

Explaining the Holidays to Non-Jews

BY RABBI SAMUEL SILVER

Every autumn the Jewish people observe what are known as the High Holydays.

This is a period of ten days beginning with Rosh Hashanah which means New Year, and ending with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

The Jewish New Year has nothing to do with the calendar year. Jews regard January the First as the beginning of the regular year, as everyone else does.

The term, new year, is used by the Jews at this time to mean the new effort which they

make to correct mistakes they may have made in the past. It is a new year of conscience, not the calendar.

Actually, the time when we get going all over again on duties and tasks temporarily suspended is the autumn. That's when school starts after the summer vacation; that's when organizations start their activities again. It's a more logical break in the year than January the First.

At that important time, when the summer is over and the brisk breezes of fall begin to arouse us, the Jewish people take time out to try to stir themselves to improve the quality of their deeds.

They do this at worship services in their synagogues. They recite prayers thanking God for giving men and women the power to tell right from wrong. They sit silently and think about the errors they may have committed.

They sing hymns in which the idea of forgiving others is emphasized. They listen to the rabbi who reminds them that believing in God means trying to make use of the powers for goodness and mercy which are deposited in all of us, but which we sometimes neglect. They hearken to the Shofar, which is a ram's horn, with a rousing sound, designed to awaken the conscience that might be slumbering.

On the tenth day of this period of penitence, or repentance, there takes place the observance of the Day of Atonement.

Although the Jewish High Holydays are the most important religious occasion for the Jewish people, there is nothing about the holydays which does not apply to all people. That is why one rabbi once told his congregation the way we can really atone is to strive to be at one with everyone.

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