Yom Kippur 2019

Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, when we are closest to G‑d and most connected to the essence of our souls. It’s the holiest day of the year, when Jews come together, fasting and praying as one. (Yom Kippur 2019 begins several minutes before sunset on October8 and concludes after nightfall on October 9.) Read on for a brief guide to Yom Kippur and its many facts, observances and customs.

1. Yom Kippur Lights

Even though there is no food to be had on Yom Kippur, we still dress the table with a festive cloth and light candles before the onset of the holy day. We say two blessings on the candles: one for the candles, and the other, the Shehecheyanu blessing, thanks G‑d for enabling us to reach this milestone.

2. Pre-Yom Kippur Blessings

There is a time-honored custom to bless one’s children before Yom Kippur begins. Although there is no required formula, it is customary to say:

**For a son:***“May G‑d make you like Ephraim and Menashe.”*

**For a daughter:** “*May G‑d make you like Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah*.”

**For all children:***The L‑rd spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying: This is how you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: "May G‑d bless you and guard you. 'May G‑d shine His countenance upon you and be gracious to you. 'May G‑d turn His countenance toward you and grant you peace." They shall bestow My Name upon the children of Israel, so that I will bless them.*

3. Kol Nidre Is Just the Beginning

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[A Chazan Sings: Kol Nidrei](https://www.chabad.org/2695785)

[22](https://www.chabad.org/2695785#comment)

The first prayer of Yom Kippur, known as Kol Nidre, is often thought of as the quintessential prayer of the day. In fact, it’s not even a prayer! It is simply a declaration that all our vows be considered null and void.

We also say the Baruch Shem Kavod out loud and wear a Talit

4. To the Power of Five

It is well known that we do not eat or drink on Yom Kippur. But did you know that it is just one of five things we eschew on this holy day? Here are the other four: conjugal relations, washing, applying lotions or oils and wearing leather footwear .

5. A Day to Forgive

More than 3,300 years ago, after hearing from G‑d at Sinai, the children of Israel sinned by creating and worshipping a golden calf. Moses came down from Mount Sinai, saw what had happened, and smashed the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved. Moses then ascended the mountain once again, and stayed there for 40 days, and then another 40 days. On the tenth day of the month of Tishrei he came down with a complete pardon as well as a second set of tablets.

Ever since, the day of Moses’s descent has been known as Yom Kippur, the day of forgiveness, an appropriate day to ask G‑d (and others) to forgive us for anything we may have done wrong

6. Pure White

There is an ancient custom to wear white on Yom Kippur. This reminds us of the burial shrouds that all people wear eventually. But the white garments also remind us of the pristine angels to whom we are compared on this most sacred of days.

7. Yom Kippur Is for Every Jew

It’s a day of unity. No matter what you do all year long, there is a spot for you in the synagogue—just as we were at Sinai, “as one people with one heart.” Looking for a seat at an inviting, friendly service?

8. The 10 Martyrs of Yom Kippur

The narrative of the Ten Martyrs graphically depicts the horrific death of ten sages at the hand of an evil Roman king nearly 2,000 years ago. Notable among the victims were Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Shimon Ben Gamliel. This heart-rending account describes deaths that were brought about on the altar of senseless hatred.

Ashkenazic Jews read the account of the Ten Martyrs in the Yom Kippur liturgy after the description of the High Priest’s service in the Temple on Yom Kippur .

9. Five Prayers

On an ordinary day, there are three daily prayers: Maariv (evening prayer), Shacharit (morning prayer) and Minchah (afternoon prayer). On Shabbat and holidays, we add Musaf (additional prayer). Yom Kippur is the only day of the year when we pray Ne’ilah, the closing prayer, which is said as the sun is sinking in the west and this special day is coming to a close.

10. How Is Yom Kippur Like Purim

The Torah actually refers to Yom Kippur as “Yom Hakippurim.” Literally, this means “the day of forgiveness.” But it can also be rendered as “a day like Purim.” Purim is a happy day, celebrated by giving gifts, partying and having a great time. And yet, Yom Kippur, the most sacred of days, is only *like*Purim, i.e., it doesn’t quite reach Purim’s level of holiness. How can that be?

Our goal on this earth is to make the mundane holy, to make Tuesday afternoon as G‑d-oriented as Friday evening. On Purim, we embrace our physical selves, our base desires and our crass surroundings, lifting them up into the realm of the spirit. On Yom Kippur, however, we focus solely on the spirit. No physical distractions or material needs to get in the way. This sets us on the road toward the goal of elevating the world around us. But it is only a start. On Purim, we finally get there.

11. Dip, Drip, Dress, Repeat!

In the Holy Temple, Jews didn’t pray with prayer books on Yom Kippur (in fact, prayer books weren’t even invented yet). Instead, the focus of the day was to watch the High Priest perform Yom Kippur’s sacred duties in the Temple. There were animals to slaughter and sacrifice, incense to burn, and much more to do before the day was done. Some of his duties would be carried out in his ornate, colorful gold-trimmed uniform. Others were done wearing a plain outfit of white linen. Every time he needed to change, he would slip behind a screen, disrobe, dip into the purifying waters of the *mikvah*, towel off, and then get dressed again. Now, the floors weren't heated, and it can get chilly in Jerusalem in the fall, so he needed to be in tip-top form! [Watch: Yom Kippur and the Real You](https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/1635901/jewish/Yom-Kippur-and-the-Real-You.htm).

12. The Two Goats and the Red String

Two goats were brought to the Temple. The High Priest would draw lots, one bearing the words, “to the L‑rd,” the other, “to Azazel.” The goat for which the words “to the L‑rd” fell was offered as a sacrifice. The High Priest confessed the sins of the nation over the other goat, and it was then taken away into the desert hills outside Jerusalem to plunge to its death, taking the sins of the people with it. Tradition tells us that a scarlet thread would be attached to its horns, and half of the thread was removed before the animal was sent away. If the rite had been effective, the red thread that remained would turn to white, symbolizing Israel's purity

13. A Week to Prepare

The Kohen Gadol (High Priest) would be separated from his family and community for a week before Yom Kippur, holed up in the “Lishkat Parhedrin,” a special chamber in the Holy Temple. This isolation process served as a way for the Kohen Gadol to make sure he remained ritually pure and had every aspect of the service down pat. It was also an opportune time for introspection, when he could finalize his spiritual preparation for representing the Jewish people on the holiest day in the holiest place on earth.

14. Jubilee Would Begin with Jubilation!

In ancient Israel, every 50th year was a Yovel (Jubilee) year. It was a special time during which there would be virtually no agricultural work. Real estate would revert to its original owners, and slaves were set free. It all began on Yom Kippur, when a *shofar*would sound, ushering in a true sense of freedom and cheer ... jubilation

15. The Rabbi Reads About What?

We read the Haftarah of Yonah during Mincha to remind us to do Teshuva

16. Napoleon’s March

It has been a long day, but as Yom Kippur comes to a close, we are sure that we have accomplished our goal: total oneness with G‑d and a complete pardon. Fittingly, in the final moments of Yom Kippur, the congregation breaks out into joyous song. In Chabad, it is customary to sing “Napoleon’s March,” a lively tune known for its victorious and up-beat rhythm. It was first sung by the Alter Rebbe as a form of opposition to the tyrant Napoleon. It was re-introduced by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to be sung at this time. As Yom Kippur ends, and this victorious song is sung, one can’t help but be enthralled and encouraged by a sense of unity and companionship that is rarely felt or seen throughout the year. It is a source of inspiration for us to carry the sanctity of this day into the rest of the year. Listen to a recording of Napoleon’s March:

[](https://www.chabad.org/530893)

Play

Mute

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[Napoleons March](https://www.chabad.org/140700)

[11](https://www.chabad.org/140700#comment)

17. The Final Blast

A Yemenite Jew blows shofar (circa 1930s).

The blowing of the *shofar*at the conclusion of Yom Kippur is the culmination of a day spent fasting and praying for a sweet new year. The blast is reminiscent of the *shofar*blasts that rang out when the Divine Presence departed from Mount Sinai. It also serves to remind everyone that the night following Yom Kippur is a quasi holiday, replete with a festive meal. To help everyone remember this, it is also appropriate to wish each other a “good *yom tov*!”

18. When a Day Is More Than a Day

Thought Yom Kippur is one day long? Our sages tell us that it is a mitzvah to extend the holy day in either direction, starting a bit early (before sunset) and ending late (after the stars come out). They make a comparison to a hungry wolf, which bites at its prey in front and behind. It’s a good thing that our “appetite” is for extra sanctity, stretching Shabbat, Yom Kippur and other holidays into the mundane.

19. From Holiday to Holiday

In Yiddish, the day after Yom Kippur is called *“Gott’s Nomen”*(“G‑d’s Name”)*.* It is a widespread custom to wish people *“gut yom tov”* (“happy holiday”) following Yom Kippur. We also begin building the *sukkah*, the foliage-covered hut where we will celebrate the holiday of Sukkot, which is five days after Yom Kippur.