



## 5 Ways to Celebrate Rosh Hashanah

### Acknowledging Jewish traditions

*Rosh Hashanah* is Jewish New Year, celebrating God as Creator and Sovereign. It begins a period of repentance that culminates ten days later in the celebration of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

#### 1. Greet.

Send your Jewish friends, neighbors, colleagues a traditional *Rosh Hashanah* greeting: '*Shanah Tovah!*' (a wish for a good year).

**2. Learn.** Ask a Jewish friend to explain more to you about his/her experience of faith and festivals. Or visit a website such as **Aish.com** (go to "Holidays").

**3. Eat.** Add a traditional Jewish festive food to your table. E.g., apples dipped in honey: a wish for the sweet year to come. Round-shaped bread (*challah*): symbol of a perfect year.

**4. Enjoy.** Savor an aspect of this beautiful world created by God, our Creator and Sovereign. Gather fresh flowers for your home. Watch the sun rise. Breathe deeply, savoring the living breath within you.

**5. Let go.** Name an attitude or habit that is not lifegiving, that is dark, sinful. Pray, repent, release it. Ask God to create you anew. In Jewish custom, on *Rosh Hashanah* the family walks to a natural water source for the *Tashlich* ritual; based on the prophet Micah 7:19 'You will hurl [*tashlich*] their sins into the depths of the sea.'



Light of Torah  
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# Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Deuteronomy 29:9—30:20

*Nitzavim*: 'stand'

## Why reflect on Torah?

*Surely this commandment which I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us?" ... No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe (Deuteronomy 30:11-12,14).*

This passage, taken from the first part of this week's Torah portion, could be a mission statement for our *Light of Torah* ministry. Our goal is to encourage Christians in seeking an intimate relationship with Scripture, to discover God's Word as 'near.'

Our pedagogy is inspired by the biblical wisdom of the Jewish people in their love for Torah. Here we find tools keenly attuned to our grassroots audience, tools that allow people to engage with the text in ways that are insightful, prayerful, imaginative, joyful.

In this way we respond to the Church's call for Christians to develop a new respect for the scriptures and interpretative traditions of the Jewish people.

Our back page reflection focuses on an approaching festival: Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year.



## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Deuteronomy 29:9—30:20

Moses and the Israelites are encamped on the plains of Moab, poised to enter the Promised Land. There Moses continues in his final speech, restating the obligations of the covenant between God and Israel. Read Chapter 29, noting the repetition of “this day.” Then, give particular attention to 29:9-15.

1. See Munk, 319.
2. Leibowitz, 299.
3. Leibowitz, 302.

Bibliography: Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim* (NY: Lambda); Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, vol. 5 (NY, 1995); Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (NY, 2005, 2006). Scripture: NRSV.

## Tasting Torah

*“I am making this covenant, sworn by an oath, not only with you who stand here with us today before the LORD our God, but also with those who are not here with us today”* (Deuteronomy 29:14-15, NRSV).

Who are those “who are not here with us this day”? It can’t mean absentees on the day since just a few verses earlier we have been told that all Israelites from all groups are assembled.

According to Rashi, the souls of all future generations of Jews were present at this covenantal moment, just as they were at Mt Sinai. This concept is of profound importance to Jewish understanding of what it means to be God’s people, bearers of the divine promises and the covenant from generation to generation. The fact that the verse uses the word “stand” when referring to those ‘here’ and then omits it when speaking of those ‘not here’ can be viewed as a distinction between those bodily present and those spiritually present.<sup>1</sup>

## Touching Torah

But how can a covenant made long ago obligate generations to come? Surely this is not possible! Abravanel, a 15th century Spanish-Jewish Torah commentator, tells of an argument he had with other sages over this very question. Before we hear how Abravanel replied, what reflections do you bring to the discussion?

## Depthing Torah

Perhaps you made the observation that what occurs in the present does indeed impact on future generations. Every family, for instance, is shaped by the actions and choices of their ancestors, for good or for ill.

Abravanel compares Israel to a family debt. *“Just as the children inherit their father’s property so they inherit his debts. Even though the children were not alive when the debt was incurred they are still liable to repay it. Similarly, God conferred a privilege on Israel and they were indebted to God for it.”*<sup>2</sup>

What was that privilege that makes future generations ‘indebted’ to God and bound to the covenant? Abravanel names it first and foremost as the Exodus miracle. Remember the verse that introduces the Ten Commandments: *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”* (Exodus 20:2). The serious obligation brought to bear on the Jewish people derives from the wonder of being called into a relationship with God who loves, liberates, and calls them into a new life of freedom as God’s people.

## Doing Torah

Our Torah passage invites us to reflect deeply on what God has done and continues to do for the Jewish people as they live in covenant with God. As we do this we will surely be led, too, into reflections on what God has done and continues to do for us as Christians in calling us into covenantal relationship through Christ.



## Faith & Life

For the Jewish people the all-embracing nature of their covenant with God has been experienced through history as both a joyful privilege and a heavy burden. Says Abravanel, writing at the time of the Inquisition and various forms of persecution:

*“Many of our people have forsaken the religion of their forefathers as a result of persecution and wished to be like the nations of the world... Though they and their descendents would do all in their power to assimilate they would not succeed. They would still be called Jews against their own will and would be accused of Judaising in secret and be burnt at the stake for it.”*<sup>3</sup>

Ponder: the privilege and cost of fidelity to God and to one’s family of faith.