Jewish Holiday Descriptions

# Name: Hanukkah (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Haa-nuh-kuh](https://www.howtopronounce.com/hanukkah)

## Meaning

* Literally Hannukah means “dedication,” but it is usually translated as the “festival of lights.”
* Hanukkah recalls the story of the Maccabees, who recaptured and rededicated the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem after it was plundered by foreign invaders in the second century B.C.E.

## When?

* Hebrew Calendar: 25 Kislev-3 Tevet.
* Western Calendar: November/December.

## Greetings

* Chag Sameach! (“a good holiday!” – Hebrew).
* Gut Yontif (“a good holiday” – Yiddish).

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* Hanukkah is commemorated by lighting a menorah (also called a “hanukkiyah”) for 8 nights, starting with one candle, and adding one candle each night until the whole menorah of 8 candles is lit.
* A story associated with the holiday of Hanukkah tells that when the Maccabees rededicated the temple, they only had enough oil to keep the temple’s menorah lit for one night - yet miraculously, it lasted for 8 nights! Lighting the menorah over 8 nights is in honor of this tale.
* There is a custom to eat fried foods during Hanukkah to remember the miracle of the oil. Some common Hanukkah celebratory foods include latkes (fried potato pancakes), sufganiyot (donuts), and fried pastries.
* Gifts are often given during Hanukkah, particularly to children.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor

* On the Jewish calendar, Hanukkah is considered to be a minor holiday. Work is permitted, and there are no particular restrictions during this time.
* Hanukkah is the Jewish holiday that falls during the winter holiday “season,” and students, staff and faculty may celebrate by travelling to be with family and friends. However, the timing of Hanukkah varies on the Western calendar, it often begins as early as November. Instructors and supervisors should be sensitive to travel needs that may arise during this time.
* Students, staff and faculty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled during Hanukkah if they are travelling to celebrate the holiday.

# Name: Pesach (Hebrew)

* Passover (English)

## Pronunciation

* [Pa-sow-vr](https://youtu.be/0BAc1UAtSvQ?si=axaVJnP-xJ0oRGr3)

## Meaning

* Festival of freedom commemorating the biblical story of the exodus, the escape of the Jewish people from slavery in ancient Egypt.

## When?

* Hebrew Calendar: 15-22 Nisan.
* Western Calendar: March/April.
* Pesach begins at sundown and ends at sundown one week later. Some Jews observe Passover for 7 days, and others for 8 days, depending on denomination and custom.

## Greetings

* Chag Sameach! or Chag Kasher v’sameach! (“a good holiday/a good and Kosher holiday! – Hebrew)
* Gut Yontif! (“a good holiday” – Yiddish)
* During the middle days of the holiday (called “chol HaMoed”) a customary greeting is “Moadim l’simcha” (may your times be happy), to which a customary response is “chagim u’zmanim l’sasson” (“joyous holidays and seasons!” – Hebrew)

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* Pesach begins with a festive “seder” – a meal that tells the story of the Exodus using symbolic foods, readings, and songs from a ritual text called a “Haggadah.” Some Jews celebrate one night of seder, on the first night of Pesach, others have two seders, on the first and second nights of the holiday.
* For the whole week of Pesach it is customary to abstain from “hametz” (leavened food). This traditionally denotes bread, but for some Jews this category also includes rice, beans, pasta and some vegetables and spices.
* Jews are instructed to clean their homes of any “hametz” (bread and leavened items). For traditionally observant Jews, this is a labor-intensive activity that involves ritually cleaning the kitchen as well as other rooms in the house and putting away regular cookware and dishes in order to use a special set of “kosher for Pesach” dishes used only during the Passover holiday. Food bought into the kitchen at this time must also be labelled “Kosher for Pesach.”

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor

* Some Jewish students, staff and faculty will observe the first two days and the last two days of Pesach as a time when work is prohibited by Jewish law, meaning that they will not be able to use electricity, answer phone calls or text messages, respond to emails, drive, take tests or exams, write or attend work or work-related events.
* Students, staff and faculty may need to travel at this time to spend the holiday with friends and family. They may need to leave campus early on the day that Pesach begins in order to prepare for the holiday before it begins at sundown.
* Some students, staff and faculty may need to work remotely during the week of Passover if their usual residence in East Lansing does not allow them access to a kitchen that is designated as Kosher for Pesach.
* Instructors and supervisors should avoid scheduling required tests, exams, or other activities on the first two days of Pesach.
* Students, staff, and faculty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled during the week of Pesach.

# Name: Purim (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Paw-ruhm](https://youtu.be/Lbpdcaj2yO8?si=W1Dz-pwzFDkSfGbt)

## Meaning

* Purim celebrates the story of Queen Esther, who saved the Jewish people from wicked Haman in ancient Persia – a story of communal tragedy averted through individual courage.

## When?

* Hebrew Calendar: 14 Adar.
* Western Calendar: February/March.
* Purim begins at sundown and ends at sundown the next day.

## Greetings

* Chag Purim Sameach (“Happy Purim holiday!” – Hebrew).
* Gut Yontif! (“Happy holiday!” – Yiddish).

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* On the evening of Purim and then again on the following morning Jews read the Megillah (“scroll”) telling the story of Queen Esther. This reading is traditionally raucous and fun.
* Purim is a joyous holiday and is celebrated with parties, wearing costumes, and festive meals.
* It is customary to give special treats to friends called “Mishloach Manot” that include triangle shaped cookies called “hamantaschen” (“Haman’s hat) or “Oznei Haman” (Haman’s ears), as well as to give charity to the poor (“matanot l’evyanim).

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor

* Work is permitted during Purim, and there are no particular restrictions during this time.
* Students, staff and faulty may celebrate Purim by travelling to be with family and friends. Instructors and supervisors should be sensitive to travel needs that may arise during this time.
* Students, staff, and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled during Purim.

# Name: Rosh Hashana (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Rosh Ha-sha-na](https://youtu.be/DfhEKgUpJs8?si=ierhTP7ADhUH4yX1)

## Meaning:

* Jewish New Year.
* Rosh Hashana begins a 10-day period of introspection that culminates with Yom Kippur (the day of atonement).

## When?

* Hebrew calendar: 1-2 Tishrei.
* Western calendar: September/October.
* Rosh Hashana begins at sundown. Some Jews observe Rosh Hashana as a 2-day holiday, others as a one-day holiday.

## Greetings:

* Shana Tova! (“a good year!” – Hebrew).
* Chag Sameach! (“a good holiday!” – Hebrew).
* Gut Yontif! (“a good holiday” – Yiddish).

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* Festive meals with sweet dishes that signify hopes for a sweet new year
* Special synagogue services featuring blowing of the shofar (ram’s horn). The shofar is said to “wake up” the soul during this season of introspection.
* “Tashlich” – throwing bread into a moving body of water to symbolize casting away sin

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* Rosh Hashana is one of the most important holidays on the Jewish calendar. Many students, staff and faulty will travel to be with family or friends during this festive time. They may also need to leave campus early on the day that Rosh Hashana begins in order to prepare for the holiday before it starts at sundown.
* Some Jewish students, staff, and faulty will observe Rosh Hashana as a time when work is prohibited by Jewish law, meaning that they will not be able to use electricity, answer phone calls or text messages, respond to emails, drive, take tests or exams, write or attend work or work-related events.
* Instructors and supervisors should avoid scheduling required tests, exams, or other activities on Rosh Hashana.
* Students, staff and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams, or study or work activities that must be scheduled on Rosh Hashana.

# Name: Shabbat (Hebrew)

* Other names include Shabbes/Shabbos (Yiddish), Sabbath (English translation)

## Pronunciation

* [Shuh-baat](https://youtu.be/p1XYQ1AdNo4?si=POwrjKX4cTlaKR8b)

## Meaning

* A day of rest, commemorating the 7th day of creation.

## When?

* Every week, from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday.
* In the winter, Shabbat may begin as early as 4.30 p.m. in East Lansing.

## Greetings

* Shabbat Shalom (“a peaceful Sabbath” - Hebrew).
* Gut Shabbes (“a good Sabbath” - Yiddish).
* Buen Shabbat (“a good Sabbath” – Ladino).

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* Shabbat is traditionally dedicated to rest, to religious prayer in the synagogue, and to celebratory meals with friends and family.
* Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday, with traditional rituals that include candle-lighting, a blessing over wine, a blessing over festive bread, and a special meal. It ends at sundown on Saturday with Havdalah, a ritual which marks the separation of the regular week from the holy day.
* Jews celebrate Shabbat in different ways, depending on their Jewish affiliations and customs. For some Jews, Shabbat is a strict 25-hour period of no “work,” which according to Jewish law means no use of electricity, transportation, phone, email, cooking, or writing. Other Jews may not observe these restrictions, but still reserve Shabbat as a special day to be with family and rest from the week.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* Jewish students, staff and faulty may need to leave campus early on Fridays in order to be at home by the time that Shabbat begins. In the winter, this could be as early as 4 p.m.
* Some Jewish students, staff, and faulty will observe shabbat as a strict day of rest, meaning that they will not be able to use electricity, answer phone calls or text messages, respond to emails, drive, take tests or exams, write or attend work or work-related events.
* Students, staff, and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled on a Friday night or on Saturday.
* Jewish law makes an exception for work on Shabbat that is necessary for saving human life – medical practitioners who are otherwise strictly Shabbat observant may determine that their work fits this criterion, depending on their particular work and practice of Judaism.

# Name: Shavuot (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Shuh-voo-owt](https://youtu.be/mboDGPzD1po?si=1s9NFzUYS8KGYecM)

## Meaning

* Literally, Shavuot means “weeks.” It is a joyous holiday that takes place 7 “weeks” after Pesach.
* Shavuot commemorates the revelation of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.

## When?

* Hebrew Calendar: 6-7 Sivan.
* Western Calendar: June/July.
* Shavuot begins at sundown and ends at sundown two days later.

## Greetings

* Chag Sameach! (“a good holiday!” – Hebrew).
* Gut Yontif (“a good holiday” – Yiddish).

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* On Shavuot Jews often attend synagogue services to celebrate the revelation of the Torah and have festive meals with friends and family.
* There is a custom to study Torah all through the night, known as “Tikkun Leil Shavuot”
* Dairy foods are traditionally eaten on Shavuot, especially cheesecake, and blintzes (cheese filled pancakes) that are rolled in the shape of a Torah scroll.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor

* Some Jewish students, staff, and faulty will observe Shavuot as a time when work is prohibited by Jewish law, meaning that they will not be able to use electricity, answer phone calls or text messages, respond to emails, drive, take tests or exams, write or attend work or work-related events.
* Students, staff, and faulty may need to leave campus early on the day that Shavuot begins in order to prepare for the holiday before it begins at sundown or travel in order to celebrate the holiday with friends and family.
* Students, staff, and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled during Shavuot.

# Name: Shemini Atzeret (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Shem-ee-nee Etz-eh-ret](https://youtu.be/lM60y6MkTqU?si=D2seMdZlSEi_0qZs)

## Meaning

* Shemini Atzeret means “the 8th day of assembly” – it is a holy day that immediately follows the weeklong holiday of Sukkot, and immediately precedes the holiday of Simchat Torah.

## When?

* Hebrew Calendar: 22 Tishrei.
* Western Calendar: September/October.
* Shemini Atzeret begins at sundown and concludes at sundown the next day, at which point Simchat Torah begins.

## Greetings

* Chag Sameach! (“a good holiday!” – Hebrew).
* Gut Yontif (“a good holiday” – Yiddish).

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* Eating festival meals and attending special synagogue services.
* Shemini Atzeret is considered a “holy day” when work is prohibited according to Jewish law.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor

* Some Jewish students, staff, and faulty will observe Shemini Atzeret as a time when work is prohibited by Jewish law, meaning that they will not be able to use electricity, answer phone calls or text messages, respond to emails, drive, take tests or exams, write or attend work or work-related events.
* Students, staff, and faulty may need to travel to celebrate the holiday or they may need to leave campus early on the day that Shemini Atzeret begins in order to prepare for the holiday before it starts at sundown.
* Students, staff, and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled on Shemini Atzeret.

# Name: Simchat Torah (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Sim-chat Toh-ruh](https://www.howtopronounce.com/simchat-torah)

## Meaning

* Simchat Torah means “rejoicing of the Torah.” It is a joyful holiday that marks the completion and the restarting of the annual Torah reading cycle. The Torah is the principal scripture of the Jewish religion.

## When?

* Hebrew Calendar: 23 Tishrei.
* Western Calendar: September/October.
* Simchat Torah begins at sundown, at the conclusion of the holiday of Shemini Atzeret. It concludes at sundown the next day.

## Greetings

* Chag Sameach! (“a good holiday!” – Hebrew).
* Gut Yontif (“a good holiday” – Yiddish).

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* Simchat Torah is a joyous holiday. The completion of the annual cycle of Torah readings is celebrated by dancing and parading the Torah through the synagogue. The last verses of the last book of the Torah and then the first verses of the first book of the Torah are read with great joy, and the giving and receiving of special blessings.
* Simchat Torah is considered a “holy day” when work is prohibited in Jewish law.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor

* Some Jewish students, staff, and faulty will observe Simchat Torah as a time when work is prohibited by Jewish law, meaning that they will not be able to use electricity, answer phone calls or text messages, respond to emails, drive, take tests or exams, write or attend work or work-related events.
* Jewish students, staff and faulty may need to travel during this time to spend the holiday with family or friends.
* Students, staff, and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled on Simchat Torah.

# Name: Sukkot (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Soo-kowt](https://youtu.be/Fy5XfqvfaCk?si=dvJjmY6WuhqO7fmx)

## Meaning

* A week-long fall Harvest festival celebrated by dwelling in a temporary outdoor hut - a “sukkah.”
* Jews eat meals, spend time, and even sleep in the sukkah to commemorate the 40-year journey of the ancient Israelites in the desert, and as a reminder of the fragility of life.

## When?

* Hebrew calendar: 15-21 Tishrei.
* Western calendar: September/October.
* Sukkot begins at sundown.

## Greetings

* Chag Sameach! (“a good holiday!” – Hebrew).
* Gut Yontif (“a good holiday” – Yiddish).
* During the middle days of the holiday (called “chol HaMoed”) a customary greeting is “Moadim l’simcha” (may your times be happy), to which a customary response is “chagim u’zmanim l’sasson” (“joyous holidays and seasons!” – Hebrew).

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* Eating festival meals in the sukkah.
* Saying a special blessing in the Sukkah holding “the four species” – plants that symbolize the unity and diversity of the Jewish people.
* The first two days of Sukkot are considered “holy days” when work is prohibited in Jewish law. The remaining days of the holiday are known as “chol HaMoed” (the intermediate days) when work is permitted. The Sukkot holiday is immediately followed by two more “holy days” – Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah – on these days work is also prohibited in Jewish law.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor

* Some Jewish students, staff, and faulty will observe the first two days of Sukkot, as well as the two days that immediately follow Sukkot as a time when work is prohibited by Jewish law, meaning that they will not be able to use electricity, answer phone calls or text messages, respond to emails, drive, take tests or exams, write or attend work or work-related events.
* Jewish students, staff and faulty may need to travel during this time to spend the holiday with family or friends.
* Jewish students, staff, and faulty may need to leave campus early on the day that Sukkot begins in order to prepare for the holiday before it begins at sundown.
* Some students, staff and faulty f may need to work remotely during the week of Sukkot and the two days that follow if their usual residence in East Lansing does not permit the building of a Sukkah (e.g., an apartment building)
* Instructors and supervisors should avoid scheduling required tests, exams, or other activities on the first two days of Sukkot.
* Students, staff, and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled during the week of Sukkot, particularly if they need to travel for the holiday.

# Name: Tisha B’Av (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Tish-ah B’Ab](https://youtu.be/vVkbMiGBe9s?si=p97DOxw9gYEqDJ8P)

## Meaning

* Tisha B’Av (the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av) is a memorial for all of the communal tragedies of Jewish history, and especially for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

## When?

* Hebrew Calendar: 9 Av.
* Western Calendar: July/August.
* Tisha B’Av begins at sundown and ends at sundown the following day.

## Greetings

* It is customary to avoid greeting people on Tisha B’Av due to the solemn nature of the day.

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* Tisha B’Av is a day of mourning and communal grief. There is a custom to fast from food and drink from sundown on the day that Tisha B’Av begins until sundown the next day. Other mourning customs include sitting on low or uncomfortable chairs, refraining from bathing and intimate relations, and avoiding wearing leather.
* Jews may attend special synagogue services to chant the book of Eicha (“Lamentations,”) and remember the tragedies of the Jewish past.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor

* Work is permitted on Tisha B’Av. However, some Jewish students, staff and faulty may have the custom of honoring the holiday by spending the day away from work in fasting and prayer.
* Students, staff and faulty may need to leave campus early on the day that Tisha B’Av begins in order to eat a meal before the fast starts at sundown.
* Students, staff, and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled on Tisha B’Av.

# Name: Yom Kippur (Hebrew)

## Pronunciation

* [Yom KIP-per](https://youtu.be/x1KvrTQNKLE?si=ahdgmpAPXeT4di55)

## Meaning

* Day of Atonement

## When?

* Hebrew Calendar: 10 Tishrei.
* Western Calendar: September/October.
* Yom Kippur begins at sundown and ends at sundown the next day.

## Greetings

* Gmar Chatima Tova (“may you be inscribed and sealed in the book of life” - Hebrew).
* Gut Yontif (“a good holiday” -Yiddish).

## Common Observances/Celebrations

* Yom Kippur is traditionally observed as a day of introspection, prayer, and repentance
* Jews often attend special synagogue services on Yom Kippur that last many hours – even all day.
* A traditional observance of Yom Kippur is to fast from all food and drink from sundown to sundown. Many Jews begin and end the fast with a festive meal.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* Yom Kippur is considered to be the holiest day of the Jewish year. Many students/faculty/staff will travel to be with family or friends during this time.
* Students, staff and faulty who observe Yom Kippur by fasting may need to leave campus early on the day that Yom Kippur begins in order to eat a pre-fast meal.
* Some Jewish students, staff, and faulty will observe Yom Kippur as a time when work is prohibited by Jewish law, meaning that they will not be able to use electricity, answer phone calls or text messages, respond to emails, drive, take tests or exams, write or attend work or work-related events.
* Instructors and supervisors should avoid scheduling required tests, exams, or other activities on Yom Kippur.
* Students, staff, and faulty should be given the opportunity to reschedule any tests, exams or study or work activities that must be scheduled on Yom Kippur.