

# UNIQUELY JEWISH

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Yom Kippur is the most uniquely Jewish day of the calendar year. By this I mean that all of our other wonderful holidays have been copied, adapted and sometimes just plain co-opted by other faiths. New Year, freedom festivals, Pentecost, Easter, Mardi Gras, etc. are all well known in other faiths and celebrated in secular society as well. But a day of holiness, of abstinence, of spirituality, of communion with one's self and one's Creator, wholly devoted to lofty ideas and the realm of the spirit is to my knowledge unknown outside of Judaism.

Even though the Torah calls the prohibitions imposed upon us by the day of Yom Kippur, such as fasting, not washing, etc., as being "afflictions," Rambam changes the whole tone of the matter in his wondrous work "Mishneh Torah." There he entitles the section on Yom Kippur as being "Shevitat Assor" - the great day of rest that occurs on the tenth day of Tishrei. It is not so much that we are "afflicted" on the day of Yom Kippur as we are at rest for a day from all worldly needs such as eating, washing, etc.

Yom Kippur is not a day of pain and sadness, which are the hallmarks of Tisha B'av, but rather a day of serenity and inner yearning for the better part of us to assert itself. One of the great lessons of Yom Kippur is that inner serenity is achievable only by a degree of separation from the worldly pursuits that press constantly upon us. To truly live well in this world, one must always distance one's self, no matter how slightly, from that very same world.

Another powerful but really very obvious lesson of Yom Kippur is the blessed consequences of the ability to repent and forgive. All of this is easier said than done. Personal hurts done to us by others leave deep and painful scars. So forgiveness, in the truest sense of the word, becomes painful and emotionally wrenching. Nevertheless, forgiving others is really the chief means at our disposal of cleansing our souls and our inner selves. It removes the corroding bitterness that changes for the worse our personalities and nature.

Brooding over past hurts only intensifies the pain that those hurts originally caused. Forgiveness allows one to move on in life and not dwell on past events and constantly relive pain and embarrassment. We are not "a turn the other cheek" people and there are certainly circumstances that do not warrant forgiveness. But in the main, forgiveness is a positive step in helping build our spiritual self and in ennobling our character.

Repentance is also a difficult concept to actualize. To say that "I was wrong" or that "I am truly sorry"

are difficult words to get out of our mouths. And, paradoxically enough, these words are far easier to say to God, so to speak, than they are to a fellow human being. In fact, the closer we are to the person - a relative, a friend, partner, business associate, employer, employee - who was wronged by our words or deeds, the more difficult the apology becomes. Yet, God's forgiveness of us, so to speak, hinges upon our ability to forgive others as well.

A person who is unforgiving and overly exacting in interpersonal relationships will be treated by Heaven in the same fashion. So Yom Kippur demands of us contriteness, a lowering of ego and a serenity of spirit that can encompass all around us as well.

Shabbat Shalom, Gmar Chatima Tova and an easy, restful and spiritually uplifting Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

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