

ROSH HASHANAH

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year, is observed on the first and second of Tishrei and together with Yom Kippur (the 10th of Tishrei), they comprise the *Yamim Nora'im* (Days of Awe), popularly known as the High Holy Days. This ten day period is also called *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* (Ten Days of Repentance) signifying the purpose and solemnity of the season – one of contemplation and stock-taking, penitence and repentance. It is the season when we reflect on our lives over the past year and commit to improvement in the new one.

For many, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur have eclipsed the three major pilgrimage holidays of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. In fact, the Bible does not use the term Rosh Hashanah at all, but refers only to a sacred assembly accompanied by loud blasts (of the shofar) on the first day of the seventh month (*Leviticus 23:23* and *Numbers 29:1*).

These Torah verses reflect an early tradition of a holiday in the seventh month that later evolved into Rosh Hashanah. New year observance in Tishrei (the biblical seventh month) began during the Second Temple period based, in part, on the assumption that creation took place at this time of year, which reflects the agricultural and climate patterns of the land of Israel. This change is reflected in the Mishnah (200 CE) that also regards the month of Tishrei as the beginning of the calendar year:

There are four new year days: on the first of Nisan is the new year for kings and feasts; on the first of Elul is the new year for the tithe of cattle (R. Eleazar and R. Simeon say: the first of Tishrei); on the first of Tishrei is the new year for [the reckoning of] the years of [foreign kings], of the years of release and jubilee years, for the planting [of trees] and for vegetables; and the first of Shevat is the new year for [fruit] trees – so says the school of Shammai; and the school of Hillel say: on the fifteenth.

Rosh HaShanah 1:1

The solemnity of the penitential season is meant to remind us of our mortality. It is customary to greet each other with *Leshanah tovah tikatevu vetechatemu* (May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year).

Words of Hiddur Mitzvah

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

The classical passage guiding us on the practice of hiddur mitzvah comes from the Talmud, Massekhet Shabbat 133b:

This is my God and I will beautify God (Ex 15:2). Beautify oneself before God through mitzvot. Make before God a beautiful sukkah, a beautiful lulav and a beautiful shofar, beautiful tzitzit and a beautiful Torah scroll, and write in it for God's sake with beautiful ink, a beautiful pen, and an expert scribe, and wrap it in beautiful silks. Abba Shaul says ve-anveihu - be like God. Just as God is gracious and compassionate, so you should be gracious and compassionate.



JEWISH HOME BASICS

Special challah cover

Honey dish and spoon

Shofar

Machzor (prayer book)

Notice the move of the paragraph – first focus inward: make yourself beautiful before God through the practice of mitzvot. To be beautiful through mitzvot is to make sure the inner conviction/intention and outer behavior cohere. No empty behaviorism here; mitzvot must come from our hearts, from our core, permeated with our mindfulness. But we do not stop with intentionality. The mitzvot should also be aesthetically beautiful. Judaism loves beauty – color, texture, smell, heft. All the artistry of a Bezalel is mustered to let the soul delight. Beauty itself is an enhancement of divine service, a chariot carrying soaring mindfulness.

Beauty has a social aspect. We beautify in order to share, so that we can celebrate as a community, so that we can relish the added sensory delights that beauty affords. Interiority, community – the practice of hiddur mitzvah affords both, and then takes one final step. According to Abba Shaul, the culmination of hiddur mitzvah is that we ourselves demonstrate God’s ethical decency. Just as God is gracious to others, we are to be gracious to each other. Just as God is compassionate to others, so we are to be as well. One cannot be gracious in isolation, one cannot manifest compassion alone. This ethical expression requires covenanted community, just as God requires creation to be able to share divine love, we need each other – Am Yisrael, humanity, the biosphere, planet earth – to make the mitzvot a pathway of respect and honor.

Interiority and mindfulness, aesthetics and community, ethics and covenant – all find expression in hiddur mitzvah. Embodied, biological creatures, we need to make physical our values and implement our concepts. In that way, we become God’s hands in the world.

Judaic Mosaic

SHANAH TOVAH CARDS: GREETINGS AND MORE

Every year near the end of Elul they begin to arrive at our homes and now via email. *Shanah tovah* greeting cards borne through the mail extend wishes for a happy ... sweet ... healthy (pick one) new year.

Some have the classic symbolic holiday imagery: a shofar, an open book, a sliced apple dripping with honey. Some reflect a more universal message of peace and good will. Some are on the smallish side, little note cards with images that are a throwback to the 1950s. Some are identical – an annual fundraising opportunity for Jewish organizations – and some are lush and rich in color, so large that they require additional postage. Jews have been sending out Rosh Hashanah cards for well over a century and no matter their size, shape or design, we open them and smile, grateful to be remembered.

But Rosh Hashanah cards originated as more than just wishes for a healthy and happy new year. Not so long ago, when Jews extended new year greetings they did it face-to-face. During the peak years of mass migration from the old world to the new, a new mode of social contact emerged – the postcard. Two-sided cards had appeared in central Europe and quickly evolved into the form that remains today, with an image on one side and the second side divided for address and message. By the late 19th century postcards had become an international craze.

Marketers developed niche audiences, offering images that would resonate with specific ethnic groups. For the Jewish market, designers sought visual expression of the promise of a new life after the upheaval of immigration. Images of political and social integration – eagles and flags, automobiles and smart clothing – reflected the



1928 Shanah tovah card from Max and Leah Bober and daughters, Gertrude and Goldie. The Bobers immigrated to the US from Poland in 1921. The younger of the two girls is Goldie B. Kweller, Women’s League president, 1978-1982. Courtesy Penny Leifer, daughter of Gertrude

transformation of Jew to *American Jew*. It was only an incremental step to the creation of Jewish new year greeting cards. These postcards were a way for the newly arrived immigrants to communicate their physical well being, material success and acculturation to the folks back home. The underlying text of the new year greeting was one of affirmation (for leaving), belonging and fulfilled promise.

Many new year postcards reflected patently American imagery and sometimes even American pseudo-religious imagery such as angels and Father Time. As testimonial to the fulfilled process of Americanization, the family portrait greeting became popular in which families posed in fashionable clothing, women with their hair nicely coiffed and their husbands dressed as Wall Street bankers. With *leshanah tovah* superimposed across the portrait, its two-fold message – religious and social – was unambiguous.

Another benefit of this new phenomenon was that holiday cards provided opportunity for women to participate in holiday preparations. In addition to their roles as consumers whose desires and pocketbooks could fuel the market, the process of organizing, purchasing and mailing the greetings involved women in a high holiday celebration that was new and modern. Moreover, the images of women on the cards reflected a world in which women were visible, not hovering about the margins.

In these trim little cards marketplace, message, modernity, and religious faith all converge. So the next time you open that *shana tovah* greeting from your Aunt Hetty and Uncle Frank, knowing this interesting little piece of historical ephemera might cause you to smile just a bit longer.

Creative Judaic Arts Project

FIBER ART POSTCARDS

Artist trading cards are a recent addition to the fiber art world. Artists create postcards from interfacing, fabrics, stamps, and other media, and mail them all over the country. Here's a way of making multiples for the holidays. Your family and friends will be amazed at your creativity and artistry.

Materials

- Stabilizer/Interfacing (Timtex or Pellon) It can be fusible or not.
- Iron on fusible interfacing (Wonder Under, Heat and Bond)
- Scissors
- Rotary mat and cutter
- Large see-through ruler
- A variety of fabrics, threads, beads, charms, sequins
- Tulle netting
- Fabric paints
- Rubber stamps/inks appropriate for fabric
- Plain fabric for the back (muslin works great)
- Other embellishments
- Parchment paper to protect your iron



Visit www.wlcj.org
for Mitzvah Yomit
A Mitzvah a Day

This extensive collection of materials can be used to introduce and encourage the observance of a variety of mitzvot.

Directions

1. Begin with a large sheet of Timtex interfacing. 24 inches long will give approximately 16 4" x 6" cards. If it is fusible, remove the paper from one side
2. Prepare fabrics by ironing fusible interfacing to the back. Remove paper and cut into strips and shapes. Place on Timtex.
3. When entire piece is covered with fabrics, place parchment paper over and iron with a hot, dry iron following manufacturer's directions.
4. Add embellishments. I began by stamping apples. You can add fabric paint swirls, dots, and other designs. Glue or sew on beads, ribbons or jewels. The more layers the more interesting the piece.
5. Dry for 24 hours.
6. Place netting over entire piece and "stipple quilt" through all layers of your piece. Be sure to sew around beads – not through them.
7. Turn piece upside down. Remove paper from back of Timtex. Place plain fabric on and iron. This is the side that will be addressed and stamped, so don't use anything dark or patterned.
8. Turn the piece right side up and place on your cutting mat. Using a rotary cutter and ruler, cut out 4" X 6" rectangles. Each card will be slightly different depending on where you stamped, painted, etc.
9. Set your sewing machine to a wide zigzag stitch (6-7 mm) and a short stitch length (.06). This will create a satin stitch. Sew along all four sides of the piece encasing the top, interfacing and backing.
10. Write a holiday message on the back with permanent fabric markers and address to your loved ones.

These cards cost more to send than a standard sized card. Each card must be hand cancelled. There is no need for an envelope.

Judaic Mosaic

APPLE AND HONEY DISH

One of the more popular home rituals on Rosh Hashanah is eating apples dipped in honey, reflecting our wishes for a sweet new year. A late medieval Ashkenazic tradition that has become almost universal, it is enhanced by serving the apples and honey in attractive dishes designed just for them.

These dishes, created from materials like Jerusalem stone, fused glass, silver, pewter, wood, ceramic, or porcelain, range from the simple to the highly ornate. Apples, pomegranates, flowers, and bees are some of the common decorative motifs. The roundness of the fruits, or the shape of the dish, expresses our hope for a year of sweetness, from beginning to end.

In the kabbalistic tradition the apple is a symbol of the Shekhinah, the Divine Presence. In the Babylonian Talmud (*Sotah 11b*) God is depicted as the original midwife who practices her craft in apple orchards. For women hoping to become pregnant the apple is a wish for fertility. Pomegranates, which contain hundreds of seeds (some maintain 613), are eaten for the same reason.

Although honey is a nectar gathered and stored by bees, it is not digested by the bees, a non-kosher insect. The nectar is broken down by enzymes and becomes honey, which if 100 percent pure and raw, is kosher when certified by a reliable kosher agency.

Another High Holy Day practice is to dip the challah in honey instead of sprinkling salt on it, as another way to sweeten the coming year.

On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, after blessing the wine and bread, recite the blessing over the apple and honey: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree.* After eating the apple and honey, say: *May it be Your will God and God of our fathers to renew us for a good and sweet year.*

Sephardic and Mizrahi families incorporate a seder into their erev Rosh Hashanah meal. They conduct a special ceremony and recite blessings over a variety of fruits and vegetables such as dates, pomegranates, leeks, and beets. Each of the blessings begins with the words *yehi ratzon* (May it be God's will). The origins of this ceremony date to the Talmud (*Horayot 12a*) in which Abaye suggests that in order to change the power of omens for the coming year, people should eat those fruits and vegetables. Each becomes a symbol for a good thought or wish for a sweet and special new year.

Creative Judaic Arts Project

APPLE AND HONEY DISH

Materials

- Small glass sherbet dish (for the honey)
- 6 or 8 inch glass dish
- Outline sketches of designs or letters spelling *L'Shanah Tova*
- Tape (either scotch or masking)
- Paint markers for glass (available at any art supply shop)

Directions

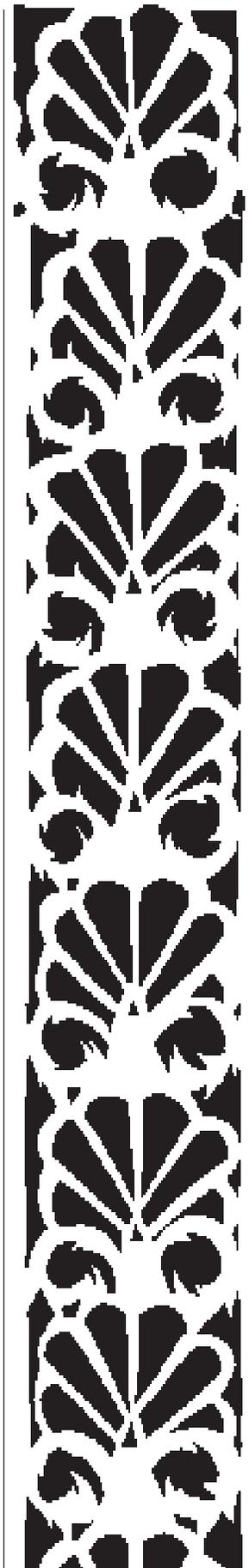
Place the outline sketch on the inside of the glass dish. Tape it to secure it.

Following the sketch, paint your design on the outer side of the dish.

For the apple dish, place the outline sketch face down on the inside of the dish. Secure with the tape.

Paint the underside of the dish either at the center or along the outer edge.

Note: These dishes must be washed by hand.





Tikkun Olam Project

HONEY CAKES FOR SENIORS

There are many Jews who cannot get into or afford Jewish nursing homes or there may not be any nearby. Scout out facilities in your area that may not be Jewish but have Jewish residents. Host a day or night of baking honey cakes at the synagogue; wrap them nicely and include Rosh Hashanah greetings. Sisterhood or USYers should deliver them personally to the Jewish residents, wishing them a sweet new year!

Note: First clear this project with your synagogue and the nursing home.

Honey Cake Recipe

You will probably want to bake in small disposable aluminum loaf pans so adjust the baking time accordingly. Watch carefully not to overbake!

Ingredients

- oil for pan
- 1 1/3 cup dark honey. Try buckwheat honey for a richer, more aromatic cake.
- 1/3 cup black coffee, brewed double strength
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 3 extra large eggs
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 2 1/2 cup sifted flour
- pinch of salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 2 teaspoons grated orange rind
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon grind

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Brush oil around bottom and sides of 9 1/2 x 5 1/2 x 3" loaf pan. Cut parchment paper to fit the bottom and sides, brushing oil on each strip. Fit paper into pan, placing un-oiled sides against the pan.

In heavy-bottomed 2 to 3 quart saucepan, bring honey to boil watching closely since honey boils up quickly. Let cool and stir in coffee and 2 tablespoons oil.

Beat eggs with sugar until pale and thickened.

Stir honey mixture into the beaten eggs. Resift flour with other dry ingredients and gently fold into batter along with citrus rinds.

Pour batter into the prepared pan and tap gently on the countertop to release air bubbles.

Bake for 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 hours or until top is golden brown and tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool completely in pan. Once cooled, cover with foil or waxed paper. Tastes best if allowed to ripen for a day.