

Spiritual Riches

Bidding prayers for religions on their major festivals



High Holy Days

Jewish High Holy Days

Judaism

The Jewish High Holy Days are a period beginning with the celebration of 'Rosh HaShana', the New Year, and culminating in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (the tenth day of the seventh month in the Jewish calendar).

Bidding Prayer

During the period of their High Holy Days, we pray for the Jewish members of our community. As they fast, pray, and ask for forgiveness to start the New Year afresh, we also pray for the strength to forgive, and the blessing of being forgiven.

For Newsletters

Jewish-Christian relations are especially close, and special, as Christianity is deeply rooted in Judaism. For Jews, the period between Rosh HaShana, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is considered to be a holy period of repentance and seeking of forgiveness, both from God and from other people.

Background

The Second Vatican Council's document, Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, known as *Nostra Aetate*, explains the close bond between Jews and Christians as follows: "The Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the

Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant", and goes on to describe Christianity as a branch that has been grafted onto the "well-cultivated olive tree" of Judaism. When Pope Saint John Paul II visited the Great Synagogue of Rome in 1986, he referred to the Jews as "our older brothers". In the UK, 0.5% of people identified as Jewish in the 2001 census, with a high concentration in urban centres such as London or Manchester. We share the Hebrew Scriptures (which Christians often refer to as the Old Testament) with our Jewish brothers and sisters. The Jewish New Year of Rosh HaShana is celebrated by eating apple dipped in honey.

Both the customary prayers of *Taschlich* (casting away) beside a body of water, recalling Micah 7:19 – "You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" – and the ritual of blowing the shofar (ram's horn) on the first two days are a reminder to repent and turn away from sin. Yom Kippur, at the end of the period of the High Holy Days, is marked by a total 25 hour fast. In the Jewish month of Elul, leading up to the High Holy Days, each one will have endeavoured to seek forgiveness from others whom they may have wronged. The traditional belief is that, on Rosh Hashana, God inscribes the righteous in the Book of Life, which is sealed on Yom Kippur. The period between the two offers an opportunity to show repentance and seek forgiveness and so be worthy to be "written in the Book of Life".

These leaflets offer suggestions for bidding prayers at the major festivals of non-Christian religions, along with a short text of explanation for use in parish newsletters, and some background information. In acknowledging these festivals, and praying for those who celebrate them, Catholics can express their connectedness to all people of faith, as well as the respect which the Church holds for their spiritual wealth.