

## Jewish High Holy Days 2019

The Jewish community is entering a period of High Holy Days. This means there are a number of ‘non-working days’ that many in the Jewish community will observe. Most will participate in both religious and cultural traditions. These include (but are not limited to) the time spent at synagogue, the type of prayers said, the food that is eaten/or the fast and individual family traditions.

At the JLC, we are incredibly proud to have a number of religious bodies that sit as members. These are, The United Synagogue (the largest grouping of Orthodox Synagogues), Liberal Judaism, Masorti Judaism, the Movement for Reform Judaism and the Sephardi – the Spanish and Portuguese congregation. Within each of these congregations there will be different traditions that come from theology or geographical origin. Liberal, Reform, Masorti and Orthodox Judaism are separate theological strands but all encompass traditions from both Ashkenazi (European) and Sephardic (Spanish, Portuguese and Middle Eastern) traditions.

This briefing is to give an overview of the High Holy Days that are taking place in the next few weeks.

## Rosh Hashanah – Jewish New Year (30th September – 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019)

### What is Rosh Hashanah?

Rosh Hashanah is Jewish New Year, the day when the year number on the Jewish calendar increases. This upcoming year will be 5780.

Rosh Hashanah is a happy festival, it is a time to look back at the past year and make resolutions for the coming year. It is also a wake-up call and marked by the blowing of the ‘shofar’ (a horn used as a trumpet). The festival begins the ten days of penitence culminating in Yom Kippur – the Jewish Day of Atonement. As with all Jewish festivals, the holiday starts at sunset the night before.

Rosh Hashanah is a non-working holiday, this means that many Jewish people in the UK will take these days as holiday, and many Jewish Businesses, Charities and workplaces will not be open. Many Jews that are culturally Jewish and not particularly religious will also mark Rosh Hashanah at home with loved ones.

### What food is eaten?

Like many Jewish holidays, there are particular traditions around food. These are different depending every families traditions but many of them stem from the same biblical themes. On Rosh Hashanah all practicing Jews, of all denominations and traditions dip Apple in Honey - we dip apple in honey, to symbolise that we should have a sweet new year.

### Why is Rosh Hashanah important?

Judaism refers to Rosh Hashanah as the birthday of the universe. The day G-d created Adam and Eve, and it’s celebrated as the head of the Jewish year. The Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah actually means “Head of the Year.” Just like the head controls the body,

Holiday dates vary because the Jewish calendar is lunar, not solar

There are many holidays and different branches of Judaism have different traditions

The biggest festivals you may hear about are, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Chanukkah

our actions on Rosh Hashanah have a tremendous impact on the rest of the year. It is a day of prayer, and also celebration and preparation for the rest of the high holy days (and the forthcoming year).

### Shofar Sounds

The 'shofar' blowing contains a series of three types of blasts: *tekiah*, a long sob-like blast; *shevarim*, a series of three short wails; and *teruah*, at least nine piercing staccato bursts.

The blowing of the shofar represents the trumpet blast that is sounded at a king's coronation. It can also serve as a call to repentance. The shofar itself recalls the Binding of Isaac, an event that occurred on Rosh Hashanah in which a ram took Isaac's place as an offering to G-d.

### Synagogue Services

Many spend Rosh Hashanah attending synagogue, where we pray that G-d grant all a sweet new year – also symbolized by sweet foods

The bible stories (from the Torah) that are read during the holiday are the birth of Isaac and the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael (this can be found in [Genesis 21: 1-34](#)). The second story is Abrahams near sacrifice of Isaac ([Genesis 22: 1-24](#))

### Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement (Sunset of 8<sup>th</sup> October – Sunset 9<sup>th</sup> October)

Yom Kippur is the Jewish Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and repentance to reconcile ourselves with the Creator for the mistakes we have made in the last year. It occurs on the ninth day after the first day of Rosh Hashanah. It is known as the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

Some calendars will mark the preceding day as Kol Nidre, which is the name of the first service of the holiday, in the evening leading before Yom Kippur.

### How is Yom Kippur Observed

Yom Kippur is a 26 hour fast from nightfall to nightfall.

Like Shabbat and Rosh Hashanah, no work is to be done on Yom Kippur, from the time the sun sets until the stars come out in the evening of the next day.

Yom Kippur is dedicated to introspection, prayer and asking G-d for forgiveness.

After night has fallen, the closing prayer service ends with the resounding cries of the Shema prayer: "Hear O Israel: G-d is our L-rd, G-d is one."

There is a custom that after Yom Kippur, we immediately begin (planning) construction of the sukkah, which we will use for the holiday of Sukkot, which follows in five days.

### Sukkot (First two days 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> October are non-working days)

Sukkot is a weeklong Jewish holiday that comes five days after Yom Kippur. This festival commemorates the Biblical period of wandering in the desert, and is commemorated by building a temporary shelter (called a sukkah) in the outdoors, with observant Jews having meals in it.

Some spend considerable amounts of time in the Sukkah even sleeping in it. Sukkot begins on the fifth day after Yom Kippur, and lasts for 7 days.

The first two days ([sundown on October 13 until nightfall on October 15 in 2019](#)) of the

festival are non-working days.

The final two days (**sundown on October 20 until nightfall on October 22 in 2019**) are a separate holiday (one day in Israel): Shemini Atzeret / Simchat Torah.

Some Jewish communities use the festival of Sukkot to reflect on the issue of homelessness.

**On each day of the festival (except Shabbat), we take the Four Kinds, recite a blessing over them. The Four Kinds are:**

- an etrog (citron),
- a lulav (palm frond),
- three hadassim (myrtle twigs)
- two aravot (willow twigs)

### **Shemini Atzeret (21<sup>st</sup> October) / Simchat Torah (22<sup>nd</sup> October)**

Simchat Torah celebrates the completion of the annual cycle of Bible readings in Sabbath services.

The Torah tells us that after the seven days of Sukkot, we should celebrate an eighth day. In the diaspora (everywhere but Israel), this eighth day is doubled, making two days of yom tov (non-working festival days). On the final day, it is customary to conclude and then immediately begin the annual cycle of Torah reading, making this day Simchat Torah (“Torah Celebration”).

The highlight of these two days tends to be the loud and joyful singing and dancing that happens in synagogues.

**For further reading on the various denominations of British Jewry, please see the links below.**

United Synagogue (Modern Orthodox) - <https://www.theus.org.uk/>

S & P Sephardi Community (Modern Orthodox from Sephardic tradition) - <https://www.sephardi.org.uk/>

Masorti Judaism - <https://masorti.org.uk/>

Reform Judaism - <https://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/>

Liberal Judaism - <https://www.liberaljudaism.org/>

### **About the JLC**

The Jewish Leadership Council is an umbrella body made up of 35 Jewish communal organisations. The Council is comprised of the Chairs or Presidents of those organisations, and the Council elects a Board of Trustees for a three-year term. The JLC represents only its members – the organisations that have chosen to join the council. This range of organisations includes synagogues, care organisations, education charities, regional Representative Councils and the Board of Deputies.

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