



## **Yom Kippur Customs:**

### **•Wearing White**

There are those who teach that we wear white on Yom Kippur to be like the angels with whom we sing Kadosh! Kadosh! Together we yearn to ascend, to be lighter, more clear, clean, pure and transparent.

And also, wearing white and particularly wearing simple organic fibers like linen or cotton, approximates the garments that we wear when die and are buried. Indeed, you may have already noticed among us those who wear a kittel, a simple white cotton robe worn over the clothing.

Why is this? First it is important to know that when we die, in Jewish tradition, we are all lovingly bathed and dressed for burial in a white linen or cotton outfit, simple, light and entirely biodegradable (as is the simple wood coffin).

We are all dressed in white, simple pure and and clean, and the same for everyone - men and women, rich and poor. All distinctions cease.

When we fast on Yom Kippur it is not a punishment – it is only to help us be lighter like the angels, and like the souls of those who have died.

We wear white, sometimes even the exact garment in which we expect to be buried -- – like a kittel-- -- because we understand that Yom Kippur is designed to bring us to the edge of our own death. We know that the most scrupulous honesty we may ever engage in might well be on our deathbed, as we review our lives and make amends if we still can. The honesty of one who faces death is amplified by the uselessness of pretending and lying any more.

On Yom Kippur, wearing the garments we will wear when we die is a stark reminder that we stand every day on the edge of life and death. On Yom Kippur this is felt with even greater intensity.

### **•Avoiding Wearing Leather**

Another custom is the avoidance of wearing anything of leather, because leather requires the death of a living creature, and it is not an auspicious time to be benefiting from another living thing's death.

## •Wearing a Tallit for Kol Nidre

Kol Nidre evening is one of the very few times in the Jewish year that we wear a tallit at night. (although actually we should make sure to put the tallit on before sunset since it is a mitzvah to wear the tallit only during the day, and thus we will try to get to our communal tallit-donning before dark)

There are many reasons why the tallit is worn at this unusual time: for one, during maariv the Thirteen Divine Attributes of Mercy ("Ado—nay Ado--nay El Rachum v'Chanun...") are chanted, and there is a very old custom that a tallit should be worn when doing this. Additionally, the tallit, which is typically a white garment is worn, as I mentioned earlier, to be like the angels who are said to be garbed in pure white

For some, a tallit is also worn as a sign of transcendent consciousness and for others the tallit can be a stark reminder of death and the transient nature of physical existence, as the dead are often buried in a tallit in addition to the simple white garments and kittel..

Kabbalistically, the covering of the tallit shawl represents the light of "makif," the outer encompassing divine force that surrounds and embraces the "p'nimi," the inner divine dimension of existence. It is the uniqueness of Yom Kippur in which the receptive Shekinah aspect of the divine, rises through all the worlds to unite with all the upper dimensions. This merging of inner and outer begins on Erev Yom Kippur and thus is also why on this night the garment of "makif" the tallit, is worn.

One last reason: We take the Torah scrolls out from the ark for the Kol Nidre prayer to insure that our prayers are linked to Torah. The person leading the prayers at that time is flanked at both sides with two people holding Torah scrolls. This is actually done to mimic a court, a "beyt din" of three, as a beyt din court is needed to annul vows.

If you are at P'nai Or I will see you Erev Yom Kippur. Wherever you are, may you be inscribed for a year of life, prosperity and shalom.

Gmar chatimah tovah

May you be inscribed for the best of years!

Rabbi Marcia