

Yom Kippur *in a nutshell*

I: PREPARING FOR YOM KIPPUR

A. Physical Prep

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.

B. Spiritual Prep

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.

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.

There is an introduction to the swinging ("b'nei adam"), followed by the 3-time recitation of the following formula (for money): "zeh chalifati, zeh temurati, zeh kaparati, zeh ha-kesef yeilech litzdaka va'ani ekaneis l'chaim tovim arukim u'le-shalom." "this is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement – this money shall go to tzedaka and I shall enter into a long and good life and to peace."

D: Eating Your Heart Out on the eve of Yom Kippur

According to most authorities, 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, though.

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: Mincha/Afternoon service on the eve of Yom Kippur

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. (ATM pp.48-59) 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. Jewish Center Mincha (86th st) is at 2:00 pm. OZ (95th) has at 1:30 and 4:00 pm. 5th Avenue synagogue (62nd and 5th) is at 1:45 pm. Adereth El (29th) is at 3:00 pm.

G. Candle Lighting

(pp. 67-71)

Candle-lighting this year is at 6:10 pm. The blessing is: "Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-Olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom ha-Kippurim"

Women should also add: "Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-Olam sheh-hechiyanu, v'kiyimanu, v'higiyanu laz'man ha-zeh." (Men say this blessing in shul after kol nidrei)

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.

H. Blessing Children

It is customary to give children a special blessing at this time as well.

For boys: "y'simcha Elohim k'efraim v'chi'Menashe" (May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe)

For girls: "y'simeich Elohim k'Sarah, Rivka, Rachel v'Leah" (May God make you like Sara, Rebecca, Rachel & Leah)

For both, continue: "Yevarech'cha Adonai v'yishmerecha. Ya-eir Adonai Panav eilecha vichuneka. Yisa Adonai Panav eilecha v'yaseim lecha shalom."

(some feminize the blessing for girls)

"May God bless you and guard you. May He shine His face to you and show you grace. May He lift His face to you and grant you peace."

I: 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 about candle-lighting, which is 6:10 pm

J: Tefilla Zaka - prayer of purification

(pp.98-109)

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.

K: Kol Nidrei ("all vows")

(pp. 110)

Kol Nidrei 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/Evening Service

(pp.118) 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 (pp.140-142). 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 (p.147-155) and once during the selichot service that follows the amida (198-99,203-210). The most beautiful poem in this service is the piyut "Like the clay in the hands of the potter" ("ki hinei ka-chomer") p.186 Avinu Malkeinu is not said on Shabbat (except at ne'ila, the concluding service) After the service, many have the custom to stay to recite special songs and/or to learn. (Some the study the mishna of Yoma, the tractate on Yom Kippur.)

One should not engage in levity or frivolous conversation. Before the first two and last two blessings of the silent devotion, short requests to be remembered and written for a good life this coming year are inserted. These are recited quietly in the silent Amida and aloud by the congregation (followed by the chazzan) during the repetition.

B: Shachrit/ Morning Service

i. Shir ha'ma'alot – Psalm 130 ("From the depths, I called out to You") is inserted in the service preceding Bar'chu on Rosh Hashana and all the 10 days of repentance. See ATM p.403.

i. The line "Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va-ed" which is usually said in a whisper (immediately after the first line of Shema Yisrael) is said in a loud voice (a shout) on Yom Kippur. See e.g. p. 121, p. 425

iii. Four insertions in the amida – Before the first two and last two blessings of the silent devotion, short requests to be remembered and written for a good life this coming year are inserted. These are recited quietly in the silent amida and aloud by the congregation (followed by the chazzan) during the repetition. In Ne'ila, "write us" (katveinu) is changed to "seal us" (chotmeinu). (e.g. p.954, second line)

v. In addition to this, the blessing "ha'eil ha-kadosh" (the holy God) is changed to "ha-melech ha-kadosh" (the holy King) on Yom Kippur. At the end of the kaddish, "oseh HA-shalom" is said instead of Oseh Shalom.

v. Confession (vidu'i, beginning with "ashamnu") is said in every silent amida and every repetition except for Ne'ila. A total of 10 confessions are made over the course of the Yom Kippur prayers.

C. Torah Reading & Yizkor

i. The Torah reading is the Yom Kippur service as described in Vayikra 16. The maftir (final Torah reading) is the sacrifice of the day, found in Bemidbar (Numbers) 29:7-11. The haftara (prophetic portion) is Yeshaya (Isaiah) 57-58.

ii. YIZKOR (p.602) is also said on Yom Kippur as a memorial to our departed relatives, martyrs and soldiers. At MJE the custom is to stay in the room during Yizkor. Yizkor is not said the first year after a death as the emotions are still too raw. There are special Yizkor prayers recited for Holocaust victims and those who fell defending Israel in her wars.

D. Mussaf

In addition to some of the same features as the Rosh Hashana service, such as "unetaneh Tokef" (p.694) and "V'chol Ma'aminim" (p.705, see RH In a Nutshell) there is one special feature to the mussaf service, which is the AVODA, the description of the Yom Kippur service. It begins on p.719. The High Priest would do 3 separate confessions: one for himself (and his wife and family, p.730), one for all the kohanim (priests, p.733) and one for all of Israel (p.739). 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 prayer book. 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 Aleynu prayer (originally a High Holiday prayer) and at the end of each priestly confession, we bow down to our knees and foreheads.

D. Mussaf cont.

- 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” (pp.762)
- iii. Blessing of the Kohanim – This is said in the Diaspora by Ashkenazic Jews only on a few festival days all year, but Yom Kippur is one of them. (pp.801)
- iv. Psalm 27 (L'david, Hashem Ori)- is recited in the morning and night or each day throughout the month of Elul and the holiday season, including Sukkot. Many congregations say it at the beginning of prayers on Yom Kippur.(pp.280)
We do not say Aleynu at the end of Mussaf.

E. Mincha/Afternoon services

(pp.828)

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 honors of the year and is often sold for a lot of money to benefit a synagogue.

F. Ne'ila/concluding service

(p.944)

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 honor to open the ark). The majority of Ne'ila is a selichot service.

Ix - Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu
Adonai Echad (Hear o Israel,
Hashem our God, Hashem is One)

3x-Baruch Shem K'vohd
Malchuto L'olam Va-ed (Blessed is
the name of His Kingship forever)
3 times

7x - Adonai hu ha-Elohim
(Hashem is the [true] God) 7 times.

This is followed by kaddish, BUT
right in the middle, the shofar is
sounded and “I'shana ha-ba-a
birushalayim” (next year in
Jerusalem) is sung. Some
congregations have the custom to
dance at the end of the service

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?
(p.1044)
- b) Havdala – pp.1102
- c) Kiddush Levana – the
sanctification of the moon.
(p.1094)

Many like rushing into
a mitzvah right after
Yom Kippur and thus
many have the custom
of beginning to build
the Succah after Yom
Kippur ends.

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

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!!