorates the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. Themes of the holiday include freedom, Jewish continuity, rebirth, and hope. The seder is a chance to discuss our feelings about big changes in our lives and what it means to be free.

As we are surrounded by family and honored guests, we discuss the themes of the ancient story and are mindful of ways people are still suffering throughout the world. We also think of the many things that can oppress people, including poverty, violence, trauma, loss, illness, addiction, and prejudice.

The story of our ancestors' journey from slavery to freedom can also be symbolic of our current-day struggles with these oppressive forces.



## *Family Discussion Topics*

- Remember those who live under oppression now. How can we help?
- How are people set apart and treated as less than they are?
- What does it feel like to know that Jews around the world are telling this same story at this same time?
- What are some of the things that have oppressed you?
- What aspect of the story is meaningful to you?

## *Family Activities*

- Get rid of any chometz (leavened foods) in your home (Page 79)
- Do a general spring cleaning
- Make a seder plate or matzah cover
- Prepare recipes with matzah
- Cook matzah brei (matzah soaked in eggs, cooked like scrambled eggs or French toast)
- Make charoset, a traditional seder dish (Page 363)
- Make a cup for Elijah or Miriam

## *Festive Elements*

- Sing Passover songs
- Draw or act out the 10 plagues (e.g. act like a frog)

## *Ritual/Spiritual Elements*

- Do something to help those still in need
- Hold a seder or attend one at a synagogue, JCC, or friend's home
- Open the door for Elijah and say how welcome he is in your home

## *Personal Experiences*

*“Get rid of the old, make room for the new. Clean up, everybody—Spring is around the bend. Passover is coming! The children sift through the clothes and toys to cull out items earmarked for donations to those less fortunate. Their small faces are pensive, a battle of wills, parting with prized possessions is no easy feat. I call Yeshivah pickup. We pack the goods. They are excited by the mitzvah they are performing. I am thrilled by the less cluttered living space, however temporary it will be!”*

## *Blessing*

*Let all who are hungry come and eat, all who are in need come and celebrate Passover.  
This year we are slaves, next year may we be free.*

# Bibliography

Abramowitz, Yosef I. and Silverman, Rabbi Susan. [Jewish Family and Life: Traditions, Holidays, and Values for Today's Parents and Children](#). New York: Golden Guides, 1998.

Anderson, Susan. [The Journey from Abandonment to Healing](#). New York: Berkley Trade, 2000.

Alter, Robert. [The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary](#). New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009

Broner, E.M. [Bringing Home the Light: A Jewish Woman's Handbook of Rituals](#). Oklahoma: Council Oak Books, 1999.

Kitov, Eliyahu. [The Jew and His Home: A Guide to Jewish Life](#). Nanuet, NY: Feldheim Publishers, 2000.

Greenberg, Irving. [The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays](#). New York: Simon & Schuster Publishing, 1993.

Hoffman, Edward, Ph.D. [The Book of Fathers' Wisdom: Paternal Advice from Moses to Bob Dylan](#). New York: Citadel Press, 2000.

Katch, Elise Edelson. [The Get: A Spiritual Memoir of Divorce](#). Deerfield Beach, FL: Simcha Press, 2001

Levy, Naomi. [Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle, and Celebration](#). New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2007

Lofas, Jeannette. [Family Rules: Helping Stepfamilies and Single Parents Build Happy Homes](#). New York: Kensington Books, 1998.

Doka, Kenneth J. [Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow](#). Lexington, MA: Lexington Press, 1989.

Netter, Rabbi Perry. [Divorce Is a Mitzvah: A Practical Guide to Finding Wholeness and Holiness When Your Marriage Dies](#). Vermont: Jewish Lights Press, 2002.

Olitzky, Kerry M. and Isaacs, Ronald H. [From Your Father's House: Reflections for Modern Jewish Men](#). Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

Olitzky, Kerry M. and Isaacs, Ronald H. [The Complete How To Handbook For Jewish Living](#). Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2004.

Olitzky, Kerry M. and Forman, Rabbi Lori. [Sacred Intentions: Daily Inspirations to Strengthen the Spirit, Based on Jewish Wisdom](#). Vermont: Jewish Lights Press, 1999.

Orenstein, Rabbi Debra. [Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages & Personal Milestones](#). Vermont: Jewish Lights Press, 1998.

Perlman, Debbie. [Flames to Heaven: New Psalms for Healing & Praise](#). Illinois: Rad Publishers, 1998.

Reform Rabbis Manual, "[Ceremony of Separation](#)."

Rothschild, Sylvia and Sheridan, Sybil. [Taking up the Timbrel: The Challenge of Creating Rituals for Jewish Women Today](#). London: SCM Press, 2000.

Strassfeld, Michael. [The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary](#). New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1993.

Strassfeld, Michael. [A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism as a Spiritual Practice](#). Vermont: Jewish Lights Press, 2006.

Syme, Daniel B. [Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living](#). New York: URJ Press, 2003.

Trafford, Abigail. [Crazy Times: Surviving Divorce and Building a New Life](#). New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1992.

Wallerstein, Judith. [The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce](#). New York: Hyperion Press, 2000.

Wolpe, David J. [The Healer of Shattered Hearts: A Jewish View of God](#). New York: Penguin, 1995.

## Helpful Websites

[www.kayama.org](http://www.kayama.org)

[www.njop.org](http://www.njop.org)—National Jewish Outreach Program

[www.ritualwell.org](http://www.ritualwell.org)—Kolot: Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies; Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC in Manhattan.