

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar. It means Day of Atonement and Jewish people fast for 25 hours. It's a day to reflect on the past year and ask God's forgiveness for any sins.

During the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur everyone gets a chance to put things right with other people before asking God's forgiveness. This period is called The Days of Repentance or Days of Awe.

It's a time when Jews can make up for the wrongs of the past year and make a firm commitment to not do the same bad thing or things again.

Yom Kippur begins at sunset. Before this solemn occasion, some Orthodox Jewish people visit a mikveh (ritual bath) to prepare themselves to become more spiritual.

Everyone who is feasting eats a large meal before the fast begins. Children under thirteen and people who are ill or pregnant do not have to fast.

The special day of Yom Kippur is marked by Jewish people in a number of ways:

- Many wear white as a symbol of purity
- No food or drink is consumed for 25 hours
- No make-up or perfume is worn
- No sex
- No bathing
- No leather shoes

It is the only day in the year that there are five services in the synagogue, starting with Maariv (the evening service) at the beginning of the fast. This service starts with the Kol Nidre (literally 'all the vows') prayer. This prayer asks God to release the people from any vows they made and not kept during the past year.

The day is spent in continuous prayer for forgiveness. Yom Kippur ends with Neilah (literally 'the closing' of the gates of heaven) service. After a day spent fasting and praying, a final plea is made to God for forgiveness. The single sound of the shofar marks the end of the holy day.