

## Welcome to 10 Minute Topics

This week's topic is: Fall and Winter Holidays

### **Chanukah: The Holiday of Lights**

Hebrew Date: Twenty-fifth of Kislev through Second of Tevet

Secular Dates: (5769) Dec 22-29, 2008 | (5770) Dec 12-19, 2009 | (5771) Dec 2-9, 2010

Duration: Eight days

Work: Permitted

Name: Chanukah

Summary: Chanukah, the festival of lights, is a Rabbinic celebration that begins on 25 Kislev (in November or December). Chanukah celebrates the miracle of the oil in the Temple in Jerusalem after the Maccabees' defeat of the Greek army as well as the Jew's freedom in the current time. Chanukah is not mentioned in the Hebrew Scripture but is related in the book of Maccabees, which Jews do not accept as scripture.

The only religious observance related to the holiday is the lighting of candles. The candles are arranged in a chanukiah that holds nine candles: one for each night, plus a shamus (servant) at a different height. It is traditional to eat fried foods, such as latkes (potato pancakes), on Chanukah because of the significance of oil to the holiday. Gift-giving is not a traditional part of the holiday, but has been added in places where Jews have a lot of contact with Christians, as a way of dealing with children's jealousy of their Christian friends. It is extremely unusual for Jews to give Chanukah gifts to anyone other than their own young children. The only traditional gift of the holiday is gelt, small amounts of money (often chocolate coins). Another tradition of the holiday is playing dreidel, a gambling game played with a square top. Most people play for matchsticks, pennies, M&Ms or gelt.

Chanukah candles are placed in the chanukiah from right to left. On each night, the left-most (newest) candle is lit first. On Shabbat, the Chanukah candles are lit before the Shabbat candles. The chanukiah should be placed outside the door opposite the mezuzah or in a window in order to proclaim the miracle of Chanukah which demonstrated the omnipotence of G-d. The candles are lit before the blessings are read.

### **Hoshanah Rabbah: The Seven Circuits**

Hebrew Date: Twenty-first of Tishri

Secular Dates: (5769) Oct 20, 2008 | (5770) Oct 9, 2009 | (5771) Sept 29, 2010

Duration: One day

Work: Non-essential work not permitted

Name: Hoshanah Rabbah

Summary: Hoshanah Rabbah occurs on the seventh day of Sukkot (21 Tishri-in September or October). Seven circuits are made around the bimah while carrying The Four Species. For this reason, the seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshanah Rabbah (the great Hoshanah). It is celebrated by the beating of the aravah, prayer, and marching around the bimah.

## **Purim: Celebrating Victory Over Haman**

Hebrew Date: Fourteenth of Adar

Secular Dates: (5769) Mar 10, 2009 | (5770) Feb 28, 2010 | (5771) Mar 20, 2011

Duration: One day

Work: Permitted

Name: Purim

Summary: Purim (which means lots) is a Rabbinic celebration that occurs on 14 Adar (in February or March). Purim is one-day holiday that celebrates the victory of Esther and Mordechai over the evil Haman who plotted to kill the Jews as described in the Book of Esther.

The primary mitzvot of Purim is to hear the reading of the Megillah (Book of Esther). It is customary to boo, hiss, stamp feet and rattle groggers (noisemakers) whenever the name of Haman is mentioned in the service. The purpose of this custom is to blot out the name of Haman. We are also commanded to eat, drink and be merry. According to the Talmud, a person is required to drink until he cannot tell the difference between cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordecai. In addition, we are commanded to send out gifts of food or drink, and to make gifts to charity. The sending of gifts of food and drink is referred to as shalach manot (sending out portions). It is customary to hold carnival-like celebrations on Purim and to perform plays and parodies.

## **Rosh Hashanah: The Jewish New Year**

Hebrew Date: First and Second days of Tishri

Secular Dates: (5769) Sept 30-Oct 1, 2008 | (5770) Sept 19-20, 2009 | (5771) Sept 9-10, 2010

Duration: Two days

Work: Not permitted

Name: Jewish New Year, Yom Ha-Zikkaron, Yom Teruah

Summary: Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year (literally "head of the year"), is a Biblical holiday that occurs on the first and second of Tishri (September or October). Rosh Hashanah is the day that G-d created man. Rosh Hashanah is a time to begin introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year. The Bible refers to the holiday as Yom Ha-Zikkaron (the day of remembrance) or Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar). The holiday is instituted in Leviticus 23:24-25.

No work is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. Much of the day is spent in synagogue where the regular daily prayers are expanded. There is a special prayer book, called the Machzor, used for Rosh Hashanah. Religious services for the holiday focus on the concept of G-d's sovereignty.

Another popular observance during this holiday is eating apples dipped in honey, a symbol of our wish for a sweet new year. Another popular practice of the holiday is Tashlikh ("casting off"). We walk to flowing water, such as a creek or river, on the afternoon of the first day and empty our pockets into the river (generally this means casting bread into the water), symbolically casting off our sins.

Candles are lit and blessings are said on the first night and the second night in order to help usher in the Holy Day. Kiddush (blessing over wine/grape juice) is said as well as the blessing over the challah (braided bread). Slices of the challah and apple slices are dipped in honey, representing sweetness and hope for the new year.

## **Shemini Atzeret: Assembly of the Eighth**

Hebrew Date: Twenty-second of Tishri

Secular Dates: (5769) Oct 21, 2008 | (5770) Oct 10, 2009 | (5771) Sept 30, 2010

Duration: One day

Work: Not permitted

Name: Shemini Atzeret

Summary: Shemini Atzeret occurs on 22 Tishri (in September or October). It brings the celebration of Sukkot into a state of perfection and is celebrated by prayer and the ending of the stay in the sukkah. Shemini Atzeret literally means the assembly of the eighth (day). No work is permitted on Shemini Atzeret. (In Israel Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated on the same day).

## **Simchat Torah: Completing the Reading Cycle**

Hebrew Date: Twenty-third of Tishri

Secular Dates: (5769) Oct 22, 2008 | (5770) Oct 11, 2009 | (5771) Oct 1, 2010

Duration: One day

Work: Not permitted

Name: Simchat Torah

Summary: Simchat Torah (Rejoicing in the Torah) occurs at the conclusion of Sukkot on 23 Tishri (in September or October). No work is permitted on Simchat Torah. Simchat Torah celebrates the conclusion of the annual reading of the Torah and the immediate beginning of the annual cycle. It is a time to celebrate the central symbol of Judaism, the Torah, through prayer and celebration. The last Torah portion, then proceeds immediately to the first chapter of Genesis, reminding us that the Torah is a circle, and never ends. This completion of the readings is a time of great celebration. There are processions around the synagogue carrying Torahs and plenty of high-spirited singing and dancing.

## **Sukkot: The Harvest Festival**

Hebrew Date: Fifteenth of Tishri

Secular Dates: (5769) Oct 14-20, 2008 | (5770) Oct 3-9, 2009 | (5771) Sept 23-29, 2010

Duration: Seven days

Work: Not permitted on the first and second days (outside Israel), first day only (inside Israel)

Name: Sukkot, Chag Ha-Asif

Summary: Sukkot, the Harvest Festival, occurs on 15 Tishri (in September or October). The word sukkot means booths, and refers to the temporary dwellings (sukkah) that we are commanded to live in during this holiday. Sukkot is also a harvest festival, and is sometimes referred to as Chag Ha-Asif, the Festival of Ingathering. The festival of Sukkot is instituted in Leviticus 23:34. It is the third of the three pilgrimage festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Pesach and Shavuot). No work is permitted on the first and second days of the holiday.

The holiday commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. The commandment to "dwell" in a sukkah can be fulfilled by simply eating all of one's meals there; however, if the weather, climate, and

one's health permit, one should live in the sukkah as much as possible, including sleeping in it. It is common practice, and highly commendable, to decorate the sukkah.

Another observance related to Sukkot involves what are known as The Four Species (arba minim) or the lulav and etrog. We are commanded to take these four plants and use them to rejoice before the L-rd. With these four species in hand, one recites a blessing and waves the species in all six directions (east, south, west, north, up and down), symbolizing the fact that G-d is everywhere. The four species are also held during the Hallel prayer in religious services, and are held during processions around the bimah each day during the holiday. These processions, known as Hoshanahs, commemorate similar processions around the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem.

## **Tu B'Shevat: Celebrating Nature**

Hebrew Date: Fifteenth of Shevat

Secular Dates: (5769) Feb 9, 2009 | (5770) Jan 30, 2010 | (5771) Jan 20, 2011

Duration: One day

Work: Permitted

Name: Tu B'Shevat

Summary: Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish Ecology Day, occurs on 15 Shevat (in January or February). Tu B'Shevat is an agricultural holiday that celebrates the earth and its produce. It is the new year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing (Leviticus 19:23-25). It is celebrated through prayer, celebration, and eating the seven types of plant produce that are cited in Deuteronomy 8:8 (wheat, barley, grape, fig, pomegranate, olives, and date-honey). Other customs include eating a new fruit on this day, planting trees on this day, collecting money for trees for Israel, and holding a seder.