

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Celebrating the new year: Rosh Hashana

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Fall has always been my favorite season. I've always loved the changing of the leaves, the cooler temperatures, pumpkin-flavored everything, getting back to a set routine after summertime, and taking the time to self-reflect.

As a child, the fall is a time for change and reset as school is starting up once again. For the Jewish people, fall is also our time for change and reset as our new year, Rosh Hashana, lands somewhere in September or early October. This year, it was celebrated from Sunday evening, Sept. 29, to Tuesday evening, Oct. 1. Coincidentally and conveniently, the Jewish new year coincides with the academic new year.

As daily schedules — perhaps even chapters of life — are changing, so too are we able to find internal change. This season of change could be a new living situation, new job, new friendships, new opportunities. This newness coupled with the Jewish new year allows for people to stop and reconsider their priorities for the upcoming year. What have we done in the past year that we would like to continue or grow? What have we done that we may want to leave behind? We examine who we are, what we have done, both the good and the bad, and look towards the future of who we strive to be.

For me personally, the Jewish new year is when I set my “new year’s resolutions.” Although I would not consider myself very religious, I do find myself connected with the high holidays, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. I very much believe that we as humans have the ability to change and grow, on a continuous journey to becoming our best selves.

For me, having the opportunity to self-reflect and set meaningful intentions twice a year is a blessing. On Jan. 1, I find that my resolutions are along the lines of: work out more, sleep more, be healthier, etc. However, my mindset for my Rosh Hashana resolutions is a bit more meaningful, such as less negative self-talk and thoughts, engaging more in my local Jewish community and improving my listening skills.

There are 12 days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, providing a time to self-reflect, with each representing a month of the previous year. Yom Kippur is our day of atonement, where we fast from sundown to sundown in order to ask for G-d’s forgiveness and be rewritten in the book of life. This two-week period is meant to reflect on both the



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good and bad that we have done in the previous year, and how we can better ourselves moving forward as we enter the new year.

I love this idea of accepting one’s flaws, acknowledging our wrongdoings, and having the opportunity to ask for forgiveness and move forward. I find the process to be incredibly uplifting, positive and encouraging. It is one of my favorite parts of Judaism. I love that we are able to recognize that we are not perfect, accept where we are and constantly work towards bettering ourselves and the world around us.

Instead of dwelling on our past sins and negative traits, I find the prayers and services to be more supportive, uplifting and focusing on our chance to improve. Just as in everything we do in the Jewish faith, we are surrounded by community during this time. We feast together, fast together, break the fast together, spend the entire day at services together and encourage one another to do better and be better.

As a student, I was not always able to make it to services. My parents never took work off, and they would rarely let me carpool to shul with my grandparents or friends, because they felt that it was more important to go to class. Whether or not I made it to services, I have always partaken in the holidays. Freshman year, I ate apples and honey and recited the prayers in my dorm with a friend. I would share the delicacy that is “Rosh Hashana challah” with my non-Jewish friends. Throughout the year, they constantly ask me for the “special challah.”

During my time at Grand Valley, if I was unable to make the drive home, I would either celebrate with my Hillel friends, or my family would drive here and prepare the feast for my roommates and me. Of course, regardless of where I am, I never forget to call my grandma to wish her a “Shana Tova,” or sweet year.

I am not always successful in my Yom Kippur fasting efforts. But when I am, I love being able to suffer with my friends and family all over the world via smartphone and social media. sending one another whinv



Emma Duhamel blows the shofar during Rosh Hashana services at Fairmount Temple in the Cleveland area. This year, the holiday was observed from Sunday evening to Tuesday evening. *Advance Local files*

texts and selfies. Hopefully, from this year moving forward, every year I will successfully have an easy and meaningful fast.

I am looking forward to entering this new year and new chapter of life with a new mindset and new intentions. I am excited to continue turning my passions into actions, surrounding myself with a supportive and inspirational community, working on self-confidence, and finding opportunities for mitzvot (fulfilling biblical commandments and religious duties) in my daily life. May we all acknowledge our imperfections, accept where we’re at, and continuously find ways to becoming our best selves.

This year, the Jewish people enter the religious year 5780. I think about how long the Jewish people have survived, how much we have endured and how far we have come, both physically and mentally. We have endured so much, yet continue to thrive. Our drive and determination to continue to practice our divine traditions is the trait I look forward to passing down the most.

Welcome to the ‘80s, and regardless of whether you’re Jewish or not, I challenge you to take a few moments to reflect on who you are versus who you wish to be. I challenge you to be OK with your imperfections, set some new goals or intentions and dip some apple slices in honey.

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