

“The Meaning of Yom Kippur”



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Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is not just another day in the calendar. It is the holiest day of the year, a time when Father YAH’S people come together to seek forgiveness for our wrongdoings from Him and from our fellow human beings. The solemnity and significance of this day cannot be overstated.

The Day of Atonement and Passover are not just historical events, but profound lessons in the forgiveness of sin and our reconciliation with Father YAH through Christ’s sacrifice. In the Passover, Christ’s shed blood atones for our past sins, a sacrifice that echoes through the ages. This atonement, this reconciliation, is what the Day of Atonement symbolizes—the reconciliation of God and all humanity. We observe Yom Kippur not just because we have been atoned, but because our Father, YAH, has instructed us to do so in His Word. The Old and New Testaments are Father YAH’s Holy and Eternal Word, a testament to His love and our reconciliation.

The Day of Atonement involves not only the forgiveness of sin; it also pictures the removal of the **primary cause** of sin – Satan and his demons. Until Father YAH removes the original instigator of sin, humanity will continue to fall back into disobedience and suffering (see 2 Cor. 11:3, Eph. 6:12). The Day of Atonement looks forward to the time when Satan’s deception will be removed. He will no longer be free to influence and deceive humanity (Rev. 20:1-3).

Leviticus 16 describes Father YAH instructing ancient Israel to observe the Day of Atonement. We are not required to offer animal sacrifices today; this chapter adds significantly to our understanding of Father YAH'S plan.

It is significant to note that Aaron, the high priest, was to select two goats for a sin offering for the people, and present them before God/Eloah. He then cast lots to select one **"for the LORD,"** which he was to offer as a sacrifice. This goat symbolized the Savior Yahshua, who would be slain to pay the penalty for our sins. The other goat, the scapegoat, served an entirely different purpose.

The other goat served an entirely different purpose: **"But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness" (verse 10).** Notice that this goat was *not to be killed*. The high priest was to **"lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert" (verses 21-22, NIV).**

The priest chose by lot the **"scapegoat,"** or **Azazel,** as the word appears in the original Hebrew. Many scholars identify Azazel as the name of a demon believed to inhabit the wilderness. The Azazel goat represents Satan, who bears the responsibility for the sins of humanity (verse 22) because of the deception that has been foisted on humanity.

The high priest laid hands on this goat and confessed over it the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people. Why did he do that? As the present ruler of the world, the devil bears responsibility for his perversity in beguiling and coercing humanity to sin. **He sent off the sin-laden goat . . . signified the**

complete removal of the sins of the people and the handing them over, as it were, to the evil spirit to whom they belonged.”

The high priest acted out the function Christ performs for repentant believers. Having ascended to the very throne of YAH to present the blood of His sacrifice, Christ intercedes for us—as He has since His resurrection—***as our High Priest***. The book of Hebrews makes this symbolism clear: **“But Christ came as *High Priest* of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this [physical] creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, *but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (forgiveness)*” (Heb. 9:11-12).**

Yom Kippur, unlike most Biblical holidays, is not a time for individual rituals. It is a time for communal worship, a time when we come together as a faith community. There are no festive meals except the breaking of the fast. There are no silly costumes or upbeat songs. But it does provide children with an opportunity to see their parents engaged in earnest prayer and reflection, which sets an important example. It is a time when we feel the unity and support of our faith community, a time when we are reminded that we are not alone in our spiritual journey.

The Ten Days of Repentance—from the **Feast of Trumpet—Yom Teruah to Yom Kippur**—is a time that lends itself to serious family discussion. **During that time, we face each other and ask for—and grant—forgiveness.** This period of time culminates on Yom Kippur with a heightened sense of truly pleading for life. We experience the power of the questions we have been asking for the past ten days: **What is the nature of our family relationship? What would we like to change in the way we relate to one another? How can I grow as a person? Or how can I better live in a relationship with the Heavenly Father? How can I contribute to bringing healing to a broken world? How can I be a better parent and spouse?**

These questions are essential because Scripture teaches that we cannot attain Divine forgiveness until we have earnestly sought forgiveness from the wronged party (person) in the community, at work, and at home. We should say with sincerity: **“Please forgive me for anything that I may have done intentionally or accidentally that you may or may not know about.”** Forgiveness from the Heavenly Father is predicated on our seeking forgiveness and making amends for those we have hurt and wronged, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The hope and intention are that in the future, we may alter our behavior.

Father YAH’S people strive to rise above the physical satisfaction of the flesh on Yom Kippur so that they can focus on their spiritual inner life. Therefore, traditionally, we fast on Yom Kippur, refraining from both food and drink for the entire 24 hours of the observance (**see Leviticus 23:26-32**). Fasting expresses our humble desire to draw closer to YAH. Fasting is not to bend God to our will. We don’t fast to receive anything from YAH except His guidance and help and His abundant mercy and forgiveness for our human weakness. Fasting helps us remember the impermanence of our physical existence. Without food and water, we would soon perish. Fasting helps us realize *just how much we need Father YAH* as the giver and sustainer of life.

It is also traditional to refrain from other earthly pleasures, such as bathing and wearing leather shoes, which were seen as luxuries in ancient times. Many choose to wear white, symbolizing purity and renewal as we repent for our past sins.

While Yom Kippur is a day for private introspection, it is also a day Father YAH’S people recite throughout the day, worded in the plural - **we seek forgiveness for the sins we committed**. Uniting in this way with our fellow believers illustrates that together, we can overcome the obstacles in our path. By facing our wrongdoing as a collective, we elevate the entire faith community. Yom Kippur is indeed a solemn day, but it is not a sad day.

We are not mourning our past missteps so much as facing up to them and truly repenting for them so that we can unburden ourselves and wipe our slate clean for a new year.