



Assembly

A chance to atone

Aim:

- To reflect on the Jewish celebration of Yom Kippur
- To consider how to atone for wrongs we have done
- To think about forgiveness

Looking Deeper

Yom Kippur

On Saturday 8 October 2011, Jews all over the world celebrated Yom Kippur – the holiest and most solemn day of their religious year. On this day, Jewish people confess to God the things they have done wrong, or the things they have failed to do, fasting (going without food) to show their sincerity. They seek forgiveness both from God and from the people they may have wronged. This act of seeking forgiveness and forgiving other people helps to restore strained relationships and allows people to feel less burdened. It has been said, 'When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.'

When, in the Old Testament, God told Moses how to celebrate the festival of Yom Kippur, it involved people placing their hands on the heads of two goats, and stating a list of all their failings of the past year. One of the goats would then be taken out into the wilderness and left to go free – symbolically taking the wrongs away from the people. The other goat would be sacrificially killed – symbolizing the end of the guilt for those wrongs, thus giving the people a fresh start.

Many Jews who would not normally celebrate other Jewish holy days will attend a synagogue to observe Yom Kippur, taking part in ceremonies to put them right with God and other people. In 1934, the Detroit Tigers were in the middle of an important baseball competition, but one of their star players, Hank Greenberg, who was Jewish, refused to play on Yom Kippur Day. The journalist and poet, Edgar A Guest, wrote a poem titled *Speaking of Greenberg* which included the following lines:

Introduction

Who celebrates?

Present pupils with the following list of religious celebrations, asking them to identify which religion each celebration is from:

1. Easter
(Christianity)
2. Nirvana
(Buddhism)
3. Ramadan
(Islam)
4. Passover
(Judaism)
5. Diwali
(Hinduism)
6. Wesak
(Buddhism)
7. Holi
(Hinduism)
8. Christmas
(Christianity)
9. Hanukkah
(Judaism)
10. Baisakhi
(Sikhism)
11. Eid-ul-Adha
(Islam)
12. Yom Kippur
(Judaism)



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Came Yom Kippur—holy feast day
worldwide over to the Jew—
And Hank Greenberg to his teaching and
the old tradition true
Spent the day among his people and he
didn't come to play.
Said Murphy to Mulrooney, "We shall
lose the game today!
We shall miss him on the infield and shall
miss him at the bat,
But he's true to his religion—and I honor
him for that!"

Reflection

Ask pupils the following questions,
pausing to allow them to reflect on the
questions and their answers to them:

- Have you ever felt that you have let someone down?
- Has something you have done put a strain on a friendship or relationship?
- What would it take to restore friendships you have broken?
- How would you react if someone who hurt you came to say sorry?
- Would it be a relief to you to have a fresh start, with the guilt of the past wiped away?

In the New Testament section of the Bible, the early Christian leader Paul advises Christians, 'Stop being bitter and angry. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.' (Ephesians 4:31, 32)

Christians believe that when people turn to God, sorry for what they have done wrong, God will always forgive, no

matter what the people have done. John, one of Jesus' first followers, said, 'If we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.' (1 John 1:9)

Prayer

Lord God
Thank you for your promise to forgive anyone who confesses their wrongs to you. Thank you for the opportunity for a fresh start. Please give us the strength to forgive others who have hurt us. Help us to work to restore relationships and bring peace.
Amen

Keywords

Yom Kippur
Atonement
forgiveness