

Navigating the Jewish High Holiday Season

The months of September and October hold a number of significant Jewish holidays that impact student lives in emotional, spiritual, and physical ways. This sheet serves as an introduction to some typical practices that Jewish students might engage in during the High Holidays that could affect their time in and out of the classroom.

There is a famous Yiddish proverb that goes, “for every two Jews there are three opinions.” Judaism is not a monolith and while the practices listed here are often regarded as normative or typical, they are by no means comprehensive. If something is confusing or different than expectations, **do not hesitate to reach out.**

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Rosh Hashanah (begins sundown September 25; ends sunset, September 27)

Translated literally as the “head of the year,” Rosh Hashanah is a two day holiday that marks the Jewish New Year. It is often spent in synagogue and is often celebrated with festive meals with family. At Rutgers, many students go home to celebrate with their families and may miss class. For many, this may be their first time away from home for the holiday.

- Many students will observe a cessation from work, technology, and focus on spirituality and prayer during this holiday
- The day after Rosh Hashanah (September 28) is often observed as a fast day.
- A typical greeting for Rosh Hashanah (and the days preceding) is “Have a Sweet New Year.”

Yom Kippur (begins prior to sundown October 4; ends after sunset, October 5)

Often regarded as the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur is the “day of atonement.” Jews engage in a fast to focus on the spiritual and religious elements of the day. Many Jews spend the full day in synagogue praying. The end of the fast is celebrated with a communal meal and is often followed by communal early bedtime.

- Many students will observe a cessation from work, technology, and focus on spirituality and prayer during this holiday
- Many students will observe a fast (no food, no drink) and still come to class, they may be grumpy.

Sukkot (begins sundown October 9; ends sunset October 17)

One of three significant Jewish festivals, Sukkot commemorates the biblical Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years. Sukkot (literally “booths”) is celebrated by erecting impermanent structures outdoors (called Sukkot, giving the holiday its name) to enjoy nature and community. This is a week-long holiday with varying observances throughout.

- Many students will observe a cessation from work and technology for the beginning two and ending two days of the holiday (Oct 10-11; October 17-18). There are a variety of observances for these days depending upon the Jewish community; when in doubt, ask the student for their particular practice.
- One observance of Sukkot is to welcome guests for meals! Feel free to come and join the Rutgers Jewish community at Hillel’s Sukkah at 70 College Ave during this week.

Shemini Atzeret (begins sundown October 15; ends sunset October 16)

Shemini Atzeret marks the end of Sukkot.

- Many students will observe a cessation from work and technology

Simchat Torah (begins sundown October 16; ends sunset October 17)

Simchat Torah is the “celebration of Torah.” This holiday commemorates both completing a yearly cycle of reading the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and beginning a new cycle. It is the culminating moment of the High Holidays and is celebrated with singing, dancing, often in public.

- Many students will observe a cessation from work and technology

Shabbat (begins sundown every Friday; ends sunset every Saturday)

This holiday occurs every week as a “day of rest.” Rutgers Hillel offers a free Shabbat dinner for any Rutgers student every Friday night.

- Many students will observe a cessation from work and technology