



Machzikei Hadas Yom Kippur Prayer Service Companion

*With insights and explanations to enrich and expand your Yom
Kippur experience.*

PREPARED BY RABBI IDAN SCHER

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An Introduction

“Getting to where you need to be is an important step.

But nothing is as important as getting out of where you are at right now.”

This brief quote is a powerful description of what Yom Kippur can be. Every single human being has something(s) keeping them back from living their best lives. Some of us know what it is and just cannot seem to overcome the obstacles and some of us are not even in touch with ourselves enough to know what it is standing in our way. Yom Kippur is uniquely positioned as the day to free us from our shackles. Whether it be spiritually, emotionally, physically (usually it is all three because we are holistic beings), Yom Kippur is the one day of the year, if approached with sincerity and resolve, that we can finally find the freedom to soar.

In his book of memoirs *All the Rivers Run to the Sea*, Noble Prize Laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel tells the following episode.

At my first visit to the the Lubavitcher Rebbe's court [at 770 Eastern Parkway, in Brooklyn, NY]... I had informed him at the outset that I was a Chasid of Vishnitz, not Lubavitch, and that I had no intention of switching allegiance.

“The important thing is to be a chasid,” he replied. “It matters little whose.”

One year, writes Wiesel, during Simchas Torah, I visited Lubavitch, as was my custom.

“Welcome,” he said. “It's nice of a chasid of Vishnitz to come and greet us in Lubavitch.

But is this how they celebrate Simchas Torah in Vishnitz?”

“Rebbe,” I said faintly, “we are not in Vishnitz, but in Lubavitch.”

“Then do as we do in Lubavitch,” he said.

“And what do you do in Lubavitch?”

“In Lubavitch we say L'chayim.”

“In Vishnitz, too.”

“Very well. Then say L’chayim.”

He handed me a glass filled to the brim with vodka.

“Rebbe,” I said, “in Vishnitz a Chasid does not drink alone.”

“Nor in Lubavitch,” the Rebbe replied.

He emptied his glass in one gulp. I followed suit.

“Is one enough in Vishnitz?” the Rebbe asked.

“In Vishnitz,” I said bravely, “one is but a drop in the sea.”

“In Lubavitch as well.”

He handed me a second glass and refilled his own. He said L’chaim, I replied L’chaim, and we emptied our glasses.

“You deserve a brocha (blessing),” he said, his face beaming with happiness. “Name it.” I wasn't sure what to say.

“Let me bless you so you can begin again.”

“Yes, Rebbe,” I said. “Give me your brocha.”

Rabbi YY Jacobson shares the rest of the story...

“And the Rebbe blessed Eli Wiesel to begin his life anew. The man who was still tormented by the horrors of “Night” (the name of his first book), where he saw the most horrific sights the human eye could endure, the individual who refused to marry and have children feeling that it is unfair to bring Jewish children into such a cruel and brutal world, ultimately rebuilt his life from the ashes, creating a family, and becoming a spokesman for hope and conscience the world over.

On the day of his son’s bris, he writes, friends sent gifts. “But the most moving gift came from an unexpected place.” It was a beautiful bouquet of flowers sent from the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I guess it represented his blessings for a life invigorated with a fresh start, blossoming like a beautiful, fresh flower. He named his son, Elisha, after his father who perished in Buchenwald.”

Section I: Introduction to the Holiday

A Walk-through Yom Kippur

Rabbi Shlomo Odze, South Hampstead United Synagogue

There are few occasions in the Jewish calendar that galvanise Jews as much as Yom Kippur. It is a day of prayer and reflection when God gives us a fresh start and gives us the opportunity to give others a fresh start too. A 2013 poll in the Israeli YNet1 newspaper revealed that 73% of Israeli Jews fast on Yom Kippur. Whilst a significant number said they fasted for religious reasons, many others listed ‘tradition’ and ‘solidarity’ with the Jewish people as their motivation. Very few ignored it entirely.

To help us make the most out of this unique day, we will try in this article to help you ‘walk through’ Yom Kippur. We can view Yom Kippur as a part of a conversation, which started on Rosh Hashanah and continues throughout the ten days of ‘Teshuva’ (from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur inclusive). On Rosh Hashanah, we started to reconnect with God and Judaism, challenging ourselves to find opportunities for the year ahead. The ten days of Teshuva give us time to work on ourselves. Before we get to Yom Kippur, we should have sought forgiveness from others and from God for what has happened in the past.

The conversation then culminates on Yom Kippur. Everything we do is in preparation for this ultimate conversation with God. We prepare ourselves, physically, emotionally and mentally as Jews, not just for talking to God but also for exploring our relationship with ourselves and others. A conversation with God through our prayers, about how we have lived the year just passed and how we should live the year ahead whilst asking for God’s help with this.

And we forgive. As we ask God to forgive us, we forgive others. We don’t forgive others just because we are compassionate and kind and willing to “turn the other cheek,” rather, we also forgive, because without forgiving we will never find the freedom to truly live:

Forgiveness is a door to peace and happiness. It is a small, narrow door and cannot be entered without stooping. It is also hard to find. But no matter how long the search, it can be found... When we forgive someone for a mistake or a deliberate hurt, we still recognize it as such, but instead of lashing out or biting back; we attempt to see beyond it, so as to restore our relationship with the person responsible for it.

Our forgiveness may not take away our pain – it may not even be acknowledged or accepted – yet the act of offering it will keep us from being sucked into the downward

spiral of resentment. It will also guard us against the temptation of taking out our anger or hurt on someone else.

Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act; it means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning.

- Johann Christoph Arnold

Key Observances of Yom Kippur Itself

On Yom Kippur, in order to be fully aware of this conversation we refrain from the following five types of enjoyments to help focus our mindset:

1. Food and drink
2. Wearing of leather footwear
3. Bathing or washing
4. Applying ointments, creams or lotions
5. Marital relations.

On Yom Kippur we also refrain from Melachah (creative labour) as on Shabbat such as not using electronic devices and writing.

Shabbat Candles

We light candles as on Friday night but with the specific blessing for Yom Kippur and Shehecheyanu instead of the blessing for Shabbat candles. An additional 24-hour candle is lit to represent the neshama (our soul) during Yom Kippur. That candle is used to light the Havdallah candle at the end of Yom Kippur.

Kittel

A prevalent custom is to wear at least one white garment. Some men, especially those leading services, have the custom of wearing a kittel, a white robe, over their Yom Kippur clothing on Yom Kippur in emulation of the ministering angels.

The Shema

We recite the line after the first line of the Shema, beginning “Baruch Shem”, aloud rather than quietly as we do during the rest of the year. Doing so denotes the special status of the day and encourages us to think like the angels, whom we are taught also recite this line aloud. One of the central sections of each part of the Yom Kippur service is vidu’i, prayers in which we acknowledge our personal and communal shortcomings and ask for

God's forgiveness. The longest one of these is Al Chet. It is recited whilst standing with the head slightly bowed, lightly striking the left side of the chest with the right fist as indicated in the mahzor.

Yizkor

Literally meaning "remember" is a prayer recited in memory of departed loved ones. The main component of Yizkor is our private pledge to give charity in honour of the deceased after Yom Kippur. By giving charity, we are performing a positive physical deed in this world, something that the departed can no longer do.

Shofar

The Shofar is sounded at the conclusion of the fast.

Havdalah

Recited with wine, candle, and no spices unless Yom Kippur and Shabbat coincide. As Yom Kippur and the 'conversation' draw to a close, may we all have made the most of the opportunities that this day brings, challenging ourselves to build a better life ahead personally, for our community and for wider society. May God accept our prayers and bless us with a wonderful year ahead.

Section II: Kol Nidrei

(pg. 489)

Kol Nidrei Symbolizes the Opportunity to Free Ourselves from the Past

Gateway to Judaism by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

Yom Kippur begins with the Kol Nidrei prayer, recited by the cantor and the congregation. In this prayer, we solemnly ask God to release us from any vows that we may have forgotten, made inappropriately, or been unable to fulfill in the previous year. It is essential to begin Yom Kippur this way because the sin of violating an oath is so serious that it may prevent one from achieving atonement. Kol Nidrei also symbolizes the idea of Yom Kippur as an opportunity to free ourselves from our past. The text of Kol Nidrei and the tune with which it is chanted are both of great antiquity, but unknown authorship. The poignant melody and the inspiring words set the tone for the rest of Yom Kippur.

Kol Nidrei is About Letting the Inner Light Shine Out

Yom Kippur with Simchah by Rabbi Yaacov Haber

Recently I heard a remarkable story. During the Second World War, a German soldier was mortally wounded in battle, and as he fell, a priest rushed up to administer the last

rites. With his remaining strength, the soldier pushed the priest's cross away, and said: "Ich bin ein Jude!" ("I am a Jew!") The priest replied: "Sorgen sich nicht, ich bin auch ein Jude!" ("Don't worry, I'm also a Jew!")

It is remarkable how every Yom Kippur all over the world, thousands upon thousands of people who otherwise never come near a synagogue, come to the Kol Nidrei service.

Rabbi Dessler in "Michtav MeEliyahu" writes that there is one part of our soul that burns like a tiny flame. That flame has the capacity to survive. No matter how hard its carrier might try to extinguish the flame, it will continue to burn.

This is what Yom Kippur and repentance are about, removing the outer garments and letting the light shine out.

Spiritual Meditation

Every soul begins its journey as pure, lucid light. But once she enters this world, she may fall.

Even had the soul remained pure, the descent would still have been worthwhile. All the more so now that she has fallen.

True, she was meant to confine herself to the permissible; she would have enlightened that realm of the world, healed it and carried it upward.

But now that she has fallen, let her return to her true, inner self, and in doing so she will transform to light that which a pure soul would never have touched.

Love and Law on Yom Kippur

From The Koren Yom Kippur Machzor by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Judaism has been accused over the centuries of being a religion of law, not love. This is precisely untrue. Judaism is a religion of law and love, for without law there is no justice, and even with law (indeed, only with law) there is still mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. God's great gift of love was law: the law that establishes human rights and responsibilities, that treats rich and poor alike, that allows God to challenge humans but also humans to challenge God, the law studied by every Jewish child, the law written in letters of black fire on white fire that burns in our hearts, making Jews among the most passionate fighters for justice the world has ever known.

Law without love is harsh, but love without law is anarchy and eventually turns to hate. So, in the name of the love-of-law and the law-of-love, we ask God to release us from our vows and from our sins, for the same reason: that we regret and have remorse for both. The power of Kol Nidrei...is [that it sets the scene of Yom Kippur as] a courtroom drama, unique to Judaism, in which we stand, giving an account of our lives, our fate poised between God's justice and compassion.

A Kol Nidrei Story

Excerpted from the Jewishpress.com by Ed Lion

This past Yom Kippur, my father, an 84-year-old Holocaust survivor, surprised our family by recounting a wartime Kol Nidre observance that stirred his soul.

It was erev Yom Kippur, September 26, 1944. My father, Kurt Lion, was in the French underground, acting as a scout for the advancing American Seventh Army in central France.

As dusk fell, he was scouting the town of Salieres in a jeep, checking to see if it was safe for U.S. Army contingents to move in following the German retreat. He was ducking into a narrow alleyway when he heard a hubbub coming from a nearby house. Intrigued, he went to investigate and discovered it was the sound of prayer.

My father, outfitted with a gun and army fatigues, went into the house and saw a small crowd with prayer books in hand. He was astounded to see one of the men wearing a tallis, because in those terrible Holocaust years, he did not expect to find any living Jews still in the area.

Four years before, he had been deported from southwest Germany with his parents and 6,000 other Jews to the Rivesaltes internment camps in southern France run by the pro-Nazi Vichy government. In 1941, his father, Philip, died from the horrible conditions there. In 1942, his mother, Rosa, died in Auschwitz.

My father managed to escape from the camps and tricked the Vichy police into issuing him identity papers under a Protestant alias. With these papers he became a farm laborer in central France, where he joined the underground, eventually serving as a scout under a gentile alias.

“I had to hide my Jewishness to get the identity papers and survive,” my father recalled. “I couldn’t tell anyone who I was because those in the underground would no longer trust me. They might even shoot me as a German spy. It was a very strange time. I had to shut off a large part of myself. I couldn’t be myself, a Jew.”

So, my father listened silently as the congregation leader, overjoyed by the arrival of an Allied scout, explained that it was Yom Kippur, a solemn Jewish holiday. He invited him to stay.

“I hadn’t even known it was Yom Kippur,” my father remembered. “I didn’t react, continuing to play the role of a non-Jew. But I accepted his invitation and took the Hebrew-French prayer book he offered me.

My father listened as the man began to recite the Kol Nidre prayer in the French translation. He looked down at the book, saw the Hebrew lettering, and then suddenly it happened. The part of himself that he had shut off for so long emerged and, in full voice, he was singing Kol Nidre in Hebrew – as he had in his childhood.

My father suddenly felt that his father was right there at his shoulders, harmonizing with him. They were praying one last time together. It was surreal, and he sang with intense emotion. He had never sung better, before or since. They were all crying in that room, as there was so much pent-up emotion. The end of the war was in sight, as the long nightmare of the Nazi era was coming to an end.

When my father finished, the group excitedly crowded around him. They heaped salutations on him, praised him for making their first Kol Nidre out of hiding so memorable, and began to pepper him with questions.

But my father, taken aback by his lapse in hiding his true identity, reverted back to his survival mode. He said he must resume his duties, left the house, and returned to his unit.

But the wellsprings of his Jewish soul had been opened. A week or two later, when he learned that one of the American soldiers was also Jewish, he shared his secret with him. He also revealed that he had two sisters in America who had managed to escape before the war. Through Army mail, my father was able to contact his sisters for the first time in four years, and they were overjoyed to learn that he was alive.

In 1946, my father was discharged from the French military and immigrated to America. He married my mother, another survivor, and raised my two sisters and me.

Over the years, our father told our family many of his wartime experiences. Yet he had never told us this story before.

We know that there are no coincidences. And it was no coincidence that my father found himself at a Kol Nidre service that reconnected him to his people, his Jewish soul, and eventually, his sisters in America.

Section III: The Yom Kippur Evening Service

Part A: The Shema

(pg. 495)

As usual, the Maariv service begins with the Shema and its accompanying blessings. The Shema, in which we declare God's unity and our fidelity to God, is perhaps the most central of all Jewish prayers. The next line, "*Baruch shem...*" ("Blessed be the name..."), is normally whispered, because it is a pronouncement so holy that it really belongs to angels. But since today we are like angels, we make a point of saying it out loud for all to hear.

The Shema is A Rallying Call for Jews

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky, Parshat Terumah, from www.torah.org

During World War II many young Jewish children were harbored by a myriad of monasteries throughout Europe. At the end of the war, the Vaad Hatzalah sent representatives to the monasteries to try and reclaim the orphaned children to their heritage. Many of the children who found refuge did so at a young age, and they had but a few recollections of their birthright.

When Rabbi Eliezer Silver, who was the Rabbi of Cincinnati, Ohio and a very influential member of the Vaad, came to a particular hermitage in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, he was met with hostility. "You can be sure, Rabbi, if we had Jews here we would surely hand them back to you immediately!" exclaimed the monk in charge. "However, unfortunately for you, we have no Jewish children here."

Rabbi Silver was given a list of refugees and was told that they were all Germans. The monk continued, "the Schwartzes are German Schwartzes, the Chandlers are German Chandlers and the Shimmers are German Shimmers."

Rabbi Silver had been told that there were definitely close to ten Jewish children in that hermitage and was not convinced. He asked if he could say a few words to the children as they went to sleep. The monk agreed. Rabbi Silver returned later that evening with two aides, and as the children were lying in their beds about to go to sleep, they entered the large dorm room.

He walked into the room and in the sing-song that is so familiar to hundreds of thousands of Jewish children across the globe he began to sing "Shema Yisrael Ado..." unexpectedly

– in mid-sentence – he stopped. Suddenly from six beds in the room the ending to that most powerful verse resounded almost in unison. “Hashem Echad!” He turned to the priest. “These are our children. We will take them now!” The children were redeemed, placed in Jewish homes, and raised as leaders of our community.

Part B: Amidah

(pg. 503)

The Shema is followed by the silent standing prayer, known as the Amidah. We stand facing the front of the synagogue with our feet together, and say the words quietly, in a whisper that only we can hear.

We’ll say the Amidah a record five times over the next 25 hours. Every time we say the Amidah on Yom Kippur, we conclude with an extensive confession. The confession lists the sins that we (may) have done this year, starting with each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As a tangible expression of regret, we strike our heart with our right fist for each sin. More important, however, is the personal, unscripted confession that we each say at this time, listing and regretting any misdeeds during the past year. (Remember: if we actually harmed someone, confession alone is not enough; we need to actually make amends by righting the wrong and asking the offended party for forgiveness).

Part C: Selichot

(pg. 527)

Literally, “forgivenesses,” Selichot is a collection of poetically written prayers asking God to forgive us on this day. The central theme of Selichot is the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy (p. 62), which God shared with Moses at Mount Sinai. We will repeat these attributes dozens of times during the Yom Kippur service. Many of the Selichot are very intricate poetry, with quotations from many parts of the Bible woven together with Midrashic motifs in rhyming verses, often arranged according to the Hebrew alphabet. The Selichot conclude with another round of confessions, but this time we read them together, with the chazzan leading the way.

Part D: The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

(pg. 529)

A major feature of the Yom Kippur prayer service is the recital of the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy. Since it appears first on Yom Kippur evening, I have placed a commentary of it here.

Selichot and the 13 Attributes

Excerpted from aish.com by Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovitz

After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses asked God to explain His system for relating with the world. God's answer, known as the "13 Attributes of Mercy," forms the essence of the "Slichot" prayers.

Merciful God, merciful God, powerful God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness and truth. Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations, forgiver of iniquity, willful sin and error, and Who cleanses. (Exodus 34:6-7)

What counts in life is meaning and substance, not the illogical or the quick-fix, quirky "spiritual" stuff. We're not into playing games. Therefore, it's very puzzling that a good part of the liturgy for the High Holiday season includes repeated requests for God to recall our ancestors' merits on our behalf and invoking the "13 Attributes of Mercy" so that He may forgive us.

If the whole season is dedicated to growth and change, why are we looking for shortcuts? In other words, how do we celebrate growth while asking for mercy? We should spend the whole-time soul searching and making resolutions for the future -- yet the main focus of our prayer seems to be on escaping responsibility for our deeds! Additionally, if God has these "13 Attributes of Mercy," why must we "remind" Him of it? Is He only merciful if we say this prayer?! What exactly are we trying to accomplish?

The classic Torah commentary "Tomar Devorah" explains that although the "13 Attributes" arouse divine mercy, the recitation of these alone is inadequate. Rather, we need to make sure that in action, our own lifestyles reflect these attributes as well. For example, the Talmud says that if you are patient with others, then God will be patient with you. You can only demand that God employ all these attributes if you apply them in your own relationships.

This approach helps to answer another question from the prayer liturgy: Why do we always mention Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Does this imply that our prayers are more effective because of the forefathers?!

The answer, of course, is that every Jew is not just a biological descendant of the patriarchs and matriarchs, but a spiritual heir as well. You have to relate to what they stood for, both in terms of basic beliefs as well as practical behavior. Just as our ancestors were pillars of kindness, service to God, and truth, these ideals must become the pillars of your life as well. Only then can you approach the Almighty and ask Him to remember

your ancestors. It's as if we say, "See who I'm trying to emulate? So, consider me and my ancestors all in this together."

As an exercise, study the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. It went against every principle that Abraham stood for. Now look at your challenges and the things you hold sacred and see if you're ready to give them up -- in order to align yourself with the will of God.

There's a different approach that goes deeper. The purpose of mentioning the "13 Attributes" is to focus us on the nature of God. We have no trouble remembering what foods give us indigestion or to keep away from poison ivy. So, when we have clarity on the existence of God and the truth of Torah, why do we forget?

The answer is because we've never really experienced spiritual indigestion. When you've had a bad experience with food, you're careful after that. You've experienced the full consequences of your actions, and you remember what it feels like.

With the spiritual, your conscience may bother you, but you've never experienced the full result of sin. This is both because we're not fully in touch with our souls, but more importantly because in His mercy, God does not allow us to immediately suffer for what we've done wrong. According to the "attribute of justice," a sinner should drop dead on the spot. We survive because the Almighty is merciful and gives us a chance.

This is why the "13 Attributes" speak of "God's patience." The same God Who created you with a clean slate and a world of opportunity gives you another opportunity after you've misused the first one. If you truly understand what "wrong" means, then even if you seem to be benefiting from your wrong actions, you have to tune into God's mercy and see what He's doing for you. Then, that success will not mislead you, because you'll be humbled. "I was rude to others and nevertheless I became popular -- because God is patient and loves me." Rather than using your success as a way of clouding truth, use it as a way of appreciating God's care and closeness.

Which brings us back to the patriarchs and matriarchs. Our fate is not up to us. The Jewish people have a destiny that was set in motion by our ancestors, and one way or another we will fulfill it. (That destiny is "Light Unto the Nations" -- teaching the world about God and morality.) The only question is how easy or how painful the road will be.

Therefore, God's tolerance and mercy appear on a national level as well. When we ask the Almighty to "remember our ancestors," we're reminding ourselves that Jewish survival is a result of our destiny. We survive because of our ancestors and it's up to us to make sure that we merit to fulfill our proper destiny.

During the High Holidays, God accommodates our change and growth more than any other time of the year. May the Almighty give us the wisdom to make use of these opportunities to really grow and change.

Spiritual Meditation

If you could travel back in time, what would you change?

Perhaps you could revisit some crucial scenes and distance yourself from the mess that occurred. Perhaps you could jump in as a hero and grab credit for some of the good.

But for that, you don't need a time machine. All you need is to stand right where you are and say, "I messed up. I dropped the ball. But I learned my lesson and now I will do things differently."

You will change yourself. You will change your past. You will say, "I am no longer that person who lived in that past."

In fact, you do have a time machine.

Part E. Vidui

(pg. 552)

The Vidui, which means "confession," is a prayer recited just before Yom Kippur, and repeated many times throughout the holiday.

During the Vidui, worshipers gently beat themselves on the chest for each transgression listed. This action serves as a symbolic punishment for our hearts, which are ultimately responsible for leading us to sins of greed, lust and anger.

The Vidui includes the *Ashamnu*, an alphabetical acrostic of different sins we have committed. It is said in first-person plural, because while each individual may not have committed these specific sins, as a community we surely have, and our fates are intertwined on this day.

Section IV: The Yom Kippur Morning Service

Personalizing Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Andrew Shaw, US Living & Learning; Stanmore & Canons Park United Synagogue

There is an old story which I think of as I approach Yom Kippur. A man, not entirely unlike any of us, enters a Shul at the start of Yom Kippur for the timeless scene. As he stands at his pew amongst all the other congregants, the Chazan and the congregation in unison start to recite the three-fold Kol Nidrei declaration that signifies the beginning of the Yom Kippur service. Yet this man has the one voice that is not following the script. At first, like the initial rendition of the Kol Nidrei prayer itself, the man's voice is hushed. Gradually though, those around him notice that something other than Kol Nidrei is emanating from his mouth. As the Chazzan's repetition of Kol Nidrei gains volume, so too does the man's repetition of his personal prayer. Surprised, more people now stop to listen. By the time the Chazzan has reached the third and final rendition, the only two voices to be heard are the Chazzan's and the man's. As the surprise wears off, the other congregants now realise that the man has not been reciting a prayer, but just the Alef Bet – the Hebrew alphabet. He recites the letters over and over again, each time with noticeable anguish on his face.

I often imagine the man praying for a world he has lost and for God to ease his suffering. What do you read into the man's chosen 'prayer'? Another congregant turns to the Rabbi, with a loud, demanding voice. "Rabbi, put a stop to this strange behaviour! How can anybody say Kol Nidrei properly while the chazzan is being drowned out by a man whose only prayer is the Alef Bet?!"

There is silence for a few seconds, but it feels much longer than that. Everybody's attention is focused on the rabbi. "No," said the rabbi. "This man might just be reciting the Alef Bet but I am convinced his 'prayer' comes genuinely from the heart. That he is speaking, appealing to God in the only way that he can at this moment. As much as I can say this, I'm sure God is listening."

Can we relate to this man? My parents gifted me with a wonderful Jewish education. During our morning prayers at school, the teachers would often beseech us to have more kavana, focus (the source of this Hebrew word is direction) so that we would direct our prayers to God and not be distracted by worldly concerns. I must admit that I still find this a challenge despite many years of praying. In fact even on a day filled with prayers about how we should live and relate to God, I need to keep directing myself, even just for a few minutes at a time, back into my machzor to help me focus on what I am saying.

The way I do this is by putting all my thoughts, and it feels like my entire being, into one small sentence, or perhaps even one word that I especially connect to each year. My prayer this year is the Shema. Even though we say it several times a day, it is especially applicable for Yom Kippur. It's first and most famous line translates as follows: 'Listen Israel: The Lord is our God, The Lord is One.' In saying that word, One, we state our belief that not only is God the only One, but that He has a plan for the world.

Each one of us, as individuals, has a role to play in that plan and to make our mark on the ongoing history of the Jewish people. Sometimes this plan and our role may appear clearer, at other times opaque. The Shema though is our rallying cry.

When you say the Shema, bear in mind God's sovereignty and think about your role as a Jew and your relationship to God. When I succeed in saying the Shema like this I feel suspended in time, like the man standing in Shul reciting the Alef Bet, whose thoughts and prayers were so pure that he was able to 'reach' God. If I could hold on to that for even a fleeting moment, perhaps I could just about touch God's greatness. My hope and wish for us is that all of our prayers come easily and inspiringly to us today and that God both hears and answers them positively.

Spiritual Meditation

When does a relationship become real? Once it has broken down.

As long as each fulfills the other's expectations, there is no relationship, only a contract and its transactions. Once trust is breached, a new depth must enter: The depth of the human being.

If there is truly a relationship—if it is the person inside that matters—then there is a search for forgiveness, for return, and for healing.

So it was that within forty days of entering into a contract with the One Above, the children of Israel broke the deal. And the soul below and the One Above discovered they could not part from one another.

Part A: Amidah and Chazzan's Repetition

(pg. 605)

Unlike last night, after we say the silent prayer during the daytime, the hazzan will repeat it out loud. The Chazzan's repetition is peppered with many additions. You will notice that for certain selections, those deemed especially powerful, we open the ark.

Many of the additions are meant to be said responsively, as a joint effort between the hazzan and the congregation.

Last night, following the prayers, we said Selihot. During the day, the Selihot are incorporated into the Chazzan's repetition of the Amidah. Thus, the shorter personal Amidah triples in size, and lasts from page 623 to page 695. And again, like last night, the Selihot are followed by the Avinu Malkeinu on page 695.

Spiritual Meditation

Everything in life is a step forward; everything has meaning. It's just that there are two ways to move forward: walking and leaping.

When you walk, you leave one foot in its place as the other moves ahead. You're secure, you're stable—and you never leave your comfort zone.

So sometimes you need to leap. But to do that, you need to first crouch down.

That's the true meaning of failure: It is the crouch before the jump, the breakaway from the past so that you can leap into the future, an opportunity to do something totally unexpected.

Failure lets you go where your footsteps could never take you.

Part B: Torah Reading

(pg. 711)

The subject of the Yom Kippur morning Torah reading is the Temple service of the High Priest. Since this service is a major feature of Mussaf, it will be discussed below in that section (see Mussaf, Part B. The Service of the High Priest).

Perhaps there is no area of the Torah which so challenges our “modern understanding” of things as that of sacrifices. Centuries ago, the Kuzari stated that had the Torah not legislated such a thing we would never have imagined that the idea of slaughtering and offering up an animal would bring us closer to God. But closeness is what it is all about.

Without the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, we no longer have the opportunity to bring sacrifices to God or to perform the sacrificial rituals outlined in the Torah. In lieu of sacrifices we now have our prayer services.

How did prayer come to replace sacrifices? What do prayer and sacrifices have to do with each other?

Prayer Did Not Come to Replace Sacrifice Offerings After The Destruction Of The Temple; Rather, It Is The Internal Dimension Of That Very Same Sacrificial Experience.

Introduction to the Koren Siddur by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The transition from sacrifice to prayer was not a sudden development. A thousand years earlier, in his speech at the dedication of the Temple, King Solomon had emphasized prayer rather than sacrifice (I Kings 8:12-53). Through Isaiah, God had said, “My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Is. 56:7). The prophet Hosea had said: “Take words with you and return to the Lord...Instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips” (Hos. 14:3). Sacrifice was the external accompaniment of an inner act of heart and mind: thanksgiving, atonement, and so on. Therefore, though the outer act was no longer possible, the inner act remained. That is how sacrifice turned into prayer.

So instead of actually performing any sacrifices in synagogue, we will read about the holy service of the High Priest; later, during the Mussaf service, we will read more about it in depth.

Part C: Yizkor

(pg. 727)

Rabbi Yosef Y. Jacobson

A Story, from Chabad.org

For the first 33 years of my life I was lucky enough to be expelled from the synagogue during yizkor services, when congregants pray for the souls of loved ones who have passed on, and those with both parents alive leave the synagogue.

I never probed the reason for this custom. As a child, even as an adult, I was happy to be legally expelled from the synagogue, to catch a fresh breath of air and enjoy a schmooze with a fellow

yizkor-evacuee. As children, it often meant that my friends and I could return an hour or two later without our fathers getting angry.

All of that changed this year for me. My father, a pioneer of the Yiddish press in America, died at 70. Two weeks later came the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, when we commemorate

the giving of the Torah at Sinai. It is also a day when synagogues throughout the world hold yizkor services.

When it became time for yizkor, more than half the people in the synagogue left. The sacred Torah scroll was brought to the center of the room. The gabbai (synagogue manager) gave a knock on the table to signify that the yizkor service would now begin.

Suddenly, an eerie silence filled the room. A sense of mystery, awe and dormant pain surfaced. You could cut the rawness of the emotions with a knife. Something profoundly authentic united all those standing in the room.

My heart shifted to my late father, whom I loved and adored so deeply. My flow of tears found solace in the knowledge that his was a life well lived. My dad was a man who utilized his journalistic wisdom and skills to become a voice for causes others left behind; he was a man of conviction, and a truly original personality. I recalled my father's last hours and the dignity with which he departed on his final journey. And I wept for my children who would not have the privilege to know the unique grandfather they had.

I lifted my eyes and gazed around at the people in the room. Near me stood a young man, my age, who had lost his mother at the tender age of 5. Life without yizkor was inconceivable to him. Near him, stood others who lost parents in their teens or in college and needed to struggle to fill the unfillable void. Then there were the older men, in their 70s and 80s, whose parents perished more than six decades earlier in Stalin's gulag or Hitler's crematoriums. They are in a class of their own. Then, of course, there were the majority of middle-aged worshippers who at some point in their lives were forced to confront the reality of loss.

A strange oneness pervaded all of us standing in that room during yizkor. The connection did not need to be articulated in words; you could see it when you peered into the eyes of the person standing near you. It took me some time till I put my finger on what that connection consisted of: A piece of each of us was not to be found any longer in this world. An integral part of each of our hearts was elsewhere.

I understood why for 33 years I was asked to leave the synagogue during yizkor. Life for those who stay behind in the synagogue has a very different meaning, one that cannot be shared by those who had not experienced the loss of a loved one.

This Yom Kippur I will again stand in the synagogue during yizkor. I will think of my Dad, which will make me both laugh and cry at the same time. I will ask him to look out for me and my family. And I will pray that I merit to internalize my beloved father's zest for life and for truth.

Am Yisrael Chai

Natan Sharansky, the famous refusenik, who was freed after spending nine years in soviet prison, led the movement together with his wife Avital to bring about the fall of the Iron Curtain.

In his book, *Fear No Evil*, he talks about how he made it through those nine years in prison with no access at all to the outside world. He describes that when he was thrown into jail and it was pitch dark, he didn't think he would make it through that first night. He could not see a thing. But then morning came.

Although he didn't have a window, there was a small crack that allowed a little bit of light in. As that light shone in, one ray lit up a small portion of the wall. It was there on the wall he found the words, "Am Yisrael Chai".

Yosef Begun, another famous refusenik and human rights activist, was held in the very same cell. Those were the words he scratched into the wall to give him strength to endure and it was now those words, explains Natan, that imbued him with the strength needed to get through those critical first few days. His resilience during those 9 years in prison would serve to nurture the courage and conviction needed to fight what was to come afterwards.

These words are not just the words of a folksong to us. We live by these words. We believe Am Yisrael Chai, our nation will live forever. This belief is why we don't just live in the past or the present, but rather in the future as well.

For we know, come what may, we will always have a future.

Section V: The Mussaf Service

We are now about to start the second silent prayer of the day. By now, you know the drill. We face the front with our feet together and read from pages 745-763. The prayer is again followed by the alphabetical confession known as the Al Cheit. Again, the reader will repeat the silent prayer with significant additions. Here are three major landmarks that you will notice:

1. **Unetaneh Tokef** (bottom of pg. 789) is one of the best-known prayers of the day. It contains the chilling description of G-d's decrees for those who will not survive the year: who will perish by "water, who by fire, who by sword, who by hunger . . ." After those sobering pronouncements, we declare loudly (and, as you can imagine,

with great sincerity) that *teshuvah*, *tefillah* and *tzedakah* (commonly translated as “repentance,” “prayer” and “charity”) avert the worst decree.

- 2. Bowing:** You will notice that people are getting down on their hands and knees and prostrating themselves on the ground. No, they did not lose anything, and sorry, there are no snacks stashed down there. Rather, we bow down when we read the words “We bend the knee, bow down and offer praise before the Supreme King . . .” on page 807, and a few more during the Avodah. What is the Avodah? Starting from page 811, we begin a blow-by-blow account of what actually took place in the Holy Temple on this day. The central figure in this narrative is the kohen gadol, the high priest, who performs much of the day’s service. This included bringing incense into the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum, which even he would dare enter but one day a year. Another highlight was the two goats upon which he would draw lots. One goat would be sacrificed on the altar, and the other was sent out to the desert. Where does the bowing come into the picture? Well, in addition to slaughtering and burning the animals, the high priest would also say a confession upon each one. And when he would make that confession, he would do so addressing God with His sacred name, the one that no one else ever said. And when people would hear that, they would bow down in deference. When we read about that, we bow as well.
- 3. The Ten Martyrs** (bottom of page 837): We just read all about the sacrifices, which have been defunct for the past 2,000 years. But are there truly no more sacrifices? How about the millions of Jews who have been killed throughout the ages simply because they were Jews? A The description of the Ten Martyrs graphically depicts the horrific death of ten sages at the hand of an evil king 2,000 years ago.

Yom Kippur’s Surprising Lessons About Joy

Excerpted from Huffpost.com by Dania Ruttenberg

For most of my life, I thought of Yom Kippur as a time for fear and trembling, a time for deep, powerful, intense work, and of course fasting and other forms of self-affliction. But somewhere along the way, I got to see another face of the day — one of dancing, singing and celebration as we ask for our lives to be rendered anew.

The Talmud tells us, “Atonement and joy go well together.” The medieval Kabbalistic book the Zohar makes the same case, but even stronger: “Yom Ha-Kippurim, hu yom k’Purim.” Yom Kippur is a day like Purim — the silly, irreverent carnival dedicated to joy and playfulness. Yom Kippur is considered to be an ideal day for romantic matchmaking,

and the rituals of Yom Kippur — fasting, ritually confessing, wearing white — are mirrored intentionally in the Jewish wedding ceremony.

None of this seems obvious, does it? But then again, joy isn't obvious.

When we're feeling most things, most times, there's an element of distraction to it. We're sad about now and afraid about the future, we're angry about something that just happened because it taps into a whole host of things that happened a long time ago. We are so often bound up into a whole, complex network of thoughts and ideas from the past and the future. We manage, sometimes, to be both in the moment and somewhere else, in another point along the spectrum of time — torn, ever-so-slightly, in two or more pieces.

When we're feeling joy, on the other hand, there's only the moment of joy, and we take it in fully. We tend to experience more, and are newly attuned to the small, everyday flashes of beauty and grace that populate our lives. We suddenly notice the loveliness of the flowers on the side of the road, the crisp sweetness of an apple, the kindness paid to us by someone we encounter briefly. In joy, we feel more sensitized, more awake, more alive. And it's that sensitivity, that openness, that situating oneself entirely in the present moment that opens us also to the transcendent, the holy, to the sacred stream of life that flows through us, connects us, surrounds us.

And yet, as Rebbe Nachman of Breslov has said, "Finding true joy is the hardest of all spiritual tasks."

Joy is actually hard and threatening, for many of us difficult to tolerate. We know how to do hurt, resentful, afraid, angry — those are familiar states, with a perverse sort of comfort to them. They may not be pleasant, but we know them, know how they work, know who we are with them. Joy is the unknown. We don't always feel like we know who we are in the unfettered openness of the present moment, what might give shape to our lives if not the recurring drama, the clinging to the past or the crafting of stories about some vague, hypothetical future. Being present in the moment means accepting what is — not rewriting what happened, not desperately crafting what happens next. It's hard to be happy. It touches a place deeper and more primal than even all of the old feelings of self-annihilation, something much closer to the core of who we really are. And that's terrifying.

Feeling happy makes us vulnerable in a way that feeling terrible doesn't. Because there is, suddenly, something to lose. Various Jewish cultures around the world have tapped into that, externalizing, and personifying our fears about the fact that joy is non-permanent. My mother would always tell me not to talk about how well things were going, because

the dybbuks — the demons — were listening, and would surely throw a wrench in my plans, or that I'd give myself a kenahorah, entanglement with the evil eye. Or, if you do admit your happiness, you have to negate it—again, as protection against the evil eye: “Things are going really well, puh puh puh.” It's almost comical, except for the ways in which it reveals the abject terror we all have to just sitting with the joy we have, to owning it. Maybe we feel like there'll have to be some price to pay later on for all the magic we're experiencing now. Maybe we just don't trust that this happiness is really here, is really real. Or maybe, as Marianne Williamson famously suggested, “Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.”

Yom Kippur is the day when we taste a measure of our own power, our own light, our own expansive greatness. The day itself washes us clean. All the old hurts and angers can be, if we let them, released into the great beyond. The work asks us to go deep down into the core of our being and excavate everything that doesn't belong, to offer up our indiscretions, our pettiness, our smallness, our fear and our anger — taking it out of our hearts, naming it, and telling it that it doesn't need to rule over us anymore.

Part of how we get there is by letting the hard stuff in. Sometimes the present moment is painful, and we need to stay present until the pain ebbs away. We can let go of the hurt and anger and sadness by first giving ourselves space to feel them, fully — trusting that they won't destroy us, that given enough room to have full reign, after a while all the hard feelings will eventually wander off somewhere else.

And part of how we get there is by letting go. We need to let go of old narratives of ourselves and our hurts and sadness, and we need to make space for the magic and the mystery of right now. And when joy comes, when you let it in, you have a choice. You can try to bind yourself to it, get yourself tangled up in, it so that when you meet someone new, you're already thinking and wondering if he or she will be someone you want to have around in your life on a permanent basis. You can decide that loving one class means that you must spend the rest of your life on that subject. You can become attached to the story turning out one particular way and inevitably be disappointed when it unfolds in a different direction. Or you can kiss the joy as it flies, as William Blake put it, and relish the moment of a wonderful conversation, a wonderful evening, a wonderful class—and wait with eager curiosity to see what might happen next. If your self is whole and not torn, it becomes impossible to do anything but let the moments flow through you, the joy flow through you. And Yom Kippur is meant to help you get there.

Rituals of purification are meant to lift us higher and higher into joy. Fasting is means for altering consciousness and helping us to access a state that's difficult when we are full and grounded. Abstaining from leather lowers our defenses as we take down protective

armor. And most importantly, naming all the ways our lives have been dysfunctional, all the ways we've strayed from who we should be, open a door wide for new possibilities.

It is the day both of last chances and of ultimate opportunities. "Who shall live and who shall die...?", the liturgy asks. Today is the day we must live, and live better than we ever have. Today is the day we must seize our lives, take hold of them, to become wider and bigger and fuller than we've ever been. To radiate out, in all directions — to not hide, to know that this is our moment for joy, this is our moment for becoming as powerful as we already are. So take the joy now, with both hands, greedily, and through it allow yourself to be made new, in this present moment, and to shine on with your great, gorgeous light.

Spiritual Meditation

Self-pity is nothing less than an impulse to self-destruction. And this is its script:

"This is the way you were made. These are the facts of your situation. It's bad. In fact, it's so bad, it's impossible to do anything about it. And therefore, you are free from any responsibility to clean it up. Nobody can blame you for anything."

Self-pity is a liar and a thief.

A liar because everyone is granted the power to clean up their own mess. A thief, because as long as it sits inside you, it is stealing away the days of your life.

Section VI: The Mincha Service

(pg. 881)

Part A: Torah Reading

(pg. 885)

During Mincha we read about the forbidden relationships. Why, on the holiest day of the year, when we are focused on spiritual ideals, do we read this portion?

Judaism Teaches That Holiness Is Intimately Connected with Sexuality

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Koren Yom Kippur Machzor (pg. 992-997)

Why the contrast with the behavior of the Egyptians and the Canaanites? Why are sexual sins so serious as to warrant the exile of Israel from its land?

Abraham and Sarah introduced (or reintroduced) a unique form of religious life, “Abrahamic monotheism,” as contrasted with the idolatry of the pagan world. But this is not a dominant theme of the narratives of Genesis. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob engage in no critique of idolatry. In this they are quite unlike the later prophets from Moses to Malachi for whom it was central. A famous rabbinic tradition states that Abraham was an iconoclast who broke his father’s idols, yet this is not mentioned explicitly in Genesis. Abraham’s family live among idolaters, sometimes make treaties with them, even pray for them, yet they do not overtly criticize their religion, or call on them to relinquish it. Wherein lies the difference between the life of the Abrahamic covenant and that of the peoples among whom they dwell? One theme emerges repeatedly and consistently: sexual ethics. Twice Abraham, and once Isaac, forced to leave home because of famine, fear that their lives will be in danger because they are married to beautiful women. They believe they are at risk of being killed so that Sarah or Rebecca can be taken into the local ruler’s harem. When two angels visit Lot in Sodom, the inhabitants of the town surround Lot’s house, demanding that he hand over the visitors so that they can be sexually assaulted. When Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, goes out to visit the women of Shekhem, she is abducted, raped, and held hostage by a local prince who has formed a passionate attachment to her. Joseph, a slave in Egypt, catches the eye of his master Potiphar’s wife who attempts to seduce him and when he refuses, accuses him of rape.

The appearance of these six stories cannot be merely incidental in so highly structured a text. The implication is bold and surprising. The fundamental difference between the life of the Abrahamic covenant and that of pagan societies is the presence in one, and the absence in the other, of a sexual ethic: an ethic of the sanctity of marriage and of sexual fidelity. Nor is it accidental that the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, Brit Milah, is circumcision. The sign of holiness is intimately connected with sexuality.

Holiness is expressed in our most intimate relationships within the family (Ibid)

Sexuality is a fundamental theme of ancient myth. There were male gods of power and potency and female goddesses of fertility and allure, and the relations between them were amoral. They fought, conquered, schemed, sired. Often, they killed one another; at times they killed their own children. It was a world of conflict and betrayal, of sexual lawlessness and anomie (or lack of social norms).

Judaism was and is opposed to this world, whether in its ancient forms of myth, or its more modern pseudo-scientific or philosophical counterparts, the neo-Darwinian myth (the “selfish gene”) that the fundamental driver of behavior is the desire to hand on one’s genes to the next generation, or the Nietzschean “will to power.”

Against this, Judaism sets forth an ethic of love and loyalty, concretized in the idea of covenant, whereby two parties, each respecting the integrity of the other, come together in a bond of mutual commitment and fidelity. The human counterpart of the covenant between God and humanity is marriage as a covenant between husband and wife.

A sexual ethic is therefore not just one among many features of Judaism. It is of its essence, for there is the closest possible connection between the way we relate to God and the way we relate to those to whom we are closest: our husband or wife, and our children. That is why Genesis, the story of our beginnings, deals only cursorily with the creation of the universe, and briefly with politics (a key theme of Exodus and Deuteronomy). Instead, it is a series of narratives about families, marriage partners, parents, children, and siblings.

One of the signs of a polytheistic or atheistic culture – where people believe that there are many gods or none – is the absence, subjectivity, or relativity of sexual ethics. Marriage is seen as one lifestyle among many. Adultery, infidelity, promiscuity, and sexual and child abuse are commonplace. Sexuality becomes the pursuit of desire. That is the world which Genesis contrasts with the life of the covenant. History supports this contention. Sexuality is often the primary force behind violence, and sexual decadence the first sign of civilizational decline.

So, the Torah passage we read on Yom Kippur afternoon, despite its seeming remoteness from the themes of the day, is telling us a fundamental truth about Judaism as a whole. Holiness is expressed in our most intimate relationships within the family: in the love that is loyal and generous, self-sacrificing and kind, in the sensitivity of marriage partners to one another and their needs, and in our ability to recognize the integrity-of-otherness that lies at the heart of love.

Part B: The Book of Jonah

(pg. 889)

On Yom Kippur afternoon we read about the prophet Jonah, sent by God to admonish the non-Jewish people of Nineveh to do teshuvah. He initially attempted to run away from this mission, for he reasoned that they would indeed repent. The teshuvah of the non-Jews would reflect negatively on the Jewish people, who did not repent. To protect the image of his Jewish brethren, Jonah rejected God's command to travel to Nineveh.

Based on Rabbi Frand On The Parsha – Yonah Defined Himself Foremost As A Jew. Do We?

One of the more memorable parts of the Yom Kippur davening is the reading of the Book of Yonah during the afternoon Minchah service. We read that the Tarshish-bound ship that Jonah had boarded was being lashed by a storm, and the ship was on the verge of breaking apart. The passengers and crew cast lots to ascertain who was responsible for their predicament. When the lots singled out Yonah as the culprit, they asked him, “What is your trade? And from where do you come? What is your land? And from what people are you?”

Jonah’s reply seems to answer only some of their questions but not others. All he says is, “I am a Hebrew (a Jew), and I fear God.”

On a deeper level, however, Jonah’s response really did answer all of their questions. The people on the boat wanted Jonah to define himself, to describe who he was – and so he did. He was a God-fearing Jew. Period.

There is a certain misconception commonplace in today’s day and age. There is nothing wrong with going out and making a living, but do we think of ourselves as doctors or lawyers first, or rather primarily as Jews? If you had to characterize yourself in one word, would you choose “accountant” or “Jew”?

Jonah’s response should penetrate into our hearts, until we likewise respond to such questions with similar words. Who are we? We are Jews.

With the numerous distractions of the complex world we live in, the way to rise to the challenge is to define ourselves. This requires us to make sure our priorities are in order, and to make sure that we are clearly aware of who we are, first and foremost.

The story of Jonah teaches us that we cannot hide from our mission in life. The world needs us.

Section VII: The Neilah Service

(pg. 957)

The culmination of Yom Kippur is the Neilah prayer, said at dusk just as Yom Kippur is coming to a close. In this climactic service, we ask God to seal our fate for good.

Neilah, literally “closing,” was thus named as it is said in the closing moments of the holy day, as the sun is setting, and the gates of heaven are clanging shut. The Lubavitcher Rebbe was wont to say that while the gates of heaven are closing, we are on the inside. Right now, each and every one of us is as close to God as we get during our lifetime. Savor

the moment and think deeply into what you have done this past year, and what you want the coming year to look like.

This fifth and final Amidah of Yom Kippur is smaller than the others, with a truncated confession. The repetition is unique in that the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are repeated time and time again, as we cling to the last moments of the day when the windows of heaven are open.

A Description of The Neilah Service

By Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 139

Yom Kippur ends with the third special prayer, Ne'ilah, which means "closing of the gates." It is the culmination of a day devoted to repentance, intense concentration, and prayer. Ne'ilah offers the last chance to seize the moment of Yom Kippur and to tap into the closeness with God that is so accessible on this holy day. Ne'ilah is said just before sundown, just before the metaphorical "closing of the Heavenly Gates." The Holy Ark containing the Torah remains open for the entire Ne'ilah service, which begins with the silent prayer of Yom Kippur. Instead of saying, "inscribe us in the book of life," as we have since Rosh Hashanah, we now say "seal us in the book of life." Ne'ilah is the time when the Heavenly judgment on each person is "signed and sealed," not merely inscribed. Ne'ilah continues with the repetition of the silent prayer, and the congregation joins in reciting the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy along with other prayers in which we literally beg for life and forgiveness.

The service ends with the entire congregation gathering its last reserves of concentration and emotion, and crying out Shema Yisrael, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is One," followed by "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity." This is said three times, after which "The Lord – Only He is God!" is repeated seven times. The cantor then recites Kaddish, the shofar is sounded, and the entire congregation says aloud and in unison, "Next year in Jerusalem!"

In many communities, the congregation repeats this phrase many times while dancing with joy. The solemnity of Yom Kippur is transformed into happiness and optimism, an expression of our belief that God will indeed forgive us and bring the redemption for which we have been praying and hoping.

The Name "Neilah" Signifies Closing

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Koren Yom Kippur Machzor

Ne'ilah, short for Ne'ilat She'arim, "the closing of the gates," is a service nowadays unique to Yom Kippur.

There was a dispute between Rav and Rabbi Yohanan as to the significance of the name. One held that it meant the closing of the gates of the Temple, the other that it meant the closing of the gates of heaven (Yerushalmi, Berachot 1). What gives this moment its drama and urgency is that it is the culmination of the one day that has the power to cleanse us of our sins. The sages said that in the absence of the Temple and the service of the High Priest, the day itself atones.

God Is Calling Us to Greatness (Ibid.)

Jews do not accept suffering that can be alleviated, or wrong that can be put right, as the will of God. We accept only what we cannot change. What we can heal, we must. So, disproportionately, Jews are to be found as teachers fighting ignorance, doctors fighting disease, economists fighting poverty, and lawyers fighting injustice. Judaism has given rise, not in one generation but in more than a hundred, to an unrivaled succession of prophets, priests, philosophers, poets, masters of halachah (Jewish law) and aggadah (moral teachings), commentators, codifiers, rationalists, mystics, sages and tzadikim, people who gave the Divine Presence its local habitation and name.

Judaism has consistently asked great things of our people, and in so doing, helped make them great. Tonight, at Ne'ilah, God is calling us to greatness.

That greatness is not conventional. We do not need to be rich or successful or famous or powerful to find favor in the eyes of God and our fellows. All we need is chesed, graciousness; chesed, kindness; rachamim, compassion; tzedek, righteousness and integrity; and mishpat, justice. To be a Jew is to seek to heal some of the wounds of the world, to search out the lonely and distressed and bring them comfort, to love and forgive as God loves and forgives, to study God's Torah until it is engraved in our minds, to keep God's commands so that they etch our lives with the charisma of holiness, to bring God's presence into the shared spaces of our common life, and to continue the story of our ancestors, writing our chapter in the book of Jewish life.

Spiritual Meditation

As a parent and a child, as siblings who remain bonded, as two young people in love, as in any marriage that stays alive—so we are with the One Above.

One chases, the other runs away. One runs away, the other chases in longing pursuit. One initiates, the other responds. The other initiates, the one responds.

It is a dance, a game, a duet, and it plays as surely as the pulse of life.

Until one falls away. Until it seems the game is over, that all is lost, and it is time to move on.

That's when the other looks and says, "This is not another. We are one." And so, they return to each other's arms.

It is a great mystery, but in that falling apart, there is found the deepest bond.

Epilogue: Looking Beyond and Repairing the World

An Excerpt from Rabbi Scher's talk at February's The Black-Jewish Story Shabbat Dinner

I am a dual citizen. One of the things that I had to do to prepare for this evening's Shabbat dinner focusing on the Black-Jewish story is distinguish between the Black-Jewish story in the United States versus Canada.

Please allow me to explain.

My great-grandmother, Ida, was the woman I am named for (just add the N and you have "Idan"). Upon arriving to the United States, she settled in a large Jewish community on Chicago's West Side. She ended up being the last white woman on her entire block because as Black people moved into the neighborhood Jewish people fled. They retreated to the northeastern part of the city and the suburbs. Was this "escape" promoted by real estate agents and amplified by fear mongering? In many cases, yes. Either way, it happened...and my great-grandmother was the last person left.

My father was the last white child in his elementary school class on the South Side of Chicago. I grew up hearing my father say that the white people leaving those beautiful neighbourhoods of Chicago were their own worst enemies. Black people came in and white people, especially white Jews...they left.

This was the story of so many areas around the United States. Black people came in and white people, especially white Jews moved out.

I only know of one exception to this story. The story of Crown Heights. Although many Jews did leave Crown Heights as the Black community came in, the Lubavitcher Rebbe insisted that all his Hassidim, Lubavitcher Jews, stay.

In the United States I can equivocally say that tension or friction does exist between some Black communities and some Jewish communities. I grew up hearing the word "shvartze" in some social circles. Some very prominent Rabbis both in the US and in Israel have used

racially charged terms, speaking of black people in a variety of derogatory and demeaning ways. In some communities derisive and degrading speech towards the Black community has normalized to the point of near-institutionalization.

As well, I would be remiss if I did not mention the discrimination that Jews of Colour experience from within the Jewish community.

We see this friction going both ways. In the Black community, prominent leaders are on record spewing real antisemitism.

Let's not forget, of course, the Crown Heights riots. The very area the Rebbe said not to leave was home to a devastating race riot in 1991 enflamed by the rhetoric of some very popular Black leaders. When a young boy was hit and killed by a car in the Rebbe's convoy, riots ensued that caused untold damage to the Jewish community and took the life of a young Jewish student.

When the chaos was truly at risk of resending beyond control, a strong voice of reason rose above the turmoil. Coretta Scott King the widow of Rev Martin Luther King Jr. told Al Sharpton the following:

“The purpose of our movement has never been to just get civil rights for us, it's to protect and stand for civil and human rights for everyone.” She continued, “sometimes you are tempted to speak to the applause of the crowd rather than the heights of the cause, and you will say cheap things to get cheap applause rather than do higher things to raise the nation higher.”

She continued with Sharpton: “You could have spoken out louder for everyone, if you are going to be in the King tradition and if you are going to be invested in your roots, and if you are going to be what we invested in you to be.”

In the afternoon, immediately after the Crown Heights riots began to subside, Mayor Dinkins, then the mayor of New York City paid a visit to the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. In front of dozens of cameras, Dinkins said he would bring “both sides” of the community back to peace. The Rebbe responded, “We are one side, one people, united by the management of New York City. May God protect the police and all the people of the city.”

Unfortunately, these visions of hope have yet to be realized. There were attacks by Black people against Jewish people in New York this past December that rehashed much of the negativity. The Jewish community spoke publicly about “Black antisemitism” as if to suggest that the Blacks are a monolithic group that hates Jews. The interviews that were

played repeatedly on the major news outlets were of Black people, residents of the communities where these hate crimes took place, unabashedly utilizing antisemitic tropes as if it were completely normal.

This is the story of the United States. A story of sometimes working together - of Rabbis and Jewish leaders taking an active lead during the civil rights movement. It's that famous picture of the march on Selma with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel standing next to Reverend King, and it's also the story of Jews being murdered for signing black people up to vote.

But it is also a story of friction and tension that exists until this very day.

However, this is not the story in Canada. Every Jewish leader and Black leader I have spoken to here in Canada - and what I have also witnessed here myself - share the same thoughts. We don't have noticeable friction and overwhelmingly don't have tension between our communities. Our story in Canada is that we just don't have anything to do with each other.

To that point, perhaps we should say "let sleeping dogs lie - we do not have to be best friends with everyone." But if we have such little interaction, we remain ignorant; and when we are ignorant, we lose out on what can be the most meaningful and rich of human relationships.

When we live side by side with people and are completely oblivious to who they are - their struggles and their hardships, but also their celebrations - we are ignoring one of the most important values of our faith.

Every human being was created in God's image. To ignore our neighbors' story is to ignore the Divine surrounding us.

As I was working on this evening it hit me hard that I knew so little about the Black communities here in Ottawa. To repair that, I have done as much as possible to learn and connect with our city's Black communities over the past couple of months. I knew of intense challenges that Black communities experienced in the US; and was shocked to find that many of these challenges exist in Canada as well.

For instance, as white Jews, we feel so comfortable with the police; we are so grateful every time we see a police officer as they are so important to us. But in the Black community this is often not so. Even my dear friend Reverend Bailey, who teaches cultural sensitivity workshops to the Ottawa Police Service, has suffered from racial profiling here in Ottawa.

I don't think most Jews are aware of this because we have so little to do with our neighbours in the Black communities. The idea that a black person may not call the police when they are in distress is a reality and will continue to be something unimaginable to a white Jew unless we learn to communicate and connect with our fellow human beings. The converse is true as well.

When students from around Ottawa come and visit our synagogue and encounter our intense security protocols, I always use the opportunity as a teaching moment. I explain that for Jews, although it is generally not institutionalized discrimination we suffer from, we still suffer from the highest number of hate crimes of any minority group in Canada and the US. Jews must struggle with people off the street thinking it's appropriate to punch a Jew in the face or much worse.

Sadly, neither of our respective communities have any idea about these things because we have so little to do with each other. The consequence is that our humanity, as guided by our faith and moral compass, is lacking because we are not properly united with our fellow brothers and sisters. This is the immediate danger of "blissful ignorance".

Sure, we have had some inspiring moments; but we can be so much more than the byproduct of getting together when something really bad happens to either of our communities.

At this point in time, we are going to make an effort to do just that. We are going to invite each other to partake of each other's communal lives. Perhaps we won't invite the Black community to come to our High Holy Day services (as they can last for about six or seven hours); but we will invite them to share in our broader celebrations. I know that Reverend Bailey will do the same. If we go out of our way to get to know each other, then not only will we be restoring the completeness of our humanity; but Ottawa will stand as a bastion for the world as to what unity really means.