



Corona Policies and Clarifications for Yom Kippur

Question: We will review some practical issues for Yom Kippur that are likely to come up this year, in the shadow of Corona. Although local rabbis will address many of them and public policy may change, we assume our discussion will be helpful.

Answer:

1. Pushing oneself to *daven* with a *minyán* – Regarding most of the *tefilla*, the importance of being in *shul* is **halachically** not much greater on Yom Kippur than on Shabbat (“Yud Gimel Middot,” which are most concentrated in *Ne’ila*, are the major additional thing that is missing). Certainly, one should not put himself (especially the elderly and other members of high-risk groups) and others at risk unwisely. To avoid that, we expect many small *minyanim* (hopefully in spacious, ventilated places). While people in high-risk groups should not *daven* in any *minyán*, except from their house or outside at a **GREAT** distance from others, regarding people of moderate risk, outdoor *minyanim* do have an advantage for those who fast well. If Yom Kippur will be a hot day and out-door *min-*

yanim may compromise one’s ability to complete the fast, it is obviously far more halachically important to fast than to *daven* with a *minyán* (see Shemirat Shabbat K’hilchata 39:28). It is more challenging to determine the correct plan when there is only a small chance that *davening* outside will cause one to break the fast. Many people’s best solution is to *daven* at an outdoor *vatikin minyan*, when it is rarely hot and easier to find shade (in addition to spiritual advantages). *Minyanim* would do best to shorten their length by eliminating *Mi Sheberachs*, skipping most *piyutim*, and doing less singing. (Singing is also a virus spreader, to an extent even with a mask on; humming, done with a mouth closed, is safer). A relatively short *Mincha* and *Ne’ila* can be done near day’s end, when it is cooler and easier to gauge how well one is fasting. Long-lasting indoor *minyanim* with air conditioning may not be the safest option, even if they apparently conform with official health guidelines (which do not eliminate danger, just lower it

to a reasonable level for the average person; we can send links to scientific articles).

2. *Tefillot* to be omitted without a *minyana* – Besides standard *devarim shebekedusha* (e.g., Kedusha, Kri'at HaTorah,...), special omissions for Yom Kippur are: Kol Nidrei (for the public), the 13 Middot (with its introductory and concluding pieces), pieces recited by the *chazan* regarding himself.
3. Early *Ne'ila* – Some *shuls* will opt for consecutive *minyanim* in the same room. It is problematic to do *Ne'ila* before *plag haMincha* (see Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 623; Ishei Yisrael 46:47). It is better to *daven* after *plag haMincha* without a *minyan* or to have the second *minyan* go past *shekia* into *bein hashemashot* (even better if *chazarat hashatz* starts before *shekia*). Regarding late *Birkat Kohanim*, see Living the Halachic Process, IV, D-2.
4. Washing with soap/cleansing with sanitizer – It is permitted to wash hands to remove dirt (Shulchan Aruch, OC 613:1). Removing germs is no less justified; only washing which can be broadly deemed as for enjoyment is forbidden. In a past column (Vayeilech 5776), we cited

sources that *sicha* (applying oil) is forbidden even not for enjoyment (Yerushalmi, Yoma 8:1). We pointed out that *sicha* is when the substance is absorbed by the skin, whereas *rechitza* removes impurities from it, and that soap resembles *rechitza*. Sanitizer is on one hand, absorbed by the skin, but on the other hand, is never for enjoyment. Certainly, when it is clearly needed for hygiene, including during a pandemic even for healthy people, it is permitted (see Shulchan Aruch, OC 614:1, who permits applying oil for any truly medicinal purpose).

Many people will experience Yom Kippur this year in an unfamiliar way. Some will benefit from pursuing responsibly their normal means of inspiration. For others, there is value in making the most of the opportunity to serve Hashem in a different way, appropriate for the situation Hashem has presented. May the Yom Kippur of all be successful! ■

Having a dispute?



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