

Yom Kippur Preparations

Yom Kippur is the culmination of a forty-day period of self-reflection that begins on the 1st of Elul. The work of self-examination leading up to the High Holidays is a personal process. We look at areas of our own life, which need adjustment and our private relationships with others. However during the High Holidays, and especially on Yom Kippur, our confessions take place in a communal setting and are expressed in the plural, as in "Ashamnu, Bagadnu....etc," where the "nu" at the end of the word translates as "we." In using the plural, we recognize both that we are not alone in falling short of our ideals, that we need others to help us achieve our best, and that even our most private failings have an impact on the community.

The **Kol Nidre** chant, with which Yom Kippur begins, is a formula, which releases us from vows. The understanding of what this means has evolved over time, beginning perhaps in the 7th century. For contemporary understanding, a vow can be seen as a commitment to something that no longer serves us, perhaps an action or way of thinking from which we wish to be freed.

This Yom Kippur we have an opportunity that comes infrequently because **Yom Kippur 5772 comes to us on Shabbat**. This means that we do not petition for forgiveness and atonement, as is the generally assumed practice of Yom Kippur. However these activities are not to take place on Shabbat. Instead, we have the gift of envisioning healing and forgiveness as affirmations rather than as pleas we make to YHVH. We will use your own words to create a liturgy of healing to accompany the chanting of the Avinu Malkenu.

On Yom Kippur day, **we encourage you to wear white**. This is because on Yom Kippur we are **in imitation of the angels**. We don't eat, engage in sexual relations, groom ourselves, or wear leather. This is part of the effort to shift our awareness from our material selves to our spiritual selves. As the day progresses, we dance along the edges between the body and soul, culminating, at the day's conclusion when we are permitted to repeatedly and in a loud voice, proclaim the second line of the Shema, "*Barukh Shem Cavod Malchuto L'Olam Vo'ed*." This line is traditionally whispered by the congregation, in recognition that it is reserved to be recited by angels, as a heavenly affirmation whenever we chant the first words of the Shema. But by the **Neila** or Closing Service of Yom Kippur, our fast and confessions have cleansed us to the point that we are granted the use of this angelic phrase.

Yizkor is a prayer in which we ask God to remember the departed, as we remember them as well. It is through the Yizkor prayer that Yom Kippur becomes a day not only to cleanse our own souls, but also the souls of those who have gone. Yizkor creates a holy space in which who we have become in the last year can visit those we have lost. Thus it is a tool for continuing our relationship with them. Yizkor affords us a place for further healing with those who are gone. Should no healing be called for, it provides an opportunity to bask in their ongoing presence. Attending a Yizkor service reminds even those who don't mourn a specific person to remember that grief is an inevitable part of the human condition. It helps to break through the denial of death, which causes so much pain and damage. You are encouraged to attend whether to mark your personal losses or to acknowledge communal tragedies in the United States, Israel and elsewhere, which we will remember together in our service. All are welcome.

While the **Closing of the Gates** is assumed to take place during the **Neila** service, we are told that the Book of Life remains open until Shemmi Atzeret, the day after Succot and before Simchat Torah. But the Gates of Tears are said to always remain open.

Since we are told that **Tefilla (Prayer), Tzeduka (Contributions), and Teshuva (Repentance)** avert the bitterness of the severe decree, please remember the second tool of the atonement triumvirate. It is customary to donate **tzeduka** as part of the process of expiating sins. Please make a donation before candle-lighting on Yom Kippur or during the weeks immediately after.

MAY YOU BE INSCRIBED FOR GOOD

p.s. please don't forget that I am available to meet with any of you individually in the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to discuss spiritual or personal issues having to do with the Days of Awe. Let me know if you would like to schedule some time.

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