



Rosh HaShanah & Yom Kippur

New Beginnings

Over the coming week we will be celebrating Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year. Rosh HaShanah (literally, "Head of the Year") is the Jewish New Year. We celebrate it on the first day of the Hebrew month Tishrei by sounding the shofar, eating round challah bread, and dipping apples in honey to represent a sweet New Year. As a community, we prepare for this holiday by reflecting on the year that has past and by thinking about how we can improve. At Alma, the children have been learning about the importance of accepting responsibility for mistakes they may have made and thinking about how they can avoid making those mistakes in the future.



The Hebrew month leading up to Rosh Hashanah is called Elul when Jewish people take time to consider how we can improve upon ourselves. In the month of Elul, there is a tradition of blowing the shofar every day and at Alma we have been blowing the shofar at the end of our morning tfillah (prayer service). Many children have had the opportunity to blow the shofar. Rosh Hashanah also marks the beginning of a 10-day period of prayer, self-examination and repentance. These are known as the Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe or High Holy Days) and are observed by prayer and reflection in synagogue.



Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement

Ten days after Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur is celebrated. This is the most important day in the Jewish calendar. All Jewish holidays begin the evening before at sundown. On Yom Kippur a big meal is served and eaten before sunset. Once the sun has set a 25 hour fast begins. The synagogue service on erev Yom Kippur following the meal is called Kol Nidre which means 'all vows'. It is a time when all promises and vows made the year before are nullified so that the year begins fresh. On Yom Kippur it is customary to spend most of the day in synagogue praying to be sealed in the book of life and reflecting on the past year and imagining the year to come. At the end of the fast period as the sun is setting the final service called Neilah begins. Here the gates are closing and the time for repenting is over. The day finishes with the final blast of the Shofar. There is a big meal called the Break fast that ends the fasting period and new year begins with a clean slate! Now it is time to start work on building the Sukkah!

Greetings & Customs

On Rosh Hashanah families gather for festive meals. Candles are lit, the Kiddush, the prayer over wine, is recited and challah and apples are dipped in honey for a sweet new year. We eat **honey cake**, because we want everyone to have a 'sweet' New Year. The Challah is different from the plaited challah we eat on Shabbat. The Rosh Hashanah challah is round, reminding us of the cycle of the year. Wearing new clothes and eating seasonal fruit remind us of the newness of the year.

HONEY CAKE RECIPE:

[HTTP://ALLRECIPES.CO.UK/
RECIPE/4816/ROSH-
HASHANAH-HONEY-
CAKE.ASPX](http://allrecipes.co.uk/recipe/4816/Rosh-Hashanah-Honey-Cake.aspx)

During the high holiday period Jewish people will greet each other saying 'Shanah Tovah' or 'Shanah Tovah Tekatevu' which means happy new year and may you be written [in the book of life]. Another greeting is Gamar Hatima Tovah [may you be sealed in the book of life]. This is because traditionally on Rosh Hashanah it is believed that names are inscribed in the Book of Life and ten days later, on Yom Kippur, the book is sealed. Those ten days are referred to as the ten days of repentance when there is the opportunity to apologize to our friends and family and to make peace with ourselves.

New Year's cards are sent and greetings are received.

Historically:

In ancient times, there were four "new years" in the Jewish calendar, each with its own significance: Nisan was the New Year of Kings, used to calculate the number of years a given king had reigned. Elul was the new year for animals, a time when one of every 10 cattle was marked and offered as a sacrifice to God. Sh'vat was the New Year of the Trees, and Tishrei was the agricultural new year, or the New Year of the Years. It is thought of as the anniversary of the creation of the world, Yom Harat Olam and became the "official" Jewish New Year around the second century C.E. according to the Mishnah. Before then, however, the day had many other designations. The oldest name according to the Torah is Yom T'ruah (Day of Sounding the Shofar). We mark this day as the "Day of Judgment" each year, hoping God chooses to inscribe us with the righteous in the Book of Life. We have the chance during the 10 days to repent before the Book of Life was sealed on Yom Kippur.

Rosh Hashana Song: Open the Gates of Justice

By Joe Black, based on Psalm 118.9, 22

Open the gates of justice, open the gates for me
Open the gates of righteousness, pitchu li
Open the gates of freedom, yes, we've traveled oh so far
Chorus: Pitchu li sha-arei tzedek, avo vam odeh Yah (2x)

Lock up the gates of hatred, throw away the key
Open the gates of righteousness, pitchu li
Open the gates of tomorrow, what are we waiting for?

Open the gates of justice, open the gates for me
Open the gates of righteousness, pitchu li
Open the gates of freedom, yes, we've traveled oh so far

This year at Alma we are focusing on the environment and are considering ways in which our school community can care for our world.

The Staff and Governors are therefore sending our wishes for a happy and health year to all our families and to our planet.