

Important Days in Judaism



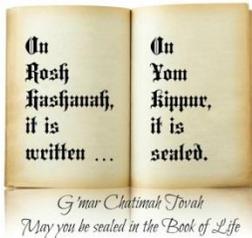
Shabbat is one of the best known and least understood of all Jewish observances. People who do not observe Shabbat think of it as a day filled with stifling restrictions or as a day of prayer. But to those who observe Shabbat, it is a precious gift from G-d, a day of great joy eagerly awaited throughout the week; a time when we can set aside all of our weekday concerns and devote ourselves to higher pursuits. Shabbat is the most important ritual observance in Judaism. It is the only ritual observance instituted in the Ten Commandments. It is also the most important special day, even more important than Yom Kippur. This is clear from the fact that more aliyot (opportunities for congregants to be called up to the Torah) are given on Shabbat than on any other day. Shabbat is primarily a day of rest and spiritual enrichment. The word "Shabbat" comes from the root Shin-Beit-Tav, meaning to cease, to

end, or to rest.



Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year. It is the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, and a Day of Judgment and Coronation of G-d as king.



Days of Awe

The ten days starting with Rosh Hashanah and ending with Yom Kippur are commonly known as the Days of Awe (Yamim Noraim) or the Days of Repentance. This is a time for serious introspection, a time to consider the sins of the previous year and repent before Yom Kippur. One of the ongoing themes of the Days of Awe is the concept that G-d has "books" that he writes our names in, writing down who will live and who will die, who will have a good life and who will have a bad life, for the next year. These books are written in on Rosh Hashanah, but our actions during the Days of Awe can alter G-d's decree. The actions that change the decree are "teshuvah, tefilah and tzedakah," repentance, prayer, good deeds (usually, charity). These "books" are sealed on Yom Kippur. This concept of writing in books is the source of the common greeting during this time is "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year."



Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year—the day on which we are closest to G-d and to the quintessence of our own souls. It is the Day of Atonement—"For on this day He will forgive you, to purify you, that you be cleansed from all your sins before G-d" (Leviticus 16:30).



Sukkot*

Sukkot is the holiday when we celebrate Jewish unity—as symbolized by the *sukkah*, whose holy walls bring us all together; and the Four Kinds, that symbolize the essential unity of all Jews, despite differing levels of Torah knowledge and observance.



Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

The holiday of Sukkot is followed by an independent holiday called Shemini Atzeret. In Israel, this is a one-day holiday; in the Diaspora it is a two-day holiday, and the second day is known as Simchat Torah. This holiday is characterized by utterly unbridled joy, which surpasses even the joy of Sukkot. The joy reaches its climax on Simchat Torah, when we celebrate the conclusion—and restart—of the annual Torah-reading cycle.



Chanukah

Chanukah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after a group of Jewish warriors defeated the occupying mighty Greek armies.



Tu B'Shevat

Tu B'Shevat, the 15th of Shevat on the Jewish calendar, is the day that marks the beginning of a “new year” for trees.



Purim

Purim celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the wicked Haman in the days of Queen Esther of Persia.



Passover*

Passover (Pesach) celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt



Shavuot*

Shavuot marks the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai. The Ten Commandments are read in synagogues, just as they were in the desert on Mt. Sinai over 3,300 years ago.



Yom Ha'atzmaut: Israel Independence Day

Held on the fifth day of the Hebrew calendar month of *Iyar*, *Yom Ha'atzmaut* is a modern holiday celebrating Israel's independence on May 14, 1948.

*The Three Pilgrimage Festivals, known as the *Shalosh Regalim*