

Tishrei: A Month with Many Purposes

A time to.....

Rosh Hashanah: A Time of Spiritual Reflection

The month of Tishrei is filled with major Jewish holidays. Beginning on the first day with Rosh Hashanah and ending with Simchat Torah at the conclusion of Sukkot, the celebrations are varied and emotions range from pensive introspection to thankfulness. Rosh Chodesh Tishrei, otherwise now known as Rosh Hashanah, marks the beginning of the calendar year. As one of four “new years” described by the Mishnah, its appointment as the first month is a late Second Temple development. But by this time it was solemnified as a time of prayer, reflection on one’s own behavior and relationship to community and God.



Instead of new year’s resolutions, Rosh Hashanah begins a ten day period of introspection ending with Yom Kippur, when a final “decree” is made for the year’s success. This period of awe does require some reflection on one’s health and habits. As recited in the High Holiday liturgy, at this time the Divine book will be inscribed and sealed – who will live and who will not. What better time to consider one’s health risks and to make some plan about how to address these concerns!

Rosh Hashanah: A Time to Reflect on Physical Wellbeing

This year, Women’s League for Conservative Judaism has begun the Wellness and Learning Network as an approach to spotlighting not only aspects of women’s health, but also the need for individual women to address the totality of their wellness – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. As part of this effort a Health Risk Appraisal (HRA) will be offered to members through the Women’s League website. The HRA is a Center for Disease Control (CDC) sponsored tool for measuring each individual’s health risk, based on age, sex and race that has been used for over 40 years. While it does have limitations, it is a meaningful first measurement of where a person stands in comparison to others in his/her group. It also offers some suggestions for change. Included in the references are several authors who raise specific issues about the impact and efficacy of this tool.

One key element in health risk assessment is the fact that such measurements are not static. A younger woman has risks attributed to childbirth. Beyond that age and menopause, those risks fade and others such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes gain importance. Sometimes these disease risks are linked to family inheritance and other times to one’s own health habits, or both. Obesity, for example, is clearly a precursor to Type 2 Diabetes. It is a good reminder that humans are influenced by heritage, but also have a measure of control in determining their life course.

This element of change also is evident in the yearly celebration of the Jewish holidays. While Rosh Hashanah marks the passage of time, individuals are not in the same place in their lives each fall. The progression was described as a “spiral” by Dr. Miriam Faust, a psychologist from Bar Ilan University. Ten years ago in a Rosh Hashanah message, she described four steps to the process of change: 1) initiation, 2) adaptation, 3) reassessment, and 4) reconciliation. Her observations grew out of her study of hundreds of subjects dealing with life changes. Over the next several months, the Wellness and Learning Network will review topics related to life changes and decision making and try to present the most meaningful studies for consideration.

The experiences of Tishrei lead from thoughts about new beginnings to setting firm goals for the year ahead. A week after the solemnity of the Day of Atonement, the holiday of Sukkot brings thanksgiving for the harvest, as well as the important reading of Ecclesiastes which states that “*there is a time to be born, and atime for everything under heaven.*”

The true meaning of Tishrei lies in recognizing the challenges of the new year, setting goals for one’s personal life change, and moving ahead in a timely manner. The need for “awe and assessment” is fundamental to the experience of this month of holy days, and a goal of the Wellness and Learning Network, as well.

With wishes for a sweet new year and an easy fast, let’s consider the topics involved in health risk assessment as we move forward into 5774.

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