

How might stories, hymns and prayers help people understand more about themselves and their relationships (8-12 years)

Key words and concepts

- **Rosh Hashanah:** Head of the Year. Jewish New Year festival.
- **Shofar:** ram's horn blown at the season of Rosh Hashanah.
- **Yom Kippur:** Day of Atonement. Fast day occurring on the tenth day after Rosh Hashanah; a solemn day of Tefillah and Teshuva.
- **Tefillah:** self-judgement. Jewish prayer and meditation.
- **Teshuva:** repentance. Returning to G-d. (Jews often write G-d instead of 'God' in order to avoid any accidental misuse of the Holy Name.)
- **Torah:** law; teaching. The Five Books of Moses.
- **Kol Nidrei** – lit. 'All Vows': Prayer recited on the evening of Yom Kippur.
- **Fasting:** willingly abstaining from food, drink or both, for a period of time.
- **Forgiveness:** in human terms, the giving up being resentful or angry at someone because of a perceived wrong. It can also refer to giving up the demand that someone be punished. When asking for G-d's forgiveness, people generally refer to their hope that the punishment they deserve from a just G-d will be tempered by mercy.

- **Creation:** the Judaeo-Christian stories of the creation of the world are written in Genesis Chapters 1 & 2. The Jewish calendar is dated from the Creation. Jews write 'AM' after each year - meaning 'Anno Mundi' (Year of the World). The pattern and purpose of Creation is revealed in the Torah and Talmud (collection of oral Torah / teaching).
- **Sin:** in Judaism, because human beings are given free-will, they are responsible for their own sin. But because human beings are weak and give in to temptation, G-d allows repentance and, through His mercy, can give forgiveness.
- **Atonement:** in the days of the Temple in Jerusalem, there were rituals for making amends for wrongdoing, and animal sacrifices were made. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, most Jews today do not make animal sacrifices, but offer prayers of confession and repentance. Yom Kippur is a day for fasting and charity.
- **G-d's forgiveness:** according to Rabbi David Shlomo Rosen, to secure G-d's forgiveness, 'It is not enough to hope and pray for pardon: man must humble himself, acknowledge his wrong, and resolve to depart from sin (e.g. II Sam. 12:13ff; 1 Kings 21:27-29)' and then, 'remorse must be translated into deeds.' See D. Rosen, 2003, 'The concept of Forgiveness in Judaism'.

Learning activities

- Tell pupils about the investigation they will be doing: into how different sorts of activities and actions can help us understand more about themselves and their relationships. Explain that to know what is important to us, it's a good idea to compare with what other people find important. Ask pupils to discuss in pairs how we can keep our relationships in a good state of repair.
- This lesson focuses on Jewish actions and underlying beliefs around Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (see definitions on p. 1). It is a good idea to start by showing pupils examples of modern Jews celebrating these days. There are many video clips on You Tube, some created to teach children, such as BBC clips, some by Jewish musical groups. The Yom Kippur clip should show the blowing of the horn (shofar). Yom Kippur is solemn and Rosh Hashanah is more celebratory, look for clips that reflect the different emotional tones of these days, such as through worship, practices and especially songs sung on these days.
- Explain that Jews believe that although people are 'sinful' G-d can forgive sins provided people say sorry (repent). So, every year on a special day called Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), Jews say sorry for anything they have done wrong and remember that G-d will balance their good deeds against their bad. It is a time to start the new year with good deeds. Ask pupils what their favourite or most special time of the year is.
- Play a clip of the shofar (ram's horn) being sounded at Yom Kippur, as well as Yom Kippur prayers and songs. Ask pupils for their reflections about the music: the chanting and the blowing of the shofar. What are their reactions?
- Teach about some Yom Kippur traditions:
 - The sound of the shofar reminds Jews of the soul's yearning to be reunited with God
 - Fasting for 25 hours
 - Reflecting on the year's past behavior; resolving to do better in the coming year
 - Confession and forgiveness of sins
 - Chanting the Kol Nidrei (see key words p. 1)
 - Retelling the story of Jonah and the Big Fish which reminds Jews that God will hear them when needed

Why do the class think the tradition of using these practices have survived in Jewish practice for hundreds of years?

- Teach about Rosh Hashanah traditions:
 - Rosh Hashanah is Jewish new Year, it is celebrated a week before Yom Kippur
 - Apples are dipped in honey to represent the hope of a good year to come
 - The first day of Rosh Hashanah recalls the first day of creation.
 - Sweet delicacies are eaten at meals to represent the hope of a good year
 - The shofar is sounded

- Ask pupils to work in pairs to create three questions they would like to ask a Jewish teenager during this period. Collect these questions and see if the class can agree on one or two questions to follow up. Ask them to record these questions on paper. Explain that this paper will be their 'Investigation Sheet' to record evidence that may help answer their question(s).
- Ask pupils to work in small groups to make notes on their investigation sheets of some of the beliefs and concepts underpinning the celebration of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur e.g. creation, repentance, atonement, forgiveness, joy. Allocate separate beliefs and concepts to each group so that all are covered by the class as a whole. Ask each group to note on their sheets what they think Jews may learn from taking part in the festivals, especially about themselves and their relationships.
- Share information about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur found in text books such as in RE Today's publication, *Opening Up Judaism*, by Fiona Moss, (ed.) 2011 to explore with pupils what these festivals mean to Jews and ask why all religions have evolved festivals and holy days; what purpose do they serve? Do such festivals help families in some special ways? Ask pupils to add any evidence to their investigations in writing.
- What other ways of finding answers to their questions might there be? Do they think of asking members of a nearby Jewish community or family? How about asking you, their teacher? Try '[Email a Believer](#)' on REonline.org.uk.
- Ask the class to work in groups to research the four foods often used at Rosh Hashanah: challah (bread), pomegranates, honey cakes, and apples. What does each symbolise? Can pupils find any information about the history of their usage? Ask groups to draw the food and write inside what it symbolises at the festival.
- Show Rosh Hashanah cards, there are many to browse through online. Alternatively show Rosh Hashanah cards from your artefacts collection or from a supplier.
- Ask the groups to make Rosh Hashanah cards featuring symbolic foods or any practice discussed. Inside, alongside a suitable greeting, they should complete a sentence beginning, 'Rosh Hashanah is important because ...'
- As pupils are completing their cards, tell the story of Jonah and the Big Fish, a story often told at Rosh Hashanah, e.g., from *Opening Up Judaism*, p.17, and ask pupils what they think Jewish people might learn from this story about (a) human beings and (b) G-d. What are their favourite stories? Do they think that stories can influence the way we behave towards others? Ask pupils to add a note on the back of their cards one of the things they think Jews may learn from the story of Jonah. They should then add the name of a story that they think important or meaningful to themselves, with a point they learnt from the story.
- Explain that many stories are told in order to encourage people to lead a better life. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are times when Jewish people recommit themselves to being kinder to others in the new year ahead. Ask pupils what good deeds they think they might do today / in the coming week. On their investigation sheets, encourage pupils to add some notes showing how the lives of Jews who keep the festivals may be changed in some way.