

Hello to all my dear friends in Iowa! For those of you who don't know me, I am a rabbi trained at the Conservative movement's Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles (where I met the wonderful Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz.) Since my ordination I have worked as a Hillel rabbinic advisor in Des Moines, a congregational rabbi in Wichita, Kansas and Fresno, California, and most recently as the head of a community conversion program in the Chicago suburbs. But many of you know me better as the husband of your former congregant Dr. Emily Schoerning, and father of Anax, Fia, and (now) Hannah. I am thrilled to be serving as your rabbi for this year's High Holidays. It is wonderful to have the chance to return to my home state and to the synagogue where I met my family.

The High Holiday period, known in Hebrew as the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* (the Ten Days of

Repentance,) is often considered the holiest time in the Jewish year. People who don't otherwise connect much to the rituals and practices of Jewish communal life often show up for these two days. But why? What is it about this 10-day time period that is so special? Why are these the *chagim* (holidays) that even the wider non-Jewish world marks on its calendar? And why are the other holidays of this month, beginning only five days later, not included in this period?

As we delve into some attempt at an answer, it gets very complicated, very quickly. After all, this period begins with a holiday we call Rosh Hashanah (the beginning of the year) that falls on the first day of the *seventh* month. Yes, the month of Tishrei is not the first month of the year. That honor falls to Nisan, the month when we celebrate Passover. You