

## Laws and Customs of Yom Kippur 5784

### **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 people and God Yom Kippur atones, but for sins between one person and another, Yom Kippur does not atone until one appeases one’s fellow.” In addition to seeking forgiveness, it is also important to grant forgiveness to those who ask.

### **Erev Yom Kippur**

Since Erev Yom Kippur, the eve of our being forgiven for our sins, is essentially a happy day, we do not say *tachanun* during morning prayers and even the *Selichot* services are short and to the point.

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 day before Yom Kippur], the Scriptures considers it as if one fasted on the ninth and the tenth” (Yoma 81b). One may continue to eat after the *seudah hamafseket* is completed and before the fast begins until one accepts the fast.

We will gather for *mincha* at 2:45 PM on Sunday afternoon. This special *mincha* service features the *vidui*, verbal confession of sins, which is recited throughout Yom Kippur itself. We recite the confession before eating the *seudah hamafseket*.

As you walk into the shul for *mincha* Erev Yom Kippur, or right before *Kol Nidre* (6:50 PM) you will notice some baskets for *tzedaka* money which will be distributed both to the needy of our community in Chicago through The Ark, Maot Chitim Project, and Nourishing Hope, and to the needy in Israel. This charity fulfills the custom of *Kaparot*, which originally involved—and still does in some communities—swinging male and female chickens around one’s head to atone for the sins of male and female children that you may have. According to Rav Aron Soloveichik zt”l, the main reason for this odd custom was to get people to give *tzedaka* before Yom Kippur. There will be sheets with the *Kaparot* prayers on them, and feel free to say them, and even to spin your money around your head. But most importantly, please give generously to those who need your help, and may God be inspired through your kindness to be kind with you as well. The baskets will be removed shortly before *Kol Nidre* begins.

Please light Yom Kippur candles and Yizkor candles by 6:27 PM. The two blessings for lighting the Yom Kippur candles are: *Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha’olam, asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel yom hakipurim. Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha’olam, shebechiyanu, vekiymanu, vehigyanu lazman hazeh.* At 6:50 PM, on Erev Yom Kippur (Sunday, September 24) we begin the holy day with *Kol Nidre*.

### **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, including using electricity, conducting business, cooking, carrying without an eruv, and more.

Five additional restrictions apply:

- 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 to determine whether fasting is dangerous. If fasting is medically problematic, please feel free to discuss with me an optimal strategy for eating and drinking on Yom Kippur.
- Wearing leather footwear – We refrain from wearing leather footwear on Yom Kippur. Other clothing or accessories made of leather (belts, kippot, etc) are permitted. If one does not have access

to leather-free shoes, one should go barefoot when possible, and wear (even leather) shoes when walking outside where it is dangerous to walk barefoot.

- 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 toilet; *kohanim* before they bless the congregation; if one's hands became soiled; and for health reasons.
- Applying ointment, lotions, or creams – Creams, lotions, perfume, and deodorant are forbidden.
- Sexual relations – The *Shulhan Arukh* writes that married couples should refrain from all physical contact on Yom Kippur and sleep in separate beds. The *Taz* ruled that, other than sleeping in separate beds, the precautionary prohibitions (*harkhakot*) apply only at night and therefore a husband and wife need not refrain from non-sexual touch during the day.

All temporary prohibitions in Judaism (not working on Shabbat, not eating on Yom Kippur, etc.) are in no way indications that the prohibited thing is problematic in any way. Rather, the Torah tells us to refrain from certain things at certain times so that we can re-engage with them with added sanctity and intention at a later time.

### Yom Kippur in Shul

Yom Kippur begins with *Kol Nidre*. Those who wear a *tallit* do so during the *Kol Nidre* and *ma'ariv* service. It is left unfolded for use again at the morning service. Many also have the custom to wear a *kittel*, the white robe worn at a wedding and at burial.

During the recitation of the Shema during Yom Kippur, in the evening and in the morning, the custom is to recite the words “*baruch shem kevod malchuto l'olam va'ed*” aloud.

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

The *Mussaf* [additional] *Amidah* of the Yom Kippur service is another highlight from the liturgy. The powerful high-holiday *piyyutim* are included, in addition to the *vidui* and the *avodah* – the recitation of the sacrificial service performed in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The day 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.

Immediately after *ma'ariv* and *Havdalah*, if it is not cloudy, we will go outside to celebrate and sanctify the new moon (already ten days old) through the ancient ritual of *Kiddush Levana*. After Yom Kippur we are reborn, so we celebrate our rebirth by celebrating the constant rebirth of the moon. Then, after eating a little, head for the nearest sukkah if you can add a finishing touch (or start building your sukkah). In this way, we start out on the best footing after Yom Kippur by doing a mitzvah.