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Tips for your First High Holy Days



By Anthony Arnello

With summer coming to a close, cooler weather (hopefully) rolling in, and the start of school, we also reach the High Holiday Season. It seems like it was just Memorial Day, and suddenly you get the *High Holidays at a Glance* email and its back in the saddle for another year of services. If you have recently converted, you may be struggling with questions like, “Is it bad if I have a coffee on Yom Kippur? Wait, do I say ‘L’Shana Tovah’ or just ‘Shana Tovah’” or “I just became Jewish, how am I supposed to ask for time off...I never have before?”

Depending where you’re at in your Jewish Journey, perhaps you already have answers to these

questions. Or, perhaps you find yourself attending services for the first time. Regardless of the place you're at in your journey, something to keep in mind is the difference between "doing" a holiday and embracing the purpose of a holiday. For so many of us, there is a temptation or even a guilt that if we don't hold ourselves to the highest standards as "Jews by Choice," we somehow will not be good enough or rather Jewish enough.

Certainly, in the beginning, there is the learning curve of asking, "Which one is this? What food do we eat? And what prayer is it again?" But soon, enough studying, experience, and mental notes create a map of the year and rather than asking which holiday we are celebrating, we can begin to question WHY we have a holiday. As we round out learning what we DO for given holiday, we can then begin to spiritually grow into transforming what we "do" into meaning, growth, and spiritual development.

As we approach the High Holidays, the second year of being back to widespread, in person services, here are some suggestions to make the most of your experience this year:

Set Your Intention:

How do you want to celebrate these holidays? What do you need right now in your life? Then consider asking yourself, "How can these practices and traditions facilitate reaching a place of spiritual calmness and fulfillment commensurate with my needs?"

Request Time Off:

The first year is always the hardest, especially if you've worked at the same place for several years. Requesting time off for a religious reason can feel foreign or even embarrassing. However, in reality, there's nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed by. Communicate your need for time off clearly, and remember you don't need to provide an explanation above, "I need the following dates off to observe the Jewish High Holidays." If, for whatever reason, you're unable to get time off, give yourself the space and time to brainstorm practices or other ways to make this time of year meaningful for you.

Plan what services and with whom you will attend:

If you determine that in person services are something you'd like to participate in, it can be a good idea to plan which services you're going to early enough to easily reserve a spot. Also, think about who you'd like to go with. Attending a massive gathering of people alone can be very lonely, and if you're still getting comfortable with your place in Jewish spaces, it can be intimidating or even discouraging. Having people to sit with and guide you can help make your first years more comfortable.

Give Back:

Tzedekah is of course a major value in Judaism, but depending on your financial standing, the price of some tickets can seem steep or even just not feasible. If that's the case, try donating a smaller amount (increments of \$18 are always good) and volunteering your time to helping the day run smoothly. Passing out tickets, ushering people in, or setting up chairs are just some of the things you can do to help make your time at services feel like you have a place in the event as well as giving back.

Plan Where and What You'll Eat:

If you plan to fast, there is NOTHING worse than hungrily fighting a headache...EXCEPT hungrily fighting a headache and not knowing where you'll go to break the fast. If for whatever reason you have decided not to fast this year, consider taking the opportunity to host a break fast for friends, mentors, or your supportive non-Jewish friends and family.

Reflect on your year: What has your growth been like personally, professionally, and spiritually. As the Jewish year ends, how would you like to evolve and grow for next year, and what steps will you take to make that happen?

Remember, this is a process, you get out what you put in. There is no right or wrong. Find what works for you and embrace it, the rest will come together in time.

Jewish Ritual Objects: Rosh HaShannah



By Muriel Dance

Judaism with its multiplicity of symbols and rituals provides many Jewish objects that you can acquire, make or be gifted with. The Jewish Holidays can be a trigger to obtain a ritual object or to think about how to adapt one from what you already own. For Rosh Hashannah a Kiddush cup would be my suggested priority.

- **Kiddush Cup**
 - The Kiddush cup is used frequently--every week on Shabbat and all Jewish holidays and life cycle events. It can be a wine cup you decorated at the local paint ceramics place or a special wine glass you inherited from your family--maybe an etched goblet. Traditionally it's silver with symbols such as grapes or Hebrew letters. It makes a lovely bar/bat/b'nei mitzvah or wedding gift, if you are at that stage of life, to put it on your registry. When I married a Jewish man, I shared the kiddush cup he had been given as a bar mitzvah gift.
- **Other Rosh HaShannah ritual objects**
 - Some people have a separate challah cover for holidays: one that says "Yom Tov," in addition to Shabbat on it. The blessing we say on Rosh HaShannah over candles uses the term "yom tov" instead of shabbat if the holiday does not fall on Shabbat. Sometimes, as this year Shabbat and Yom Tov are both Friday/Saturday and then you say both. You will see honey pots with "drizzlers" and apple plates on Judaica websites. I have never owned or been gifted with these and prefer to focus on buying an unusual honey and freshly picked local apples rather than buying these additional objects.

Round Challah Tutorial



Want to bake and braid your own challah for Rosh Hashanah? This recipe and tutorial from Little Kosher Lunch will have you ready for the High Holy Days in no time. Watch the video above or [click here](#) for the original recipe.

Ingredients:

1 1/3 cup water
1/3 cup oil
4 large egg yolks
2 tsp table salt
4 1/4 cups high quality bread flour
Generous 1/2 cup sugar
1 tablespoon *instant* yeast

Instructions:

Follow these basic instructions to make the dough, and watch the video above for round braid instructions.

1. Combine all ingredients in a bowl. This works in the bread machine on the dough cycle, or by hand. If kneading by hand, be sure to knead for 5 minutes!
2. After rising (in the dough cycle or around 90 minutes if doing it by hand) divide into 6 equal sized pieces.
3. Roll each piece into a snakey shape, and braid 3 of the strands together. Repeat with the other 3 strands. (Or braid in another style of your choice!)
4. Place on a greased cookie sheet or loaf pan. (For 2 round loaves, greased pie pans work great.) Let rise for another 20-30 minutes, egg wash, then bake at 350 for 30-40 minutes! Makes 2 loaves

Jewish Cultural Field Trips: Steps to Take in the New Year



As a Jew By Choice, it can be a challenge to feel connected to your local Jewish community beyond your synagogue. That's why it's so important to step outside of your temple community and see everything Southern California has to offer. We've put together a list of some of our favorite Jewish field trips in the area.

- **The Skirball Cultural Center - [Link](#)**
 - Located on a beautiful campus in the hills just north of the Getty, The Skirball Cultural Center is a museum with plenty to offer. They have a massive collection of Jewish art and cultural items and a Noah's Ark exhibit for the kids, along with an amazing selection of limited-time exhibits. Adults reflect on our people's struggles and triumphs on the West Coast, and children can have a fun, hands-on experience exploring the Noah flood story.
- **Food Tour of the Fairfax District - [Link](#)**
 - There's no question that food plays a major part in Jewish culture, and there's no better place in California to experience that than the Fairfax district. In the mood for classic American Jewish cuisine? Try the famous Canter's Deli (Note: Not Kosher). How about some Challah French toast from Mensch Bakery? Even if you're not craving explicitly Jewish food, Fairfax has plenty of Kosher takes on everything from sushi (Meshuga 4 Sushi) to burgers and fries (Melrose Burgers n Fries).
- **San Diego Center for Jewish Culture - [Link](#)**
 - LA isn't the only hotspot for Judaism in SoCal. If you're down near San Diego, check out the San Diego Center for Jewish Culture. Despite the name, it's actually located in La Jolla as a part of Lawrence Family JCC. Both the center and the JCC offer fantastic cultural programming for the whole family, including the annual San Diego International Jewish Film Festival.
- **Holocaust Museum LA - [Link](#)**
 - While it's easy to focus on the fun and vibrant side of Jewish culture, it's also important to remember the darker parts and honor those that fell victim to bigotry and hate. As they put it, the goal of the Holocaust Museum LA is to "Inspire humanity through truth." As a people, we know it's important to study both our trauma and our triumphs. The Holocaust Museum is the perfect way to do that.
- **Hebrew Union College Frances-Henry Library - [Link](#)**
 - Interested in the academic side of Judaism? There's no better place to start than HUC's library, located just north of USC. The library is open to the public, and if you're an LA City resident, you can even borrow books and other resources. As it's only open Monday through Thursday from 9 to 5, it can be difficult to plan a trip, but it's worth the effort.



My name is Lucy...

and I am a Chinese-American artist living in Santa Clarita. I grew up in New Jersey and was unknowingly surrounded by a lot of Jewish culture that influenced me growing up, but I did not know much about the actual religion. In college, I met my husband, and when we eventually started discussing marriage, he mentioned that his family would be really appreciative if I considered converting. I was unsure at first, but after thinking it over, I felt that since we wanted to have children, I wanted to make sure that they would be just as Jewish as they would be Chinese.

So, we enrolled in the Intro to Judaism class together, where I fell in love with Judaism. I love that despite containing a lot of ancient wisdom, it is an ever-evolving religion that adapts with the times. It was so refreshing to see how intellectual Judaism was, and how much it welcomed questioning, and how so many of its teachings are grounded in every day life. More than anything, it made me feel so connected to people of the past, and I realized how much of the human experience is universal and unchanging, which can be so comforting in a fast-paced world.

Who was most recent mentee?

My most recent mentee was a woman around my age who's fiancé was from Israel (my husband is also from Israel), though she had been interested in Judaism long before meeting him. I've only had one meeting with her, and I could tell that she was very excited to make this next step in her journey.

Why did you decide to become a conversion mentor?

Muriel had been following my conversion journey and was even present at my T'vilah immersion that I did in the ocean. She reached out and asked if I would be interested in being a mentor. Throughout my conversion process, having my husband be my guide was an invaluable resource and made the experience a lot more comfortable. I know that not everyone has that kind of resource, so I wanted to give back the community by donating my time.

What were the biggest challenges you faced in your mentor relationship?

The biggest challenge was when I mentored a Chinese family of 6 that spoke very little English. Even though I am fluent in Chinese, it was very difficult to find good translations for Jewish terms, as they tend to be virtually non-existent in the Chinese language. I was the main point of contact and translator between them and their sponsoring Rabbi, and there were sometimes misunderstandings that I had to clear up.

Do you have any tips for helping mentees overcome language/cultural barriers?

I would firstly be sure not to use references that are too culturally specific. Never assume that your mentee has any prior knowledge of Judaism unless they tell you they do. Even if they do, remember that Jewish culture is very diverse, which means that many things you associate with Judaism or holidays may not be universal to other Jews. In terms of language barriers, tools like Google Translate are helpful, but there may be multiple translations for a single word. Make sure when communicating that you are using consistent translations to avoid confusion. And lastly, the best resource is someone of that culture who already has a Jewish background, though these contacts are understandably sometimes very difficult to find.

What has been the most rewarding part of your mentor experience?

With the previous family of 6, there had been a point when the parents started to feel that they may never be able to bridge the cultural gap and fully convert. Instead, they focused on

giving their children the opportunity to convert in the future by having the right spiritual foundation. However, after a few more meetings with the Rabbi, he said he felt that they would be ready for the Bet Din soon. By that point, I had already been mentoring the family for several months. When I broke the news to them, I saw their faces immediately light up.

Post Conversion Course: Continuing Your Jewish Spiritual Journey

Designed to deepen your connection to Jewish life and community, boost your confidence, and answer questions that surfaced after you converted, this seven session workshop series, offered by Zoom, includes experiential learning and text study in a **supportive environment for people who have recently chosen Judaism.**

Topics include Jewish identity, family, finding a spiritual home, Shabbat and holidays, Jewish study, aging and illness, and Jewish spiritual practices.

The course will be taught by **Dr. Muriel Dance**, a Jewish chaplain, professor of English, and current Executive Director of Sandra Caplan Community Bet Din, and **Rabbi Janet Madden**, a professor of literature, a Dayan and former Governor of the Sandra Caplan Community Bet Din. Both have taught adults at universities, colleges, synagogues, and adult education programs and Introduction to Judaism.



Dr. Muriel Dance

Tuesdays, 7:00 - 8:30pm

Oct 17th - Nov 28th

[Register Now](#)

Elul has arrived, and as we all know in preparing for Rosh Hashanah, *Tzedaka*, *Tefillah* and *Tsuvah* are the three areas this month calls upon us to review and act on. As Reb Nachman of Bratslav teaches: "All beginnings require that you unlock new doors. The key is giving and doing. **Give Tzedakah and do kindness.**"

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We Are Here For You

We have staff resources to help if you are in need of a listening ear or additional support. Please [email](#) or call if you need our help.

A Bet Din that Welcomes All People Interested in Converting to Judaism



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