



The holiest day in the Jewish calendar

Jews all over the world are preparing for Yom Kippur – a day of fasting, praying and giving to charity.

There are more than 250,000 Jewish people in the UK, and on 11–12 October they will join other Jewish people around the world in observing Yom Kippur, otherwise known as the Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. It marks the end of the Days of Repentance, which last for 10 days. During this time, Jewish people ask for God's forgiveness for anything bad they might have done. Yom Kippur lasts for 25 hours from sunset. Many Jewish people will fast – which means not eating or drinking – and pray in a synagogue (a Jewish place of worship). Yom Kippur always comes 10 days after Jewish new year – known as Rosh Hashanah.

What is Rosh Hashanah?

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year festival and marks the creation of the world, according to the Jewish calendar. The Jewish calendar moves around each year because it is based on the movement of the Moon. This means dates are not fixed, so Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur happen on a different date every year, although they usually occur in September and October.

Rosh Hashanah is when Jews believe that God considers their good and bad deeds. Over the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jews will repent of their sins against God, themselves and other people. Jewish people will give charity to those in need as a way to bring justice and balance to the world.

READER REPORT

"Yom Kippur is the Hebrew name for the Jewish festival the Day of Atonement. It's the holiest day of the Jewish year. For 25 hours, Jewish adults aren't allowed to eat or drink anything. They also mustn't work and instead they go to the synagogue.

During the day we pray to God to ask for forgiveness for all the sins of the last year. We also have to ask our friends and family for forgiveness for anything bad we've done to them.

At the end of the synagogue service, the shofar (a ram's horn) is blown and everyone is allowed to go home and have a family feast."



Name: Hannah
Year: 5



Jews celebrate the end of Yom Kippur with a big meal.

WORLD'S LARGEST SYNAGOGUE
The largest synagogue in the world is the Belz Great Synagogue in Jerusalem, Israel. It can hold more than 10,000 people.



WORD OF THE WEEK
Atonement literally means "at one with". It means making up for something you've done wrong.

CELEBRATING HANUKAH
Head to the Jewish Museum in London to celebrate Hanukah on Sunday 11 December for Hanukah Ceramics Family Day. For more information go to jewishmuseum.org.uk

A rabbi unrolls the Torah – the first five books of the Hebrew holy book – during a Yom Kippur service.

What is Judaism?

Judaism is one of the world's oldest religions. It is practised by more than 14 million people worldwide. Judaism originated in the Middle East around 3,500 years ago.

What do Jews believe?

Jews believe that there is a single god who created the universe and chose a man named Abraham to be the father of all Jewish people. Jews try to set an example of God's holiness in the world.

The Jewish faith is very family-orientated and ceremonies start when children are very young. At around 12 and 13 Jewish children have their Bar Mitzvah, if they are a boy, or Bat Mitzvah, for girls – which are ceremonies to celebrate becoming an adult.

What's important in Judaism?

Some of the most important days in the Jewish calendar are Pesach (Passover), Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Yom Kippur and Hanukkah (the Festival of Lights). The emblem of the Jewish people is the Star of David, a six-sided star made up of two triangles. Jewish people pray in a synagogue and their spiritual leaders are called rabbis. Jewish people pray using the Torah, which is a collection of five books that Jews believe are the word of God spoken to Moses.



A boy celebrates his Bar Mitzvah by reading the Torah.

The Western Wall

The Western Wall or the Kotel is an ancient limestone wall in the Old City of Jerusalem, Israel. The wall dates back to 19BC and is one of the holiest Jewish sites in the world. It is one of the few surviving remains of the mount on which the Holy Temple once stood. Inside the temple was the Holy of Holies, the location of the stone from which, it is said, the world was created.

Many people travel to the Western Wall before Yom Kippur to ask for forgiveness. Worshippers leave prayers written on paper slipped in the cracks between the stones. The prayers are collected twice a year and taken to the cemetery at the Mount of Olives, where they are buried. In each collection there are enough to fill about 100 shopping bags.



The Western Wall.

Praying

For many Jewish people, the most important part of Yom Kippur is the time they spend in the synagogue. Even Jews who are not particularly religious will attend a synagogue on Yom Kippur. It is the only day of the year when five services are held. Worshippers spend the day in continuous prayer asking God for forgiveness. To mark the end of the day, a shofar is blown. A shofar is a musical instrument made from a ram's horn.



A shofar.

Fasting

No food or drink is supposed to be consumed during Yom Kippur – not even water. Jewish people fast as a way to show their devotion to God and to focus their mind on their prayers. Children under 13 and pregnant women do not have to fast on Yom Kippur. To prepare for fasting, families get together and have huge feasts. The traditional food eaten includes the challah, a Jewish braided bread usually dipped in honey, and kreplach, rolled pasta filled with minced meat.



The challah.

Clothing

Yom Kippur is about spiritual cleansing and the opportunity for a fresh start, so most Jewish people will wear white all day as a symbol of purity. Some Jewish people will choose not to wear make-up or perfume or to bathe during Yom Kippur and some communities do not wear leather shoes. Some Jews will not sleep during the 25-hour period, and others will not use their smartphones or watch TV either, to help them focus on God.



Jewish people often wear white during Yom Kippur.