

**OPINION**

# Observing Yom Kippur

**EDITORIAL**

The Days of Awe began last week with Rosh Hashanah and will conclude this weekend with Yom Kippur, the most holy day in the Jewish calendar.

Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement, this year begins Friday, Sept. 29, and runs through Saturday, Sept. 30. Yom Kippur, the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar, is notable in that it is a 25-hour fast day, during which Jews cannot eat, drink or bathe, among other restrictions. Work is strictly forbidden on Yom Kippur, which, along with Rosh Hashanah, makes up the High Holy Days. Due to the seriousness of Yom Kippur, many Jews — even those who do not typically attend synagogue — pray for atonement.

Yom Kippur is so important in the Jewish faith because it ends the process of judgment that began 10 days earlier on Rosh Hashanah. According to the Talmud tractate on Rosh Hashanah, three books of account are opened on the New Year, wherein the fate of the wicked, the righteous and those of an intermediate class are recorded. The names of the righteous are immediately inscribed in the “book of life” and they are sealed “to live.” The intermediate class is allowed a respite of 10 days, until Yom Kippur, to reflect, repent and become righteous. The wicked are blotted out of the book of the living forever. For those in the intermediate class, Yom Kippur is the final drive to truly repent of past misdeeds and make a commitment to live a better life in the coming year.

Yom Kippur begins in the evening with a synagogue service named for its most important feature, Kol Nidre, a prayer in Aramaic that nullifies vows, allowing congregants

to begin anew. The Kol Nidre is sung in the same tune in synagogues around the world — a haunting yet beautiful tune.

From there, Yom Kippur continues the following day with a full day of prayer, including several services that are not typically done. Among them are Yizkor, a memorial service for those who have died; Yizkor is only recited four times each year. Only those who have lost a member of their immediate family attend the service, with all others usually taking a break in the cool air outside. Yizkor is a time to remember all those who have died, the impact they left on the world and how you should do acts of charity in their memory.

This year’s Yom Kippur varies from the traditional holiday a bit as it falls on the Jewish Sabbath. As such, there are prayers added in some places and prayers removed in others. These two holy days draw an interesting juxtaposition, as the Sabbath is a joyous day that is in no way diminished by the fact that it comes each week, while Yom Kippur is a time of contemplation and solemnity.

As such, Jews are supposed to humble themselves before God on Yom Kippur. Most Jews do not wear their best clothes on this day, they do not wear makeup or perfume, they do not shave, and they do not even wash their hair. Yom Kippur is a religious day of mourning.

It is therefore incorrect to wish someone a “Happy Yom Kippur.” Instead, you should wish them a meaningful Yom Kippur or wish them: “G’mar chatimah tovah,” which is to wish them a good final sealing in the book of life.

To all our Jewish neighbors, we wish you a meaningful Yom Kippur.

## Library wins literacy grant

**LIBRARY MATTERS**

**BY ISABEL CASTRO**

Earlier this year, 19 U.S. public libraries were selected to receive an American Dream Literacy Initiative grant and, deservedly, West Orange Public Library was one of them!

The grant from the American Library Association, funded by the Dollar General Corporation, allows libraries to “augment their print and digital ESL collections; increase computer access and training; provide job training; hold ELL, GED and citizenship classes; and raise the visibility of services for immigrant populations.”

In the application, West Orange Public Library stressed our commitment to meeting the needs of all residents, as challenging as that can be. According to a recent American Community Survey, almost half of West Orange residents that spoke another language reported speaking English “less than very well.” In addition, work leading to the development of a Strategic Plan identified a need for ESL instruction and was the impetus for applying for this grant.

English class at the library is nothing new. Each new wave of immigrants seeks out the library as one of the first places to learn the language. Recently a couple from

Turkey visited the library within days of arriving in West Orange for just this reason. Another man, who had recently emigrated from Brazil, wanted to learn as much English as he could before starting his new job in Ohio.

Almost daily, people come into the library seeking ESL classes and books for improving their English language skills. Many more access the library’s free language-learning courses through the digital resources portal on our website. Both Rosetta Stone and Duolingo offer English language instruction in addition to dozens of other languages. Another online program available from the library, USA Learns, is exclusively for learning English. While users of these programs may be highly motivated to learn, research shows that self-directed programs work much better when paired with a teacher. Recently, the library began offering free ESL classes on Saturdays and each week more students sign up.

Tutors from Literacy Volunteers of Essex

and Passaic are fixtures at the library and meet regularly with their students in our Literacy Room. An upcoming 18-hour tutor training session starting in November will be held at the library and will increase the availability of trained tutors in West Orange. They won’t have to wait very long to be paired with eager and willing students! If you would like to become a Literacy Volunteer of America in our area, you can contact them at 973-566-6200, ext. 225.

The West Orange Chronicle has previously reported on the plans for classroom space on the library’s lower level and the efforts of library staff and Friends of the Library to prepare that space. Friends of the Library is also a strong supporter of a robust English learning program. Working together we hope to eventually have a program in place that can offer needed instruction in many areas of adult literacy. Our mission is to assist all residents of West Orange to be able to participate fully in our community and achieve their American dreams.

**Isabel Castro is the adult services librarian at the West Orange Public Library.**

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