



To help enrich your appreciation of the upcoming holiday, Kolel is happy to provide this “fact sheet.” We hope it helps you prepare both spiritually and physically. Please feel free to study with us any time at www.kolel.org or at any of our classes at the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, or the Family Resource Centre. You can reach us at 416-636-1880 ext 255.

ROSH HASHANAH



WHAT IS IT?

The Jewish New Year

Rosh=head

Hashanah=the year

Pronounced in Hebrew “Rosh ha-shah-nah” with a long o and the accent on “nah”; pronounced in Yiddish/English (Yinglish!) “Rush-a-shanah” with the accent on “sha”. Spelled **Rosh Hashana** or **Rosh Hashanah** (the “h” at the end stands for the Hebrew letter hey which appears in the Hebrew spelling as the last letter.)

WHY IS IT?

The months of the Jewish year are counted from the spring (Nisan). The “Jewish” part of the year, or the “new year of being Jewish” originates from our experience at Sinai, i.e. Passover, the Exodus, and the receiving of the Torah. We celebrate that theme of newness in Nisan. BUT there is also a “universal” New Year- that is, when the agricultural cycle starts, when the year organically begins, i.e. the “birthday” of the whole world. That is in the fall, in Tishre, with Rosh Hashanah.

WHEN IS IT?

The first of the Hebrew month Tishre, which occurs in the fall. In Israel and abroad in Orthodox and Conservative congregations two days are observed. Some Reform and Reconstructionist congregations observe only one day although in Toronto all observe two.

WHERE IS IT FROM?

The name “Rosh Hashanah” actually appears only once in the Bible, in Ezekial 40:1 where it doesn’t designate the festival but just the “beginning of the year.” The festival of “memorial proclaimed by the blast of the shofar” is described (though not named Rosh Hashanah) in Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6.

WHAT DO WE DO?

Rosh Hashanah is the one holiday, apart from Yom Kippur, celebrated mostly in a synagogue. A joyful family meal is served both at the evening before and each day of the holiday but the main rituals are done in synagogue: announcing the actual New Year (this year it is 5769) and hearing the shofar (the ram’s horn) blast. *Tashlich* is a ceremony of ceremonially throwing your sins into the water (by casting bread) done after services on the first day or on the second day if the first falls on Shabbat. There is a Sephardic tradition to have a second night “Seder” with special foods whose names contain puns on blessings for a happy new year.

WHAT DO WE EAT?

Round challah to symbolize the cycle of the year; apples and honey to symbolize fruitfulness and sweetness; fish or fish head to symbolize abundance (the head also represents our desire to be the “head” and not the “tail” and also the “head” of the year). Some Ashkenazim eat carrot tzimmes (stew) because carrots in Yiddish (meren) means “increase.” On the second night of Rosh Hashanah, we eat a new fruit which we have not yet eaten this season so we can say the “shehechyanu” blessing over something new. Many people choose a pomegranate because it is claimed that this fruit contains 613 seeds just as there are 613 mitzvot.

WHAT DO WE SAY?

“Shanah Tovah”= a good year. We start saying this a month before the actual holiday, and all through the holiday itself, until Yom Kippur. Some people say “I’shanah tovah” which literally means “for a good year”- part of a longer phrase which you will sometimes see on Rosh Hashanah cards, “I’shanah tovah tikateivu”-may you all be inscribed for a good year. This “inscription” is for the Book of Life, which is a metaphor for the Eye that Sees and the Ear that Hears all; that is, there is something above our own small selves to which we answer.