

Observance of Rosh Hashanah Begins on Sunday



Rosh Hashanah is a special holiday that inaugurates the Jewish New Year. It is a time for celebration, often over festive family meals that feature apples and honey to emphasize our hopes for a “*Shana Tova u’metukah*,” a “sweet and good New Year.” This year, Rosh Hashanah will usher in the year 5783 in the Jewish calendar.

Yet Rosh Hashanah also marks the beginning of a ten day period for sober reflection and introspection, urging us to examine our conduct over the past year with honesty and integrity, apologize to those we have harmed even inadvertently, and to commit to living a better, more meaningful and purpose-driven life in the upcoming year. This period of the Jewish calendar, called the High Holy Days or Days of Awe, culminates in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

One of the most unique elements of the holiday is the blowing of the Shofar (a ram’s horn) throughout the service. This penetrating, primal sound is a powerful call to action, shaking us from our complacency, and calling us to engage in repentance.

Judaism emphasizes, particularly within the liturgy for our High Holy Days, that human beings, created in God’s image, have innate dignity and worth along with free will. We therefore have the capacity, and even the obligation, to continually recreate ourselves. Neither the world nor our own lives are static. The Holocaust survivor and psychologist Dr. Victor Frankl wrote that, no matter how dire one’s fate might seem, each of us has

the freedom “to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” On Rosh Hashanah, we rededicate ourselves to choosing the kind of life we hope to lead.

Rabbi Josh Ratner is the rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Fairfield. He also recently joined the interfaith staff of the Office of Mission Integration, Ministry and Multicultural Affairs at Sacred Heart University. Ratner is a community leader, educator, spiritual adviser, and social justice advocate. He most recently served as the Director of Advocacy at JLens, a Jewish non-profit organization engaging corporate America on social, environmental, and Israel-oriented issues on behalf of Jewish foundations and philanthropies. He previously served as the director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater New Haven, Associate Rabbi and Jewish Educator at Yale Hillel, and as a pulpit rabbi at Congregation Kol Ami in Cheshire.

Ratner is a board member of the Jewish sustainability organization Hazon, a Global Justice Fellow with American Jewish World Service, and a Rabbinic Fellow of CLAL’s Rabbis Without Borders program. His writings about the interplay between Judaism and contemporary topics have been featured on myjewishlearning.com. Ratner was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary, and is a graduate of both Columbia University and Columbia Law School. He was a corporate attorney before entering rabbinical school. He and his wife, Dr. Elena Ratner, are the proud parents of Dimitri, Elijah, Gabriella and Sasha.