

Yom Kippur - Atoning For Sins

By Dvora Waysman

(WZPS) — Yom Kippur is observed on the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Tishri, when each individual's fate for the coming year is allegorically 'sealed' in the 'Book of Life.'

Only sins between man and God can be atoned for on Yom Kippur, and at the end of the day worshippers at the synagogue can only hope that they have been successful in overcoming their faults and reaching God with their prayers.

"For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to

cleanse you; from all your sins shall ye be clean before the Lord." (Lev. 16:30)

Thus was instituted Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement - the one Jewish festival, aside from Rosh Hashana, that does not relate to any historical event or agricultural concept. Most other Jewish holidays have some kind of national significance that even secular Jews can relate to. Yom Kippur, however, relates only to man's relationship with God and his fellow man, and involves asking forgiveness from God. The days proceeding the Day of Atonement are for man to make restitution and ask pardon from those he may have wronged during the year.

The Nature of Sin

In Hebrew there are about 20 different words denoting "sin," each with a different nuance. The usual Rabbinic term is "averah" from the root "avar" - to pass over, and interpreted as a rejection of God's will. Jews believe sin is caused by the evil inclination (yetzer ha-ra), a force which drives one to gratify instincts regardless of the cost. God said (Kid. 30b): "My children! I created the evil inclination, but I created Torah as its antidote: if you occupy yourself with the Torah you will not be delivered into its hand." Rabbi Ishmael taught: "My son, if this repulsive wretch (yetzer ha-ra) attacks you, lead him to the house of learning: if he is stone, he will dissolve; if iron, he will shiver into fragments." (Kid. 30b).

Freedom of choice is a basic Jewish doctrine - from the first story in Genesis where Adam and Eve are given the option to accept or reject God's commandment. The great medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides wrote: "Every man has the possibility of becoming as righteous as Moses our teacher, or as wicked as Jeroboam; wise or stupid; kind or cruel; miserly or generous..." (Yad, Teshuva 5). This contradicts a popular Yiddish expression that things are "beshert" or predestined. Judaism teaches us that we can make the choices, and go towards righteousness or to sin and its consequences.

Fasting and Prayer

We recite a prayer during the High Holydays, however, which seems to contradict this: "On the New Year it is written down and on the Day of Atonement it is sealed...who shall live and who

shall die, who at the measure of man's days and who before it..." Some rabbis claim this is meditation rather than prayer, designed to help a Jew understand the important conclusion: "But penitence, prayer and charity avert the severe decree." Even if our lives warrant punishment, we can still choose to repent - even up to our last hour on earth. This is a wonderful and optimistic aspect of Judaism.

This is a special dimension to the solemnity of Yom Kippur in Israel, especially in Jerusalem. No cars are seen on the streets for the entire 24 hours - even the most secular Jew would not publicly profane this holy day. As darkness descends and the long day of fasting and prayer draws to a close, the synagogues are crowded and thousands more walk to the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site, to hear the final blast of the shofar - the ram's horn. As the piercing blast rends the night, we in Israel are mindful of Isaiah addressing the exiles: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great horn shall be blown; and they shall come that were lost in the land of Assyria." (Isaiah 27:13).

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Happy Birthday, Juliet



Opening nights are often filled with surprises, and Juliet Prowse's was no exception at the Desert Inn. After her first dance number, her two dancers, Jim Hogan (left) and David Chavez (not shown), wheeled out a birthday cake, and the entire audience joined in for a chorus of "Happy Birthday." Although the cake had a question mark on it for a candle, Prowse revealed that this was her 50th birthday and that this was also her first surprise party. Prowse is opening for Tony Orlando in the Desert Inn's Crystal Room. For show reservations, call 733-4566.

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