

Jlife

SGPV JEWISH LIFE

September 2026
Elul, 5786 - Tishrei, 5787

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PRESENT
*Agatha Christie's
Murder on the Orient
Express adapted by
Ken Ludwig*

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MY NON-JEWISH
FRIENDS TO THE
HIGH HOLIDAYS

THE HIGH HOLIDAY ISSUE

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CONNECTION IN THIS HIGH HOLIDAY SEASON

As we begin to prepare for the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, consider what these High Holidays mean to you.

Are they a time to focus on the present, and to take the time to connect with family and friends? Perhaps the High Holidays are an opportunity to reach out to our local community, attend services, and connect with our extraordinary Jewish liturgy and music. Or perhaps, they offer an opportunity to pause and remember; to recall the formative moments of our childhood: the stickiness of honey dripping between your fingers, the sweetness of a freshly baked raisin challah, and the warmth of feeling connected to the people we love.

For me, the High Holidays are my favorite time of year to connect with my faith, spend time with family, and take the time to reach out and fully engage in our wonderful local community. It is such a joy to see people that I don't always see during the year, and to pause and reconnect with Judaism.

Each year, the Jewish Federation sends a letter to our local school district Superintendents in which we inform them about the dates of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and remind them that no student can be penalized in any way, according to the California Education Code, if they miss school in observation of these Jewish holidays. We work on your behalf to ensure that all of our kids have the opportunity to celebrate with us and we are proud to be your advocate in our local community.

One of the most wonderful



parts of the High Holidays in our San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys is the opportunity to reconnect with our wonderful local organizations. I always come away from High Holiday services with a new energy to participate in more of the wonderful learning opportunities and programs that are available, to engage Jewishly about issues that are of importance to our time, and to connect with more of the incredible and inspiring people that are our neighbors and partners in building our local community.

As we head into the *Yamim Noraim*, the 10 Days of Awe, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I encourage each of us to explore beyond what we already know and commit to trying something new in our Jewish community. Between

now and next year's High Holidays, consider attending an adult education program at a local synagogue, a Jewish Federation Jewish Book Festival event, or something else that is of meaning to you. Take some time to explore our local Jewish community, meet the people in it, and open up to the possibility of connecting and learning something new.

On behalf of the Jewish Federation's Board of Governors and Staff we wish you a *Gmar Chatimah Tovah* - may each of you be inscribed in the Book of Life for another year of good health and happiness. *Shana Tova!* ☆



JASON MOSS IS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF THE GREATER SAN GABRIEL AND POMONA VALLEYS.

“For as far back as I can remember, the question 'Why was I born Jewish?' has nagged at me.”

STANDING AT THE GATES

BY ANDREA SIMANTOV

Once again, we stand at the cusp of the High Holy Days. This moniker has always felt too stilted for my liking; the Hebrew term for this poignant time, *Yamim Noraim* (Days of Awe), better reflects the tenor of this reflective and most hopeful period.

"Hopeful?" you ask. I reply with candor: "You're darn tootin'!"

For as far back as I can remember, the question "Why was I born Jewish?" has nagged at me. My family was not religiously observant, yet G-d lived in our house. There was never a moment where I doubted the existence of HaShem, who loved me, had faith in me, and wanted me to be better, and better, and best. This iron-clad belief aligns with the Jewish teaching that every infant, while in utero, experiences an instinctual Divine closeness to Heaven. "Original sin" is the antithesis of Judaism. We hold that babies are not born flawed but are, instead, the holiest of creations, fashioned in G-d's image and imbued with holiness and infinite potential. The "sin" part is introduced only when we systematically—either by design or neglect—stop nourishing this most basic element of human existence.

Halachic Jews are Jewish because, despite 4,000 years of relentless persecution, our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and every ancestor who preceded them stayed the course. They did not succumb to the desperation and bleakness that accompanied holding fast to our faith. How easy it might have been to opt out of this stiff-necked nation, which was exiled from Babylonia, expelled from Rome, slaughtered in retaliation for blood libels that began in the 12th century and continue to this day, blamed and consequently massacred for causing the Black Death, drawn and quartered during the Spanish Inquisition, burned and killed for sport in Russian

pogroms, and nearly exterminated as part of Hitler's "Final Solution."

The October 7th attacks and the Nova Festival massacre were merely the most recent events in the never-ending cycle of Jew-hatred, unleashing undeniably dormant but all-too-familiar vile assaults upon

our beleaguered people. Most often masked as anti-Zionism or objection to the State of Israel rather than the Jewish people, these shopworn canards do not fool students of Jewish history. And still, we live. *Am Yisroel Chai*.

"But why, G-d? WHY???"

How is it that each year, as we stand before You dressed in white (to trick You into believing that we're indistinguishable from angels), You hear our prayers and, figuratively and hand each of us a fresh canvas, taut and primed with Your faith in us, as You utter, "Paint, my precious child."

"But paint what?" you might ask. "You told me to paint last year, and I mucked it up. I painted ugly interactions with my spouse, impatience with my children, neglecting my parents, and belittling co-workers. I painted stinginess, gossip-mongering, gluttony, and worse. Who do you think I am? Modigliani? Rembrandt?"

"You are correct that your previous canvas was not entirely museum-worthy. But you are here. You showed up. Like the sons at the Passover table, including the 'evil' child, you showed up. You showed up like your fathers before you. Flawed, battle-scarred, weary, and not a little timid, you stand before Me, your G-d, and ask for another opportunity. I am a parent, and I love My child. You, My child,



merit another chance for nothing more than asking. Because, whether or not you believe in Me, I completely believe in you..."

"Upon this canvas, I ask that you paint kindness. Mix the colors, alternate brushes, and cover the vista with laughter and blessing, generosity and patience. Dabble and splatter the corners with knowledge of Me, and improve those listening skills. Know less; hear more. Love your fellow Jews, especially the ones you don't agree with. Sanctify My name and be a light unto the nations. Pray for Israel, your brethren who bravely keep the land that I bequeathed to all of you, and, above all, pray for the holy soldiers, sons and daughters who physically man her borders with unparalleled faith in the holiness of their mission.

"Paint, bubbaleh, paint."

The *Yamim Noraim* need not necessarily be scary even though fear of the unknown always causes anxiety. But proudly embracing this unbroken chain of existence can alter the yearly experience into something more lofty and hopeful than ever before. It just requires a "tweak" in expectations.

Shana Tovah U'Metukah! ☆

NEW YORK NATIVE **ANDREA SIMANTOV** HAS LIVED IN JERUSALEM SINCE 1995. SHE WRITES FOR SEVERAL PUBLICATIONS, APPEARS REGULARLY ON ISRAEL NATIONAL RADIO AND OWNS AN IMAGE CONSULTING FIRM FOR WOMEN.

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MAH JONGG WAS A JEWISH GRANDMOTHER THING. NOW TEENS ARE GETTING IN ON THE GAME.

BY MICAH BIDNER, THE JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY, JTA



Staff at URJ Camp Harlam in Pennsylvania play mah jongg, a new elective offered in summer 2026. (Ellie Shulman)

For generations of Jewish Americans, the clacking of mah jongg tiles was the soundtrack of a social and sometimes raucous table game associated with their mothers and grandmothers. Now, a new generation is taking a seat at the table.

The game, which originated in China in the 19th century and became a staple among American Jewish women in the mid-20th century, is finding new life among Jewish teenagers and young adults. Once associated largely with retirees, mah jongg is increasingly being played in synagogues, community centers and family homes by younger players drawn to its strategy and, perhaps most of all, its coveted demand for face-to-face connection without screens.

For some young players, that interaction is the point. "I always thought of it as a game for grandmothers," said Louisa Gordon, 19, of New Jersey. "But once I started playing with friends we couldn't stop! It has really given me an opportunity to connect with others off of my phone."

The growing interest has not gone unnoticed by the people helping bring mah jongg to new audiences.

Dara Collins and Donna Kassman, founders of Modern Mahjong—an online mah jongg store, resource guide

and Facebook group with more than 100,000 members—have watched the game's audience get younger.

"We started teaching people in their 60s," Kassman said. "And now college clubs, high school, middle schools."

They increasingly see posts about high school mah jongg clubs, with players and supporters sending cards and tiles to help new groups get started.

"People just want to put the phone down and socialize," Kassman said. "We always say 'no phones and no politics.'"

For Sarah Shlefstein, 18, of Searingtown, New York, learning mah jongg was about spending more time with her family.

"I wanted to learn so I could play with my grandmother, mother and sister," Shlefstein said.

Although she found the game difficult at first, Shlefstein soon became hooked and now regularly joins her mother's mah jongg group.

"The biggest misconception is that mah jongg is boring or only for older people," she said. "Once you learn how to play, it's actually very engaging and competitive."

She said the constantly changing strategy keeps the game fresh, but the conversations around the table are just as meaningful.

"I enjoy spending time with the people I play with," she

said. "It's a fun way to connect with family and friends."

That same shift is playing out at Jewish summer camps, where mah jongg is reaching children who might never have encountered the game at home.

At URJ Camp Harlam in Pennsylvania, the game was offered this summer during "Camper Free Choice," a Saturday afternoon program where campers choose their own activities. Ellie Tepper Schulman, the camp's associate director, said the idea came after a camper suggested bringing mah jongg to camp.

"My friends were all playing," she said. "I learned and became pretty addicted myself, and so I was like, now that I want to play it all the time, I need to play it at camp."

She brought several sets to camp and began teaching campers.

"So I just started setting it up, and so many kids were opting into just coming to learn how to play mah jongg or playing because they already knew," she said. "At one point this session, we had like six or seven tables in this one area of camp, and every table was filled with kids playing mahjongg."

The game quickly spread beyond the original Saturday program.

"We are seeing kids [who] want to play during rest hour," Schulman said. "A couple counselors have added mah jongg as their staff specialty."

Some campers have even started keeping sets in their bunks.

"They can't get enough of it now," she said.

The game has also created unexpected connections between campers and staff.

"Last Saturday, I played mah jongg for three and a half hours straight, and it was like the best afternoon," she said, "It feels really funny to get excited to win a game against 12-year-olds."

For Schulman, the game gives campers something different from traditional camp activities.

"It's a hard game, which I think is also not something that we typically do at camp," she said. "We don't use our brains so much at camp in the way that mah jongg kind of forces you to."

Camp Harlam has also tried to get boys involved in what has historically been described as a women's pastime, passed down in America by Jewish mothers to



A 1924 photo shows a floating game of mah jongg. The game became a craze that swept across the country, and was quickly adopted by Jewish women.
(Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

daughters at bungalow colonies and suburban get-togethers.

"We've been really intentional about making sure that campers know that anybody can play the game," she said. "I didn't want it to just be something that campers were like, 'This is a girls' game.' I want it to be for everyone."

And for Schulman, the most meaningful part may be what happens when campers leave camp.

"I think that mah jongg is one of the things that I'm really excited that our campers are going to go home and tell their grandparents about."

For other young players, mah jongg has become a way to connect across generations.

Michelle Soussan, 24, of Long Island, first learned mah jongg in March after her mother encouraged her to watch instructional videos before playing a practice game with family friends.

"My mom was going every Wednesday to play mah jongg with friends, and it seemed like a fun idea to learn," Soussan said.

What started as curiosity quickly became a favorite pastime. Typically four players draw and discard tiles, each with a symbol like a deck of cards, trying to assemble a winning 14-tile combination. Winning hands have to match one of the combinations printed on cards published annually by the National Mah Jongg League.

"Mah jongg is different from other games because the card changes every year, so it makes it more challenging,"

Soousan said. "I've met a lot of young people recently who also learned to play mah jongg, so I think the idea that mah jongg is associated with older generations is changing. It's a fun game for anyone to learn."

Talia Rosen, a rising senior at Tufts University, learned mah jongg from her best friend while staying at her house.

"I definitely had preconceived notions that it was going to be very hard and boring," she said. "Because of those, I thought I would not like it, but I was quickly proven wrong."

She said learning the game has also strengthened relationships across generations.

"This summer I work with older adults at my local JCC, and I have actually been able to connect with some of them and form bonds over a shared interest of mah jongg," Rosen said.

Long Island instructor Jill Zoccoli has watched this generational shift unfold.

After her mother died before could teach her the game, Zoccoli took a mah jongg class at her local library. When she struggled to find people to play with, she "started creating drop-in games at my local library so everyone always had a place to play," Zoccoli said.

Zoccoli said she is currently teaching a mother and her 13-year-old daughter. After teaching one group of women on Long Island, their daughters also enrolled in lessons.

"Now they all play together weekly," Zoccoli said. "They play with their grandparents as well."

The trend extends beyond mothers and daughters. Some of Zoccoli's younger students now play regularly with parents, grandparents, spouses and in-laws, even gathering



At Camp Harlam, mah jongg has created unexpected connections between campers and staff. (Ellie Shulman)

for games during Shabbat weekends.

"I feel like I'm a little part of that, bringing families together," Zoccoli said.

For Zoccoli, the relationships built through the game have become its greatest reward. She recalled one former student telling her, "You gave me a whole new life. I'm getting out of my house now. I play three times a week. I met new friends."

Whether she's teaching a teenager or a retiree, Zoccoli believes anyone can learn the game.

"It definitely takes time. You have to be patient," she said. "Once you get the hang of it, you're going to be addicted."

This article was produced as part of JTA's Teen Journalism Fellowship, a program that works with Jewish teens around the world to report on issues that affect their lives. ☆

MICAH BIDNER IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JTA AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

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REFLECTIONS

BY DEBI KUPERBERG

Last week, I really thought a lot about being a Jew here in America, about being descended from Ashkenazi immigrants, and about being a woman in a man's world in the year 2026. My husband Basil and I took a quick trip to New York City in order to see four Broadway plays, but the main draw for us was the musical "Ragtime", which touches on all three of those issues. Prior to seeing the play, we had breakfast at Russ and Daughters, a well-known Jewish appetizer cafe known for their smoked fish dishes. You know it's easy to find acceptable lox and bagels here and there in Southern California, but a good smoked whitefish salad? One without any bones? Definitely not in the San Gabriel Valley! So, even though Basil (a true lox lover) had never tried either whitefish salad or creamed herring, I ordered both for our breakfast; he loved each of them layered with cream cheese on an everything bagel, while my taste buds reveled in flavors I remembered from my childhood visits to New York to see my grandparents. Parenthetically, I've enjoyed watching my non-Jewish husband of 32 years be exposed to Jewish culture, in particular Jewish foods, over three decades. He loves gefilte fish, though not with horseradish; he can't get enough of matzah ball soup, half-sours, kugels, and knishes, and he's the first to look for lox on a breakfast buffet spread. Although Basil draws the line at chopped liver, the fact that he took so readily to whitefish and herring thrilled me.

We spent the afternoon at the Tenement House Museum, which showcases the many cultures of all the immigrants who moved into the Lower East Side tenement buildings. In my naivete, after having read Sydney Taylor's "All-of-a-Kind Family" series as a child, I thought for years that only Jews, such as my great-grandparents (and the fictional family in the books), settled there. At the Tenement House Museum, one can take tours of various families' apartments, real families who actually lived there;



Debi at Russ & Daughters

the units have been faithfully recreated using furniture, kitchen appliances, clothing, religious items, and knick-knacks from the past century, and many have objects donated from actual descendents and kin. Although one can tour the rooms belonging to the predominately Jewish families who initially lived there in the late 1800s, Basil and I visited two other flats, one an apartment from the '50s belonging to a Jewish couple who met in a refugee camp after surviving the Holocaust, and additionally that of a Puerto Rican family who immigrated to New York City in the 1960s. Another person taking the tour was a British professor who teaches Jewish Studies at a university in London, and I asked him about antisemitic violence in London; he said the one of the saddest things he was seeing these days were young men removing their *kippahs* and tucking in their *tzitzit* before going out into the streets.

The musical "Ragtime", based on E.L. Doctorow's 1975 novel of the same name, opened almost 30 years ago now, taking Broadway by storm while winning numerous Tony awards. It's a literal rags-to-riches immigration story following Tateh, an artistic Jewish widower who comes to the Lower East Side in the early 1900s to find the American dream for himself and his

young daughter. They intersect with an upper-class white family who in turn connect with a Black jazz musician's world in Harlem, all of them chasing acceptance, social standing, and the emotional and financial elements of the good life.

We've all seen the characters of Tevye, Golde, and their five daughters in the old country of the iconic "Fiddler on the Roof", and the virulent hatred and anti-Semitism of the Eastern European pogroms, which is why Tateh, Tevye, and their families flee their homelands. In America, one of Tateh's predominant fears is that his daughter will get lost or be stolen; in fact, a man approaches him with the express purpose of buying the girl. Eventually, Tateh's perseverance pays off and his luck changes. Not only is he able to "grab the gold ring" with a novel entertainment invention, but like Tevye's three older daughters, he also chooses to marry the person he falls in love with, as opposed to participating in an arranged marriage, and this is symbolic of the changing times and values of the modern world. Even more interestingly, like with Chava, this new era ushers in a Christian spouse for Tateh; he's found his "happily ever after", and at least for him, there's no Tevye bellowing that there's "no other hand!"

Tateh's newly-blended family consists of him and his daughter, his Christian wife and her son, and the black baby she adopts after he's been left orphaned; this ending of "Ragtime" is obviously a vision of an interracial, interclass world, the wonderful melting pot that is so often heralded when describing America. Despite the brutality surrounding the racial and social injustices in the story, Doctorow obviously hoped that the children in Tateh's new home would represent a move towards a more equitable, progressive future, portraying the ideal of a harmonious yet diverse world.

Watching Brandon Uranowitz (Tateh) take his final bows during the curtain call, I felt a wave of sadness as I contemplated the fact that anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli violence has skyrocketed in the past several years, both here in the States and throughout the world. Acts of savagery and physical cruelty towards immigrants and people of color are not only condoned by our government today, just as they were in the play, but are now also carried out and executed by federal agents. In "Ragtime", we see Tateh's love interest come into her own as a strong, independent woman, fighting with surety and confidence as she makes choices and decisions that challenge the societal norms of those times, but today the rights that women have fought for over the years, including making medical decisions regarding birth control, reproduction, and our own bodies have seemingly been swept away by a

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RAGTIME



nonchalant stroke of a pen.

Being a musical theater nerd, I constantly listen to the Broadway channel on Sirius XM, and I generally leave a playhouse humming and singing the score of the play. It was the same with "Ragtime"; I found myself crooning the tunes, while thinking about lyrics, in particular Tateh's lines from "Success" that state:

*"How can I feed her or clothe
Or protect her here?
Where's the America
We were supposed to get?
Was it a silhouette?"*

Tateh's life grows harder before it gets easier, but as he does find his success finally, I can only hope that our country will, too, and that the harmony that's symbolized by the three children in the newly-blended family will soon make its way to cover all of us: men and women, Jews, Christians and Muslims, immigrants and American-born. The New World doesn't have to be a silhouette. ☆

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AGATHA CHRISTIE'S *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS* ADAPTED BY KEN LUDWIG

BY LORI MCKENNA

One of the most iconic mystery novels written by Agatha Christie is *Murder on the Orient Express*.

With an exotic location, colorful characters, a plot that keeps one guessing, and the incomparable detective, Hercule Poirot, this story has become a classic – adapted many times for the screen, its plot the inspiration for countless imitators, and now adapted for the stage by Ken Ludwig. The story takes place in 1934, a time when the world was focused on the Lindbergh baby kidnapping, upon which the story is loosely based. The location is the Orient Express, reputedly the most luxurious train in the world, traveling from Istanbul to Paris. The first-class passengers are a polyglot bunch of unique characters, and when one is murdered, all the rest are suspects. Luckily for the Wagon-Lit Corporation, the owners of the Orient Express, Hercule Poirot is on board.

How, you may ask, did this famous Agatha Christie mystery end up in the hands of Ken Ludwig, a playwright known as a master of complex comedic farces? In fact, the JFed Players has previously produced two of his comedies – *Lend Me a Tenor*, and *Leading Ladies*. In 2015, Ludwig's agent was contacted by Agatha Christie Limited, who commissioned him to adapt one of Christie's novels for the stage. He chose *Murder on the Orient Express* "... because it is such a stunning mystery in so many ways." In retrospect, the story, with its intricate and surprising plot twists, was the perfect vehicle for Ludwig's demonstrated talent melding hugely entertaining characters with insanely complex plots. Making its debut in 2017, *Murder* was the first stage play in 75 years to feature Hercule Poirot.



The JFed Players production of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* adapted by Ken Ludwig, is directed by John Carlton and Lori McKenna. The cast,



led by Neil Brown as Poirot, is superb. Rob Schaumann brings a subtle comedic air to Bouc, the hard-working man who runs the Wagon-Lit Company. Others in the cast are: Karen Hochman Brown as Mrs. Hubbard, a brash American; Michael DiRosa pulling double-duty as the Head Waiter and Conductor; Norm Gold as the insufferable American, Mr. Ratchett; Andrew Stetkevich as MacQueen, the long-suffering assistant to Mr. Ratchett; Steven Owsley as Arbuthnot, the Scottish colonel; Sarah Bernhardt (yes, her real name!) as Mary, his paramour; Kate Landro as the exiled Russian Princess; and newcomers Hannah Slattery as the lovely and accomplished Countess, and Janice Rocker as Greta, the Princess's assistant. The set was crafted by Brian and Edeena Gordon, working their magic again as the train transforms before your very eyes. Do not miss this production!

Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* adapted by Ken Ludwig opens Saturday, September 26, 2026, 8:00pm at Lineage Performing Arts Center in Pasadena. For tickets, go to www.jewishsgpv.org. ☆



LORI MCKENNA IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLIFE MAGAZINE.



MY ROSH HASHANAH RESOLUTION: ACCEPTING MY CHILD WITH ADD

BY BRYAN SCHWARTZMAN, MY JEWISH LEARNING

Why did I get the child who doesn't work right? What did I do to deserve the child who doesn't eat when she's supposed to—if she eats at all—who doesn't sleep when she's supposed to sleep, who doesn't learn what she's supposed to learn, and often doesn't do what she's supposed to do?

I really hate to admit it, but in some of my most trying moments of parenthood, the word “unlucky” plays in my mind like a background song, trying to be heard. “I’m unlucky,” I’ll find myself thinking—even though, intellectually, I know that of the 7.4 billion people on the planet, I’m in the top one percent when it comes to luck. I’ve got two healthy children who shower me with affection; a loving spouse; parents who are actively involved in my children’s lives; a fine house in a desirable, safe neighborhood; a rewarding career. I could go on and on.

And yet, I can’t shake the sense that within my greatest joy I’ve experienced misfortune. Sometimes I’ll remember that I’m far from alone: my partner is with me in raising a child one could call “challenging,” and there are clearly millions of other parents in similar situations. Undoubtedly, when the word “unlucky” resurfaces in my mind, I’ll feel guilt or shame. But the word remains, ready to reveal itself at the exact moment when I need positive, life-affirming thoughts.

You see, my older daughter has been “diagnosed” with Attention Deficit Disorder. Whether you’d call it a diagnosis—and whether or not this is something to lament—is a question that can fill many books and blog posts. But now that she has this label, it’s all too easy to overlook my daughter’s many wondrous qualities, like her creativity and curiosity. But you take her ADD, throw in some anxiety and a litany of food allergies and eating issues, and you’ve got a combustible cocktail.

Being a parent of a child with ADD can be so much more demanding than I ever realized. And while I truly believe being a parent is my most important mission in life, there’s so much I want to do: I want to write, be fit, be active in my community, maintain a romantic relationship with my partner, advance my career. Yes, I can practically hear you say, “being pulled in multiple directions is the essence of modern parenthood.” But so often, attending to my child’s unique needs seems to require skipping a workout, putting off the latest essay, or surrendering any semblance of down time. I know it doesn’t sound like much, but when you look forward to small things, missing them feels like a big sacrifice.

With the High Holidays upon us, I take solace in the

fact that Judaism places a much higher value on what people do and how we act—and not what we think. I also know that so many parents lose patience or have selfish thoughts. That doesn’t mean we don’t love our children or that we’re ineffective parents.

At the same time, however, everything from the Rosh Hashanah liturgy to modern psychology reinforces the notion that what and how we think influences how we behave. So, as I prepare to sit for hours in shul, I’m pledging to work on my thinking, to reframe the narrative from one of burden to one of gratitude, to focus on nourishing my child’s gifts rather than lamenting her faults. I hope to use this time to focus on what I’m gaining through the joys and challenges of raising both my daughters, rather than what I am losing. I don’t think I’ll make it all the way to my destination, but I’m optimistic I can cover a lot of ground.

I’m being aided by a wonderful book, *Superparenting for ADD: An Innovative Approach to Raising Your Distracted Child*. Both authors—Edward M. Hallowell and Peter S. Jensen—are leading psychiatrists who have also lived with ADD in their families. They offer a range of parenting techniques and medical advice, but more than anything, they remind us that, at its heart, parenting is about love and empathy. The book provides real hope that with love, expert advice, passionate teachers, and possibly medication, my daughter can fulfill her potential in school and in life. She can lead a life of joy, meaning, and achievement.

Over the years, I’ve worked to cultivate empathy for others—those with stark differences in life situations, socio-economic backgrounds, or political views. But I’ve recently realized that, on some level, I’ve failed to empathize with my own child. But my book got me thinking about what it is like to be a 7-year-old with ADD, to have a brain that works too fast, to want to please but to be unable to refrain from “bad” behavior—and to therefore face criticism from well-meaning adults and, at times, cruelty from other children.

Our fractured society suffers from a lack of empathy. But maybe a first step toward a broader societal healing might entail parents taking a closer look at their own children. What if we encourage our kids rather than find fault with them? What if we comfort them rather than chasten them?

This is my assignment for the Jewish New Year. I know it’s a tough one. As I confront the liturgy and life’s frailty and impermanence, I’ll try and focus the mind and spirit on how lucky I am. I’m sure I’ll falter—I’m only human. I’m just a dad, trying to do the best he can. Here’s hoping my best gets better. ☆

BRYAN SCHWARTZMAN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIFE MAGAZINE..



IN MY BOISTEROUS JEWISH FAMILY, I STRUGGLE TO BE HEARD. AND THEN I BLEW THE SHOFAR.

BY ELANA RABINOWITZ, MY JEWISH LEARNING

We all have our reserved places in the family, the titles given to us that we usually can't escape—the funny one, the prodigy, the black sheep. For the longest time, my role was “the shy one.” I was the quiet little girl who was filled with ideas but didn't know how to let them out.

At school, I'd hide under desks when I didn't want to give presentations. I'd whisper when I was in pain. For the longest time, no one knew what I was thinking, and in a family of vociferous people, I simply balanced them out.

I am not the timid one anymore—quite the opposite. As an adult, I'm very outgoing; I love parties and, as a teacher, I'm the one who can get even the shyest child to open up. But when my family gathers for the Jewish holidays, just as our seats are assigned, so, too, is my role. Consciously or not, I inevitably revert back to the quiet little girl I used to be.

It is hard to be reserved in a family as outspoken as mine. When we gather for dinners or holidays, the room is always filled with a lively discussion about politics, society, and, of course, success.

“You remember her, she is a tenured professor...”

“He had an A-plus average at Columbia...”

“He started his own company...”

Humble is not part of our vocabulary. I try to add to the conversation but I am often cut off mid-sentence. My parents are therapists, so there's always someone willing to offer an ear when you need it, but when we gather en masse it's nearly impossible to get a word in edgewise. It is our culture to talk over each other; to increase your volume when you want to be center stage. This is not me. I patiently wait for everyone to finish, to share my stories. But when I do, I am often interrupted. I wish my voice could be heard. Why can't I be stronger? Louder?

Alas, when it comes to making myself heard within my family, I'm not only deficient when it comes to speaking. I also lack musical gifts. I love music, but I don't have the natural talent that blesses so many of my relatives. This melodic gene was given to both my brother and my cousin, who both became well known for their talents—for years, my brother toured with his band, and my cousin is considered one of the best French horn players in the world. I always felt inferior to such

talent. Music came slowly to me and, while I loved it, I often wondered why I wasn't better at it.

But then came Rosh Hashanah last year. We were all gathered at my parents' apartment. I had just returned from an incredible trip to Japan and was about to start a new year teaching ESL at a middle school. My cousin entered the room, filled with joy, with her French horn with her as it almost always is. But this year, she also brought with her two shofars, the rams' horns that have heralded the Jewish New Year since ancient times. To play it, you need precision and energy and wind and strength. When done right it makes a hum that is almost biblical.

It's also a difficult instrument to play, even if you're a professional. First, my niece and nephew tried — they barely eeked out a sound. Then, our two pro brass players gave it a go. They each make noise with the shofar, but it is not nearly as robust as with their brass instruments.

Just for fun, I decided to give it a try. And just like I learned in yoga, I inhaled then exhaled deeply. I mustered all my will, I scraped together the sum total of my musical talent, and gave the shofar a blow. Barely a sound squeaked out of it.

But, then, I did something I normally didn't: I tried again. And, thanks to my persistence, I began to hear a sound; it was soft at first, but then, slowly, it became louder. Before I knew it, I had sounded out the loudest, purest sound out of anyone else in the room.

For once—and all at once—my family was silent. And the note I was blowing from the shofar felt like it lasted forever—like all the words that I never said came pouring out of me, through the shofar. I couldn't believe what I was hearing; a beautiful, long note that reverberated with a long, lasting grace. My lungs filled with air and I could breathe in a way I couldn't imagine. That day, I was the musician; I was the prodigy. I was the one making the most noise. I had finally done it!

Everyone's eyes were on me. “Elana! That was amazing!” my sister-in-law screamed.

After all these years, I was finally heard.

As it turns out the biblical name for Rosh Hashanah is Yom Teruah, which means “day of shouting or blasting.” And just like that, I realized, sometimes we need to shout to be heard.

Shana Tova. ☆

ELANA RABINOWITZ IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIFE MAGAZINE..

@JLIFE SEPTEMBER 2026 21



4 WAYS TO MAKE USE OF ALL THAT ROSH HASHANAH HONEY

BY JOANNA C. VALENTE, MY JEWISH LEARNING

When we typically think of all that honey you have because of Rosh Hashanah, you probably think to use the rest of it in your morning tea, your challah bread recipe, or you know, just eating it off a spoon (hey, don't judge me).

But honey isn't just amazing to eat, but it can actually be part of your skin care routine. I know, I know, you're thinking, "But I don't HAVE time!" But really, if you have time to wash your face, you can slather some honey on it beforehand. (Who doesn't love a beauty regimen you can also eat?!)

Why is honey so great for your face? Honey is rich with minerals and vitamins (including B6, niacin, and zinc), and balances the skin's pH while also moisturizing it (which can also prevent wrinkles, hey!). Of course, it works even better if you can mix it with other ingredients, like yogurt and cinnamon—all items you already have in your kitchen.

Recently, Pop Sugar talked to celebrity esthetician Ildi Pekar, who shared her favorite easy to make beauty treatments using honey. Here are the ones I can't wait to check out:



1. Lip Scrub

What You Need:

2 tablespoons of brown sugar

-1 teaspoon of 100 percent raw honey

Directions: After mixing the two ingredients together, apply it directly to your pout. Rub your lips together to scrub, then wait five minutes before rinsing off the treatment with warm filtered water. Follow with a natural lip balm to add hydration.

2. Hair and Scalp Treatment

What You Need:

-3 tablespoons of liquid coconut oil

-1/4 cup of 100 percent raw honey



Directions: Blend the two ingredients, then apply from your roots all the way down to the ends of your strands. Leave it on for 20 minutes so the ingredients can fully penetrate your hair and scalp. Rinse thoroughly.

3. Facial Cleanser

What You Need:

-1 tablespoon of 100 percent raw honey

Directions: Thoroughly wet your face, then smear the honey onto your face. It should emulsify slightly and become easier to spread. After lightly massaging it into your skin, rinse thoroughly.

4. Face Mask

What You Need:

-½ of a banana

-1 apricot

-1 teaspoon of 100 percent raw honey

Directions: Remove the skin and pit of the apricot and the peel of the banana, and cut both fruits into small pieces. Mix them with the raw honey in a blender until you achieve a creamy, fluffy texture. Apply the blend to your entire face (except for your eyes, lips, and nostrils), leave on for 20 minutes, and rinse off with cool water.

Can't wait to try these out. ☆



JOANNA C. VALENTE IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

COVER STORY

SHANA TOVA!

WHY I INVITE MY NON-JEWISH FRIENDS TO THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

Opening my heart and table to friends who are new to Jewish culture demystifies ritual, deepens empathy and creates the kind of honest conversation that brings people closer.

BY MEGAN VERED, MY JEWISH LEARNING

My mother had a marvelous talent for filling our home with joy. She rarely passed up an opportunity to welcome the stranger, inviting Jews and non-Jews alike to family celebrations. In our home, the openhearted sharing of Jewish culture and tradition built bridges that have lasted for decades. The best illustration of inclusion was our father's Haggadah, marked up with guests' names, to ensure that everyone was involved in the retelling—and that no one could quietly escape a reading part. When I ask friends what they remember about being guests in our house, they mention the long Passover table set with carrot tsimmes, beet-colored horseradish and charoset; the comfort of Shabbat prayers and age-old traditions; the lights of the menorah and the fresh latkes sizzling in my mother's electric frying pan. And nobody forgets her gift bags of homemade zemelach set out on the hearth.

More than anything, my friends remember being included.

Since my mother's death, I have become the family hostess, doing my best to carry on her tradition of generous hospitality. Opening my heart and table to friends who are new to Jewish culture demystifies ritual, deepens empathy and creates the kind of honest conversation that brings people closer, while setting a positive example for the next generation.

Most recently, I invited two non-Jewish friends to attend a *Tisha B'Av* sorrow circle with me. They were both deeply grieving the loss of a sister, and I thought they might find comfort in a room where sadness was not only accepted but welcomed. At the end of the evening, they said, "This is exactly what we needed. When can we come to temple with you again?" Their response touched me. I had extended an open hand, and our friendships deepened.

Last year, a Baptist pastor attended our Passover seder. Afterwards, he told me that reading the Haggadah gave him material for a month's worth of Sunday sermons, especially in its insistence that each generation tell the story as if they themselves had come out of Egypt. He then joined us for a Friday evening service, his first time ever in a synagogue, and thanked me for offering a meaningful opportunity for cross-cultural contact and understanding.

Why carry on my mother's tradition of inclusivity? Because each invitation widens the circle of empathy. When one friend tells me after Shabbat services that she was moved by the beauty of the prayers and the warmth of the congregation, something opens



in our relationship. When another says a High Holiday sermon felt as if the rabbi were speaking directly to him, misunderstanding gives way to recognition. And sometimes sharing my Jewishness is as simple as making a pot of chicken soup—still my most reliable form of interfaith dialogue.

It is intimidating to extend ourselves beyond our comfort zone, and it can be just as intimidating for guests entering unfamiliar traditions. Cross-cultural hospitality does not have to be complex. Keep it simple: Offer guests context in advance, give them a sense of the timeline, provide English translations for prayers, explain ritual foods, invite them to join in readings and encourage questions. You might ask guests to bring a reading or poem from their own tradition to share. A little orientation goes a long way; nobody wants their first question to be whether they are holding the prayer book upside down.

It also helps to think in advance about how to navigate polarizing questions, which may surface in today's high-stakes climate around Jewish identity, safety and belonging. A host does not need to have every answer, but can listen generously, name boundaries when needed and steer the room back toward curiosity rather than debate. When people sit together in community it encourages honest and respectful dialogue.

As it turned out, years after attending our family seder, my friend Tina married a Jewish man. She told me recently how grateful she is for those Passover celebrations with my family because they helped her create a seder for her husband and his children. This is the ultimate *kvell* for me. I thank my mother every day for teaching me the quiet power of the goodwill gesture: One open door can become another, carrying understanding from one table to the next.

☆

MEGAN VERED IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIIFE MAGAZINE.

THE NIGHT BEFORE, THE NIGHT BEFORE ROSH HASHANAH

BY AMERICA'S REBBITZMAN, JOSHUA KAIL

It was the night before the night before Rosh Hashanah and all through the land, the rabbis were *schvitzing*, were their services all planned?

Were the sermons long enough to make people know that it was not Shabbos they were there sitting through?

Had the *shofar* been oiled (or whatever you do), could they remember the name of every twice-a-year Jew?

And I, the Rebbitzman, fearing in bed, if I fell asleep now, will she tap on my head?

When up in the office, there was such a clatter I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

Away in a flutter, I flew like a flash

I opened the door to see sermons in trash!

Light on the crest of a deep furrowed brow

Gave rise to a voice, "I must rewrite these all NOW!"

When what to my wondering eyes did I divine?

But an inspiration struck Rabbi (and an empty bottle of mid-priced red wine).

With a flurry of typing so lively and fast

I knew in that moment the rewrites were vast.

And she whistled and shouted and called them by name

Now Hillel! Now Buber! Now Heschel! And Ramban!

On Sacks! On Akiva! On Ha-Nasi, and Rambam!

To the bottom with footnotes for all she had wrote

Now find segways, SEGUES, SEGUES, SEGUES, FOR ALL OF THOSE QUOTES!!!!

As words before context flop all about

When they meet with a scholar, add meaning and clout

So into the sermon, the vocabulary flew

With double meanings and inspirations for each Jew



And then with a whisper, I heard a short yawn

Could it be that the sermon crises was gone?

As I drew in my head and was turning around

"One down, six to go!" was the sound.

These deadlines were looming when what do I say?

"Go to sleep dear; you still have another day."

It's 3 in the morning, you've done what you could, you are acting as nervous as during *yichud*.

You've dusted your tallis; the Torah's been rolled

That part about Chelm, you'll just have to hold.

If it doesn't work out, you could always just wing it

Shanna Tova to All... On second thought, just make the cantor sing it! ☆

AMERICA'S REBBITZMAN, JOSHUA KAIL IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLife MAGAZINE.

SGPV'S JEWISH YOUTH & PARENTS

kiddish

***The High
Holidays***

SEPTEMBER 2026

3 KID SHOWS THAT FEATURE THE JEWISH HIGH HOLIDAYS

These few but mighty shows offer stories of Rosh Hashanah

4 THE SWEETEST HEBREW BABY NAMES INSPIRED BY THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

6 THE BEST ROSH HASHANAH SONGS FOR KIDS

Get in the spirit of the Jewish New Year with these delightful original tunes.



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Kid Shows That Feature the Jewish High Holidays

These few but mighty shows offer stories of Rosh Hashanah.

BY EVELYN FRICK, MY JEWISH LEARNING



Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur aren't quite the entertainment industry's idea of a made-for-TV-special kind of holiday. So finding an episode of something to get your family excited for the season, and perhaps even explain to your kids what the High Holy Days are all about, is a tough task.

Thankfully, we've got you covered!

These few but mighty shows offer stories of Rosh Hashanah-themed friendship and problem-solving, figuring out fasting for the first time and even a fun song or two. Read on for five kids TV shows or web series which feature the Jewish High Holidays.

"The Sticky Shofar"

Episode 8 of the 2011 "Shalom Sesame" series

This episode of "Shalom Sesame" has just about everything you could ever want from a High Holiday episode. It's got a shofar, apples and honey, teshuvah and plenty of Muppets hilarity. When Muppet Avigail and Grover gets their honey-covered hands stuck to Muppet Brosh's shofar, the pair must both figure out how to get unstuck and apologize to Brosh for touching his shofar without asking.

It's the perfect episode to teach your kids about asking for forgiveness and something you'll appreciate as a parent who no doubt is always dealing with sticky hands.

Watch "The Sticky Shofar" on YouTube.

"Rap Battle: Rosh Hashanah"

Part of "Lunchbox Rap Battles" on CBC

"Lunchbox Rap Battles" is a recurring segment on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's kid's programming, featuring upbeat and educational

songs. Their Rosh Hashanah rap nods to the holiday with a fun earworm that'll have you repeating, "It's Rosh Hashanah, enjoy it how you wanna! It's Rosh Hashanah, shana tova!"

If you're looking for a more nuanced exploration of the holiday, this isn't quite it. But it's definitely a fun jam to get your kids excited whether you're going to the kid's Rosh Hashanah service at shul or noshing on apples and honey.

Watch "Rap Battle: Rosh Hashanah" above or on YouTube.

"An UnBEElievable Rosh Hashanah"

Season 2, episode 27 of "Marvel's Spidey and His Amazing Friends"

Did you know The Thing from "The Fantastic Four" is canonically Jewish in the comics? The people at Disney seem to, as they wrote this Rosh Hashanah-themed episode in 2023.

"In the episode, Gobby (as they call Green Goblin) steals all the bees and The Thing has to help Team Spidey get the bees back and save Rosh Hashanah," Linda Buchwald wrote for Kveller ahead of the episode's premiere. She adds, "In one scene, The Thing wears a yarmulke as he eats Rosh Hashanah dinner, including apples and honey, of course, at the friendly neighborhood community center where people from different backgrounds celebrate each other. Ari and his dad, Mr. Rosenberg, were invited by The Thing to spend Rosh Hashanah with him, and they tell him that he made the community proud."

Watch "An UnBEElievable Rosh Hashanah" on Fandango.

"The Rosh Hashanah Shaboom! Special: Be the Best Me"

Holy honey cakes! This colorful and engaging animation really gets into the deeper meaning of the High Holidays. When the Plony family seems to be missing their opportunity to become better people for Rosh Hashanah, magical "sparks" (fairy-like creatures) Gaby and Rafi come to help teach them all about teshuvah.

Plus, this episode also features a Rosh Hashanah seder!

Watch "The Rosh Hashanah Shaboom! Special: Be the Best Me" above or on YouTube. ☆

EVELYN FRICK IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE.



The Sweetest Hebrew Baby Names Inspired By the High Holidays

BY ARIELLE KAPLAN, MY JEWISH LEARNING

The High Holidays are just around the corner, and we are SO ready for the new year—5787, here we come!!

If you're welcoming a new bundle of joy anytime between the start of Rosh Hashanah—which begins this year on the evening of September 11th—and the end of Yom Kippur (nightfall on Monday, September 21, 2026), peruse this lovely list of baby names inspired by the High Holidays.

If these don't tickle your fancy, check out our extensive baby name bank.

Female

Melissa. Melissa is a Jewish name for girls that means “honey bee.” It's customary to eat honey on Rosh Hashanah.

Bina. Bina is a Hebrew name for girls that means “wisdom.” We—hopefully!—enter the new year with more wisdom than the year before.

Bracha. Bracha is a Hebrew name for girls that means “blessing.” Every new year is a blessing.

Chaggit. Chaggit is a Hebrew name for girls that means “celebrate.”

Daniella. Daniella is a Hebrew name for girls that means “G-d is my judge.” On Rosh Hashana, G-d judges if we're worthy of being written in the Book of Life.

Deborah. Deborah, or Devorah, is a Hebrew name for girls that means “bee.”

Dinah. Dinah is a Hebrew baby name for girls that means “judgement.”

Gila. Gila is a Hebrew name for girls that means “joy.” The new year should bring immense joy!

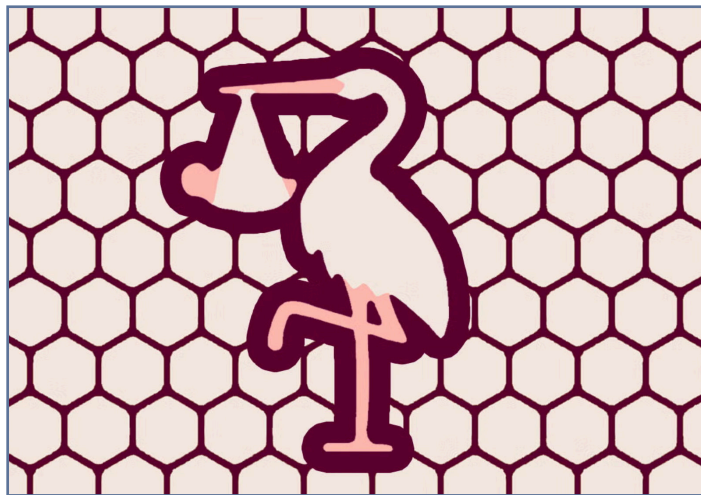
Shlomit. Shlomit is a Hebrew name for girls that means “peace.” During the High Holidays it's important to find peace within ourselves and our social circles before entering a new chapter of our life.

Metuka. Metuka is a Hebrew name for girls that means “sweet.” This name isn't very common, so let's make it trendy again!

Apple. OK, Apple is not a Hebrew baby name. But if it's good enough for Jewish mom Gwyneth Paltrow's daughter, then it's good enough for us!

Unisex

Osher. Osher is a unisex Hebrew name that means “happiness.” The new year should bring much



happiness.

Doron. Doron is a unisex Hebrew name that means “gift.” Every new year is a gift.

Dvash. Dvash is a unisex Hebrew name that means “honey.”

Rimon. Rimon is a unisex Hebrew name that means “pomegranate.” It's customary to eat pomegranates on Rosh Hashanah. The seeds of the fruit represent the 613 mitzvot from the Torah.

Male

Avidan. Avidan is a Hebrew name for boys that means “my father judges.” Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgment.

Boaz. Boaz is a Hebrew name for boys that means “strength.” It takes might and strength to atone for our transgressions on Yom Kippur.

Baruch. Baruch is a Hebrew name for boys that means “blessed.” May the new year be as blessed as the last!

Chaggai. Chaggai is a Hebrew name for boys that means “celebrate.”

Dan. Dan is a Hebrew name for boys that means “judgment.”

Elisha. Elisha is a Hebrew name for boys that means “Go-d is my salvation.”

Yerachmiel. Yerachmiel is a Hebrew name for boys that means “G-d shall have mercy.”

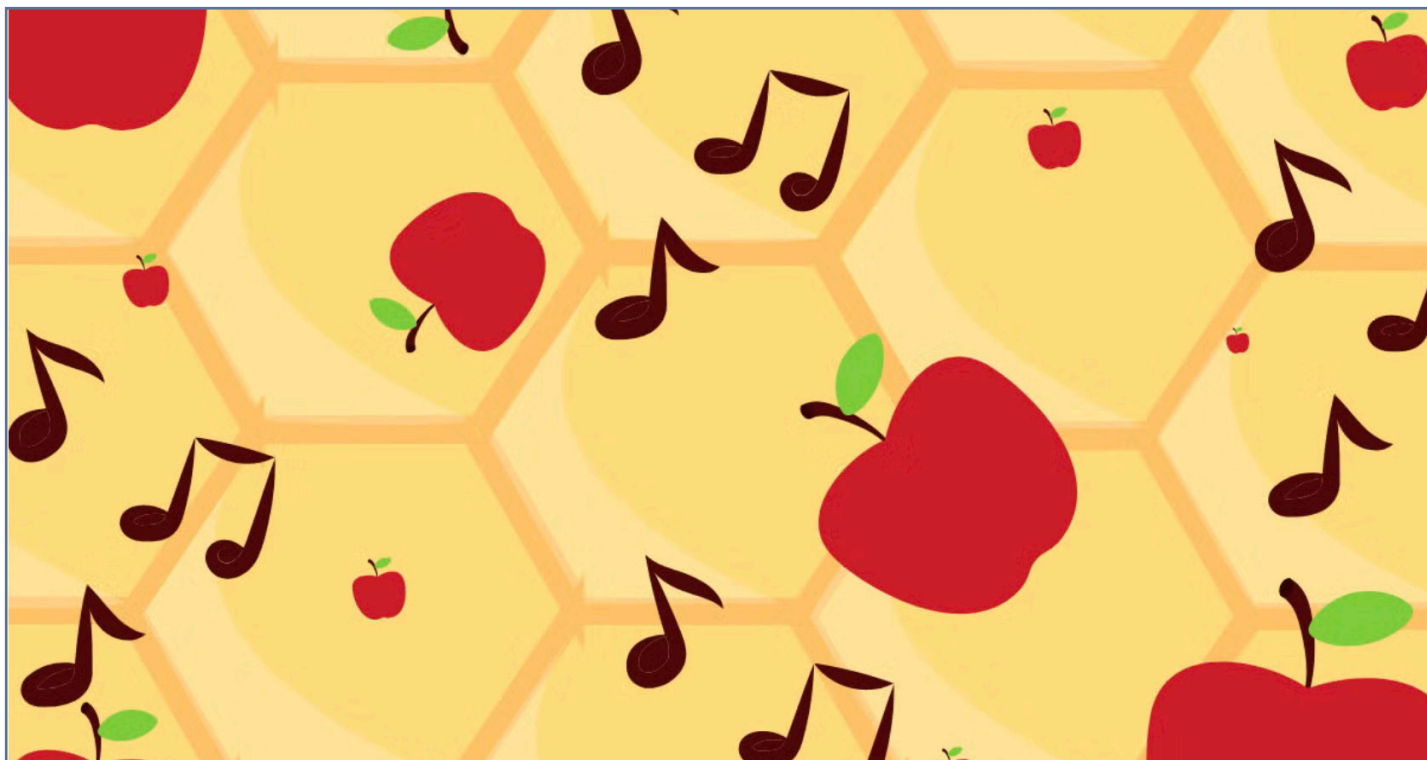
Zedekiah. Zedekiah is a Hebrew name for boys that means “G-d is righteous.” ☆

ARIELLE KAPLAN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE.

The Best Rosh Hashanah Songs for Kids

Get in the spirit of the Jewish New Year with these delightful original tunes.

BY LIOR ZALTZMAN, MY JEWISH LEARNING

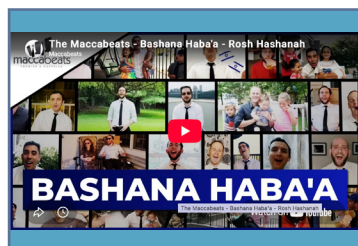


How do you get your kids in the mood for Rosh Hashanah? In my house, the answer is the same for every holiday — with Jewish music, of course.

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, starts at sundown on September 15, 2023 this year, so I've decided to collect some of my favorite original Rosh Hashanah songs (yes, no parodies on this list, I'm sorry) for kids and adults that will help anyone get in the spirit of the holiday.

"Bashana Haba'a" by The Maccabeats

This hopeful song of longing, whose title means "in the next year," was written by Ehud Manor two years after the passing of his brother in the War of Attrition. It's all about setting intentions for how good the next year will be.



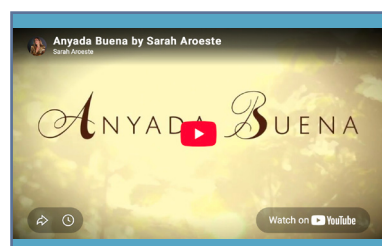
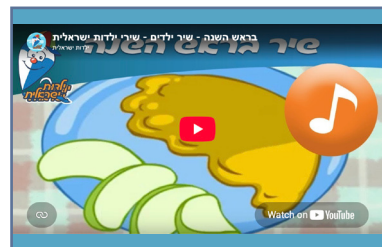
I love so many versions of this song, but this one released by the Maccabeats in 2020 during the pandemic is especially lovely.

"Be'Rosh Ha'Shana" by Naomi Shemer

I don't know why this simple Naomi Shemer song always moistens my eyes a little, but it might be the chorus in which we sing about our hearts filling with an ancient prayer, how the year that begins today will be beautiful and different.

"Anyada Buena" by Sarah Aroeste

This super moving tune from songstress Sarah



Aroeste mixes both Ladino and English and is filled with the most wonderful wishes for the new year.

"Matana Le'Rosh Hashana" by Chava Alberstein

Chava Alberstein, one of Israel's best singers, shares this tune about "a gift for Rosh Hashanah" and the joys of enjoying nature as a kid, being grateful for everything around us.

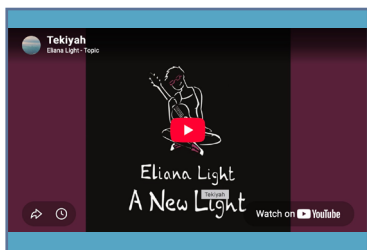
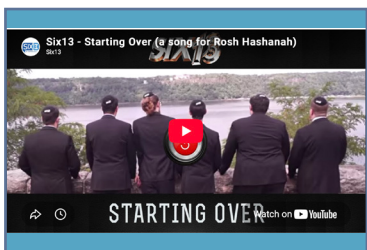


"Starting Over" by Six13

Jewish parody kings Six13 wrote this original Rosh Hashanah ballad.

"Tekiyah" by Eliana Light

We love Eliana Light's Jewish music (including the Taylor Swift Passover parody she did for Kveller), and this soulful song is a perfect call to wake up and be your best self.



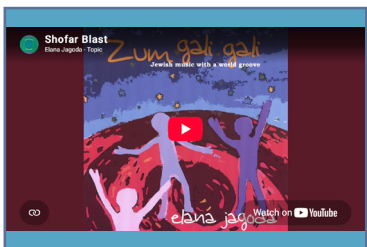
"Apples & Honey" by The Macaroons

The Macaroons make the best of a sticky situation with this song about remembering the sweetness in life. If you ever thought your holiday was missing a tune with a classic rock feel, this is the song for you.



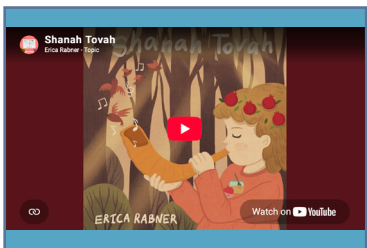
"Shofar Blast" by Elana Jogoda

Here's a Rosh Hashanah classic that's great to both jump up and down to and help teach our kids the different shofar blasts of the High Holidays.



"Shanah Tovah" by Erica Rabner

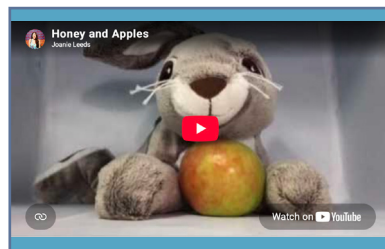
We love Rabner's



Hanukkah album, and the CocoMelon songwriter also put out this Rosh Hashanah song that's almost too sweet!

"Honey and Apples" by Joanie Leeds

Add a bit of a country feel to your High Holidays with this song from Grammy-award winning Jewish kids' music maven Joanie Leeds!



"Tapvah Bi'Dvash" by HaGashash HaHiver

This song title means "apple and honey," and it was originally recorded by HaGashash HaHiver, who lovers of classic Israeli entertainment know as the OG Jewish musical comedy trio.

This video of two worms stuck in a honeyed apple singing a sped-up opening of the song went viral over a decade ago, and if your kids love short, funny videos like mine do, you might want to show them.



"Shofar Callin" by Prodezra Beats

This song isn't only about Rosh Hashanah rituals, it goes through the Torah stories that we read during the holiday, retelling the tale of Abraham and Isaac.



"Rosh Ha Shanananana" by Josh and the Jamtones

Someone had to give Rosh Hashanah the shanananana treatment and I'm so glad it was Josh and the Jamtones. How delightful.



"Shanah Tovah" by Debbie Friedman

Of course we had to end this list with Debbie Friedman. ☆



LIOR ZALTZMAN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE.



COOKING JEWISH

Lifestyle

CELEBRATING ROSH HASHANAH

Edible links to our
Jewish history

BY JUDY BART KANCIGOR

The Best Honey Cake Yet

When the exotic yellow Barhi dates first appear in the open-air markets of Israel, no one needs a calendar to sense that Rosh Hashanah is approaching. So too did the ancient Hebrews mark the seasons with cues from nature – the ripening of wheat in spring, the profusion of figs in summer, pomegranate harvest in fall, the pressing of olives in winter.

Rosh Hashanah, which begins at sundown on Friday, September 11, began as an agricultural festival. The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. by the Romans, which forced the Jewish people into exile, helped transform how the holidays were understood and observed. “The Essential Book of Jewish Festival Cooking” (HarperCollins, \$29.95) by Phyllis Glazer with her sister, Rabbi Miriyam Glazer, explores, through mouth-watering recipes and their fascinating origins, how the holidays were remolded by the rabbis and sages in the Diaspora.

“There were no familiar signs of nature for the people to follow in their new land,” explained Phyllis Glazer, visiting from her home in Israel where she is a cookbook author and well-known food journalist. “The rabbis sought to save the holidays and give them other meanings.”

“There’s a beautiful line in one of the Psalms: ‘How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?’” added Miriyam, “and so the rabbis looked for scriptural evidence in the Bible itself in order to preserve the festivals.”

While the Bible mentions a day for blowing of the *shofar*, there is no evidence of a holiday called Rosh Hashanah. “Centuries later Rosh Hashanah evolved,” noted Miriyam, “because, although our New Year had been in the spring, the culture our ancestors were living in had a New Year celebration in the fall. All the holidays as we know them today are products of hundreds of years of discus-

sion that are captured in the Talmud.”

Over the centuries, as the Jewish people found themselves dispersed across the globe, traditions were added. For Rosh Hashanah we dip apples in honey to wish each other a sweet year. We eat carrots, because the Yiddish word for carrots, “*merren*,” also means “increased,” so we wish for “increased” health and prosperity at this time.

Challah, the egg bread so inextricably linked with every celebration, takes various shapes for each holiday. “I learned to braid my hair by learning to braid challah,” recalled Phyllis of her mother’s Sabbath loaf. On Rosh Hashanah we create grand spirals to dip in honey. “Since Rosh Hashanah also celebrates the creation of the world, the round challah is a symbol of the holiness of life and the life cycle, the endlessness of life,” said Miriyam. “We add raisins for the same reason that we dip apples in honey, to enjoy a sweet New Year.”

Because Rosh Hashanah comes at the beginning of the lunar month when the moon is hidden, we eat “hidden” foods. “That’s echoed in food like *kreplach*, in which you can’t see what’s inside,” noted Miriyam, “just as the moon is hidden at the holiday.”

Pomegranates too assume a special place on the Rosh Hashanah table. “It’s a blessing to eat a food at Rosh Hashanah that you haven’t eaten in that season yet,” said Miriyam. “That’s why we eat pomegranates at Rosh Hashanah when they have just come into season.” This ancient fertility symbol was even used to make wine, the Glazers point out, as we see in the Song of Songs.

Wine is so central to the celebration of Jewish festivals that grapes are the only fruit that have their own special blessing. “Every sacred meal begins with a glass of wine,” said Miriyam, “But the wine of our ancestors was very different from ours.

They had to dilute it, because it was like a thick syrup. Today Israel has really reclaimed and developed beautifully the wine industry, so all these new and really fine wines are coming out of there. Many people associate kosher wine only with the thick, sweet wine that used to exist 75 years ago, but today they have the finest and a wide variety.”

Grapes are one of the Seven Species of the Bible, the special foods that best portray the land and its traditions, a list which also includes wheat, barley, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and honey.

“Seven is a magical number, mystical number in the Jewish tradition,” observed Miriyam. “The world was created in six days and on the seventh day G-d rested. The Seven Species are all over the tradition. We see them as evoking the whole spiritual path from the fulfilling of the basic needs of a human being, wheat and barley, to the sweetness of honey. We believe that they map a whole spiritual process.”

These ancient foods are not merely ingredients on a holiday table. They are edible links to the land, the Bible and generations of Jewish life. ☆

“**Over the centuries, as the Jewish people found themselves dispersed across the globe, traditions were added.”**

JLIFE FOOD EDITOR JUDY BART KANCIGOR IS THE AUTHOR OF “COOKING JEWISH” (WORKMAN) AND “THE PERFECT PASSOVER COOKBOOK” (AN E-BOOK SHORT FROM WORKMAN), A COLUMNIST AND FEATURE WRITER FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS AND CAN BE FOUND ON THE WEB AT WWW.COOKINGJEWISH.COM.



**MAKE
ME!
EASY TO
FOLLOW
RECIPE**

The Best Honey Cake Yet

Makes one 12-inch loaf or two 9-inch loaves

One of the Seven Species of the Bible, honey symbolizes the wish for a sweet New Year. "Inspired by the Romanian-Jewish honey cake – which is light rather than dark – this version is light as a feather and really delicious," write Phyllis and Miriyam Glazer.

1 cup walnuts or pecans, chopped
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1 1/4 cups honey
6 large eggs, separated
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
Pinch of ground cardamom
2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 cup sugar

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Lightly grease 12-inch loaf pan or two 9-inch loaf pans. Line bottom and sides with parchment paper to facilitate removal after baking. Set aside.
 2. Place chopped nuts in baking pan and roast in oven for 10 minutes, shaking pan occasionally. Remove from oven and let cool.
 3. Lower heat to 300°F.
 4. In bowl of a standing electric mixer, beat oil, honey, egg yolks, and spices. Sift flour and baking powder and blend into honey mixture until smooth.
 5. In separate bowl, beat egg whites until foamy. Add sugar gradually, continuing to beat until egg whites are stiff. Fold small amount of egg whites into honey mixture, then fold in the rest gradually, mixing gently each time until incorporated. Stir in nuts.
 6. Carefully pour batter into prepared pan(s). Bake on middle shelf of preheated oven for 60 to 75 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in center pulls out almost dry. (It will have fine crumbs stuck to it.) Place baking pan(s) on wire rack and let cool for 20 minutes before turning out on rack to finish cooling.
- Variations: Add 1/3 cup finely chopped crystallized ginger to batter instead of nuts or add 1/2 cup finely chopped candied citron to batter instead of or in addition to nuts.

Georgian Chicken In Pomegranate And Tamarind

Yield: 5 to 6 servings

This richly flavored fragrant chicken dish from Georgia on the Black Sea is traditional among Georgian Jews for Rosh Hashanah and the festival season. Traditionally made with chicken thighs, it can also be made with a combination of thighs, legs, and breast. Both tamarind paste and pomegranate molasses are available in Middle Eastern groceries.

10 chicken thighs
2 cups diced onion (about 4 medium)
4 cups diced red onion (about 4 medium)
2 cups chopped fresh cilantro
10 garlic cloves, sliced or pressed
1 teaspoon sweet paprika
1 teaspoon hot paprika or cayenne pepper, or to taste
1 teaspoon black pepper
3 tablespoons tamarind paste
1/2 cup pomegranate molasses, diluted in 1/2 cup of water
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
Seeds of 1/2 pomegranate, for garnish (optional but spectacular)

1. Remove skin from chicken thighs, rinse, and pat dry. In large Dutch oven or pot with cover, mix diced onions, 1 1/2 cups cilantro, the garlic, and spices. Blend in tamarind paste, diluted pomegranate molasses, tomato paste, and salt. Add chicken thighs and ladle sauce on top.
 2. Cover and cook on medium high heat for 10 minutes, then lower heat and cook until meltingly tender, about 45 minutes or more depending on the size of the chicken parts.
 3. Transfer chicken and sauce to serving platter and garnish with remaining 1/2 cup chopped cilantro. Sprinkle pomegranate seeds on top and serve hot.
- Source: "The Essential Book of Jewish Festival Cooking" by Phyllis Glazer with her sister, Rabbi Miriyam Glazer ✧

I'M BIKING 100 MILES ON ROSH HASHANAH. HERE'S WHY.

BY MICHELLE DICKSTEIN, MY JEWISH LEARNING

Over the past four years, I've been actively exploring my relationship with Judaism, Jewish culture, and my personal spirituality. What I've realized is that while I feel connected to Jewish traditions, values, and the concept of a higher power, I don't feel spiritual connection in synagogue. Reading prayers in Hebrew during services just doesn't do it for me.

I enjoy the Jewish High Holidays for the opportunity to connect with "framily"—my close friends who feel like family, whom my husband and I first met when at the JCC when we were newlyweds and new in town. Ten years later, these are now our lifelong friends, with whom we spend Kol Nidre, the Yom Kippur break fast and Passover seders.

We joined our local synagogue because it felt the most like "home" to me and my husband, and our girls attend Hebrew and Sunday school there. I like our synagogue very much—we enjoy attending young family Shabbat services, decorating the Sukkah and celebrating holidays with the congregation. But I don't attend High Holiday services there.

Don't get me wrong—I like Rosh Hashanah. I enjoy reflecting on the past year, remembering the hopes and dreams I had for myself and my family. Last year, my oldest daughter started kindergarten. The nerves and emotions I felt this time last year have given way to excitement over how much she'll enjoy the 1st grade; and my twins will now begin preschool in separate classrooms, the first time they'll be apart.

But I've found I don't feel particularly spiritual when I'm praying inside a sanctuary. Rather, I feel connected to a higher power in other ways—namely yoga, meditation, writing, and enjoying nature by hiking, biking or camping. Last year I kicked off my Yom Kippur fast with a meaningful hot yoga class. And this year, on Rosh Hashanah, instead of hearing the shofar blow 100 times in synagogue, I'll be doing a 100-mile bike ride.

I seek a spiritual experience on Rosh Hashanah. I'm riding my bike because it combines the elements of being outdoors with physical movement, and that's a double whammy for me when it comes to connecting with the divine.

The Jewish New Year is a reminder to take stock in where I am in my life and where I want to go. As I grip the handlebars, pedal round and round,



and watch the ground fly below me, I am transported to a quiet and reflective place in my mind. I cannot predict where my mind will go, but I know I will connect to the tender places in my heart, and explore areas I want to focus on, like my marriage, and my evolving relationships with my daughters. I will also think about how I can be my most authentic self, and live and behave with love and kindness as my guiding intention.

When it comes to repentance, I'm not waiting to give loved ones one big annual "I'm sorry." As the mother of three young daughters, I feel like I repent and ask for forgiveness daily, because it's what they need for their emotional growth and development—they know even Mama can be wrong, and that's OK. I can easily admit fault and wrongdoing with my husband because our relationship is built on mutual love, respect, and teamwork, not ego.

So, on Rosh Hashanah, I will be working up a major sweat and pushing my body to the extreme (this is my first hundred-mile ride). I anticipate this will subsequently push my mind to places it has never been before, either. At the end of my long and exhausting day, I will look forward to reuniting with my family. Together we will welcome the New Year with apples, honey and challah, and then I will collapse into bed, and fall into an exceptionally deep sleep with dreams for a very sweet New Year. ☆

MICHELLE DICKSTEIN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

**SELICHOT
SERVICES START ON
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5
7:00 PM**

Jews Sing the Blues: Slichot
Service at Temple Beth David
Temple Beth David, TBD

**SUNDAYS, SEPTEMBER 6,
13, 20 & 27**

8:45 - 9:15 AM

Men's Club
Weekly Zoom Chat
Breakfast Get-Togethers
Selected Dates at Nearby
Restaurants
Other events include annual
Sukkah building, Super Bowl
Party, Museum and other
places of interests, The Quakes
minor league baseball games,
BBQs, and more.
Temple Beth David, TBD

**SUNDAYS, SEPTEMBER 6,
13, 20 & 27**

9:30 - 10:30 AM

Adult Hebrew Intermediate
Temple Beth David, TBD

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10
11:00 - NOON
ON ZOOM**

(Second Thursday
of the month)
Caffeine for the Soul
Chabad of the Inland Empire,
CIE

**ROSH HASHANAH
(JEWISH NEW YEAR)**

**SUNSET OF FRIDAY,
SEPTEMBER 11 –
NIGHTFALL OF SUNDAY,
SEPTEMBER 13**

**FAST OF GEDALIAH
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18
7:30 PM**

Shabbat Shuvah – L'Dor VaDor
Temple Beth David, TBD

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20
9:30 AM - 12:30 PM**

1st Day of Jewish
Adventure School
(every Sunday until
November 1)
Temple Beth David, TBD

**YOM KIPPUR
(DAY OF ATONEMENT)
SUNSET OF SUNDAY,
SEPTEMBER 20 –
NIGHTFALL OF MONDAY,
SEPTEMBER 21**

**SUKKOT (FESTIVAL OF
TABERNACLES)
SUNSET OF FRIDAY,
SEPTEMBER 25 –
NIGHTFALL OF FRIDAY,
OCTOBER 2**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25
7:00 PM**

Sukkot begins-
Mooncake Festival
Temple Beth David, TBD

JFed Players Presents:
Murder on the Orient Express
**PERFORMANCES
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26,
7:30 PM**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27,
3:00 PM**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29,
7:30 PM**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1,
7:30 PM**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4
3:00 PM AND 7:00 PM**

TICKETS
\$35 General | \$25 Students /
Groups 10+
LOCATION
Lineage Performing
Arts Center
920 E. Mountain St.
Pasadena, CA 91104
For more information, contact
Cantor Judy Sofer at jsofer@jewishsgpv.org.
JFGSGPV

**SHEMINI ATZERET
SUNSET OF FRIDAY,
OCTOBER 2 –
NIGHTFALL OF SATURDAY,
OCTOBER 3**

**SIMCHAT TORAH
SUNSET OF SATURDAY,
OCTOBER 3 –
NIGHTFALL OF SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 4**

We encourage our readers
to visit our community's
synagogue websites to get
information on their schedules
for Rosh Hashanah and Yom
Kippur services.

**Beth Shalom
of Whittier (BSW)**
www.bethshalomofwhittier.net

**B'nai Simcha
Community Preschool**
www.bnaisimcha.org

**Chabad Jewish Center of
South Pasadena**
www.jewishsouthpasadena.com

**Chabad of Arcadia
(CoA)**
www.jewisharcadia.com

**Chabad of Pasadena
(CoP)**
www.chabadpasadena.com

**Chabad of the
Inland Empire (CIE)**
www.chabadinlandempire.com

**Congregation Hugat
Haverim (CHH)**
www.hugathaverim.com

Congregation Emanu El (CEE)
<https://emanuelsb.org/>

**Jewish Federation of the
Greater San Gabriel and
Pomona Valleys (JFGSGPV)**
www.jewishsgpv.org

**Pasadena Jewish
Academy (PJA)**
www.pasadenajewishacademy.com

**Pasadena Jewish
Temple & Center (PJTC)**
www.pjtc.net

**Temple Ami Shalom
(TAS)**
<https://templeamishalom.org/>

**Temple Beth Israel of
Pomona (TBI)**
www.tbipomona.org

**Temple Beth David of
the San Gabriel Valley
(TBD)**
www.templebethdavidsgv.org

**Temple Beth Israel of
Highland Park and Eagle
Rock (TBILA)**
www.tbila.org

Temple B'nai Emet (TBE)
<https://templebnaiemet.org>

**Temple Sinai of Glendale
(TSG)**
<http://temple-sinai.net>

**Temple Sholom of
Ontario (TSO)**
www.templesholomofontario.org

**Tree of Life Preschool
(formerly TBI Preschool)
(ToL)**
<https://tbipomona.org> ☆



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PERFORMANCES

Saturday, September 26, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, September 27, 3:00 p.m.

Tuesday, September 29, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, October 1, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, October 4, 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

TICKETS

\$35 General | \$25 Students / Groups 10+

LOCATION

Lineage Performing Arts Center
920 E. Mountain St.
Pasadena, CA 91104

NEWS & JEWS

Repair the World and Hillel International Set to Engage Over 800 College Students in Service and Learning to Mark 25th Anniversary of 9/11

National Initiative Honors the Anniversary in the Spirit of Service and Remembrance

As the nation prepares to commemorate the 25th anniversary of September 11, Repair the World—an organization that mobilizes Jewish communities to take action to pursue a just world—and Hillel International—the world's largest Jewish campus organization—will engage over 800 college students across the U.S. at approximately 15 campus Hillels to honor this solemn day through acts of service.

Supported by a grant from 9/11 Day and Americorps, campus Hillels nationwide will host volunteer projects addressing food security, environmental stewardship, and other pressing local needs, paired with Jewish learning grounded in the importance of remembrance and renewal.

"Most college students today know September 11 through history books and the stories they've heard from family, teachers, and the media," said Melissa Levine, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives at Repair the World. "On that day, people came together to care for one another. Service is a way for young adults to connect with and carry forward that legacy. As we enter the High Holiday season and reach the 9/11's milestone anniversary, Jewish young adults and their peers can embody the value of responsibility and chesed, caring for their neighbors."

The timing of the commemoration is especially significant as the Jewish community prepares for the High Holidays and the three-year mark of October 7. Through Jewish service and learning, Repair the World and Hillel International are helping a new generation connect with the spirit of civic engagement, compassion, and collective responsibility.

"Bringing students together to help their communities is one of the most meaningful ways we have to mark such a solemn day," said Dani Levine, Hillel International's Senior Director of Social Impact. "Even though these students aren't old enough to remember 9/11, it is inspiring that they are choosing to spend the day in service. This is the model we are building for future Jewish leaders."



The initiative also marks the opening of Repair the World's National Days of Jewish Service (NDJS), a month-long activation running September 10 through October 10 that invites thousands of young adult volunteers across the country to engage in meaningful service. In addition to campus 9/11 programming, this campaign features volunteer opportunities with nonprofit partners nationwide focused on issues including food, the environment, housing, and refugee and immigrant support.

NDJS is Repair the World's signature framework for mobilizing Jewish communities around moments of shared meaning throughout the year. In addition to the fall program, Repair organizes nationwide service initiatives around Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January, and during the spring, centered around Passover, Earth Day, Holocaust Remembrance, and National Volunteer Week. Together, these three annual events provide funding, training, and resources that empower local leaders and partners to organize meaningful Jewish service and learning opportunities across the country.

Repair the World expects to engage tens of thousands of volunteers each year, creating opportunities for Jewish young adults to build relationships, respond to local needs and experience Jewish life through service.

"Whether we're commemorating September 11, honoring Dr. King's legacy, celebrating Passover, or entering the High Holiday season, we have opportunities to act on our values," added Melissa Levine. "NDJS brings people together to serve with neighbors, strengthen their communities, and demonstrate that remembrance is a catalyst for action."

To learn more about National Days of Jewish Service or find a volunteer opportunity, visit werrepair.org/get-involved/campaign/ndjs/.

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About Repair the World

Repair the World mobilizes Jews and their communities to pursue a just world, igniting a lifelong commitment to service. Service in support of social change is vital to a flourishing Jewish community and an inspired Jewish life. By 2030, the organization aims to inspire one million acts of service and learning.

About Hillel International

For over 100 years, the Hillel movement has been uniquely focused on serving all kinds of Jewish students. Today, Hillel is the largest Jewish campus organization in the world, serving nearly 200,000 Jewish students each year at 850+ colleges and universities around the world. ✧

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