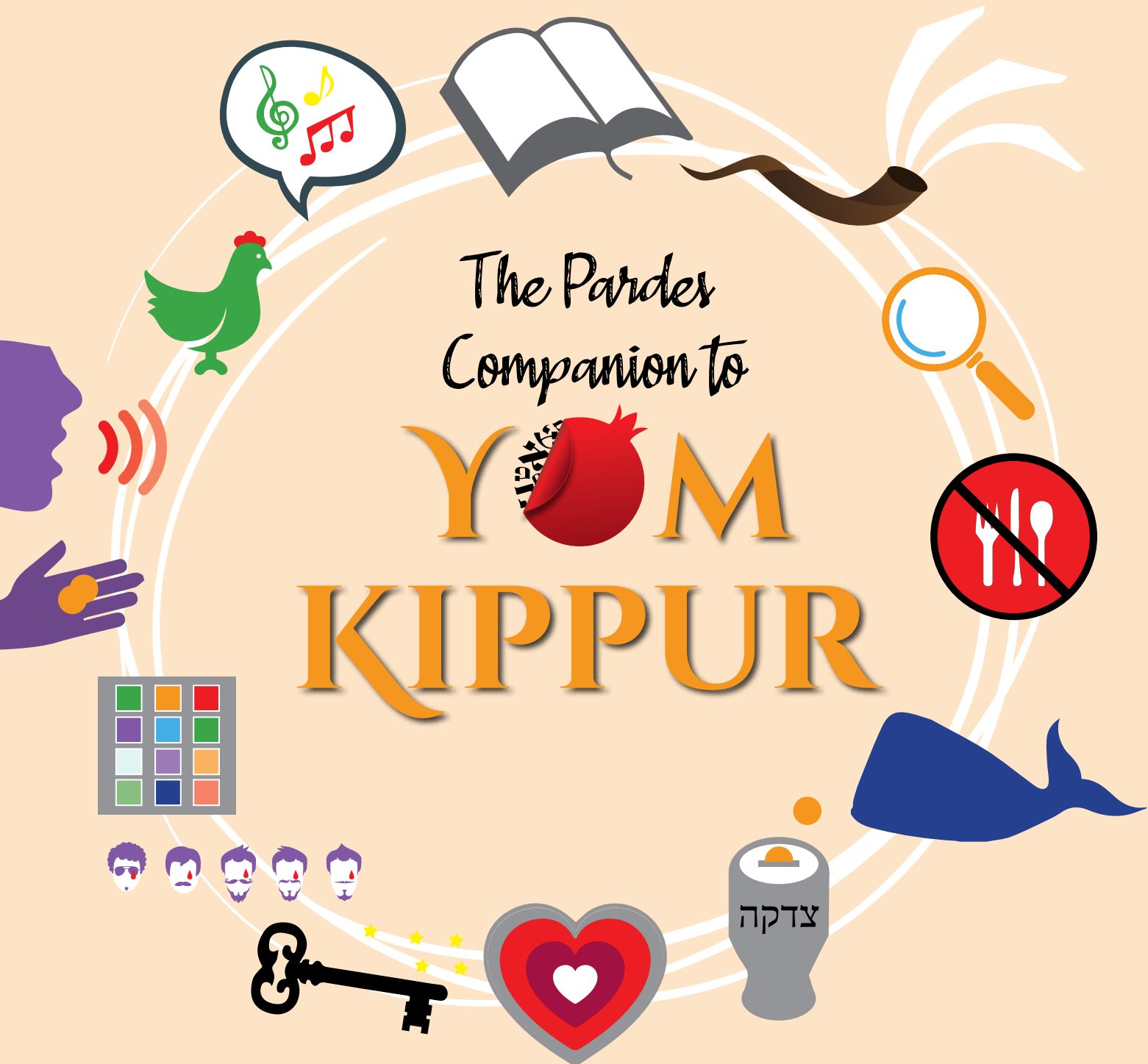
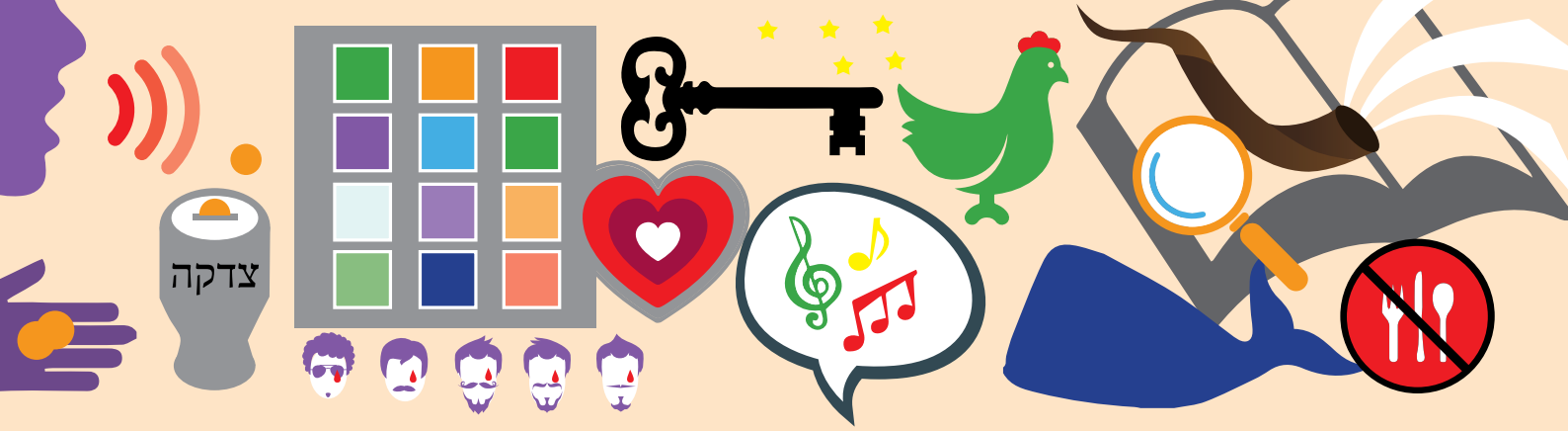


*In memory of Fred Simon Worms OBE from his loving family.  
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## A day of joy and intimacy **Meesh Hammer-Kossoy**

The Mishnah (Taanit 4:8) describes Yom Kippur festivities:

אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל, לא היו  
 ימים טובים לישראל כחמישה עשר  
 באב וכיום הכיפורים, שבהם בני  
 ירושלים יוצאין בכלי לבן שאולים,  
 ובנות ירושלים יוצאות וחונות  
 בכרמים. וכך הן אומרות, שא נא  
 בחור עיניך וראה, מה אתה בורר לך...

Rabbi Simon ben Gamliel said: There never were greater days of joy in Israel than the fifteenth of Av and the Day of Atonement. On these days the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in white dresses...The daughters of Jerusalem came out and danced in the vineyards exclaiming at the same time, young man, lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself...

The most joyous day of the year?! Yom Kippur is associated first and foremost with self-denial (עינוי), a word repeated five times indicating abstention not just from food and drink, but also from washing, anointing, wearing shoes, and marital relations. As if showing contrition in a court appeal, we spend the day in shul, in chest pounding, confession and supplication before God.

So why are we dancing in white? The Mishnah compares Yom Kippur to a wedding day, as well as to the day of the giving of the law. Rashi (1040-1105, France) does the math. After Moses breaks the tablets on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, he spends forty days praying. On Rosh Hodesh Elul, Moses is told to ascend for forty more days, culminating on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei when he delivers the second tablets successfully, symbolizing lasting union and ultimate forgiveness.

Yom Kippur is the climactic end to a long process of reconciliation. Together with God, we have been in marriage counseling since the summer. That healing brings the relationship to new depths, that could never have been achieved otherwise. "The spiritual place occupied by penitents is unapproachable by the one who has always been righteous" (Berachot 34b). What better reason to dance?

We do not take care of our physical needs on Yom Kippur because it is a day of self-denial. But also because it is a day of joy and revelation. Like Moses on Mount Sinai and the angels all year round, we have reached a spiritual height in which doing so is totally unnecessary! We hope this companion adds meaning – and joy – to your Yom Kippur, and pray that we will be sealed in the Book of Life. *Gmar Hatimah Tovah.*

**Rabbi Meesh Hammer-Kossoy** teaches Talmud and is the Director of the Pardes Social Justice Track.



# Preparing for Yom Kippur: A practical *teshuva* exercise

David I. Bernstein

Every year before Yom Kippur, I run a practical *teshuva* (introspection) workshop in which people are asked to write answers to certain questions and prepare themselves for the awesome day ahead. Here are some of the questions to do on your own before the great day. A warning: do not think before you write! It will lead to self-censorship. Read each question, and begin to write immediately as a stream of consciousness.

**1** Two ways I can be a better daughter/son.

**2** Two ways I can be a better sister/brother.

**3** Three ways I can be more serious at my job, or as a student.

**4** Three ways I can be a better roommate/partner/spouse.

**5** There are two kinds of people we ask forgiveness from: those who love us, and those who do not. Two people in each category I must ask forgiveness from.

**6** Many years ago, I was a counselor in summer camp for a young man named Marc Sackin. Tragically, this extremely talented adolescent died in a car crash. He had grown enormously in his character, and I never got to tell him that. Someone I need to tell something to.

**7** Two *mitzvot* (commandments) that I would like to do, but didn't do well, or didn't do enough, or at all.

**8** The two things I did this year that I am most proud of.

**9** Two things I am ashamed I did last year, two things which don't reflect the real me.

**10** Three goals I set myself for the coming year.

**11** What do I want to BE (i.e. what kind of person do I want to be) when I grow up?

**12** How can I go about becoming the kind of person I want to be?

**13** Two people I look up to and what it is I admire about them.

May this exercise help you to have a meaningful Yom Kippur, and may we all be granted forgiveness and a good year!



## Why we fast on Yom Kippur

Zvi Hirschfield

Fasting on Yom Kippur is not as obvious as one might think. Nowhere does the Torah explicitly command it. Instead, the verses teach us to “afflict ourselves” without defining the nature of this “affliction.”

We do know that Yom Kippur is about atonement and forgiveness. So how does “afflicting” ourselves through fasting relate to *teshuva*? Many assume that fasting is a form of self-punishment, a way of balancing the scales for over-indulgence or rule-breaking. The pietists of medieval Ashkenaz called this *teshuvat hamishkal*, literally repentance of balance. The pleasure brought by sin must be accounted for and balanced by physical discomfort. But this does not connect fasting to the personal growth and psychological transformation.

In his commentary on Leviticus, the Abravanel (1437-1508, Portugal) connects fasting to our capacity to be like angels. When we abstain from food and water we demonstrate our spiritual identities. As another medieval commentator noted, when we fast our bodies are afflicted, but our souls rejoice. I find the sharp dualism hard to connect with. I do not conceive of myself as a good, pure soul in constant conflict with and chained to a corrupt, sinning body. I find an integrated identity more relevant.

The Talmud alludes to another approach that I find to be the most helpful. In the section dealing with fasting, the rabbis note that Yom Kippur is referred to as a *shabbaton*, a day of rest. From this perspective, when we abstain from eating and drinking, we are actually “resting” or “pausing” from these activities. The discomfort we feel on Yom Kippur is not a direct result of the absence of physical pleasure but rather, from the psychic and spiritual pain brought on by sin.

When we act in ways that betray our inner goodness and contradict the essence of who we are as beings in relationship with God and each other, our souls are in pain. While this pain is always present, many of us ignore it, cover it up, or distract ourselves with physical pleasure.

On Yom Kippur we “rest” from these distractions and allow the “affliction” in our hearts (from pain caused, opportunities missed, and alienation from our best selves) to be fully experienced and felt. This type of affliction can then push us towards growth, forgiveness and transformation!

*Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield teaches Talmud, Halakha and Jewish Thought.*



# תפילה זכה Tefilah Zakkah

## Bilateral and unilateral forgiveness on the eve of Yom Kippur

Daniel Roth

As we change our shoes, grab our *mahzor* (prayer book) and rush off to find our seats in synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur, there is one more thing we must do – forgive others. The Mishnah says: “Transgressions that are between a person and God Yom Kippur atones for; transgressions that are between fellow people Yom Kippur does not atone for, until one appeases their fellow person” (Mishnah Yoma 8). This mishnah inspired two later traditions.

The first may be found in the traditional *mahzor* for Yom Kippur and is part of the *tefilah zakkah* popularized by Rabbi Avraham Danzig (1748-1820, Lithuania) in which it states:

והנני מוחל במחילה גמורה לכל מי  
שחטא נגדי, בין בגופו ובין בממונו, או  
שדבר עלי לשון הרע ואפלו הוצאת  
שם רע, וכן לכל מי שהזיק לי בגופי או  
בממוני, ולכל חטאת האדם אשר בין  
אדם לחברו...אני מוחל במחילה גמורה  
ולא יענש שום אדם בסבתי. וכשם שאני  
מוחל לכל אדם, כן תתן את חני בעיני  
כל אדם שימחלו לי במחילה גמורה.

I extend complete forgiveness to everyone who has gossiped about me or even slandered me. So, too, to anyone who has injured me, whether physically or financially, and for any human sins between a person and their neighbor ... I grant complete forgiveness; and may no person be punished on my account. And just as I forgive everyone, so may You grant me favor in every person's eyes, so that they will grant me complete forgiveness.

However at the exact same moment there is another tradition of forgiveness that requires us to stand up and go over to others and directly ask them for forgiveness, as Rabbi Avraham Klauzner (14<sup>th</sup> century, Austria) writes:

הולכים יחפים לבית הכנסת  
ומוחלין זה לזה בלב שלם.

They walk barefoot to synagogue,  
and forgive each other with a full heart.

And later Rabbi Yichiel Epstein (Aruch Hashulchan 606:4) wrote:

ונהגו בעיור"כ כמה אנשים  
לבקש אחד מחבירו מחילה אף  
שלא חירפו זה לזה כלל אלא  
שמא פגעו בכבוד זה לזה.

And it is a custom of some people on the eve of Yom Kippur, that each person asks his friend for forgiveness even if they did not insult the other one at all, but rather it is possible that they hurt the honor of the other.

The question raised is whether there is really a need to do both of these traditions. Wouldn't it be enough to just recite the words in our *mahzor*, and then there is no need to ask others directly to forgive us, since they too have recited the same declaration of forgiveness? (See Responsa Az Nidbaru 68, of Rabbi Binyamin Zilber).

The answer, is we absolutely need to do both of these traditions as they serve two different functions. When we sit by ourselves and recite the declaration of *tefilah zakkah*, we are engaging in unilateral forgiveness, thereby releasing our psychological pain and desire for revenge. However it does not heal our relationship. When we ask for or grant forgiveness, we can heal or strengthen our relationships, but this may not happen without our doing the inner work of forgiving others unilaterally in our hearts first.


I suggest we leave five minutes earlier to synagogue to say the *tefilah zakkah* prayer and then approach others and ask them to forgive us and offer our forgiveness to them. If we can do both of these, then perhaps God can grant us the gift of forgiveness on Yom Kippur as the midrash states (Pesikat Rabbati, 44, p.199b):

צריכין כל ישרי להחזיק בתשובה  
ולעשות שלום בין אדם לחבירו  
למחול זה לזה בערב יום הכיפורים,  
כדי שיקבל תשובתם ותפילתם  
לפני הק' בשלום ובחיבה יתירה.

All of Israel are required to engage in repentance and to make peace between people and to forgive one another during the ten days of repentance in order that their repentance and their prayer be accepted before God in peace and abundant love.


Further Pardes study guides on *Jewish Views of Forgiveness* are available for adults at: [www.elmad.pardes.org/ykstudyprsc](http://www.elmad.pardes.org/ykstudyprsc) and for schools at: [www.elmad.pardes.org/ykstudyprss](http://www.elmad.pardes.org/ykstudyprss).

*Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth is the Director Emeritus of the Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution and an adjunct faculty member. He is now the Director of Mosaica – The Religious Peace Initiative.*




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# כל נדרי Kol Nidrei

## An appropriate time, an appropriate place

Levi Cooper

The hasidic master Rabbi Meir Horowitz of Dzików (1819-1877) was asked “about the custom of Israel to sing on *Rosh Hodesh* at the festive meal.” Rabbi Meir’s response was definitive: There is no such prohibition. Moreover, singing in praise of the Almighty is to be lauded.

Rabbi Meir of Dzików explained that the authorities who had been against singing were referring to singing songs out of context, like when cantors sing passages from the service of the High Holy Days – such as *Unetaneh Tokef* – at festive meals. Such performances were merely for the public’s enjoyment and were not aimed at thanking or praising the Almighty, and as such they were forbidden.

Years later, the world renowned cantor, Yossele Rosenblatt (1882-1933) was reportedly given a lucrative offer to sing in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first feature-length motion picture with synchronized dialogue, signaling the arrival of talkies.

The hero of the film, Jakie Rabinowitz, was played by Al Jolson, and Yossele was asked to play Jakie’s father, the old cantor. The plot involved Jakie pursuing a career as a jazz singer and coming into conflict with his Jewish heritage. Jakie runs away after being chastised by his father for choosing to “debase the voice God gave him.” That Yom Kippur, Cantor Rabinowitz says: “My son was to stand at my side and sing tonight – but now I have no son,” and then he soulfully chants *Kol Nidrei*.

Yet Yossele declined the offer, since the part required him to sing *Kol Nidrei* on the silver screen. Reminiscent of the words of Rabbi Meir of Dzików, Yossele felt that it was inappropriate to sing High Holy Day prayers outside the framework of the service. The producers still wanted Yossele, and he appeared in the film as himself, singing *Yartzeit Licht* – a song in Yiddish.

Rabbi Meir of Dzików and Yossele Rosenblatt understood that there is a time and place for everything. Rabbi Meir of Dzików expressed this in his legal writing, Yossele Rosenblatt in his career choices. Indeed, there is an appropriate time and an appropriate place for everything.

As we begin the Yom Kippur service we know that *this* is the time, *this* is the place. It is *now* that we dedicate ourselves to heartfelt prayer, to soul-searching and introspection, to communion with the Almighty. May all our prayers be answered.

Read the longer article, *The Tisch: The (hassidic) jazz singer* on [www.elmad.pardes.org](http://www.elmad.pardes.org)





# Ma'ariv: Vidui וְדוּי Repent any way we can

Elisha Ancselovits

At this time of year, we reevaluate who we are and our behaviors. We may have sinned against others and already made amends. We may have personal habits that detract from our ability to be good. We may have failed to maintain good habits. Whatever may be, we need to change and the best way for us to change ourselves is to acknowledge aloud the wrongfulness of what we have done. We change when we cease hiding from ourselves, or from God, or from our need to change.

So why do we confess an alphabetical list of sins: “א been guilty, ב betrayed, ג stolen [etc.]” rather than acknowledge the details? Why do we confess forty-four characteristics of how people in general sin (*al heit*) rather than the actual sins we committed?

One answer is that these lists prepare us psychologically to confess. By recognizing the characteristics of how all people sin, we can see why we sinned and are able to allow ourselves to acknowledge our sins. By confessing lists of general sins repeatedly, throughout the period of repentance, we weaken our resistance to admitting our own specific sins.

An opposite answer is that the detailed revisiting of a sin may overwhelm us with guilt. It may even remind us of the temptation that we left behind. We may not be ready to internalize the serious wrongness and accept the inherent human weakness of our actions. We may be ready to abandon the old behavior but not to examine ourselves. As Rabbi Akiva taught against the Tannaitic consensus. It can be best to avoid dwelling on sins when repenting:

רבי עקיבא אומר: אין צריך [לפרוט  
את החטא] (תוספתא יומא ד, יד)

Rabbi Akiva said: One need not [confess the sin in  
detail (t.Yoma 4:14)]

רבי עקיבא אומר: אשרי נשוי פשע  
כסוי חטאה (בבלי יומא פו ע"ב)

Rabbi Akiva said: Fortunate is he whose transgression is  
covered, whose sin is pardoned (b.Yoma 86b)

So, which approach is correct? The debate continues throughout Jewish history. And the famous 16<sup>th</sup> century code of Jewish law summarizes it best. It all depends on the person and the sin:

אין צריך לפרט החטא; ואם רצה לפרט,  
הרשות בידו; ואם מתודה בלחש, נכון  
[אבל אינו חייב] לפרט החטא.  
(שו"ע או"ח סימן תרז סע"ב)

One need not specify the sin. If one wishes, however,  
he may do so. And it is correct [but not obligatory] to  
specify the sin if he confesses silently.  
(Shulhan Arukh OH 607:2)

We must do whatever works best for each one of us in relation to each sin. Our goal in confessing is to speak in order to change.







# Ma'ariv: 13 Attributes of Mercy

## מדות

### An invitation to join God in prayer

Yaffa Epstein

The thirteen attributes of God's mercy are first found in Exodus 34:6-7. After the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe pleaded for forgiveness on their behalf. This moment of forgiveness happened the second time Moshe ascended Mount Sinai, and the Rabbis teach us that this day of ultimate forgiveness corresponds to Yom Kippur.

Rosh Hashana 17b explains that God actually used these thirteen attributes to show Moshe how to pray and ask for forgiveness.

א"ר יוחנן אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי  
אפשר לאומרו מלמד שנתעטף  
הקב"ה כשליח צבור והראה לו  
למשה סדר תפלה אמר לו כל זמן  
שישראל חוטאין יעשו לפני כסדר  
הזה ואני מוחל להם

Rabbi Yochanan states: If it wouldn't be a verse in the Torah, we would not be able to say this: We are taught that God wrapped Himself in a talit, like the prayer leader, and showed Moses the order of the prayer. He said to Moses: "Whenever the people of Israel sin, they should repeat before me this prayer, and I will forgive them."

This text implies that there is guaranteed forgiveness if we recite these words. But, isn't this problematic? What is the meaning behind muttering these words if there is no *teshuva* process?

A closer look at Rabbi Yochanan's entire statement will help us understand. The verse states:

ועבור ה' על פניו, ויקרא, ה' ה', קל רחום  
וחנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת

God passed by before him and proclaimed:  
"God, God, Omnipotent, merciful and kind, slow  
to anger, with tremendous love and truth."

Rabbi Yochanan focuses on the word, *VaYavor*, And God passed before – and draws a parallel to a prayer leader who passes before the ark, which in Rabbinic parlance is called *la'avor lifnei hateiva*. Rabbi Yochanan explains that God is actually acting as the *shaliach tzibbur*, the prayer leader, showing and guiding Moshe.

It is a beautiful moment. God is both praying and leading – telling Moshe how to get forgiveness while also reciting God's attributes as a prayer. Perhaps this teaches us that God is exposing God's own wish to be able to overcome anger and to forgive. Interestingly, Rabbi Yochanan states in Brachot 7b that this is actually God's prayer – that God's mercy overcome God's anger.

We are not only praying to God but *with* God. God is the prayer leader, who guides us, who is with us and invested in a relationship with us. Even if at times we feel lost, alone and far away, God is there, leading us, guiding us and helping us to find our way back. The recital of the thirteen attributes is not a magical spell but a reminder that the relationship is always there, if we decide to access it.

*Rabba Yaffa Epstein* is a former member of the faculty and staff and is currently the Director of the Wexner Heritage Program.





# Ma'ariv: Ki Hinei כי הני

## Escape from freedom of choice?

David Levin-Kruss

*“Like clay in the hand of the potter...Like stone in the hand of the cutter...Like an ax-head in the hand of the blacksmith...Like an anchor in the hands of the sailor. Like the glass in the hands of the blower...Like the curtain in the hand of the embroiderer...Like the silver in the hand of the silversmith.”*

These words are from an anonymous poem, probably written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by a French liturgist who based himself on Jeremiah 18:6 which reads, in part: “Behold, as clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.” The words dramatically express the fragility of our lives and how, especially at this time of the year, we are intensely aware of how our fate is in God's hands.

But isn't there something very passive about this? This poem gives the impression that everything on our journey is under Divine authority. In theological terms, God's providence is central, and free choice is denied. This is a hard position for many of us moderns who emphasize control.

Two systems clashing? Perhaps. And yet, I have spoken to artists and they have told me that sometimes they want to use their clay, stone, glass, material, silver and, especially, wood (which is not mentioned in this poem) in a specific way but when the time comes, the material gets a life of its own and asks to be directed differently. Authors, too, speak of their characters becoming independent of their creator.

So when it says that we are like stone in the hand of the cutter, it is true that God is shaping us but God shapes us according to who we choose to be – on the path that a person wants to go, on that path they are led (Makot 10b). Theologically this is complicated – if God is all powerful how can God allow us to shape ourselves? But religiously and psychologically, it makes perfect sense – we are a combination of God, luck and circumstances, as well as our own efforts. This is even alluded to in the poem itself when we ask God to remember the covenant God made with us and not be swayed by accusations against us. When we say this we are affirming that we may have the power to change God's mind. How apt for Yom Kippur.

*Rabbi David Levin-Kruss is an adjunct faculty member at Pardes. He works as Director of Jewish Education for Europe at the JDC.*



# Musaf: Seder Avodah עבודה

## The drama of the High Priest

Alex Israel

On Yom Kippur, at the climax of the *Avodah* (the description of the Temple in the *musaf* service on Yom Kippur), we sing:

אמת מה נהדר היה כהן גדול.  
בצאתו מבית קדשי הקדשים  
בשלום בלי פגע

Truly how splendid was the High Priest, as he came out of the Holy of Holies...Like the heavenly canopy stretched out over the angels, like the lightning flashes from the radiance of the heavenly beings

But did the High Priest really shine so radiantly? In the Bible, whose is the man whose face shone? It is *Moshe Rabbeinu*. Moses descended Mount Sinai on Yom Kippur with the second Tablets of Stone, and with a message of divine forgiveness (Exodus 34).

On Yom Kippur, the High Priest, who enters the Temple's inner chamber – the *Kodesh HaKodashim* – simulates Moses's ascent to Sinai. This manifests itself in several ways:

**1** Nahmanides (Exodus 25:1; Numbers 1:1) says that the Temple symbolizes Sinai: The Sanctuary structure is restricted to non-priests, just like Sinai (Exodus 19:22,24); the inner chamber (the Holy of Holies) symbolizes the mountain-top. It is the place where Moses encounters God, and the place where law is transmitted (Exodus 25:22).

**2** On Yom Kippur the High Priest must enter the inner chamber enveloped in a cloud (Leviticus 16:2) of incense, much like the peak of Sinai was covered by a cloud, an embodiment of God's presence (Exodus 19:9,16).

**3** The High Priest enters the inner sanctum just once a year. The High Priest is fasting, just as Moses, "He did not eat bread, nor did he drink water" (Exodus 34:28).

**4** The High Priest must enter the inner chamber unaccompanied. The same instruction was given to Moses when he ascended Mount Sinai to receive the second tablets.

The focus of the service on Yom Kippur, sees the High Priest entering the "virtual" zenith of Mount Sinai; re-enacting Moses's encounter with God on Mount Sinai, on the same date – Yom Kippur – as he received the second set of Tablets.

Moreover, the High Priest discards his golden garb before entering the Holy of Holies, wearing only pure white garments. Why? The Talmud explains: "The prosecutor cannot act as the defense

attorney.” The golden garb is reminiscent of Israel’s sin of the Golden Calf; in response, the High Priest enters without a sign of gold upon him.

The Golden Calf had been Israel’s greatest sin, an abrogation of the covenant. As a result, the symbol of the covenant – the two tablets – were smashed. But now, some time afterwards, God forgives. Moses is invited to the top of Mount Sinai to craft, together with Him, a new set of tablets just like the first, a tangible symbol of the renewal of the relationship (Exodus 34:1-2).

When the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies, he does not receive anything material. But on the anniversary of God’s exoneration of Israel despite their great betrayal, the High Priest emerges with God’s blessing, God’s covenant of forgiveness.

When the High Priest’s face shines, it is a reflection of Moses’s radiance. Our prayer is that God will continue to extend forgiveness to His nation, and renew the covenant for Israel, on the anniversary of God’s historic forgiveness.

*Rabbi Alex Israel teaches Bible and is the Director of the Pardes Community Education Program and the Pardes Summer Program.*

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# Musaf: Ten Martyrs הרוגים

Mike Feuer

The poem *Eleh Ezkera*, (These I Will Recall) weaves together stories from gemarah and midrash, into a narrative telling of the ten Sages executed by the Roman Empire. Though we are not sure which details of their deaths are literal, we are sure that there is *kabalat ol malchut shemayim*, the acceptance of the sovereignty of heaven, at the root of their tale.

The story opens with the Emperor's insistence on justice. Nobody was ever punished for the kidnapping of Joseph, an act for which the Torah mandates death. When he confronts the Sages with his judgment that they will be offered in place of the long-dead sons of Yaakov, they turn to God in order to determine if this is just. The voice from 'behind the veil' indicates that the Emperor's will is Divine, making what unfolds a submission to God, not Caesar.

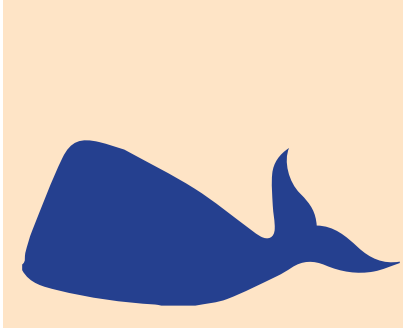
On the national historical scale, the death of the ten martyrs is the final dissolution of the second Jewish Commonwealth. On the personal scale, their deaths expose the difficulty of seeing justice in the context of individual life.

At the heart of this tragedy is a space where the personal and historical intersect. Despite the end of sovereignty, the Sages chose to live their lives in the context of Torah, rooting their decisions in a Divine will which transcends particular historical events. Their defiance of the power of Rome was an assertion of a sovereignty of God not defined by socio-political circumstance.

The ultimate consciousness of this Divine kingship is expressed through Rabbi Akiva. Enduring terrible suffering, Rabbi Akiva recites the *shema* as his last act, handing over his soul with the word *echad*, one. Rabbi Akiva was not driven to turn away from this world. Rather, by asserting the unity of creation in the face of power that denied it, he subsumed the external kingship of Rome into his inner experience of the Divine. In leaving the world he did not reject it, but elevated it through his consciousness.

In that moment, Rabbi Akiva taught that God's sovereignty is everywhere, as long as it rests within. Whatever life brings we must integrate our experience and understanding as we grow; facing what is around and within us without fear. When life seems to contradict unity, we can hold fast to the hope that the widest perspective is always yet to emerge.

*Rabbi Mike Feuer teaches Hasidut, Rav Kook and Jewish Law.*



# Mincha: Book of Jonah יונה

Neima Novetsky

The book of Jonah tells the well-known story of Jonah's reluctance to rebuke the people of Nineveh, Hashem's not so gentle prodding via the whale, and Jonah's eventual fulfillment of the task assigned. At first glance, it is a tale of disobedience, second chances, and repentance, all themes very important to Yom Kippur and perhaps the reason for the book's being read on that day. However, deeper analysis suggests that more might lie beneath the surface.

To discover the main message of the book, we must first try to understand the motives of its main character, Jonah. Why does he flee from Hashem's assignment? Is not helping people repent and avert destruction part of every prophet's mission? Why would Jonah not want to reform the people of Nineveh?

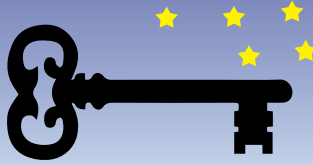
In Chapter 4 of the book, Jonah provides his own explanation for his actions. He tells Hashem: "Therefore I fled to Tarshish; for I knew that You are a gracious God, compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy, and repenting of evil." Taken at face value, these words are somewhat shocking. Jonah fled because God is merciful!? Because God forgives? Why is Jonah upset about this?

In his commentary to the book, Rabbi E. Ben-Menachem suggests that Jonah's words reflect his concern over a deep philosophical issue: In a world of true justice, what room is there for mercy and repentance? Why, if the people of Nineveh killed, stole or raped, should they go unpunished? How is that fair? Why is saying sorry enough to evade retribution? Jonah the son Amitai, a man of *emet*, truth, cannot comprehend a God of mercy. In listing Hashem's attributes, he conveniently leaves out this quality because he sees no justice in Hashem's ways.

Hashem, thus, seeks to teach Jonah the value of mercy. At the end of the book, He provides a gourd to shade Jonah from the sun, then removes it, leading Jonah to lament its loss. Through the episode, Hashem teaches Jonah that he, too, sometimes wants things that he does not particularly deserve. Everyone needs mercy in life.

The book, then is not about repenting, but about legitimating the institution of repentance. It makes the reader question the relative values of justice and mercy. Can the two co-exist? Or, does the presence of one mean the absence of the other? Finally, if one has to choose, when is strict justice proper, and when is compassion the preferred option?

*Neima Novetsky is a former member of the Pardes faculty and is the co-founder of alhatorah.org.*



# נעילה Ne'ila

## When the gates are closing

Amy Eilberg

For many years, I have served as the *sh'lichat tsibur* (prayer leader) for the Ne'ila service. It is an awe-inspiring experience that has produced major turning points in my life. I stand with my back to the congregation, facing the *aron kodesh*, the holy ark. I do not believe that God lives in the ark. Yet it is immensely powerful to stand on the *bimah*, podium, feeling that faithful energy behind me. With little but the ark in my line of vision, it feels as if I am speaking directly to God.

I chant the words of the liturgical poem, *P'tach lanu sha'ar b'ait n'ilat sha'ar*, Open the gate for us at this time of the closing of the gate. The central image of the *piyyut*, poem, powerfully captures the mood of the moment: the gates of prayer are closing. This is our last chance to recite desperately desired words of prayer. Our hearts pour out their deepest desires.

Near the end of the service, we once again pray *Avinu Malkeinu*, Our Parent, Our Sovereign. The prayer grows in intensity as we move through the traditional supplications.

*Avinu Malkeinu*, we have sinned before You.  
*Avinu Malkeinu*, make this new year a good year for us.  
*Avinu Malkeinu*, have mercy on us, forgive and pardon all our sins.  
*Avinu Malkeinu*, send complete healing to all those who are ill.

At this late time of the day, we can no longer ask to be inscribed in the Book of Life, for the proverbial entries have already been made. We can only ask to be sealed for good in the book of life, in the book of redemption, in the book of forgiveness.

Finally, we sing the closing words of the prayer, "*Avinu Malkeinu*, have mercy on us and answer us, though our deeds are inadequate. Treat us with fairness and kindness and deliver us from harm." At this moment, it feels like anything is possible. We sense that we can become the people that we aspire to be, melting away patterns that obstruct the image of God within us, easing blocks that keep us from people we care about.

Hasidic Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev (1740–1810) teaches that God did not only create us when God breathed life into the first person. God gives us life with each breath we breathe. With each breath, then, we are a completely new creation, a different person than we were yesterday. This means that yesterday's sins are forgiven. It also means that we can create ourselves anew at any moment. At Ne'ila, our bodies are hungry but our hearts believe that we can become the person we aspire to be. When the gates are closing, we pour out our hearts' desire to live more holy and loving lives. May we carry that powerful *kavvanah* (intention) into our lives beyond the fast and into the new year.

*Rabbi Amy Eilberg* is the former Director of the Pardes Rodef Shalom Communities Program, part of the Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution.



## Ne'ila: Tekiat Shofar שופר

Aviva Lauer

When I hear the sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashana morning, I hear a baby crying. This is because when my father blows the shofar, the sound is distinctively his: short, staccato blasts, ending on a strident up note. A wail of distress and anguish. In his words, a baby crying. My father tells me that the sounds of his shofar blowing are meant to demonstrate how alone we all are in this world. And how on the High Holidays we must make our pained voice heard because it is only God who can truly take us in and care for us.

Over the years I've learned about other shofar blows and on Rosh Hashana morning, I try to hear them all. When King David joyfully installed the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem, he "whirled with all his might before God...David and all the House of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts and blasts of the shofar" (II Samuel 6:15). So when I hear the shofar on Rosh Hashana, I hear joy. I too give myself over to God, ecstatically setting up a home for God and His word in my heart.

I also hear the siren of looming disaster of which the prophet Zephania warns, should I not mend my wrongful ways. "The great day of the Lord is approaching, approaching most swiftly. Hark, the day of the Lord, it is bitter!...That day shall be a day of wrath, of trouble and distress, of calamity and desolation, of darkness and deep gloom, a day of densest clouds, a day of shofar blasts and alarms..." (Zephaniah 1:14-16). This shofar blast gets louder and louder in my ears.

I feel in my bones the psalmist's exhortation as he describes the coronation of God as king over the entire universe: "All you peoples, clap your hands, raise a joyous shout for God...God ascends midst acclamation; the Lord, to the blasts of the shofar" (Psalms 47:2, 6). On Rosh Hashana morning, I hear the shofar's shout as the wordless, instrumental equivalent of the jubilant refrain, "*Hashem hu haElohim!*" (The Lord is God).

But at the end of Yom Kippur, at the closing of the Ne'ila service, it is the freedom call I hear – the music that inaugurates the Jubilee year, after the 49 years of seven sabbatical cycles. "You shall count off seven weeks of years...Then you shall sound the shofar loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month – the Day of Atonement – you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants." (Leviticus 25: 8-10). By that time I allow myself release, and the belief that the year will be a good one for me, my family, the entire Jewish people, and the whole world.

*Aviva Golbert is the Director of the Pardes Center for Jewish Educators.*



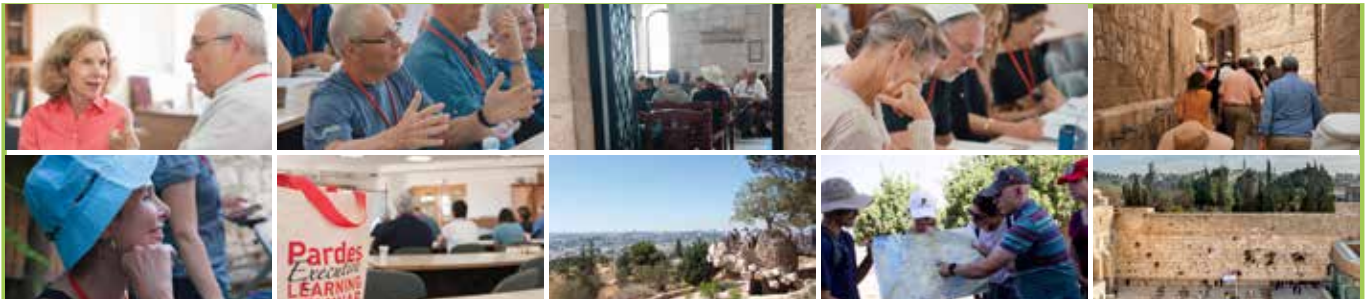


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Yom Kippur 5781 /2020.

