



To help enrich your appreciation of the upcoming holiday, Kolel is happy to provide this “fact sheet.” We hope it helps you prepare both spiritually and physically. Please feel free to study with us any time at www.kolel.org or at any of our classes at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, or the Family Resource Centre at the Promenade. You can reach us at 416-636-1880 ext 255.

YOM KIPPUR

WHAT IS IT?

The Day of Atonement

Yom=day

Kippur=atonement

Pronounced in Hebrew “Yom Key-poor” with a long o in Yom and the accent on “poor”; pronounced in Yiddish/English (Yinglish!) “Yum-kipper” with the accent on “kip”. Also called “Yom Hakippurim” or the day of (many) atonements.

WHY IS IT?

Once a year Jews confess their sins before G-d and before the whole community. This confession is communal because Judaism teaches that every human being “misses the mark” but has the opportunity to improve themselves in the future. The idea of repentance is central to Yom Kippur: we are supposed to ask each and every person we have wronged for forgiveness in the days before, and to sincerely change our behaviour for the better.

WHEN IS IT?

The tenth of the Hebrew month Tishre, which occurs in the fall. It is the climax of ten days of repentance after Rosh Hashanah, and of the “high holy days.”

WHERE IS IT FROM?

In Leviticus 16:30 we read, “For on this day shall atonement be made for you, from all your sins you shall be cleansed...” The requirement to fast is Leviticus 16:29, (worded as an “affliction of the soul”) as well as the prohibition against working on Yom Kippur. There is a lengthy description of the High Priest’s ritual on Yom Kippur in verses 1-34.

WHAT DO WE DO?

Yom Kippur, like Rosh Hashanah, is celebrated mostly in the synagogue. Kol Nidre, the special and haunting chant which opens the holy day, is recited, usually with at least one Torah scroll and two

witnesses in the front of the synagogue. The next day there is special liturgy, and the day ends with one long blast of the shofar signalling the conclusion of the fast. There is a custom of wearing white, to show that we are confident in our eventual forgiveness (as long as we repent!) and our return to purity as it says in Isaiah 1:18 that our sins will be made “as white as snow.” Many people refrain from wearing leather shoes, to deny ourselves that “luxury.” In some communities people also do not shower, put on perfume, or engage in sexual activity. This is to “simplify” our lives and to bring us right back to our essence in order to spiritually concentrate on the grand themes of the day rather than on our physical needs.

WHAT DO WE EAT?

Nothing!! The main ritual is the 25 hour fast, from sundown the night before to after sundown the next day. This is a complete fast, with no food and no water. There is a festive meal before the fast. Before the meal memorial candles are lit for our loved ones now deceased. After the meal the holiday candles are lit, and the fast begins with that lighting. Of course, anyone who is ill, pregnant or nursing is absolved from fasting, and if you must take medicine during the 25 hours that is permitted. There is a festive meal to break the fast. Children from 12 and up generally fast the whole time; those younger can “try it out” in increasing increments through the years though not if it is deemed unhealthy to the child.

WHAT DO WE SAY?

We continue to say “Shanah Tovah” (a good year), for the rest of the month. Many people replace that, or add to it, by saying “G’mar Chatimah Tovah” which means “may you be sealed (in the Book of Life) for goodness” indicating that the “writing” is done on Rosh Hashanah but the book is “sealed” on Yom Kippur. This is also said in a shortened form, “G’mar Tov” (“a good seal!”)