

Although many people, including Christians, consider these holy days to be "Jewish holidays," **the moadim are in fact God's Holy Days and festivals.**

"These are the LORD's appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times." (Leviticus 23:4)

The Hebrew month of Elul, which immediately precedes the High Holy Days, is seen by the religious Jewish person as a period of preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Because of that, the shofar has been and is continuing to be sounded every morning except Shabbat in many Orthodox Jewish communities.

It's piercing, haunting sound stirs our hearts to seek God and repent of the sin in our lives.

Selichot is designed for introspection, to review the past year for preparation for repentance. The Hebrew word **selichot** is related to **slichah**, which is the equivalent expression for excuse me, I'm sorry, and forgive me.

Rabbinic thinking holds that teshuvah (returning), does not happen at will but only with great effort, direction, and time (works). Forgiveness and saying sorry can be life changing.

They are crucial to leaving the past behind and moving forward with God's plan for our lives. Asking for forgiveness is pivotal to repentance, a closer walk with God and to successful relationships with our family, friends, and our fellowman.

Interestingly, the name Israel can be taken to mean right with God, from two Hebrew words—**Yashar** (straight, right, or honest) and **EI** (God).

Jesus identified unforgiveness as a critical issue. He said that it would keep us from receiving forgiveness from our Heavenly Father.

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

Since our fallen human nature leads to sin and unforgiveness, **God provided this special time to focus on repentance and forgiveness.**

**Selichot** will continue to be recited in prayer services right through **the Days of Awe** or Ten Days of Repentance, a special ten-day period that begins with **Rosh HaShanah**.

This year (2021) the Jewish New Year begins on the evening of September 6th and culminates with **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement) on the evening of September 15th.

**This ten-day period is an even more intensive time of introspection and self-examination.**

It provides everyone the opportunity to survey the condition of their lives and hearts and **get right with God.**

During this time also, it's customary to visit the graves of relatives and teachers, to remember the sanctity of their lives and gain inspiration for the coming year.

Penitential prayers are recited the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah and must go on for a minimum of four days.

Rosh Hashanah is not the Biblical name for the festival. However, this name does occur once (Ezekiel 40:1). It is more appropriately called Yom Teruah (blowing) (Numbers 29:1; Leviticus 23:24) or Yom ha Zikaron (remembrance).

The Shofar has solemn significance in Scripture (Amos 3:6, Exodus 19:16, Ezekiel 33:3). Rabbi Saadia Gaon listed 10 reasons why the Shofar was to be blown on Rosh Hashanah (see list on Royschwarcz.org under Rosh Hashanah)

Blowing the Shofar was a call to gather for worship or warfare, as well as to call for judgement and repentance. Maimonides, likened the sound of the shofar to an alarm call that awakens us:

"Sleepers, arise from your slumber, and those who are dozing, awake from your lethargy. Review your actions, repent from your sins, and remember your Creator!" (Hilchot Teshuvah 3).

This is reminiscent of Rev. 3:3 "So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

As well as Ephesians 5:14-16 "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Messiah will shine on you. Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

At home when the candles are lit as on the Sabbath it's traditional to dip

bread or apple in honey to symbolize the hope of sweetness in the year to come.

There is some ambiguity as to the mood of Rosh Hashanah. On one hand, it is a day of judgement - a solemn time of reconciliation and confronting the year past. On the other hand, it is a New Year's Day, although not as frivolous as January 1. It is considered Yom Ha Olam, the Birthday of the World.

The festival is a time of greeting, the common expression is Shannah Tovah "a good year" or Le Shanah Tovah Tikkatevu, "May you be inscribed for a good year".

Tashlich - On the afternoon of the first day, or the second, if the first is a Sabbath or rainy, it is customary to walk to a river or spring and recite penitential prayers while emptying pockets or casting breadcrumbs and reading Micah 7:18-20:

**Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea.**

The ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are called the Days of Awe, or ten days of repentance.

It is customary to ask forgiveness of other people whom we have slighted or hurt during the year, since the atonement of Yom Kippur is between man and God alone.

"Only in directly confronting the other person can we approach forgiveness and reconciliation with others. It should be noted that even more difficult and often more important than asking forgiveness is being able to give it. It is difficult to make spiritual return when shackled with unresolved guilt and resentments."<sup>1</sup>

Yom Kippur - is the culmination of the High Holy Days period. While the Temple stood, all eyes were on the Temple.

Yom Kippur is the only fast ordained in the Scriptures, Leviticus 16:1-34, 23:27-32, Numbers 29:7-11. The purpose of this day was to make atonement for the holy sanctuary, the tabernacle, (Temple), the altar, the priests and all the people, Leviticus 16:33.

It was a time of national confession and personal atonement for sins not confessed or forgiven during the year.

The Rabbinic Sages had concurred that indispensable to sincere atonement was "the broken heart". When the Temple stood it was the day that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies with the appropriate sacrifices outlined in Lev. 16.

Today the ark, where Torah scrolls are stored in Synagogues, are draped in spotless white. The Torah scrolls are dressed in shimmering white mantles, as white was the ancient Jewish symbol of purity and hope for God's forgiveness.

There is a custom called Kapparot practiced today by very Orthodox Jews on the day before Yom Kippur. It entails swinging a chicken around one's head and family members as a means of covering sin. The chicken

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish Catalog page 123

is then slaughtered and given to the poor for the end of fast meal.

Before Yom Kippur, giving of Tzedakah is traditional. In the afternoon the men go to the mikveh (baptistry) for symbolic purification.

Kol Nidre - The evening Yom Kippur service begins with the canting of Kol Nidre ("all vows"). It likely began in Spain during the inquisitions in the middle ages. It is an appeal to God for release from vows made during the year, particularly those made under compulsion.

Yom Kippur ends with the traditional Neihlah (closing of the gates) service. This service signifies the end of the days of Awe and the completion of repentance and judgment.