

Darkhei Noam: Yamim Noraim Davening Model

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On Yom Kippur we dress and act like angels, staying away from the failings of mortals: food, drink and other distractions. And yet on Musaf of Yom Kippur we recite a *piyut* which suggests that what we really should be on this holiest of days is... human beings. The *piyut*, “*Asher Eymatcha*” – אשר אימתך – describes how God – despite having myriad of awesome angels – actually craves praise from sordid, mortal, lying, human beings:

Though your dread is upon the faithful angels, who are mightily powerful...	אשר אימתך באראלי אמן, באבירי אמיץ...
Yet you desire praise from clods of earth... of putrid deeds, who are sated with rage, who are devoid of truth... and this is Your praise!	ואביתה תהילה, מגלומי גוש... מסרוחי מעש, משבעי רגז, מעדורי אמת... והיא תהלתך!

As the Rebbe of Kotzk put it: “God doesn’t want more angels. He has enough angels. Angels are boring – they have no choice. What God wants is human beings. And being a human being is so much harder...”

Yamim Noraim are days of self-searching and self-knowing. נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה אליך. – “we will seek our ways, investigate, and return to You.” We must come to the Tefillah of Yamim Noraim with our full selves, manifesting the values we believe in: as individuals and as a community. On our third year of praying together on the High Holy Days, we asked ourselves: how should a community like Darkhei Noam approach the Yamim Noraim?

At Darkhei Noam, we are committed to maximizing the role of women within the path of Halakha, and to creating a vibrant lay led community. As part of that path, we – like many other congregations across the world, and on the constant advice of our Halakhic advisor – have reset the Shabbat prayers as a place where both men and women’s voices are heard, where the entire community has the ability to participate in the mainstay of serving Hashem through communal prayer. Indeed, our Torah service, which is the center (and perhaps the origin) of communal prayer on Shabbat, is ordinarily led by a woman and both men and women read from the Torah for the kahal.

On Yamim Noraim however, it is not the Torah reading at the center, but rather the public repetition of Musaf which is the high point of Tefillah – both halakhically and emotionally. Thus this year we strove to find a way to include the voices of both men and women in Musaf.

After discussing these questions with the community and board, and having consulted with our Halakhic Advisor, Rabbi Daniel Sperber, we will have two “Baalei Tefillah” for Musaf and Kol Nidrei evening. A man will serve as *Shaliach Tzibur* (leader), leading all the core pieces of *hazarat haShatz* (the repetition) – the brachot and any section that is a repetition of the *tefillah lachash* (silent recitation). A woman will lead segments of *piyyutim*, the additional liturgy that is unique to the repetition, perhaps at times being joined in doing so by the male leader. During the *selichot* of Yom Kippur Maariv, a woman will lead the sections that are recited by individuals when praying without a minyan, in addition to sections of Kol Nidrei in continuation of our minhag in the past.

This is a shift from the traditional model of one “leader” who goes ahead of the community, climbing the mountain of Tefillah alone, like Moshe, to appease God. Having two leaders is a symbolic statement that as a community that believes in lay leadership, Darkhei Noam davening is one in which everyone is asked to be present. It might be easier to have one person who will carry the burden for us, but in the same spirit in which we run our community, the tefillah of Yamim Noraim should be a place where many people are asked to step up and share the responsibility. In most cases the davening will be led by either the man or woman alone, but in those parts of the prayer that do not constitute *tefillat lachash*, they may join together.

This model is not entirely new: In synagogues around the world it is not uncommon to have people who are not the *Shaliach Tzibur* (often more musically inclined) lead piyyutim: from the tradition of a *paytan somekh* alongside the Hazan, through to the custom of Sephardic communities where piyyutim are led by various members of the community, including those not yet *bar mitzvah*. Anyone who has participated in a Hazzanut “tefillah concert” has probably witnessed as various hazzanim lead segments of the tefillah, alternating with the *Shaliach Tzibur*. More recently, many partnership minyanim, such as ours, have experimented with different models of co-leading.

It is not simple to change minhagim on the Yamim Noraim. While it is perhaps our core humanity that God seeks as he forgives us on these days, there is also a primacy of place to our *zechut avot* – the merit of our ancestors who paved spiritual paths for us to walk on. As we seek to do our share in the important Teshuva moment which Orthodox Feminism represents, we must be doubly attuned to holding on to the authenticity of the paths of our ancestors. If we are to innovate in our tefillah as a community, we must be doubly present in our tefillah as individuals. This is not a perfect model, nor is it necessarily one for generations. However, as a community which is strongly committed to maximizing women’s roles according to Halakha, and creating an inclusive, lay-led and spiritually committed community, we seek to live the values we believe in, both inside the synagogue and outside of it. By including both men and women voices in our Tefillot this year, we will be able to unabashedly say in front of the open Aron Kodosh: שמע קולנו ה' אלרהינו – Hear *our* voice.

May our prayers this year be received in earnest, and may we be written in the Book of Life.

הרחמן יקבל תפילתינו ברצון, ויכתבנו בספר חיים

[Mishael Zion, in the name of the Darkhei Noam Yamim Noraim Committee]