

RUSSELL SANDERS

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ROSH HA SHANAH – SIMCHAT TORAH

THE JEWISH HIGH HOLY DAYS - PART 7

THE DAYS OF AWE

Today is Tishri 7 on the Jewish civil calendar. Tishri 8 begins at sundown this evening. This is the seventh of the ten High Holy Days from Tishri 1 to Tishri 10 (Rosh Ha Shanah to Simchat Torah). The days in between are called the days of Awe. This present year of 2021 has the entire period from Rosh Ha Shanah to Simchat Torah, a total of 23 days falling entirely within our month of September. In most years the latter part goes into October.

This period between Tishri 1 and Tishri 10 is a time for introspection. It is a time to examine oneself and their “works” of the past year. They (Jews) must “right” any “wrong” they did in the past year. They must make amends with anyone they have hurt or offended. They must make restitution to anyone they shortchanged, cheated, or dealt with dishonestly. They need to do “almsgiving,” and do charitable things or good deeds.

They do this to make things right in God’s book because on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) according to their tradition, God will weigh their works on the balance scale of life. If the good outweighs the bad their name will be written in the Book of Life for the new year. This will give them God’s favor in life, health, business, and all aspects of their life. If the bad outweighs the good, their name will not be written in the book, and they will fall into disfavor with God. Things will not go well for them in the coming year.

This period of time is actually called by several names, each of which stress a particular aspect of these High Holy Days.

1. Days of Awe: forgiving, reverence or “awe” to an awesome, holy God.
2. Days of Repentance: a time to make things right with God and with other people.
3. Days of Admitting: a time to acknowledge or “admitting” that which is not right in ones’ life; sins, offenses, etc.
4. Days of Returning: returning their focus back to God.

Since the diaspora had scattered the Jews to many different nations, some of their customs and traditions began to vary according to their location, since the various pockets of Jewish populations had little or no communication with each other. This accounts for the four different names for this period as well as a few other traditions that exist today.

Just as Christendom has many different denominations, so likewise does Judaism have various groups or “sects” with differing practices. There are even numerous Jews who are atheists and agnostics.

The more we know and understand about them, the more we can appreciate what we have as Christians. That is the reason for this study series.