

SAMCHAINU GUIDE TO THE HALACHOS OF YOM KIPPUR

A SELECTION OF LAWS & CUSTOMS WITH A FOCUS ON SINGLE MOTHER FAMILIES

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The Shela Hakadosh writes that learning and properly observing the Halachos of a Yom Tov infuse the Chag with tremendous blessing. Please note that the laws and customs contained in this article follow the Ashkenazi custom.

EATING ON EREV YOM KIPPUR

There is a mitzvah to eat and make seudos on Erev Yom Kippur. According to some, it's one of the 613 Torah commandment. Any act of eating or drinking that is done on Erev Yom Kippur, even if it is not part of a formal meal is a mitzvah. Many authorities hold that women are also commanded in the mitzvah to eat on Erev Yom Kippur.

The Rosh says that the special day of Yom Kippur was given to us out of Hashem's abundant love for us. Hashem commanded us to fast for our own benefit, so that we can achieve forgiveness. In order to avoid any harm that might result from fasting, Hashem gave us a separate mitzvah to prepare for the fast by eating and drinking on Erev Yom Kippur. These meals enable us to fast properly and healthily. The Chofetz Chaim adds that if we eat and drink on Erev Yom Kippur, Hashem in His kindness considers it as if we fasted for two days, Erev Yom Kippur, and Yom Kippur itself. Our reward for a mitzvah is commensurate with how difficult it was for us to do the mitzvah. Since Hashem considers our eating as if we fasted for two days, the reward for fulfilling the easy mitzvah of eating on Erev Yom Kippur is similar to the reward for fasting for two days! The Rabbeinu Yona explains that eating on Erev Yom Kippur is to express our celebration of Yom Tov, since we don't have an actual Yom Tov meal on Yom Kippur.

The mitzvah to eat applies during the daytime of Erev Yom Kippur (not the night before.)

There is a minhag to have a meal in the morning. However, the main meal, referred to as the "seudah hamafsekes", takes place in the afternoon, after mincha.

At the seudah hamafsekes, one should eat only easily-digestible foods, so as not to feel uncomfortable and overly full. It is best to avoid dairy products at this meal. Chicken is preferred over meat, since it is easier to digest.

Before bentching at the conclusion of the meal, it is best to verbalize that one is not yet ready to accept ("be mekabel") the fast. If you did not verbalize, but had this thought in mind, you may still eat until the start of the fast. Even if you didn't have this in mind at all, you may continue eating after bentching, as long as you are not accustomed to accepting the fast with bentching.

After the seudah hamafsekes, there is a custom to bless children with the traditional Bracha of "שמך אלקים" and "ברוך". There is a special Yehi Ratzon prayer added to the Bracha, the text of which can be found in a machzor. Mothers can and should bentch their children.

VIDUI

There is a Torah commandment of vidui (confession) on Yom Kippur. Women are obligated in this mitzvah as well.

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Vidui is also said on Erev Yom Kippur during mincha. Women should try to say the *vidui* during Mincha. If it is difficult for a woman to say the entire *vidui*, she should try to say at least the paragraph of "אשמנו" (*Ashamnu*- we have sinned).

During *vidui*, you should stand, without the support of a wall or other object. Someone who cannot stand without support is permitted to lean.

CANDLE LIGHTING

Two blessings are recited when lighting candles on Erev Yom Kippur. (See Machzor for full text)

- להדליק נר של יום הכיפורים.
- שהחיינו.

RESTRICTIONS

Yom Kippur is the only Torah-commanded fast, and must be strictly observed by anyone above Bar or Bas Mitzvah. If someone has a serious health problem, they should speak to a Rav before Yom Kippur to discuss their specific health concerns.

Leather shoes may not be worn on Yom Kippur. Since one accepts Yom Tov immediately upon lighting candles, leather shoes should be removed prior to lighting.

One may not wash the hands or any other part of the body on Yom Kippur. Washing just the hands until the knuckle is allowed for a permitted reason only. Situations permitting one to wash until the knuckle include washing for Negel Vaaser, washing soiled hands, or washing after using the bathroom.

MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

If a woman has young children at home and is unable to go to Shul, she should know that her primary Mitzvah is to care for her family. However, if she does have the chance to daven, even for a short while, she should try to take advantage of the special opportunity to daven on Yom Kippur.

Chazal tell us that even a small prayer with *kavana* (intent) is special to Hashem.

YIZKOR

Yizkor is said on Yom Kippur between Shacharis and Mussaf . It may be said at home.

A Yartzeit candle should be lit on Erev Yom Tov by anyone in the household who will be saying Yizkor.

One should pledge Tzedakah as a zechus for the neshama (soul) of the departed family member. In the next world, a neshama is also granted forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

HAVDALAH

Ideally, the fast should not be broken until after havdalah is made. Someone who is waiting for others to make havdalah and finds the wait difficult can say "Baruch Hamavdil" and then drink only water until after havdalah.

Havdalah on Yom Kippur is made without besamim.