

Jewish Holidays

Rosh Hashanah

This is the celebration of the Jewish New Year and occurs in the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*, generally coinciding with September. It is basically a 2 day Holiday which is traditionally celebrated by families with two festive dinner meals. At synagogue services all over the world, the *Shofar*, which is a very basic instrument made from a ram's horn, is sounded to remind us when the Jewish people accepted G-d's commandments at Mount Sinai.

Yom Kippur

This is the Jewish Day of Atonement and occurs in the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*. It is the holiest and most solemn day for Jews. The holiday commences at sundown with a traditional synagogue service reciting an Aramaic prayer called *Kol Nidre*, which translates to "all vows". Yom Kippur is observed by fasting period from sundown on the first evening through the next day at sundown. This is the time that forgiveness is being asked of G-d and the prayer sought is for a healthy and good year.

Sukkot

This week long festival celebrates the harvest and it is symbolized by a *Sukkah*. It too is celebrated in the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*, usually in October. A *Sukkah* is a temporary hut where all of the meals are served during the entire festival. It is considered a great *mitzvot* (a good deed recognized by G-d) to have a *Sukkah* set up for the duration of this holiday. It is a joyous holiday celebrated from the time when the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem.

Simchat Torah

This holiday marks the beginning of the yearly cycle of Torah reading. It is a time when synagogues celebrate the actual Torah Scrolls and is quite often marked by parading the Torah Scrolls happily throughout the synagogue's sanctuary. Quite often there is a lot of joyous dancing and singing.

Chanukah

This holiday is a celebration of the miraculous victory of the Macabees, a simplistic Jewish army, against the Syrian Army. At this time in Jewish History that the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was recaptured by the Jewish people. When they went to the Holy Temple, a small jug of oil was available to allow light for their menorah for only one day. However, as the story goes, there was actually enough which kept the menorah lit for eight days. The holiday is in fact 8 days in length and Jewish homes

traditionally light the menorah each night of the holiday. This holiday is often called the “Festival of Light”. To properly enjoy this holiday, fried food is served to preserve the importance of the oil, which in America consists of potato latkes and in Israel has always meant donuts! The holiday has also evolved to include gift giving and is generally a special children’s holiday, where the *dreidl* is the game of choice.

Tu B’Shvat

This is known as the holiday of the trees. Traditionally it is supposed to mark the new year of the trees and it is also the season where the trees begin to bud in the Holy Land of Israel. It always takes place on the 15th day of *Shvat* . In America it has become quite traditional at this time of year to purchase trees through the Jewish National Fund and the trees will be planted in Israel. The trees are sometimes planted in honor or in memory of someone. The Jewish National Fund has filled many forests in Israel with these beautiful trees.

Purim

This holiday serves to commemorate victory and the liberation of the Jews against the annihilation plot of the tyrannical Haman, an advisor to the Persian King Ahashverosh. A beautiful Jewish young woman named Esther was married to the King. The King who was so taken by the beauty and charm of Esther could not refuse a request by Esther. The request made was of course to save the Jewish People from the evil plot of evil Haman. When Purim is celebrated the story of Purim, called the *Megilah*, is read and sometimes even acted out. When the name of Haman is mentioned while the story is told, is common for the congregants to express displeasure by making noise or by sounding groggers. Purim is also celebrated by the wearing of costumes, where little girls quite often proudly parade as Queen Esther.

Passover (*Pesach*)

Is an eight day long holiday which marks the celebration of the liberation of the Israelites as slaves from the Egyptians. Passover marks the birth of the Jewish nation and it is a Holiday rich in tradition. It is celebrated in the month of *Nissan*. It begins with a *Seder* on the first night and in America there is also a second Seder during the second night. In Israel there is only a Seder on the first night. The Seder is an elaborate dinner marked by the retelling of the story of the Exodus and prayer is also included. During the *Seder*, we think of the suffering that the Jewish slaves had under Egyptian domination. The important idea of this holiday, is that when the Jewish People left Egypt, they literally had to run. Therefore there was no time to wait for their bread to rise. From this came the existence of unleavened bread or Matzah. Matzah, not bread is eaten during this holiday and all other *Chametz* , which is any foods made from leavened wheat , barley,rye, oats, pasta etc. must not be eaten and must be removed from Kosher homes. The Kosher homes must be cleaned and cleared of every crumb of

Chametz.

Yom Hashoah

This is the memorial day for the Holocaust. It is held for the pure purpose of *Zachor* - to remember this tragedy of the 20th century committed against the Jewish People. It is a recent holiday, added by Israel in 1951 and is celebrated throughout the world in synagogues by a memorial service. Interestingly enough, the date for this holiday was debated in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) for two years, which can easily be attributed to the importance of this holiday. Finally, the 27th day of Nissan was agreed upon, unless that day is on Shabbat, and if so, it is moved to the Thursday before.

Shavout

This holiday celebrates the giving of the Torah by G-d to the entire Jewish nation, celebrated in the month of *Sivan*. The foods associated with this holiday are dairy related. Quite often blintzes are a popular food of choice. It is also customary to decorate a Jewish home with flowers, similar to those on Mount Sinai, where the Torah was given.

Tisha B'Av

Always commencing on the 9th day of Av this is the saddest day of the Jewish Calendar. This is when G-d decreed that the Jewish People would wander around the desert for 40 years. In Israel it marks a national day of mourning for all of the tragedies of the Jewish people. In modern times, this holiday includes the remembrance of the Holocaust as well. Tisha B'Av is a solemn day of prayer. During this holiday, it is customary to not eat any meat or meat related products.