

## ***ROSH HASHANA***

### *ABOUT THE HOLIDAY*

Rosh Hashana, literally, the "Head of the Year" opens the doors to the "Days of Awe", the *Yamim Noraim*. Rosh Hashana falls on the first day of the seventh Hebrew month, *Tishrei*, the month in which, according to our Sages, God created the world. In Jewish tradition, creation implies the goodness of the world: "And God saw everything that God had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). The Days of Awe are a time for each individual to concentrate on mortality, on the meaning of life, and on our capacities to improve as human beings.

Rosh Hashana is also known as *Yom Teruah*, the Day of Sounding the *Shofar*, the ram's horn. The piercing wail of the *shofar*, traditionally sounded one hundred times, is one of the highlights of the synagogue service. Its cry reminds us of the binding of Isaac, when God provided Abraham a ram to be sacrificed in his stead, and of the revelation of Torah at Mt. Sinai, when thunder and shofar calls were heard. The great twelfth century sage Moses Maimonides wrote that the cry of the *shofar* should serve as a spiritual alarm clock, as if to say, "Awake, O you sleepers, awake from your sleep! Awake, O you slumberers, awake from your slumber! Search your deeds and turn in *teshuva* (repentance).

During this time God is imagined as both our father and our ruler, *avinu* and *malkenu*. We pray for God to judge us through the eyes of a parent; with lovingkindness, understanding, compassion, and forgiveness. We also realize God's ultimate power and appreciate the fragility of our own lives. We pray that God will "Remember us for life, King who loves life; write us in the book of life, for your sake, Lord of Life".

### *HOW WE CELEBRATE*

Rosh Hashana begins, as do all Jewish holidays, the previous evening at sundown with candle lighting, *kiddush*, the blessing over the wine, and a festive meal. Special foods for the holiday include sweet round challah, symbolizing the cyclical year and the crown of sovereignty, and any sweet food, particularly apples with honey and honey cake, for a sweet year. It is customary to eat a new fruit on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. Some Sephardic and other Jews choose a pomegranate for its symbolic 613 seeds (the number of *mitzvot*, commandments, in the Torah), and say, "May our merits multiply as pomegranate seeds." We wish one another, those near and afar, *L'Shana Tova Tikateivu v'Techatemu*, May You Be Written and Sealed for a Good Year - or a simple "*Shana Tova*" will get the point across! We give *zedakah* (justice and charity), do *gemilut chasadim* (good deeds), and *teshuva* (repentance) in hopes of tipping the scales of judgment in our favor, and in so doing, start the year shaping a better world for all. We recite the *Shehechyanu* prayer, praising God for keeping us in life, sustaining us and enabling us to reach this season. During the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashana the custom of "*Tashlich*" is performed. Jews go to a river or other flowing body of water to empty a few bread crumbs from their pockets, symbolically "casting their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19).

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY CELEBRATION

Explain to children that *teshuva* is asking others for forgiveness, as well as asking forgiveness of God. Parents can use this opportunity to serve as models, acknowledging mistakes and wrongdoing, and asking for forgiveness from one another and from their children. You might choose a special time to decide on one or two family values to highlight this year, such as patience, appreciation, helpfulness, or better communication. This is a great time to make and send cards for family and friends who are far away. Families may choose this time of year to collectively decide where the year's *tzedakah* is to be distributed, or to choose a family *tzedakah* project for the coming year. It's always great to include the entire family in meal preparation, and this is a good time to practice the *mitzvah* of hospitality by inviting those whose families are far away or who are new to town. Many families buy a special holiday outfit, get a haircut, and generally "spiff up" at this time of year.

### A FINAL WORD

Just as each of us individually can use rousing now and again from our spiritual slumbers, so can families use just such a wake up call. We easily fall into the routines of carpools, activities, housework, and the demands of work, and our attention and intention to those whom we love turns into habitual response. Rosh Hashana, with its summons of the *shofar*, helps us to turn once again to our best selves, to appreciate the beauty and brevity of all that surrounds us, and to relate to our world and those we love with our full awareness.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For Adults: S.Y. Agnon, *Days of Awe*; Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Jewish Holidays*; Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper, *Living a Jewish Life*; Arlene Rossen Cardozo, *Jewish Family Celebrations*.

For Children: Carol Levin, *A Rosh Hashanah Walk*; Eric Kimmel, *Days of Awe-Stories for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippor*; Aliza Shevrin, *Holiday Tales of Shalom Aleichem*.

*Shana Tova U'Metukah!*

Wishing You a Good and Sweet Year

A Favorite Honey Cake Recipe: (Parve)  
(From *Mama Leah's Jewish Kitchen*, by Leah Loeb Fischer)

1 orange	1/2 tsp. ground cloves
1 cup brown sugar	1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
4 eggs	1/2 tsp. salt
1 16 oz. jar honey	3/4 cup black coffee
1/4 cup corn oil	1 cup pitted prunes, cut in half
3 1/2 cups flour	1/2 cup raisins
1 1/2 tbsp. baking powder	1/2 cup chopped walnuts, pecans, or hazelnuts
1 tsp. baking soda	

Quarter the orange, remove any visible seeds, and grind it together with the peel in a food processor or electric grinder. In a bowl beat together the sugar and eggs until very light and frothy. Add honey, oil, and ground orange and beat well. In a separate bowl sift together 3 cups of flour, baking powder, baking soda, cloves, cinnamon, and salt. Gradually beat the dry ingredients into the honey mixture alternately with the black coffee until well blended. Preheat oven to 350. Grease the insides of two 9x5 inch bread pans with oil and line the bottom with parchment paper. Mix the remaining 1/2 cup flour with the prunes, raisins and nuts. Fold gently into the cake batter. Spoon batter into prepared pans. Bake for about an hour. Check for doneness by inserting toothpick in the center. If it comes out clean, the cake is done. If not, bake another 15 minutes. Let cool in pans. Remove when cool, peel away parchment paper, wrap tightly in plastic wrap. This honey cake will keep several weeks without refrigeration and tastes better after it has ripened a few days.

#### An Easy and Delicious Honey Cake: (Parve)

3 eggs	1 cup sugar
1 cup honey	1 cup oil
1 tsp. baking powder	1 tsp. baking soda (heaping)
1 cup cold black coffee	3 cups flour
1 cup chopped nuts (optional)	

Beat eggs and sugar well, then add honey and oil. (Measure oil before honey so honey won't stick to the cup.) Sift dry ingredients and add alternately with the coffee. Add nuts. Oil and flour an oblong pan and pour in the batter. Add rest of nuts on top. Bake at 300 for 1 hour. For mini honey cakes, bake in muffin cups for 20 to 25 minutes.