



YOM KIPPUR EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

This brief review of Yom Kippur laws and customs is not meant to be comprehensive, but will hopefully help you prepare for and enjoy this High Holiday season.

I: PREPARING FOR YOM KIPPUR

A: Physical and Spiritual

Preparation

On the physical side, it is customary for men to wear a *kittel*, a special white robe, and for women to wear white. Wearing white shows our hope and confidence that our sins will be 'whitened' back to innocence again. On the spiritual side, preparations over the course of the 10 days of repentance should fit into 3 categories:

Teshuva (repentance) – We think back over the errors, transgressions and rebellions we committed this year and repent for them. Formal repentance involves articulating our sins (making a list can be helpful), regretting them and affirming that we will not repeat them. For sins that had an impact upon other people, asking their forgiveness is required first.

Tefilla (prayer) – We spend most of the Yom Kippur day in prayer. What else would you be doing?

Tzedaka (charity) – Giving *tzedaka* is encouraged at this time of year as an act of redemption. This is why many synagogues have Rosh Hashana, Kol Nidrei or Yom Kippur day appeals.

These three kinds of actions are said to “nullify the harshness of the decree”, or to be the most effective ways of asking God for a good year to come.

B: Tashlich, Hatarat Nedarim (Release of Vows) and Selichot

If you did not do Tashlich (casting your sins into the water, or Hatarat Nedarim (annulment of vows) earlier, you should do them before the onset of Yom Kippur. We will do this in shul on Sunday Morning after Shacharit. Selichot (penitential prayers) are said each day of the 10 days of Repentance and are a recurring part of the Yom Kippur service as well.

C: Kaparot

It is customary to give *tzedaka* the day before Yom Kippur. Some people do this by swinging an object of value over their head to 'transfer' their sins into and then donating it to *tzedaka*. Traditionally, the object has been a chicken, but money in a handkerchief suffices as well. Some people do not practice this custom.

D: Eating Your Heart Out

According to our tradition, one who eats on the day before Yom Kippur and fasts on Yom Kippur gets credited as if they fasted for both days. According to most authorities, one should eat frequently over the course of the day, making many blessings, and enjoying their eating before the fast. One should avoid spicy or dehydrating foods.

E: Asking for *mechila* (forgiveness)

One has to ask forgiveness from their fellow human beings before Yom Kippur for any wrongs one committed against them. This is a prerequisite to asking God to forgive us. Thus, it is customary to approach those people and ask them to *mocheil* (forgive) you for what you have done to them. One should specify the wrong and state how sorry they are. If rebuffed, the rule is that you must try at least 3 times to gain forgiveness, before witnesses. Of course, you may choose to forgive those who have wronged you without them asking you for forgiveness as well.

F: Mikva

It is customary for men (and in some places for women) to go to the *mikva* (ritual pool) on the day before Rosh Hashana and the day before Yom Kippur. One should bring his own towel and should shower before entering the *mikva*. Some have the custom of completely immersing once, some 3 times and some 7 times. This year of course many will refrain and therefore a long shower will suffice.

G: Mincha

The afternoon service is said earlier than usual. Even though it is not yet Yom Kippur, there is a Yom Kippur confession service (with the confession - "*al cheit*" ("for the sin of...") and beating the chest) included in Mincha. This is both to get one prepared for Yom Kippur and in the rare event that one's life would come to an end before Yom Kippur, it gives one the opportunity of having done that confession first. **This will be in shul at 2.00 followed by Yizkor and will be streamed on zoom.**

H: *Se'uda ha-Mafseket* (Final Meal)

In theory, one should have a festival meal on Yom Kippur. Since this is impossible, this final meal before the fast takes its place. Many have the custom of dressing nicely, eating nice foods and making sure to eat bread (two challah rolls are not necessary, though) and bench at this meal.

I: Lighting Candles and Blessing Children

One should light the candles first (while covering the eyes) and then say the blessing. The match should not be snuffed out, but put on a fire-safe surface to burn out on its own. It is customary to give children a special blessing at this time as well, which is found in the machzor. One should also light an extra candle in order to use for Havdalah after Yom Kippur.

J: Adding on

It is a commandment to lengthen the beginning and end of Yom Kippur by a few minutes. This is called *tosefet al ha-Kodesh*, adding on to the holiness. For this reason, we conclude our preparations for Yom Kippur a little earlier than we really have to. One should start fasting at candle-lighting.

K: Tefilla Zaka – prayer of purification

A particularly moving prayer was composed by the Chayei Adam (R. Avraham Danzig) and is recited by many in the time before Kol Nidrei. It is found at the beginning of most Yom Kippur prayer books.

L: Kol Nidrei

Kol Nidrei (“all vows”) is really a pre-Yom Kippur service, which is similar to the annulment of vows, but on a communal level. We invite all the Jews to come pray with us – both righteous and sinners – and attempt to do a mass nullification of any outstanding vows in the community. It is a short service, done before sunset.

II: YOM KIPPUR NIGHT

A: Ma’ariv

The Ma’ariv service includes the usual aspects of a night service: *bar’chu* (call to prayer), 2 blessings before and 2 blessings after Sh’ma and an *amida* (silent devotion). The *amida* has seven blessings, the middle one of which is the sanctification of the Yom Kippur day. The four insertions said during the 10 days of repentance are included as well. The Yom Kippur confession service (beating the chest) is said twice: once during the silent *amida* and once during the *selichot* service that follows the *amida*. The most beautiful poem in this service is the *piyut* “Like the clay in the hands of the potter” (“*ki hinei ka-chomer*”).

After the service, many have the custom to stay to recite special songs and/or to learn.

B: Shabbat and Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the only day that can uproot our regular Shabbat observances; it is called itself a “Shabbat shabbaton”, Shabbat of Shabbats. Nonetheless, all the negative prohibitions of Shabbat – from cooking to carrying – apply on Yom Kippur as well. All the restrictions of Yom Kippur apply both to the night and the day.

III: YOM KIPPUR DAY

Yom Kippur day has its own power of atonement, just by living through it. However, combined with the power of *teshuva*, repentance, almost all sins are forgivable. There are five major prohibitions on Yom Kippur day:

- Ø Eating and Drinking
- Ø Wearing leather shoes
- Ø Bathing or washing (ritual hand-washing is still done, up to the knuckles)
- Ø Anointing
- Ø Marital Intimacy

Pregnant and nursing women and those with specific illnesses or medications should consult with both their doctors and a rabbi to establish a protocol for breaking one’s fast. Fasting is meant to spur you to do *teshuva*.

YIZKOR is also said on Yom Kippur as a memorial to our departed relatives, martyrs and soldiers. Yizkor is often not said the first year after a death, as the emotions are still too raw, but if one is already saying Yizkor for someone else, then it is acceptable. There are special Yizkor prayers recited for Holocaust victims and those who fell defending Israel in her wars.

Mussaf

i. In addition to some of the same features as the Rosh Hashana service, such as “*unetaneh Tokef*” and “*V’chol Ma’aminim*” there is one special feature to the *mussaf* service, which is the **AVODA**, the description of the Yom Kippur service. The High Priest would do 3 separate confessions: one for himself, one for all the *kohanim* and one for all of Israel. He would offer a special sacrifice to God and send out the scapegoat to the desert. He would also enter and (hopefully) exit from the Holy of Holies on this day. All of this is dramatically presented in the machzor. One of the high points of the service was when the *kohein gadol* (high priest) would utter the Ineffable name of God and all the people would prostrate themselves in respect and awe. Most congregations still do this. In the *Aleinu* prayer and at the end of each priestly confession, we bow down to our knees and foreheads.

ii. Ten Martyrs – this poem is said commemorating the 10 great Rabbis put to death by the Romans. It is called “*eileh Ezkara*”, “These I remember”

Mincha

Mincha has its own Torah reading (picking up where we left off) regarding prohibitions against sexual immorality. There are three *aliyot*. The fourth also reads a special *haftara*, the book of Jonah. This is often one of the most coveted honours of the year.

Ne’ila

This last-chance service is unique to Yom Kippur in contemporary Judaism. It is called Ne’ila because it means “the shutting” (or locking) as in the gates of Yom Kippur being shut as the day ends. No confession is said in Ne’ila (too late for that) and, instead of the idea of “writing”, we express the idea of “sealing”. The verdict for the year is sealed as Yom Kippur comes to a close. The entire service is said with the ark open while standing (it is also a big honour to open the ark). The majority of Ne’ila is a *selichot* service. Most congregations finish Ne’ila right as the day ends.

This is followed by *kaddish*, and the *shofar* is sounded and “*I’shana ha-ba-a birushalayim*” (next year in Jerusalem) is sung. (In practise we do this after Maariv).

Following Ne’ila, a number of additional prayers should be recited:

- a) Ma’ariv for the next day – why start slacking now that your sins have been forgiven?
- b) Havdala
- c) Kiddush Levana – the sanctification of the moon.

In addition, there is a custom to begin symbolically (one piece, e.g.) building one’s *sukka*, to go from forgiveness straight into a mitzva. In any case, one should not rush to end one’s fast, both add on to the day a little and also so as to show that we are human beings, not animals.

**One should not begin to prepare their break fast meal until
after Yom Kippur has ended at 7.32**

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!!