



Nisa-Nashim

Jewish Muslim Women's Network

Celebrating Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Succot

For our Jewish sisters, September and October are busy months for festivals. The period from Rosh Hashana to the end of Succot is just under a month, and for most is a time of feasting, fasting and reflection.

What are Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?

Rosh Hashana marks the beginning of a ten-day period of what are called the 'High Holy Days', a time of reflection and prayer that concludes with Yom Kippur.

Rosh Hashana is the start of the Jewish year and commemorates the time when God created Adam and Eve. It is the day that Jews consider the birthday of all human beings, and tradition tells us that on Rosh Hashana the names of the righteous are inscribed in the Book of Life, guaranteeing another year of life. Jewish people celebrate Rosh Hashana in many different ways but all would agree it is a time for families to come together to eat an evening meal which will almost always include a round challah (a sweet bread with a circular shape representing the never-ending cycle of time) and apple dipped into honey (a symbol of the wish that the entire new year be filled with sweetness). Lots of honey cake is eaten too!

Traditionally, Jews are given the period of the ten days to make amends for their transgressions. By **Yom Kippur** ('Day of Atonement'), it is believed that, having made amends, their prayers for repentance can compensate for the rest of the year. During Yom Kippur, healthy adults fast for a 25 hour period to remind themselves of the frailty of the human body and the many ways we are tempted. Being restricted in this way helps to focus on prayer and atonement.

Yom Kippur customs include wearing white (this is the colour that Jews are traditionally buried in and reminds us of our mortality) and abstaining from wearing leather garments which are traditionally associated with luxury and arrogance.

Synagogue services throughout this time give us a chance to reflect and resolve to do better in the coming year. A shofar (Ram's horn) is blown, almost like a King's fanfare, to remind Jews of the majesty of Hashem.



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What is Succot?

Succot begins a few days after Yom Kippur and lasts eight days in the UK. It is a festival which both celebrates the harvest and commemorates the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt.

A few key traditions associated with Succot include the erection of and residency inside a Succah, a temporary structure without a solid roof so that the stars can be seen at night. Jews consider it a *mitzvah* (good deed) to eat and sleep in this transient structure to remind them of the Exodus, when the Jewish people had no permanent home and had to place their complete faith in Hashem.

Jewish people also consider it a *mitzvah* to make blessings over an *Etrog* fruit and a *lulav*, which is a bound collection of four natural species reminding us of the harvest and represents both the four-letter name of Hashem, and also the various limbs through which Jews should serve Him. Jews say a prayer with it and shake it in six directions, symbolising that Hashem is everywhere.

Celebrating Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Succot with your Nisa-Nashim Group

Here are some ways in which you could celebrate Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur with your Nisa-Nashim group:

- A 'mock' Rosh Hashana meal, sharing some of the traditions and ideas behind them
- A baking evening, making apple strudel and honey cakes that can be donated to homeless shelters nearby or for children to take into school
- A 'goal-setting' evening where you share and explore some of your personal and collective goals for the year
- A Q&A event with a Rabbi of a local Jewish community

Celebrating Succot:

- A member with a Succah could invite the group for a meal, explaining its significance
- A talk or investigation into how different faiths celebrate harvest
- As Succot commemorates the Exodus from Egypt, it lends itself to social action activities for refugees.