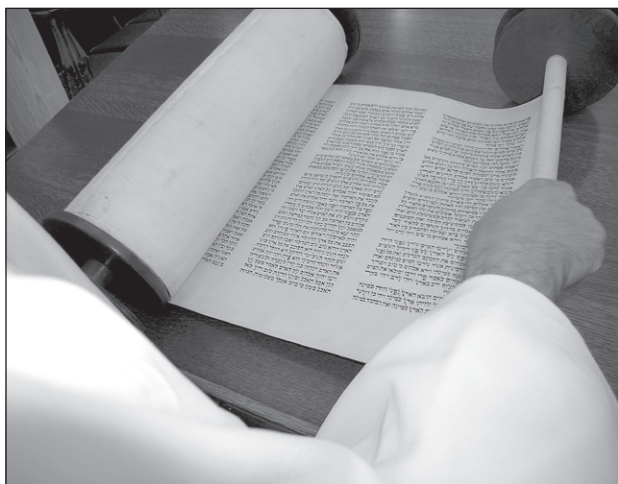


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Above, Rabbi Dana Kaplan reviews the Torah portion to be read on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Right, the Torah, or Jewish book of law, handwritten in vowel-less Hebrew on animal skin, is treated reverently when removed from Temple B'nai Israel's ark, located behind Kaplan.



This week and next, those of the Jewish faith are fasting, praying and cleansing themselves of sin, all part of a special annual observance known collectively as ...

HIGH HOLIDAYS

By **CAROLYN MASCHKE**
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Mournful notes blown from a ram's horn at Albany's only Jewish synagogue this month echo around the world and down the ages, says Rabbi Dana Kaplan.

At sundown on Wednesday, the congregation of Temple B'nai Israel began observance of the High Holidays, a time of prayer, self-examination and repentance.

"The High Holidays are the most important days of the year. They begin with Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and conclude 10 days later with Yom Kippur (Day of

Atonement)," Kaplan said.

"On Rosh Hashanah, a shofar (ram's horn) is blown. When people hear the sounds, it is supposed to make them think about their need to repent. And repenting in Judaism is an extensive process. Maimonides, the 12th-century Jewish sage, said, 'First, you have to say you are sorry to the person you wronged, and to God as well.

"You have to feel regret for what you did, and you have to resolve not to do it again.' In other words, you must sincerely understand what you have done wrong, and stop doing it," he explained.

The shofar, an instrument used in Biblical times,

is made of the horn of a ram, an animal that figures prominently in Rosh Hashanah's best known Torah reading, the tale of Abraham preparing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The Torah, which is the scroll of Mosaic Law used in a synagogue, relates that just before Abraham takes the life of his son, God directs him to a ram with its horns caught in a thicket.

"Abraham sacrifices the ram instead of Isaac," Kaplan said. "Jews don't sacrifice animals any more. Prayers, charity and good deeds have replaced animals as being appropriate sacrifices to God."

The shofar is also blown during Yom Kippur, when Jews fast and pray for forgiveness for their sins during

High Holidays Guide

Temple B'nai Israel

3917 Gillionville Road
229-446-6536

www.uahc.org/ga/ahc

Rabbi Dana Kaplan

Weekly services, Friday, 8 p.m., Torah Study, (when Rabbi Kaplan is in town), Saturday, 10 a.m.

Visitors are welcome, but are encouraged to call first.

High Holidays

Rosh Hashanah, Sept. 15, 8 p.m., Sept. 16, 10 a.m. (Shofar service), Tashlich (Ritual casting of bread, symbolizing sins, into the water) following at RiverFront Park.

Yom Kippur, Sept. 24, 8 p.m. (Kol Nidre), Sept. 25, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. (Shofar Service), followed by Break the Fast

the past year.

"Yom Kippur is a much more stressful day than Rosh Hashanah. By fasting, we mimic the idea of death," he said. "This is also the time the Kol Nidre is sung to a mournful tune."

The Kol Nidre, which is thought to be at least 1,000 years old, became popular during the Spanish Inquisition, when thousands of Jews were forced to recant their beliefs or be killed, Kaplan explained.

Like the blowing of the shofar, the mournful notes of the Kol Nidre sound in Jewish congregations throughout the world during the High Holidays, he said.

"Although the new synagogue here is only about five years old, there has been a Jewish congregation in Albany since 1875. Jews were present here even before that, being among the first white settlers here in the 1840s," noted Kaplan. "Temple B'nai Israel is the only synagogue in Albany of any type, and there are only a few others in this area."

B'nai Israel is a Reform congregation made up of around 100 families, he said. A Conservative Jewish congregation worships in Fitzgerald, while the next closest Jewish congregations are in

Columbus and Tallahassee, Fla.

During the High Holiday services, Kaplan continued, he will call out one of four notes produced by a shofar, and a member of the congregation here will blow the ram's horn.

"Many congregations have different shofars made of ram's horn. The one we will use was donated to Temple B'nai Israel in honor of the Bat Mitzvah of Marci Prisant," he said. A Bat Mitzvah ceremony marks a 13-year-old's coming of age as a young woman in Judaism.

"Many Jewish holidays, like Chanukah and Passover, have direct parallels to Christian holidays. But the High Holidays don't really relate to anything in Christianity," Kaplan said. "Less is known about them. But the themes Judaism attaches to the High Holidays — repentance and forgiveness — are universal themes that Christians are also quite interested in.

"The High Holidays link the Jews in Albany with other Jewish communities across the United States and the world. We invite unaffiliated Jews or persons without religious affiliations to join us.

"We welcome religious searchers to consider attending our services and becoming active in our congregation." ❏

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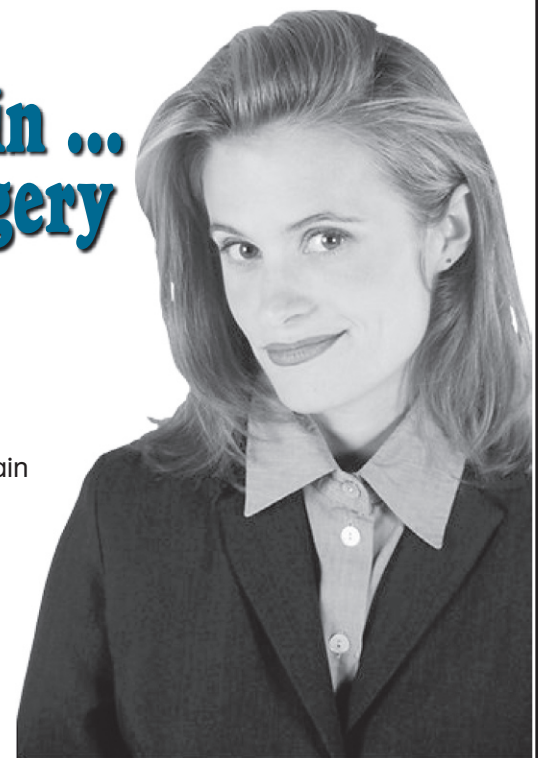
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