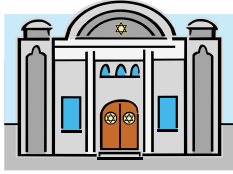




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YOM KIPPUR – THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, occurs on the tenth of the month of Tishrei – the last of the Ten Days of Repentance.

In keeping with the Biblical Mitzvah to “afflict yourselves,” we abstain from five physical activities:

- eating and drinking
- wearing leather shoes
- use of skin creams or oils
- marital relations
- washing any part of the body (unless imperative to remove dirt). Required hand-washings (e.g. upon waking in the morning or before prayers) are done only until the knuckles.

Jewish Tradition sees these restrictions as not merely an act of penance, but a transcendence of our physical nature. We are depicted as angels on this holy day; we wear white garments, spend the day in prayer, and free ourselves of pettiness and strife.

The Yom Kippur service begins with **Kol Nidrei**, an Aramaic declaration nullifying vows, either past or future. [Most vows can be revoked only by a Jewish court; the legal significance of Kol Nidrei is beyond the scope of this article.] Some interpret Kol Nidrei as a plea for the annulment of harsh Heavenly decrees.

Structure of Yom Kippur service:

- **Yom Kippur Eve:**
 - **Kol Nidrei**
 - **Maariv** – evening service
- **Yom Kippur Day:**
 - **Shacharis** – morning service
 - **Mussaf** – additional daytime service, as on every Sabbath and Holiday
 - **Mincha** – afternoon service
 - **Ne’ilah** — special concluding service. Ne’ilah means “Closing [of the Gates]” – a reference to either the closing of the Temple gates at the end of the day, or the closing of the Gates of Heaven at the end of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the climax of the Ten Days of Repentance, and Ne’ilah is the climax of Yom Kippur – a time for all-out emotional effort, our last chance to advocate for a good year for ourselves, our loved ones and our entire people.

Each prayer service incorporates **Vidui** – confession. An alphabetical list of sins catalogues various areas of human weakness. It is customary to strike the heart lightly with one’s fist when reciting each item on the list, indicating that transgression originates in the heart.

Before seeking forgiveness from G-d, we must seek forgiveness from Man. The days leading up to Yom Kippur are a time to repay debts, right wrongs and apologize to any human beings we may have hurt.

Another pre-Yom Kippur custom is **Kapparo**th – “atonement.” Some use a live chicken, others use money; in either case, the item is swung slowly in a circle around one’s head while declaring that it is being offered as an atonement “in one’s place”; it is then distributed to the poor. The ceremony highlights the importance of seeking atonement for our sins.

Though Yom Kippur is solemn, even frightening, it is nevertheless a holiday, whose underlying mood is one of joy. We leave the day purified, relieved and uplifted, confident in G-d’s love and the promise of a better future.

G’MAR CHASIMA TOVA!