A Note to Parents

Yom Kippur is an opportunity to take responsibility for our actions and our words—a time when we are reminded of the importance of "saying what we mean and meaning what we say."

Yom Kippur is an opportunity for change. It reminds us to look at our past and challenges us to recognize when we have hurt another human being—through either our actions or words. This guide is a resource for you to explore the values and rituals associated with this often-misunderstood holiday. Yom Kippur is more than attending services—it is all about saying we’re sorry and actually DOING something about it. When things are difficult with a friend or a family member, it can be tempting to rush into saying we’re sorry so we can make everything better right away and move on. But if we don’t take the time to stop and decide what kind of people we want to be FIRST—then how can we figure out what we are sorry for?

Yom Kippur is a three-step process.

Step one: Examine personal values. What do I believe in? What is important to me? What kind of person do I want to be? What kinds of actions does that kind of person do?

Step two: Self-assessment. Did I live up to my goals? In what ways did I behave like the person I want to be? In what ways did I not? Is there anything I can do next year to make it easier to be the person I want to be? Are there people I have hurt, including myself, to whom I need to apologize?

Step three: Work of repair. Now that I’ve figured out who I want to be and where I have fallen short, it is time to go talk to all the people I care about in my life and share my truth with them. Maybe I need to apologize and tell them how next time I will handle the situation differently. Maybe, instead of apologizing, I actually need to tell them how they hurt me.

Remember, like all Jewish holidays, there is no one correct way to celebrate Yom Kippur! This Resource Guide is designed to help you and your family create the most meaningful Yom Kippur for YOU. Our hope is that this guide provides you and your family materials, resources, and activities to use in your exploration of
this holiday. Each family and every person are different, so feel free to modify the activities to best suit the ages of those participating.

There are NO RULES—just opportunities for growth, reflection, and, of course, fun!

Shana Tova, Happy New Year!

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi
Iah Pillsbury, Rabbinic Intern
FAQs about Yom Kippur

What is the point of Yom Kippur?

Yom Kippur is a process, not just one day, through which we examine ourselves and repair our relationships to ourselves, the people we love, and the larger communities we are a part of. Yom Kippur is all about taking responsibilities for our actions—even those that have hurt others. It is a time when we think about how we’ve lived our lives in the past year, decide how we would like to live our lives in the coming year, and then do the work of bridging the difference.

Where does the holiday Yom Kippur come from?

Twice, Leviticus (a book in the Bible) describes a holiday called Yom HaKippurim, the Day of Atonements. One time it is mentioned (Leviticus 23:27), the holiday takes place on the first day of the seventh month; another time (Leviticus 16:29), it takes place ten days later, on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei. Nowadays, the first day of Tishrei is when we celebrate Rosh Hashanah, not Yom Kippur. This just shows us that Jewish holidays have always been evolving, even in biblical times!

How do you celebrate Yom Kippur?

Like every Jewish holiday, there is no one right way to celebrate Yom Kippur! Many Jews fast (they don’t eat or drink) starting at sunset of Erev Yom Kippur (the evening before the holiday morning) and many choose to attend services at a synagogue. In Israel, secular Jewish kids spend Yom Kippur fasting and bike riding on the traffic-less street. Whether or not you choose to attend services or fast, Yom Kippur is an opportunity to reflect on your life and your values as well as apologize to people you may have harmed in the past year. Click here http://bit.ly/OJC-HH for help finding the most meaningful way to celebrate Yom Kippur for you and your family!

Why do some people fast on Yom Kippur?

In the description of Yom HaKippurim in Leviticus 23:27, the holiday is described as a day when we afflict our souls. The rabbis of the Mishna added to the restrictions listed in Leviticus, claiming it was the holiest day of the year; the rabbinic discussion begins with trying to define the phrase “afflict your soul,” which can be understood as afflicting your throat = fasting; but the other

1 Tishrei is the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. The Jewish calendar works differently than the secular calendar because it is a combination of lunar and solar calendars, whereas the secular calendar (January, February, March, etc.) is entirely a solar calendar. Check out the Rosh Hashanah Resource Guide for more info!


3 The Mishna is a Jewish legal text that was codified around 200 CE. Most Western dates are divided between BC (before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, or after Christ). Jewish historians tend to use BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) to designate the same periods of time.
FAQ’s (cont.)

prohibitions all derive from the understanding of afflicting oneself.

Have people always been celebrating Yom Kippur this way?
No! Like all our Jewish holidays, Yom Kippur has evolved and changed over the centuries. The rabbis of the Mishna wanted to make the holiday extra special, so they added more prohibitions (things you can’t do). As such it was forbidden to eat or drink, wear leather shoes, bathe, use lotion or perfume, or have sexual relations (Yoma 8:1). While it is technically against Jewish law to get dressed up and wear makeup, most Jews who attend services in a synagogue on Yom Kippur will get more dressed up than they usually do for services. In modern times, we often show our respect for an event or idea by getting dressed up. The rabbis felt empowered to change the ritual observance of the holiday so it reflected the values of their times; now is our chance to continue their legacy of change, growth, and renewal.

When is Yom Kippur?
It falls on the tenth day of the Jewish month of Tishrei (which usually falls in September or October), ten days after Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year). For more information about the Jewish calendar and how it works, check out the Rosh Hashanah Resource Guide here http://bit.ly/OJC-RH-Guide

What can I expect from a traditional Yom Kippur Service?
Yom Kippur services tend to be the most solemn and performance-oriented services of the year. The evening service, often called Kol Nidre, is generally the shortest service, running anywhere from an hour to two hours. Since many adults choose to fast for Yom Kippur, congregations often design their services on Yom Kippur Day to follow one after the other—so there is always something to do or learn and a distraction from being hungry and doing work. It is common for congregations to require nonmembers to purchase tickets for services on Yom Kippur, so make sure and call ahead!

But just like the rabbis of old recreated Yom Kippur to make it more meaningful for them, so too have we done that at Beth Adam. So if you are in Cincinnati, we would love to see you at Congregation Beth Adam for services, or online at ourjewishcommunity.org—no tickets required!!

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4 Yoma is a section/tractate of the Mishna.
5 Many congregations also hold a very short service at the very end of Yom Kippur day called Neilah, which means “locking.” Legend has it that on Yom Kippur, the Gates of Heaven are open, but they close when the last service concludes.
Important Yom Kippur Terms and Themes

**Yom:** Hebrew for "day"

**Kippur:** Hebrew for "atonement"; thus, Yom Kippur means "Day of Atonement"

**Atonement:** Atonement is a fancy word for both saying you are sorry and taking responsibility for what you did wrong. When you atone for something, you make up for what you did by naming what you did wrong, asking for forgiveness, and repairing harm when possible.

**Identity:** For many Jews, Yom Kippur is the only time they set foot in a synagogue. Because of this, it can serve as an important reaffirmation of Jewish identity. It is important to remember, however, that how often you go to synagogue does not make you any more or less Jewish. You can still be Jewish and go to work or school on Yom Kippur—it's all about finding the way that works best for you!

**Forgiveness:** There are many kinds of forgiveness as well as many ways to forgive. Forgiveness could mean that you are no longer upset by what someone has done to you, OR it could also mean I am still upset by what you did, but now I understand why you did it. Forgiveness can also mean that I want to move forward in the relationship. Perhaps I am still upset, but I no longer want that to dominate or disrupt our relationship. It is possible to forgive someone without forgetting or accepting the behavior. Forgiving someone does NOT have to mean you absolve that person of his or her wrongdoing!

**Growth:** Yom Kippur is all about personal growth. On Yom Kippur we are reminded that no one is EVER perfect, but no matter; we have a responsibility to continue to grow and change and become more and more of the people we really are and really want to be.

**Shofar:** A ram’s horn that has been turned into a horn and is blown on Yom Kippur to wake us up and remind us to actively work on being the people we want to be.

**Kol Nidre:** Kol Nidre is the name of a traditional prayer that often opens the Yom Kippur evening service. Because of the prayer’s popularity, the term Kol Nidre has come to be used to name the entire Erev Yom Kippur (Yom Kippur evening) service (the very first service of the holiday). The prayer Kol Nidre has a powerful melody (to listen to Dr. Terri Barr chant the Kol Nidre, please click on this link) and talks about how important it is to make promises, but sometimes, despite our best intentions, we fall short, and that is okay too. There was even a time when rabbis wanted to remove this from the service because they worried that it made Jews look bad.
Fasting: Many Jews choose not to eat or drink during Yom Kippur in order to focus on self-reflection and emphasize that the day is set aside from everyday activity and thoughts. While fasting is designed to remind the person of how lucky they are the rest of the time, the Yom Kippur fast is not supposed to be overly burdensome and it is in fact against Jewish Law (halacha) to fast if you are pregnant, a child, or someone whose health will suffer because of the fast. Unfortunately, there are those who judge others based upon whether they fast or not. Whether one fasts or not is a personal choice. One should always do rituals that affirm one's understanding of Judaism and Jewish ritual.

Yahrzeit: A Yiddish term for the anniversary of a person’s death. Many Jews honor the yartzeit of their loved ones by lighting special candles, gathering with loved ones, and reciting special readings or prayers in the synagogue.

Yizkor: The act of remembrance; many congregations hold Yizkor, or memorial, services on Yom Kippur afternoon. Yizkor generally refers to a service where multiple people, or groups of people, are remembered, rather than just one person.
Finding the Right Yom Kippur Service/Way to Celebrate

While many Jews choose to go to religious services to celebrate Yom Kippur, others do not. For many, this is the only day of the year when they will set foot in a religious service. If this is you, or you are looking for new ways to make the holiday more meaningful, here are some things to think about when determining the best way for your family to celebrate.

- Is Yom Kippur important to you? Why or why not?
- If you go to services only on Yom Kippur, why? And how do you decide which service to go to?
- What does Yom Kippur mean to you? (What is the point of the holiday?)
- With whom do I want to spend Yom Kippur? (Frequently, folks get together to conclude Yom Kippur and break the fast (if they are fasting) with friends and family. Eating together speaks to community and connections.)
- How can I give/receive forgiveness? How can I do something to be better in the coming year?
- Whether or not you fast—what does fasting mean to you?
- If I’m fasting—what might I do with the food I otherwise would have eaten?
- If I’m not fasting—what are ways in which I might deprive myself of something meaningful to feel that “pang of hunger” throughout the day? (Think phone, video games, etc.)
Things to Consider from an Interfaith Perspective

There are many holidays that we can celebrate throughout the course of the Jewish, Christian, and even secular year—holidays such as Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, and New Year’s. Celebrating holidays both affirms and helps to shape identity. Deciding which holidays to celebrate can, for some, be a challenging experience. This is because the decisions we make about how we celebrate holidays aren’t just about identity—they are also about family connections. Given this approach, which holidays are you and your family going to celebrate in the coming months? How did you determine this? Were there any stumbling blocks in deciding on the holidays?

Yom Kippur focuses lots of attention on the notion of atonement. Forgiveness and atonement might seem like universal concepts, but actually they are not understood by all religions in the same manner. In Judaism, even in the most traditional circles, while “sins” between a person and God can be forgiven on Yom Kippur, transgressions between people are not. Thus, atonement moves beyond services and prayer—it is about personal responsibility and action. What are you going to do with the yucky feelings of guilt and wrongdoing? How are you going to move forward in the healthiest and most productive way possible? You and your partner may want to explore how you understand certain religious terms to see if you have a common understanding. This becomes important as you teach children about the values you want them to hold and act on.
Discussion Questions
(You're encouraged to modify these questions to the ages and backgrounds of the individuals participating this activity.)

1. Yom Kippur requires us both to forgive those who have hurt us AND to apologize to those we have hurt. Which is easier for you, apologizing or forgiving? Why? Has this always been true for you?

2. On Yom Kippur we tend to focus on the ways we have hurt other people in our community, but we also have a large capacity to hurt ourselves. What ways have you hurt yourself in the past year? What do you need to do to be able to forgive yourself and make better choices next year?

3. What does forgiveness look like to you? How do you know when you have been truly forgiven? How do you know when you have forgiven someone else?

4. During Yom Kippur and the lead-up to the holiday, many people go around to their friends and family members to repair their relationships. Not all relationships, however, should be repaired. What relationships are you choosing to walk away from this Yom Kippur? Into which relationships are you willing to put the work? Why?

5. Would you say that you are friends with yourself? Why or why not? Would you like to be? If so, what do you need to do to make that possible?

6. If there is no one to forgive for an action you’ve taken and are ashamed of (i.e., the person you “hurt” has died, or you were “cruel” to a person you didn’t know), what do you do? How do we move beyond our personal failings when there is no one to forgive us? What do we have to do so that we can forgive ourselves?

7. How can you enlarge your life? Where do you want to have an impact in the coming year?

8. Are you content with your life as it is? What happens when material, external success is insufficient to feel satisfaction or joy? What can you do to find more satisfaction in your life? Do you need to make concrete changes in your life? If so, what are they?

9. The special section in the Torah the Sages prescribed for Yom Kippur involves a scapegoat ritual. Who are the scapegoats in the 21st century?
Discussion-Generating Activities

Sometimes it can feel uncomfortable to start big conversations with family and friends.
Try using these activities to help you get started.

1. **Tell a story in pictures.** Think of something that happened in the last few days and then draw it in pictures without using any words. After you are done, have your audience guess what the story was about. Did they get it right? What parts were clear to them and which were not? You can also try drawing a famous story or fairy tale that everyone knows and see if they can guess what story it is. Why did you choose to tell the story you chose? Why did you choose to emphasize the parts you emphasized and skip over the parts you skipped over? What does that tell you about what was the most important part of the story? How can you apply this learning to asking for forgiveness and forgiving others?

2. **Make a list.** Make a list of ten things you did in the last year that make you feel proud of yourself and five things you wish you had done differently in the past year. Trade your list with another member of your family and find out what they are working on and why. Are your lists similar? Different? Are you surprised by anything that is on their list?

3. **Coat of arms.** Which values are most important to you? Which values deserve to be on your personal coat of arms? Now create your coat of arms by showing your values in words and/or pictures. Once you are done, explain your coat of arms to a family member or friend. Do you share the same values? Which were different? Why did you pick the X value that your friend or parent did not?

4. **Goals.** Make a list of goals for the year. Then compare them with a family member or a friend. Were your goals similar to each other? Is there anything you can do to help your friend meet his or her goals? Is there anything YOU need to make it easier for YOU to meet your goals?
Personal-Responsibility Activities

1. Getting Centered: Before we can communicate well with others, we have to first learn how to speak and to listen to ourselves. Find a quiet, comfortable place where you can sit or stand. Take a few deep breaths and feel your body, paying attention to what position your body just fell into. Now, when you are ready, slowly roll your shoulders back so your chest is puffed out and your heart is open to the world, letting in whatever thoughts come to you.

   • Something to think about: Do you ever say or do things you regret when you are tired, hungry, or upset? HALT—people make their worst decisions when they are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. Sometimes when we rush from one activity to the next and don’t take the time to breathe and reset, it becomes much more difficult to behave like the people we know we can be, and, in fact, really are. This is why centering yourself with something like the above activity can be really helpful.

2. Tree Pose: There are many ways to stop and decide what is most important to us, using our minds, bodies, and hearts. Tree pose is a great way to help bring all three together.

   • Directions: Begin standing tall with your feet hip distance apart and your arms at your sides. Make sure you are standing on both of your feet evenly. On your next exhale, shift all of your weight to your left foot and rest the sole of your right foot on the inner left ankle. Then bring your hands together, palms facing each other in the center of your chest. You can either stay in this position or, if you are feeling adventurous, bring the sole of the right foot higher up to your left inner thigh. Be careful to keep the sole of your foot higher or lower than your knee. After you are done balancing on one side, switch it up and try tree pose on the other side!

   • Something to think about: Balance is really important, but it can also be very difficult to find. When we do things even a little bit differently (like standing on one leg), everything else feels different too.
3. **Archer Pose**: It’s important to bring focus to what is important in each of our lives. Archer pose allows us to feel focus playfully in our bodies.

- **Directions**: Begin standing tall with your arms at your sides. Take a breath and rock slightly front to back, feeling for your center. Come to standing on both of your feet evenly. On your next exhale, step your right foot back 2 to 3 feet. Then turn the toes of your back foot outward to the right. If your back foot were the hand of a clock, the toes would point toward the 3 o’clock position. Bend your front knee slightly, keeping the knee over the left ankle. Extend your left arm forward and your right arm backward. Bend your right arm as if you were shooting a bow and arrow. Curl your fingers on both hands and stretch the thumbs upward. Allow your gaze to settle on the forward thumb. After you “shoot your arrow” on one side, try archer pose on the other side!

- **Something to think about**: Focus is very important, but it can often be difficult to hold. When we bring playfulness to our hearts and minds, we often find more stamina.

4. **Taking Personal Responsibility**: Becoming a mensch⁶ (a good person) and continuing to BE a mensch is a lifelong process; it isn’t something you do just once and then POOF → you’re a good person, a mensch! Being a good person, or a mensch, means making lots of consistent choices that reflect your values. The first step to becoming a mensch is figuring out what is most important to you. What are the values you want to live your life by? What kind of values do you think are most important? Then, once you have figured out what is important to you, the next step is finding opportunities to put them into action!

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⁶ Mensch is technically a masculine Yiddish term with no female equivalent. Here we are using it the way it has come to be used in Jewish-English, without gender-association.
5. **Values Superhero:** What is the most important value EVER?? Remember, a value is not a rule. It is an overriding principle. A value is something that is important to us that we live our lives by, like kindness, sharing, or honesty, to name just a few. After you have decided on THE MOST important value to YOU, create a superhero that embodies that value and draw a comic strip showing the superhero’s adventures.

- **Something to think about:** We all have many things that are important to us, and yet we can only have ONE top priority at a time. Sometimes when we focus on one value or idea, our behavior in that area improves, but we also lose sight of the larger picture and that there are many things that are important to us.

6. **Love Letter:** Write a love letter to yourself, as if you are the MOST amazing person you have EVER encountered (because, guess what? YOU TOTALLY ARE!!!). You are an amazing, wonderful, unique, and beautiful person, but sometimes it can be hard to remember that. Often, we are our own worst critics. But if we don’t love and respect ourselves, it makes it much more difficult to let other people love and respect us. Here is an opportunity to see yourself through the eyes of someone who loves and respects you!

- **Something to think about:** How we feel about ourselves can change a lot depending on our emotions, our behavior, and how the people around us treat us. After you write your love letter, put it somewhere safe where you can reread it when you are having a bad day. In six months or a year from now, if you reread the letter, do you think you will have more awesome things to add to it? Do you think there will be different things you love about yourself in the future?
7. Apology Letter: Sometimes we get so focused on all the ways we have hurt other people that we forget about the ways we have hurt ourselves. Yom Kippur is an opportunity not only to repair and renew the relationships you have with other people you love, but ALSO, and perhaps most importantly, with yourself! Take some time to write down in words or pictures all of the things you would like to say sorry to yourself for. Perhaps you were mean to yourself when you made a mistake or have told yourself that you aren’t good enough or maybe you have been lying to yourself about something important. Whatever it is, take the time to think through your year and make amends to yourself.

• Something to think about: If you were apologizing to someone else, rather than to yourself, what would you say? Are there any actions that would go with the words of the apology? Now think about what it is you are apologizing to yourself for. Would you ever talk to another person that way? Would you ever think it was okay to treat another person the way you treat yourself sometimes? If the answer is no, what are some things you could do in the future to help remember that you matter just as much as everyone else does?
Activities around Communication

It can be easy to get our feelings hurt, or hurt someone else’s feelings when we get careless with our words. Sometimes we mean to hurt each other with our words, and sometimes it is a TOTAL accident, but it still hurts the person we care about, regardless of whether we meant to or not. Sometimes we don’t even realize how vague we are with our word! Here are some fun ways to practice saying what we mean, and meaning what we say!

1. PB and J: Get a parent or a friend together with you in the kitchen, then, very slowly, explain to that person how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, step by step. If you enjoy writing, you could take a note card and write down the steps in order. Once you give each direction to your parent or friend, it’s his or her job to follow it AS LITERALLY as possible!
   - Something to think about: How often do you fill in the gaps and make assumptions about what people mean when they are talking? How often do you assume everyone understands what you are saying, even when they might not?

2. Listening: When we talk about communication, it is easy to only think about our own words, but listening is also super important. When we listen to our friends or people we love, we show them we respect them, that we care about what they have to say, and that we want their ideas and words to impact our lives.
   - Story telling with a team of 2: Spend one minute telling a story to a parent or friend. Then have your listener repeat the story back to you as closely as he or she can. What was different about the version of your story the listener told? What was the most important thing about each story? Now change roles and repeat the exercise.
   - Storytelling with a team of 3: The storyteller tells listener 1 while listener 2 leaves the room, then listener 1 tells listener 2 without the storyteller in the room, and then listener 2 has to repeat the story back to the original storyteller. It adds more changes to a story for an older group.
   - Something to think about: How we tell a story changes what the listener thinks is the most important part. Could you retell the same story but emphasize different parts? Would that change the story? Why or why not?
3. **Popcorn Listening:** Grab a parent or friend and pick a word that both of you use a lot when you tell stories. Now have one partner tell a story, trying not to use the word you both decided on. Every time the partner messes up and uses the word, spring out of your seat like a piece of popcorn.

- **Something to think about:** Much of the time when we are mean or hurtful with our words, we don’t even realize what we are saying. An offhand remark can be just as painful as a deliberate insult. Are there any words or phrases you use that could be heard as hurtful and best avoided in the future?

4. **Nonverbal Communication:** While the words we use, and how we listen to other people’s words, is SUPER important, 97 percent of communication is nonverbal, which means it is our bodies, faces, and tone of voice that tell stories even more than our words do. It’s not just what you say, it’s how you say it! Try saying the same sentence to your friend five different ways to experiment with how it works!

5. **Tell a Story in Silence (mime a story):** Think of something that happened in the last few days and then act it out without using any words. After you are done, have your audience guess what the story was about. Did they get it right? What parts were clear to them and which were not? You can also try acting out a famous story or fairy tale that everyone knows and see if they can guess what story it is. A second option is a game of telephone, but where you mix/alternate speaking a phrase, drawing a phrase, and acting it out (person 1 mimes to person 2, person 2 tells person 3, person 3 mimes to person 4, and so on).
Coloring Book Pages
Color Me
Games: Word Search and Maze

Yom Kippur Word Search

Forgiveness  Fasting  Sorry
Yahrzeit  Atonement  Kol Nidre
Growth  Yizkor  Yom Kippur
Identity  Shofar  Responsibility

(Answer Key on Page 25)
Yom Kippur Word Search

Responsibility
Yom Kippur
Kol Nidre
Sorry

Shofar
Yizkor
Atonement
Fasting

Identity
Growth
Yahrzeit
Forgiveness

Answer Key
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