

Our Messianic Faith & Yom Kippur

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The day of Yom Kippur comes to us with the traditions of somber reflections and introspection. The divine injunction to “humble your soul” (Lev 23:27, 29, 32; Num 29:7) on this day teaches us that this appointed time, more than any of the other *mo’edim*, is a time to stop and ponder where we each need to seek repentance, restoration, and correction before the Lord and with our fellowman. It is a time to make an honest evaluation of our own progress in sanctification—in becoming more and more like our Messiah, Yeshua. Such an evaluation is healthy and proper, even as Paul admonished the Corinthians:

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Yeshua Messiah is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? (2Cor 13:5)

Yet when we study the traditions which have encircled the observance of Yom Kippur throughout the centuries, we are confronted with a sense that many Jewish communities approach the day as though the manner in which one humbles oneself is directly related to whether or not they will be received by God. In some traditions, fasting as a means of humbling our souls before the Lord is not enough. More must be added: no bathing, no combing of the hair, no wearing of leather shoes, because things that might bring any comfort are forbidden on a day marked by affliction. The more one denies oneself on the day, the more one is assured of forgiveness. The question of whether one’s name is written in the Book of Life hinges, according to rabbinic Judaism, on what one does or does not do in the days preceding Yom Kippur, as well as on how one afflicts oneself on the day itself.

As I contemplated these things in preparing my own heart for the observance of Yom Kippur, I was saddened to think that as believers in Yeshua, we might be persuaded to adopt any tradition that would diminish one of the greatest things this awesome day is given to reinforce, namely, the infinite compassion of God toward His children. Our fallen nature (which is allied to the enemy of our souls) naturally inclines toward the idea that the more we make ourselves wretched, the more God will have compassion upon us. It is this very fact that the evil one exploits as one of his “flaming arrows” (Eph 6:17) to wound us, and thus that against which we must constantly guard by “putting on the full armor of God” (Eph 6:11ff).

Consider, then, the infinite love and compassion of God toward those who are His children. Isaiah speaks of the Messiah with these words:

Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. (Is 42:1–3)

What is the metaphor of a “bruised reed” or a “dimly burning wick”? A bruised reed is one that is bent over because it has been injured, and a dimly burning wick is one that seems to have run its course and is therefore of no lasting value. I dare say that many people think of themselves this way. We think that our past sins have bent us over so severely that we are therefore beyond repair. Or, like a dimly burning wick, that we really have nothing of value in our lives to offer the King.

But that is not how Yeshua looks at us! He neither breaks the bent reed nor extinguishes the dimly burning wick. Rather, He straightens the bent and rekindles the light of the soul, for He acts in faithfulness to bring forth that which is according to His own righteousness. Indeed, His compassions are new every morning because His faithfulness toward us is great (Lam 3:23).

When Paul wrote “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Messiah Yeshua” (Rom 8:1), he intended us to know that the suffering our sin required has already been accomplished by our Savior. For He took all that was against us—all that would have condemned us—and nailed it to His cross (Col 2:14). As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Ps 103:12). And the love of God has been poured out within our hearts (Rom 5:5), proof of which is the abiding Spirit Who dwells in us, Who is the seal and guarantee that He accepts us “in the Beloved One,” even in Yeshua our Messiah (1Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13–14; 4:30; Phil 1:6).

So on this awesome day—Yom Kippur—as we do heart inventory and *teshuvah*, may the love and compassion of God in His Son, Yeshua, be all the more precious to us! And may the contemplation of His greatness produce in us an unquenchable sense of joy and praise to Him for His infinite and all-encompassing compassion.