

Laws and Customs of Yom Kippur 5784-2023

Yom Kippur is a day designed to bring God and the Jewish people closer together. Through its powerful liturgy and practices, Yom Kippur can inspire deep meaning, soul searching, and joy. It is our hope that this guide will explain the basic practical laws of the day and some of their underlying meanings, so that we can live the days in accordance with tradition. The positions indicated tend to represent majority opinion or widespread practice, but not always the breadth of halakhic possibility. We urge you to be in touch with us with any questions or concerns about these laws or others.

The Days Before Yom Kippur

The days before Yom Kippur are a good time to visit or call friends, family and community members whom you might have hurt and ask for forgiveness. Asking forgiveness is an integral part of the holiday. The Talmud says (Yoma 87b) “For sins between man and God, Yom Kippur atones, but for sins between any one and one’s fellow, Yom Kippur does not atone until one appeases one’s fellow.”

In addition to seeking forgiveness, it is also important to grant to those who ask forgiveness from us. “When R. Zeira would have grounds [for a grievance] against someone, he would pass in front [of the offender], thereby making himself available to him so that he would come and appease him.”

Erev Yom Kippur (Sunday, Sept. 24)

The day before Yom Kippur has a mini-Yom Tov aspect to it. Therefore, the *Selichot* prayers are abbreviated, and *Tachanun* and related tefillot are omitted at Shacharit and at Mincha. *Mizmor LeTodah* is also omitted, as is *Avinu Malkeinu*.

Many have the custom to immerse in the *mikvah* on Erev Yom Kippur.

Unlike Tisha B'Av, the meal before the Yom Kippur fast (*Seudah Hamafseket*) is a joyous one. “R. Chiyya bar R. Difti taught: anyone who eats and drinks on the ninth [of Tishrei], the Scriptures considers it as if one fasted on the ninth **and** the tenth.” (Yoma 81b). One may eat after the meal is completed and before the fast begins as long as one did not officially accept the fast.



Candles are lit, with the blessing of *Baruch Ata ... Lehadlik Ner Shel Yom ha-Kippurim*, followed by *Shehechianu*. Candle Lighting is at **6:32pm**. Memorial candles are lit for the departed, as *Yizkor* is recited on Yom Kippur day. The fast officially begins at sundown, **6:50pm** this year. Yom Kippur originates the notion of “adding on to” Yom Tov by lighting candles well before sundown, a practice we follow on Shabbat and holidays as well. We try to bring in the fast and the Yom Tov early, beginning *Kol Nidre* around or before candle lighting time (see below).

Yom Kippur Restrictions

Yom Kippur is referred to in the Torah as “*Shabbat Shabbaton*”, the Sabbath of Sabbaths. The same 39 categories of labor that we refrain from on Shabbat also apply on Yom Kippur, such as refraining from using electricity, conducting business, cooking, and carrying without an *eruv*.

Five additional restrictions apply that add a level of hardship to the day (*inuyyim*):

- **Eating and drinking:** Children over the age of 9 or so should start to try fasting according to their ability. Those who are ill, elderly, pregnant or nursing, or have medical conditions should consult medical professionals and a rabbi to determine whether or not they should fast.
 - For those permitted or obligated to eat on Yom Kippur, there will be designated spaces in the Bayit to do so in privacy.
- **Wearing leather footwear:** We refrain from wearing leather footwear on Yom Kippur, as these were historically the most comfortable footwear. This prohibition includes all parts of the shoe.
 - All other leather-wear (e.g. belts, kippot) is permitted.
- **Bathing or washing:** This prohibition applies to all parts of the body, with warm or cold water. The exceptions are: upon waking, one performs the ritual morning washing up to the knuckles; after using the bathroom; kohanim before blessing the congregation; if one’s hands become soiled, and for health reasons.
- **Applying ointment, lotions, or creams:** All creams, lotions, perfume, and deodorant are forbidden.
- **Sexual relations:** Spouses refrain even from meaningful touch and sharing a bed.



Yom Kippur in Shul (Sunday night, Sept. 24 - Monday, Sept. 25)

Yom Kippur begins with Kol Nidre (**this year @ 6:35pm**). One of the most famous prayers in our liturgy, Kol Nidre is also one of the most mysterious. Its haunting melody contrasts with its straightforward legal procedure for annulling vows. Those who wear a *tallit* do so during the *Kol Nidre* and Maariv service. It is left unfolded for the morning service. Many also wear a *kittel*, the white robe worn at a wedding and at burial, on Yom Kippur.

During the recitation of the Shema at any time during Yom Kippur, the custom is to recite the words *Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto Le'olam Va'ed* **aloud**. This is in contrast to the rest of the year when we recite this verse in an undertone. One reason offered is that it is the angels who recite this verse to God, and Yom Kippur is the day when we are closest to being like angels, abstaining from earthly pleasures.

The *viduy*, or confession, is recited many times throughout the *amidah* prayers of the day. *Al Cheit* and *Ashamnu* are two prayers that alphabetically list all types of wrongs committed by the collective Jewish people, as we ask for forgiveness as a collective. During the listing of the sins, the custom is to bend over (as a sign of humility) and strike the left side of the chest with the right hand.

The *Musaf* [additional] *Amidah* of the Yom Kippur service is another highlight from the liturgy. The powerful high holiday *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) are included, in addition to the *viduy* and the *avodah* – the recitation of the sacrificial service performed in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The service concludes with the *Ne'ilah* [closing] prayer, which begins shortly before sunset, when the "gates of prayer" will be closed. Yom Kippur comes to an end with a recitation of Shema Yisrael and the blowing of the shofar, which marks the conclusion of the fast, this year at **7:33pm**.



After Yom Kippur

- After Maariv, *Kiddush Levanah* (blessing of the new moon) is generally recited.
- *Havdalah* is recited without spices (*b'samim*).
- A blessing is said on a flame from a candle that was lit from before Yom Kippur (*ner sheshavat*).
- A prevalent practice is to do some work on Sukkah preparations so that the very night following Yom Kippur can be spent bridging Yom Kippur with Sukkot and showing our eagerness to fulfill *mitzvot*.

Times on Sunday | 9/24

6:32pm: Candle lighting

6:35pm: Kol Nidrei

6:50pm: Fast begins

Times on Monday | 9/25

8:00am: Shacharit

10:30am: Yizkor

5:55pm: Neilah (MS)

6:00pm: Neilah (SH)

7:33pm: Fast ends

Gemar Chatimah Tovah!

***May we, our families, and our communities
be sealed for a healthy and a good year!***

