

End and Beginning

Yahrzeit: A candle called the *yahrzeit* candle is lit before the holy day in memory of parents and others who are recalled during the *yizkor* (memorial) service.

Final Meal: The meal taken before Yom Kippur should be substantial and a joyful experience. This is considered as much of an obligation as fasting on the day itself. **Challot** baked for the pre-Yom Kippur meal are sometimes shaped like winged birds, symbolizing human hope to reach the level of angels.

In helping one prepare for the worship service that follows, the Talmud declares: “Yom Kippur effects atonement for one’s transgressions against God; but it effects atonement for one’s transgressions against other human beings only if the offended has first been appeased.

The *Neilah* (concluding service) speaks of the gates of heaven closing at the approaching end of the sacred day, and urges the worshiper on to a final effort to win forgiveness.

With a long, loud, piercing blast of the *shofar*, the heavenly gates close and Yom Kippur ends. That evening marks the start of the building of the *sukkah*, or booth, for the festival of Sukkot—as a reaffirmation of the continuity of the Jewish year.

Breaking the Fast: This is another festive meal, one that, while often simple, can feel particularly meaningful.

It is appropriate to begin with *HaMotzi*, the blessing over bread:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech
Haolam, Ha-Motzi lechem min ha-aretz.*

Blessed are You, Our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Since this meal marks a new phase in life, it is also possible to recite an additional blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחַיִּי וְקִיָּמָנוּ
וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech
Haolam, she-he-che-yanu, ve-ki-ye-manu,
ve-hi-gi-yanu laz-man ha-zeh.*

Blessed are You, Our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, Who has given us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season.

A meal begun with *HaMotzi* should be concluded with *Birkat Hamazon*, the Grace after Meals. There is a short form of this blessing in the *Prayer Book for Jewish Personnel in the Armed Forces of the United States* on pages 423-425.



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A Guide to Yom Kippur





Days of Days

Yom Kippur was known in ancient times as “The Great Day” or simply “The Day.” It is the most awesome of the **Yamim Noraim** (Days of Awe), the Day of Atonement, when individual fates are sealed, the holiest day of the Jewish year.

The intensive process of self-examination begun 10 days earlier on Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, culminates in a full day of fasting, worship, study, confession and prayer.

Through this process, Jews feel closer to God and become more acutely aware of an enduring linkage to the entire Jewish people, developing a heightened sense of responsibility for helping to fashion a world in which the prophetic vision of peace and justice may be fulfilled for all of humanity.

Repentance, Reconciliation, Regeneration

The spiritual learning experience at the heart of Yom Kippur can be expressed in “three R’s,” repentance, reconciliation and regeneration.

Repentance requires turning from past mistakes, admitting errors privately and publicly, expressing sincere regret, and resolving not to repeat the sin.

Reconciliation means seeking out those we have offended and winning their forgiveness.

Regeneration is the aim of the full day of self-denial and prayer: heightened sensitivity to what is wrong with society and determination to help conquer such ills as poverty and disease.

A common greeting on Yom Kippur is **“G’mar chatimah tovah”** – May you receive a final sealed for good – a wish for good tidings for the year ahead.

Conscience and Confession

The evening service ushering in Yom Kippur begins with **“Kol Nidre.”** This hauntingly beautiful prayer is repeated three times to set the awesome mood and to strive for a clear conscience as this Day of Awe begins.

The **Vidui**, or confession of sins, is recited during each of the five services on Yom Kippur. It is expressed in the plural: “For the sins which we have committed...” This signifies that each of us is a part of a community, responsible not only for personal shortcomings, but for the wrongs of society as well.

During the **Mincha**, or afternoon service, the Book of Jonah is read. Jonah’s futile flight from God mirrors our duty and responsibility to our fellow men. We may atone on Yom Kippur, however, only for the wrongs committed against God. Atonement for wrongs against fellow human beings can only be achieved by making amends and obtaining forgiveness from the injured person.

The True Fast

The fast on Yom Kippur is not carried out for its own sake. In the words of Isaiah (58, 5-7), it goes beyond the bowed head, sackcloth and ashes:

“...the fast that I have chosen (is) to loose the fetters of wickedness, to undo the bonds of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free...Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him...?”

“Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and... the glory of God shall be your reward.”

Tzedakah: It is particularly important to give **tzedakah** before Yom Kippur. While this word is normally translated as “charity,” it has the connotation in Hebrew of the giving that God requires of us to make the world more just.

This is a direct response to God’s command, “...and you shall bring an offering...” (Leviticus 23.:27), which obligates us to give charity and do kind acts. An essential message of Yom Kippur is that **tzedakah**, along with **tefillah** (prayer), and **teshuvah** (repentance), can prevent the severest judgment.