



# tishrei

## tishrei on one foot

Tishrei is a month that is full of Jewish holidays!

Rosh Hashana 1 & 2 Tishrei  
 Fast of Gedaliah 3 Tishrei  
 Yom Kippur 10 Tishrei  
 Sukkot 15 Tishrei  
 Shemini Atzeret 22 Tishrei  
 Simchat Torah 23 Tishrei

Tishrei is known as the Month of mercy and forgiveness. The Selichot prayers are said prior to the month's beginning and up until Yom Kippur to help put us into the appropriate frame of mind for self-reflection. The announcement for Tishrei begins at the beginning of the prior month, Elul, with the blowing of the shofar. There is no Birkat HaHodesh prayer for the coming month said on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashana.

During Tishrei, Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the second tablets (Ten Commandments).

## holiday highlight: sukkot

**Sukkot** is a holiday with roots in many different parts of the Jewish tradition. Sukkot is one of the Shalosh Regalim, three pilgrimage festivals during the time of the Temple in which Jews would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. Sukkot commemorates the wandering of the Jews in the desert for 40 years. During that time, the Jews lived in temporary huts or booths (sukkot in Hebrew). Sukkot is often times referred to as Z'man Simchateinu or the time of our rejoicing. In contrast to the solemn message of the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, Sukkot is a joyous festival.

הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לַיהוָה: בְּיוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן  
 מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ כָּל־מְלֹאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּקְרְיֻבוּ אִשָּׁה  
 לַיהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה  
 עֲצֵרֶת הוּא כָּל־מְלֹאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ:

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפַּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנַף עֵץ־עֵבֶת  
 וְעֲרֵבֵי־נָחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: וְחַגְגַּתֶּם אִתּוֹ חַג  
 לַיהוָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה חֲקַת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי תַחֲנוּ  
 אִתּוֹ: בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל־הָאֹזֶרֶת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ  
 בַּסֻּכּוֹת: לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַּסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה  
 אֶת־מִעַרְי יְהוָה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

On the fifteenth day of this seventh month there shall be the Feast of Booths to the Lord [to last] seven days. The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations: seven days you shall bring offerings by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion and bring an offering ... it is a solemn gathering: you shall not work at your occupations. ... On the first day you shall take the product of *hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall observe it as a festival of the Lord for seven days in the year; you shall observe it in the seventh month as a law for all time, throughout the ages. You shall live in booths seven days all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that future generations may know that I mad the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. (*Vayikra*. 23:34-36, 40-43)



## observance and practice

Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, has great significance as a day of beginnings, concealment, balance, and atonement. Rosh Hashana marks the beginning of the month of Tishrei, sometimes referred to as the first month of the year. In Hebrew, Rosh Hashana means, literally “head of the year” or “first of the year”.

It is said that the world was created in the month of Tishrei, the patriarchs were born during Tishrei, Joseph was freed from prison during Tishrei, the Israelites were freed from slavery during Tishrei, and mankind began during Tishrei. The significance of these events led the Jewish people to mark Rosh Hashana as a day of beginning, rather than the month of Nissan, which is often regarded as the first month of the year.

The name “Rosh Hashana” is not used in the Bible to discuss this holiday. The Bible refers to the holiday as Yom Ha-Zikaron (the day of remembrance) or Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar).

While Yom Kippur is known as the Day of Atonement, it is Rosh Hashana that starts off the spirit of judgment and balancing sin and merit. Rambam (b.1135 – d.1204) taught that man should act as if he is precisely half sin and half meritorious, therefore each sin or each mitzvah is capable of tipping the scale. It is customary to eat a piece of apple dipped in honey to ensure a sweet new year, and a pomegranate to ensure that our merits are as “plentiful as the seeds of a pomegranate”.

One of the most important rituals of Rosh Hashana is the sounding of the Shofar. This sounding contains several meanings, and has a very specific order to the sounds.

It is customary to perform a service known as Tashlich on the first day of Rosh Hashana (if the first day is Shabbat, then Tashlich occurs on the second day). In this service, individuals symbolically cast away their sins

## examining the rituals:

“On Rosh Hashana all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him [in judgment] like a flock of sheep” (M. *Rosh Hashana* 1:2).

“All are judged on Rosh Hashana, and the verdict is sealed on Yom Kippur” (Tosefta, *Rosh Hashana* 1:12).

“Rabbi Kruspedai said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: ‘Three books are opened on Rosh Hashana, one for the utterly wicked, one for the perfectly righteous, and one for the intermediates. The perfectly righteous are straightaway inscribed and sealed for life; the wicked are straightaway inscribed and sealed for death; the intermediates are suspended and wait from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are inscribed for life; if not—they are inscribed for death’” (B. *R.H.* 16b).

These passages make it apparent that in talmudic times, Rosh Hashana had already developed into a day of reflection, repentance, and judgment. Whereas in the case of Yom Kippur the Bible tells us: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you; from all your sins shall you be clean before, the Lord” (Lev. 16,30), in the case of Rosh Hashana there is no mention that it is a New Year festival or that it is a day of judgment, but only that it is a *yom teru’ah* or *zikhron teru’ah* (i.e. a day of Shofar blowing, or remembering the sound of the shofar). The name Rosh Hashana occurs for the first time in the Mishnah, in *Rosh Hashana* 1:1 where we are told that there are four “Rosh Hashana” or “new year” days. The first of the month of Tishri, was designated for calculating the years of foreign kings and the sabbatical and Jubilee years, and for planting trees and vegetables.

The festival was also known as Yom Hadin, Day of Judgement, and Yom Hazikaron, Day of Remembrance. Each of these names conveys one of the characteristics of Rosh Hashana, but the name Rosh Hashana has become prevalent. It is based on tradition that the creation of the world was finished on the first of Tishrei (*Rosh Hashana* 11a). (JRP)

# one day or two? The Second Day of the Festival

According to the Bible, the festivals during which no work was to take place comprised on day of Rosh Hashana, one day of Yom Kippur, the first and last days of Sukkot, the first and last days of Pesah and one day of Shavuot. Later, one day was added to each of these with the exception of Yom Kippur (Babylonian Talmud bet (abbreviation is not explained in source 4b-5a).

This practice [of observing a two day holiday] on the way the calendar was calculated in ancient times. Originally, the beginning of each month was determined by direct observation of the phases of the moon. A council of the Sanhedrin sat in session beginning with the thirtieth of each month to receive witnesses who had seen the "new moon." If the tiniest crescent of the moon had been observed, to the satisfaction of the court, the day was declared Rosh Hodesh. If not, then the next day was declared Rosh Hodesh (M. R.H. 2:5-7).

When the court declared the new moon to be mekadash (sanctified),

the news was spread to the people by means of beacons lit on the tops of mountains (M. R.H. 2:4). When the awaited signal was observed on neighboring mountains, similar fires were lit "until one could behold the whole of the diaspora before him like a mass of fire" (Mishnah Rosh Hashana 2:4). When the Samaritans deliberately attempted to confuse the Jews by lighting such signals at the wrong time, the practice was discontinued. In its place messengers were sent to convey the news (Mishnah Rosh Hashana 2:2).

This put those who lived far away at a disadvantage. In the case of Rosh Hashana the disadvantage was particularly strong, since Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first of the month and therefore no time was left for the messengers to arrive. This problem gave birth to the Yom Tov Sheni Shel Galut (the second day of the festival observed in

the diaspora). Residents of places that the messengers did not reach observed all the festivals for two days since they could not be sure whether the first of the month was on the thirtieth of the previous month or on the thirty-first (B. Bet. 4b).

A two-day Rosh Hashana was sometimes observed even in Jerusalem, for the residents began to observe the festival on the thirtieth day lest the witnesses come and testify that they had seen the new moon that day. If they came late that day, another day had to be observed (Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashana 30b). Only in the case of Yom Kippur was one day observed since the observance of two days would cause undue hardship.

When the calendar became fixed, the custom of observing two days was retained in the diaspora (B. Bet. 4b) In Israel one day was observed, as it is today with the exception of Rosh Hashana. There is good authority for the theory that Rosh Hashana was observed only one day until the thirteenth century (see Wahrman, Hagei Yisrael Umoaday, pg 25 f.). (JRP)

**since modern communication methods can ensure that everyone around the world will know exactly when a yom tov will begin, is it necessary to still have holidays observed for two days?**



**Deeper Thoughts...**  
**On Rosh Hashanah, we read the Akedah-- the Binding of Isaac. What could Abraham have said to God to save Isaac?**

The day following Rosh Hashana is known as the **Fast of Gedaliah**. It commemorates the assassination of Gedaliah ben Achikam. After the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, Gedaliah was appointed to govern the Jews who remained in Israel. His assassination prompted those who had remained in Israel to depart

The ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are known as the **Days of Repentance**. They represent the last days for which Jews can do Teshuvah (repentance) to other people.

The Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is known as **Shabbat Shuvah**, the Sabbath of return or repentance. there are slight additions and changes to our liturgy to reflect this importance of this day.



## observance and practice

Kol Nidrei--The Yom Kippur services begin with Kol Nidrei, which must be recited before sunset because it deals with the annulment of vows, and this cannot take place on a Sabbath or on a festival (Orach Hayim 619:1 in Rama and in M.A. 5).

Because of the extra solemnity of the day, the Talit is donned for the evening prayers, the only evening service of the year when this is done. Since the donning of the Talit is obligatory only during the day, it should be put on while it is still day so that the benediction may be recited.

(Levush, Orach Hayim 619:1; Orach Hayim 619 in Mishnah Berurah 4).

(JRP)

## thinking it through:

On Yom Kippur we recite a long list of sins we may or may not have committed during the previous year. These are the Al Het Prayers. They begin with the formula "for the sin we have committed."

List below three sins you have committed and the actions you will take to avoid committing them again.

1.

2.

3.



## examining the rituals:

Yom Kippur is the holiest and most solemn day of the year. Its central themes are atonement and reconciliation. Every act, every ritual, every observance, and every prayer heightens and accentuates the meaning of the day. Yom Kippur is, therefore, the only festival during which the prohibition of work is as severe as on the Sabbath. The exceptions made in the case of the other holidays in regard to cooking, using fire, and carrying do not apply to Yom Kippur (Orach Hayim 611:2). (Klein 209)

Yom Kippur has additional prohibitions that add to the solemnity of the day. We are forbidden to eat, drink, bathe, anoint ourselves, wear shoes, and have conjugal relations (Orach Hayim. 511:1; Talmud Bavli, Yoma 11a).

## perspectives:

Rabbi Richard Kalmin<sup>1</sup>

No day of the Jewish year is as dramatic as Yom Kippur. We sense the anticipation of the throngs crowding into the synagogue, and draw in our breath at the first haunting notes of Kol Nidre.

**The images of God** as all-powerful judge, sovereign and father intensify the impact of the Yom Kippur liturgy. Our other traditional images of God as protector, refuge and comforter are overwhelmed. Our defenses are worn down as the repetition of words and phrases, the extended periods of standing and the long hours of fasting draw us out of our everyday lives and carry us deep into the world created by the liturgy.

Sacred Theater Excerpted from Masoret Magazine, Fall 1995

**Deeper Thoughts...**  
**The Book of Jonah is read on Yom Kippur. What is its central message? Is it an effective way to get the message across? What does it say about our relationship with God?**



# thinking it through

## Names of God

Rabbi Kalmin describes some of the visual names we have for God during the high holidays. Below you will find over 100 names that we use to refer to God. These names come from Jewish liturgy and from Torah.

**Why are there so many names for God?**

**Are there different times that we use different name to refer to God? Why?**

**Are there any names that you would want to add to this list?**

- |                                    |                               |   |  |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Adonai, "My Lord"                  | Lover of His People           | The Merciful                                  | Sovereign  |
| King                               | Israel                        | The Holy God                                  | The Compassionate One  |
| Lord                               | The Ransomer                  | The Place                                     | The Patient One  |
| The True God                       | The Merciful One              | The Might                                     | The Bountiful One  |
| The Divinity                       | The Merciful                  | The Faithful One                              | The One Who is Forgiveness                                   |
| The Fear of Isaac                  | The Holy God                  | Lord of the Universe                          | The Generous One   |
| Mighty One of Jacob                | The Place                     | He Who Spoke and the Universe Came Into Being | The Eternal Hidden of Hidden                                 |
| El the God of (The Patriot) Israel | The Might                     | Our Father in Heaven                          | Ancient of Ancients  |
| Most High                          | The Faithful One              | The Infinite                                  | The First Cause  |
| Everlasting God                    | Lord of the Universe          | The Possessor of Will                         | World-Soul   |
| God Almighty                       | Our Father in Heaven          | Hosts   | Absolute Spirit  |
| God of Vision                      | The Infinite                  | King of Compassion and Mercy                  | Absolute Rest  |
| God of the Covenant                | The Possessor of Will         | Rock of Our Lives                             | The Power That Makes for Salvation                           |
| Everlasting King                   | Hosts                         | The Good One                                  | The Power That Makes for The Fulfillment of All Valid Ideals |
| Everlasting Rock                   | King of Compassion and Mercy  | He Who is Merciful                            | Lord, Man of War   |
| Ancient God                        | Rock of Our Lives             | Maker of Peace                                | The Lord Who Hides His Face                                  |
| Everlasting Arms                   | He Who is Merciful            | "Thankworthy" God                             |  |
| Everlasting Life                   | Maker of Peace                | The Holy King                                 |  |
| YHWH, "He causes to Be"            | "Thankworthy" God             | The Redeemer                                  |  |
| I am that I am                     | The Holy King                 | The Guide                                     |  |
| Lord of Hosts                      | The Redeemer                  | Our God, God of Our Ancestors                 |  |
| Creator of Heaven and Earth        | The Guide                     | God of Abraham                                |  |
| Holy One                           | Our God, God of Our Ancestors | God of Isaac                                  |  |
| Holy One of Israel                 | God of Abraham                | God of Jacob                                  |  |
| Shepherd of Israel                 | God of Isaac                  | The Mighty One                                |  |
| The Rock                           | God of Jacob                  | The Heroic One                                |  |
| King of Israel                     | The Mighty One                | Acquirer of All                               |  |
| The God of Truth                   | The Heroic One                | The Living Lord                               |  |
| Former of All                      | Acquirer of All               | Rescuer                                       |  |
| Praiseworthy God                   | The Living Lord               | Reviver of the Dead                           |  |
| Guardian of Israel                 | Rescuer                       | Father of Mercy                               |  |
| Shield of Abraham                  | Reviver of the Dead           | The Merciful One                              |  |
| Rock of Israel                     | Father of Mercy               |   |  |
| King over the kings of kings       | The Merciful One              |   |  |
| The Name                           |                               |   |  |
| Judge of the Earth                 |                               |   |  |
| The Awesome One                    |                               |   |  |
| My Rock                            |                               |   |  |
| Eternal One of Israel              |                               |   |  |
| Ever-living God                    |                               |   |  |

*Higher and Higher: Making Jewish Prayer Part of Us. Steven M. Brown pg 62-64*

# heshbon ha-nefesh

As we enter the New Year, this is the time where we need to pause to take stock of what we have and what we are doing. This is the time to set a new direction and determine where we want to be. Rosh Hashanah is a time for heshbon hanefesh, self-inventory. The idea of heshbon hanefesh is based upon the assumption that human beings have the ability to evaluate themselves and make decisions about their lives. The heshbon hanefesh is a critical assessment of the past, together with hopeful anticipation and resolve for the future.

Heshbon hanefesh is the first step in teshuvah, repentance. The Hebrew word teshuvah comes from the word for return. Repentance in the Jewish view is a return to the right path.

**What do you think is really important in life? Why did you choose these things? What are you doing now to make them important?**

Knowing what you want in life and striving to get there will keep you motivated, the more you work towards your goals, the more likely you are to reach them. People who don't have goals or who can't picture themselves doing anything positive with their lives, often end up right where they expected and may feel unhappy and unfulfilled

**WHAT IS YOUR DESTINATION? What are some questions that we might ask yourself at the end of your career? Would you be happy with the answers?**

Rava said: When a person is led in for judgment, they are asked, "Did you deal with integrity in business? Did you fix times for learning? Did you have children? Did you hope for salvation? Did you study wisdom? Did you think?"  
(Talmud: Shabbat 31A)

Akaviah ben Mahalalel taught: Ponder three things and you will avoid falling into sin: Know your origin, your destination, and before Whom you will be required to give an accounting.  
Your origin? A putrid drop.  
Your destination? A place of dust, worms, and maggots.  
Before Whom will you be required to give an accounting?  
Before the King of Kings, the Holy One, praised be God.  
(Pirke Avot 3:1)

(Note: Akaviah was a student of Hillel's)

## **the ashamnu prayer**

This is a well-known confessional prayer from the High Holiday Machzor. The original Hebrew is constructed so that each succeeding word begins with the next letter of the alphabet. The Ashamnu is our liturgical way of facing up to what we have done over the past year and literally accounting to God and to ourselves.

We are not so arrogant or presumptuous as to claim that we are righteous and without sin.  
Indeed we have sinned:  
We abuse, we betray, we are cruel  
We destroy, we embitter, we falsify  
We gossip, we hate, we insult  
We jeer, we kill, we lie  
We mock, we neglect, we oppress  
We pervert, we quarrel, we rebel  
We steal, we transgress, we are unkind  
We are violent, we are wicked, we are xenophobic.  
We yield to evil, we are zealots.  
We have ignored Your commandments and statutes, and it has not profited us. You are just, we have stumbled. You have acted faithfully, we have been unrighteous.

Ashamnu, High Holiday Machzor

## observance and practice

It begins on the fifteenth of Tishrei and continues for seven days. The first two of these are celebrated as full holidays with all the prescriptions already mentioned. The five days that follow are *Hol Hamo'ed*—intermediate days which retain some aspects of the festival. The seventh day (the fifth of the Intermediate Days) is Hosha'nah Rabbah, with special observances of its own. There follow two concluding days which are separate festivals (Shimi regel b'fnei atzmo) (Bavli *Sukkot* 47a) and bear individual names: Shemini Atseret and Simhat Torah. (JRP)

Sukkot is a harvest festival during which we rejoice over the bounty of the harvest and are given an opportunity to thank God for his blessings. While the Sukkah symbolizes the historical aspect of the festival, the Four Species bring to mind the agricultural.

### Hallel - Prayer of Praise

Reflecting the unadulterated spiritual joy on tap during this holiday, the full Hallel, prayer of praise recited during morning services, is said each day of Sukkot. In contrast, for most of Passover's seven days an abridged Hallel is recited.

# סוכות



The four species make up the lulav and etrog. A lulav contains three parts, the palm fronds, myrtle branches and willow branches

A midrash in Vayikrah Rabba 30:12 explains the items as symbols of the importance of unity among different types of Jews. The etrog, a fruit, has both a flavor and a scent, like a Jew who is both learned and observant of the commandments. The lulav is from a date palm, and so it has a taste but no scent. It is likened to a Jew who is learned but does not apply that knowledge in action. A myrtle has a pleasant odor but there is nothing tasty about it, and it parallel is the Jew who has little book learning behind his or her observance. Finally the willow lacks both fragrance and food value, just like the Jew who neither studies the Torah nor keeps the commandments. The differences between Jews may be substantial, but, like the lulav and etrog which must be held together for the waving ritual, only when Jews come together do they merit a blessing. etrog together for the blessing informs the meaning of the metaphor. The secret ingredient to achieving the true happiness promised by Sukkot is to feel unity within, to be true to oneself and not say one thing and feel another.

**With which part of the Lulav and Etrog can you associate yourself?**

## what's in a name?

Pilgrimage Festivals have a threefold significance: historical, agricultural, and ideological. The festival of **Sukkot** is a Pilgrimage Festival. Sukkot is the last in the cycle of pilgrimage festivals. Passover and Shavuot are the other two. When the ancient Holy Temple stood, Jews gathered in Jerusalem for special sacrifices and ceremonies to mark the day. Each of the three festivals, known collectively as the Shalosh Regalim, the three on foot (a reference to the mode of transport used by the pilgrims), has historical and agricultural components.

The names of the festival also reflect these various themes. The name used most often is *Sukkot*, (the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles); it is also called Chag Ha'Asif (the Feast of Gathering) and simply Chag, the festival par excellence. While rejoicing is enjoined for all festivals, in the case of Sukkot an extra measure of enjoyment was prescribed. Hence in the Amidah the descriptive phrase for this particular festival is (zman simchateinu). The three names are also indicative of the religious truths that the festival seeks to impart.

In our day Sukkot should become a call to the ethical life, free from the corruption and vices of the affluent society. The name Chag Ha'Asif (Feast of Gathering) reminds us to thank God for the many fruits of the earth. It's easy to look at the work of modern farmers and forget that the harvest is in God's hands. Recognizing God's place at the center in the wheel of fortune keeps our egos in check during the good times and keeps despair in its place during hard times.

# examining the rituals

While the Sukkah symbolizes the historical aspect of the festival, the Four Species bring to mind the agricultural,

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרֵי עֵץ הָדָר פַּתַּת תְּמָרִים  
וְעֵנַף עֵץ-עָבֹת וְעַרְבֵי-נַחַל  
וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

“on the first day you shall take the product of *hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days” (Vayikra 23:40).

The Tanakh stresses the historical aspect:

בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל-הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל  
יֹשְׁבוּ בַסֻּכּוֹת: לְמַעַן יָדַעוּ דַרְתֵּיכֶם כִּי בַסֻּכּוֹת  
הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

“You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (Vayikra, 23:42, 43).

כִּי כָל-הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִעָנֶה בְּעַצְמָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְנִכְרְתָה  
מֵעַמּוּהָ:

The agricultural theme is indicated earlier: “when you have gathered in the yield of your land, you shall observe the festival of the Lord [to last] seven days” (Vayikra 23:29).

Sukkot is thus a harvest festival during which we rejoice over the bounty of the harvest and are given an opportunity to thank God for his blessings.

# perspectives on sukkot

Anne Lapidus Lerner<sup>1</sup>



Sukkot is a sensory celebration. After spending Yom Kippur denying the most basic needs of our bodies, we immediately set about building the

very physical sukkah. From hammering the first nail to dismantling the structure, Sukkot offers a riot of tastes, smells, touches, sights and sounds.

The foods of the bountiful harvest and the scent of the lulav and etrog surround us. Colorful posters, collages of New Year’s cards and even Persian rugs are among the various wall decorations inside the sukkah, and fruits of the harvest hang from a roof made of tree branches. Even the smells of the sukkah are special. One local non-Jewish elementary school child visited the Jewish Theological Seminary sukkah in New York and exclaimed, “It’s like walking into a Christmas tree!”

What does the sukkah mean? We are commanded to dwell in the sukkah—to eat all our meals in it, to sleep in it, to study Torah in it, even to relax in it. Living in this temporary shelter is a deeply physical experience that ties us to our ultimate experience of homelessness, the Exodus from Egypt. We were a nation newly born, adrift in the desert, living in temporary huts. Sukkot also links us to the agricultural cycle in Israel and reminds us of the fragility of the food chain. Like the farmers who sleep outside near their crops at harvest time, we also sleep outside on Sukkot.

<sup>1</sup>Sukkot Beyond the Sensory Feast, JTS Magazine Fall 1997

## thinking it through:

What makes Sukkot a “sensory celebration?”

Is an agricultural custom relevant today?

List other holidays and share the reasons why they are able to stimulate your senses as well:



## thinking it through:



### Discussion Questions:

In the tanakh the sukkah is referred to as a type of temporary dwelling used by the Israelites in the desert. **What does the sukkah symbolize for you today?**

### Building a Sukkah:

Guidelines for Building a Sukkah:

At least three walls

The schach (roofing) should consist of plant life that grows from the ground but is no longer connected to a tree or the ground.

Your sukkah should be free and clear to see the sky overhead; it should not be placed under trees, awnings or overhangs.

The schach should provide shade but not block the sky completely.

The maximum height (given in the ancient measurement of amot) of a sukkah is approximately 30 feet.

The minimum height is approximately three feet.

**Why do you think there is a height maximum?**

**Why should no trees be allowed to hang over the roof of a sukkah?**

**Why must the branches be separated from the ground?**

**List a few spiritual and practical reasons for each of these rules.**

**Create your own scenarios-- Pick one answer from the list of spiritual and practical reasons above and write a scenario that would explain why the rule is important and valuable to maintaining the spirit of Sukkot.**

You may want to consider issues such as safety, practicality and modesty in your answers as well as spirituality.---

**Sample Scenarios:** A wealthy person is prevented from building a sukkah as high as his many storied house. On the one hand, he is stopped from demonstrating his affluence to the community with the grandeur of a very high sukkah, as it would be dangerous to construct, and potentially unwieldy. However, it is determined that if this person wants to create a very long and wide sukkah, that would be acceptable halachically. In *that* sukkah, however, many people could fit, providing an opportunity for many to fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah. Also, while the height would impede its construction or the placing of schach, the length would just add to the amount of schach needed to cover the sukkah.

While it makes sense that nothing unnatural or solid should be covering the roof of the sukkah, many wonder why not a tree, when the schach may even be branches from that very tree? There are a few reasons, imagine an apple tree dropping its apples above your yom tov meal, falling through the schach and landing in your soup! While a funny image, not one your family would probably enjoy during a holiday meal. Even for a non-fruit bearing tree, if a branch were to fall or lightening were to strike it, it could be dangerous to have a sukkah directly beneath the tree.



## observance and practice

**Simhat Torah**, the festival of rejoicing with the Torah, is a fitting finale for the holiday season, as it marks the completion of a full reading of the Torah. In the diaspora it falls on the ninth day of Sukkot, and is devoted completely to rejoicing. In Israel, where the eighth day is the last day, the practices of Simhat Torah are observed on Shemini Atzeret. (Klein 170-171)

The term **Simhat Torah** does not appear in the Torah. It does not even appear in the Talmud. What, then is the origin of this popular holiday which every Hebrew school child knows as a day of singing, dancing, flags, and some degree of chaos?

On the most basic level, *Simhat Torah* is the second day of *Shemini Atzeret*. As with every *Yom Tov*, diaspora Jews traditionally celebrate an additional day to that prescribed in the Torah. *Shemini Atzeret* is, itself, a bit of a hybrid. On the one hand, it is *shemini* (literally, the eighth) and concluding day of the fall pilgrimage festival (i.e., *Sukkot*). On the other hand, the Talmud relates that it is *regel bifnei atzmo*, a holiday unto itself. Still, the second day of every other festival (*Pesah*, *Shavuot*, *Sukkot*) simply bears the name of that festival. How did the second day of *Shemini Atzeret* get its own special designation?

Initially, in ancient Palestine, the Torah was divided into many more portions than the 54 we now use. However, in the first diaspora community of Babylonia, it became the custom to read the entire Torah on an annual cycle. Sometime during the Talmudic period (before 500 C.E.), it became customary to both end and immediately thereafter begin that annual cycle on *Shemini Atzeret* (or on the second day, in the diaspora).

*Adapted from USCJ Holiday Leaflet Dancing  
with Scrolls:  
Simhat Torah*

## perspectives:

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson <sup>1</sup>  
Simchat Torah celebrates God's gift of Torah to the Jewish people, and our age-old love affair with the Torah. As we swirl and dance with these precious scrolls, now may be a particularly appropriate time to consider what the Torah really means, and how it connects our lives to God's will....

Something happened in the early stages of our people's history which changed their destiny, and ours, forever. At some point, their awareness of God's presence became so overwhelming that they perceived the world in a new and deeper way. In response to an experienced encounter with the divine, the Jewish responded by committing their communal identity to that divine source. From that time forward, the marriage of the sacred with the ethical, the moral with the ritual, became the central calling of the Jewish people. The Torah represents the attempt of the Jewish people, across a millennium, to encapsulate that experience and its implications in words.

<sup>1</sup> *University of Judaism Parashat HaShavua section Shabbat/Shmini Atzeret: Thinking About Revelation, October 2004, Tishrei 5763*

**Deeper Thoughts...  
Hakafot (or circling) on  
Simchat Torah is a way to  
symbolically include everyone  
in the community. What other  
rituals can you think of that  
are inclusive to the  
community?**

# mitzvah of the month - tishrei

## Ushpizin- אושפיזין

### Inviting in Guests: Feeding the hungry

The tradition of Ushpizin, literally “holy guests” is a mystical tradition that holds that certain of our ancestors are invited in to the sukkah. The patriarchs and matriarchs are supposed to be welcomed in to join the meal. The invitation is a verbal one, “I invite to my meal, honored spiritual guests Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Miriam and Esther.” The Zohar warns that these “holy guests” will not join the celebration unless we also invite the poor. This may be a part of the reason that it has become custom to provide the food we would have served to these honored guests to those who are in need.

וּבִקְצֹרְכֶם אֶת־קְצִיר אֲרֻצְכֶם לֹא־תִכְלֶה פֶּאת שְׂדֶךְ בְּקִצְרֹךְ וְלִקְט קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעָנִי  
וְלִגֵּר תֵּעֹזֵב אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger. (Vayikra 23:22)

כִּי־יְהִיֶּה בְךָ אֲבִיוֹן  
מֵאֲחֵר אֲחִידָךְ בְּאֲחֵר שְׂעָרֶיךָ בְּאַרְצֶךָ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תֵאֶמֶן  
אֶת־לִבְבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת־יָדְךָ מֵאֲחִידָךְ הָאֲבִיוֹן:

... Lend him sufficient for his need. (D'varim 15:7)

וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּחַגֶּךָ אֹתָהּ וּבְנֶגְדָּהּ וּבְתֵדָהּ וּעִבְדֶּךָ וְאִמְתֶּךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהִיתוּם וְהָאֵלֶּמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:  
You shall rejoice in your festival (sukkot), with ... the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. (D'varim 16:14)

כִּי תִכְלֶה לַעֲשׂוֹר אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂר תְּבוּאָתְךָ בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁלִישִׁת שְׁנַת הַמַּעֲשֵׂר  
וְנִתְתָהּ לְלוֹי לִגֵּר לִיתוּם וְלֹא־לְמִנָּה וְאָכְלוּ בְשַׁעְרֶיךָ וּשְׂבָעוּ: וְאָמַרְתָּ לְפָנָי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּעֵרְתִּי  
הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִן־הַבַּיִת וְגַם נָתַתִּיו לְלוֹי וְלִגֵּר לִיתוּם וְלֹא־לְמִנָּה כְּכָל־מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי לֹא־עִבְרָתִי  
מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי:

When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your field ...you shall declare before the Eternal your God, “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as you have commanded me.” (D'varim 26:12-13)

Welcoming guests is greater than receiving the divine presence. (Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav, Talmud, Shabbat 127a)

[During Sukkot] one must also gladden the poor. (Zohar, Emor 103a)

While eating and drinking himself, one is obligated to feed the stranger, orphan, and widow, along with the other unfortunate poor... [One who does not] is not enjoying a mitzvah, but rather his stomach. (Rambam, Laws of Yom Tov 6:18)

## making the mitzvah your own



**on your own:** Volunteer at a soup kitchen or a food or clothing pantry. Sit down with someone there and talk to him or her, either someone who volunteers regularly or someone who benefits from the organization, and get to know his or her story.

lettries or other sundry items depending on the needs of the organizations in your community. If you don't have a local clothing pantry, clothing can be donated to programs such as Dress for Success, local shelters or the Salvation Army.

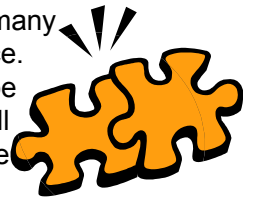


**with your family:** Time to clean the closets! As a family, decide whether to take on the food pantry or clothes closets. From pasta to shoes it is time to donate what is no longer used and/or those items that don't fit properly. If the house is already spic and span, join in on a Habitat for Humanity project with your family.



**with the community:** Along with your USY chapter or class, organize a food or clothing drive for your synagogue or larger community. You may want to gather toi-

**putting it together:** The reason that Sukkot is an appropriate time to focus on feeding, clothing and sheltering the hungry is that in addition to the commandments above, the Sukkah itself reminds us of how temporary and unreliable shelter can be. In addition, an issue that comes to mind when we feed the hungry is the issue of homelessness. By providing a shelter for someone, or by providing clothes for those who need them, you are aiding in many ways one who is in need of sustenance. By providing these resources you may be enabling someone to get a job which will keep him or her from being hungry in the future.



## tzedakah for the 21st century

**The Community Feeds the Hungry--**On a communal level, immediate sustenance should be available for the truly destitute with few, if any, questions asked. Programs like Mazon and Sova do this now on an ongoing basis.... Many synagogues and Jewish Family Service agencies collect money for the needy before Passover and Purim. Food may also be provided to the hungry by giving them food stamps or other supermarket vouchers rather than by running a soup-kitchen or food pantry....Jewish law holds us responsible for ensuring that our combined efforts supply food to the hungry in adequate quantities and with sufficient regularity to meet their nutritional needs, just as these needs were met in the soup-kitchens of long ago.

**The Community Gives Shelter to the Homeless--**Jewish communities made arrangements of varying sorts for the poor.... Some synagogues have opened their doors to the homeless on an ongoing basis. These synagogue shelters provide a warm sleeping place and a hot meal about 10-15 homeless men who have begun to find jobs and get back on their feet. Many of the synagogue shelters rely on nightly teams of volunteers who staff the shelter and help the men.

**Responding to Beggars on the Street--**Have you ever been approached by someone on the street asking for money? Would you give someone money if they asked? What if they appeared inebriated? What else could you do for that person? Jewish law requires that we give something to those who ask—or, if we cannot, that we at least treat them kindly. Jewish law intended, though, that we provide food for the hungry; if the beggar is asking for money, and if he or she is clearly inebriated or under the influence of drugs, we need not give this person money to feed his/her habit. On the contrary, that would be “placing a stumbling block before the blind,” a violation of Vayikra 19:14. To avoid this problem, some people keep food coupons with them that can be redeemed at various food establishments. No one is obliged by Jewish law to supply people who ask for help under such circumstances with large sums of money. It may, in fact, be counterproductive, for ultimately we do not want to encourage people to beg on the streets; we want them instead to get help from the agencies that we have created to supply assistance with continuity and with the professional expertise to assess and respond to people's actual needs. When people who are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol approach you on the street, knock on your door, or enter a synagogue asking for money, it is often hard to determine whether they are needy or simply manipulating your sense of compassion and the welfare system. There is no easy guideline for dealing with these situations. If possible, it is often best to refer them (and maybe even offer to take them) to the agencies established to deal with these needs, including governmental and private facilities, the Jewish Free Loan Society, and the Jewish Family Services; that both tests their need to get assistance and provides it in the most appropriate way possible. Most often, though, such a referral is not possible, and then it is probably better to give those asking something, knowing full well that you may be the object of deception, rather than pass by someone who is truly in need.

*(This section has been excerpted from “You shall strengthen them:” A Rabbinic Letter on The Poor” by Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff, pp30-34, used in Tzorchei Tzibbur, Revised edition, USCJ Dept of Youth Activities)*



# heshvan

## heshvan on one foot

The Rabbis often refer to this month as Mar Heshvan because it is without holidays. Mar means bitter, like the Maror we eat at the Passover seder.

Heshvan always has a two-day Rosh Hodesh, the second of which, the first of the new month, always falls on a Monday, Wednesday, Thursday or Shabbat.

On the seventh day of Heshvan those living in Israel begin requesting rain by adding “*Veten Tal U’Matar*” to their Amidah prayers. If no rain has fallen by the 17th, a drought is feared and ritual fasting and special prayer begins.

Though Rosh Hodesh occurs every month, it is the one occasion in Heshvan when we include some rituals which are reminiscent of a Jewish holiday celebration, such as saying Hallel and reading a specified section of the Torah (Bamidbar 28:1-15).

The Shabbat before the celebration of Rosh Hodesh is called Shabbat Mevorkhim HaHodesh, the Sabbath of Blessing the Month.

## holiday highlight: rosh hodesh

### The Fire of Rosh Hodesh: An Opening Ritual

In ancient times, two witnesses had to confirm the appearance of the new moon. The exact day of this appearance was crucial because the new moon would determine when the month began and when that year’s festivals would fall. The Mishnah reports that two witnesses would report that they had sighted the new moon to a court of judges in Jerusalem. These judges would examine the witnesses carefully to make sure their testimonies were identical, and then confirm that the new moon had indeed appeared (Mishnah Rosh haShana 2:6). In order to quickly transmit this knowledge to the far-flung Jewish community, bonfires were lit on hilltops around Jerusalem. Each community that saw the fires burning would light its own bonfire. Thus the news would pass from mountain to mountain and town to town, until all the Jews knew it was Rosh Hodesh, the new moon.

Some modern Rosh Hodesh groups, in remembrance of this custom, begin their rituals in the following way: After everyone in the group has been given an unlit candle, a single participant lights her candle from a central flame. Then she passes the flame to the next person in the group, until all the candles are lit. Through this ritual, we recall both the ancient bonfires of the Jewish people and the light of hope and warmth that we pass from one person to another.

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Jill Hammer *The Fire of Rosh Hodesh: An Opening Ritual from RitualWell.org*

## rosh hodesh in the sources

וּבְיוֹם שְׂמֵחַתְכֶם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֳדְשֵׁיכֶם וּתְקַעְתֶּם בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת עַל  
עֲלֹתֵיכֶם וְעַל זִבְחֵי שְׁלָמֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן לְפָנַי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

And on your joyous occasions - your fixed festivals and new moon days - you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being. They shall be a reminder of you before the Lord your God. (Bamidbar 10:10)

וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֳדְשֵׁיכֶם תִּקְרִיבוּ עֹלָה לַיהוָה פְּלִים בְּגִי-בָקָר שְׁנָיִם וְאַיִל אֶחָד  
כִּבְשִׂים בְּגִי-שָׁנָה שִׁבְעָה תְּמִימִם:

On your new moons you shall present a burnt offering to the Lord. (Bamidbar 28:11)

## observance and practice

Rosh Hodesh is now counted among the minor festivals, however, because in the course of the centuries, and especially after the destruction of the Temple, it lost its festive character. The only observances still associated with Rosh Hodesh are liturgical; there are no restrictions on work and no special rituals (Orach Hayim 417:1). In former times pious women used to refrain from working on Rosh Hodesh (ibid.) a custom based on the tradition that the women of the generation of the desert were rewarded with a festival of their own because they refused to cooperate when their husbands asked them to give their jewelry for the golden calf (Arukh Hashulhan 417:10, quoting Pirquei DeRabbi Eli'ezer; P. Ta'an. 1:6). Today, though, Rosh Hodesh differs from an ordinary weekday only in the order of the service, but it remains important because of its connection with the Jewish calendar.

(JRP)

What is noteworthy is the rebirth of Rosh Hodesh. Modern rituals have developed through women's Rosh Hodesh groups, adolescent and adult alike. Groups meet to discuss Jewish issues, world issues and women's issues amongst other topics. They have developed activities and rituals which range from poetry and prayer writing to symbolic foods and

A Hebrew month can have either 29 or 30 days since there are 29 1/2 days between each moon. If the month has 30 days, it is considered to be "Full".

The Shabbat before Rosh Hodesh is called Shabbat Mevorchim-- the Shabbat of Blessing. After the Torah reading, a special blessing is said announcing the new month and blessing the congregation. On Rosh Hodesh, we read special verses from the Torah-- Bamidbar 28:9-15. We also chant Hallel on Rosh Hodesh, the psalms of praise.

## examining the rituals

### How We Celebrate Rosh Hodesh

By Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin

The celebration of Rosh Hodesh begins the week before the new moon and continues up to 14 days afterward. The Shabbat before Rosh Hodesh is called Shabbat Mevorchim, the Sabbath of Blessing. After the Torah reading, the congregation rises. The Torah is lifted by the cantor, or other person leading the service, who begins to chant a special blessing on behalf of the congregation and all Israel. It is a prayer as tender as a parent's wish for a newborn, with a tune as soft and as embracing. It is a prayer full of hope and the power to overcome fear. A proclamation is then made, telling everyone when the New Moon will appear, down to the very hour. The congregation repeats the proclamation to reinforce the news.

Because the day of Rosh Hodesh is a semiholiday, we read from the Torah, Numbers 28:9—15, in the synagogue in its honor. (When Rosh Hodesh falls on Shabbat, we read that portion along with the regular weekly reading. A special haftarah, Isaiah 66:1-24, which speaks of hope and rebirth, replaces the haftarah that would otherwise accompany that Shabbat's parashah). Hallel, the psalms of praise and rejoicing, are recited. Tefillin—the black boxes and leather straps that Jews wrap around their arms and heads during weekday-morning blessings—are removed for the later part of the morning prayers as a sign of the New Moon's holiday status.

Rosh Hodesh is a holiday for everyone, but women have a special attachment to the day. For at least 2,000 years, Jewish women have celebrated the appearance of the New Moon in their own way, most notably by refraining from sewing, spinning, weaving or doing any needlework. It was a day on which women were free of family chores, a one- or two-day vacation they honored every month. In some communities, women would gather to light candles (perhaps recalling the bonfires of Israel), tell one another stories, enjoy one another's company.

Many societies associate women's bellies with the moon. In Judaism, the rabbis offered the following explanation for the special relationship between women and the new moon: After the Exodus, while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Torah from God, the Israelites, impatient and worried, succumbed to idolatry. They pooled their gold and made the golden calf. But in this case, the rabbis tell us, "the Israelites" means only the men. The women refused to participate; they refused to offer up their gold and jewelry for such an abomination. Yet when the time was right, they proved themselves generous, for upon Moses' return and the building of the Tabernacle, they gave abundantly of their mirrors and other prized belongings to

# perspectives on rosh hodesh

## The Moon - Renewed

By Karen Legman Segal

help make the sacred instruments of the Temple. God rewarded the women for their devotion and their generosity by granting them the New Moon as their holiday.

In the 1970's Jewish women around the world began to reclaim Rosh Hodesh. Once again women are celebrating the day. They sing songs, share stories, study Torah, comfort one another in response to recent losses, or rejoice at one another's successes and pleasures, large or small. It is a time of caring and connecting, of knowing that they belong. And for some, it is a moment of reconnecting to a tradition that they had thought had no place for them.

The celebration for Rosh Hodesh—for both men and women—continues with the Kiddush Halevanah, the sanctification of the New Moon, on the first or second Saturday night of the month. After the evening service, if the skies are clear and the moon can be seen, the congregation goes outdoors. Congregants turn their faces skyward and say:

Halleluyah. Praise God from the heavens, praise God from the heights...Blesses are You, God, Sovereign of the universe, Who with but a word created the heavens and who said to the moon that she will be renewed as a crown of splendor for all God's children, just as they are destined to be renewed like her. (A private prayer for those in need of healing or seeking to have a child is sometimes inserted here.)

Kiddush Halevanah cannot be said after the moon has reached its zenith. That time belongs to next month's New Moon.

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin *The Tapestry of Jewish Time* Behrman House Inc pg 48-52

Why should we celebrate? What's so special about the beginning of each month? Judaism honors the first day of each month. Rosh Hodesh, the new moon, with beautiful tradition and observance. Naturally, the term "new moon" connotes the use of the lunar calendar.

Judaism has evolved throughout the centuries, but has never attempted to disband or reject the use of the lunar calendar. Today a combination lunar-solar calendar is followed by Jews. Thereby, it incorporates the lunar calculations and adds the solar seasonal dimension. Essentially, the "new moon" celebration illustrates the uniqueness of observed time as opposed to calculated time.

The lunar year is usually composed of twelve months; Rosh Hodesh, a new month, depicts a new moon. Similar to the solar calendar, the days in each month can vary.

Therefore, thirty-day and twenty-nine-day months exist. Nisan, Sivan, Av, Tishri, Shevat, Adar I (in leap years) are thirty-day months bearing two days of Rosh Hodesh. Iyar, Tammuz, Elul, Tevet, and Adar (Adar II in leap years) celebrate one day of Rosh Hodesh because they only contain twenty-nine days to the month. The other two months, Cheshvan and Kislev, contain either 29 or 30 days, depending on the adjustment required in a given year.

Rosh Hodesh separates one month from another. This monthly separation causes each month to function independently. Each month becomes a distinct unit or building block of the Jewish calendar. Accord-

ingly, each month bears a personality unto its own. This unique interpretation allows the Jewish year to flow smoothly with monthly variations. Each month adds separate characteristics essential for the "total year." For example, the month of Elul prepares one for Rosh Hashana through repentance.

Amongst the Rosh Hodesh excitement, it is customary to relate redemption and hope for Israel's strength. In the blessing of the new month, *Birkat HaHodesh*, we say: "renew our lives in the coming month for good and for blessing ...give us a long life, a peaceful life with....sustenance and health

....Help us to live with honor and a love of Torah....Redeem us soon and gather our dispersed from the four corners of the earth...Bless us in the new month with life and peace, joy and gladness, deliverance, and consolation." Klal Yisrael, Israel, the Jewish people, remain a constant thought throughout this prayer, hope entwined with simplicity.

Jewish mystics and other Jewish seers associate the day before Rosh Hodesh with atonement. The name Yom Kippur Katan has been given to this day. A new month requires "minor" atonement. It is believed that one should purify the soul and repent before entering into a new month or "unit" of life. Klal Yisrael, the Jewish community, must thoughtfully begin each month bearing the responsibility of an entire nation!

Karen Legman Segal *The Moon - Renewed* Achshav! Summer 1977



# mitzvah of the month - heshvan

## Bikkur Holim-Visiting the Sick

וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ

You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Vayikra 19:18)

Moses cried unto the Lord, saying: 'Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee' (Bamidbar 12:13) "El na, refa na la; Please God, please heal her," spoken when Miriam was stricken with leprosy.

Visiting the sick is listed amongst the precepts which are rewarded both in this world and the world to come. (Talmud Bavli Shabbat 127a)

The Tanakh teaches that the Holy One visited the sick; [therefore] you should visit the sick. (Talmud Bavli, Sotah 14a)

### making the mitzvah your own



**on your own:** Create a packet of activities for a local children's hospital. Fill it with puzzles, games, mazes, short stories and the like. Help raise awareness about a cause you care about.

Whether you know someone affected by cancer or addiction, or you love the treatment center or research facility down the road, find ways of staying educated and getting your ideas out there. You can join a list-serve or add an awareness ribbon to your bag or an awareness bracelet to your wrist. These colored ribbons and bracelets are great because they prompt conversation. Most importantly, find ways to talk about illness and recovery. This will make it easier to spend time with people who are confronting those very issues.

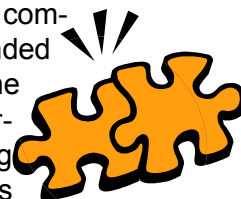
**with your family:** How do you treat your family members when they get sick? Do you look out for each other, providing food, comfort and extra tissues? Does someone have a special chicken soup recipe that you can learn? Offer to help out in any way that you can.



**with the community:** Schedule a group visit to a local hospital or hospice to talk to or play games with patients. You can even inquire with children's wards to set up a movie night or "coffeehouse" with performances. If there aren't any opportunities nearby, you can make necklaces or puzzles and craft get well cards to send as close as the nearest city or as far away as Israel.



**putting it together:** When we say the blessing for the new month, we pray for a long, peaceful life filled with sustenance and health. For those who are not in good health, our presence can help comfort and sustain them. As we are reminded in Leviticus, we are concerned with the wellbeing of "our neighbors as ourselves," this obligation which, along with God's own ability to perform this mitzvah, should inspire us to fulfill it as well.



### thinking it through - Who needs Bikkur Holim?

Sometimes it is hard to see a loved one; a friend or a family member sick in a hospital, or even at home. Visits can often be awkward in that it is hard to judge what to say, and how to say it. If you have ever been sick, what were your needs when people came to visit you?

**List 5 needs of a sick person. Think of 5 topics or questions to discuss with loved ones when you see them in a hospital.**

