



Yom Kippur, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, is observed the tenth day of the Jewish month of Tishri, September or early October in the Gregorian calendar.

The first Yom Kippur took place after Moses returned from his second trip to Mt. Sinai with the replacement set of tablets containing the Ten Commandments. He had broken the original set when he returned the first time to discover the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf rather than G-d, who had brought them out from Egypt.

Moses successfully pleaded with G-d on their behalf, and on the first of the month of Elul, he ascended the mountain, this time for a second set of tablets. In Moses' absence, the nation fasted from sunrise to sunset each day. Moses descended the mountain on the tenth of Tishri. Upon returning, Moses found the nation truly repentant and announced that G-d had forgiven them. He decreed that the tenth of Tishri would remain a day of atonement for all generations.

And this shall be an eternal law for you. Each year on the tenth day of the seventh month you must fast and do no work. This is true of the native born and of the convert who comes to join you. This is because on this day you shall have all your sins atoned, so that you will be cleansed. Before G-d you will be cleansed of your sins. It is a Sabbath of Sabbaths to you, and a day upon which you must fast. This is a law for all time. (Leviticus 16:29-31)

Yom Kippur is probably the most important holiday of the Jewish year. Many Jews who do not observe any other Jewish custom will refrain from work, fast and/or attend synagogue services on this day. Yom Kippur occurs on the 10th day of Tishri. The holiday is instituted at Leviticus 23:26. Synagogue attendance on Yom Kippur can be double or triple the normal number of worshippers.

In Israel on Yom Kippur there is no broadcast television, no public transportation, the airports are closed, and people do not drive cars unless there is an emergency. There is no commerce of any kind in the Jewish areas. Yom Kippur there has the nickname "Festival of Bicycles," referring to children's practice of freely riding their bicycles in the streets without motor vehicles presenting danger.

The name "Yom Kippur" means "Day of Atonement," and that pretty much explains what the holiday is. It is a day set aside to "afflict the soul," to seek forgiveness for the sins of the past year. In the presentation on Rosh Hashanah, you learned about the metaphor of the "books" in which G-d inscribes all human beings. On Yom Kippur, it is thought that the judgment entered in these books is sealed. This day is, essentially, the last appeal, that last chance for a person to change the judgment, to demonstrate his or her repentance to G-d and make amends.

Yom Kippur reconciles only for sins between man and G-d, not for sins against another person. To atone for sins against another person, people must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs they committed against them if possible. That must all be done before Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a complete Sabbath (day of rest); no work can be performed on that day. Jews are supposed to refrain from eating and drinking (even water) on Yom Kippur. It is a complete, 25-hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ending after nightfall on the day of Yom

Kippur. The Talmud (an important book compiled rabbis that contains official teachings of Judaism) also specifies additional restrictions -- washing and bathing, anointing one's body with lotions and cosmetics, and wearing leather shoes, among other things, are all prohibited on Yom Kippur.

As always, any of these restrictions can be lifted where a threat to life or health is involved. In fact, children under the age of nine and women in childbirth (from the time labor begins until three days after birth) are **not permitted** to fast, even if they want to. Older children and women from the third to the seventh day after childbirth are permitted to fast, but are permitted to break the fast if they feel the need to do so. People with other illnesses should consult a physician and a rabbi for advice.

Most of the holiday is spent in the synagogue, in prayer. In some synagogues, services begin early in the morning (8 or 9 AM) and continue until about 3 PM. People then usually go home for an afternoon nap and return around 5 or 6 PM for the afternoon and evening services, which continue until nightfall. The services end at nightfall, with the blowing of a long blast on the shofar.

It is customary to wear white on Yom Kippur, which symbolizes purity and calls to mind the promise that those who atone for their sins shall be made as white as snow (Is. 1:18). Some people wear a *kittel*, the white robe in which the dead are buried.

Yom Kippur Liturgy

The liturgy (or prayer ritual) for Yom Kippur is much more extensive than for any other day of the year. Liturgical changes are so far-reaching that a separate, special prayer book for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. This prayer book is called the *machzor*.

The evening service that begins Yom Kippur is commonly known as *Kol Nidre*.

There are many additions to the regular liturgy. Perhaps the most important addition is the confession of the sins of the community. Note that all sins are confessed in the plural (we have done this, we have done that), emphasizing communal responsibility for sins. The vast majority of the sins that are mentioned involve mistreatment of other people, most of them by speech (offensive speech, scoffing, slander, gossiping, and swearing falsely, to name a few). These all come into the category of sin known as "*lashon ha-ra*" (literally: the evil tongue), which is considered a very serious sin in Judaism.

The concluding service of Yom Kippur, known as *Ne'ilah*, is one unique to the day. It usually runs about 1 hour long. The ark (a cabinet where the scrolls of the Torah are kept) is kept open throughout this service, thus Jews must stand throughout the service. There is a tone of desperation in the prayers of this service. The service is sometimes referred to as the closing of the gates; think of it as the "last chance" to get in a good word before the holiday ends. The service ends with a very long blast of the shofar.

After Yom Kippur, Jews begin preparing for the next holiday, Sukkot, which begins five days later.

Yom Kippur will occur on the following days of the Gregorian calendar:

- Jewish Year 5767 : sunset October 1, 2006 - nightfall October 2, 2006
- Jewish Year 5768 : sunset September 21, 2007 - nightfall September 22, 2007
- Jewish Year 5769 : sunset October 8, 2008 - nightfall October 9, 2008
- Jewish Year 5770 : sunset September 27, 2009 - nightfall September 28, 2009