

Erev Yom Kippur Drash

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement is upon us. In ancient times this is when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies, and the sins of the nation would be atoned. The entire process is explained in detail in Leviticus 16. The duties of the regular people during that day are described in Leviticus 23:26-32. A central point is to “afflict your soul,” in some translations written as “deny yourselves,” or “humble yourselves.” This has traditionally been translated as fasting. The fasting, however, was not the main point of this holiday. The main points were the sacrifice, the scapegoat, the entering of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies.

The Talmud details a miracle that would happen every year at Yom Kippur. A scarlet thread called *Lashon haZehorit* would turn white if God forgave their sins, matching with the verse, “*Though your sins be like scarlet, they will be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they will become like wool*” (Isaiah 1:18). So if it did turn white, people would know that their sins were forgiven. If it didn’t, they would know that something wasn’t right, and that they might need to be more careful in how they performed the sacrificial system, making sure to follow the Torah better during the coming year.

However, the same source also states that about forty years before the destruction of the temple, the thread stopped turning white altogether. The destruction was in 70 AD, so the scarlet thread stopped turning white right around the time of *Yeshua*’s death and resurrection! From that moment, the atonement was already done, and God stopped the miracle. He no longer accepted the Yom Kippur sacrifice.

Many Christians say that Yom Kippur is now irrelevant because our sins are already atoned for. We have forgiveness of sins 24/7. We can turn to God and repent of our sins whenever we want, not just on Yom Kippur. They do have a strong case, especially when we read what the New Testament says about Yom Kippur: “*But into the inner, once a year, the kohen gadol alone...⁹ It is a symbol for the present time...regulations for the body imposed until a time of setting things straight*” (Hebrews 9:7,9,10).

But should we really cease observing Yom Kippur altogether? I can’t find any scripture that supports a full cessation of keeping the Holy Days God gave us in Leviticus 23. This holiday carries the “forever” tag. If nothing else applies, we keep it out of obedience to the Father.

I have heard some Messianic Jews try to solve this question by saying that this is a good holiday to celebrate our atonement. Rather than praying and crying over our sins, like the Orthodox Jews do, we can celebrate that our sins have already been forgiven. There is some merit to this viewpoint.

Here is where we find the true meaning of Yom Kippur for the Messianic Jew today. It is not just THE day to ask God to forgive our sins, nor is it just a day to celebrate the forgiveness we have. But in keeping with the entire Elul theme that culminates at Yom Kippur then this is a day to put the finishing touch on repentance. We take one day a year for fasting, praying, repenting and take stock of our life. Ask ourselves where we are on our walk with God and where we want to be. How can we do better next year? Where do we wish our spiritual life to be next Yom Kippur? It is a day to reckon all matters recognizing that *Yeshua* is the High Priest of our lives who has entered the Holy of Holies and makes continual intercession for us having provided eternal atonement.

Yes, *Yeshua* obtained for us eternal forgiveness. Yes, our sins can be forgiven. But we are still required to **confess our sins – to bring them before The Almighty**. We can do this daily, but having one day a year that is intended to fast and pray over it is good medicine. It gives us a yearly opportunity to do what Paul told the Corinthians to do: “*Test yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Examine yourselves!*” (2Cor 13:5) Yom Tov!