

Days of Awe



An antelope horn is pictured on the left along with other Shofars. The Chitat is read during the Rosh Hashana services. TIFFANY SMART

Reflection comes at a time of virtual Rosh Hashana

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While many across the world may think they have been living in a time of "awe," surprised by events over which they have no control, for others, the words, "Days of Awe," have another, more reverential meaning.

For Jews across the globe, Friday at sundown marked the beginning of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashana. And with it, the following 10 days, the Days of Awe, will signal the time when Jews are called to consider their behaviors, the things for which they must repent, and to make plans to begin the changes for which God calls.

At the end of the 10 days, there follows the most holy day in the Hebrew calendar, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, on Sept. 28. Scholars describe this day of a 25-hour fast as the day when God decides, "seals," each person's fate for the following year.

It is, in a way, the last chance to atone for what was not pleasing to God, to make amends, and ask forgiveness, with the belief that God is merciful.

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Rabbi Michael Shields became the leader of Temple Israel in 2019. The Temple has created High Holy Days videos so families can study together. TORI LYNN SCHNEIDER/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Rosh Hashana

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Teshuvah (repentance), Tefilah (prayer), Tzedakah (charity) are words that are heard during Rosh Hashana, also called, the “Head of the Year.”

What is also heard is a sound synonymous with Judaism, the shofar, the long, curved ram’s horn whose 30 to 101 elongated or quivering Rosh Hashana blasts signal the joy of awakening or of repentance. The horn of the ram also touches upon the relationship between God and Abraham when God permitted the prophet to sacrifice a sheep instead of his son, Isaac.

During these days, white will be worn in skull caps, on the curtain covering the Ark, and the Torah mantle, all symbolizing purity.

Other rituals include scattering bread crumbs into a running body of water signifying the abandoning of sin and the beginning of a new life, and the dipping of a piece of challah bread or apple into a bit of honey, representing the hope for “a good, sweet year.”

Rabbi Michael Shields, who has headed Temple Israel for the last 14 months acknowledges how different this year’s High Holy Days will be. “Yes, since the COVID outbreak, there are certain things that cannot be duplicated when you are not praying in person,” Shields said.

Temple Israel was one of the first houses of worship

that in early March adapted services to online. “But there have been other things which have grown better.”

“We are actually seeing a greater number of participants in services than before. Extended families, people who are working long or unusual hours, friends from distant places, we find are tuning into our virtual services.”

Shields doesn’t see the Temple reverting to only in-person attendance when the pandemic has passed.

“For Jews, the home was always to be a sacred place where religious and family life were not separated. Now, with religious practice again taking place within the home...though via computer... we see that returning.”

Seniors too, now used to digital device manipulation, have renewed or deepened supportive relationships within the Temple family... “not just a brief hello at the end of a service, but now phone calls among people who are developing true friendships.”

Shields says that the Temple has created High Holy Days “story time” videos so that families can watch and study together from home, and though there will be a real service held in the garden on the second day of Rosh Hashana, it will be by reservation only, and limited to 20 persons.

All are welcome to contact Temple Israel and learn how to become part of a Facebook live-streamed service for both the High Holy Days and other services 850-877-3517 and israeltlh.org

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