



# Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (known as the High Holy Days) are often regarded as the most important of all Jewish holidays. They are observed in the fall season during the month of Tishrei, the first month of the Jewish lunar calendar. Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year and begins a ten-day period known as the *Yamim Nora'im* ("Days of Awe" in Hebrew), which is a time of reflection, repentance and renewal. Traditionally, no work is permitted during Rosh Hashanah, as it is a day the Torah calls "Holy Convocation." The ten-day period ends with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—a day set aside to atone for the sins of the previous year. In addition to the prohibition of work during Yom Kippur, fasting is traditionally practiced and the day is spent in prayer and meditation in synagogue.

## **Rosh Hashanah**

Unlike the secular New Year's Day on January 1<sup>st</sup>, or Christmas, which always falls on December 25<sup>th</sup>, Rosh Hashanah falls at a slightly different date each year. Managers should be alert and check its dates. In 2019, Rosh Hashanah will begin at sundown on September 29<sup>th</sup> and end at sundown on October 1<sup>st</sup>. There is a range of ways that Jewish employees may observe and celebrate the holiday. Some may request two days off in observance, while others may take a half-day off to attend services at synagogue, and others may ask to leave early to attend a holiday dinner. Recognizing that each employee has a distinct set of beliefs and traditions is the key to effectively managing time off requests. Invite your employees to share how they observe Rosh Hashanah and to which practices they plan to adhere. "Happy New Year" or "*Shana Tova*" ("Good New Year," in Hebrew), can be used to greet your colleagues and friends appropriately during Rosh Hashanah. You may also wish your colleagues "a sweet New Year."

## **Yom Kippur**

As noted, Yom Kippur always falls ten days after the start of Rosh Hashanah. In 2019, Yom Kippur will begin at sundown on October 8<sup>th</sup> and continue until sundown on October 9<sup>th</sup>. Many Jews view Yom Kippur as the most holy of the Jewish sacred times. Jewish employees may request time off to observe Yom Kippur. It is important to be flexible in an effort to meet their needs. "Easy Fast," or "*Tzom Kal*" in Hebrew, can be used to greet colleagues and friends appropriately during Yom Kippur.

## **Fasting**

In observance of Yom Kippur, Jews will traditionally fast for a full day, beginning at sundown the evening before and usually after a large holiday meal. During the fast, observers consume neither food nor drink. The fast ends at sundown of the second day and is usually referred to as the break-fast. This year, it will occur at sundown on October 9<sup>th</sup>. It is likely that a Jewish employee will request to take the day off in observance of Yom Kippur. However, if a Jewish employee is fasting in observance of Yom Kippur but has willingly agreed to work, it is important for employers to be aware of the employee's need for a break to end the fast after sunset.

## **Scheduling**

In general it is important for companies to take Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur into account when scheduling conference calls, meetings, or luncheons. To avoid scheduling conflicts, a better practice is for companies to ensure that the High Holy dates (amongst other holidays) are circulated in advance, or automatically programmed into online scheduling tools.

It is also important to keep in mind that other significant Jewish holidays are observed in the two weeks following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Sukkot, which always begins the fifth day after Yom Kippur, is a seven-day festival commemorating the 40-year period in which the Jews wandered in the desert after leaving Egypt and before arriving in Israel. The holiday is considered a harvest festival and in 2019 will take place from sundown on October 13<sup>th</sup> to sundown on October 20<sup>th</sup>. Traditionally, as is the case with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, no work is permitted on the first two days of Sukkot, and some Jews may take these days off work. Sukkot is followed immediately by two additional holidays, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, which are observed on two separate dates except in Israel (where they are celebrated in one day). Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are also holidays in which many Jews are traditionally not permitted to work, and some Jewish employees may request these days off as well. In 2019, Shemini Atzeret will begin on sundown on October 20<sup>th</sup> and will end on sundown on October 21<sup>st</sup>, at which time Simchat Torah will begin and last until sundown on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. Since these holidays come so soon after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is important to take into account that some employees may request multiple days off in a short period and to work with such employees to find ways of accommodating these requests.

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