

Brief insights into Jewish Festivals

The story of Christianity is profoundly intertwined with that of the Jewish people. In the words of Pope John Paul II on his historic visit to the Synagogue of Rome in 1986:

The Church of Christ discovers her 'bond' with Judaism by 'searching her own mystery'... The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion.

This relationship should naturally lead Christians to be mindful and supportive of the life and faith of Jewish communities.

This page offers a simple way to foster this awareness by drawing attention to the Jewish High Holiday period which commences at sundown on 24 September 2014. Use it with parish groups, as a point of reflection, or as a newsletter item.



Simple ways to acknowledge Rosh Hashanah

Greet Jewish friends with a *Rosh Hashanah* greeting: '*Shanah Tovah!*' (a wish for a good year).

Savour this beautiful world created by God, our Creator and Sovereign. Gather fresh flowers. Watch the sun rise. Breathe deeply.

Add a festive food to your table; e.g., apples dipped in honey, 'for a sweet year'. Round *challah* (festive bread) is also part of Rosh Hashanah festivities.

Ponder a Torah text read on *Rosh Hashanah*: Genesis 22:1-19. This scripture passage is profoundly formative for both Jews and Christians.

Rosh Hashanah | Jewish New Year



In 2015 Rosh Hashanah begins at sunset on 13 September. It is the start of an intense penitential period ('Days of Awe') which climaxes ten days later in Yom Kippur ('Day of Atonement').

This period is known as the Jewish High Holy Days.

In a particular way Rosh Hashanah acknowledges God's sovereignty over all creation. The Talmud draws out the importance of Rosh Hashanah as the birthday of the world and links the festival to important dates in the history of the Jewish people.

One of the Torah texts read on this festival is Genesis 22:1-19, known as the 'binding' of Isaac in Jewish tradition (the 'sacrifice' of Isaac to Christians).

The sounding of the shofar (ram's horn) is an important element of Rosh Hashanah. It proclaims both God's sovereignty and the call to repentance, as people seek forgiveness and healing in their relationships.

In Jewish tradition the sages ask: *Why do we sound the ram's horn?*

One reply: "To remind us of the binding of Isaac who offered himself to heaven. So ought we be ready at all times to offer our lives for the sanctification of the Name."

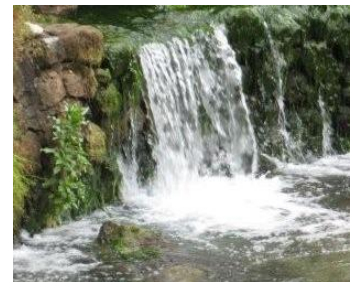
A parable

From the words of Malachi (3:7), "Return to me, and I will return unto you", the Midrash (Jewish storytelling traditions) weaves a poignant parable:

A king had a son who was exiled to a far country. After some time the king began to yearn for his son, and sent a messenger to him, saying "Return to me". The son replied "I cannot return, for the way is too far". So the king sent a message back again: "Do not fear, but start on the journey and come as far as you are able. I will come the rest of the way to meet you". (Pesikta Rabbati)

"You will cast our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19).

A Rosh Hashanah custom is the *tashlich* ceremony: people walk to a water source with running water and cast breadcrumbs as a symbol of casting off their sins.



Further reading

- Etz-hayim.com (see 'festivals');
- Aish.com (see 'holidays')
- Michael Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays* (NY: HarperCollins, 1985). A good introduction for a general audience.
- S.Y. Agnon, ed., *Days of Awe* (NY, Schocken Books 1965). A classic compilation of traditional Jewish wisdom by one of the great Jewish writers of the 20th century. A treasure.

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