



# The Pre Fast Meal

A Guide with Readings and Rituals  
for the Yom Kippur Pre Fast Meal

The sun is setting and Yom Kippur is about to begin. Yom Kippur is translated as “The Day of Atonement” and this title tells you a little about what the next 25 hours will bring. Yom Kippur is a day meant for individual and communal introspection and is an opportunity in the Jewish year for offering forgiveness to yourself and others. There are many ways to set the tone for this kind of day. Fasting is one tool we use. This guide also suggests other rituals that might serve to make the day meaningful as well. Since the holiday is bookended by two meals, you can spend time at these dinner-gatherings evoking the holiday’s mood and themes.

As you sit down to eat this evening’s meal, perhaps before a daylong fast, you can take a few moments to set the tone for the upcoming day. Maybe you have time for a phone call to a loved one, someone from whom you want to ask forgiveness for something that happened last year. Or, perhaps you have a few private regrets that are on your mind. Now is the time to write them down on paper. And if you want, rip that note to shreds. (Or burn it! Or throw it in water!) You and your family and friends can even do this act together before you sit down to eat.

A big meal awaits with your favorite Jewish foods to sneak in before the sun sets. But tonight, the dishes will taste different as you imagine their serving as the energy you will need for the next day’s challenging work on yourself and your relationships.

When you sit down at this pre-holiday meal tonight, you and your family and friends have the opportunity to get ready for the day to come. This guide provides some readings and rituals that can help you feel the spirit of the holiday.

**Whatever tomorrow brings, tonight is still yours for the making.**



## A Selection of Readings

These poetic excerpts are meant to evoke some of Yom Kippur's most important themes. We suggest you read them aloud or to yourself when you are about to sit down to eat.

The waters cannot return in repentance  
The waters cannot return in repentance  
To where would they return?  
To the faucet, the sources, the ground,  
the roots, the cloud, the sea, into my  
mouth?  
The waters cannot return in  
repentance, every place is their seas  
days of old, their waters of old,  
every place a beginning and end, and a  
beginning.

Yehuda Amichai

### Guiding Questions:



How is the symbolism of water used in this poem?

What might the waters teach us about our own capacity for repentance?

### Guiding Questions:



What is the relationship between memory and reflection?

How can we use the past to create the future?

Remorse—is Memory—awake—  
Her Parties all astir—  
A Presence of Departed Acts—  
At window—and at Door—

Its Past--set down before the Soul  
And lighted with a Match—  
Perusal—to facilitate—  
And help Belief to stretch—

Emily Dickinson

Out of nothing I became a being,  
and from a being I shall be  
nothing -- but until then  
I rejoice, a mote in Your world,  
a spark in Your seeing.

Charles Reznikoff

### Guiding Questions:



How might we acknowledge the cycles of life today in particular?  
How do you imagine Yom Kippur's demonstrating the complicated truth of a person's simultaneous significance and insignificance?

Is this the fast I desire: a day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing heads like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth in ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day when the LORD is favorable? No! This is the fast I desire: to unlock the chains of wickedness, and to untie the cords of the yoke! To let the oppressed go free! To break off every yoke! It is to share your bread with the hungry and to take the wretched poor into your home. When you see the naked, to clothe him. And not to hide yourself from your own kin.

(Isaiah 58:5-7, traditionally read in synagogues on Yom Kippur)

**Guiding Questions:** What are some of the injustices in our community and world today that need to be addressed? How can we use Yom Kippur to bring attention to rectifying those injustices?





# Blessings Before the Meal

Yom Kippur is sometimes called in Hebrew “Shabbat Shabbaton,” “Sabbath of Sabbaths,” the idea being that Yom Kippur is the holiest Sabbath of all. We suggest reciting the traditional Shabbat blessings at the start of Yom Kippur’s pre-fast meal in order to welcome the holiday into our homes. We invite you to use these traditional blessings or alternatives, or words of your own, or no words at all.

## Blessing of the Children/Friends

Traditionally, the person saying the blessing places two hands on the heads or shoulders of those receiving the blessing. Holding hands works too.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ

**May God bless you and guard you** (Alternative: My you find blessings and protection from all who love you)

יְאֵר יי פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וְיַחֲנֶנֶךָ

**May God show you favor and be gracious to you** (Alternative: May you find favor and grace in this world)

יִשָּׂא יי פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וְיִשָּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

**May God show you kindness and grant you peace** (Alternative: May you experience kindness and peace.)

## Blessing over the Candles

Traditionally, two candles are lit.

Those reciting the blessing might cover their eyes.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שַׁבָּת

**Blessed are You, God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctified us with the commandment of lighting Shabbat candles.**

Alternative: Blessed be the memory of our ancestors who passed on to us traditions of sanctifying life and time, and of lighting the candles of Shabbat.

## Blessing over the Wine

Traditionally, the wine cup is held and raised during the blessing.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן

**Blessed are You, God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.**

Alternative: Blessed be the world that produces such fruit, and the hands that labored to turn such fruit into wine.

## Blessing over the Bread

Traditionally, a braided, round challah is used, but any bread will do.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

**Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has brought forth bread from the earth.**

Alternative: Blessed be the world that produces such grain, and the hands that labored to turn such grain into bread.



## Some Traditions For You To Try

### Tashlich

Before Yom Kippur begins, it is traditional to throw pieces of bread into a body of water. Each piece of bread represents a regret from the past year. When the bread dissolves in the water, we imagine that our regrets are dissolving too. Before you sit to eat your pre-fast meal, you might gather together and write your regrets on notes of paper. You can then rip the notes and throw them into water (or burn them if you prefer) to symbolize a new start for a new year.

### Removing the Challah

When you finish eating, you can take the bread off your dinner bread plate and put it out of sight. On the empty bread plate, lay some books and cover these with a cloth, as you would cover challah with a cloth. Leave the covered books in the center of the table. This can be a symbol for you that we honor this day not with food and drink, but with words - with study and prayer, with apologies and intentions.

### Standing at the Threshold

It is told of the radical secular Hebrew writer, Yosef Hayim Brenner, that he would walk to synagogue on Yom Kippur with his friend, the Hebrew writer, Shai Agnon, and with the Rabbi, Rav Avraham Yitzkhak HaCohen Kook, but that Brenner himself would not in fact enter the house of worship. Instead, he would stand in the doorway between the street and the prayerful congregation, watching and listening but never crossing into the space of the religious. We might take this as a precedent in our own contemporary secular Jewish lives—we may not feel comfortable in synagogue, but to be a secular Jew is to stand on the threshold between multiple worlds. This then is something we might do as a Yom Kippur ceremony itself: to stand in the doorway as a ritual symbol of our feelings of betwixedness.

### Kol Nidre

If you are not planning to attend Yom Kippur services, you might still want to read the famous poem that opens the Yom Kippur prayers. The “Kol Nidre” poem is surprising: it actually annuls all the vows that we are about to make! “Kol Nidre” protects us in case we are not able to fulfill our intentions. The poem is an opportunity to remind ourselves that even our best laid plans can often not work out. We are still human, after all. Forgive yourself too.

**All vows we are likely to make, all oaths and pledges we are likely to vow, or swear, or consecrate, or prohibit upon ourselves between this Yom Kippur and the next Yom Kippur, we publicly renounce. Let them all be relinquished and abandoned, null and void, neither firm nor established. Our vows are no longer vows, our prohibitions are no longer prohibitions, and our oaths are no longer oaths.**