

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the holiest, most important day of the year in Judaism, known as the “Day of Atonement.” This year it begins at sundown **Wednesday, September 15th 2021** and ends on **Thursday evening, September 16th 2021** — the last of the ten days of penitence that began with [Rosh Hashanah](#) (the Jewish New Year). Yom Kippur commemorates the day Moses came down from Mount Sinai after seeking God’s divine forgiveness for the Israelites who sinned against him by worshipping a golden calf idol.

Yom Kippur is considered the “Sabbath of all Sabbaths” because, not only is it a day of complete rest (no work, no driving, etc.) but it’s a day of fasting and other restrictions: **no washing or bathing**, no perfumes or deodorants, no wearing leather shoes, and no sex.

Throughout the 10 Days of Awe (Repentance) leading up to Yom Kippur, those practicing Judaism have been reflecting on the personal aspects of the past year, deciding how to improve, seeking forgiveness and showing compassion to others. Traditionally, the belief is that after judging a person by their deeds over the last year, God decides who will be sealed in the Book of Life (to live for another year) and who will die.

Feasts are replaced with fasting on this holiest of religious days. However, two traditional meals are enjoyed the day before the fast begins at sundown. Both meals begin by dipping round challah bread into honey, as is customary on Rosh Hashanah. At sundown, the “soul is afflicted” by 25 hours of fasting—no drinking or eating. Fasting enables followers to stop their normal routine to refocus their attention to prayer and connecting spiritually with God.

Just as Yom Kippur is a day of fasting, the day *before* Yom Kippur is set aside for [lighting of candles](#), donating to charity, and requesting and receiving honey cake, which provides blessings for a sweet year.

It is tradition for everyone to wear white clothing on Yom Kippur. The men often wear a Kittel—a white, robe-like garment—on Yom Kippur. It is said to resemble angels, the high priest’s garment, and burial shroud. White reminds those attending services that they are to be like the angels, praising God. White also symbolizes the forgiveness and spiritual cleansing they’re praying for, and that life on earth is temporal. White is worn with a humble awareness of one’s need to repent sins and pray to God for forgiveness. They pray in hope, remembering how God forgave the children of Israel for their sin of idolatry during the days of Moses.

At the conclusion of the last Yom Kippur service, many enjoy a festive meal at home with family and friends. The foods traditionally eaten vary, but are often baked, breakfast goods....such as...

bagels, lox (preserved salmon), and cream cheese. Not because there is any real connection between a bagel and the fast day, but simply because it’s a super easy, high-carbohydrate meal to throw together (and it’s delicious). Because of this, Jews who follow specific dietary laws cannot serve meat and dairy together, so the break-fast meal tends to be meat-free. The ultimate trick for prepping your break-fast feast is to plan non-meat foods that can be made at least a day in advance and can be served cold or warmed up in a snap.

The greeting for Yom Kippur is *G’mar Hatima Tova*, or *G’mar Tov*. (meaning, “May you be sealed in the Book of Life”).

It is also customary to say, “have a meaningful fast” before the holiday begins.