



## **Masa - Journey - Reflection, Return and Renewal**

**By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director**

In the secular world, there is one new year - January 1. It is a time for reflection on the past year, what could you have done better, differently, the same so that the coming year is just as fabulous (or better than the previous year?) People make New Year's resolutions - I will exercise more, I will eat less, etc.

In the educational world, we have the start of school each year. Of course, it depends on the area of the country where you live when this occurs. In Chandler, it usually begins the third week of July. On the East Coast, where I grew up (can't you tell by my ever-moving hands when I speak?) the school year begins after Labor Day. And here at the J, we begin in August.

In Judaism, we use a different calendar; one that is a lunar calendar. This is why the Jewish holidays seem to migrate. On a Hebrew calendar, they are on the same day every month, I promise you. On a secular calendar, however, the date changes. In Judaism, there are actually four New Year's or new beginnings. One of them is not very well known at all. It is the first of the Hebrew month of Elul (which typically falls in August). "The tithe for cattle had to be made from cattle born in the same fiscal year, between 1 Elul one year and the next" according to [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com).

The other three, while not everyone knows that they mark a new beginning, are a tad more famous than the first. The second to last one is the first of Nisan which begins the redemption from Egypt and the birth of the Israelite nation and marks the Jewish holiday of Passover. The third one is the 15th of Shevat which is also known as Tu B'Shevat or the birthday of the trees. The first one is the first of the Hebrew month of Tishrei - Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah literally means "the head of the year." Jewish years are traditionally figured from creation (Rosh HaShanah is celebrated on the day that Adam and Eve were created) which begins this Friday evening at sundown.



During the week, I was reading a story about Rosh Hashanah to the children and all through the book, there are pictures of gold and red leaves. I find it so fascinating how the prevailing thought is always from that East Coast perspective. I say this with the full knowledge that I lived there for a large chunk of my life but because I had relatives all over, I knew that fall was a relative term, at least in conjunction with specific dates and what one might see.

Reflection, Renewal, Return - this Masa, this journey, in my opinion, is a wonderful gift. I find it very satisfying to have the opportunities for new beginnings. I am not big on making resolutions in the sense of, "This year, I will plan to..." But the ability to reevaluate a situation, to take a fresh look at a challenge, this makes me smile. I feel like I get a do-over; I can make it better this time.

This concept of reflection, return and renewal, Masa, definitely signifies my journey through life. I began my career in education as a teacher. Each school break was a time to reflect on my classroom and children and renew my commitment to them when the break ended. Summer time was my opportunity to do the same for my family, reconnecting each June here in Arizona or in September in New York. My thoughts turn to the hope of a better tomorrow and my part in that. How can I make a difference? How can I make today better than yesterday? How can I encourage and support others in this journey as well? My daughters have no choice in that this question is often asked of them everyday, not just at Rosh Hashanah. I challenge them to evaluate where they are and where they want to be. And then ultimately, how can they get there and who can they bring along.

With the beginning of this Jewish year, the birthday of the world, let's take a moment or two to reflect on our lives, our families, our children, and make a commitment to bettering ourselves and strengthening our relationships with those we love.

Shana Tova U'Metuka - May you have a good and sweet New Year!