# EVE OF YOM KIPPUR: What do we have to do today?

Today, Sunday September 20, a little before sunset, the holiest day of the Jewish year begins.

This is what we do on the eve of Yom Kippur.

## ASKING FORGIVENESS

The offenses we have committed against another person are NOT forgiven on Yom Kippur unless we first obtain forgiveness from the person we have hurt or offended. So we must go and see (or at least call, email, or send a message to) anyone we have harmed, offended, or hurt, whether we meant to or not, and ask for forgiveness. This includes friends, colleagues, husband and wife, and other family members. We must pay special attention to asking our parents for forgiveness.

## FORGIVING

It is a beautiful gesture and a great merit to forgive, unilaterally and sincerely, all those friends and family members who have hurt or offended us, clearing out the negative feelings that may be breeding resentment in our hearts. Remember what the Sages explained: God judges us and forgives us the same way we judge and forgive others. We, parents, should forgive our children in our hearts, so that they do not feel guilty of transgressing the Fifth Commandment.

## EATING

On the eve of Yom Kippur we should eat and drink more than usual. Eating abundantly will give us the energy and the strength to fast. According to some rabbis, such as Menorat haMaor, the extra food on the eve of Yom Kippur makes up for

the festive meals (Yom Tob) that we do not have on Yom Kippur, since Yom Kippur is, in essence, a day of celebration. Before the fast begins we have the se'udat hamafseqet, the last meal before fasting.

We must finish eating about 15 to 20 minutes before sunset. In New York the sun sets today at 6:55 pm. See the times for your own city here.

## TEFILA

We should review our Tefilot and try to understand what we are going to say in our prayers, and especially in the Viduy, the confession prayer. It is advisable to have in mind the wrong actions and the bad habits we have fallen into, so that we can admit them, articulate them, and, God willing, change them.

## TSEDAQA and KAPPAROT

It is a very good custom to give extra charity on the eve of Yom Kippur. Practicing tsedaqa is one of the best ways to show our renewed commitment to goodness and righteousness. It is also highly recommended to do the Kapparot with Tsedaqa.

## MIKVE

In many communities it is customary for men to immerse in the Mikve (ritual bath) on the eve of Yom Kippur. This reminds us of the Kohen Gadol, who purified himself in the Mikve before performing his Sacred Service ('abodat Yom haKippurim).

## MINCHA GEDOLA

Today it is customary to pray Mincha early. In some communities the custom is to pray today's Mincha with Talit and Tefilin. During the Amida we recite the Viduy. Then we go home and prepare for the last meal before the fast.

## ADDING TIME

We must abstain from the five prohibitions of Kippur, and from doing any work prohibited on Yom Kippur just as we do on Shabbat (melakha), approximately 15 to 20 minutes before sunset, fulfilling the Mitsva of adding time on the eve of Yom Kippur. For the same reason, we also delay the end of Yom Kippur until a little after nightfall.

## LIGHTING THE CANDLES

There are different customs regarding the obligation to light candles on the eve of Yom Kippur, since the main reason for lighting candles before Shabbat and Yom Tob is to have light for the meal, which obviously does not happen on Yom Kippur. The opinion of Rabbi Obadia Yosef (Sephardic) and Rabbi Melamed (Ashkenazic) is that women should light the candles and say the berakha the way they do before Shabbat begins, about 15 to 20 minutes before sunset.

The berakha is: *…asher qiddeshanu bemitsvotav vetsivanu lehadliq ner shel Yom haKippurim*.

As for the berakha Shehecheyanu, it is best that women, like men, listen to the blessing recited at Kol Nidre. If that is not possible, in many Sephardic communities the custom is for the woman to say Shehecheyanu herself. But she should know that by saying this blessing she is accepting Yom Kippur, and from that moment she may not eat or drink, do any prohibited work, or wear leather shoes. In some Sephardic communities women light the candles without saying any berakha.

## LEAVING A CANDLE LIT FOR HABDALA

On Monday night, at the end of Yom Kippur, we recite the Habdala, as we do at the end of a Yom Tob, but with two differences.

First, we do not say the blessing of besamim. Why? Because when Shabbat ends we smell an aromatic plant as an expression of consolation for the sadness that the Seventh Day is over. But at the end of Yom Kippur we are not sad. On the contrary: we are happy, because we have been forgiven by the Creator of the world and all our sins have been erased.

Second, we recite the blessing Bore Meore haEsh, even though it is not Saturday night. But this berakha is said only if we have a candle that was lit before Yom Kippur. The Chakhamim instructed us to recite this blessing to point out that during Yom Kippur we could not use the fire of that candle to cook or to light other candles, as we do on Yom Tob. Looking now at this candle that went unused (ner sheshabat), we declare the difference between Yom Kippur and an ordinary day.

So before Yom Kippur begins we leave a special candle burning, a ner neshama, or any long-burning candle. If no candle has been left burning from before, we do not say Bore Meore haEsh at the Habdala.

□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□