

**To: The Brandeis Community 2009
From: The Chaplaincy**

On Monday night, September 29, Jews around the world will begin a very special period called "the Days of Awe". It's a ten day span beginning with Rosh Hashanah, the start of the Jewish New Year and ending on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, Thursday, October 9. Rosh Hashanah, traditionally a two day holiday, is a joyous holiday, but it is also a time for reflection about our relationships with others and with God -- a time to contemplate how we can improve ourselves and our world.

It's a custom for families to be together for Rosh Hashanah and many students will be going home to keep this tradition with their families. In synagogues everywhere we hear the blast of the Shofar, the ram's horn that calls everyone to come together -- to heed the call for celebration and contemplation.

There are many different traditional foods for the holiday, but by far the signature foods for Rosh Hashanah are apples and honey. Apples are dipped or drizzled with honey to symbolize our hope for a sweet New Year.

Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of our preparation for Yom Kippur. During the 10 days from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, Jews engage in the process of reflecting on their misdeeds of the past year, seeking forgiveness from those they may have knowingly and unknowingly harmed or otherwise offended in the past year. Many Jews also participate in a simple service called Tashlich, where they symbolically cast off their sins by tossing crumbs into a body of flowing water. Massell pond qualifies as such a body of water! The Yakus Geese have been carrying off the sins of Brandeis students for generations!

Yom Kippur is one of the most widely observed holidays on the Jewish calendar and more Jews attend synagogue services on this day than on any other. It is marked by fasting beginning at sundown the previous evening, and refraining from food, drink, as well as other luxuries including wearing leather shoes. Many Jews head to services in their finest holiday suits and dresses with canvas tennis shoes on their feet!

On Yom Kippur, Jews come together for a final confession of their sins in order to begin the New Year with a proverbial clean slate; Jews are required to repent for sins between themselves and others and between themselves and God. Tradition has it that one cannot come before God for these confessions before having first approached our family, friends, and neighbors with requests for forgiveness.

During the final hour of the day, all who have fasted and prayed gather strength from their friends and cry out for the gates of forgiveness to remain open as they are about to close. The Holy Day is concluded by a final blast of the shofar.

On campus, Hillel at Brandeis sponsors four different services for students and local community members to be able to partake in the observance of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. There are two festive dinners for Rosh Hashanah on Monday and Tuesday evenings as well as a HUGE buffet to break the fast after Yom Kippur ends Thursday night.

For more information on the different services and meals, please check out www.brandeis.edu/hillel.

At this time of year is it customary to wish everyone a Shana Tova U'metuka (a happy and sweet year). May this be a year of joy and celebration, a year of growth and fulfillment, a year of health and wholeness, a year of peace.

Dear Brandeis Community,

In the past week you may have noticed that there were huts in different locations on campus and students walking around with palm branches and what appeared to be lemons. These customs - building and dwelling in a sukkah (the hut) and shaking a lulav and etrog (the branches and fruit)- were part of the celebration of the Jewish festival of Sukkot.

Lasting eight days, Sukkot commemorates the Israelites' wanderings in the desert following their Exodus from Egypt. As they traveled, they lived in portable shelters. Sukkot also has an agricultural significance, coinciding with the autumn harvest season and celebrating the earth's bounty. For many, this holiday is celebrated by building, eating in and sleeping in a sukkah and waving tree branches, specifically a palm branch, 3 myrtle branches and 2 willow branches, (put together, called the lulav) and a lemon like fruit called a citron (called etrog in Hebrew). The customs of dwelling in a sukkah and shaking the lulav and etrog are very ancient and derived from Biblical references.

This evening at sundown, the holiday will begin (but just begin!) to come to a close. The celebration continues, though, for two more days. Tonight and tomorrow will mark Shmini Atzeret, the Eighth Day of Celebration, with an extension of the joy, the eating, the singing, etc. Tuesday night and Wednesday mark the conclusion of this festive season with the mega-celebration of Simhat Torah, the Festival of Rejoicing in the Torah. On Simhat Torah, amidst yet more singing and dancing, Jews read the final passages of the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) and then go all the way back to the beginning to start reading it again. If the weather is nice on the 22nd, the celebration and dancing will spill out the doors and all around Usdan.

These harvest time festivals are a time of both spiritual uplift and an appreciation of the natural world. We invite you to join the party, ask questions if you'd like to learn more and enjoy yet another of the very special ways Brandeis is home to rich and diverse cultural and religious traditions.

Wishing you joy and celebration (and time for your studies) --

The Brandeis Interfaith Chaplaincy

Dear Brandeis Community,

This Monday night, March 9 and Tuesday, March 10 you might see princesses, clowns, kings and a variety of quirkier costumes parading the campus.

What's going on?

The answer: It is the holiday of *Purim*, a Jewish holiday celebrating religious freedom and unity. Set in Persia in the 5th century BCE, the story of Purim tells of the sinister villain, Haman, who gains the confidence of Ahashverosh, the King of Persia, persuading him to issue a decree for the destruction of the Jews. The beautiful and brave Queen Esther saves

the day with the help of her uncle Mordechai. Together they expose Haman's evil plan and thereby save the Jewish people. The story of Esther is filled with small, seemingly coincidental events, all of which link together in a miraculous manner. Hollywood couldn't do it better!

Purim is the holiday of hidden miracles, but it is celebrated in ways which reveal the hidden. It is customary to wear costumes on Purim to show that like the story of Esther, one must go beyond the surface to gain a true understanding. The hallmarks of Purim include a joyful retelling of the Purim story, sharing gifts of food with friends, giving funds to help the poor and enjoying a festive meal. The celebration of survival is accompanied by a quest to blur the lines between good and evil, recognizing that ultimately, we are each defined by a little bit of both as we strive towards goodness.

Watch for tables on Tuesday in Usdan (11-1:30) and Shapiro (10-12:30) with more information on Purim and holiday treats. All are invited to join in on the fun at the best Purim party ever, sponsored by Hillel, on Monday, March 9 in Levin Ballroom from 9:30pm-12am.

The Brandeis Interfaith Chaplaincy

PALM SUNDAY - PASSOVER - EASTER

If you see students walking around campus with palms in hand this Sunday, April 5, you are not imagining things. It is Palm Sunday for the Catholic and Protestant communities. (The Orthodox Christian community celebrates a week later this year as they follow the Julian calendar.) This marks the beginning of Holy Week, historically the most sacred time of year for Christians.

Palm Sunday recalls an event in the Christian Scripture (The New Testament) of Jesus entering into Jerusalem and being greeted by the people waving palm branches. For Christians, it is a reminder of the welcoming of Jesus into our hearts and of our willingness to follow him. The service on Palm Sunday also includes a reading of the *Passion*, that is, the story of the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. In today's church, great care is given to make sure that the story of the death of Jesus is not presented in an anti-Semitic manner. We see his death as salvation for us and as a reminder of how prophets are often killed when they stand for justice and peace. Mass with the distribution of palms will be at 10 a.m. and 7:10 p.m. at the Bethlehem Chapel.

Wednesday of Holy Week, as every week, the Protestant Chaplaincy hosts an Open Prayer Meeting with Bible readings, prayer and singing at 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. in Harlan Chapel.

Holy Thursday (sometimes referred to as Maundy Thursday after the Latin *mandatum* or command to love one another) is a day when Christians commemorate the Last Supper of Jesus. In some traditions, there is the washing of the feet of various members of the community to recall a gesture of Christ at the Last Supper when he washed the feet of his disciples. This is a sign of our need to do more to love one another and to serve all people, especially the poor.

Good Friday is a solemn day on which Christians recall the death of Jesus and its promise of hope and new life. In some traditions a wooden cross is set up and people spend time meditating before it. Other people make the *Stations of the Cross* a devotion that recalls the journey of Jesus on the Via Dolorosa (Way of Sorrows) in Jerusalem to Calvary where he was crucified. (In Jerusalem the place of Christ's death and resurrection is commemorated inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.) Many Christians keep this devotion but also see in the suffering of Jesus a reminder to be more concerned for the suffering of people in today's world. For example, from noon - three p.m. (the traditional time that scripture records Jesus was on

the cross) there is a demonstration in front of the State House in Boston praying for an end to capital punishment and to the suffering in the Sudan and for peace in the Holy Land and Iraq. For many Christians, this day is also a day of fasting and penance.

Easter Sunday is the greatest feast in the Christian calendar. While our society puts a major emphasis on Christmas, no other day is traditionally as sacred for the Christian community as Easter. This is the day Christians commemorate the resurrection of Christ. In some traditions, the services begin the night before with the lighting of a new fire and the blessing of a large Easter candle. Water is blessed and many are baptized. But for all Christians, this is a day to renew one's faith. In the Catholic Church, there is a sprinkling of all people with the newly blessed Easter water as a sign of renewal of our baptismal commitment. In many Protestant communities, Easter is celebrated at a sunrise service early on Easter morning. Easter usually ends with festive celebrations with special foods and Easter delicacies. Easter Mass will be celebrated at 10 a.m. in The Bethlehem Chapel followed by an Easter breakfast. All are welcome!

Holy Week this year coincides with Passover. It is a special opportunity for both communities to renew bonds of friendship and esteem as we both continue to seek real liberation, freedom, and new life.

Passover begins on Wednesday evening, April 8, and continues through Thursday night, April 16. Passover marks the liberation of the children of Israel from bondage and their subsequent exodus from Egypt. To acknowledge this most meaningful set of events, many Jews refrain from eating bread and bread-like products for the duration of the holiday (the technical term is *hametz*, meaning something which ferments or inflates) and mark the first nights of the holiday with a tableside ritual known as a *Seder*, where they engage in a retelling of the story. This celebration of freedom is an opportunity for a reflection on those pieces of our souls which ought to be swept away along with the crumbs of *hametz* we clean from the corners of our homes, as well as a framework for understanding (and eliminating) that which enslaves us and those around us.

SHAVUOT - PENTECOST

Most of the Brandeis student community will be leaving soon either for summer break or for new endeavors following graduation. We wanted to take this time not only to wish everyone a happy summer and best wishes for graduation, but to offer a short reflection on the upcoming feasts of Shavuot for the Jewish community (May 29 and 30) and Pentecost for the Christian community (May 31).

Shavuot

In the biblical tradition, the holiday of Shavuot marks the end of the grain harvest and the bringing of the first fruits. Shavuot comes fifty days after Passover and those fifty days, which we mark even today with the ritual of counting the Omer (sheaves), were a time of great trepidation in anticipation of the quality of the harvest.

Following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, the focus of the holiday appears to have shifted to a celebration of the receiving of the Torah. This remains the identity of the holiday to this day. We continue to ritually count those fifty days, now in anticipation of receiving the gift of the Torah. Echoing the holiday's agricultural roots, synagogues, and even the Torah itself, are often decorated in fresh greenery as part of the celebration.

This celebration is uniquely suited to the university environment - its central observance is all-night study of the Torah and other Jewish texts. It is traditional to eat dairy foods on Shavuot, both because of the notion that the laws of keeping kosher were not given until the Torah was received, as well as because the words of the Torah should be sweet in our mouths.

Pentecost

The Christian community, coming out of Judaism, modeled many of its celebrations on the Jewish calendar. Pentecost, as its name implies, marks the fiftieth day after Easter as Shavuot marks the fiftieth day after Passover. For the church it is celebrated as the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on the community. It is, in a sense, the "birthday" of the church. In many churches the story of Pentecost is read from the Acts of the Apostles which describes this gift of the Spirit as a moment that unites all peoples. While the early followers of Jesus were from different places around the Mediterranean and spoke different languages and had different cultures, the Spirit made them one people. In many Christian traditions red is the color of the day as it signifies the "fire" and the "power" of the Spirit in our lives. This feast brings to a close the Easter season. The remainder of the year is Ordinary time or Time after Pentecost until Advent (November 29) which begins again the cycle of the Christian calendar.

The Interfaith Chaplaincy

TO: The Brandeis Community,

Ramadan, one of the most sacred months for Muslims, started on Saturday, August 22, 2009. **Ramadan** is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. It is also the month in which it is believed that the Holy Qur'an was sent down from heaven "as a guidance for men and women, a declaration of direction, and a means of salvation." During this month, Muslims observe a strict fast from dawn until sunset. They are not allowed to eat or drink, not even water, during these daylight hours. This fasting helps to develop skills of controlling urges and desires and to bring more sensitivity to the needs of others. At the end of the day, the fast is broken with prayer and a festive meal called an *iftar*. In the evening, following the *iftar*, it is customary to visit family and friends.

During **Ramadan** many Muslims go to the *mosque* and spend several hours praying. In addition to the five daily prayers that are part of the core of Islam, Muslims recite a special prayer called the *Tarawih* prayer (night prayer). On the evening of the 27th day of the month of **Ramadan**, Muslims observe a special night called *Layat al-Qadr* (the evening of September 15) sometimes referred to as "the Night of Power." It is believed that on this night Muhammad first received the Holy Qur'an.

At the end of **Ramadan**, a feast called *Eid al-Fitr* (September 20) is celebrated. It celebrates the breaking of the fast. Gifts are exchanged and friends and families gather for festive meals. Special gifts are also given to the poor.

The Interfaith Chaplaincy of Brandeis University wishes to extend its blessing to all our Muslim students, staff and faculty. There will be special prayers on Friday, August 28 at 1PM in the International Lounge. In the evening at 7:30PM, there will be a special *iftar* dinner in the Muslim Community Center (BMSA) located off the dining room in Usdan Student Center. Our Muslim chaplain, Dr. Imam Talal Eid, is happy to answer any questions at 617-365-7427.

The Interfaith Chaplaincy