

## INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

## Jewish New Year serves as a wake-up call for rededication to our faith

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Today is Rosh Hashanah, when Jews in West Michigan and around the world are celebrating the arrival of our New Year. It is the first of our High Holy Days and is followed by Yom Kippur just nine days later.

The book of Leviticus, the third book of the Torah, tells us on this day we should not work at our occupations, but should rest. We also commemorate this day with loud blasts from one of the oldest instruments in human history, the horn of a ram, known as a shofar.

The shofar is most often sound-

ed in the synagogue and heralds in the arrival of the New Year, but also serves as a wake-up call. Like an alarm clock rouses us in the morning out of our slumber, the sounding of the shofar is meant to stir us to action. The music is meant to inspire us to rededicate ourselves to our faith and to our traditions, and to challenge us to do more to heal and repair the world.

At Temple Emanuel, we have a long-standing tradition of teaching our children to sound the



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shofar. Each year at the conclusion of our morning worship service, we listen to some of our youngest students sound the shofar. What a joy it is for us to see our children and our grandchildren embrace this tradition and their heritage.

Our Rosh Hashanah celebration is filled with sweet foods, like honey cake and apples and honey, as we hope for a sweet New Year.

There also is a tradition that on Rosh Hashanah afternoon we take bread crumbs and toss them into a living body of water. The bread crumbs symbolize our sins from the past year, and so on the first day of a New Year we

toss them away. This tradition is known as Tashlich and the roots of it come from the Book of Micah.

In Micah we read, "Cast your sins into the depths of the sea."

But what is most significant about our celebration of Rosh Hashanah is how we embark on a journey of self-assessment on the first day of our New Year.

Our observance of this day is filled with opportunities to reflect and consider who we are as human beings, as children of God, and as members of both our religious and secular communities.

We are instructed to do more than simply revel in this day off

from work, but to look within the depths of our souls and try to figure out how we might change ourselves for the better.

We call the process of making changes, altering the parts of our lives that need some redirection, teshuvah which means to turn. We hope to turn ourselves into better people. Teshuvah really is the most significant part of our holiday season.

And throughout the holiday season we say to each other, "L'Shanah Tovah."

This means, "May it be a good year."

This is my hope and prayer for all of us in West Michigan. May it truly be a Shanah Tovah!