

SEPHARDIC INSTITUTE

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בס"ד

Halakhot of Yom Kippur

I. Overview

G-d created man and instilled in him free will so that man may choose to serve his Creator and abide by His commandments, thereby to be attached to the Divine will. The Torah provides the guidelines.

In general, abiding by G-d's will is defined a number of times throughout Tanakh. G-d praised Abraham because "he will instruct his children and household after him to observe the way of Hashem, to do righteousness and justice..." (Gen. 18:17-19). "What is it the Lord requires of you, only to do *mishpat*, love *hesed*, and walk modestly with your G-d" (Micah 6:8). "But let him who chooses to be praised be praised in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Hashem who does *hesed*, *mishpat* and *sedakah* in the earth, for in these do I desire, declared Hashem" (Jer. 9:23). "*Hesed umishpat* observe" (Hosea 12:7).

Since "there is no man on earth ... who does not sin" (Qohelet 7:20), G-d granted Israel one day each year, the day of Yom Kippur, to facilitate repentance, to purify everyone and grant them forgiveness and atonement. He established this day because He does not desire the death of the sinners, neither physically nor spiritually, but their repenting and living. Indeed, He does not desire the destruction of the world but its flourishing. His desire is that all human society cease from all unethical and immoral behavior and return to Him. It is the responsibility of the nation of Israel to play a leadership role in accomplishing this. Of course, the decision to repent is in the hands of man, dependent on his exercise of his free will.

The prohibitions of the day of Yom Kippur, the fasting and other hardships, and the prayers, help us acknowledge the reality that we have sinned, that we have not sufficiently thought about our actions, that there is great need for improvement and that we deserve punishment. Most of our waking hours during the

twenty-four hours of Yom Kippur should be devoted to prayer, introspection, repentance (*teshuba*) and some time should be made for study of Torah.

II. Ereiv Yom Kippur

It is proper for each person to ask forgiveness from anyone he/she may have wronged before the day of Kippur sets in. When one wrongfully harmed another monetarily, it is best to settle before Kippur. When not practical, at least the apology and the commitment to settle should be given to the wronged party before Kippur.

It is a *misvah* to eat well Ereiv Yom Kippur.

Some have a practice to make symbolic "*kaparah*" on Ereiv Yom Kippur (or during the few days before it) with chickens, one for each member of the family. Some give a donation to charity in place of chickens. Some, following Shulhan Arukh, which specifically and strongly stated that this custom should be eliminated because it looks like the , do not engage in this practice at all.

Mincha is prayed early so that there should be sufficient time for all to eat and get ready for the holy day before sunset. Talit and tefillin are worn at mincha.

After the final berakha of the individual's amida of mincha, but before reciting the amida's concluding portion, viduy (acknowledgment and confession of sins) is recited. It is not repeated in hazara.

It is customary to kindle a remembrance candle or a light in or about the synagogue as a memorial for departed members of the family. Remembrance of the departed may serve as inspiration for the living.

It is customary for men to immerse in a mikvah (or natural body of water) on Ereiv Kippur with thoughts of repentance and purification in their minds. When one is

not available or it is impractical it is appropriate to intend such purification with a shower somewhat longer than usual. Although a shower is invalid for the law of a woman's fulfilling the misvah of mikvah after her period, immersing of men is not an actual law.

Seuda Hamafseket: The final meal before Yom Kippur begins must be completed before sunset, at which time the fast and all halakhot of the day begin. If one completes this meal early it is considered an early acceptance of the fast unless the person stated (or specifically thought) that he/she does not wish to accept the fast yet. When one accepts the fast early, it is understood that all the laws of Yom Kippur take effect for that individual at that time.

Some communities have the custom to light candles before sunset, as before Shabbat and festivals, and some do not. A widespread practice is to light without a berakha.

Men wear a talit for all Yom Kippur prayers, including arbit. One should try to arrive at the synagogue before sunset so as to be able to say the berakha on donning the talit.

The evening service begins with the chanting of *Lecha Keli*. Although the Torah is not read during the evening, the Ark is opened and the Torah is shown to the congregation, to increase the level of inspiration. Seven Torah scrolls are brought out and *Kal Nidre* is recited three times in the past tense and once in the future tense. It is preferable that this be done before nightfall. The berakha of *Shehehiyanu* (for the arrival of Yom Kippur) is recited before beginning arbit.

III. Yom Kippur and Repentance

Since Yom Kippur, the final day of the Ten Days of Repentance that begin with Rosh Hashana, is the time of teshuba for each individual as well as for the community, each individual is responsible to repent and confess any wrongdoing on this day. The rabbis have formulated comprehensive texts of confession that are incorporated in the prayers of the day. These include "viduy hagadol," a long list of transgressions. Although this list of transgressions includes some that most people undoubtedly did not commit, it is permitted to be recited by all, as it is considered a communal confession. Also, one may be responsible for a

transgression that was committed by another due to having played a role in causing it. The ripple effects of a transgression go far and wide.

Yom Kippur secures atonement only for those who have faith in the power of atonement that G-d placed in the day.

Teshuba and Yom Kippur secure atonement for sins between man and G-d only. For sins against one's fellow man there is no atonement until the penitent has compensated the injured party for any loss and gained his forgiveness. One must seek forgiveness from his fellow man even if he had only angered him with words.

One being asked for forgiveness should not be difficult to appease but rather quick to forgive with a sincere heart (of course not speaking of monetary debts). If the injured party is confident that the person requesting forgiveness is insincere, he is not obliged to grant forgiveness.

It is proper that each individual specifically state at the beginning of the evening of Yom Kippur that he/she forgives everyone (excluding monetary debts).

Just as one must repent of sins involving actions, so must one repent of evil dispositions that he/she may have. These may include a tendency to anger quickly, jealousy, overweening pride, greediness, gluttony, etc.

IV. The Four Components of Repentance

1. *Viduy* - confessional: this is acknowledgment and identification (mention) of the sin. When done silently it is appropriate to specify the particular transgression being repented for.
2. The decision to abandon the sinful practice.
3. Having a feeling of regret for having transgressed.
4. A resolution for the future. In making a resolution, it is proper to devise a strategy to cope with the temptation that may arise and "build a fence" around the transgression.

V. Prohibitions

All work that is forbidden on Shabbat is forbidden on Yom Kippur. The prohibitions specific to Yom Kippur are:

- a) eating and drinking

- b) washing the body
- c) application of ointments to the body
- d) wearing leather shoes
- e) marital relations.

Sick people and women who are pregnant, nursing or who recently gave birth (after the first three days) are not automatically exempt from fasting on Yom Kippur as is the case with the minor fasts. Exemption is based on there being at least a minor possibility that fasting would endanger life. Medical experts have stated that in normal pregnancies there is no danger in fasting, although in the later months it may induce labor. A medical and halakhic authority should be consulted in individual cases.

A woman in labor on Yom Kippur should eat.

One who must eat or drink on Yom Kippur for medical or health reasons should do so in as limited a fashion as possible. If it does not increase the danger to do so, it is proper to eat less than an ounce of food at a time. After the passage of a ten-minute period from having started, the individual may once again eat less than an ounce of food, and repeat this process as often as necessary. Drinking should be limited to one and a half ounces of liquid in a five-minute period. If necessary, the interval for drinking may be just long enough that it is not considered the same drinking.

One who eats or drinks on Yom Kippur does not recite qiddush.

Washing the body on Yom Kippur should be limited to the fingers. *Netilat Yadayim* is up to the knuckles. It is permitted to wipe away the sediment from one's eyes in the morning. After using the bathroom, or if one has touched a covered part of the body, one should wash up to the knuckles. However, if a part of the body became very sweaty or dirty, it is permitted to wash in a limited manner, for the essential prohibition of washing the body is when done for pleasure.

Application of a spray or solid deodorant to prevent body odor is permitted.

An individual who is distressed when not brushing teeth or using mouthwash, may do so in a careful, limited manner.

Non-leather sneakers that have non-structural leather ornamentation are permitted. Leather garments other than shoes are permitted.

VI. Prayers

On both the night and day of Yom Kippur, the phrase “*Barukh Shem Kebod Malkhuto Le'olam Va'ed*,” is recited audibly upon reciting Shema.

In Birkhot Hashahar, the blessing of “*She'asah Li Kol Sorkhi*” is omitted. Although the appreciation expressed in this berakha is general, it was established to be recited in conjunction with the putting on of leather shoes. Since on this day we do not wear such shoes we omit it. On other days, if one does not wear leather shoes, he still recites this berakha as they could be worn and as others are wearing them.

The Torah reading for shahrit is the portion that describes the Yom Kippur service in the sanctuary. Another portion about Yom Kippur is read from a second Sefer Torah. The haftarah is the portion from the prophet Yeshaya that criticizes superficial repentance on a fast day, describing true repentance and calling on the nation of Israel to comport ethically.

During hazara (repetition of the amida) of musaf, the hazan recites the “*Aboda*,” a description of the Yom Kippur service by the high priest in the days of the Temple. The Ark is opened for this prayer.

The Torah reading at minha is the portion exhorting Israel to refrain from immoral conduct, particularly sexual impropriety. The haftarah reading is *Sefer Yona*, which deals in depth with the subject of repentance and G-d's compassion on all people, even sinners.

The shofar is not blown during Yom Kippur proper; it is blown after sunset toward the conclusion of the day. The blowing of the shofar does not signal the end of the day, as the day continues until the “stars appear,” approximately thirty-five minutes after sunset in the New York region.

There are five *amidot* recited on Yom Kippur. In addition to *musaf*, “*neila*” is recited after *minha*. This is the “closing” prayer, also so-called in reference to the

closing of the Heavenly Gates that are especially opened on Yom Kippur.

The Aron Haqodesh is opened at the beginning of neila and is kept open for the duration of this important prayer.

Birkat Kohanim is not recited in mincha, but is recited in neila. It must be said before sunset.

It is customary to recite “the long viduy” during Yom Kippur. There is a version of the “*viduy hagadol*” for the positive commandments and a version for the

negative ones. Some congregations have the custom to recite the version for the negative precepts in arvit and the version for the positive precepts during musaf.

At the conclusion of Yom Kippur habdala is recited. The candle must be lit from a flame that was burning all of Yom Kippur and “rested.” The berakha on besamim (fragrant spices) is not recited. When Kippur occurs on Shabbat, habdala may be recited on a candle lit from a fire produced at the moment.

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