

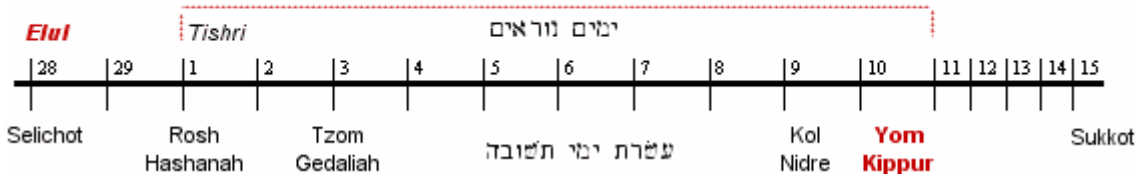


Yom Kippur -

The Day of Atonement

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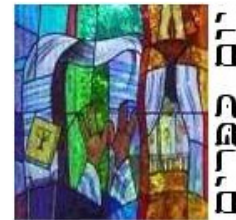
Days of Awe



כִּי נַפְשׁ הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּדָּם הוּא וְאֲנִי נָתַתִּיו לָכֶם עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר
 עַל-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם כִּי הַדָּם הוּא בִּנְפֹשׁ יִכַּפֵּר:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. - Lev 17:11

YOM KIPPUR is the holiest day of the Jewish year, and provides prophetic insight regarding the Second Coming of Mashiach, the restoration of national Israel, and the final judgment of the world. It is also a day that reveals the High-Priestly work of the Mashiach Yeshua as our *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) after the order of *Malki-Tzedek* (Hebrews 5:10, 6:20).



The biblical name for the day of Atonement is *Yom Kippurim*, meaning “the day of covering, canceling, pardon, reconciling.” Yom Kippur was the only time when the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and call upon the Name of YHVH to offer blood sacrifice for the sins of the people. This “life for a life” principle is the foundation of the sacrificial system and marked the great day of intercession made by the High Priest on behalf of Israel.

In Rabbinic Judaism, Yom Kippur marks the climax of the ten day period of repentance called the Days of Awe or *yamim nora'im*. In the Hebrew calendar, *Erev Yom Kippur* begins at nightfall on Tishri 9 and continues 25 hours through the next day until nightfall. It is a day marked by complete fasting, prayer, and additional synagogue services.

According to the Jewish sages, it was on Tishri 10 that Moses came down from Sinai bearing the second set of tablets, after God had forgiven Israel for worshipping the Golden Calf. This explains why Orthodox Jews begin the season of Teshuvah beginning with Elul 1 and continue through to Tishri 10 -- for the 40 days that Moses was upon the mountain receiving the *second* set of tablets. Here we also find the first inkling of the *Book of Life* (see Rosh HaShanah), when Moses asked to be stricken from “the Book you have written” if God would not make an atonement for his people (Exodus 32:32-3). The willingness of Moses to be “stricken from the book” on the people's behalf is a powerful image of the mediating role of *Yeshua ha-Mashiach* (Hebrews 9:15).



The Meaning of the word *Kippur*

The “Day of Atonement” is the English phrase for *Yom Kippur*. The *shoresh* [root] for the word “Kippur” is *kafar*, which probably derives from the word *kofer*, meaning “ransom.” This word is parallel to the word “redeem” (Psalm 49:7) and means “to atone by offering a substitute.” The great majority of usages in the Tanakh concern “making an atonement” by the priestly ritual of sprinkling of sacrificial blood to remove sin or defilement. The life blood of the sacrificial animal was required in exchange for the life blood of the worshipper (the symbolic expression of innocent life given for guilty life). This symbolism is further clarified by the action of the worshipper in placing his hands on the head of the sacrifice and confessing his sins over the animal (Leviticus 16:21; 1:4; 4:4, etc.) which was then killed or sent out as a scapegoat. The *shoresh* also appears in the term *Kapporet* [the so-called “Mercy Seat,” but better rendered as simply the place of atonement]. The *Kapporet* is the golden cover of the sacred chest in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle or temple where the sacrificial blood was presented.

The Biblical Observance

The High Priestly Ritual

Every year on Tishri 10 the Kohen Gadol [High Priest] would perform a special ceremony to purge defilement from the tabernacle (*mishkan*) or temple (*Bet Ha-Mikdash*) as well as from the people of Israel (see Leviticus 16 for the details). In particular, in addition to the regular daily offerings, he would bring a bull and two goats as a special offering, and the bull would be sacrificed to purge the *mishkan*/temple from the defilements caused by misdeeds of the priests and their households (Leviticus 16:6). He would sprinkle the blood of the bull inside the veil of the Holy of Holies upon the *kapporet* (“Mercy Seat”). Then he would draw lots and select one of the two goats to be a sin offering on behalf of the people (this goat was designated *L’Adonai* - “to the LORD”). He would likewise enter the Holy of Holies sprinkle the blood of the goat upon the *kapporet*. Finally, the High Priest would lay both hands upon the head of the second goat (designated “for Azazel”) while confessing all of the transgressions of the people. This goat was then driven away into the wilderness, carrying on it “all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited” (Leviticus 16:22). According to the Talmud, a scarlet cord was tied around the neck of the scapegoat that was reported to have turned white as the goat was led away from city. However, for the last forty years before the Second Temple was destroyed (in AD 70), the scarlet cord failed to change color.

The Role of the People

While the High Priest performed these functions, the people would fast in eager anticipation of the outcome of the rituals. After completing his tasks, the garments of the High Priest were covered with blood (Leviticus 6:27). Only after this did the LORD accept the sacrifice (according to one midrash, as the High Priest hung out his garments, a miracle took place and his garments turned from bloodstained crimson to white; see Isaiah 1:18).



In three separate passages in the Torah, the Jewish people are told “the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri) is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall afflict your souls.” (Leviticus 16:29-34, Leviticus 23: 26-32, Numbers 29:7-11). This is the only Holiday of the year where fasting is literally commanded by the LORD. It also was a “Shabbat Shabbaton,” or a day of complete abstention from any kind of mundane work.

It is enlightening to note the sequence of this holiday in relation to the time of preparation (Elul) and the activities surrounding Rosh HaShanah leading up to Yom Kippur. First God commands that we repent, or return to Him in earnestness of heart, and then He provides the means for reconciliation or atonement with Him.

Modern-day Observances of Yom Kippur

Though originally focused on the Kohen Gadol [High Priest], since the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, Rabbinic tradition states that each individual Jew is supposed to focus on his personal *avodah*, or service to the LORD. Most Yom Kippur prayers therefore revolve around the central theme of personal repentance and return.

According to Halakhah, we must abstain from five forms of pleasures:

1. Eating and drinking
2. Washing and bathing
3. Applying lotions or perfume
4. Wearing leather shoes (a sign of luxury)
5. Marital relations

Any form of *melakha* [work] is prohibited. In fact, Yom Kippur is called *Shabbat Shabbaton*, a Sabbath of Sabbaths. According to the Jewish sages, performing any form of work (other than work required to save a life) is punishable by premature death.

By fasting and praying all day, we are said to resemble angels. By giving up the sensual pleasures of life and refraining from *melakha*, we are said to live for 25 hours as if we are dead (many men wear kittels (white burial robes) and white raiment, to remind them of their fate as mortals before God).

Erev Yom Kippur

The Meal before Yom Kippur

On Erev Yom Kippur, a special meal (*seudah ha-mafseket*) is usually prepared - the last meal before the Fast and eaten after the afternoon confessional service before sundown. (The usual explanation for having confession before Yom Kippur is that in case you choke to death on a chicken bone, you will have at least asked for forgiveness before you died!)



The *seudah* meal includes the holiday candle lighting blessing (“*Baruch Atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melekh Ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Yom Hakippurim*”) and the *Shehecheyanu*. A memorial candle (called *yahrzeit*) is often lit for deceased parents or grandparents, and women often wear white, while men wear “kittels” (white robes also used for burial shrouds). After eating, it is customary to wish everyone present a *Tzom Kal* - an “easy fast.” Another common greeting is “*G'mar chatimah tovah*” - “May you be *sealed* (in the Book of Life) for good.”



The Kapparot Ceremony

An old custom, called *kapparot* [atonements] is sometimes performed as a sort of “scapegoat” ceremony. This custom, observed by Charedi and Chassidic Jews, was said to symbolically transfer a person’s sins to a rooster or hen. First, verses from Psalms and Job are recited. Then the live chicken is swung around the head three times, while the following declaration is made: “This fowl shall be in my stead, shall be my atonement, it shall go to death, so that I can attain a good life and peace.” In this way it is believed that the fowl will take on the misfortunes caused by the person’s sins.

Presumably, the purpose of the *kapparot* ceremony was to serve as a vicarious sacrifice in place of the sacrifices offered in the Temple which could no longer be practiced after the destruction of the Temple. At any rate, the chicken was then slaughtered by a Rabbi and given to the poor for their Erev Yom Kippur meal (*seudah ha-mafseket*). Today, many Orthodox Jews observe *kapparot* by simply giving *tzedekah* [charity] to the poor (“*tzedekah* can avert the evil decree”).



This is my exchange,
this is my substitute,
this is my expiation.
This chicken shall go to
death and I shall proceed
to a good, long life and peace.

Some people also observe Erev Yom Kippur by going to the *mikveh* - the ritual bath - to purify themselves before the Holy Day. Jewish tradition also states that forgiveness can be sought from God only for those sins committed against God (for example, by breaking His laws). Sins committed against others must be confessed and reconciliation sought from the offended party - and then forgiveness may be sought also from God (Matt 5:23-4). Reconciliation is often attempted during Elul and the period of Selichot.



The Five Yom Kippur Synagogue Services

Most of Yom Kippur is spent at the synagogue praying and listening to chants. In fact, Yom Kippur is the only Jewish Holiday that requires five separate services for the observant Jew to attend! This day is, essentially, your last appeal, your last chance to change “the judgment of God” and to demonstrate your repentance and make amends.



Day of
Judgment

Recall from Rosh Hashanah that one of the themes of the Days of Awe is that God has “books” that He writes our names in, noting who will live and who will die in the forthcoming year. These books are “written” on Rosh Hashanah, but our deeds during the Days of Awe can alter God’s decree. The actions that change the decree are *teshuvah* (repentance), *tefilah* (prayer) and *tzedakah* (good deeds). The books are “sealed” on Yom Kippur.

As with Rosh Hashanah, a white satin *parokhet* (curtain which adorns the ark in the synagogue, mimicking the curtain which separated the sanctuary from the Holy of Holies in the Temple), is hung in place of the heavy velvet one used at other times.

1. Kol Nidrei and the Ma’ariv Service

The evening service begins with the *Kol Nidrei* [“all vows”], an Aramaic chant that declares null and void any promises made during the previous year (Sephardim) or for the coming year (Ashkenazim). *Kol Nidrei* is actually considered a “legal procedure,” and therefore entails the use of various *halakhic* [legal] formulations such as recitation three times before a *minyan*, before sundown, and so on. Normally tallit [prayer shawls] are worn only in the morning service, but during Yom Kippur, they are worn during all five of the services.

The Viddui - Confessional

The Ma’ariv [evening] service is chanted in a different style and additions to the Amidah are made, including the *Viddui* (ve-DOO-ee), or confessional. The obligation of Viddui derives from Scripture: “If a man or woman sins against his fellow man, thus being untrue to God..., *they* must confess the sin that he has committed” (Numbers 5:6-7). Note the plural personal pronoun used in the confession - implying that the sin of an individual is also borne by the community. Viddui is said in the plural because we are all responsible for one another (*Shavu’ot 39a*).

Viddui prayers comprise two main sections: the *Ashamnu*, a shorter, more general list of sins (“we have been treasonable, we have been aggressive, we have been slanderous”) and the *Al Chet*, a longer, alphabetically arranged, and more particular list of sins (“for the sin we sinned before you forcibly or willingly, and for the sin we sinned before you by acting callously”).

When Viddui is recited, you should strike the breast lightly as if to say, “You (my heart) caused me to sin” (*Mishnah Berurah 603:7*). Viddui is recited ten times over the course of the five services of Yom Kippur, paralleling the Ten Commandments.



2. **Shacharit Service**

The Shacharit [morning] service includes Torah readings about service in the temple (*avodah*). There are six separate *aliyot* (calls to read from the Torah). The *Yikzor* [memorial prayer] is often recited after the Torah and Haftarah readings.

3. **Musaf Service**

A Musaf service is an additional service. During this service, the Biblical account of the Day of Atonement (*Avodah*) is read. In four places of the service, some people might prostrate themselves (during the re-telling of the High Priest and his confessions). After this, a portion of the service is devoted to the retelling of how some early Jewish sages were martyred during the reign of the Roman emperor Hadrian.

4. **Minchah Service**

The *Minchah* [afternoon] service focuses on additional Torah reading (Leviticus 18). In addition, the entire book of Jonah is read (after this service there is usually a “break” before the fifth and concluding service for Yom Kippur).

5. **The Ne'ilah Service**

According to Jewish tradition, on Rosh HaShanah the destiny of the righteous [*the tsaddikim*] are written in the Book of Life, and the destiny of the wicked [*the resha'im*] are written in the Book of Death. However, many people (perhaps most people) will not be inscribed in *either* book, but have ten days -- until Yom Kippur -- to repent before *sealing* their fate. On Yom Kippur, then, a final appeal is made to God to be written in the Book of Life.

The word *ne'ilah* comes from a word which means “closing” or “locking” [the gates of heaven (or temple gates)]. The appeal to have our names “sealed” in the Book of Life” is made at this time. A shorter *Viddui* is made. This service has a sense of urgency about it, and concludes with a responsive reading of the Shema, with the phrase “*barukh shem kavod malkhuto l'olam va-ed*” said aloud three times, and the phrase “The LORD is God” said seven times.

(Note: By the second temple period, the High Priest ceremony had been elaborated so that on three separate occasions the High Priest appeared before the people and recited a formula of confession in their hearing. On this occasion only - during the entire year - these three confessions included the High Priest's saying aloud the sacred Name “YHVH.” During each confession, when the High Priest would begin the recitation of the Name, all the people would prostrate themselves and say aloud, “*Baruch shem K'vod malchuto l'olam va-ed*,” “Blessed be the Name of the radiance of the Kingship, forever and ever.”)

A final shofar blast (*Shofar ha-Gadol* or *Tekiah Gedolah*) is then sounded (this is referred to in Isaiah 27:13 and Matthew 24:31). Worshippers then exclaim, “*L'shanah haba'ah b'Yerushalayim!*” After the service ends, some synagogues perform also a Havdalah ceremony.



At this point, people are generally quite relieved that they have “made it” through the Days of Awe, and a celebratory mood sets in (traditionally a time of courtship and love follow this holiday). Since Sukkot is only five days away, the first steps toward making a Sukkah are discussed.



Jesus as Kohen HaGadol of the New Covenant



One of the roles of our beloved Mashiach Yeshua (Jesus Christ) is that of *Kohen HaGadol* (High Priest) who offered true *kapparah* [atonement] for our sins by offering His own blood in the Holy of Holies made without hands. As it is written in the letter of Hebrews:

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and *high priest of our confession*, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. (Hebrews 3:1-2)

The Importance of a Blood Sacrifice

In Leviticus 17:11 it is written:

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to atone (*l'kapeir*) for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement (*y'khapeir*) by the life.”

כִּי נַפְשׁ הַבָּשָׂר בַּדָּם הוּא וְאֲנִי נִחְתִּיו לָכֶם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
לְכַפֵּר עַל־נַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי־הָדָם הוּא בִנְפֶשׁ יִכְפֹּר:

A blood sacrifice is required by the LORD for the issue of sin. Leviticus 17:11 agrees with the teaching in the B'rit Chadashah in Hebrews 9:22: “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission.” In Yoma 5a it is likewise written, “There is no atonement without blood.” The substitutionary shedding of blood, the “life-for-life” principle, is essential to the true “at-one-ment” with the LORD God.

Yeshua offered His own body up to be the perfect Sacrifice for sins. By His shed blood we are given complete atonement before Adonai. The Levitical system of animal sacrifices, including the elaborate Yom Kippur ritual, was meant to foreshadow the true and abiding Sacrifice of Yeshua as the means of our reconciliation with God. The *B'rit Yeshanah* (Old Covenant) provides a shadow of the substance revealed in the *B'rit Chadashah* (New Covenant). If the old covenant had been sufficient to provide a permanent solution to the problem of our sin, there never would have been need for a new covenant to supercede it (Hebrews 8:7).



Under the old covenant, sacrifices merely “covered” sins, but under the new covenant, these sins are taken entirely away (Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, 9:25-28). There is no more need for continual sacrifices, since Yeshua provided the once-and-for-all sacrifice for all of our sins (Hebrews 9:11-14; 9:24-28; 10:11-20).

Indeed, Yeshua ha-Mashiach is the “propitiation” or “expiation” for our sins. The Greek word used in Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, and 1 John 4:10 (“*hilasterion*”) is the same word used in the LXX for the *kapporet* [cover of the ark of the covenant] in the Holy of Holies which was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice on Yom Kippur.

For Messiah has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself... So Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.
(Hebrews 9:24-ff)

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.
(Hebrews 10:14)



Yom Kippur, Confession, and the Book of Life

What do Messianic Jews do regarding Yom Kippur? Do we fast, afflict ourselves, and confess our sins, or do we rejoice in the knowledge that we are forgiven of all our sins because of Yeshua’s perfect avodah as our Kohen Gadol of the New Covenant? In other words, should we be sad and afflicted or happy and comforted?



אִם-נִתְנַדָּה אֶת-חַטֹּאתֵינוּ
נֶאֱמָן הוּא וְצַדִּיק
לְסַלַּח לָנוּ אֶת-חַטֹּאתֵינוּ
וּלְטַהַר אֶת-נַפְשֵׁנוּ מִכָּל-עֲוֹן:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9



Some Messianic Jews observe Yom Kippur (i.e., keep the 25 hour fast, confess sins, etc.) in order to better identify with the Jewish people, while others might observe it as a special time of personal confession and teshuvah. We are careful, however, to keep in mind that such observance does not grant us a “favorable judgment” before the LORD or determine whether our names will be written in *Sefer Hachayim* (the Book of Life), since Yeshua’s sacrifice and intercession is all we need for at-one-ment with the Father. Those who belong to Yeshua are indeed written in the “Lamb’s book of life ” (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19).



What is *Sefer haChayim*? This is the allegorical book in which God records the names and lives of the righteous (*tzaddikim*). According to the Talmud it is open on Rosh Hashanah (the Book of the Dead, *sefer hametim*, is open on this date as well) and God then examines each soul to see if teshuvah is *sh’leimah* (complete). If a person turns to God and makes amends to those whom he has harmed, he will be given another year to live in the following (Jewish) year. On the other hand, if he does not repent, then the decree may be given that he will die during the coming year...

In Jewish tradition, Yom Kippur is essentially your last appeal, your last chance to change “the judgment of God” and to demonstrate your repentance and make amends. The books are “written” on Rosh Hashanah, but our deeds during the Ten Days of Awe can alter God’s decree. The actions that change the decree are *teshuvah* (repentance), *tefilah* (prayer) and *zedakah* (good deeds). The books are then “sealed” on Yom Kippur.

Again, it is important to keep in heart that those who are trusting in Yeshua as their Atonement before the Father are thereby declared *tzaddikim* and their names are written (and sealed) in the Book of Life. The Day of Judgment for our sinful lives has come in the Person of Yeshua the Mashiach, blessed be He. All those who truly belong to Yeshua are written in the “Lamb’s book of life ” (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19).

The traditional *viduy* (a confessional prayer consisting of two parts, *ashamnu* and *al chet*) is written using the first person plural: “We have sinned...” since *kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh* - "All Israel is responsible for one another." Traditionally *al chet* is recited ten times during the course of the five Yom Kippur services (once for each of the 10 commandments that we have broken).



Here's how *al chet* starts:

Al Chet...

For the sin which we have committed before You under duress or willingly.
And for the sin which we have committed before You by hard-heartedness.
For the sin which we have committed before You inadvertently.
And for the sin which we have committed before You with an utterance of the lips.
For the sin which we have committed before You with immorality....

For all of these, God of pardon, pardon us, forgive us...

[Note: See www.hebrew4christians.com for the complete *al chet* text.]

Confession is vitally important for Messianic Jews and Christians, since it both reminds us of our great need for God's intervention in our lives, and also helps us walk in the truth. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye (plural) may be healed" (James 5:16).

Eschatologically, Yom Kippur represents the national restoration of Israel at the end of the Great Tribulation period, but it also is a reminder of the terrible cost of sin in our lives. Sin is so offensive and the debt is so great that it took nothing less than the sacrifice of Yeshua Himself in order to secure our reconciliation with God. We therefore should tremble with fear before God in reverent gratitude of His mercy toward us.



The Future Fulfillment

Just as Rosh Hashanah reveals the *coming* time of Judgment and the rapture of the *kehillat Mashiach* (church of Christ), Yom Kippur prophetically pictures the **Day of the LORD** or the Day of Judgment in the *Acharit HaYamim* [last days]. After the judgment of the nations during the Great Tribulation, national Israel will be fully restored to the LORD and their sins will be purged (see Matthew 24). Indeed, our beloved Mashiach will one day return to Israel, cleanse her temple, restore her to Himself, and set up His glorious kingdom.

May His Kingdom come speedily, and in our day. Amen.