

## **A new year and its blessings**

### *Thought for the Day*

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This is the busiest time of year for Judaism and Jewish people; it started two weeks ago with the holiest days of the Jewish calendar - first the new year festival, followed last week by Yom Kippur, the 25-hour long fast of the Day of Atonement.

Now this week we turn from holy days to holidays with the festival of Sukkot or Tabernacles, and next week the celebration of Simchat Torah, when we complete the annual reading of the Torah, the Hebrew Bible and immediately start the cycle again from the beginning.

The Jewish new year is a time for contemplation, not partying; a kind of personal and collective self-appraisal, when we ask ourselves how we've faced up to the challenges of the year gone by and what we hope to achieve in the year ahead, and we try to muster the spiritual resources we need to fulfil our goals.

One of the principal themes of this annual contemplation is life. The weekly reading from the Torah immediately before the new year is Moses' farewell address to the people as they prepare to enter the Promised Land:

“I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil. ... And you shall choose life.”

This is the basis of the principle that other religious duties are set aside to save life – acts that are prohibited on Shabbat - the Sabbath - become compulsory when life is at risk. That is why we refer to God as the God of life, and the God who values life.

Now, a week later, as we celebrate the completion of one cycle and the start of another, we do not do so in comfort, but in the temporary huts or tabernacles that symbolise the frailty of human existence.

In this year of tsunamis, hurricanes, and earthquakes, to say nothing of man's needless inhumanity to man, that is not symbolism that needs explanation or that should be taken lightly.

So let the tragedies of the old year depart, and may the new year bring only life and blessings.