

Celebrating *Yom Kippur*

the holiday that brings us all together. It is the one day a year when we put aside our differences and pray to God to grant us life, safety, health, prosperity, and happiness for the upcoming year.

Although each person makes their own personal appeals to God on *Yom Kippur*, I truly believe that it is the intensity of the community coming together that touches the angels up in heaven. On this day we know we are one because we are all God's children.

For me, *Yom Kippur* is a wakeup call for change. The world faces many problems, but what *Yom Kippur* reminds me is that all change must start within each person's heart and home.

Although we may not be directly involved in high level peace talks or economic debates, we are not powerless when it comes to these issues. In fact, we have the greatest weapon for change of all—prayer.

I find that when I really pray with all my heart and cry out to God like I do each year on *Yom Kippur*, I see

a direct change for good in my life. Seeing God at work in my life gives me confidence that I can change the world for the better.

All of us at one time have struggled with the question: Can I, one little person, change the whole world? We all have a burning desire to leave the world a better place

for our children and grandchildren.

Yom Kippur is the day when God tells us, His children, that all we need to do is to approach Him with a humble and grateful heart and ask for the things we need, and He will do the rest.

Although *Yom Kippur* is a one-day observance for Jews, our prayers from those 24 hours follow us throughout the year. They are the voice in our ear asking us if each decision we make will bring us closer to or further from God.

Yom Kippur renews our resolve to listen to what God is telling us and institute real change within ourselves, our families, and the world.

Shalom!



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Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, is observed on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei on the Hebrew calendar, which falls in September or October on the Gregorian calendar (the calendar in common use throughout the world). This day marks the culmination of the High Holy Days or Ten Days of Repentance, which began ten days earlier with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Yom Kippur offers Jews the final opportunity of the year to repent of their sins.

During the 24-hour period of *Yom Kippur*, Jews fulfill the biblical commandment to deny themselves by fasting from food and water, engaging in intense soul-searching, and praying for forgiveness. From the evening of the holiday until sundown the following day (except for the few hours when they go home to

sleep), Jews are in the synagogue beseeching God for forgiveness and reflecting upon the course of their lives.

Besides fasting, there are a number

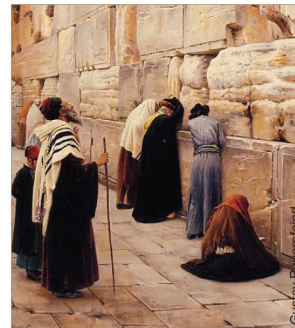
of Jewish customs and traditions associated with *Yom Kippur*. For example, Jews immerse themselves in



a *mikvah*, or ritual bath, beforehand in order to fulfill the biblical command, "You shall immerse yourselves in water and be purified."

This practice, from which Christian baptism originated, symbolizes purification and regeneration, as well as new birth through repentance. Jews greet each other on the holiday with the words "*gemar chatimah tovah*,"

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Gustav E. Schmidt



meaning, “May you be sealed for good in God’s Book of Life in the coming year.”

Special blessing and services

Parents customarily bless their children with the priestly benediction and often with an additional special blessing as well. Here’s an excerpt:

“May it be the will of our Father in Heaven to put into your heart love and reverence for Him. May the reverence for God accompany you all the days of your life that you may not commit sin. May your longing be for the Bible and God’s commandments. May your eyes be directed straight, your mouth speak wisdom, your heart strive for holiness. May your hands be occupied with good deeds and your feet hasten to do the will of your Father in Heaven.”

It is also customary to give extra charity before the holiday and to light memorial candles in memory of departed family members.

As with all Jewish festivals, the woman formally ushers in the holiday by lighting the candles at sundown.

On *Yom Kippur*, Jews attend synagogue, where the mood is one of solemnity and awe but also of hope.

A spirit of holiness pervades the congregation as all stand before God during this final 24-hour period before the end of the year. All appeal to the eternal Judge for a merciful judgment.

The services on *Yom Kippur* morning and afternoon contain a number of unique features. Jews recite a series of confessionals for sins they may have committed during the course of the past year.

These prayers recall how the high priest in ancient days entered the Holy of Holies as intercessor to pray for forgiveness for the House of Israel (see Leviticus 16).

In another portion of the service, worshipers remember their ancestors who suffered martyrdom rather than abandon their faith in God. They also recite prayers of *Yizkor*, or “remembrance,” for



the souls of deceased members of their families. The biblical passages read on this holy day include the 58th chapter of Isaiah describing the true nature of a fast day, and the Book of Jonah, which reminds Jews that God’s people can never flee from Him or His judgment.

The Book of Jonah also reaffirms on this special Day of Atonement that God is a loving, merciful, and forgiving Lord, who cares for our welfare and seeks our repentance.

Finally, as nightfall approaches and *Yom Kippur* is about to end, Jews pray the *Neilah*, or “closing service.” The liturgy of this service describes the heavenly gates as closing, leaving man, the petitioner, with a last opportunity to plead his case before final judgment.

The prayer service reaches its climax as the congregation declares the central Jewish affirmation, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God the LORD is One. Blessed be His glorious kingdom for ever and ever,” and repeats seven times the phrase, “God is the LORD.”

The service concludes with one blast of the *shofar*, or ram’s horn. The congregation, trusting in God and confident of His favorable judgment, proclaims, “Next year in Jerusalem!” The drama of the Day of Atonement has reached its finale. The High Holy Days have come to a close.

Celebrating *Yom Kippur* in Jerusalem

by Yael Eckstein

Below is a firsthand description of a *Yom Kippur* celebration in Jerusalem



Yael Eckstein

from Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein’s daughter Yael Eckstein, who writes a column titled “*Yael’s Corner*” that appears on *The Fellowship’s* website (ifcj.org).

It really felt like angels were walking down the streets on *Yom Kippur*,

as Jerusalem’s residents walked to Temple fasting, dressed in all white in order to represent the spiritual state that we all aspire to during this very holy and meaningful day.

Nearly every Jewish person in Israel was attending Temple from morning until night.



There were no cars on the streets so the children frolicked and played while their parents watched from the windows of the synagogue.

Like any democracy, Israel contains people of all levels of religious observance and widely varying political opinions. But *Yom Kippur* is

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