

## YOM KIPPUR/ THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Look at **Leviticus 23: 27-28** for the date of the Day of Atonement and what it involves.

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is about people restoring themselves to God by seeking forgiveness. People consider that they are at a distance from God. Remember that the *Book of Life* gets closed, a focus of Rosh Hashanah and the Days of Awe that followed. So on what the Talmud (Jewish Oral Law and discussed commentary by Rabbis) calls *The Day*, some glimpse is sought of what the world should be like, restored to God.

Timings and actions:

- ✓ Last meal before sundown: consider dead relatives, seek God's blessing on children so they go into the Book of Life.
- ✓ Giving of money: to charity to show willingness to restore wrongs (no longer a goat sent into the wilderness or kill a chicken).
- ✓ Special dress like a white gown, other reminding garments too.
- ✓ A removal of all vows unfulfilled: Kol Nidrei at the synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur calls God to release people from previous vows that have not been fulfilled between themselves and God (not, interestingly, those with other people - these vows must be kept). There may be forced religious vows to be cleared. Then sin needs to be cleared in the service which requires confession and absolution. The sins removed are done for "we" and "us" because we all share the same sorrow. Sins are only removed, however, if something concrete has been done to restore things. When people show willing, God removes the sins.
- ✓ Morning synagogue Yitzor service includes Leviticus 16 and remembering all who died.
- ✓ Musaf is a festival service which reminds about ancient ceremonies outlined in the Talmud.
- ✓ The Minchah service in the afternoon includes Leviticus 18 and the Book of Jonah (for repentance by Jonah, and other peoples also cared for by God)
- ✓ Also in the synagogue is the stance that God prefers people to change their ways and live than die wickedly, and this happens in the Neilah service, the closing of the heavenly gates of God's judgement.
- ✓ After this there can be preparations to build a sukkot, ahead of the Festival of Booths which comes next in the Jewish calendar.

An act of restoration is a fast that takes place all day. The fast lasts twenty five hours and means no food or even water. So there are no refreshments at the synagogue! All adults and girls from 12 years and boys from 13 years fast.

The fast is:

To focus on the spiritual nature of life	No physical food preparations
An act to demonstrate sincerity for putting right things that were wrongly done.	Doing without, and having no pleasures
A demonstration of self-control	It shows that something like New Year resolutions can be kept
Compassion and putting oneself in the place of others less fortunate	A feeling of what it is like to go hungry
Everyone is equal	Everyone is doing the same fast

So the fast is not an end in itself but for a wider purpose. **Isaiah 58: 6-7 and 9** demonstrates this.

Having a fast might make someone a bit miserable, but, though it may be mildly unpleasant, there is hope and a deeper joy that comes from the notion of coming closer to God.

In order to focus on the spiritual the fast also includes:

No sexual relationships	No pleasure
No washing (except for hygiene)	You are what you are
No make up	You are what you are
No wearing leather shoes	No creature comforts

The fast is ended with a blast from the shofar.

### Questions

Which do you think are the three most important reasons for keeping the fast at Yom Kippur? Explain why.

Are there any good things in the fast and other restrictions that might especially for young people? Think of peer pressure, for example.

What do you think is the benefit of confessional prayers said as "we" instead of "I". Would it be more sincere or embarrassing to say "I"?