

How to Celebrate the Biblical Feasts

Rosh Hashanah (Lev. 23:24-25)



Rosh Hashanah is scripturally known as Yom Teruah which means “Day of Blowing” and is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. This is the only feast day when the shofar is blown during the service one hundred times. The shofars are blown in a set pattern of three different sounds, blown three times each for a total of nine blasts. This series of patterns is repeated eleven times for a total of ninety-nine blasts. The one hundredth blast is set apart and is known as the “Last Trump”. Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of the month of Tishrei. Rosh Hashanah lasts for two days, but it is referred to as one long day. It is customary to eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a wish for a good and sweet year. It is also common to eat round challah to symbolize a crown that reflects our coronating God as the King of the world. It is customary to greet other by saying L'shanah tovah meaning "for a good year". This is a shorter version of "L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem" (or when addressing women, "L'shanah tovah tikatevi v'taihatemi"), which means "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year." Rosh Hashanah is a Holy Convocation in which no work is permitted.

Yom Kippur (Lev. 23:26-27)

Yom Kippur literally means “Day of Atonement” and is essentially your last chance to change the judgment that will come when the books are closed and to demonstrate your repentance and make amends with God. Yom Kippur is the day of atonement for the nation of Israel and was the only day the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies. Yom Kippur is a Holy Convocation in which no work is permitted. Yom Kippur is also a fast day. It is a complete 25-hour fast that begins sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ends after sunset on the day of Yom Kippur. It is customary to wear white on Yom Kippur to symbolize purity and cleanness from sin.



Sukkot (Lev. 23:39-42a)



Sukkot is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles. Sukkot begins on the fifteenth of Tishrei and last for seven days. The first and eighth days are Holy Convocations in which no work is permitted. During Sukkot we are to “dwell in booths” or a sukkah for seven days. We dwell in booths to remind us of the temporary dwelling places in the wilderness. There are no laws in scripture pertaining to the specifics of how a sukkah must be built, just that it is temporary. Tradition however says it must have at least two and a half walls that will not blow away in the wind. The walls could be canvas, wood, bamboo, cornstalks, etc. And traditionally speaking you should be able to see stars through the ceiling. Many people also decorate their sukkah. During Sukkot we are to also worship the Lord with what is known as The Four Species (Lev. 23:40). The Four Species are also known as the Lulav and Etrog. The Four Species are made up of an Etrog (a citrus fruit native to Israel, similar to a lemon), a palm branch, two willow branches and three myrtle branches. The six branches are bound together and are referred to as the Lulav. While holding the four species a blessing is said and the species is waved in six directions, East, South, West, North, Up and Down to symbolize God being everywhere.

Chanukkah

Chanukah begins on the twenty-fifth of Kislev and lasts for eight days. Chanukah is also known as the Feast of Dedication and the Festival of Lights. Chanukah is also spelled many different ways including: Chanukah, Chanukkah, Hanukah, Hanukkah, and many more. Chanukah is about the rededication of the Temple after it was defiled by Antiochus IV. According to tradition, at the time of the rededication, there was very little oil left that had not been defiled by the Greeks. The oil was needed to light the menorah in the Temple. Tradition says there was only enough oil for one day, but it miraculously lasted for eight days which is the amount of time it took to make more of the oil. There is no proof this actually happened, it is purely tradition. During Chanukah we light candles in a nine branched menorah often called a chanukiah. There are eight branches for the eight days of Chanukah as well as a ninth branch called the Shammus (servant) branch which is used to light the other candles. Each night one more candle is added. For example, the first night you will have one candle in the far right branch plus the shammus candle which is often in the center branch and is taller than all the other candles. The candles are placed in the chanukiah from right to left but the candles are light from left to right, always lighting the newest candle first. The shammus is always light first and then used to light all the other candles. There are traditionally three blessings recited after lighting the shammus candle on the first night and then only two of those blessings are recited for the remaining seven days. It is also a tradition to eat fried foods during Chanukah such as Latkes and Sufganyot. Latkes are essentially potato pancakes and sufganyot are doughnuts that are often filled with jelly. Latkes are pronounced like "lot-kuhs" or "lot-keys" depending on dialect. Sufganyot are pronounced like "soof-gone-E-oat". Some people like to give gifts during Chanukah but it is not one of the most common traditions. Another fun tradition is playing dreidel. Dreidel is a game played with a spinning top called a dreidel. The dreidel is marked with four Hebrew letters, the Nun, Gimel, Hey and Shin. Each letter stands for the Hebrew phrase "Nes Gadol Hayah Sham", meaning "a great miracle happened there". Often dreidel is played for "gelt" (small amounts of money made of chocolate).



Purim (Esther)



Purim means "lots" referring to the lottery that Haman used to choose the date for the massacre of the Jews. Purim is celebrated on the fourteenth day of Adar. The fourteenth was chosen because it is the day that the Jews battled for their lives and won. The fifteenth is celebrated as Purim also because the book of Esther says that in Shushan (a walled city), deliverance from the scheduled massacre was not completed until the next day. So the fifteenth is referred to as Shushan Purim. It is customary to read the book of Esther on Purim. While reading it is tradition to boo, hiss, stamp feet and rattle gragers (noise makers) whenever Haman's name is mentioned for the purpose of "blotting out the name of Haman". It is customary to have a party during Purim. It is tradition to dress up and to "eat, drink and be merry". Gifts are often given during Purim to friends, family and charity. Hamantaschen is a triangular fruit-filled cookie that is common to make for Purim as well. Hamantaschen is pronounce like "Ha-men-tah-sh-en" and literally means "Haman's pocket" and is meant to represent Haman's three cornered hat.

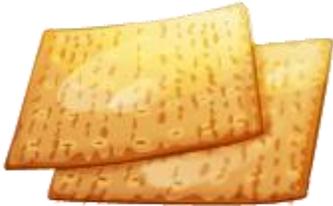
Passover (Lev. 23:5)

Passover is the fourteenth day of the month Nissan. Passover is celebrated in Jewish homes with a Seder. The story of Passover is often recounted during the Seder and read from a Haggadah. Traditionally symbolic foods like Charoset and Horseradish are eaten. The symbolic foods are placed on a specific plate called a Seder plate/tray. No leavened foods are eaten during Passover. The Passover Seder is a reminder to the families celebrating of their ancestors suffering in Egypt and of the miraculous deliverance from their bondage.



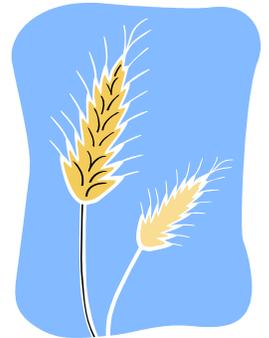
Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the fifteenth day of Nissan and lasts for seven days. The first and seventh days are Holy Convocations in which no work is permitted. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread no food with leaven is eaten. In the days leading up to Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread Jewish families clean their homes of any leaven so as not to cause defilement during the feast. The unleavened bread eaten during the feast is called Matzo. Matzo is pronounced like “Ma-tzah”.



First Fruits (Lev. 23:10-14)

The Feast of Firstfruits is a celebration of the barley harvest which began in the month of Nissan. It was required of the Israelites to bring the first sheaf of their harvest to the Temple as a wave offering. Feast of Firstfruits also begins the counting of the Omer leading up to Shavuot.



Shavuot (Lev. 23:15-21)

Shavuot is to take place exactly seven Sabbaths and one day or fifty days total from Firstfruits. In Hebrew Shavuot means “weeks”. Shavuot is often called Pentecost which means “fifty” in Greek. Shavuot, like Firstfruits, is a harvest festival in which the Israelites were to present an offering of new grain (in this case wheat) to the Lord in the Temple. Today Shavuot is celebrated in Israel by reading the account of the giving of the Law in Exodus chapters 19 and 20. The book of Ruth is also read because it is a book of harvest and redemption. It is customary to eat dairy foods like cheese during Shavuot.



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