

Yom Kippur

ABOUT THE HOLIDAY

Yom Kippur, or *Yom Hakippurim*, is known as the holiest day in the Jewish year.

The goal of Yom Kippur is to bring about reconciliation between people, and between each individual and God. "The tenth day of the seventh month is a day of atonement. It shall be a sacred occasion for you...it is a day on which atonement is made on your behalf before Hashem your God...a Shabbat of complete rest it shall be for you" (Lev. 23:26-32). During the time of the First Temple, the high priest offered special offerings to cleanse himself and his family, and then sent away a second goat into the wilderness, symbolically carrying away the wrongdoing of the people. By the time of the Second Temple this ritual had been elaborated to include three separate moments during which the high priest appeared before the people reciting a formula of confession in their hearing. At this momentous occasion only, the high priest would utter the tetragramaton, the YHVH, the name by which God identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush. Upon hearing this, the people would respond aloud, "*Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuto L'Olam Va'ed!*" "Blessed is His glorious sovereignty forever and always." In traditional synagogues, Yom Kippur is still the only day on which these words are spoken aloud after saying the *Shema*. Yom Kippur is the only fast day mandated in the Torah, and on Yom Kippur, Jews are also forbidden to drink any liquid, bathe, engage in marital relations, or wear leather shoes. On Yom Kippur we often see the incongruous sight of people attired in their finest fall fashions wearing canvas sneakers!

HOW WE CELEBRATE

Before the actual holiday of Yom Kippur is ushered in, we have spent ten days in the process of *teshuva*, repentance. In Judaism the term, "*chet*," sin, connotes a sense of missing the mark, as in target practice. It is understood that although none of us is able to be truly accurate in our deeds at all times, we are required to strive toward the ideal of complete perfection. We use these ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, or the *Aseret Yamei HaTeshuva*, to look within ourselves in a process of *cheshbon hanefesh*, literally, an accounting of our souls, reviewing our behaviors of the past year. If one has offended or injured another person, one is obligated to sincerely request forgiveness of that person. The victim of the affront is correspondingly obligated to forgive, provided the request has been honestly made. All day attendance at synagogue, even if spent in ardent prayer, will not wipe clean the slate for offenses committed against other people. The only actual transgressions forgiven on this day are those that have been committed against God.

Yom Kippur begins with a pre-fast meal prior to sunset. Holiday candles are lit and *yahrzeit*, memorial, candles are also lit, if the family is remembering loved ones who have died. (This can be a good time to share precious memories of beloved departed relatives with the children.) Children younger than nine are forbidden to fast, while older children are encouraged to eat less than usual, but to not fast for the entire

twenty-five hours of the holiday. Any person suffering from a life-threatening illness is also forbidden to fast, with the Jewish value of the sanctity of life taking precedence over all other *mitzvot*. The children are blessed before leaving home for the evening service. The synagogue liturgy of Erev Yom Kippur contains the stirring melodic chanting of the *Kol Nidrei* prayer. With the *Aron Kodesh*, the Holy Ark of the Torah, open, each Torah dressed in pure holiday white and held by congregants, we ask to be released from vows to God that we have made and not kept.

Highlights of services during Yom Kippur day, the longest of the Jewish holidays, include the *Al Chet* prayer, an acrostic in which our transgressions of the past year are confessed, in *Alef-Bet* order. People lightly beat their fists against their chest as each *chet* is spoken. Most of the transgressions mentioned are moral failings, such as wronging others, gossiping, disrespect of parents and teachers, using foul speech or being dishonest in business. The entire *Al Chet* prayer is recited in the plural, reminding us that each of us bears responsibility for the well-being of our community, as well as to save individuals from the embarrassment of the recitation of particular failings. We pray for God to be compassionate in judging us, and pray that our prayer, our *tzedakah*, and our performance of good deeds will cancel a harsh decree. The Book of Jonah is read during the afternoon service. Its predominant theme is God's willingness to forgive when *teshuva* is sincere. The day inches toward a close with the *Ne'ilah* service, which refers to the "shutting of the gates." Jewish tradition regards Yom Kippur as the day on which God ends decisions on the fate of each human being, and the liturgy vividly depicts gates beginning to close as the sun sets. A long, single note is sounded on the shofar to end Yom Kippur. Now, it's time to celebrate a new, worthy beginning, having made peace with one another and with God.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY CELEBRATION

Our children are not too young to begin to learn the deeper meanings of the holiday. Even if apples and honey, new clothes, and the blasts of the shofar are momentarily more enticing, on some level the deeper meanings of these days are making an impression - if we provide those meanings. The actual steps of *teshuva* can be taught and practiced at home. According to Maimonides, the first step is to recognize and regret faulty behavior, asking forgiveness of those who have been wronged; second, to reject the behavior by ceasing to do it; and third, to resolve to behave better by making different choices in the future. Rabbi Irving Greenberg calls these "the three R's of repentance." As parents, our responsibility is to not only model the practice of *teshuva*, but to help our children - and one another - understand that mistakes can be overcome, and the slate wiped clean. This is the time of year to raise our own moral consciences as well; setting goals with our families for *mitzvah* actions and *tzedakah* work for the coming year. Sharing these goals and activities with friends can be a positive and supportive project. A few concrete suggestions include:

Collect baby items; books, toys; give away outgrown clothes; purchase extra food for the food bank; adopt an elderly shut-in or nursing home resident; pet animals at the Humane Society; weed the garden of a neighbor unable to care for their yard; plant a tree; clear ivy from a park; pick a day to be on litter patrol; volunteer at a

school or hospital; serve a meal at a shelter; save every penny that comes your way and donate them to a homeless shelter; donate your old furniture to the community warehouse; give to an institution whose values and work you admire; invite others for holiday or Shabbat dinners whose families are far away; say, "I love you" to each member of your family every day; say the *Shema* each night before you go to sleep.

A FINAL WORD

In his book, "Seasons of Our Joy," Arthur Waskow calls the intense spiritual moment of Yom Kippur a "tallis in time", a time when our prayers, meditations, and actions cover the confusions and shortcomings of our daily lives. Each of us intrinsically knows that we are unable to sustain this measure of self-monitoring over time. We understand that, for ourselves and for our families, *teshuva*, the process of readjusting our aim, is ongoing and lifelong. As we practice *teshuva*, we allow ourselves and our children to make mistakes and grow, with a heightened sensitivity to others, knowing that we will come closer to our goals in the future, having made the effort to learn from our mistakes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For Adults

The Yom Kippur Anthology; Phillip Goodman
The First Jewish Catalogue; The Second Jewish Catalogue; The Third Jewish Catalogue; Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld, et.al
Raising Your Child to be a Mensch, Neil Kurshan

Ziv Tzedakah Fund, (Danny Siegel's) 263 Congressional Lane, Suite 708, Rockville, MD 20852, (301) 468-0060, which started when he collected a few dollars to distribute on a trip to Israel and now collects and distributes thousands to grass-roots groups in the United States and Israel.

For Children:

Sneakers to Shul, Floreva Cohen,
Yussel's Prayer; Barbara Cohen,
First Fast; Barbara Cohen,
Reaches of Heaven, I.B. Singer,
If Not Higher. Y.L. Peretz

L'Shanah Tovah Tikatevu,
May You Be Inscribed in the Book of Life for a Good, Healthy and Happy Year

AFTER THE FAST RECIPES

Eggplant Caviar

2 medium eggplants	4 garlic cloves
kosher salt	1/4 cup corn oil
1 large green bell pepper	1 small can tomato sauce
1 large onion	1 tsp. salt, or to taste

Trim away tops of eggplants and peel away the skin. Cut the eggplants lengthwise into slices about 1/2 inch thick. Sprinkle eggplant slices on both sides with kosher salt and arrange slices in colander. Let stand for 30 minutes. Rinse the eggplant slices under cold running water to remove salt. Preheat oven to 375. Place eggplant slices on foil-lined baking sheet and bake for half-hour at 375. Remove from oven and let cool. When cool enough to handle, chop into small pieces. Remove seeds and trim core from green pepper. Dice. Dice onion and crush garlic. Sauté onion, garlic and pepper in oil until slightly softened. Add chopped eggplant, tomato sauce, and salt. Cook over low heat for about 1 hour, until eggplant is very soft and mixture has thickened. Taste for seasoning. Add more salt if needed. Can be served hot or cold, as a side dish or appetizer. May be refrigerated for 5 or 6 days.

Tzatziki

(Dilled Cucumber and Yogurt Salad) From the Isle of Rhodes

4 medium cucumbers, peeled and diced
2 scallions, sliced
1/4 tsp. salt, or to taste
2 cups plain yogurt
1 tbsp. cider vinegar
1/2 tsp. sugar
2 tbsp. snipped fresh dill
1 tsp. dried mint

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.