

# 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 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. 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, traditionally Jews observe the day with a 25-hour fast, and the day is spent in prayer and meditation in synagogue.

## Rosh Hashanah

The Jewish calendar is a hybrid lunar/solar calendar of 12 months, each of which has either 28 or 29 days. Approximately every three years, a month is added to the calendar to keep the holidays in the same season. This is why holidays fluctuate within the Gregorian (civic) calendar. Managers should be alert and check its dates. In 2023, Rosh Hashanah will begin at sundown on **September 15<sup>th</sup>** and end at nightfall on **September 17<sup>th</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 2023, Yom Kippur will begin at sundown on **September 24<sup>th</sup>** and continue until just after sundown on **September 25<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 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 nightfall of the second day and is usually ended with a communal meal called the break fast. This year, it will begin just before sundown on **September 25<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.

## Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, & Simchat Torah

These three holidays are both distinct and connected, occurring consecutively. Sukkot (also spelled: Succot, Sukkos, or Succos) begins five days after Yom Kippur and lasts seven days. Sukkot is one of the three pilgrimage holidays (along with Passover and Shavuot), *hagim* or *regalim*, during which, in biblical times, Jews would gather to Jerusalem, to the Temple. This holiday has dual significance: historical and agricultural, as it celebrates the end of the harvest season and God's protection of the Israelites in the wilderness, where they wandered for forty years after leaving Egypt. To celebrate, many Jews build temporary structures, called *sukkot* (singular: *sukkah*) or huts, in which to eat and sometimes sleep. These huts are likened to the structures the Israelites lived in while wandering in the desert. Some Jews will avoid eating or drinking outside of a sukkah, so they may request to temporarily erect one on work property (typically on the lawn, roof, or an open-air courtyard) for the holiday. Another part of the traditional observance is to gather four species of vegetation (a citron, a palm frond, myrtle twigs, and willow twigs) and wave them together in six directions, representing God's presence all around.

In Israel, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated on one day, the day after Sukkot. Outside of Israel, Shemini Atzeret occurs immediately after Sukkot and Simchat Torah on the second day after. Shemini Atzeret literally means "the gathering of the eighth day and celebrates God's unique relationship with the Jewish people. Simchat Torah is a joyous celebration of the Torah when Jews finish reading the Torah (which takes a year) and start again. The observance of Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are traditionally observed in the synagogue. These holidays are a period of great happiness and joy. All three holidays are also referred to as *Zman Simhateinu*, or "Time of our Joy."

### Sukkot

In 2023, Sukkot begins at sundown on **September 29<sup>th</sup>** and ends soon after sundown on **October 6<sup>th</sup>**. The first two days, **September 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>**, are "festivals," or *yom tov*, traditionally during which no work is done. Employees might request time off to observe the holiday and be with family. During the remaining days of Sukkot, work is permitted. Many Jews still eat in sukkot and wave the four species. An appropriate greeting for Sukkot (as well as for Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah) is, "*Hag Sameach*," or, "Happy Holidays!"

### Shemini Atzeret

In 2023, Shemini Atzeret begins at sundown on **October 6<sup>th</sup>** and ends soon after sundown on **October 8<sup>th</sup>**. Shemini Atzeret is another *yom tov*, where most work is forbidden, and many Jewish employees may request time off. It is not required to continue to eat in the *sukkah* but many have the custom to continue to do so.

## **Simchat Torah**

In 2023 in the Diaspora, Simchat Torah begins at nightfall of **October 7<sup>th</sup>**. Another *yom tov*, work is not permitted during this day. Many Jews will request the day off from work to observe the holiday. Many spend the day in synagogue, dancing and singing with Torah scrolls.

## **Scheduling around the Fall Jewish Holidays**

In general, it is important for companies to take all these fall Jewish holidays into account when scheduling conference calls, meetings, or conferences. To avoid scheduling conflicts, a better practice is for companies to ensure that the dates for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah are circulated in advance, or automatically programmed into online scheduling tools.

It is important to note that some of the days of *yom tov* occur during the workweek. This means that Jewish employees who wish to observe these holidays may be out of the office or unavailable for much of late September and early October. It is best to remain flexible with employees during this time of year.

A final scheduling consideration is the timing of the start and end of the Jewish holidays. As mentioned previously, Jewish holidays begin at sundown the night before and continue until at nightfall the day of the holiday. Traditionally, the holiday begins 18 minutes before sundown and ends when there are three stars visible in the sky. While not all observers may use these definitions, it is important to be aware of them when considering the availability of your colleagues and clients around the holidays.

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