

How My Christian Wife Taught Her Jewish Husband to Observe Yom Kippur

This week, my wife and I spent 25 hours observing Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), which is considered to be the holiest day of the year. It is a day that I have observed as long as I can remember, but one my wife has observed only after we started living as Messianic Jews.

It is also only after years of being married that together we understood the fullness of the promise of this appointed time, as she began to understand how Yeshua brought about our atonement in perfect fulfillment as high priest and as I learned from her the part of Yom Kippur that I was missing.

Let me explain. I have been married for nearly 39 years to one of the most wonderful women in the world—a partner who does so many things behind the scenes in my world that no one sees, that allow me to do the many things I do that people do see. She is a woman of intense faith and a prayer warrior who seems to have found the key to reaching the throne room of heaven. She has stood with me through many years of congregational ministry, walking with me through many battles; many of those battles are caused by my own failures.

She has overcome many life tragedies, including her parents' divorce at a young age and two house fires, one which took the life of her mother and was followed shortly by her father taking his own life after falling into severe illness and depression. In her childhood and youth, she went from affluence to poverty in the space of only a few years' time.

I could list many more things she endured in her lifetime that may have, and in many cases, caused people to turn their hearts away from G-D and faith because the sorrow and loss was

too great for them to bear without blaming G-D and walking away.

I have watched her as our newborn son became gravely ill and was admitted into the pediatric ICU. I have watched her when we lost our child to miscarriage. I watched her when our oldest son was diagnosed with a severe lung condition, which would rob him of the joys of ever playing outside (a condition from which he was miraculously healed and I credit to her prayer life). I watched her as our son, while a senior in high school, was attacked by a crippling illness (another miraculous healing also due to her prayers). Yet, my wife has always seemed to walk through the hardships and adversities of life without wavering in her faith and trust in G-D.

Over the years, I watched her faith and strength over and over as these tragedies took place, she cried, she prayed, and she trusted in her G-D. I watched because I wanted to know her secret. How could she stand so strongly at times when, if I am to be honest, I was shaken?

The losses were real. The pain was immense. The crises were overwhelming. But there was something she had grasped as a child that gave her the strength to continue walking forward. After many years of watching, I found the answer to her strength within the Bible, but in a surprising place. Her faith came from her deep understanding of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—a holy day observance she never took part in until years after we were married.

You see, my wife was raised in a Christian home and came to faith in Yeshua (Jesus) when she was only 7 years old. So she never participated in any of the Holy Days of Judaism, which had been a part of my life since I was a child.

However, even though I participated in Yom Kippur services my whole life, my participation in this Holiest of Days was focused only on one half of the true experience of Yom Kippur.

The half I observed and participated in was the part that dealt with repentance and seeking forgiveness.

For me, Yom Kippur was an extremely long and dry series of prayers in Hebrew that would seal my eternal fate for the entire next year. This time of introspection and fear of being found unrighteous was made worse by the fact that Yom Kippur is also a day of fasting. So not only was I consumed by the fear of not having my name written in the book of life, but I also was starving.

However, my wife, though she never participated in a full day of beautifully inspiring prayers of repentance and fasting on Yom Kippur, had somehow grasped the truth about the first half of Yom Kippur (the part repentance and atonement), which she had confidently received through her faith in Yeshua as her Messiah. She also somehow achieved a full understanding of the second half of Yom Kippur, the half that I, even as a practicing Jew raised within a wonderful synagogue, never comprehended. You see, my observance of Yom Kippur was focused mostly on Leviticus 23:27-28 (TLV):

“However, the tenth day of this seventh month is Yom Kippur, a holy convocation to you, so you are to afflict yourselves. You are to bring an offering made by fire to Adonai. You are not to do any kind of work on that set day, for it is Yom Kippur, to make atonement for you before Adonai your God.”

But my wife, who was not raised in Judaism, had not only understood the concept of Yom Kippur’s repentance and atonement found in Leviticus 23, but she also understood the concept of Yom Kippur’s liberty and restoration found in Leviticus 25:9-10:

“Then on the tenth day of the seventh month, on Yom Kippur, you are to sound a shofar blast—you are to sound the shofar all throughout your land. 10 You are to make the fiftieth year holy, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its

inhabitants. It is to be a Jubilee to you, when each of you is to return to his own property and each of you is to return to his family.”

It’s also found in Isaiah 58:5-6:

“Is this the fast I have chosen? A day for one to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and spreading out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to Adonai? Is not this the fast I choose: to release the bonds of wickedness, to untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to tear off every yoke?”

And it’s in the words that Yeshua read from Isaiah in Luke 4:17-21:

“When the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him, He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ‘The Ruach Adonai is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of Adonai’s favor.’ He closed the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue were focused on Him. Then He began to tell them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears.’”

My wife had somehow learned a powerful truth of Judaism at an early age as a Christian, something that I had not learned as a Jew raised up within my synagogue. This powerful truth was that Yom Kippur was not just a time for repentance and atonement; it was also a time of freedom and deliverance.

She somehow had heard G-D’s shofar call spoken of in the book of Isaiah. She had found a freedom inside of her faith in God that was so complete that no hardship, calamity or trial could steal away from her.

The truth is that I had observed Yom Kippur all of my life, but it took years of watching my wife's faith before I ever fully understood and observed the fullness of Yom Kippur for myself.

("The Fast" is a reference to Yom Kippur as we see in both the Old Testament and the New Testament in Act 27:9) {eoa}

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