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Halakhot of Yom Kippur

I. Overview

G-d created man with free will so that he may choose to abide by and be attached to the Divine will. The Torah together with human conscience, nurtured by education and tradition, provide the guidelines.

The basic principles of abiding by G-d's will are defined a number of times throughout Tanakh. G-d praised Abraham because "he will instruct his children and household after him to observe the way of Hashem, to do righteousness and justice" (Gen. 18:17-19). "What is it that Hashem requires of you, only to do *mishpat*, love *hesed*, and walk modestly with your G-d" (Micah 6:8). "But only in this shall one be praised, that he knows and appreciates Me that I am Hashem who does *hesed*, *mishpat* and *sedaqah* in the earth, for in these do I desire, declared Hashem" (Jer. 9:23). "*Hesed* and *mishpat* observe" (Hosea 12:7).

Since "there is no righteous man on earth who does [only] good and does not sin" (Qoheleth 7:20), G-d granted Israel one day each year, the day of Yom Kippur, to facilitate repentance. "For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to purify you from all your sins" (Lev. 16:30). He has made it clear that "I do not desire the death of he who dies, declares Hashem the Lord; Repent and live" (Ezek. 18:32). "I do not desire the death of the wicked but that the wicked should repent from his way and live; Repent, repent from your evil ways, why should you die, O House of Israel" (Ezek 33:11). Indeed, He desires the flourishing of the world, that all human society cease from all unethical and immoral behavior and return to Him. It is the responsibility of the nation of Israel to play a leadership role in accomplishing this. The decision to repent is in the hands of each individual person, dependent on his or her proper exercise of free will.

The prohibitions of the day of Yom Kippur, the fasting, the hardships and the prayers, help us acknowledge our reality. We have sinned. We have not sufficiently disciplined ourselves, surely we could have done better, there is need for improvement. And we deserve chastisement. Most of our waking hours during the twenty-four hours of Yom Kippur should be devoted to prayer, introspection and repentance. Some time should be made for study of Torah.

II. Ereb Yom Kippur

Before Yom Kippur sets in it is proper for each person to ask forgiveness from anyone he/she may have wronged whether monetarily, in words or by not having fulfilled a commitment. When one wrongfully harmed another monetarily, it is best to settle the account before Kippur. When not practical, at least the apology and the commitment to settle should be given to the wronged party before Kippur.

It is a mitzvah to eat well Ereb Yom Kippur.

Some have a practice to make symbolic *kaparah* on Ereb Yom Kippur (or during the few days before it) with chickens, one for each member of the family. Some give a donation to charity in place of chickens. Shulhan Arukh emphatically and unequivocally states that this custom should be eliminated because (as explained in the Bet Yoseph) it is reminiscent of the way of idolators. One who has practiced *kaparot* in the past or whose family has done so may change to follow Shulhan Arukh.

Mincha is prayed early so that there should be sufficient time for all to eat a proper meal and get ready for the holy day before sunset. Talet and tefillin are worn at mincha to increase one's sense of *kedusha* (holiness).

After the final berakha of the individual's amida of minha, but before reciting the amida's concluding portion, *viduy* is recited. This is an acknowledgment and confession of sins. It is not repeated in hazara.

It is customary to kindle a remembrance candle or a light in or about the synagogue as a memorial for departed members of the family. Remembrance of the departed may serve as inspiration for the living.

It is customary for men to immerse in a mikvah (or natural body of water) on Erev Kippur with thoughts of repentance and purification in their minds. When not available or impractical it is appropriate to intend such purification with a shower of standard length. Although a shower is invalid for a woman's fulfilling the mitzvah of immersing in a mikvah after her period, the immersing of men is not an actual law.

Se'uda Hamafseket: The final meal before Yom Kippur begins must be completed before sunset, at which time the fast and all halakhot of the day begin. If one completes this meal early it is considered an early acceptance of the fast unless the person stated (or specifically thought) that he/she does not wish to accept the fast yet. When one accepts the fast early, it is understood that all the laws of Yom Kippur take effect for that individual at that time.

Some communities have the custom to light candles before sunset, as before Shabbat and festivals, and some do not. A widespread practice is to light without a berakha.

Men wear a talet for all Yom Kippur prayers, including arbit. One should try to arrive at the synagogue before sunset so as to be able to recite the berakha on donning the talet.

The evening service begins with the chanting of *Lecha Keli*. Although the Torah is not read during the evening, the Ark is opened and the Torah is shown to the congregation, to increase the level of inspiration. Seven Torah scrolls are brought out and *Kal Nidre* (a type of *hatarat nedarim*) is recited. Our custom is to recite it three times in the past tense and once in the future tense. It is preferable that this be done before nightfall. The berakha of *sheheheyanu* (for the arrival of Yom Kippur) is recited before beginning arbit.

III. Yom Kippur and Repentance

Since Yom Kippur, the final day of the Ten Days of Repentance that begin with Rosh Hashana, is the time of Teshubah for each individual as well as for the community, each individual is responsible to repent and confess any wrongdoing on this day. The rabbis have formulated comprehensive texts of confession that are incorporated in the prayers of the day. These include *viduy hagadol*, a long detailed list of transgressions. Although this list includes some transgressions that most people undoubtedly did not commit, it is permitted for all to recite it, as it is considered a communal confession. Also, an individual must repent for all transgressions that he/she may have caused another to do in whatever manner it may have been. The same applies to transgressions that one may have prevented another from doing but did not do so. The ripple effects of every type of transgression, those of omission or commission, go far and wide and are subtle and long-lasting.

Yom Kippur secures atonement only for those who have faith in the power of atonement that G-d placed in the day.

Repentance and Yom Kippur secure atonement for sins between man and G-d only. For sins against one's fellow man there is no atonement until the penitent has compensated the injured party for any loss and gained his forgiveness. One must seek forgiveness from his fellow man even if he had only angered him with words.

One being asked for forgiveness should not be difficult to appease but rather quick to forgive with a sincere heart (of course excluding monetary debts). If the injured party is confident that the person requesting forgiveness is insincere, he is not obliged to grant forgiveness.

It is proper that each individual specifically state at the beginning of the evening of Yom Kippur that he/she forgives everyone (excluding monetary debts).

Just as one must repent of sins involving actions, so must one endeavor with resolution and thoughtfulness to correct and rein in any evil dispositions that he/she may possess. These may

include a tendency to anger quickly, jealousy, overweening pride, greediness, gluttony, etc.

IV. The Four Components of Repentance

1. *Viduy* - confessional: this is acknowledgment and identification of the sin. When done silently it is appropriate to specify the particular transgression being repented for. If the individual fears that specifying might lead to distraction it is not necessary to go beyond mention of the general category.
2. The decision to abandon the sinful practice.
3. Having a feeling of regret for having transgressed.
4. A resolution for the future. In making a resolution, it is proper to devise a strategy to cope with the temptation that may arise and “build a fence” around the law to prevent approaching the sin.

V. Prohibitions

All work that is forbidden on Shabbat is forbidden on Yom Kippur. The prohibitions specific to Yom Kippur are:

- a) eating and drinking
- b) washing the body
- c) application of ointments
- d) wearing leather shoes
- e) marital relations.

Sick people and women who are pregnant, nursing or who recently gave birth (after the first three days) are not automatically exempt from fasting on Yom Kippur as is the case with the minor fasts. Exemption is based on there being at least a minor possibility that fasting would endanger life. Medical experts have stated that in normal pregnancies there usually is no danger in fasting. In later months situations may arise; there may be a threat of dehydration or fasting may induce labor. A medical and halakhic authority should be consulted in all individual cases.

A woman in labor on Yom Kippur should eat and drink.

One who must eat or drink on Yom Kippur for medical or health reasons should do so in as limited a fashion as possible. If it does not cause danger to do

so, it is proper to eat less than an ounce of food at a time. After the passage of a ten-minute period from having started, the individual may once again eat less than an ounce of food, and repeat this process as often as necessary. Drinking should be limited to one and a half ounces of liquid in a five-minute period. If necessary, the interval for drinking may be shorter, just long enough that it is not considered the same drinking.

One who eats or drinks on Yom Kippur does not recite qiddush.

Washing the body on Yom Kippur should be limited to the fingers. *Netilat yadayim* is up to the knuckles. It is permitted to wipe away the sediment from one's eyes in the morning. After using the bathroom, or if one has touched a covered part of the body, one should wash up to the knuckles. However, if a part of the body became very sweaty or dirty, it is permitted to wash in a limited manner, for the essential prohibition of washing the body is when done for pleasure.

Application of a spray or solid deodorant to prevent body odor is permitted.

An individual who is greatly bothered when not brushing teeth or using mouthwash, may do so in a careful, limited manner.

Leather garments other than shoes are permitted. Non-leather sneakers that have non-structural leather ornamentation are permitted.

VI. Prayers

On both the night and day of Yom Kippur the phrase *Barukh Shem Kebod Malkhuto Le`olam Va`ed* is recited audibly upon reciting Shema.

In Birkhot Hashahar, the blessing of *she`asah li qol sorki* is omitted. Although the appreciation this berakha expresses is general, it is understood that it was established to be recited in conjunction with the putting on of leather shoes. Since on this day we do not wear such shoes we omit it. On other days, if one does not wear leather shoes the berakha is nevertheless recited as leather shoes could then be worn and as others are wearing them.

The Torah reading for *shahrit* is the portion that describes the Yom Kippur service in the sanctuary. Another portion about Yom Kippur is read from a second Sefer Torah. The haftarah is the portion from the prophet Isaiah that criticizes superficial repentance on a fast day, describing the nature of true repentance and calling on the nation of Israel to comport ethically.

During *hazara* (repetition of the *amida*) of *musaf*, the *hazzan* recites the '*aboda*, a description of the Yom Kippur service performed by the high priest in the days of the Temple. The Ark is opened for this prayer.

The Torah reading at *minha* is the portion exhorting Israel to refrain from immoral conduct, particularly sexual impropriety. The haftarah reading of *minha* is the book of *Yonah*, which deals in depth with the subject of repentance and G-d's compassion on all people, even sinners.

The *shofar* is not blown during Yom Kippur proper; it is blown after sunset toward the conclusion of the day. The blowing of the *shofar* does not signal the actual end of the day, as the day continues until the "stars appear," approximately thirty-five minutes after sunset in the New York region.

There are five '*amidot* recited on Yom Kippur. In addition to *musaf*, *ne'ila* is recited after *minha*. This

is the "closing" prayer, also so-called in reference to the closing of the heavenly gates that are especially opened on Yom Kippur.

The Aron Haqodesh is opened at the beginning of *ne'ila* and is kept open for the duration of this important prayer.

Birkat Kohanim is not recited in *minha*, but is recited in *ne'ila*. The schedule should assure arriving at that juncture before sunset.

It is customary to recite "the long *viduy*" during Yom Kippur. There is a version of the *viduy hagadol* for the positive commandments and a version for the negative ones. Some congregations have the custom to recite the version for the negative precepts in *arbit* and the version for the positive precepts during *musaf*.

At the conclusion of Yom Kippur *habdalah* is recited. When Kippur did not occur on Shabbat the candle must be lit from a flame that was burning all the day and "rested." The *berakha* on *besamim* (fragrant spices) is not recited as it is on a standard Saturday night. When Kippur occurs on Shabbat, *habdalah* may be recited on a candle lit from a fire produced at the moment.

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