

Yom Kippur: A Day of Atonement

September 15-16, 2021

Otherwise known as the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur is considered one of the holiest days in Judaism and commemorates the day Moses came down from Mount Sinai after seeking God's divine forgiveness for the Israelites who sinned against him by worshipping a golden calf idol.

This year, Yom Kippur begins at sundown Wednesday, September 15 and ends Thursday evening, September 16, and will last for approximately 25 hours.

10 Days of Awe (Repentance) Before Yom Kippur

Leading up to Yom Kippur, those practicing Judaism typically reflect on personal aspects of the past year, deciding how to improve, seeking forgiveness and showing compassion to others during the ten days of Awe (Repentance).

The day before Yom Kippur is set aside for eating and preparing for this holy day. There are many activities done before the fast, including eating a pre-fast meal, known as the seudah ha-mafaseket ("meal of separation" or "concluding meal"), lighting of candles, donating to charity and requesting and receiving honey cake, which provides blessings for a sweet year.

A Few Yom Kippur Traditions

There are many traditions associated with Yom Kippur. Here are just a few:

- **Fasting for the Day** - Feasts are replaced with fasting on Yom Kippur. However, two traditional meals are enjoyed the day before the fast begins at sundown. Both meals begin by dipping round challah bread into honey, as is customary on Rosh Hashanah. At sundown, the "soul is afflicted" by 25 hours of fasting – no drinking or eating. Fasting enables followers to stop their normal routine and refocus on prayer and connecting spiritually with God.
- **Attend Synagogue Services** - There are several synagogue services throughout Yom Kippur. Songs, religious customs, as well as prayers and readings from the Machzor, the special prayer book, are recited. The readings encourage those in attendance to live holy lives and draw closer to God. They are also reminded to love others.
- **Wear White** - It is traditional for many to wear white clothing on Yom Kippur. The men often wear a Kittel, a white, robe-like garment. White reminds those attending services that they are to be like the angels, praising God. White also symbolizes the forgiveness and spiritual cleansing they're praying for and that life on earth is temporal. White is worn with a humble awareness of one's need to repent sins and pray to God for forgiveness.

At the conclusion of the last Yom Kippur service, many enjoy a festive meal at home with family and friends. The foods traditionally eaten vary but are often baked breakfast goods.