Rosh HaShanah is the Jewish New Year festival, held on the first (also sometimes the second) day of Tishri (in September). It is marked by the blowing of the shofar, and begins the ten days of penitence culminating in Yom Kippur. Rosh HaShanah begins at sundown on Sept 18 thru Sept 20. Yom Kippur begins at sundown on Sept 27 – Sept 28.

Rosh HaShanah (literally, “Head of the Year”) is a time of prayer, self-reflection, and t’shuvah. The faithful review their actions during the past year, and look for ways to improve self, community, and our world in the year to come. The holiday marks the beginning of a 10-day period, known as the Yamim Nora-im (“Days of Awe” or “High Holidays”), ushered in by Rosh HaShanah and culminating with Yom Kippur (the “Day of Atonement”). Rosh haShanah is widely observed by Jews throughout the world, often with prayer and reflection in a synagogue. There also are several holiday rituals observed at home.

Rosh HaShanah is celebrated on the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, which – because of differences in the solar and lunar calendar – corresponds to September or October on the Gregorian or secular calendar. Customs associated with the holiday include sounding the shofar, eating a round challah, and tasting apples and honey to represent a sweet New Year.

Yom Kippur is considered the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. This is the moment in Jewish time when Jews dedicate mind, body, and soul to reconciliation with fellow human beings, themselves, and God, committing to self-reflection and inner change in the new year, then turning to God to ask for forgiveness. The Yom Kippur liturgy reads, “And for all these, God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, and grant us atonement.” Yom Kippur is also observed through fasting, communal worship, familial prayer, and the sounding of the shofar. Work is forbidden on both days.

To share greetings with Jewish friends, students, and colleagues: On Rosh HaShanah, we can say “Shanah tovah um’tukah,” which means “May you have a good and sweet new year.” The greeting can be shortened to “Shanah tovah” (“A good year”).

Special greetings on Yom Kippur include “g’mar chatima tovah,” which means, “May you be inscribed (or sealed) for good [in the Book of Life],” and “tzom kal,” which is used to wish others an “easy fast.”

You can learn more about terms to use during the High Holidays in the reformjudaism.org glossary. (Text from Reformjudaism.org)