

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year--the day on which we are **closest to God** and to the **quintessence** of our own souls. It is the **Day of Atonement** -- "For on this day He will **forgive** you, to **purify** you, that you be cleansed from all your **sins before God**" (Leviticus 16:30).

For **twenty-six hours**--from several minutes before sunset on Tishrei 9 to after nightfall on Tishrei 10--we "**afflict** our souls": we **abstain from food and drink**, do not wash or anoint our bodies, do not wear leather shoes, and abstain from marital relations.

Before Yom Kippur we perform the **Kaparot** atonement service; we request and receive honey cake, in acknowledgement that we are all **recipients** in God's world and in prayerful hope for a sweet and abundant year; eat a **festive meal**, immerse in a **mikvah**, and give extra **charity**. Late afternoon we eat the pre-fast meal, following which we **bless our children**, light a **memorial candle** as well as the **holiday candles**, and go to the **synagogue** for *Kol Nidrei* services.

In the course of Yom Kippur we hold **five prayer** services: *Maariv*, with its solemn **Kol Nidrei** service,

on the eve of Yom Kippur; *Shacharit*--the morning prayer; *Musaf*, which includes a detailed account of the Yom Kippur **Temple service**; *Minchah*, which includes the reading of the **Book of Jonah**; and *Ne'illah*, the "closing of the gates" service at **sunset**. We say the *Al Chet* **confession** of sins eight times in the course of Yom Kippur, and recite **Psalms** every available moment.

The day is the most solemn of the year, yet an undertone of **joy** suffuses it: a joy that revels in the spirituality of the day and expresses the confidence that G-d will accept our repentance, forgive our sins, and seal our **verdict** for a year of life, health and happiness. When the closing *Ne'illah* service climaxes in the resounding cries of "**Hear O Israel... God is one**" and a single **blast** of the *shofar*, followed by the proclamation, "**Next year in Jerusalem**." Then joy erupts in song and dance (a Chabad custom is to sing the lively "**Napoleon's March**"), followed by the festive after-fast meal, making the evening **after Yom Kippur** a *Yom Tov* (festival) in its own right.



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