



5 ways to pray on Yom Kippur

Jewish traditions and Christian life

The Jewish Scriptures (or what we Christians call the 'Old Testament') are a rich source of prayer. Jesus' life was shaped by these Scriptures. On Yom Kippur, take some verses from the readings of this Jewish festival (below) and include them in your prayer time.

1. Leviticus.

"For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord" (16:30). See also 16:1-34; 18:1-30.

2. Numbers.

"You shall offer a burnt offering to the Lord..." (29:8). In 29:7-11 we read of penitential rituals of our ancestors-in-faith. Talk with the Lord about your penitential rituals.

3. Isaiah.

"The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong;

and you shall be like a watered garden" (58:11). See also 57:14—58:14

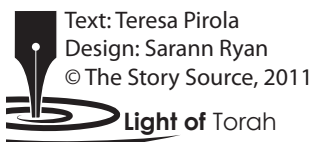
4. Jonah.

"I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried" (2:2). Yom Kippur includes the story of Jonah's tumultuous relationship with God.

5. Micah.

"You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old" (7:19-20).

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Why reflect on Torah?

"If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry, and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday."

(Isaiah 58:9-10.)

From a reading on Yom Kippur.)

This week, the Jewish people celebrate Yom Kippur, ('Day of Atonement'). We depart slightly from our usual Torah-reading format to focus on the meaning of this festival and how it reveals the God of mercy and compassion.

Sometimes we Christians act as if the teaching about God's compassion started with Jesus! But Jesus himself was drawing on a teaching handed down through his people, the Jewish people. God's loving mercy is powerfully embedded in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is a teaching that some Jews in Jesus' day overlooked (just like we Catholics lose sight of core teachings at times) yet nonetheless beautifully enshrined in Jewish tradition; a teaching that Jesus drew out, highlighted and embodied in a powerful way. Join us as we explore Yom Kippur.

Issue #54
8 Oct 2011

A special issue for
Yom Kippur



Yom Kippur 'Day of Atonement'

Yom Kippur is the holiest and most solemn of all the holy days of the Jewish liturgical calendar. It is the day when the Jewish people cast themselves upon God's mercy and ask forgiveness for their transgressions. Yom Kippur is the climax of a forty day period of introspection and examining one's conscience. As Yom Kippur approaches, this period intensifies in 'Ten Days of Awe/Repentance' during which Jews confess their sins and seek forgiveness of one another. At the heart of this festival is a confidence in God's mercy and a keen awareness of the communal implications of our choices for good and evil.

Temple times

Yom Kippur is described in Leviticus as a day of atonement. No one must work; self-denial is to be practiced. In ancient times, when Jewish liturgical life revolved around the Temple, Yom Kippur involved elaborate cultic rituals for the atonement of the people. Central to the ritual for expiating Israel's sins was the act of taking a goat, symbolically burdening it with the sins of the community, and sending it away into the wilderness. Later, in Christian times, Jesus' sacrifice for sinful humanity would be compared to this 'scapegoat.'

Today

Yom Kippur continues to be celebrated by the Jewish people as a day of atonement, principally by gathering at their local synagogue for a day of prayer. A striking aspect of the Yom Kippur liturgy is the calling out of the Thirteen Attributes of God during the penitential prayers:

"The Lord! The Lord! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin" (Ex.34:6-7; JPS).

This and other beautiful prayers, chants and readings give voice to God's steadfast love. People wear white, an expression of confidence in God's forgiveness. Yom Kippur is a day of fasting. Abstinence from the activities of work, bathing, sexual relations, anointing the body with oil, and wearing leather shoes are all part of Yom Kippur observance in Orthodox Judaism.

Teshuva

Teshuva ('repentance') and reconciliation are hallmarks of God's people. Central to the festival of Yom Kippur is a sensitivity to the communal dimension of sin, an awareness that also shapes our Catholic understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation. There is no 'private' sin in the sense that our lives are interwoven as members of a human family. Just as we can hurt each other, so too can we heal one another and our world. In fact, the Mishnah teaches:

"For transgressions that are between man and God, Yom Kippur effects atonement; for transgressions between a man and his fellow man, Yom Kippur only effects atonement if he has appeased his fellow..." [Yoma 8:9]

Can we also hear in this echoes of the Gospel?

"...leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt.5:24).

Taking it to heart

- In what ways does Yom Kippur resonate with your Catholic beliefs, rituals and customs (e.g., penitential prayer, Lenten practices, sacrament of reconciliation, etc)?
- What penitential practices are part of your home life; i.e., how do you say 'sorry' to spouse, family, friends, neighbors?
- In what ways are our penitential practices in the church and in society effective and helpful? In what ways do they need reshaping?



Faith & Life

In Jewish custom, Yom Kippur is one of a number of occasions during the year when a Yahrzeit* (Memorial) Candle is lit to remember loved ones who have died. According to custom, the candle is lit as Yom Kippur begins at sundown and it burns for 24 hours. During this time of introspection, the flame of the Yahrzeit Candle is a reminder of the precious fragility of life, life that must be embraced and cherished at all times.

* *Yahrzeit* is Yiddish for: "a year's time"

Sources: Steinberg, *Celebrating the Jewish Year* (Philadelphia, 2007); Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays* (NY, 1985); www.etz-hayim.com/festivals.
Scripture: *NRSV*.