

Dear Friends,

As we head into the final days of preparation for the Holidays, I'd like to take the opportunity to write a little about some customs specific to Yom Kippur. For me, taking time to review these rites and rituals helps to put my consciousness in the proper state of mind to think about and seek forgiveness.

After having spent the entire month of Elul (the month preceding Rosh HaShanah) focusing on our conduct and interactions with others, we make use of the days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur to apologize to and seek forgiveness from those we have wronged. Of course, we should take ownership for our conduct every day of the year, but the pursuit takes on heightened importance during these interceding days, because once Kol Nidrei begins on the evening of September 24, our opportunities to find and interact with these people will be few and far between.

In the days leading up to Yom Kippur, and especially on the final day before Yom Kippur, it is customary to increase our charitable giving. Dating back at least to the 9th century, during the ancient tradition of kaparot (from the same Hebrew root as kippur – “atonement”), a live chicken is held high in the air and passed around in three circles while the one performing the rite recites a prayer asking God to accept the chicken as expiation for personal sins. After this, the chicken is slaughtered and then (usually) donated to the needy to eat. A more modern tradition involves swinging a piece of fabric holding coins inside. Then, rather than donating the meat of a chicken to the needy, we donate the money instead.

As we all know, Yom Kippur is perhaps the most important fast day of the Jewish year. The fasting, however, is not punishment. Rather, it serves to bring discipline and focus to our pursuit of atonement on Yom Kippur. As well, fasting demonstrates our obedience and willingness to submit to the will of God. And, finally, just like some people fast in order to cleanse their bodies, Jews fast on Yom Kippur to cleanse their spirit.

Because our fast is not understood to be punishment, it makes sense that tradition teaches us to eat two festive meals – lunch and dinner – the day prior to Yom Kippur.

Our rabbis teach that fasting is not for everyone, though. If you live with any medical conditions that render fasting physically unsafe, it is not only permitted, but actually commanded that you do in fact eat. Even without existing health concerns, because fasting is for positive purposes rather than punishment, we do what we can to fast as comfortably as we can. Some practices recommended by modern-day health professionals that we should begin a couple days before Yom Kippur include:

- Don't overeat, but do eat to the point of satiation
- Eat foods that are rich in protein and complex carbohydrates, which will help you maintain healthy sugar levels for longer periods of time. (Good choices include, nuts, seeds, legumes, whole grains, beans and fresh produce.)
- Drink extra fluids (water is the best)
- Reduce consumption of drinks and foods containing caffeine, in order to protect from caffeine withdrawal on Yom Kippur
- Reduce intake of salty foods and spicy foods, in order to curb thirst As well as preparatory traditions for Yom Kippur, so too are there traditions we follow on the day itself, two of the more common of which are:
 - Wearing white clothing, because tradition teaches that white is the color both of purity (to help us enter the new year with pure intentions) and death (to remind us of the severity of the day).
 - Abstaining from wearing anything made from leather, because draping ourselves in such luxury material may hinder the humility we need to recognize, accept, and atone for our sins.

In the end, no matter how you choose to prepare for Yom Kippur, whether or not you will be fasting, or how you plan to observe the day itself, I wish you a Happy and Sweet New Year

לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה וְמוֹתְקָה תִּתְקַוּהוּ

L'Shana Tova u'M'tuka Looking forward to seeing you all soon,

Rabbi Dubin