

Create your own Shana Tova card!

Framing this unit

Have you ever received a Shana Tova card for the Jewish New Year? Nowadays it is less common to send cards in the mail, people usually greet their friends and family with text messages and emails. But not so long ago it was customary to send cards to friends and family for Rosh Hashanah. These cards were often decorated with designs and pictures portraying the festivals of the month of Tishrei or other Jewish motifs. Sometimes, however, the cards showed completely different designs. Let's explore some Shana Tova cards and then create our own!

The origin of the Jewish tradition of New Year greetings is from the time of the Mishna. According to Jewish tradition, a person's destiny is decided between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This was the time when it was determined whether the following year would be a good or bad one, and thus it was also the time to pray for a good future. The first evidence of writing New Year greetings is in an halachic answer written on the subject by the Maharil (an Ashkenazi German rabbi from the fourteenth century). After the eighteenth-century development of post, travel and print, this tradition flourished in communities beyond Germany and throughout Eastern Europe, and printing businesses started to print special Shana Tova cards.

The graphic motifs on these Shana Tova cards were usually traditional or ideological Jewish symbols or images of people and events that were significant to the Jewish communities.

Shana Tova cards from Israel both before and after the establishment of the State of Israel depicted major Zionist values, such as agriculture, the Bible, the landscape of Israel, cultural and industrial achievements, and even the army and soldiers. Indeed many Shana Tova cards from the early years of the State of Israel show soldiers as an example of the revival of the Jewish people in their own land. It is interesting to note that European Shana Tova cards portrayed Jewish soldiers in armies such as the Prussian army. These images represented the new, powerful Jew who was loyal to his country.

Shana Tova cards are a souvenir of times when communication was far more difficult. Receiving a card from friends and family far away was a major family event. However, with the development of more efficient communication devices such as telephones, the internet and mobile phones, the popularity of Shana Tova cards has declined.

The National Library of Israel collects Jewish memories and traditions and has also accumulated a large collection of Shana Tova cards that document the life of the Jewish people around the globe and in Israel.

Group Activity

We will use [this worksheet](#) to explore Shana Tova cards and examine them in detail, as preparation for designing our own.

Discussion

- What is special about the design? What interesting details and symbols do you notice?
- What can you learn from the card about Jews of that time or place?
- What questions come to mind from examining the card? How can you find the answers?
- What would you include in a Shana Tova card? What symbols, design, and content would you incorporate? Why?
- To whom would you like to send a Shana Tova card?

Creative Activity

Plan a card of your own. Think about the illustrations and the texts you would like to include in the card. Then create a card with art materials or on the computer.

Share your card with friends and family!

Create an exhibit with all of the Shana Tova cards created by the group.

Primary sources in this lesson

Shana Tova cards [on Education website](#) and [on main NLI website](#)