

FALL 2021 | HEBREW YEAR 5782

# JEWISH HIGH HOLIDAYS



CREATED BY



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# IMPORTANCE OF THE JEWISH HIGH HOLIDAYS

The High Holidays are religious traditions celebrated by Jewish people all over the world. They fall on different days each year, as they follow the Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are, considered to be, two of the most important Jewish holidays observed. Rosh Hashanah translates as “head of the year” hence this is the Jewish New Year. Yom Kippur translates into “Day of Atonement” and follows ten days later. During this time, also referred to as the Days of Awe, people who are Jewish reflect on their actions and behaviors over the last year – both the positive acts and the negative acts or sins too that they committed. The two holidays combined are a time of joy in celebrating a New Year, along with renewal as one reflects on where to improve and hoping for forgiveness from people and God. For this reason, Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, as this is the last day of the Days of Awe and when God seals you into the Book of Life for another year of health, happiness, love, and more.



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## TIMING CHANGES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

The Gregorian calendar is based on the sun, while the Hebrew or Jewish, calendar is based primarily on the moon. The Hebrew calendar is a Soli-lunar calendar, which means that the months begin on the new moon and last either 29 or 30 days. It is also for this reason that Jewish holidays always begin at sundown and end at sundown because people would know the holiday was upon them by taking note of three stars in the sky to signify the holiday was set to begin. This is why people often say, "The Jewish holidays are late this year" or "The Jewish holidays are early this year." However, the holidays never are early or late; they're always considered to be on time by the standard of the Jewish calendar. To keep the holidays relatively around the same time there is a leap month added to the Jewish calendar 12 of every 19 years. This month is called Adar II because it's the second month of Adar added in the spring. These adjustments account for the differences between the solar and lunar cycles.

According to tradition, the Hebrew calendar started at the time of Creation, placed at 3761 BCE. While the Gregorian calendar places us in 2021/2022, the Hebrew calendar actually refers to this upcoming year as 5782.



# CELEBRATING THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

Like many religions, Judaism values living a full and ethical life, while understanding that all people make mistakes. Celebrating the High Holidays looks different to everyone. Many Jewish people find praying with the sounding of the shofar (ram's horn) and fasting to be spiritually beneficial. The sounding of a shofar represents many parts of the holiday including the clean slate of a new year. Many people look forward to signaling the start of a new year.

The High Holidays are most often celebrated in a synagogue, split into several services on each observing day. Rosh Hashanah is two days, and Yom Kippur is one. On Rosh Hashanah, people who are Jewish eat sweet foods like apples and honey to signify a sweet new year.

One of the more common aspects of Yom Kippur includes the tradition of fasting for a full twenty-five hours. There are exemptions to this fasting rule for young children, those with medical conditions, and pregnant women because Judaism values health and preserving life itself above all. Fasting is a way to purify the spirit and concentrate your energies and mindfulness around forgiveness and moving forward. These ten days of Awe that kick off with Rosh Hashanah and end with Yom Kippur are meaningful, significant, and a beautiful time of year for many Jewish people and their loved ones.



# HIGH HOLIDAY TERMINOLOGY



- **High Holy Days:** a term used to describe Rosh Hashanah through to Yom Kippur.
- **Rosh Hashanah:** “Head of the Year,” is the Jewish New Year, starting at sunset and continuing for two days. Rosh Hashanah also marks the beginning of the Ten Days of Awe or Repentance, which concludes on Yom Kippur.
- **Yom Kippur:** Is celebrated 10 days after Rosh Hashanah and Is also known as the “Day of Atonement.” Jews observe Yom Kippur with a 24-hour fast (this does not include children, or those unable to fast for health/safety reasons) and attend religious services.
- Other Jewish holidays celebrated after the High Holy Days:
  - **Sukkot:** begins five days after Yom Kippur, and lasts a total of eight days. The holiday is named after the huts (Sukkots) the Israelites lived in during their exodus from Egypt. Today, Jews today build their own Sukkots to dwell and eat in to commemorate this time. Sukkot is also a fall harvest holiday and the beginning of the season of prayers for rain. Important ritual objects on Sukkot include the:
    - **Lulav:** a bundle of different types of branches
    - **Etrog:** species of citrus fruit commonly found in the Middle East).
  - **Shemini Atzeret:** is also called “The Eighth Day of Assembly,” which is the eighth day of Sukkot and marks the beginning of Simchat Torah.
  - **Simchat Torah:** is also called “Rejoicing with the Torah,” and marks the completion of one Torah reading cycle and the beginning of a new one.
- **Shofar:** is a ritual musical instrument, made from the horn of a ram or other animal, used on important Jewish public and religious occasions.
- **Synagogue:** the building where a Jewish assembly or congregation meets for religious worship and instruction.
- **Torah:** is the first part of the Jewish bible. It is the central and most important document of Judaism and has been used by Jews through the ages. Torah refers to the five books of Moses which are known in Hebrew as Chameesha Choomshey Torah. These are Bresheit (Genesis), Shemot (Exodus), Vayicra (Leviticus), Bamidbar (Numbers), and Devarim (Deuteronomy).
- **Yarmulke/Kepah:** a skullcap worn in public by Orthodox Jewish men or during prayer by other Jewish men.

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# CURRENT RISE IN ANTISEMITISM... EFFECTS OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT



Antisemitism has been on the rise for the last several years, and current events surrounding the conflict in Gaza are part of what has fueled a spark in anti-Semitic attacks all over the world.

The deadly May 2021 11-day war between, Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas, made headlines as protests and violence erupted in cities across the world – thousands of miles away from the conflict. As of May 2021, Antisemitism in the U.S. was reported to be up 115% from last year. On top of this grueling number, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has reported 305 anti-Semitic attacks this year, alone, which includes: 190 cases of harassment, 50 cases of vandalism, and 11 assaults.

Jewish people in America, from New York City to Los Angeles found themselves as the opposing end of hate crimes. From May 11 – 13th, the ADL recorded 251 incidents (including assault, vandalism, and harassment) – a 115% increase from the same period in 2020, when 117 incidents were reported.

Protests and anti-Semitic attacks erupted around Europe, videotaped and projected on the internet, saluting Adolf Hitler and mimicking a Nazi march and wave promoting a future Holocaust. While a cease-fire in Gaza calmed some fumes from the current escalated conflict, this ongoing conflict is expected to continue, leaving all parties at the receiving end of violence and hate.

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## DID YOU KNOW?

- There are 14 million Jewish people in the world (only .025%) of the world's population.
  - 6 million live in the United States, which equals about 2% of the population.
  - 6.7 million Jews live in Israel, about 75% of the country's population.
- About half of the Jewish population identifies as Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox, while the rest consider themselves to be "secular" (or non-religious).
- New York City has more Jews than any other city in the world. The New York Metropolitan area is home to 1,728,000 Jews, roughly 10% of its total population.

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# CREATING EQUITY IN THE WORKPLACE

## Does your organization provide Religious Observance Days to your employees for the Jewish Holidays?

The Jewish High Holy Days are considered Work-Restricted Holidays - a recognize denominational sacred or holy days that are observed by persons or groups who are required - through a set or system of religious beliefs, laws/doctrines, tenets, canons, or theology - to restrict or limit work and/or physical or mental activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something; toil; labor. This can include going to the office, class, an exam, or other day-to-day occupations.

For example, Christmas, New Year, Ramadan, and the Birth of Bab are all work-restricted holidays. As Christmas and New Year are celebrated without penalization, perhaps this should go for all holidays under the same requirement.

Many organizations do not have religious observation day standards set in place, or often have them but are not put into effect. It is common for employees to have to take their own vacation time to observe in a synagogue or celebrate with their families, which is seen as penalizing the employee.

The Jewish High Holidays can be challenging for someone to ask their employer for several days off in a short time frame, as the high holidays are one after another. There are holidays in the calendar where employees are free to observe away from work - the Jewish High Holidays could (or should) be treated as such. As an employer, it's imperative that all employees are treated with equity and inclusivity. The power of an organization's diversity is tied to the organization's ability to support its people, and what makes them who they are. A way to solve this is to provide all employees several 'floating holidays' to use as they need (Jewish High Holiday, birthday, mental health day, a family member who is ill, death of a pet, etc.)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are a time to reflect on our behaviors from the last year and understand how to be a better person. Do these lessons remind you of any holidays you celebrate? If you are comfortable, share with the group.
- \*Ted Talk\* Jana describes how she feels her being Jewish is a "physical barrier". How can physical barriers like those Jane describes, lead to prejudice and discrimination Anti-Semitism?
- Prejudice and/or discrimination against Jews is often based on stereotypes and myths that target the Jews for their religious practices and beliefs. What do you know about antisemitism? Do you know anyone or have you been with anyone who has been confronted with this?
- How might anti-Semitism be connected to other forms of hate and prejudice?
- How do you/would you respond to a peer's anti-Semitic remarks?

# FAITH-BASED ERG'S

A great way to incorporate diversity and inclusion into your organization is by creating a space for Faith-based ERG's.

A new study by World Forum Organization reveals that religious inclusion has overwhelmingly been left out of corporate diversity initiatives, however, many companies are making the effort to change this - including Fortune 100 and 200 companies.

Among the most important reasons people leave their organizations is because they cannot show up as their authentic selves. Religion falls into this category, and some employees are not comfortable showing up to work with a Star of David necklace or a yarmulke, or anything that shows other employees their religion. Providing a space for people of all religions to implement events, discussions, and awareness is something that can be done in an ERG setting. Representation from people of all religions, genders, races, and ages should all have a seat at the table. Encourage your employees to participate in an ERG that will be beneficial to them, where they can show up and be accepted as their authentic selves, all while spreading awareness about what is important to them.



## RESOURCES

**ADL Calendar: A universal Religious and Awareness Event calendar for companies to utilize for Jewish American Heritage Month / Learn More:**

- [Jewish American Heritage Month](#)
- [Hebrew Calendar](#)
- [Jewish Holidays](#)
- [5 Things to Know about the Jewish High Holidays](#)
- [Antisemitism on the Rise](#)
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### Faith-based ERG Links

- [Companies with Faith-Based ERGs](#)
- [Rise in Faith-Based ERGs](#)
- [Jewish Holidays Calendar](#)