

Dear Families,

The beginning of the school year is a perfect time to talk about *Rosh Hashanah* (the Jewish New Year) and new beginnings. Celebrating the start of a fresh year gives us an excellent opportunity to look at how much we have grown, to reflect on where we've been in the year past, and to peek ahead to where we will be going in the coming year.



In the spirit of new beginnings, our children have begun to explore our curriculum, **Fingerprints: Discovering Jewish Life**. As you may already know, "Fingerprints" is an age appropriate holiday curriculum that bridges best theories and practice from the fields of early childhood and Jewish education. It was developed by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland as part of its centerpiece work, Project Curriculum Renewal.

Before each holiday you will receive a letter like this one, explaining the holiday and suggesting some activities for you and your family. We hope you enjoy them. If you and your family try them, or others, please share your experiences with us. We would love to hear about them!

It seems fitting that we as Jews celebrate our new year at the same time that school begins. The name ראש השנה (*Rosh Hashanah*) literally means "head of the year." And in fact, *Rosh Hashanah* is said to be the day on which the world was created. For that reason, it is seen as the Jewish New Year or the world's birthday.

As with personal birthdays, even in the midst of celebration, people often take the time to reflect on the past year. The same is true for the world's birthday; Jews engage in self-evaluation and renewal. It is said that on *Rosh Hashanah*, God opens the Book of Life in which (metaphorically) every living person's fate for the future is recorded, and "pencils in" a fate for each human. Ten days later, on *Yom Kippur*, this fate is sealed. For that reason, the ten days beginning on *Rosh Hashanah* and ending on *Yom Kippur* are known as the יָמִים נֹרָאִים (*Yamim Noraim*; Days of Awe).

During this ten-day period, Jews attempt to "assure their fate" so that their names are recorded in the Book of Life. To do so they repent, known in Hebrew as doing תְּשׁוּבָה (*t'shuvah*; returning to good behavior). This process includes looking inward and becoming conscious of those areas where the mark of good behavior was missed. This self-inventorying process involves four steps:

1. Acknowledging poor behavior choices.
2. Apologizing to those who were harmed.
3. Finding ways to make sure that these same mistakes are not repeated in the future.
4. Praying to God for forgiveness.

While it is customary to do *t'shuvah* at this time of year, it is most appropriate to continue this conversation throughout all seasons.

A popular custom observed during *Rosh Hashanah* is *Tashliḥ*. During *Tashliḥ*, Jews gather at a nearby body of water to ceremonially throw away their sins. Most local synagogues observe this custom and welcome non-members to join them. Because it is so concrete and because it is celebrated outside, this short ceremony is very appealing to young children. If this sounds interesting, call any local synagogue for meeting times.

Though the tone of this period is often solemn, it need not be, for the beginning of the year is a time to celebrate growth and renewal.

THINGS YOU CAN DO AS A FAMILY



Write down each member of your family's wishes for a sweet new year. Read these at the table on *Rosh Hashanah*.



Commit, as a family, to following the steps of *t'shuvah*:

- Recognize or acknowledge the wrong behavior choice (e.g., "I took the toy car Josh was playing with.")¹
- To say sorry for what was done wrong (e.g., "I'm sorry that I took the car.")
An appropriate added step is taking some responsibility to fix the problem caused by poor behavior (e.g., "Josh can have extra time with the car - until the timer rings.") Students may need some help figuring out how to fix the problem, or in the actual execution of the "fixing."
- To not do it again (e.g., "I won't take Josh's car without permission")

As a parent, be sure to role-model the process by apologizing for the things you do wrong, as well.



Ask each family member to draw a picture of their memories from the past year. Write down a few ideas for which each is grateful. Laminate the pictures (this service is available at many photocopy stores) and turn them into placemats to be used at the holiday meals.



As a family, go through your old clothes. Determine which have been outgrown, thus showing growth and change. Collect these and donate them as an act of *tz'dakah* in honor of *Rosh Hashanah*.



Talk about your favorite "sweet" foods. During the week after *Rosh Hashanah*, include these foods as dessert. Discuss your wishes for a sweet new year.



As a family, you may want to take this time to look through old family pictures, including your child's baby pictures. Talk about how much he or she has grown and changed over the past few years, not only physically, but also in acts of maturity and behavior.

For additional background information, family activities, and holiday recipes, see:

<http://www.jccathisnewmonth.org> (click on *Tishrei*)
or <http://uahc.org/educate/parent/> (click on *Rosh Hashanah*)

¹ Of course, all the sentences would be in child-appropriate language, or in the parent's language for pre-verbal children.

