

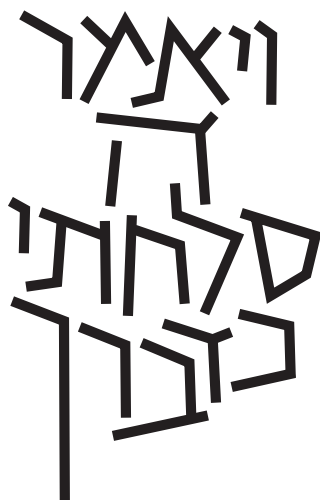
מחזור קורן ליום הכיפורים • נוסח אשכנז
The Koren Yom Kippur Mahzor • Nusah Ashkenaz



THE ROHR FAMILY EDITION

מחזור קורן ליום הכיפורים

THE KOREN YOM KIPPUR MAḤZOR



WITH INTRODUCTION, TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY

Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks שליט"א

FOREWORD BY

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin שליט"א



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דָּוָר לְדָוָר יִשְׁבַּח מֵעַשְׂרֵינוּ...

*The Rohr Family Edition
of
The Koren Yom Kippur Mahzor
pays tribute to the memory of*

Mr. Sami Rohr ז"ל
ר' שמואל ב"ר יהושע אליהו ז"ל

who served his Maker with joy
and whose far-reaching vision, warm open hand, love of Torah,
and love for every Jew were catalysts for the revival and growth of
vibrant Jewish life in the former Soviet Union
and in countless communities the world over

and to the memory of his beloved wife

Mrs. Charlotte Rohr (née Kastner) ע"ה
שרה בת ר' יקותיאל יהודה ע"ה

who survived the fires of the Shoah to become
the elegant and gracious matriarch,
first in Colombia and later in the United States,
of three generations of a family
nurtured by her love and unstinting devotion.
She found grace in the eyes of all those whose lives she touched.

Together they merited to see all their children
build lives enriched by faithful commitment
to the spreading of Torah and *Ahavat Yisrael*.

Dedicated with love by
The Rohr Family
NEW YORK, USA

CONTENTS

מבוא	ix	Preface
פתיחה	xi	Foreword
הקדמה	xv	Introduction
ערב יום הכיפורים		YOM KIPPUR EVE
כפרות	3	Kaparot
מנחה	7	Minḥa
עירובין	43	Eiruvין
הדלקת נרות	45	Candle Lighting
ברכת הבנים	47	Blessing the Children
תפילה זכה	53	Tefilla Zaka
כל נדרי	69	Kol Nidrei
קבלת שבת	77	Kabbalat Shabbat
ליל יום הכיפורים		YOM KIPPUR EVENING
מעריב	81	Ma'ariv
סליחות	125	Seliḥot
וידוי	165	Viduy
שיר היחוד	213	Shir HaYiḥud
שיר הכבוד	253	Anim Zemiroṭ
מסכת יומא	263	Massekhet Yoma
תרשימים	444	Diagrams
שחרית		SHAḤARIT
השכמת הבוקר	449	On Waking
ברכות התורה	453	Blessings over the Torah
עטיפת טלית	457	Tallit
שיר של יום	461	Daily Psalm
ברכות השחר	475	Morning Blessings
פסוקי דומרה	511	Pesukei DeZimra
נשמת	551	Nishmat
המלך	555	HaMelekh
ברכו	561	Barekhu
קריאת שמע	579	Shema
עמידה	589	Amida
חזרת הש"ץ לשחרית	613	Leader's Repetition for Shaḥarit
קדושה	661	Kedusha
וידוי	681	Viduy

אבינו מלכנו	711	Avinu Malkenu
סדר קריאת התורה	719	Reading of the Torah
יקום פרקן	749	Yekum Purkan
יזכור	757	Yizkor
מוסף		MUSAF
הנני העני ממעש	771	Leader's Prayer
עמידה	777	Amida
חורת הש"ץ למוסף	803	Leader's Repetition for Musaf
ונתנה תוקף	843	Untaneh Tokef
סדר העבודה	879	Seder HaAvoda / Temple Service
אלה אזכרה	929	Eleh Ezkera / "The Ten Martyrs"
וידוי	949	Viduy
ברכת כהנים	975	Birkat Kohanim / Priestly Blessing
מנחה		MINḤA
קריאת התורה	989	Reading of the Torah
הפטרה: ספר יונה	999	Haftara: The Book of Jonah
עמידה	1015	Amida
חורת הש"ץ למנחה	1041	Leader's Repetition for Minḥa
וידוי	1071	Viduy
נעילה	1105	NE'ILA
עמידה	1113	Amida
חורת הש"ץ לנעילה	1137	Leader's Repetition for Ne'ila
סליחות	1153	Seliḥot
פסוקי יחוד ה'	1197	Shema Yisrael
תקיעת שופר	1203	Shofar
מעריב למוצאי יום הכיפורים	1205	MOTZA'EI YOM KIPPUR
קידוש לבנה	1249	Kiddush Levana
הבדלה	1259	Havdala
אתה כוננת	1264	Ata Konanta (Seder HaAvoda – Nusah Sepharad)
פיוטים נוספים	1279	Additional Piyutim
הלכות תפילה	1339	Halakha Guide
ביאור לוידוי	1355	Annotated Viduy
קדיש דרבנן באותיות לועזיות	1378	Rabbis' Kaddish Transliterated
קדיש יתום באותיות לועזיות	1379	Mourner's Kaddish Transliterated

PREFACE

*You have given us one day in the year,
a great and holy day, this Day of Atonement...*

From the opening haunting melody of *Kol Nidrei* to the closing shofar blasts of *Ne'ila*, the prayers of Yom Kippur carry us on a journey of self-reflection, confession, and contrition – and ultimately, we hope, a re-dedication of our covenant with God. The ancient words of *tefilla* and the heartfelt poetry of *piyut* are our roadmap to *teshuva*, our path back home to the One who gifted us with this one day in the year on which the way is clear and open to all who seek to return. It is with hope and humility that we have created the *Koren Yom Kippur Mahzor* to aid, support, and guide us on this long road home to God.

Once again, a project of this scope would have been virtually impossible without the partnership of the Rohr family, who have dedicated this Mahzor in memory of their dear parents, Charlotte and Sami Rohr. The Rohr family's passions for *Avodat HaShem* and for books come together in their support for the creation of this Mahzor. On behalf of the scholars, editors and designers of this volume, we again thank you; on behalf of the users and readers of this Mahzor, we are forever in your debt.

We could not have embarked on this project without the moral leadership and intellectual spark of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. Rabbi Sacks provides an invaluable guide to the liturgy through his remarkable introduction, translation, and commentary. His work not only clarifies the text and explains the teachings of our sages, but uniquely and seamlessly weaves profound concepts of Judaism into the reality of contemporary life. It was our distinct privilege to work with Rabbi Sacks to create a Mahzor that we believe appropriately reflects the complexity and depth of Jewish prayer.

We only hope that Rabbi Sacks' contribution is matched by the scholarship, design and typography that have been hallmarks of Koren Publishers Jerusalem for more than fifty years. Raphaël Freeman led Koren's small but highly professional team of scholars, editors and artists. Rabbi David Fuchs supervised the textual aspects of the work. Rachel Meghnagi edited the English texts. Efrat Gross edited the Hebrew texts, and these were ably proofread by Baruch Braner and Yisrael Elizur.

Jessica Sacks supplied the superb translation to *Mishnayot Yoma* and Rabbi David Fuchs elucidated the *Mishnayot* commentary. We thank Dena Landowne Bailey and Chaya Mendelson for their invaluable assistance in assembling and typesetting the text. Rabbi Eli Clark contributed the informative and useful Halakha Guide, and we are grateful to Jessica Sacks and Adina Luber for their translation of the *piyutim*.

This new edition of the Koren Maḥzor continues the Koren tradition of making the language of prayer more accessible, thus enhancing the prayer experience. One of the unique features of the Maḥzor is the use of typesetting to break up a prayer phrase-by-phrase – rather than using a block paragraph format – so that the reader will naturally pause at the correct places. No commas appear in the Hebrew text at the end of lines, but in the English translation, where linguistic clarity requires, we have retained the use of commas at the end of lines. Unlike other Hebrew/English maḥzorim, the Hebrew text is on the left-hand page and the English on the right. This arrangement preserves the distinctive “fanning out” effect of the Koren text and the beauty of the Koren layout.

We hope and pray that this Maḥzor, like all our publications, extends the vision of Koren’s founder, Eliyahu Koren, to a new generation to further *Avodat HaShem* for Jews everywhere.

Matthew Miller, Publisher
Jerusalem 5772 (2012)

FOREWORD

On the holiest day of the year, at the entrance to the holiest spot in the world, a representative of the Jewish nation stands alone in prayer before his God.

He only has a moment. He is prohibited from offering an extensive prayer, lest he frighten the waiting nation by his lengthy absence. No other moment of the year compares to this moment. At no other time of the year are the stakes higher, the burden of spiritual leadership greater.

The *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest, prepares to enter the *Kodesh Kodashim*, the Temple's Holy of Holies, on the one day allowed, Yom Kippur. At the entrance to this sanctified location, he pauses to pray for his people's welfare.

What will be the content of the High Priest's prayer?

According to the Talmud (*Yoma* 53b), the High Priest's petition is practical and to the point. On behalf of the people, he succinctly pleads with God for: a year of physical sustenance, authentic political leadership and economic independence for all. But then, the Talmud reports, the *Kohen Gadol* adds one last line: "And may the prayers of travelers not enter Your presence."

The scholars explain this puzzling addition. A traveler's progress is disturbed by rain and as such, he naturally prays for dry weather. Such prayers, however, are antithetical to the needs of the majority, for whom rain is an absolute necessity. The *Kohen Gadol*, therefore, begs God not to heed the "prayers of travelers."

How abundantly strange! Offered the opportunity to confront his Creator on this holiest of days; granted only a brief moment for his petition; the *Kohen Gadol* finds it necessary to plead for the rejection of prayers offered by others? What does he fear? Does the High Priest truly believe that a thinking God would be swayed by the appeals of a minority, in the face of the needs of the vast majority? Would God not weigh the overwhelming common good against the "prayers of travelers?"

And yet, upon consideration, perhaps the Talmud could not have made a stronger nor more profound statement about the power of prayer.

When God grants man the gift of prayer, He offers man entry into a partnership of power: "*I retreat, in order to give you space. Although it*

will not always be clear when or how, your words will make a difference; they will have practical effect. Rising to the vault of the heavens, your heartfelt supplications will help shape My will and thus play a role in determining our shared path."

As the *Kohen Gadol* prepares to enter the Holy of Holies, he recognizes a frightening truth. He realizes that the nation's fate during the coming year may well depend upon whose prayers are more heartfelt, his own or those of the "travelers." Once the gift of prayer is granted to man, it is granted to all. No one is denied the opportunity to partner with the divine. The *Kohen* must pray, therefore, that his own supplication will outweigh the conflicting pleas of others.

Here, then, the challenge as we open the Yom Kippur Maḥzor; as each of us alone confronts our Creator on the holiest day of the year. Will our prayers be the ones to reach God's throne? Will our words be imbued with the passion, the thought and the commitment needed to affect God's will? Will God perceive in our hearts, as we pray, a true desire to partner with the divine? Will we succeed in overpowering, not only the prayers of those who might wish us ill, but our own internal voices of apathy, insensitivity and indifference that seek to distance us from our people, our tradition and our Creator?

The opportunity has been granted; the moment has arrived; the answers will lie with us...

The members of the Rabbinical Council of America are honored to partner with Koren Publishers Jerusalem in the presentation of this beautiful Maḥzor to the community. May we each find in its words the inspiration to seek an ever-deepening partnership with the divine; and may we each imbue its words with the passion needed to carry them to the very throne of God.

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin
President, Rabbinical Council of America, 2011–2013

INTRODUCTION

Ideas and Insights for Yom Kippur

by

CHIEF RABBI LORD
JONATHAN SACKS

INTRODUCTION

Yom Kippur is the holy of holies of Jewish time. Observed with immense ceremony in the Temple, almost miraculously rescued after the Temple was destroyed, sustained ever since with unparalleled awe, it is Judaism's answer to one of the most haunting of human questions: How is it possible to live the ethical life without an overwhelming sense of guilt, inadequacy and failure?

The distance between who we are and who we ought to be is, for most of us, vast. We fail. We fall. We give in to temptation. We drift into bad habits. We say or do things in anger we later deeply regret. We disappoint those who had faith in us. We betray those who trusted us. We lose friends. Sometimes our deepest relationships can fall apart. We experience frustration, shame, humiliation, remorse. We let others down. We let ourselves down. These things are not rare. They happen to all of us, even the greatest. One of the most powerful features of biblical narrative is that its portraits are not idealized. Its heroes are human. They too have their moments of self-doubt. They too sin.

Judaism sets the bar high, expecting great things of us in word and deed. So demanding are the Torah's commandments that we cannot but fall short some, even much, of the time. God asks us in some sense to be like Him ("Be holy for I, the LORD your God, am holy" [Lev. 19:2]). Yet how can we be equal to such a challenge when we are, and know we are, human, all too human? How can we fail to disappoint Him? Better surely to accept what we are than aspire to be better than we are. Yet this is a recipe for faint hearts and small spirits, and it is a route Judaism never took. Better to fail while striving greatly than not to strive at all.

Judaism's resolution to this tension is so radical that it transformed the moral horizons of humankind. It says that the God of love and forgiveness created us in love and forgiveness, asking that we love and forgive others. God does not ask us not to fail. Rather, He asks us to acknowledge our failures, repair what we have harmed, and move on, learning from our errors and growing thereby. Human life, thus conceived, is neither tragic nor mired in sin. But it is demanding, intensely so. Therefore at its heart there had to be an institution capable of transmuting guilt into moral growth,

◀ and estrangement

and estrangement from God or our fellow humans into reconciliation. That institution is Yom Kippur, when in total honesty we fast and afflict ourselves, confessing our failures and immersing ourselves, mystically and metaphorically, in the purifying waters of God's forgiving love.

I want in this introduction to tell the story of the day and the ideas it embodies, for it is one of the most fascinating narratives in the history of ethics and spirituality. In ancient times the day was celebrated in the form of a massive public ceremony set in the Temple in Jerusalem. The holiest man in Israel, the High Priest, entered the most sacred space, the Holy of Holies, confessed the sins of the nation using the holiest name of God, and secured atonement for all Israel. It was a moment of intense drama in the life of a people who believed, however fitfully, that their fate depended on their relationship with God, who knew that there is no life, let alone a nation, without sin, and who knew from their history that sin could be punished by catastrophe.

Crowds of people thronged the Temple in Jerusalem, hoping to catch a glimpse of the High Priest as he fulfilled his ministrations. We have eyewitness testimony of a Roman consul, Marcus, who served in Jerusalem at the time of the Second Temple. This is how he describes the procession that made its way to the Temple Mount:

And this I have seen with my own eyes: first to go before [the High Priest] would be all those who were of the seed of the kings of Israel... A herald would go before them, crying, "Give honor to the house of David." After them came the house of Levi, and a herald crying, "Give honor to the house of Levi." There were thirty-six thousand of them, and all the prefects wore clothing of blue silk; and the priests, of whom there were twenty-four thousand, wore clothing of white silk.

After them came the singers, and after them, the instrumentalists, then the trumpeters, then the guards of the gate, then the incense-makers, then the curtain-makers, then the watchmen and the treasurers, then a class called *chartophylax*, then all the workingmen who worked in the Sanctuary, then the seventy of the Sanhedrin, then a hundred priests with silver rods in their hands to clear the way. Then came the High Priest, and after him all the elders of the priesthood,

two by two. And the heads of the academies stood at vantage points and cried, “Lord High Priest, may you come in peace! Pray to our Maker to grant us long life that we may engage in His Torah.”*

It was a glittering spectacle, the closest of encounters between man and God at the supreme intersection of sacred time and space. The service itself was long and elaborate. The High Priest would be rehearsed in his rituals for seven days beforehand. Five times on the day itself he would have to immerse himself in a *mikveh* and change his robes: gold for his public appearances, plain white for his ministrations within the Holy of Holies. Three times he would make confession, first for himself and his family, then for his fellow priests, and finally for the people as a whole. Each time he used the holy name of God, the watching crowd would prostrate themselves, falling on their faces.

The confession involved a strange and unique ceremony. Two goats, identical in size, height and appearance, would be brought before the High Priest, and with them a box containing two plaques, one inscribed, “To the LORD,” the other “To Azazel.” Over the goat on which the lot “To Azazel” had fallen, he would confess the sins of the nation, and the goat would then be led by a special person selected for the task into the desert hills outside Jerusalem where it would plunge to its death from a steep precipice. If the confession had been effective, so an ancient tradition states, the red thread it carried would turn white.**

After the destruction of the Second Temple there would be no more such scenes. Now there was no High Priest, no sacrifice, no divine fire, no Levites singing praises or crowds thronging the precincts of Jerusalem and filling the Temple Mount. Above all there was no Yom Kippur ritual through which the people could find forgiveness.

It was then that a transformation took place that must constitute one of the great creative responses to tragedy in history. Tradition has cast Rabbi Akiva in the role of the savior of hope. The Mishna in *Yoma*, the tractate dedicated to Yom Kippur, tells us in effect that Rabbi Akiva could see a new possibility of atonement even in the absence of a High Priest

* Solomon ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehuda* (c. 1550), cited in Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Days of Awe*. New York: Schocken, 1948, 255–258.

** Mishna, *Yoma*, ch. 1–7.

and a Temple. God Himself would purify His people without the need for an intermediary.* Even ordinary Jews could, as it were, come face to face with the *Shekhina*, the Divine Presence. They needed no one else to apologize for them. The drama that once took place in the Temple could now take place in the human heart. Yom Kippur was saved. It is not too much to say that Jewish faith was saved.

Every synagogue became a fragment of the Temple. Every prayer became a sacrifice. Every Jew became a kind of priest, offering God not an animal but instead the gathered shards of a broken heart. For if God was the God of everywhere, He could be encountered anywhere. And if there were places from which He seemed distant, then time could substitute for place. “Seek God where He is to be found, call on Him where He is close” (Is. 55:6) – this, said the sages, refers to the Ten Days of Repentance from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur (*Yevamot* 105a). Holy days became the surrogate for holy spaces. Yom Kippur became the Jerusalem of time, the holy city of the Jewish soul.

Thereafter it never lost its hold on the Jewish imagination. There is a tradition that during the Middle Ages, when Jews were being pressured under threat of expulsion or death to convert to Christianity or Islam, many who did so – the *anusim* or, as they were contemptuously called by the Spanish, *marranos* (swine) – often remained Jews in secret. Some scholars assert that once a year they would make their way to the synagogue on the night of Yom Kippur to reaffirm their Jewish identity.

More recently the story of Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) became emblematic. This young German-Jewish intellectual from a highly assimilated family had been persuaded by a friend to convert to Christianity. Insisting on entering the Church not as a pagan but as a Jew, he decided that his last Jewish act would be to go to synagogue. He traveled to Berlin in 1913 to spend Yom Kippur in a small orthodox synagogue as his last Jewish act.

The experience changed his life. A few days later he wrote that “Leaving Judaism no longer seems necessary to me and... no longer possible.” He became a *ba'al teshuva*, one of the greatest in the pre-war years. On postcards in the trenches of the First World War he wrote one of

* Mishna, *Yoma* 8:9.

the masterpieces of Jewish theology in the twentieth century, *The Star of Redemption*. He became a friend of Martin Buber and founded the *Judisches Lehrhaus*, the House of Jewish Learning, in Frankfurt.* For the secular *marranos* of the twentieth century as for their medieval forerunners, Yom Kippur was the day that touched the heart even of those who were otherwise estranged from their faith. It was the day of “coming home,” one of the root meanings of the word *teshuva*.

And so it is for us. What has given Yom Kippur its unique place on the map of the Jewish heart is that it is the most intensely personal of all the festivals. Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot are celebrations of Jewish memory and history. They remind us of what it means to be a member of the Jewish people, sharing its past, its present and its hopes. Rosh HaShana, the anniversary of creation, is about what it means to be human under the sovereignty of God. But Yom Kippur is about what it means to be me, this unique person that I am. It makes us ask, What have I done with my life? Whom have I hurt or harmed? How have I behaved? What have I done with God’s greatest gift, life itself? What have I lived for and what will I be remembered for? To be sure, we ask these questions in the company of others. Ours is a communal faith. We pray together, confess together and throw ourselves on God’s mercy together. But Yom Kippur remains an intensely personal day of conscience and self-reckoning.

It is the day on which, as the Torah says five times, we are commanded to “afflict” ourselves.** Hence: no eating or drinking, no bathing, no anointing, no sexual relations, no leather shoes. It is customary for men to wear a *kittel*, a white garment reminiscent, some say, of the white tunic the High Priest wore when he entered the Holy of Holies (*Mateh Efrayim* 610:11). Others say it is like a burial shroud (Rema, *ibid.* 3). Either way, it reminds us of the truths we must face alone. The Torah says that “No man shall be in the Tent of Meeting when [Aaron] comes to make atonement in the holiest place, until he leaves” (Lev. 16:17). Like the High Priest on this holy day, we face God alone. We confront our mortality alone. Outwardly we are in the company of others, but inwardly we are giving a reckoning for our individual life, singular and unique. The fact that everyone else around us is doing likewise makes it bearable.

* Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*. New York: Schocken, 1961.

** Leviticus 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Numbers 29:7.

Fasting and repenting, I stand between two selves, as the High Priest once stood facing two goats, symbolic of the duality of human nature. There is the self I see in the mirror and know in my darkest hours. I know how short life is and how little I have achieved. I remember, with a shame undiminished by the passing of time, the people I offended, wounded, disappointed; the promises I made but did not fulfill; the harsh words I said and the healing words I left unsaid. I know how insignificant I am in the scheme of things, one among billions who will live, die, and eventually vanish from living memory. I am next-to-nothing, a fleeting breath, a driven leaf: “dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen. 3:19).

Yet there is a second self, the one I see in the reflection of God’s love. It is not always easy to feel God’s love but it is there, holding us gently, telling us that every wrong we repent of is forgiven, every act of kindness we perform is unforgotten, that we are here because God wants us to be and because there is work He needs us to do. He loves us as a parent loves a child and has a faith in us that never wavers however many times we fail. In Isaiah’s words, “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed” (Is. 54:10). God, who “counts the number of the stars and calls each of them by name” (Ps. 147:4), knows each of us by name, and by that knowledge confers on us inalienable dignity and unconditional love. *Teshuva* means “coming home” to this second self and to the better angels of our nature.

The history of Yom Kippur stands in sharp contrast to that of Rosh HaShana. About the New Year, the biblical sources are sparse and enigmatic, but to the Day of Atonement the Torah devotes an entire and detailed chapter, Leviticus 16. On the face of it there is little left unsaid. This introduction will, however, argue otherwise. The intellectual history of Yom Kippur is still too little understood. Tracing it will take us through a dispute between two of the greatest rabbis of the Middle Ages, a study of the difference between the way priests and prophets understood the moral life, the power of the rabbinic mind to unite two institutions that had remained distinct throughout the whole of the biblical era, and much else besides. First, however, we begin with one of Judaism’s greatest innovations, the idea of forgiveness itself.

A Brief History of Forgiveness

There are rare moments when the world changes and a new possibility is born: when the Wright brothers achieved the first man-made flight in 1903; or in 1969 when Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon; or when five thousand years ago someone discovered that marks made in clay with a stick could, when the clay dried, become permanent signs, and thus writing and civilization were born.

The birth of forgiveness is one such moment. It is one of the most radical ideas ever to have been introduced into the moral imagination of humankind. Forgiveness is an action that is not a reaction. It breaks the cycle of stimulus-response, harm and retaliation, wrong and revenge, which has led whole cultures to their destruction and still threatens the future of the world. It frees individuals from the burden of their past, and humanity from the irreversibility of history. It tells us that enemies can become friends.

Forgiveness, writes David Konstan in an important philosophical study (*Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea*), did not exist before Judaism.* It is, on the face of it, an odd claim to make. Surely every culture has a need to avoid the sheer destructiveness of anger and vengeance that arises in every society when one person wrongs another. That is true, but not every society develops the idea of forgiveness. The ancient Greeks, for example, did not. Instead they had something else often mistaken for forgiveness, namely the *appeasement of anger*.

When someone harms someone else, the victim is angry and seeks revenge. This is clearly dangerous for the perpetrator who will then seek to calm the victim and move on. They may make excuses: It wasn't me, it was someone else. Or, it was me but I couldn't help it. Or, it was me but it was a small wrong, and I have done you much good in the past, so that on balance you should let it pass.

Alternatively, or in conjunction with these other strategies, the perpetrator may beg, plead, and perform some ritual of abasement or humiliation. This is a way of saying to the victim, "I am not really a threat." The Greek word *sungnome*, sometimes translated as forgiveness, really means, says Konstan, *exculpation* or *absolution*. It is not that I forgive you for what

* David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

you did, but that I understand why you did it – you were caught up in circumstances beyond your control – or, alternatively, I do not need to take revenge because you have now shown by your deference to me that you hold me in proper respect. My dignity has been restored. The result of excuse or self-abasement is that, in the phrase of the book of Esther, “the anger of the king abated” (7:10). Appeasement is a way of defusing anger but it is not repentance and it does not lead to forgiveness.

There is a classic example of this in the Torah itself. In Genesis 32–33, Jacob is terrified at the prospect of his meeting with Esau. Twenty-two years earlier Jacob had fled into exile after taking Esau’s blessing and hearing that his brother had vowed to kill him as soon as their father was dead. Now they are about to meet. Jacob hears that Esau is coming with a force of four hundred men. His response is a paradigm case of appeasement. He sends Esau gifts, accompanied by messengers. When Esau finally appears he abases himself, prostrating himself seven times to the ground. Repeatedly he calls Esau, “my lord” and himself, “your servant.” Esau is placated. The two brothers embrace, weep and go their separate ways. Anger has been averted. But between them there has been appeasement, not forgiveness. Forgiveness plays no part in the story.

THE IDEA OF FREEDOM

Before forgiveness can enter the world, another world-changing idea had to appear: the idea of human freedom. Despite its centrality to Western thought, freedom – the ability to choose between alternatives and act in accordance with one’s choices – is anything but self-evident and has been challenged in most cultures and ages.

The ancients did not think about it much, and when they did they were more inclined to deny it than affirm it. The human person was a boat adrift on the waves of an ocean, chaff blown by the wind, a plaything of the gods, a pawn moved by other hands, a slave, not the master, of his fate. We are what we are and we cannot change what we are.

Once our fate has been decided, there is nothing we can do to avoid it. Laius was told by the Delphic oracle that his son would kill him and take his place. Laius tried every way to ensure this did not come about. So did his son, Oedipus. Yet each plan they made to avoid the outcome helped make it happen. This – the idea of *moira*, inevitability, or *ananke*,

blind fate – is at the heart of Greek tragedy and is central to its bleak view of the human situation.

Freewill has been denied many times in history. Spinoza did so in the name of natural necessity: our acts are the result of causes beyond our control. For Marx, the shaper of human behavior was economics; for Freud, the play of unconscious drives; for the neo-Darwinians, our genetically encoded instincts. Science has never given a compelling account of freewill. For if there can be a complete scientific account of human behavior, it would tell us that our acts have causes such that we could not have acted other than we did.

Radical unconditioned freedom enters Western civilization in the first chapter of Genesis when the free God freely creates the universe, saying “Let there be.” Making humankind in His image, after His likeness (see Genesis 1:26–27), He endowed us too with freedom. We may be dust of the earth but there is within us the breath of God. The human person is, as Pico Della Mirandola put it in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, the one being in creation that is neither angel nor beast but can be either depending on his choice. To be human, said Jean-Paul Sartre, is to know that our existence precedes our essence. We have no essence. All we have is choice.

All life was created. Humans alone are creative. Every life-form has drives, inherent instincts of survival. Humans alone are capable of what philosophers call second-order evaluations, deciding which drives to pursue and which not. Other animals act. We alone bear responsibility for our acts because we could have chosen to act otherwise. Freedom is God’s greatest gift to humankind but it is also the most fateful and terrifying. For it means that we alone have the power to destroy the work of God.

Genesis tells a troubled story. Gifted with freedom, almost immediately humans betray that gift. Adam and Eve sin. Cain, the first human child, murders Abel his brother. By Genesis 6, the world has become a place of violence and random cruelty, and God regrets He created man. The modern world with its extermination camps and gulags, its oppression and terror, seems hardly to have advanced at all. Technically humans have excelled. Morally they have failed and continue to fail. For freedom is a double-edged sword. The freedom to do good is inseparable from the freedom to do harm, to commit sin, to practice evil. The problem of evil is *the* problem of humanity.

Yom Kippur is the answer.

For if freedom means that humans will sin, then God must have accepted in advance that they would sin, which means that He provided a mechanism for their forgiveness – a mechanism that, without releasing people from moral responsibility, acknowledges that they can recognize that they did wrong, express remorse for the past and dedicate themselves to learning from it and growing thereby, in short, that they can do *teshuva*. They can repent. This is the meaning of the following remarkable midrash:

Rabbi Yannai said: from the beginning of creation God foresaw the deeds of the righteous and wicked. *The earth was void* – this refers to the deeds of the wicked. *And God said, Let there be light* – this refers to the deeds of the righteous. *And God separated the light from the darkness* – this means, the deeds of the righteous from the deeds of the wicked. *God called the light “day,”* – this refers to the deeds of the righteous. *The darkness He called night* – this refers to the deeds of the wicked. *And there was evening* – the deeds of the wicked. *And there was morning* – the deeds of the righteous. *One day* – this means that God gave them [both] a single day. Which was it? Yom Kippur. (*Bereshit Raba* 3:8)

The midrash is based on the observation that the Hebrew text of Genesis calls the first day of creation, *yom ehad*, literally “one day,” when it should have said, *yom rishon*, “the first day” (see *Bemidbar Raba* 13:6). Evidently, then, the Torah does not mean “the first day.” It means the singular, unique day of days, which in Jewish terms means Yom Kippur.

But the midrash is clearly saying something deeper. It is asserting that *divine forgiveness preceded the creation of the first humans* for without a mechanism for repentance, the creation of *Homo sapiens* does not make sense. Without it, our guilt would accumulate, as it did in the generation of the Flood. There would be no way of mending the past or moving on from it. The human condition would be tragic. We would live weighed down by the burden of remorse, or worse we would seek to liberate ourselves from the voice of conscience altogether, and we would then become lower than the beasts.

Repentance and atonement alone redeem the human situation, telling

us that though “There is no one on earth who is righteous, does only good, and never sins” (Eccl. 7:20), still God accepts our fallibility and failures so long as we acknowledge them as such. Indeed, when we grow through our failures, we become greater than those who never failed. “Where penitents stand,” said the sages, “even the perfectly righteous cannot stand” (*Berakhot* 34b).

God gave us freedom, knowing the risks. Because we are free, we bear responsibility for our deeds: we *need* to repent. But because we are free, we can change, so we are *able* to repent. This Jewish insistence on freedom – that morally, we become what we choose to be – is one of its greatest contributions to the ethical imagination. Economics may make us rich or poor. Genetics may make us tall or short. But it is our freely made choices that make us good or bad, honest or deceptive, generous or mean-spirited, altruistic or self-centered, patient or irascible, courageous or cowardly, responsible or feckless. Judaism is the world’s great ethic of responsibility, born in the vision of the free God seeking the free worship of free human beings honoring the freedom and dignity of others.

God, who made us in love, forgives. Only on this assumption does the creation of humanity make any sense at all.

BEFORE GOD FORGIVES, MAN MUST FORGIVE

Oddly enough, though, it takes time for forgiveness to make its appearance in the Torah. This is strange. If, as the Midrash states and logic dictates, God created forgiveness before He made man, why does it play no obvious part in the early stories of Genesis? Did God forgive Adam and Eve? Did God forgive Cain after he had murdered Abel? Not explicitly. He may have mitigated their punishment. Adam and Eve did not immediately die after eating the forbidden fruit. God placed a mark on Cain’s forehead to protect him from being killed by someone else. But mitigation is not the same as forgiveness.

God does not forgive the generation of the Flood, or the builders of Babel, or the sinners of Sodom. Significantly, when Abraham prayed for the people of Sodom he did not ask God to forgive them. His argument was markedly different. He said, “Perhaps there are innocent people there,” maybe fifty, perhaps no more than ten. Their merit should, he implied,

save the others, but that is quite different from asking God to forgive the others (Gen.18).

The first time we encounter a clear instance of forgiveness is when Joseph, by now viceroy of Egypt, finally reveals his identity to his brothers. Years earlier, they had contemplated killing him and eventually sold him as a slave. They have come before him in Egypt twice without recognizing who he was. Now he discloses his identity and, while they are silent and in a state of shock, goes on to say these words:

I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. (Genesis 45:4–8)

This is the first recorded moment in history in which one human being forgives another.

So astonishing is this forgiveness that the brothers cannot entirely believe it. Years later, after their father Jacob has died, the brothers come to Joseph fearing that he will now take revenge. They concoct a story:

They sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers for the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept. (Genesis 50:16–18)

The brothers understand the word “forgive” – they use it in their speech – but they are uneasy about it. Did Joseph really mean it? Does someone really forgive those who sold him into slavery? Joseph weeps that his brothers haven’t really understood that he meant it when he said it. But he did, then and now.

David Konstan, in *Before Forgiveness*, identifies this as the first recorded instance of forgiving in history. What he does not make clear is *why* Joseph forgives. There is nothing accidental about Joseph's behavior. In fact the whole sequence of events, from the moment the brothers appear before him in Egypt for the first time to the moment when he announces his identity and forgives them, is an intricately detailed account of *teshuva*, repentance, the key act of Yom Kippur itself.

Recall what happens. Joseph, having been sold into Egypt as a slave, then thrown into prison on a false charge, eventually rises to become second-in-command in Egypt, having successfully interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. As he predicted, there are seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine and drought. Lacking food, Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to buy grain, and there they meet the viceroy, not recognizing him as their brother. He is, after all, dressed as an Egyptian ruler and goes by the name Tzafenat-Pane'ah. Coming before him, they "bowed down to him with their faces to the ground" (Gen. 42:6).

At this point, by the logic of the story, something should happen. As a young man Joseph had dreamed that one day his brothers would bow down to him. They have just done so. We now expect him to announce his identity and tell the brothers to bring Jacob and the rest of the family to Egypt. His dreams would be fulfilled and the story would reach closure.

Eventually this happens, but not without the longest detour in any narrative in the Torah. Seemingly without reason, Joseph embarks on an elaborate and convoluted stratagem whose purpose is initially far from clear. He keeps his identity secret. He accuses the brothers of a crime they have not committed. He says they are spies. He has them imprisoned for three days. Then, holding Simeon as a hostage, he tells them that they must now return home and bring back their youngest brother, Benjamin.

Slowly as the plot unfolds we begin to get a glimpse of what Joseph is doing. He is forcing the brothers to reenact the earlier occasion when they came back to their father with one of their number, Joseph, missing. Note what happens next:

They said to one another, "Truly we are guilty [*aval ashemim anahnu*] because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress

has come on us”... They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. (Genesis 42:21–23)

An echo of those words, *Aval ashemim anahnu*, “truly we are guilty,” will reverberate throughout our prayers on Yom Kippur. They represent the first stage of repentance. The brothers *admit they have done wrong and demonstrate remorse*.

The brothers duly return with Benjamin. Joseph receives them warmly and has them served with a meal. The food comes from Joseph’s own table, a sign of royal favor. There is only one discrepant note. The text says that Benjamin, the youngest, is served with a portion that is “five times the size” of that of the other brothers (Gen. 43:34). At this stage we do not know why.

The next morning, the brothers are on their way home when an Egyptian officer pursues them, accusing them of stealing a precious silver cup. It has been planted deliberately in Benjamin’s sack. The cup is found and the brothers are brought back. Benjamin has been found with stolen property in his possession. Judah then says this:

What can we say to my lord? What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves – we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup. (Genesis 44:16)

This is the second stage of repentance: *confession*. Judah does more. He speaks of collective responsibility. This is important. When the brothers sold Joseph into slavery it was Judah who proposed the crime (Gen. 37:26–27) but they were all (except Reuben) complicit in it.

Joseph dismisses Judah’s words: “Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace” (42:17). He gives the brothers the opportunity to walk away, leaving Benjamin a slave as they once left Joseph. But Judah, undeterred, mounts a passionate plea to be allowed to take the guilt on himself so that Benjamin can be reunited with his father: “So now let me remain as your slave in place of the lad. Let the lad go back with his brothers!” (42:33). It is at this point that Joseph breaks down, discloses his identity, and forgives his brothers.

The reason is clear. Judah, who had many years earlier sold Joseph as a slave, is now willing to become a slave so that his brother Benjamin can go free. He has just demonstrated what the Talmud and Maimonides define as *complete repentance*, namely *when circumstances repeat themselves and you have an opportunity to commit the same offense again, but you refrain from doing so because you have changed* (Yoma 86b; Maimonides, Laws of Repentance 2:1).

We now, in retrospect, understand Joseph's entire strategy. With great care and precision he has set up a controlled experiment to see whether the brothers have changed. Will they abandon Benjamin as they once abandoned Joseph? Like Joseph, Benjamin is a son of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel who died young. The brothers – sons of the less-loved Leah or the handmaids – might be expected to be jealous of Benjamin as they were of Joseph. And just as Joseph had his "many-colored coat" (37:3), so Benjamin at the feast is given five times as much as the others. Will they be provoked by envy yet again?

The parallel is complete. The brothers are free to repeat their crime and no one would blame them. It was, after all, the Egyptian ruler who seized Benjamin through no fault of their own. But they do not repeat the crime. Judah ensures that they do not. He offers to sacrifice his freedom for the sake of Benjamin's. The villain has become a hero. Judah is the first *ba'al teshuva*, the first penitent, the first morally transformed individual in history. Joseph's behavior has had nothing to do with his dreams, or revenge, and everything to do with repentance. Where there is repentance there is forgiveness. The brothers, led by Judah, have gone through all three stages of repentance: (1) admission and remorse (*ḥarata*), (2) confession (*viduy*) and (3) behavioral change (*shinui ma'aseh*).

Forgiveness only exists in a culture in which repentance exists. Repentance presupposes that we are free and morally responsible agents who are capable of change, specifically the change that comes about when we recognize that what we have done is wrong and we are responsible for it and must never do it again. The possibility of that kind of moral transformation simply did not exist in ancient Greece or any other pagan culture. Greece was a culture of character and fate. Judaism is a culture of will and choice, the first of its kind in the world.

Forgiveness is not just one idea among many. It transformed the human

situation. For the first time it established the possibility that we are not condemned endlessly to repeat the past. When I repent, I show I can change. The future is not predestined. I can make it different from what it might have been. And when I forgive, I show that my action is not mere reaction, the way revenge would be. *Forgiveness breaks the irreversibility of the past.* It is the undoing of what has been done. Repentance and forgiveness – the two great gifts of human freedom – redeem the human condition from tragedy.

Now we can return to our original question. If God created forgiveness before He made man, why does it play no part in the stories of Genesis from Adam and Eve to the patriarchs? We cannot be sure of the answer. The Torah is a cryptic work. It leaves much unsaid. It has, as the sages said, “seventy faces” (*Bemidbar Raba* 13:15). More than one interpretation is possible. But one suggests itself overwhelmingly: *God does not forgive human beings until human beings learn to forgive one another.*

Consider the alternative. What would happen if God forgave but humans did not? Then history would be an endless story of retaliation, vendetta, vindictiveness and rancor, violence begetting violence and evil engendering new evil – in short, the world before the Flood, the world that still exists today in the form of tribal warfare and ethnic conflict, the world of Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo and Darfur, a world of victims seeking vengeance thereby creating new victims and new vengeance in a process that, without forgiveness, never ends.

The first act of forgiveness in the Torah is Joseph forgiving his brothers, to teach us that only when we forgive one another does God forgive us. Only when we confess our wrongs to one another does God hear our confession to Him. Only when we repent and show we are worthy of being forgiven, do we show that we have learned the responsibility that goes with freedom, without which “mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

Humanity changed the day Joseph forgave his brothers. Only when the book of Genesis reaches this note of forgiveness and reconciliation can the drama of Exodus and the first Yom Kippur begin.

Two Types of Atonement

It was the most shocking, unexpected sin in history. The Israelites were encamped near Mount Sinai. They had just been liberated from slavery. No exiled people had ever been freed this way before. The supreme Power

◀ had intervened

had intervened in history to rescue the supremely powerless. The rescue had been accompanied throughout by signs and wonders. Ten plagues had struck the Egyptians until Pharaoh let the people go.

Even then the wonders did not cease. When the people were thirsty on their journey through the desert, God sent them water from a rock. When they were hungry, he gave them manna from heaven. When they came up against the impassable barrier of the Sea of Reeds, God divided the waters so that they could cross on dry land. More than three thousand years later we have not stopped telling the story, the greatest narrative of hope the world has ever known.

Then, at Mount Sinai, the people had experienced the greatest revelation in history, when God spoke to an entire nation and made a covenant with them, promising to be their Sovereign and Protector, inviting them to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a nation unlike any other, constituted by its faith.

Now, forty days later, after the memory of that moment had receded, the people wondered what had become of their leader. Moses had climbed the mountain to receive a record of the covenant on tablets of stone, and had not returned. The people panicked. What were they to do in the absence of the man who led them out of Egypt and communicated with God on their behalf? They felt the need for a substitute. They clamored around Aaron. They made a golden calf. Even today, reading the story, it remains a shocking moment. From the heights they had descended to the depths. God, aware of what was happening, told Moses: “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt” (Ex. 32:7).

Moses prays. Never had there been a prayer as long, protracted, passionate, as this. “I fell prostrate before the LORD for forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water, because of all the sin you had committed, doing what was evil in the LORD’s sight and so arousing His anger” (Deut. 9:18). In the end God relented. He agreed to forgive the people, and promised Moses a new set of tablets to replace those he had broken in his anger and now lay in fragments beyond repair.

The new tablets symbolized a new beginning. For another forty days Moses was with God. He then descended the mountain, holding the tablets. The people saw him and what he was carrying and knew that they

had been forgiven. That day, when Moses came down the mountain with the second tablets, became the enduring image of forgiveness. Moses descended on the tenth of Tishrei, and thereafter, the anniversary of that day would become established as a time of forgiveness for all generations.

There is a daring midrash on this, taking as its point of departure the line from Psalm 61, “Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.” The psalm, like many others, begins with the word *Lamenatze’ah*, literally, “For the conductor, the director of music.” The word could be read, however, as “For the victor,” and with a truly remarkable inversion, the midrash interprets this as: “For the victor who sought to be defeated”:

For the victor who sought to be defeated, as it is said [Is. 57:16], *I will not accuse them forever, nor will I always be angry, for then they would faint away because of Me – the very people I have created.* Do not read it thus, but, *I will accuse in order to be defeated.* How so? Thus said the Holy One, blessed be He, “When I win, I lose; and when I lose, I win. I defeated the generation of the Flood, but I lost thereby, for I destroyed My own creation, as it says [Gen. 7: 23], *Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out.* The same happened with the generation of the Tower of Babel and the people of Sodom. But in the days of Moses who defeated Me [by persuading Me to forgive the Israelites whom I had sworn to destroy], I gained for I did not destroy Israel. (*Pesikta Rabati*, 9)

Moses is the hero who defeated God – which turned out to be God’s own deepest victory. That day, when Moses came down with the symbol of the power of penitential prayer, became the first Yom Kippur.

THE AFTERMATH OF SINAI: PENITENTIAL PRAYER

That is not the only legacy of that moment, however. Something else happened that has had a decisive impact on Jewish prayer. To understand it we must turn to the great scene when Moses, having secured the people’s forgiveness, asks God to show him His glory (Ex. 33:18). God tells Moses to stand in the crevice of a rock. There God will cause His glory to pass by. Moses will not be able to see God directly, “for no one may see Me and live,” but he will come as close as is possible for a human being:

◀ And the LORD

And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed in the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him and proclaimed: “The LORD, the LORD, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness and truth, extending loving-kindness to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin, and absolving [the guilty who repent]...” (Exodus 34:5–7)

Note that God speaks these words, which became known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, not Moses. What is God doing at this point? God Himself says, “I am making a covenant with you” (Ex. 34:10). But it is not yet clear what this means. After all, God had just made a covenant with the people. They had endangered it by their sin, but Moses had prayed for and achieved their pardon. What then is this new covenant with Moses? The answer to all these questions becomes clear only two books later, in the book of Numbers.

It is then that the people commit another sin as grievous as the making of the golden calf. Moses had sent spies to look at the land. They had come back with a demoralizing report. The land is indeed good, they said, flowing with milk and honey. But the people are strong. Their cities are highly fortified. We will not be able to defeat them. They are giants. We are grasshoppers (Num. 13).

At this point the people, despondent and hopeless, say, “Let’s choose a leader and go back to Egypt” (Num. 14:4). As He did at the time of the golden calf, God threatens to destroy the people and begin a nation anew with Moses. Again Moses prays to God to forgive the people, for His sake if not for theirs. Then he adds a new element to his prayer:

Now may the LORD’s strength be displayed, just as You have declared: “The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness, forgiving iniquity and rebellion.” Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. In accordance with Your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as You have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now. (Numbers 14:17–19)

Moses is doing something he has not done before. Previously he has prayed on the basis of how God's acts will look to the world, and on the basis of His covenant with the patriarchs. Now he is praying on the basis of God's own nature. He is, as it were, recalling God to Himself. Essentially he is repeating what God Himself had said at Mount Sinai. He says so. He says, "as You have declared," as if to say, "These are Your words not mine."

Only now do we fully understand what God was doing on that previous occasion. *He was teaching Moses how to pray.* This is how the sages put it, with their characteristic daring:

Were it not written in the Torah it would be impossible to say it, but this teaches that God wrapped Himself in a tallit like a leader of prayer and taught Moses the order of prayer. He said: whenever Israel sin, say these words and I will forgive them. (*Rosh HaShana* 17b)

That is what Moses inferred, and what he did during the episode of the spies. We now understand what God meant earlier when He said, "I am making a covenant with you." This was a covenant specifically about the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. God was saying that when Israel said these words, He would relent and forgive. As for the anthropomorphic idea that God "wrapped Himself" in a tallit, the sages are translating the words *vaya'avor... al panav* (Ex. 34:6) not as "God passed before him [Moses]" but rather, "God passed [a cloak, a cloud] over His face" so that Moses would not see His face (Malbim). The tallit is the screen separating us from God – the distance that allows God to be God and humans to be human.

No sooner does Moses pray this prayer, than God says two momentous words that will be repeated time and again during Yom Kippur: *Salahti kidvarekha*, "I have forgiven, as you asked" (Num. 14:20). So forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf was more than a one-time event. It gave Moses and his successors the words needed to secure divine forgiveness on other occasions also. The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are the prayer God taught humanity, the prayer Moses used successfully after the episode of the spies.

The dual episode of the calf and the spies became an essential element of our devotions on Yom Kippur and other penitential days, the prayers we know as *Selihot*. Every time we say them we reenact the drama of Moses pleading for his people. *Selihot* take us back to the scene of Moses in the crevice of a rock at Mount Sinai as God's glory passed by. It was one of the great moments in the history of the prophets.

THE SECOND YOM KIPPUR

But prophets are not the only type of religious leader in Judaism, and for a compelling reason. There was only one Moses. Not every generation produces a prophet. We have not had them in Judaism since Malachi two and half millennia ago.

Judaism begins in a series of transfiguring moments of epiphany. Something momentous happens. The world seems lit as if by a heavenly light. God has entered the human arena. People glimpse new possibilities. The world will never be quite the same again. So it was when Abraham first heard the call of God, when Moses encountered God in the burning bush, when the Israelites left Egypt on their way to freedom, and when the sea divided and they passed through on dry land. But how do you turn unique moments into ongoing continuity? How do you translate them into the biorhythms of succeeding generations? How do you prevent epoch-making moments fading into the distant past?

That is when we need memory and ritual. You take a unique event and turn it into a recurring ceremony. You turn linear time into cyclical time. You reenact history by writing it into the calendar. The Hebrew word for calendar, *luah*, also means "a tablet." The tablets of stone are written onto the tablet of the year and thus into the tablet of the heart. The descent of Moses from the mountain in a blaze of divine light was to become not a once-only event but a regularly repeated one. Thus Yom Kippur as an annual event, the Sabbath of Sabbaths of the Jewish year, was born.

But that required someone other than a prophet. The prophet lives in the immediacy of the moment, not in the endlessly reiterated cycles of time. This required religious leadership of a different order, namely, the priest. The priest represents order, structure, continuity, the precisely formulated ritual followed in strict, meticulous obedience. Max Weber called

this the routinization of charisma. The first Day of Atonement needed the intercession of a Moses, but the second and subsequent occasions required the agency of an Aaron, a High Priest. That is indeed how the Torah describes it in Leviticus 16.

The service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur was high drama. It was an event like no other. It involved strange rituals performed at no other time, such as the casting of lots on two animals, one of which was offered as a sacrifice to God, the other of which was led, bearing the sins of the people, “to Azazel.” There is nothing remotely comparable in any of the other Temple rituals.

This was the moment of supreme solemnity when, each year, the High Priest atoned for the sins of the entire nation. He prepared for it for seven days in advance. Elaborate contingency measures were taken in case at the last moment he was unable to officiate. It involved an elaborate choreography of ritual and changes of garments. There were public moments when the High Priest appeared before the people robed in gold and splendor. There were also intensely private ones, as when he entered the Holy of Holies alone, dressed in a simple white tunic, and communed with God.

The transition from the first to the second Yom Kippur involved a move from prophet to priest. This is a huge difference. Prophets and priests were different kinds of people who served God in different ways. What was appropriate to one was inappropriate, even forbidden, to the other. Judaism is a religion of distinctions and differences. Only thus do we bring order to the world. Judaism radically distinguishes between priestly and prophetic sensibilities. Each has its place in the religious life. Each receives eloquent expression on Yom Kippur. But they are different, especially when it comes to atonement and sin.

PRIESTS AND ATONEMENT

Some of the differences between priests and prophets are obvious. Priesthood was dynastic. It passed from father to son, from Aaron to his descendants. Prophecy was not. Moses’ children did not succeed him. The son of a prophet is not necessarily a prophet. In general, the prophets were drawn from no particular tribe, class, region or occupational group. Prophecy is a uniquely individual gift that you do not inherit.

The priesthood was exclusively masculine, whereas there were women prophets as well as men. Tradition counts seven: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther. Priests wore robes of office; prophets had none. Priests functioned within the precincts of the Temple; prophets lived among the people.

The authority of the priest was official, while that of the prophet was personal. That is why the prophets were so distinctive. Their personalities shaped their perception and message. Hosea was not Amos. Isaiah was not Jeremiah. Prophet and priest exemplified Max Weber's famous distinction between charismatic and traditional-legal authority.

What I want to explore here, though, is the difference between *Torat Kohanim* and *Torat Nevi'im* – the codes that guided priestly and prophetic sensibilities – in their response to the religious life, obedience and sin, atonement and repentance. We are used to thinking about these things as if they all belonged to a single system. They do now, but they did not always. When prophets and priests were the active Jewish religious leaders, they had different ways of thinking about the life of faith, so far apart that they hardly overlapped at all.

For the priest, the key words of the religious life are *kadosh*, holy, and *tahor*, pure. To be a Jew is to be *set apart*: that is what the word *kadosh*, holy, actually means. This in turn has to do with the special closeness the Jewish people have to God. Because of this we are bound to a special code of conduct that gives expression to this singularity. It means, for example, eating only certain kinds of food and being bound to a strict discipline of sexual ethics. In *Torat Kohanim*, the priestly law, there are statutes, *hukkim*, that do not seem to make obvious sense in terms of conventional ethics, such as not eating meat and milk together, or wearing clothes of mixed wool and linen, or not sowing fields with mixed seeds. All these laws have to do with the special perspective of *Torat Kohanim*.

They have to do with order. The priestly mind sees the universe in terms of distinctions, boundaries and domains, in which each object or act has its proper place and they must not be mixed. The Kohen's task is to maintain boundaries and respect limits. For the Kohen, goodness equals order. We learn this from the way God created the world. He took chaos – *tohu vavohu* – and turned it into a finely tuned universe with its myriad life-forms,

each with its ecological niche, its place in the scheme of things. A world that is ordered is good. One that is chaotic is bad and unsustainable.

So Jews are charged to respect and honor boundaries and differences by obeying the will of God, Creator of the world and Architect of its order. Priests see the world in terms of strictly defined categories: *kodesh* and *hol*, holy and profane, *tahor* and *tameh*, pure and impure. The key priestly verbs are *lehavdil*, “to distinguish, separate, demarcate,” and *lehorot*, “to teach” in the sense of giving halakhic rulings.

Priests have a strong moral sense. The commands to love your neighbor and the stranger as yourself occur, in the Torah, in the most priestly of the books, Leviticus, and are taught alongside the *hukkim*, the statutes, that have no apparent moral content. The highest virtue for the priest is obedience: doing exactly as God told us to do. Prophets often acted on the spur of the moment. That is what Moses did when he smashed the tablets on seeing the golden calf. But there is absolutely no place for spontaneity in the world of the priest.

Nadav and Avihu, two of Aaron’s sons, spontaneously made a fire offering at the consecration of the Tabernacle and died as a result. When priests, charged with maintaining order, act spontaneously, it is like mixing milk and meat, or matter and anti-matter. It creates disorder, and disorder in the moral universe is like entropy in the physical universe. It means a loss of energy, a diminution of the presence of God. So when people sin, they have to restore order through the appropriate ritual.

When the Temple stood, this involved purification if you had become defiled, or the bringing of a sacrifice if you had done wrong. You had to come to the Temple because that, in the world of the priest, is where humans meet God. God is everywhere, but we meet Him only in special places at special times. Each time has its appropriate sacrifice and service, just as each prayer has its appropriate words. It is through acting exactly as God has prescribed that we restore the order we have damaged through our sins.

Listening carefully to how the Torah describes the ritual of the High Priest on Yom Kippur, we hear the key terms of the priestly sensibility:

When he finishes bringing atonement for the holiest place and the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall offer up the living goat. Aaron

shall press his hands onto the head of the living goat and confess all the guilt of Israel, and all of their rebellions, all of their sins... For you will be atoned on this day and made pure; of all your sins before the LORD you shall be purified. (Leviticus 16:20–21, 30)

The key themes are confession, purification, and atonement, the last of which occurs a sizeable twenty-three times in the space of a single chapter. The day itself, the tenth of Tishrei, is described three times in the Torah as *Yom [Ha]Kippurim*, the “Day of Atonements.”

The root *k-p-r*, “atone,” has a variety of meanings. It means “to cover over”: Noah was told to cover [*vekhafarta*, Gen. 6:14] the ark with pitch. The gold covering of the Ark in the Tabernacle was called a *kaporet*. A *kofer* was also a ransom, a sum paid to redeem a debt or avoid a hazard (see Exodus 21:30).

Guilt, therefore, is seen as a kind of debt incurred by the sinner to God and must be redeemed by the performance of a ritual, confession, and the payment of a ransom, the sin-offering. This “covers over” or obliterates the sin. It also cleanses the sinner since sin leaves a mark on the soul. It is a kind of defilement (see Nahmanides to Leviticus 4:2).

Sin, for the Kohen, is the transgression of a boundary, and there are specific names for the different kinds of sin: *het*, for an unintentional sin, *avon* for a deliberate sin, and *pesha* for a sin committed as a rebellion. All sin threatens the Divine–human harmony on which the universe depends. Confession accompanied by sacrifice restores that harmony, and the ritual itself must follow a highly structured procedure. Structure is of the essence, for the priest is the guardian of order, and only by obediently following divine instructions do we honor the order God made in creating the universe. Note that the fundamental concern of the priest is the relationship between the people and God.

Note also what is missing from the priestly account. There is nothing here about the relationship of human beings with one another. The verb *shuv*, to “return” or “repent,” does not appear at all. The priest is engaged in *kapara* and *tahara*, atonement and purification, not with *teshuva*, repentance and return.

PROPHETS AND REPENTANCE

The prophets are quite different. They use different words. They think in different ways. Here, for example, are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Joel on the subject of repentance:

Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of My sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: If your sins are like scarlet, they shall be whitened like snow; should they be as red as crimson, they shall become like wool. (Isaiah 1:16–18)

Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster He has pronounced against you. (Jeremiah 26:13)

Return, Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him: “Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.” (Hosea 14:2–3)

Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness, and He relents from sending calamity. (Joel 2:13)

This is a completely different way of thinking. The prophets are intensely concerned with social morality. They regard injustice, corruption, the neglect of the poor and the oppression of the weak as national catastrophes. They are not indifferent to the relationship between the people and God: far from it. They constantly castigate idolatry. But they see this in moral terms. It is an act of betrayal, disloyalty, faithlessness. Also they are concerned less with outward ritual than with inner remorse: “Rend your heart and not your garments.” They are not opposed to ritual and sacrifice, but they are outraged when it is used as an attempt, as it were, to bribe God to avert His eyes from evil and injustice.

Note also that the prophets speak from and in the midst of history. Sin is not something that has consequences only for the spiritual relationship between the people and God. It damages the nation’s fate. It threatens

its future. When drought, famine, war and defeat happen it is because the people have sinned, and if they continue to do so, worse will follow.

The language the prophets use is quite different from that of the priests. Time and again they use the word the priests never use, namely “return,” *shuv*, from which we get the word *teshuva*. Return to God, they say, and He will return to You. The priestly word *k-p-r*, “atone,” plays almost no role whatsoever in the prophetic literature. Isaiah uses it rarely, Jeremiah only once and negatively (“Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from your sight” [18:23]). The twelve minor prophets do not use it at all (Amos uses it once [5:12] to mean a bribe). This is particularly noticeable in the book of Jonah whose entire theme is repentance.

There is one other difference between the language of priests and prophets. They both make use of the verb *s-l-h*, to forgive. But the prophets use it always and only in the active form: God forgives. Priests use it exclusively in the passive form: *venislah*, “it will be forgiven.”

So we have two types of religious leader, the priest and the prophet, both of whom serve the same God as part of the same faith and the same people, whose visions of the spiritual-moral life are quite different. The priest thinks of sin primarily in terms of the relationship between humans and God. The prophet sees the effects of sin on society. He or she knows that if you dishonor God you will eventually dishonor human beings.

What angers the prophet is seeing people trying to have it both ways – honoring God by bringing sacrifices at the Temple while exploiting or oppressing their fellow humans. Don’t think you can fool God, the prophet says. You cannot ignore Him and survive as a nation. The prophet speaks not in the language of holy and profane, pure and defiled, commandment and sin, but in terms of the great covenantal virtues: *tzedek*, righteousness, *mishpat*, justice, *hesed*, love and *rahamim*, compassion.

The prophet does not speak about putting things right by sacrifice and confession but by a change of heart and deed, abandoning evil and returning to God. The one exception was Ezekiel, the only person to use both a prophetic and a priestly vocabulary. The reason is simple: Ezekiel was that rare phenomenon, a prophet who was also a priest (unlike Jeremiah, both roles are evident in the language of Ezekiel).

Priests and prophets belong to different worlds. The only reason we think of them together is because of the history of Yom Kippur. The first

Yom Kippur was brought about by Moses, the greatest of the prophets. The second and subsequent Days of Atonement belonged to Aaron and his descendants, the High Priests.

It took historical catastrophe and a religious genius to bring the two worlds together. The catastrophe was the destruction of the Second Temple. The genius was Rabbi Akiva.

The Two Hemispheres United

It was one of the most turbulent periods in history. An ancient order was coming to an end, and almost everyone knew it. With the death of Herod in 4 BCE, Israel came under direct Roman rule. There was unrest throughout the land. Jews and Greeks vied for influence, and conflict often flared into violence. There were Jewish uprisings, brutally suppressed. Throughout Israel there were sects convinced they were living through the end of days. In Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea a group of religious pietists were living in expectation of the final confrontation between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. A whole series of messianic figures emerged, each the harbinger of a new “kingdom of heaven.” All were killed.

In the year 66 CE the tension erupted. Provoked by persecution, buoyed by messianic hope, Jews rose in rebellion. A heavy contingent of Roman troops under Vespasian and Titus was sent to crush the uprising. It took seven years. In 70 CE the Temple was destroyed. Three years later the last remaining outpost of zealots in the mountain fastness of Masada committed suicide rather than allow themselves to be taken captive by the Romans. Some contemporary estimates put the number of Jewish casualties during this period at over a million. It was a devastating blow.

In 132 there was another uprising, this time under Shimon bar Kosiva, known as Bar Kokhba and considered by some of the rabbis to be the messiah. For a while it was a success. For two years Jews regained a fragile independence. The Roman reprisal, when it came, was merciless. The Roman historian Dio estimated that in the course of the campaign, 580,000 Jews were killed and 985 Jewish settlements destroyed. Almost an entire generation of Jewish leaders and teachers, sages and scholars, was put to death. Hadrian had Jerusalem leveled, then rebuilt as the Roman

city Aelia Capitolina. Jews were forbidden entry on pain of death. It was the end of resistance and the beginning of what would eventually become the longest exile ever suffered by a people. Within a century the center of Jewish life had moved to Babylon.

All the institutions of national Jewish life were now gone. There was no Temple, no sacrificial order, no priests, no kings, no prophets, no land, no independence, and no expectation that they might soon return. With the possible exception of the Holocaust it was the most traumatic period in Jewish history. A passage in the Talmud records that at the height of the Hadrianic persecutions there were rabbis who taught that “By rights we should issue a decree that Jews should not marry and have children, so that the seed of Abraham comes to an end of its own accord.”* To many it seemed as if the Jewish journey had reached its close. Where in the despair was there a route to hope?

In the encompassing turmoil one problem was acute for those whose religious imagination was most sensitive. What, in the absence of a Temple and its sacrifices, would now lift the burden of sin and guilt? Judaism is a system of high moral and spiritual demands. Without some way of resolving the tension between the ideal of perfection and the all-too-imperfect nature of human conduct, the weight of undischarged guilt would be immense.

So long as the Temple stood, the service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur was designed to secure atonement for all Israel.** Already, though, even before the destruction of the Temple, the priesthood no longer commanded the respect of all sections of the population. For several generations it had become enmeshed in politics. Some Hasmonean kings had served as High Priests, transgressing against the principled separation of powers in Judaism. There were times under Greek and Roman rule when the office went to the highest bidder. There were other times when the priesthood was caught up in the conflict between Pharisees and Sadducees, a serious rift in late Second Temple times. All too often the office of High Priest became a pawn in a game of power.

Many sages wrestled with this problem. One in particular, though,

* Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 60b.

** Leviticus 16:2–34.

is associated with the conceptual revolution that occurred in the post-Temple age. Rabbi Akiva had an almost legendary life. He had grown up as an illiterate shepherd with a violent dislike of rabbis and their culture. At the insistence of his wife, he undertook a course of study and eventually became prodigiously learned, a leader of Jewish scholarship and one of its most heroic figures. Amid the despair at the destruction of the Temple, his was one of the great voices of hope. In old age he gave his support to the Bar Kokhba rebellion, and was put to a cruel death by the Romans. He remains a symbol of Jewish martyrdom.

His response to the end of the Temple and its Day of Atonement rites was not one of mourning, but a paradoxical sense of uplift. Tragedy had not defeated hope. It could even be used to bring about a spiritual advance. The Temple rites might be lost, but in their place would come something even deeper and more democratic. Far from being separated from God, the sinner was now able to come closer to the Divine Presence. His words were these: “Happy are you, Israel: before whom do you purify yourselves, and who purifies you? – Your Father in heaven.”*

He meant this: Now that there was no Temple and no High Priest, atonement need no longer be vicarious. The sinner could obtain forgiveness directly. All he or she needed to do was confess the sin, express remorse and resolve not to repeat it in the future. Atonement was no longer mediated by a third party. It needed no High Priest, no sacrifice and no Temple ritual. It was a direct relationship between the individual and God. This was one of rabbinic Judaism’s most magnificent ideas. Jews continue to mourn the loss of the Temple and pray for its restoration, but their ability to transform grief into growth, defeat into spiritual victory, remains awe-inspiring.

UNITING PRIEST AND PROPHET

Essentially what Rabbi Akiva and the sages did was to bring together the priestly and prophetic ideas of atonement and return. They took from *Torat Kohanim*, the law of the priests, the idea of Yom Kippur itself – a special day in the Jewish calendar dedicated to fasting, self-affliction and the rectification of sin. The prophets never thought in terms of specific

* Mishna, *Yoma* 8:9.

days of the year when they spoke about repentance. Any day was a good day when it came to abandoning evil and returning to God.

They also took from the service of the High Priest the idea of *viduy*, confession. The High Priest confessed three times on Yom Kippur: first for himself and his family, then for his fellow priests, then for the people as a whole. We too confess on Yom Kippur – ten times, corresponding to the ten times the High Priest used the most holy name of God.

To be sure, confession was not strictly confined to priests or the Temple. Saul and David both confessed, using the word *hatati*, “I have sinned,” when confronted with their sins by a prophet. But the formal act of confession was mainly associated with the bringing of a sin or guilt offering, and collective confession with the service of the High Priest. Note that in confession there is no direct address to God, no argument, no pleading, no case for the defense, no plea in mitigation. Instead there is ritual. We have done wrong. We are guilty. We now wish to undergo the process that will allow us to be atoned for and cleansed.

There are other elements unique to Yom Kippur, designed to reenact the service of the Temple. During the Repetition of Musaf, we recount the whole of the High Priest’s service – something we do at no other time – telling the story much as we relate the exodus at the Seder table on Pesah. Even the account, said during Musaf, of the “ten martyrs,” the sages who died for their faith during the Roman era, has a priestly undertone as if to say: Let all those who died *al Kiddush Hashem*, for the sanctification of God’s name, count as our people’s sacrifices to You. Let their deaths atone for our sins.

We say aloud the line, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and all time,” immediately after the first verse of the Shema (said silently the rest of the year) because in ancient times it was said aloud in the Temple in place of the word “Amen,” which was never used in the Temple service. We prostrate ourselves four times during Musaf, something we only do on one other occasion, Rosh HaShana, again in memory of the Temple. The custom of men wearing the *kittel*, a white tunic, on Yom Kippur recalls the white robe the High Priest wore on that day when he entered the Holy of Holies. All of this is priestly.

But we also say *seliḥot*, direct prayers to God asking for forgiveness. This, as we saw in the last chapter, is a supremely prophetic act, going

back to Moses' two great prayers on behalf of the Jewish people, after the golden calf and the episode of the spies.

Equally prophetic are the two haftarot we say on Yom Kippur. The first, in the morning, comes from one of the most prophetic of all utterances, the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, with its insistence that true repentance is measured by the way we treat our fellow humans:

Is this the fast I have chosen – a day when a man will oppress himself? When he bows his head like a rush in the wind, when he lays his bed with sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, “a day for the LORD’s favor”? No; this is the fast I choose: Loosen the bindings of evil, and break the slavery chain. Those who were crushed, release to freedom; shatter every yoke of slavery. Break your bread for the starving, and bring dispossessed wanderers home. When you see a person naked, clothe him: do not avert your eyes from your own flesh. (Isaiah 58:5–7)

This is an astonishing passage to read on a day in which we *are* fasting, humbling ourselves and bowing our heads. The afternoon Haftara, the book of Jonah, is a no less counterintuitive choice since it concerns the repentance, not of Israel but of Israel’s enemies, the Assyrians in Nineveh. Yet it too makes the point that it is not fasting as such that constitutes repentance but rather a change of heart and deed: “[All] shall cry out to God with a powerful cry; let every man turn back from his evil way, and from the violence that fills his hands. Who knows – perhaps God, too, will turn back and relent; will turn back from His burning rage, before we are all lost” (Jonah 3:8–9).

Equally striking is the following paradox. The sages ruled that Yom Kippur atones only for the sins between us and God, not for those between us and our fellow humans. *Kol Nidrei*, the legal procedure for the annulment of vows, refers only to vows between us and God. Yet the confessions, both the shorter *Ashamnu*, “We have sinned,” and especially the longer *Al het*, “For the sin,” speak mainly of sins between us and our fellows. This is a prophetic perspective translated into the language of the priest, that is, into *viduy*, the confession that accompanied sacrifices for wrongdoing. So Yom Kippur as it developed from the days of Rabbi Akiva

succeeded in uniting two religious mindsets, that of the priest and the prophet, that had been distinct and separate for more than a thousand years. It was an immense achievement.

MAIMONIDES ON REPENTANCE

We can gain a deeper insight into this synthesis by looking closely at a major disagreement between two of the greatest rabbis of the Middle Ages, Maimonides and Nahmanides.

Maimonides was one of the most polymathic minds the Jewish people has ever produced. Born in Spain (c. 1135) to Rabbi Maimon, a rabbi and religious judge, he spent his childhood in Cordoba, then enjoying the brief period of relative tolerance known as the *Convivencia* when Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together in relative harmony. In 1148 a radical Islamic sect, the Almohads, came to power, instituting religious persecution and forcing the Maimon family into flight. Originally they went to Fez in Morocco, then to Israel, but the Jewish community, devastated by the Crusades, offered no possibility of a livelihood, and the family eventually settled in Fustat, near Cairo, where Maimonides was to live out the rest of his days until his death in 1204. There he wrote some of the greatest works of Jewish scholarship, including the unsurpassed code of law, the *Mishneh Torah*, and the sublime if enigmatic philosophical masterpiece, *The Guide for the Perplexed*.

Nahmanides, born in Gerona, Catalonia, in 1194, was, like Maimonides, a physician as well as the greatest rabbi of his time, equally adept at Jewish law and biblical interpretation. In 1263 in Barcelona he was enlisted into one of the great confrontations between Judaism and Christianity: the public disputation, in the presence of King James I of Aragon, with Pablo Christiani, a Jewish convert to Christianity. Nahmanides spoke brilliantly, but was forced into exile in 1265 when the king was put under pressure by the Christian authorities. He traveled to Israel and set about strengthening the Jewish community in Jerusalem, establishing a yeshiva and a synagogue. It was the beginning of the recovery of a Jewish presence in the holy city.

Both men were concerned to find the source of the command at the heart of Yom Kippur, namely *teshuva*, the duty to repent one's sins

and “return” to God, but they differed utterly in their analyses. Here is Maimonides’ account:

In respect of all the commands of the Torah, positive or negative, if a person transgressed any of them, deliberately or in error, and repents and turns away from his sins, he is under a duty to confess before God, blessed be He, as it is said, “If a man or a woman sins against his fellow man, thus being untrue to God, and becoming guilty of a crime, he must confess the sin he has committed” [Num. 5:6–7]. This means verbal confession, and this confession is a positive command.

How does one confess? The penitent says, “I beg of You, O LORD, I have sinned, I have acted perversely, I have transgressed before You and have done such and such; and behold, I repent and am ashamed of my deeds and I will never do this again.” This constitutes the essence of confession. The fuller and more detailed the confession one makes, the more praiseworthy he is. (Laws of Repentance 1:1)

Note how circuitous Maimonides’ prose is: *If* one commits a sin, and *if* one then repents, *then* one must confess. It sounds as if the command is the confession, not the repentance that precedes it. In the superscription to the Laws of Repentance he puts it slightly differently. There he says that the command is “that the sinner repent of his sin before God and confess,” as if the mitzva were *both* the repentance and the confession.

What Maimonides is saying is that the actual command is the confession, a verbal declaration. But confession must be sincere in order to count, and a sincere confession presupposes that you repent of the sin, meaning, (1) you know it was a sin, (2) you feel remorse that you committed it, and (3) you are now formally declaring your guilt and your determination not to repeat the offense. Repentance, for Maimonides, is not directly commanded in the Torah. It is commanded obliquely. You have to have it in order to fulfill the command of confession. Confession is the *ma’aseh mitzva*, the physical act, while *teshuva* is the *kiyum mitzva*, the mental component necessary to make the act the fulfillment of a command.

Note that Maimonides locates the mitzva in the world of the Temple and its sacrifices. It was there that individuals confessed when they

brought sin or guilt offerings. It was there that the High Priest confessed his and the people's sins on Yom Kippur. We might have thought that, since confession was an accompaniment of sacrifices, when the sacrifices ceased, so too did confession itself. However, elsewhere (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, positive command 73) Maimonides cites the *Sifri*, an authoritative halakhic midrash, to prove that the command of confession still holds, even though we lack the sacrifices that accompanied it in Temple times.

In short, for Maimonides, repentance belongs to *Torat Kohanim*, the law of the priests. It derives, ultimately, from the Sanctuary and its rituals, the world over which Aaron and his descendants officiated. It is what we have left from the Temple.

NAHMANIDES ON REPENTANCE

The view of Nahmanides could not be more different. Searching for the basis of the command of *teshuva*, he turns to one of the great prophetic visions Moses outlined at the end of his life:

When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where He scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back ... The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as He delighted in your ancestors, if you obey the LORD your God and keep His commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 30:1–10)

This is the passage in which Moses, lifting his eyes to the furthest horizon of prophecy, foresees a time when the Israelites will be defeated and forced into exile. There they will come to the conclusion that this was no mere happenstance. It occurred because they had sinned and forsaken

God and He in return had forsaken them. They would then return to God. He would return to them and they would return to their land.

Note that the entire passage does not mention sin or transgression, confession or sacrifice. It makes no mention of any ritual or verbal declaration. Nor does it mention the key word, *k-p-r*, “atonement,” in any of its forms or inflections. There is not a single hint of *Torat Kohanim*, the world and mindset of the priest. It is a vast conspectus of history, a portrait of national decline and restoration, exile and a new beginning.

What is missed in almost every English translation is the fact that the key word in the passage is the verb *shuv*, “to return,” from which the word *teshuva*, repentance, is derived. It appears no less than eight times in ten verses. This was clearly the decisive consideration as far as Nahmanides was concerned. If we are looking for a source of the command of *teshuva*, then we must seek a passage in which the verb occurs. Nahmanides then notes that immediately after this vision Moses adds:

This command I am prescribing to you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not in heaven, so [that you should] say, “Who shall go up to heaven and bring it to us so that we can hear it and keep it?” It is not over the sea so [that you should] say, “Who will cross the sea and get it for us, so that we will be able to hear it and keep it?” It is something that is very close to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can keep it. (Deuteronomy 30:11–14)

Which is “This command”? asks Nahmanides, and answers: “This is the command of *teshuva*, repentance.”

Note how very different Nahmanides’ view of repentance is from that of Maimonides. For him repentance is part of the historical drama of the Jewish people. The punishment for sin is exile. Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden. Cain was condemned to permanent exile (“You shall be a restless wanderer” [Gen. 4:12]) after murdering his brother Abel. So would the Israelites, if they sinned, suffer defeat and displacement. Hence the rich double meaning of the word *teshuva*, signifying both spiritual and physical return. If they came home spiritually to God He would bring them home physically to their land.

It would be hard to find a wider disagreement not only on the source

but also the nature of the command. For Nahmanides repentance is not about a ritual of atonement but about the complete reorientation of an individual, or the people as a whole, from estrangement from God to rededication and return. Nahmanides' account locates repentance not in *Torat Kohanim*, the law of the priests, but in *Torat Nevi'im*, the world of the prophet. It is the prophet who relates spirituality to history, the state of a nation's soul to its fate in the vicissitudes of time. Where Maimonides finds *teshuva* in the world of Aaron and the priests, Nahmanides locates it in the mind of Moses and the prophets.

In the light of all we have said, we can see that Maimonides and Nahmanides were both right because they were speaking about different things. Maimonides tells us that the origin of *kapara*, atonement, is priestly. Nahmanides tells us that the basis of *teshuva*, repentance-and-return, is prophetic. It was the genius of the sages to bring these two processes together, strengthening the connection between honoring God and honoring the image of God that is our fellow human.

That, then, is Yom Kippur, a day of restoring our relationship with God, with our fellows and with the better angels of our nature. Rabbinical Judaism integrated the twin hemispheres of the Jewish brain, the priestly and prophetic mindsets. Yom Kippur still bears traces of its dual origin in the prophetic moment of the first year when Moses achieved divine forgiveness for the Israelites' sin, and the priestly nature of the second, when Aaron secured atonement for the people by his service in the Sanctuary.

A REPUBLIC OF FREE AND EQUAL CITIZENS

The following speech, adapted from Ansky's play *The Dybbuk*, expresses beautifully the revolution wrought by rabbinic Judaism:

At a certain hour, on a certain day of the year, the four supreme sanctities met together. On the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year, the holiest person, the High Priest, entered the holiest place, the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem, and there pronounced the holiest word, the Divine Name. Now that there is no Temple, wherever a person stands to lift his eyes to heaven becomes a Holy of Holies. Every human being created by God in His own likeness is a High Priest. Each

day of a person's life is the Day of Atonement. Every word he speaks from the heart is the name of God.

At Mount Sinai in the days of Moses, God invited the Israelites to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). All would be priests. The nation as a whole would be holy. Under the sovereignty of God, there would be a republic of free and equal citizens held together not by hierarchy or power but by the moral bond of covenant.

It did not happen, at least not literally. Throughout the biblical era there were hierarchies. There were kings, prophets and priests. Yet ideals, repeatedly invoked, do not die. They lie like seeds in parched earth waiting for the rain. It was precisely at Israel's bleakest moment that something like the biblical vision did emerge. Monarchy, priesthood and prophecy ceased, and were succeeded by more egalitarian institutions. Prayer took the place of sacrifice. The synagogue replaced the Temple. Repentance substituted for the rites of the High Priest.

Judaism, no longer a religion of land and state, kings and armies, became a faith built around homes, schools and communities. For eighteen hundred years without a state Jews were a nation linked not by relationships of power but by a common commitment to the covenant. Jewry, no longer a sovereign nation, became a global people. From that point onward every Jew in politics became a king, in study a prophet, and in prayer, especially on Yom Kippur, a priest.

Out of catastrophe, the Jewish people, inspired by sages like Rabbi Akiva, brought about a revolution in the life of the spirit, foreshadowed at Mount Sinai but not fully realized until more than a thousand years later, and perhaps not fully appreciated even now. The Judaism of the sages – a Judaism without the revelatory events or manifest miracles of the Bible – achieved what no other religion has ever done, sustaining the identity of a people, dispersed, stateless and largely powerless, everywhere a minority and often a despised one, for two millennia, leading it in generation after generation to heights of scholarship and piety that transfigured lives and lit them with an inner fire of love and longing and religious passion that turned pain into poetry and transformed Yom Kippur from a day on which one man atoned for all, into one on which all atoned for each in a covenant of human solidarity in the direct unmediated presence of God.

New Insights into Ancient Texts

Three passages in the Yom Kippur prayers have occasioned much speculation, and in this chapter I offer a new interpretation of each. First is *Kol Nidrei*, the prayer-that-is-not-a-prayer with which Yom Kippur begins. Second is the service of the High Priest, in the Tabernacle and later the Temple, especially the rite of the goat sent to Azazel, the original “scape-goat.” What was the meaning of this strange procedure? Third is the poem said on *Kol Nidrei* night, “Like clay in the potter’s hands” misunderstood by many commentators and translators.

KOL NIDREI

Kol Nidrei is an enigma wrapped in a mystery, the strangest prayer ever to capture the religious imagination. First, it is not a prayer at all. It is not even a confession. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. It is written in Aramaic. It does not mention God. It is not part of the service. It does not require a synagogue. And it was disapproved of, or at least questioned, by generations of halakhic authorities.

The first time we hear of *Kol Nidrei*, in the ninth century, it is already being opposed by Rav Natronai Gaon (Responsa 1:185), the first of many sages through the centuries who found it problematic. In their view, one cannot annul the vows of an entire congregation this way. Even if one could, one should not, since it may lead people to treat vows lightly. Besides which, there has already been an annulment of vows ten days earlier, on the morning before Rosh HaShana. This is mentioned explicitly in the Talmud (*Nedarim* 23b). There is no mention of an annulment on Yom Kippur.

Rabbeinu Tam, Rashi’s grandson, was particularly insistent in arguing that the kind of annulment *Kol Nidrei* represents cannot be retroactive. It cannot apply to vows already taken. It can only be a preemptive qualification of vows in the future. Accordingly, he insisted on changing its wording so that *Kol Nidrei* refers not to vows from last year to this, but from this year to next (*Sefer HaYashar* 100). However, the custom developed to say both – a compromise at the cost of coherence. It is one thing to seek to undo vows we have already made, quite another to preclude vows we might make in the future.

Disturbingly, *Kol Nidrei* created hostility on the part of non-Jews, who said it showed that Jews did not feel bound to honor their promises since they vitiated them on the holiest night of the year. In vain it was repeatedly emphasized that *Kol Nidrei* applies only to vows between us and God, not those between us and our fellow humans. Throughout the Middle Ages, and in some places until the eighteenth century, in lawsuits with non-Jews, Jews were forced to take a special oath *More Judaica*, because of this concern.

So there were communal and halakhic reasons not to say *Kol Nidrei*, yet it survived all the doubts and misgivings. It remains the quintessential expression of the awe and solemnity of the day. Its undiminished power defies all obvious explanations. Somehow it seems to point to something larger than itself, whether in Jewish history or the inner heartbeat of the Jewish soul.

Several historians have argued that it acquired its pathos from the phenomenon of forced conversions, whether to Christianity or Islam, that occurred in several places in the Middle Ages, most notably Spain and Portugal in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Jews would be offered the choice: convert or suffer persecution. Sometimes it was: convert or be expelled. At times it was even: convert or die. Some Jews did convert. They were known in Hebrew as *anusim* (people who acted under coercion). In Spanish they were known as *conversos*, or contemptuously as *marranos* (swine).

Many of them remained Jews in secret, and once a year on the night of Yom Kippur they would make their way in secret to the synagogue to seek release from the vows they had taken to adopt another faith, on the compelling grounds that they had no other choice. For them, coming to the synagogue was like *coming home*, the root meaning of *teshuva*.

There are obvious problems with this hypothesis. Firstly, *Kol Nidrei* was in existence several centuries *before* the era of forced conversions. So historian Joseph S. Bloch suggested that *Kol Nidrei* may have originated in the much earlier Christian persecution of Jews in Visigoth Spain, when in 613 Sisebur issued a decree that all Jews should either convert or be expelled, anticipating the Spanish expulsion of 1492. Even so, it is unlikely that *conversos* would have taken the risk of being discovered practicing

Judaism. Had they done so during the centuries in which the Inquisition was in force, they would have risked torture, trial and death.

Yet the connection between *Kol Nidrei* and Jews estranged from the community continues to tantalize, and may be the explanation for the preceding passage introduced by Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg in the thirteenth century: “By the authority of the heavenly and earthly court we grant permission to pray with the transgressors.” This constitutes the formal lifting of a ban of excommunication and was a way of welcoming outcasts back into the community. The fact remains, though, that the text of *Kol Nidrei* makes no reference to conversion, return, identity, or atonement. It is what it is: simply an annulment of vows.

Others have suggested that it is not the words of *Kol Nidrei* that have ensured its survival, but the music, the ancient, moving melody that immediately evokes a mood of drama and expectancy as the leader of prayer turns toward heaven, pleading on behalf of the congregation. The tune of *Kol Nidrei* is one of those known as *miSinai*, “from Sinai,” meaning in this context, of great antiquity, though probably it was composed in Rhineland Germany in the age of the Crusades. The music is indeed uniquely soulful. Beethoven chose the same opening sequence of notes for the sixth movement of his *String Quartet in C sharp minor, opus 131*, one of his most sublime compositions. Already in the fifteenth century we read of rabbis who sought to rectify the text of *Kol Nidrei*, only to find their suggestions rejected on the grounds that they would interfere with the melodic phrasing.

The Ashkenazi melody, rising from *diminuendo* to *fortissimo* in the course of its threefold repetition, has intense power. Music, since the Israelites sang a song to God at the Reed Sea, has been the language of the soul as it reaches out toward the unsayable. Yet rather than solve the problem, this suggestion only deepens it. Why chant a melody at all to a text that is not a prayer but a legal process?

So the theories as they stand do not satisfy.

To understand *Kol Nidrei* we need to go back to a unique feature of Tanakh, without counterpart in any other religion. Time and again we find that the dialogue between God and the prophets takes the form of a legal challenge. Sometimes, especially in the books of Hosea and Micah, the plaintiff is God and the accused, the children of Israel. At other times,

as when Abraham argues with God over the fate of Sodom, or Jeremiah or Habakkuk or Job protest the sufferings of the innocent, the roles are reversed. Always the subject is justice, and the context, the covenant between God and Israel. This genre – the dialogue between God and humanity structured as a courtroom drama – is known as the *riv* (“contention, dispute, accusation”) pattern, and it is central to Judaism.

It emerges from the logic of *covenant*, Judaism’s fundamental idea. A covenant is an agreement between two or more parties who, each respecting the dignity and freedom of the other, come together to pledge their mutual loyalty. In human terms the closest analogy is a marriage. In political terms it is a treaty between two nations. Only in Judaism is the idea given religious dignity (Christianity borrowed the idea of covenant from Judaism but gave it a somewhat different interpretation). It means that God, having liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, adopts them as His *am segula*, His specially cherished nation, while the Israelites accept God as their Sovereign, the Torah as their written constitution, and their mission as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6) or, as Isaiah puts it, God’s “witnesses” in the world (Is. ch. 43–44).

The covenant bestows an unrivaled dignity on humans. Judaism acknowledges, as do most faiths, that God is infinite and we infinitesimal, God is eternal and we ephemeral, God is everything and we next-to-nothing. But Judaism makes the momentous claim in the opposite direction, that we are “God’s partners in the work of creation” (*Shabbat* 10a and 119b). We are not tainted by original sin; we are not incapable of greatness; we are God’s stake in the world. Tanakh tells an astonishing love story: about the love of God for a people to whom He binds Himself in covenant, a covenant He never breaks, rescinds or changes however many times we betray it and Him. The covenant is law as love and loyalty.

Hence the model of the courtroom drama when either partner feels that the other has not honored the terms of the agreement. Before the impersonal bar of justice, God may accuse Israel of abandoning Him, or sometimes the roles are reversed and the prophets challenge God on what they perceive as a lack of justice in the world. This is a consistent theme in both Tanakh and the rabbinic literature. It also had a major practical influence on synagogue life.

Any Jew who felt he or she had suffered an injustice could interrupt

the reading of the Torah in synagogue (*ikuv keria*) and present their case before the congregation. The plaintiff would mount the *bima*, bang three times on the table and say, “I am delaying the Torah reading.” He would explain why he had chosen to present his case directly to the community instead of a court or Beit Din. He would then tell the members of the community that he was depending on them for truth and justice, and one of the leaders of the congregation would accept the responsibility.

The case would be discussed, the *gabbai* would mount the *bima* and announce the names of three arbitrators (*borerim*) who had been chosen to hear the case, and the deadline for settling the disagreement. Usually this was accepted, but if the plaintiff still felt unfairly treated, he could continue to delay the Torah reading. Yaffa Eliach, who describes how this worked in Poland in the interwar years, says that it “proved a potent social weapon, quite often providing the community with a satisfactory and speedy resolution to extremely knotty problems.”*

The synagogue, in other words, could be turned into a court of law. That is the function of *Kol Nidrei*. Precisely because it is not a prayer but a legal process, it signals that for the next twenty-five hours what is about to happen is something more and other than prayer in the conventional sense.

The prayers of Yom Kippur are different from those of any other festival. They include a legal act, confession, a plea of guilt that rightly belongs in a court of law. Physically, the synagogue looks like it does the rest of the year, but functionally it has changed. The Beit Knesset has become a Beit Din. The synagogue is now a court of law. Sitting on the Throne of Justice is God Himself and we are the prisoners at the bar. The trial that began on Rosh HaShana has reached its last day. We are the accused, and we are about to be judged on the evidence of our lives. So *Kol Nidrei*, the prayer-that-is-not-a-prayer, transforms the house of prayer into a law-court, providing the setting and mood for the unique drama that will reach its climax at Ne’ila when the court rises, the Judge is ready to leave, and the verdict, written, is about to be sealed.

That is the first dimension of *Kol Nidrei*, but we can go a level deeper.

How, after all, does *teshuva* work? We confess our wrongs, express remorse, and resolve not to repeat, but how can we undo the past? Surely,

* Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998, 84–87.

what's done is done. The asymmetry of time means that we can affect the future but not the past. However, it is not quite so. *The release of vows that takes place through Kol Nidrei constitutes a legal precedent – the only one – for what we seek, through teshuva, to achieve for our sins.* The ground on which we seek annulment of vows is *harata*, “remorse.” The fact that we now regret having taken the vow is the reason the sages were able to say that full intent – an essential element of a valid vow – was lacking from the outset.

But this is precisely what we do when we confess our sins and express our remorse for them. We thereby signal retroactively that full intent was lacking from our sins. Had we known then what we know now, we would not have acted as we did. Therefore we did not really mean to do what we did. This is what Resh Lakish meant when he said that *teshuva* has the power retroactively to turn deliberate sins into inadvertent ones (Yoma 86b), and inadvertent sins can be forgiven. In fact this is why, immediately after *Kol Nidrei*, we recite the biblical verse that says: “All the congregation of Israel will be forgiven ... for they sinned without intent [*bishgaga*]” (Num. 15:26). So both the annulment of vows and *teshuva* share the power of remorse to change or mitigate the past and liberate us from its bonds.

But there is a third level of significance to *Kol Nidrei* that is deeper still. Recall that Yom Kippur only exists in virtue of the fact that Moses secured God’s forgiveness of the Israelites after the sin of the golden calf, descending from the mountain on the tenth of Tishrei with a new set of tablets to replace those he had smashed in anger at their sin.

How did Moses secure God’s forgiveness of the people? The text introducing Moses’ prayer begins with the Hebrew words, *Vayehal Moshe*. Normally these are translated as “Moses besought, implored, entreated, pleaded, or attempted to pacify” God (Ex. 32:11). However, *the same verb is used in the context of annulling or breaking a vow* (Num. 30:3). On this basis the sages advanced a truly remarkable interpretation:

[*Vayehal Moshe* means] “Moses absolved God of His vow.” When the Israelites made the golden calf, Moses sought to persuade God to forgive them, but God said, “I have already taken an oath that *Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the LORD must be punished* [Ex. 22:19]. I cannot retract what I have said.” Moses replied, “LORD of the universe,

You have given me the power to annul oaths, for You taught me that one who takes an oath cannot break his word but a scholar can absolve him. I hereby absolve You of Your vow.” (Abridged from *Shemot Raba* 43:4)

According to the sages, *the original act of divine forgiveness on which Yom Kippur is based came about through the annulment of a vow*, when Moses annulled the vow of God.

If this is so, we understand precisely why *Kol Nidrei* was chosen to introduce the prayers of Yom Kippur:

1. It transforms the synagogue into a courtroom, and prayer into a trial.
2. It establishes the logic of atonement through the power of *harata*, “remorse,” retroactively to vitiate the intention behind the deed, thus rendering our sins unwitting (*beshogeg*) and hence forgivable.
3. An act of annulment of a vow – the sages’ interpretation of Moses’ daring plea to God after the sin of the golden calf – constitutes the historical precedent for Yom Kippur.

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* has less to do with forced conversions, or even music, than with the courtroom drama, unique to Judaism, in which we stand, giving an account of our lives, our fate poised between God’s justice and compassion.

THE SCAPEGOAT

The strangest element of the service on Yom Kippur in Temple times was the ritual of the two goats, one offered as a sacrifice, the other sent away into the desert “to Azazel.” They were brought before the High Priest, to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from one another: they were chosen to be as similar as possible to one another in size and appearance. Lots were drawn, one bearing the words “To the LORD,” the other, “To Azazel.” The one on which the lot “To the LORD” fell was offered as a sacrifice. Over the other the high priest confessed the sins of the nation and it was then taken away into the desert hills outside Jerusalem where it plunged to its death. Tradition tells us that a red thread would be attached to its horns, half of which was removed before the animal was sent away. If the rite had been effective, the red thread would turn to white.

Sin and guilt offerings were common in ancient Israel, but this ceremony was unique. Normally confession was made over the animal to be offered as a sacrifice. In this case confession was made over the goat *not* offered as a sacrifice. Why the division of the offering into two? Why two identical animals whose fate, so different, was decided by the drawing of a lot? And who or what was Azazel?

The word Azazel appears nowhere else in Scripture, and three major theories emerged as to its meaning. According to the sages and Rashi it meant “a steep, rocky or hard place,” in other words a description of its destination. According to Ibn Ezra (cryptically) and Nahmanides (explicitly), Azazel was the name of a spirit or demon, one of the fallen angels referred to in Genesis 6:2. The third interpretation is that the word simply means “the goat [ez] that was sent away [azal].” Hence the English word “(e)scapegoat” coined by William Tyndale in his 1530 English translation of the Bible.

Maimonides offers the most compelling explanation, that the ritual was intended as a symbolic drama: “There is no doubt that sins cannot be carried like a burden, and taken off the shoulder of one being to be laid on that of another being. But these ceremonies are of a symbolic character, and serve to impress men with a certain idea, and to induce them to repent; as if to say, we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible” (*Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:46). This makes sense, but the question

remains. Why was this ritual different from all other sin or guilt offerings? Why two goats rather than one?

The simplest answer is that the High Priest's service on Yom Kippur was intended to achieve something other and more than ordinary sacrifices occasioned by sin. The Torah specifies two objectives, not one: "For on this day you will be atoned and made pure; of all your sins before the LORD you shall be purified" (Lev. 16:30). Normally all that was aimed at was atonement, *kapara*. On Yom Kippur something else was aimed at: cleansing, purification, *tahara*. Atonement is for acts. Purification is for persons. Sins leave stains on the character of those who commit them, and these need to be cleansed before we can undergo catharsis and begin anew.

Sin defiles. King David felt stained after his adultery with Bathsheba: "Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity and cleanse me of my sin" (Ps. 51:4). Shakespeare has Macbeth say, after his crime, "Will these hands ne'er be clean?" The ceremony closest to the rite of the scapegoat – where an animal was let loose rather than sacrificed – was the ritual for someone who was being cleansed of a skin disease:

If they have been healed of their defiling skin disease, the priest shall order that *two live clean birds* and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn, and hyssop be brought for the person to be cleansed. Then the priest shall order that *one of the birds be sacrificed* over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird... And he is to *release the live bird in the open fields*. (Leviticus 14:4–7)

The released bird, like the scapegoat, was sent away carrying the impurity, the stain. Clearly this is psychological. A moral stain is not something physical. It exists in the mind, the emotions, the soul. It is hard to rid oneself of the feeling of defilement when you have committed a wrong, even when you know it has been forgiven. Some symbolic action seems necessary. The survival of such rites as *Tashlikh*, the "casting away" of sins on Rosh HaShana, and *Kaparot*, "atonements, expiations" on the eve of Yom Kippur – the first involving crumbs, the second a live chicken – is evidence of this. Both practices were criticized by leading halakhic authorities yet both survived for the reason Maimonides gives.

It is easier to feel that defilement has gone if we have had some visible representation of its departure. We feel cleansed once we see it go somewhere, carried by something. This may not be rational, but then neither are we, much of the time.

That is the simplest explanation. The sacrificed goat represented *kapara*, atonement. The goat sent away symbolized *tahara*, cleansing of the moral stain. There is however an additional suggestion made by the Midrash, the *Zohar*, and the fifteenth-century Spanish commentator Abarbanel that takes us to an altogether deeper level of symbolism. All three note a series of connections, verbal or visual, between the two goats and the sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau.

Two identical goats suggest twins, and Jacob and Esau are the Torah's most notable (if non-identical) twins. Two goats also play a part in their story. When Rebecca hears that Isaac is about to bless Esau, she tells Jacob, "Go out to the flock and bring me *two choice young goats*, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, such as he likes" (Gen. 27:9).

The Hebrew word used for "goat" in Leviticus 16 is *se'ir*, which also means "hairy." This is the word used to describe Esau at birth ("His whole body was like a hairy garment" [Gen. 25:25]) and later when Jacob was about to take Esau's blessing ("But my brother Esau is a hairy man" [Gen. 27:11]). Esau's territory throughout the Bible is Mount Seir. The red thread attached to the goat also has Esau connections. His alternative name, Edom, means "red," either because his hair was red at birth (Gen. 25:25) or because of the red lentil soup for which he traded his birthright (25:30).

The keyword of Leviticus 16 is *k-p-r*, "atone." It appears twenty-three times in this one chapter. Significantly, the only time it appears in the sense of "atone" in Genesis is when Jacob, about to meet Esau after an absence of twenty-two years, sends messengers with gifts, saying, "I will pacify him [*akhapra panav*] with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me" (32:20).

If there is a connection between the scapegoat and the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, what is it? A clue is offered by the analysis of sacrificial rites by the French scholar Rene Girard in his classic work, *Violence and the Sacred*. Girard argues that (1) the primary religious act is sacrifice; (2) sacrifice is always an attempt to curb violence within society; and (3) the primary source of violence is sibling rivalry.

Girard takes issue with Freud who argued that violence is born in the tension between fathers and sons: the Oedipus and Laius complexes. Genesis supports Girard. One of its key themes is sibling rivalry – between Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau and Joseph and his brothers. In at least three of these cases, violence is waiting in the wings and in one, Cain and Abel, there is actual fratricide.

Girard suggests that the origin of violence is “mimetic desire,” that is, *the desire to be someone else, to have what they have*. The classic instances of this in literature usually have to do with twins. Non-biblical examples are, in Greek myth, Oedipus’ sons Eteocles and Polynices, and in Roman folklore, Romulus and Remus. Girard states that “The proliferation of enemy brothers in Greek myth and in dramatic adaptations of myth implies the continual presence of a sacrificial crisis” – that is, without sacrifice there is violence between siblings, at least one of whom wants what the other has.

Turning to Esau and Jacob, this is the dominant theme of their early life. Jacob buys Esau’s birthright, takes Esau’s blessing, and when asked by his blind father Isaac, “Who are you, my son?” replies, “I am Esau your firstborn” (Gen. 27:18–19). Even when the twins were born, Jacob was clinging to Esau’s heel. Jacob is the supreme instance in the Torah of mimetic desire.

It can be hard for us today to realize that there was once a time when Jacob and Esau were not seen in black-and-white terms. Rabbinic tradition tends to give Jacob all the virtues, Esau all the vices (except in honoring his father, where all agree that he was exemplary). Already in Tanakh we find this contrast in the statement of Malachi (1:2–3) that God loves Jacob and hates Esau. But Malachi was the last of the prophets, and two earlier prophets, Hosea and Jeremiah, saw matters in a very different light.

Hosea says: “The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah; He will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he grasped his brother’s heel” (Hos. 12:3–4). Jeremiah says, in a passage laden with echoes of the Jacob story, “Beware of your friends; do not trust your brothers, for every brother behaves like Jacob [*kol ah akov Yaakov*]” (Jer. 9:3). Hosea and Jeremiah are criticizing Jacob for his behavior toward Esau. Both are speaking about sin and the need for repentance. The Jeremiah passage is the haftara for Tisha B’Av, the saddest day of the year.

In the haunting passage (Gen. 32:24–32) in which Jacob wrestles,

alone at night, with an unnamed adversary, he finally throws off his mimetic desire to be like Esau. The stranger, who refuses to be named, was identified by the sages as “the guardian angel of Esau” (“*saro shel Esav*,” *Bereshit Raba* 77:3, 78:3). He asks Jacob to let him go. Jacob says, “I will not let you go until you bless me.” The stranger then gives him a new name, Israel. A new name in this context means a new identity. Jacob will no longer be *Yaakov*, the child who would not let go of his brother’s heel (Gen. 25:26). He will be content to be himself, “the man who wrestles with [or, who has become great before] man and God” (Gen. 32:28). At that point, Jacob lets go. It is the turning point in his life.

The next morning he meets Esau after their long separation. He bows down to him seven times, calls him “my lord,” and himself “your servant,” and says about the huge gift of cattle which Esau is reluctant to accept, “Please *take my blessing* that is brought to you, for God has shown me favor and I have everything” (33:11). The reference is to the blessing Jacob took pretending to be Esau, in which Isaac said, “May nations serve you and peoples *bow down to you*. Be *lord over your brothers*, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you” (Gen. 27:29). By bowing down to Esau and calling him “my lord,” Jacob is showing that he no longer wants his brother’s blessing and is content with his own (“I have everything”).

Putting all this together we arrive at a dramatic conclusion. (1) *The worst sin – it caused the Flood – is violence*; (2) *the greatest source of violence in Genesis is sibling rivalry, one person wanting the blessing that rightly belongs to another*; (3) *the antidote to violence is to stop wanting to be someone else and to be content to be yourself*. Jacob and Esau were able to meet, embrace, and peaceably go their separate ways as soon as Jacob was content to be himself and no longer wanted Esau’s blessings. So it is with us. We can live at peace with the world when we are at peace with ourselves. If we seek to cure ourselves of the will to sin, we must let go of the desire to have someone else’s blessings.

The ritual of the two identical goats, one of which was sent away bearing with it our sins, can then be seen to symbolize the two identities that live in every troubled heart: the one that is myself and the one that is not-myself. *When I learn to let the “not-myself” go, as the goat was let go on Yom Kippur, I find inner peace and can live at peace with the world.* The goat

sent away is the Esau that lived in Jacob's mind until, one night wrestling with a stranger, Jacob learned to let go, and in that act became Israel, the father of the Jewish people, content to be itself, no longer seeking the identity or the blessings of others.

OF POTTERS AND CLAY

One poem said on *Kol Nidrei* night has long confused commentators and translators, the one beginning, "Like clay in the potter's hands" (page 151). What has puzzled them is the refrain, "Look to the covenant and disregard our inclination." Many have understood "the covenant" to be a reference to the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, about which the Talmud says that God made a covenant that this prayer would not go unanswered (*Rosh HaShana* 17b). They have interpreted *Yetzer* as "the Accuser," that is, the angel, Satan, who is prosecuting counsel on the Day of Judgment.

However the poem is in fact about an earlier covenant, and the word *yetzer* means "inclination," not "Accuser." The refrain is based on a remarkable midrash that weaves together four biblical verses – two from the story of Noah and the Flood, and two from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah – to provide a stunning account of the human condition and a powerful plea for the defense of those who sin.

The story begins with the moment in the book of Genesis when God decided to bring a Flood:

God saw that man's wickedness on earth was increasing. Every inclination [*yetzer*] of his innermost thought was only for evil, all day long. God regretted that He had made man on earth, and He was pained to His very core. (Genesis 6:5–6)

God then brought a flood that wiped out everything He had made other than Noah, his family and the animals he brought with him into the ark. Eventually the flood ended, the waters receded, and Noah and his entourage set foot on dry land to begin the story again. Noah made an offering to God, which moved God to vow that never again would He punish humanity in this wholesale way:

God said to Himself, "Never again will I curse the soil because of man, for the inclination [*yetzer*] of man's heart is evil from his youth. I will never again strike down all life as I have just done." (Genesis 8:21)

The contradiction between the two passages is glaring. In Genesis 6 man's inclination was a reason for God to bring a flood. In Genesis 8 it has become a reason for God *not* to bring another flood. How are we to understand this?

The sages made an intuitive connection between the word *yetzer*, "inclination," and *yotzer*, "creator, former, molder, shaper." The verb *y-tz-r* is the one used in Genesis 2:7 to describe the creation of the first man: "Then the LORD God formed [*vayitzer*] the man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." More specifically, *yotzer* also means "potter," and this led the sages to two other biblical verses. One appears in the book of Jeremiah. The prophet has been told by God to go to the house of the local potter and watch him as he shapes the clay. Then Jeremiah hears God saying:

"Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter [*yotzer*], so are you in My hand, Israel. (Jeremiah 18:6)

Jeremiah heard this as a warning of imminent catastrophe. The people were sinning and they were about to suffer defeat and exile at the hands of the Babylonians. Israel could do nothing to avoid this fate except to repent. Without God, all attempts to defeat their enemy would fail. They were in God's hands, like the clay on the potter's wheel.

Isaiah, however, took the same image and gave it a quite different slant:

Yet You, LORD, are our Father.
 We are the clay, You are our Potter [*Yotzrenu*];
 we are all the work of Your hand.
 Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD;
 do not remember our sins forever. (Isaiah 64:7–8)

Forgive us, says Isaiah, for we are what You made us. If we do wrong, it is because You gave us the freedom to do wrong. If we disappoint You, remember it is You who shaped us, formed us, made us what we are. You are the Potter, we merely the clay in Your hands.

Out of this array of verses spanning the centuries, and playing on the

connection between *yetzer* and *yotzer*, “inclination” and “potter,” the sages constructed the following remarkable midrash:

What is the meaning of *We are the clay, You are our Potter*? Israel said: “Master of the universe, You have caused it to be written about us, *Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in My hand, Israel*. Therefore do not leave us even though we sin and provoke You, for we are merely the clay and You are the Potter. Consider: if a potter makes a jar and leaves a pebble in it, when it comes out of the furnace it will leak from the hole left by the pebble and lose the liquid poured into it. Who caused the jar to leak and lose its liquid? The potter who left the pebble in the jar as it was being made.” This is how Israel pleaded before God: “Master of the universe, You created in us an evil inclination from our youth, as it says, *for the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, and it is this that has caused us to sin, since You have not removed from us the inclination that instigates us to sin.” (*Shemot Raba* 46:4)

We now see how the sages understood the change in God’s relation to the world before and after the Flood. Before the Flood, God was exasperated at the human capacity for evil, the *yetzer*. After the Flood, however, seeing Noah’s devotion, God realizes that it is not the human capacity for evil that is remarkable. It is our capacity for good. We do evil because we are flesh and blood. We are physical. We have instinctual drives. We are clay not fire, mortals not angels. God formed us from the dust of the earth. Dust we are, and to dust we return.

“How then can I punish them for their *yetzer* if I am their *Yotzer*?” That is the thought God had after the Flood. It was then that He made a covenant with Noah that He would never again destroy humanity. Many centuries later the same dialectic occurs in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah. He reminds Jeremiah of His total power over the fate of nations. But the powerlessness of humanity in the face of God serves Isaiah as the great plea for the defense: How can You blame us for what we are if You made us what we are?

Isaiah’s prayer serves as the basis for the poet to say we are “like clay in the potter’s hands ... look to the covenant, and disregard our inclination.” We have a *yetzer* because God is the *Yotzer*. We have instinctual drives that

lead us to sin because that is how we were made, creatures of earth with earthly passions, physical beings imprisoned in our physicality. We are, said Hamlet, the “quintessence of dust.” The poet throws himself on the mercy of God expressed in the covenant He made with Noah after the Flood when He said, “Never again will I curse the soil because of man, for the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth.”

Is this, considered impartially, an adequate defense? Can we blame our sins on God who made us? In general terms, No. For God gave us the power to defeat the inclination. That is what He said to Cain at the dawn of the human story: “Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you can master it” (Gen. 4:7).

Nonetheless, tonight we are on trial, and the poet is concerned less to state a metaphysical truth than to throw himself on the mercy of the Judge, reminding Him of the time when He first made a covenant of compassion and forbearance with humankind. This is, in short, a plea in the great Judaic tradition of audacity in prayer, about which the Talmud says, “*Hutzpa* even toward Heaven, helps” (*Sanhedrin* 105a).

As with *Kol Nidrei* so with “Like clay in the potter’s hands,” this is less a conventional prayer than a judicial hearing in which counsel for the defense pleads with every argument at his disposal, from confession to self-abasement, to the annulment of vows, to a reminder of the great moment of divine compassion after the Flood when God forgave humanity for merely being human. An ultimate truth? No. Rather a prayer said in the confidence borne of the love God has for us, His human children, the work of His hands.

Yom Kippur – How It Changes Us

To those who fully open themselves to it, Yom Kippur is a life-transforming experience. It tells us that God, who created the universe in love and forgiveness, reaches out to us in love and forgiveness, asking us to love and forgive others. God never asked us not to make mistakes. All He asks is that we acknowledge our mistakes, learn from them, grow through them, and make amends where we can.

No religion has held such a high view of human possibility. The God who created us in His image, gave us freedom. We are not tainted by original sin, destined to fail, caught in the grip of an evil only divine grace

can defeat. To the contrary we have within us the power to choose life. Together we have the power to change the world.

Nor are we, as some scientific materialists claim, mere concatenations of chemicals, a bundle of selfish genes blindly replicating themselves into the future. Our souls are more than our minds, our minds are more than our brains, and our brains are more than mere chemical impulses responding to stimuli. Human freedom – the freedom to choose to be better than we were – remains a mystery but it is not a mere given. Freedom is like a muscle and the more we exercise it, the stronger and healthier it becomes.

Judaism constantly asks us to exercise our freedom. To be a Jew is not to go with the flow, to be like everyone else, to follow the path of least resistance, to worship the conventional wisdom of the age. To the contrary, to be a Jew is to have the courage to live in a way that is not the way of everyone. Each time we eat, drink, pray or go to work, we are conscious of the demands our faith makes on us, to live God's will and be one of His ambassadors to the world. Judaism always has been, perhaps always will be, counter-cultural.

In ages of collectivism, Jews emphasized the value of the individual. In ages of individualism, Jews built strong communities. When most of humanity was consigned to ignorance, Jews were highly literate. When others were building monuments and amphitheatres, Jews were building schools. In materialistic times they kept faith with the spiritual. In ages of poverty they practiced *tzedaka* so that none would lack the essentials of a dignified life. The sages said that Abraham was called *haIvri*, “the Hebrew,” because all the world was on one side (*ever ehad*) and Abraham on the other (*Bereshit Raba* 42:8). To be a Jew is to swim against the current, challenging the idols of the age whatever the idol, whatever the age.

So, as our ancestors used to say, “*S'iz schver tzu zein a Yid*,” It is not easy to be a Jew. But if Jews have contributed to the human heritage out of all proportion to our numbers, the explanation lies here. Those of whom great things are asked, become great – not because they are inherently better or more gifted than others but because they feel themselves challenged, summoned, to greatness.

Few religions have asked more of their followers. There are 613 commandments in the Torah. Jewish law applies to every aspect of our being,

from the highest aspirations to the most prosaic details of quotidian life. Our library of sacred texts – Tanakh, Mishna, Gemara, Midrash, codes and commentaries – is so vast that no lifetime is long enough to master it. Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, sought for a description that would explain to his fellow Greeks what Jews are. The answer he came up with was, “a nation of philosophers.”

So high does Judaism set the bar that it is inevitable that we should fall short time and again. This means that forgiveness was written into the script from the beginning. God, said the sages, sought to create the world under the attribute of strict justice but He saw that it could not stand. What did He do? He added mercy to justice, compassion to retribution, forbearance to the strict rule of law. God forgives. Judaism is a religion, the world’s first, of forgiveness.

Not every civilization is as forgiving as Judaism. There were religions that never forgave Jews for refusing to convert. Many of the greatest European intellectuals – among them Voltaire, Fichte, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Frege and Heidegger – never quite forgave Jews for staying Jews, different, angular, countercultural, iconoclastic. Yet despite the tragedies of more than twenty centuries, Jews and Judaism still flourish, refusing to grant victory to cultures of contempt or the angel of death.

The majesty and mystery of Judaism is that though at best Jews were a small people in a small land, no match for the circumambient empires that periodically assaulted them, Jews did not give way to self-hate, self-disesteem or despair. Beneath the awe and solemnity of Yom Kippur one fact shines radiant throughout: that God loves us more than we love ourselves. He believes in us more than we believe in ourselves. He never gives up on us, however many times we slip and fall. The story of Judaism from beginning to end is the tale of a love of God for a people who rarely fully reciprocated that love, yet never altogether failed to be moved by it.

Rabbi Akiva put it best in a mere two words: *Avinu Malkenu* (*Ta’anit* 25b). Yes, You are our Sovereign, God Almighty, Maker of the cosmos, King of kings. But You are also our Father. You told Moses to say to Pharaoh in Your name: “My child, My firstborn, Israel” (Ex. 4:22). That love continues to make Jews a symbol of hope to humanity, testifying that a nation does not need to be large to be great, nor powerful to have

influence. Each of us can, by a single act of kindness or generosity of spirit, cause a ray of the divine light to shine in the human darkness, allowing the *Shekhina*, at least for a moment, to be at home in our world.

More than Yom Kippur expresses our faith in God, it is the expression of God's faith in us.

SHAME AND GUILT

Judaism is the world's greatest example of a guilt-and-repentance culture as opposed to the shame-and-honor culture of the ancient Greeks.

In a shame culture such as that of Greek tragedy, evil attaches to the person. It is a kind of indelible stain. There is no way back for one who has done a shameful deed. He is a pariah and the best he can hope for is to die in a noble cause. In a guilt culture like that of Judaism, evil is an attribute of the act not the agent. Even one who has done wrong has a sacred self that remains intact. He may have to undergo punishment. He certainly has to make amends. But there remains a core of worth that can never be lost. A guilt culture hates the sin, not the sinner. Repentance, rehabilitation and return are always possible.

A guilt culture is a culture of responsibility. We do not blame anyone else for the wrong we do. It is always tempting to blame others – it wasn't me, it was my parents, my upbringing, my friends, my genes, my social class, the media, the system, "them." That was what the first two humans did in the Garden of Eden. When challenged by God for eating the forbidden fruit, the man blamed the woman. The woman blamed the serpent. The result was paradise lost.

Blaming others for our failings is as old as humanity, but it is disastrous. It means that we define ourselves as victims. A culture of victimhood wins the compassion of others but at too high a cost. It incubates feelings of resentment, humiliation, grievance and grudge. It leads people to rage against the world instead of taking steps to mend it. Jews have suffered much, but Yom Kippur prevents us from ever defining ourselves as victims. As we confess our sins, we blame no one but ourselves.

That is demanding, psychologically and spiritually. Yet it is the price we must pay for freedom. Other ancient literatures record the successes of rulers and empires. The Hebrew Bible is a unique chronicle of failures. No one in its pages is perfect, not the patriarchs and matriarchs, not

priests or prophets, not kings or the ruling elite. No history is as painfully honest as that of Tanakh, and it was possible only on the deep belief that God forgives. God pardons; God atones; God is holding out His hand, calling us back with unextinguishable love. That allows us to be honest with ourselves.

THE GROWTH MINDSET

It also allows us to grow. We owe a debt to cognitive behavioral therapy for reminding us of a classic element of Jewish faith, that when we change the way we think, we change the way we feel. And when we feel differently, we live differently. What we believe shapes what we become.

At the heart of *teshuva* is the belief that we can change. We are not destined to be forever what we were. In the Torah we see Judah grow from an envious brother prepared to sell Joseph as a slave, to a man with the conscience and courage to offer himself as a slave so that his brother Benjamin can go free.

We see Moses grow from a man lacking the confidence to lead – “Who am I?” (Ex. 3:11), “They will not believe in me” (Ex. 4:1) – to become the greatest leader of all time. The man who once stammered and said of himself “I am not a man of words” (Ex. 4:10), becomes by the end of his life the most eloquent and visionary of all the prophets.

We see remarkable women transcend their social situation. Tamar, the woman Judah mistakes for a prostitute, eventually teaches him to have the courage to admit he was wrong, reinforcing his role as the first *ba'al teshuva* in history. Ruth, the woman from Moab, Israel’s enemy, displays such growth through her loyalty to Naomi that she becomes the great-grandmother of David, Israel’s greatest king.

We see Hosea, Jeremiah, Jonah and Job wrestle with themselves and with God. That, after all, is what the name Israel means: one who wrestles, not one who accepts the status quo. The figures of the Hebrew Bible are not two-dimensional figures who remain at the end of their lives what they were at the beginning. Theirs may be a painful, but not a tragic, fate.

We know that some people relish a challenge and take risks, while others, no less gifted, play it safe and ultimately underachieve. Psychologists tell us that the crucial difference lies in whether you think of your ability as a fixed quantum or as something developed through effort and

experience. *Teshuva* is essentially about effort and experience. It assumes we can grow.

Teshuva means I can take risks, knowing that I may fail but knowing that failure is not final. Time and again Moses failed to engender in his people a clear sense of history and destiny, even a basic gratitude for what God had done for them. But failing a hundred times does not make a failure. Indeed in God's eyes none of us is a failure so long as we still have breath to breathe and a life to live.

Teshuva means that if I get it wrong and make mistakes, God does not lose faith in me even though I may lose faith in myself. "Were my father and my mother to forsake me, the LORD would take me in" (Ps. 27:10). Some of the greatest heroes in the Bible did not believe in themselves. Isaiah said, "I am a man of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). Jeremiah said, "I cannot speak for I am a child" (Jer. 1:6). Jonah, given a mission by God, ran away. God believes in us, even if we do not. That alone is a life-changing fact if we fully open ourselves to its implications.

Teshuva means that the past is not irredeemable. Through *teshuva* undertaken in love, said Resh Lakish, "even deliberate sins may be transformed into merits" (*Yoma* 86b). Resh Lakish himself was a *ba'al teshuva*, a reformed bandit who used the strength he had once devoted to robbery to save people held hostage. King David, another *ba'al teshuva*, drew some of his deepest poetry from the pain of his personal abyss.

Teshuva means that from every mistake, I grow. There is no failure I experience that does not make me a deeper human being; no challenge I accept, however much I fall short, that does not develop in me strengths I would not otherwise have had.

That is the first transformation of Yom Kippur: a renewed relationship with myself.

OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

The second is a renewed relationship with others. We know that Yom Kippur atones only for sins between us and God, but that does not mean that these are the only sins for which we need to seek atonement. To the contrary: many, even most, of the sins we confess on Yom Kippur are about our relationships with others. Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa taught: "In one whom people delight, God delights" (*Avot* 3:13). Throughout the

prophetic and rabbinic literature it is assumed that as we act to others so God acts to us. Those who forgive are forgiven. Those who condemn are condemned.

The days from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur are a time when we try to mend relationships that have broken. It takes one kind of moral courage to apologize, another to forgive, but both may be necessary. Failure to heal relationships can split families, destroy marriages, ruin friendships and divide communities. That is not where God wants us to be. As the sages pointed out, God allowed his own name to be blotted out to make peace between husband and wife. They also said that after Sarah died, Abraham took back Hagar and Ishmael into his family, mending the rift that had occurred many years before. Aaron, according to tradition, was loved by all the people because he was able to mend fractured friendships.

Writing as a self-confessed secular Jew, the philosopher Alain de Botton says that Yom Kippur is “one of the most psychologically effective mechanisms ever devised for the resolution of social conflict.” He explains:

The Day of Atonement has the immense advantage of making the idea of saying sorry look like it came from somewhere else, the initiative of neither the perpetrator nor the victim. It is the day itself that is making us sit here and talk about the peculiar incident six months ago when you lied and I blustered and you accused me of insincerity and I made you cry, an incident that neither of us can quite forget but that we can't quite mention either and which has slowly been corroding the trust and love we once had for each other.*

Without a designated day, would we ever get around to mending our broken relationships? Often we do not tell people how they have hurt us because we do not want to look vulnerable and small-minded. In the opposite direction, sometimes we are reluctant to apologize because we feel so guilty that we do not want to expose our guilt. As De Botton puts it: “We can be so sorry that we find ourselves incapable of saying sorry.”

* Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012.

He adds: "So cathartic is the Day of Atonement, it seems a pity that there should be only one of them a year."

That is the second transformation of Yom Kippur: a renewed relationship with others.

COMING HOME

The third is a renewed relationship with God.

On Yom Kippur, God is close. Admittedly in Judaism we prefer to talk *to* God than *about* God. Hence we have relatively little theology. We know that God is beyond our understanding. If I could know God, said one Jewish philosopher, I would be God. Yet Jewish life is full of signals of transcendence, intimations of eternity. We encounter God in three ways: through creation, revelation and redemption.

Through creation: the more we understand of cosmology, the more we realize how improbable the universe is. According to Lord Rees, former President of the Royal Society and Britain's most distinguished scientist, the margin of error in the six mathematical constants that determine the shape of the physical universe is almost infinitesimally small. The universe is too finely tuned for the emergence of stars, planets and life to have come into existence by chance. The only alternative hypothesis is that there is an infinity of parallel universes of which we happen to inhabit the one congenial to the emergence of life. That raises as many questions as it solves, if indeed it solves any. The more we understand of the sheer improbability of the existence of the universe, the emergence of life from inanimate matter, and the equally mysterious appearance of *Homo sapiens*, the only life-form capable of asking the question "Why?" the more the line from Psalms rings true: "How numerous are Your works, LORD; You made them all in wisdom" (Ps. 104:24).

Through revelation: the words of God as recorded in the Torah. There is nothing in history to compare to the fact that Jews spent a thousand years (from Moses to the last of the prophets) compiling a commentary to the Torah in the form of the prophetic, historical and wisdom books of Tanakh, then another thousand years (from Malachi to the Babylonian Talmud) compiling a commentary to the commentary in the form of the vast literature of the Oral Torah (Midrash, Mishna and Gemara), then another thousand years (from the Geonim to the *Aḥaronim*, the

later authorities) writing commentaries to the commentary to the commentary.

No people has so loved a book, declaring that its study is a higher religious experience than prayer. In the land of Israel it was their written constitution as a nation. In the Diaspora it was, as Heine put it, the “portable homeland” of the Jews. It remains the source and wellspring from which the West has drawn its great ideals of the sanctity of life, the twin imperatives of justice and love, personal and social responsibility, peace as an ideal, *tzedaka* as an imperative, the importance of equal access to knowledge and dignity, our duties as guardians of the natural world and many other ideals without which the West would not be what it is. If we search anywhere for the voice of God, it is here, in the Book of books.

And through history: many great thinkers, including Blaise Pascal and Leo Tolstoy, believed that Jewish history was the most compelling evidence of the existence of God. Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948) was a former professor of philosophy at the University of Moscow who eventually rejected Marxism and devoted the rest of his life to religion. In *The Meaning of History* he explains why:

I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint ... Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny.*

But perhaps such reflections are beside the point. For it can sometimes be that God comes to us not as the conclusion of a line of reasoning but as a feeling, an intuition, a sensed presence, as we stand in the synagogue on this holy day – listening to our people’s melodies, saying

* Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2009, 86–87.

the words Jews have said from Barcelona to Bergen-Belsen to Benei Berak, from Toledo to Treblinka to Tel Aviv – knowing that we are part of an immense story that has played itself out through the centuries and continents, the tempestuous yet ultimately hope-inspiring love story of a people in search of God and God in search of a people.

There has never been a drama remotely like this in its ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies, its songs of praise and lamentation, and we are part of it. For most of us it is not something we chose but a fate we were born in to. But as Winston Churchill put it, “Some people like the Jews, and some do not. But no thoughtful man can deny the fact that they are beyond question the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has ever appeared in the world.” Or as the Oxford literary scholar A.L. Rowse wrote toward the end of his life, “If there is one honor in the world I should like, it would be to be an honorary member of the Jewish people.”

WHAT CHAPTER WILL WE WRITE IN THE BOOK OF LIFE?

In 1888, Alfred Nobel, the man who invented dynamite, was reading his morning papers when, with a shock, he found himself reading his own obituary. It turned out that a journalist had made a simple mistake. It was Nobel's *brother* who had died.

What horrified Nobel was what he read. It spoke about “the dynamite king” who had made a fortune from explosives. Nobel suddenly realized that if he did not change his life, that was all he would be remembered for. At that moment he decided to dedicate his fortune to creating five annual prizes for those who'd made outstanding contributions in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature and peace. Nobel chose to be remembered not for selling weapons of destruction but for honoring contributions to human knowledge. The question Yom Kippur forces on us is not so much “Will we live?” but “*How* will we live?” For what would we wish to be remembered?

On this day of days we are brutally candid: “before I was formed I was unworthy, and now that I have been formed it is as if I had not been formed. I am dust while alive, how much more so when I am dead” (page 119). Yet the same faith that inspired those words also declared that we should see ourselves and the world as if equally poised between merit

and guilt, and that our next act could tilt the balance, for my life and for the world (Maimonides, *Laws of Repentance* 3:4). Judaism lives in this dialect between our smallness and our potential greatness. We may be dust, but within us are immortal longings.

Yom Kippur invites us to become better than we were in the knowledge that we can be better than we are. That knowledge comes from God. I remember as a student hearing a witty put-down of a brash business tycoon: “He is a self-made man, thereby relieving God of a great responsibility.” If we are only self-made, we live within the prison of our own limitations. The truly great human beings are those who have opened themselves to the inspiration of something greater than themselves.

“Wherever you find the greatness of God,” said Rabbi Yoḥanan, “there you find His humility” (*Megilla* 31a). Yom Kippur is about the humility that leads to greatness: our ability to say, over and over again, “We have sinned,” and yet know that this is not a maudlin self-abasement, but rather, the prelude to greater achievement in the future, the way a champion in any sport, a maestro in any field, reviews his or her past mistakes as part of their preparation for the next challenge, the next rung to climb.

Jews had a genius for spiritual greatness. Even Sigmund Freud, hostile as he was to religion in general, could not but express admiration in the last book he wrote, *Moses and Monotheism*, for the way Judaism produced not one charismatic figure but generation after generation of them. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, even more ambivalent about his Jewish ancestry, wrote in his notebook in 1931, “Amongst Jews ‘genius’ is found only in the holy man.”* Jews had this genius not because they are better than others – often, reading the prophets, you get the impression that the opposite was sometimes true – but because they worked harder at it. The Hebrew word for serving God, *avoda*, also means “hard work.”

Judaism takes the simple things of life and makes them holy. *Kashrut* makes eating holy. *Kiddush* makes drinking holy. The laws of family purity make the physical relationship between husband and wife holy. Study sanctifies the intellect. Prayer reconfigures the mind. Constant acts of generosity and care sharpen our emotional intelligence, honing our skills

* Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 18e.

of empathy. Judaism, as Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik put it, sees creativity as the essence of humanity, and our greatest creation is our self. We forge our life in the fire of love: love of God, the neighbor and the stranger. And by sanctifying family and community, Judaism sacralizes the bonds of belonging that make us who we are.

The power of Yom Kippur is that it brings us face to face with these truths. Through its words, music and devotions, through the way it focuses energies by depriving us of all the physical pleasures we normally associate with a Jewish festival, through the sheer driving passion of the liturgy with its hundred ways of saying sorry, it confronts us with the ultimate question: How will we live? Will we live a life that explores to the full the capacity of the human mind to reach out to that which lies beyond it? Will we grow emotionally? Will we learn the arts of loyalty and love? Will we train our inner ear to hear the cry of the lonely and the poor? Will we live a life that makes a difference, bringing the world-that-is a little closer to being the world-that-ought-to-be? Will we open our hearts and minds to God?

It is possible to live a lifetime without asking any of these questions. It is the genius of Judaism that it makes us do so once a year, when God is close to us because we are close to Him. Yom Kippur retains the traces of those two great figures, Moses the prophet and Aaron the priest, who between them created a tension between spontaneity and structure, passion and order, which continues to vitalize the Jewish spirit, giving it the blessings of both restlessness and rest. Alone with God, together with our people, singing the songs and praying the prayers they said in every age under the most diverse circumstances, we find ourselves questioned, challenged, summoned, inspired.

Like Moses on the mountain, like Aaron in the Holy of Holies, we come as near as we can to being face-to-face with God, and after it we are not the same as we were before. That personal transformation, the ability to make our tomorrow greater than our yesterday, is the essence of *teshuva* and of Yom Kippur.

The most demanding day of the Jewish year, a day without food and drink, a day of prayer and penitence, confession and pleading, in which we accuse ourselves of every conceivable sin, still calls to Jews, touching us at the deepest level of our being. It is a day in which we run toward the

open arms of God, weeping because we may have disappointed Him, or because sometimes we feel He has disappointed us, yet knowing that we need one another, for though God can create universes, He cannot live within the human heart unless we let Him in.

It is a day not just of confession and forgiveness but of a profound liberation. Atonement means that we can begin again. We are not held captive by the past, by our failures. The book is open and God invites us – His hand guiding us the way a scribe guides the hand of those who write a letter in a Torah scroll – to write a new chapter in the story of our people, a chapter uniquely our own yet one that we cannot write on our own without being open to something vaster than we will ever fully understand. It is a day on which God invites us to greatness.

May He forgive us. May we, lifted by His love, rise to meet His call.

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
London, 5772 (2012)

מחזור קורן ליום הכיפורים

THE KOREN YOM KIPPUR MAḤZOR

KAPAROT

*Taking a rooster (men), or a hen (women) in the right hand
(alternatively one may use money), say the following paragraph three times:*

בְּנֵי אָדָם Children of men,
those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death,
cruelly bound in iron chains –
He brought them out from darkness
and the shadow of death and broke open their chains.
Some were fools with sinful ways,
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.
They found all food repulsive,
and came close to the gates of death.
Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and He saved them from their distress.
He sent His word and healed them;
He rescued them from their destruction.
Let them thank the LORD for his loving-kindness
and His wondrous deeds for humankind.
If there is one angel out of a thousand in his defense,
to declare his righteousness on his behalf,
He will be gracious to him
and say,
“Spare him from going down to the pit;
I have found atonement.”

Ps. 107

Job 33

induce them to repent, as if to say: we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible” (*The Guide for the Perplexed* 3:46). It is difficult to experience the absolution of sin without some physical ceremony. Therefore symbolic action has often been felt to be helpful.

Nowadays most people use money instead, distributing it to charity since, “Charity delivers from death.” Maimonides states that it is the custom to increase one’s charitable giving at this time of the year (Laws of Repentance 3:4).

סדר כפרות

*Taking a rooster (men), or a hen (women) in the right hand
(alternatively one may use money), say the following paragraph three times:*

תהלים קו

בְּנֵי אָדָם, יִשְׁבִּי חֶשֶׁךְ וְצַלְמוֹת, אֲסִירֵי עֵינַי וּבְרֹזֶל:
 יוֹצִיאֵם מִחֶשֶׁךְ וְצַלְמוֹת, וּמִזְסוּרֵיהֶם יִנְתַּק:
 אֲוִלִים מִדֶּרֶךְ פֶּשַׁעַם, וּמִעֲוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם יִתְעַנּוּ:
 כָּל-אֶבֶל תִּתְעַב נַפְשָׁם, וַיִּגְיעוּ עַד-שַׁעֲרֵי מוֹת:
 וַיִּזְעֲקוּ אֶל-יְהוָה בַּצָּר לָהֶם, מִמִּצְקוֹתֵיהֶם יוֹשִׁיעֵם:
 יִשְׁלַח דְּבָרוֹ וַיִּרְפָּאֵם, וַיִּמְלֹט מִשְׁחִיתוֹתֵם:
 יוֹדוּ לַיהוָה חֶסֶדּוֹ, וְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו לְבְנֵי אָדָם:
 אִם-יֵשׁ עָלָיו מְלֶאכֶד מְלִיץ אֶחָד מִנִּי-אֱלֹהִים
 לְהַגִּיד לְאָדָם יִשְׂרוּ:
 וַיַּחַנְנוּ, וַיֵּאמְדוּ פִּדְעָהּ מִרְדַּת שַׁחַת, מִצָּאתַי כֹּפֵר:

איוב לג

KAPAROT

Kaparot, meaning “atonements,” or “expiations,” is the name of a custom that originally involved taking a chicken, circling it round the head three times, and saying over it, “Let this be my exchange, let this be my substitute, let this be my atonement...” The chicken was then slaughtered, and it or an equivalent sum of money given to the poor. A chicken was used rather than any animal that might in Temple times have been offered as a sacrifice, so as not to confuse the custom with a sacrificial rite.

Not mentioned in the Talmud, it is first referred to in Geonic times. Strong objections were raised against the practice by, among others, Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret, Nahmanides and Joseph Karo, who believed it was an imitation of non-Jewish customs and a superstitious practice with no basis in Judaism. Others, notably the mystics Isaac Luria and Isaiah Horowitz as well as Moses Isserles, defended it.

The psychological force of *Kaparot* was similar to that of the scapegoat in Temple times, about which Maimonides writes: “These ceremonies are of a symbolic character, serving to impress people with a certain idea, and to

A man revolves the rooster around his head and says:

זֶה חֲלִיפָתִי Let this be my exchange, let this be my substitute,
let this be my atonement. Let this rooster go to death
while I go and enter a good, long life and peace.

A woman revolves the hen around her head and says:

זֹאת חֲלִיפָתִי Let this be my exchange, let this be my substitute,
let this be my atonement. Let this hen go to death
while I go and enter a good, long life and peace.

If money is used, then revolve the money around the head and say:

אֵלּוֹ חֲלִיפָתִי Let this be my exchange, let this be my substitute,
let this be my atonement. Let this money go to charity
while I go and enter a good, long life and peace.

or unintentionally. If the other person is unwilling to forgive, we should ask those close to him or her to intercede on our behalf. If this too fails, we should try again a second and third time. If forgiveness is still not forthcoming, we have fulfilled our duty, and it is now the other who is at fault (Maimonides, Laws of Repentance 2:9).

If others apologize to us, we should forgive. We should be hard to provoke, easy to placate. In any case, it is forbidden to take vengeance or harbor a grudge (ibid. 2:10). When others offend us, we should say so rather than storing up silent resentment (Maimonides, Laws of Ethical Character 6:6). However, if this would not make things better because the other is unwilling or unable to accept the reprimand, it is permitted to forgive silently even those who have not apologized to us (ibid. 6:9).

As we behave toward others, so does God behave toward us (*Mekhilta, Beshallah*). Those who forgive are forgiven. Those who are loved by their fellows are loved by God (*Avot* 3:13), while those who judge others harshly are themselves harshly judged. Therefore, as Yom Kippur draws near, when we and the Jewish people stand before God in judgment, we should make every effort to restore peace where we can, apologizing, forgiving, placating, reconciling and mending fractured relationships, for where there is peace, there the Divine Presence finds its home in our midst.

A man revolves the rooster around his head and says:

זֶה חֲלִיפְתִּי, זֶה תְּמוּרָתִי, זֶה כַּפָּרְתִּי.
 זֶה הַתְּרַנְגּוּל יֵלֵךְ לְמִיתָה
 וְאֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ וְאֶכְנֶס לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים אַרְבָּים וּלְשָׁלוֹם.

A woman revolves the hen around her head and says:

זֹאת חֲלִיפְתִּי, זֹאת תְּמוּרָתִי, זֹאת כַּפָּרְתִּי.
 זֹאת הַתְּרַנְגָּלַת תֵּלַךְ לְמִיתָה
 וְאֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ וְאֶכְנֶס לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים אַרְבָּים וּלְשָׁלוֹם.

If money is used, then revolve the money around the head and says:

אֵלּוֹ חֲלִיפְתִּי, אֵלּוֹ תְּמוּרָתִי, אֵלּוֹ כַּפָּרְתִּי.
 אֵלּוֹ הַמַּעוֹת יֵלְכוּ לְעִדְקָה
 וְאֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ וְאֶכְנֶס לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים אַרְבָּים וּלְשָׁלוֹם.

THE FIVE AFFLICTIONS

Five times in the Torah we are commanded to “afflict your souls” on Yom Kippur (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Num. 29:7). The sages inferred from this that there are five forms of affliction: refraining from (1) eating and drinking, (2) washing, (3) anointing, (4) wearing leather shoes, and (5) sexual relations (Mishna *Yoma* 8:1).

Some say the reason we do not wear leather shoes on Yom Kippur is because on this day all the world is holy, and we stand on holy ground. Therefore we are like Moses to whom God said: “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5).

APOLOGY AND FORGIVENESS

The eve of Yom Kippur is a time for mending broken relationships. Yom Kippur itself atones only for sins between us and God. For sins between us and others, there is atonement only when we have been forgiven by those we have offended or harmed (Mishna, *Yoma* 8:9). Therefore we should make every effort to apologize to those we have wronged in word or deed, intentionally

Minḥa for Erev Yom Kippur

אֲשֵׁרֵי Happy are those who dwell in Your House;
they shall continue to praise You, Selah!

Ps. 84

Happy are the people for whom this is so;
happy are the people whose God is the LORD.

Ps. 144

A song of praise by David.

Ps. 145

I will exalt You, my God, the King, and bless Your name for ever and all time. Every day I will bless You, and praise Your name for ever and all time. Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; His greatness is unfathomable. One generation will praise Your works to the next, and tell of Your mighty deeds. On the glorious splendor of Your majesty I will meditate, and on the acts of Your wonders. They shall talk of the power of Your awesome deeds, and I will tell of Your greatness. They shall recite the record of Your great goodness, and sing with joy of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in loving-kindness. The LORD is good to all, and His compassion extends to all His works. All Your works shall thank You, LORD, and Your devoted ones shall bless You. They shall talk of the glory of Your kingship, and speak of Your might. To make known to mankind His mighty deeds and the glorious majesty of His kingship. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your reign is for all generations. The LORD supports all who fall, and raises all who are bowed down. All raise their eyes to You in hope, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand, and satisfy every living thing with favor. The LORD is righteous in all His ways, and kind in all He does. The LORD is close to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the will of those who revere Him; He hears their cry and saves them. The LORD guards all who love Him,

מנחה לערב יום הכיפורים

תהלים פד
תהלים קמד
תהלים קמה

אֲשֶׁרִי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתְךָ, עוֹד יְהַלְלוּךָ סֵלָה:

אֲשֶׁרִי הָעַם שָׁכְבָה לוֹ, אֲשֶׁרִי הָעַם שִׁיְהוּהוּ אֱלֹהֵיו:

תְּהַלֵּה לְדוֹר

אֲרוֹמְמֶךָ אֱלֹהֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְאֶבְרַכָּה שִׁמְךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

בְּכָל־יוֹם אֶבְרַכְךָ, וְאֶהַלְלָה שִׁמְךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

גָּדוֹל יְהוָה וּמְהַלָּל מְאֹד, וְלִגְדֹלְתוֹ אֵין חֶקֶד:

דוֹר לְדוֹר יִשְׁבַח מַעֲשֶׂיךָ, וּגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ יִגְדֹדוּ:

הַדָּר כְּבוֹד הַדוֹרְךָ, וּדְבָרֵי נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה:

וַעֲזוֹז נוֹדְאוֹתֶיךָ יֹאמְרוּ, וּגְדוּלְתֶךָ אֲסַפְּרָנָה:

זָכַר רַב־טוֹבְךָ יַפְיֵעוּ, וְצִדְקֹתֶךָ יִרְנְנוּ:

חֲנוּן וְרַחֻם יְהוָה, אַרְךָ אַפְּיִם וּגְדֹל־חֶסֶד:

טוֹב־יְהוָה לְכָל, וְרַחֲמָיו עַל־כָּל־מַעֲשָׂיו:

יִדְוֹךְ יְהוָה כָּל־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ, וְחִסְדֶּיךָ יִבְרַכּוּכָה:

כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתֶךָ יֹאמְרוּ, וּגְבוּרֹתֶךָ יִדְבְּרוּ:

לְהוֹדִיעַ לְבַנְיָהּ הָאָדָם גְּבוּרֹתָיו, וּכְבוֹד הַדָּר מַלְכוּתוֹ:

מַלְכוּתֶךָ מַלְכוּת כָּל־עֲלָמִים, וּמִמְשַׁלְתֶךָ בְּכָל־דוֹר וָדוֹד:

סוֹמְךָ יְהוָה לְכָל־הַנְּפֹלִים, וְזוֹקֵף לְכָל־הַכְּפוּפִים:

עֵינַיִךְ כָּל־אֵלֶיךָ יִשְׁבְּרוּ, וְאַתָּה גוֹתֵן־לָהֶם אֶת־אֲכָלָם בְּעֵתוֹ:

פּוֹתַח אֶת־יְדֶיךָ, וּמִשְׁפִּיעַ לְכָל־חַי רִצּוֹן:

צִדִּיק יְהוָה בְּכָל־דְּרָכָיו, וְחִסִּיד בְּכָל־מַעֲשָׂיו:

קָרוֹב יְהוָה לְכָל־קֹדְאָיו, לְכָל־אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאֵהוּ בְּאֵמֶת:

but all the wicked He will destroy. ▶ My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and all creatures shall bless His holy name for ever and all time.

We will bless the LORD now and for ever. Halleluya!

Ps. 115

HALF KADDISH

Leader: יתגדל! Magnified and sanctified
may His great name be,
in the world He created by His will.
May He establish His kingdom
in your lifetime and in your days,
and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel,
swiftly and soon –
and say: Amen.

All: May His great name be blessed for ever and all time.

Leader: Blessed and praised,
glorified and exalted,
raised and honored,
uplifted and lauded
be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He,
above and beyond any blessing, song,
praise and consolation
uttered in the world –
and say: Amen.

רְצוֹן-יִרְאִיו יַעֲשֶׂה, וְאֶת-שׁוֹעֲתָם יִשְׁמַע, וְיוֹשִׁיעַם:
שׁוֹמֵר יְהוּה אֶת-כָּל-אֲהָבָיו, וְאֶת כָּל-הַרְשָׁעִים יִשְׁמִיד:
• תְּהִלַּת יְהוּה יִדְבֵּר פִּי, וּבִבְרֵךְ כָּל-בָּשָׂר שֵׁם קִדְשׁוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:
וְאֲנַחְנוּ נִבְרַךְ יְהוָה מְעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם, הַלְלוּיָהּ:

תהלים קטו

חצי קדיש

ש"ץ: יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא (קדל: אָמֵן)

בְּעֲלָמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ

וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתָהּ

בְּחַיִּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

בְּעֻגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן. (קדל: אָמֵן)

קדל: וְהָא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלְמַי וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא. ש"ץ:

ש"ץ: יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא

וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל

שְׁמֵהּ דְקִדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא (קדל: בְּרִיךְ הוּא)

לְעֵלְא לְעֵלְא מְכַל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא, תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא וְנַחַמְתָּא

דְּאֲמִירָן בְּעֲלָמָא

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן. (קדל: אָמֵן)

THE AMIDA

The following prayer, until “in former years” on page 34, is said silently, standing with feet together. If there is a minyan, the Amida is repeated aloud by the Leader. Take three steps forward and at the points indicated by ♪, bend the knees at the first word, bow at the second, and stand straight before saying God’s name.

When I proclaim the LORD’s name, give glory to our God.
O LORD, open my lips, so that my mouth may declare Your praise.

*Deut. 32
Ps. 51*

PATRIARCHS

♪ בְּרוּךְ You are blessed, LORD our God and God of our fathers,
God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob;
the great, mighty and awesome God, God Most High,
who bestows acts of loving-kindness and creates all,
who remembers the loving-kindness of the fathers
and will bring a Redeemer to their children’s children
for the sake of His name, in love.

♪ זְכֹרֵנוּ לְחַיִּים Remember us for life, O King who desires life,
and write us in the book of life –
for Your sake, O God of life.

If forgotten, the Amida is not repeated.

King, Helper, Savior, Shield:

♪ Blessed are You, LORD, Shield of Abraham.

DIVINE MIGHT

♪ אַתָּה גִבּוֹר You are eternally mighty, LORD.
You give life to the dead and have great power to save.

In Israel: He causes the dew to fall.

He sustains the living with loving-kindness,
and with great compassion revives the dead.
He supports the fallen,
heals the sick,
sets captives free,
and keeps His faith with those who sleep in the dust.

עמידה

The following prayer, until קְדַמְנִיַּת on page 35, is said silently, standing with feet together.

If there is a מִנּוּן, the עמידה is repeated aloud by the שליח ציבור. Take three steps forward and at the points indicated by †, bend the knees at the first word, bow at the second, and stand straight before saying God's name.

דברים לב
תהלים נא

פִּי שֵׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא, הָבוּ גְדֹל לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ:
אֲדַנְי, שְׁפָתַי תִּפְתָּח, וּפִי יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ:

אבות

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן
גּוֹמֵל חַסְדִּים טוֹבִים, וְקִנְיַת הַפֶּלַע
וְזוֹכֵר חַסְדֵי אֲבוֹת
וּמְבִיא גּוֹאֵל לְבָנָי בְּנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה.
זְכַרְנוּ לְחַיִּים, מִלֶּךְ חַפֵּץ בְּחַיִּים
וְכַתְּבָנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים, לְמַעַן אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים.

If forgotten, the עמידה is not repeated.

מִלֶּךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מַגֵּן אַבְרָהָם.

גבורות

אַתָּה גִּבּוֹר לְעוֹלָם, אֲדַנְי
מְחִיָּה מֵתִים אַתָּה, רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ

בארץ ישראל: מוֹרִיד הַטַּל

מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחֶסֶד, מְחִיָּה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים
סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים, וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים, וּמִתִּיר אֲסוּרִים
וּמְקַיֵּם אֲמוּנָתוֹ לִישְׁנֵי עֶפְרַיִם.

Who is like You, Master of might,
and who can compare to You,
O King who brings death and gives life,
and makes salvation grow?

מִי כְמוֹךָ Who is like You, compassionate Father,
who remembers His creatures in compassion, for life?

If forgotten, the Amida is not repeated.

Faithful are You to revive the dead.
Blessed are You, LORD, who revives the dead.

When saying the Amida silently, continue with "You are holy" on the next page.

KEDUSHA

*During the Leader's Repetition, the following is said standing
with feet together, rising on the toes at the words indicated by ^.*

Cong. then **שְׁקִיפוּ** We will sanctify Your name on earth,
Leader: as they sanctify it in the highest heavens,
as is written by Your prophet,
"And they [the angels] call to one another saying: Is. 6

Cong. then ^Holy, ^holy, ^holy is the LORD of hosts;
Leader: the whole world is filled with His glory."
Those facing them say "Blessed –"

Cong. then ^"Blessed is the LORD's glory from His place."
Leader: And in Your holy Writings it is written thus: Ezek. 3

Cong. then ^"The LORD shall reign for ever. He is your God, Zion,
Leader: from generation to generation, Halleluya!" Ps. 146

Leader: From generation to generation
we will declare Your greatness,
and we will proclaim Your holiness for evermore.
Your praise, our God, shall not leave our mouth forever,
for You, God, are a great and holy King.
Blessed are You, LORD, the holy King.

The Leader continues with "You grace humanity" on the next page.

מִי כְמוֹךְ, בְּעַל גְּבוּרוֹת, וּמִי דוֹמֶה לָךְ
מִלְּךְ, מִמֵּית וּמִחַיָּה וּמִצְמִיחַ יְשׁוּעָה.

מִי כְמוֹךְ אֵב הַרְחָמִים
זוֹכֵר יְצוּרָיו לְחַיִּים בְּרַחֲמִים.

If forgotten, the עמידה is not repeated.

וְנֶאֱמַן אֶתְּהָ לְהַחְיֹת מֵתִים.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מַחְיֵה הַמֵּתִים.

When saying the עמידה silently, continue with אֶתְּהָ קְדוּשׁ on the next page.

קְדוּשָׁה

*During the חזרת השׁוץ, the following is said standing
with feet together, rising on the toes at the words indicated by ^.*

נִקְדַּשׁ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ בְּעוֹלָם, ^{קהל then שׁוץ}

ישעיהו

בְּשֵׁם שְׁמֶךָ דִּשְׁתִּים אוֹתוֹ בְּשֵׁמִי מְרוֹם
כְּפָתוּב עַל יַד נְבִיאָךְ: וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וְאָמַר

קְדוּשׁ, יְקְדוּשׁ, יְקְדוּשׁ, יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת ^{קהל then שׁוץ}

מְלֵא כְלֵה־אָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:

לְעַמְּתָם בְּרוּךְ יֵאמְרוּ

יחזקאל ג

יְבָרוּךְ כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה מִמְּקוֹמוֹ: ^{קהל then שׁוץ}

וּבְדַבְרֵי קְדֻשְׁתְּךָ פָּתוּב לֵאמֹר

תהלים קמו

יִמְלֹךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם, אֱלֹהֶיךָ צִיּוֹן לְדוֹר וָדוֹר, הַלְלוּיָהּ: ^{קהל then שׁוץ}

לְדוֹר וָדוֹר נִגִּיד גְּדֻלָּתְךָ, וּלְנִצְחַת נִצְחִים קְדֻשְׁתְּךָ נִקְדִּישׁ ^{שׁוץ}

וְשִׁבַּחְךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִפִּינֵנו לֹא יִמוּשׁ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

כִּי אֵל מִלְּךָ גְּדוֹל וְקְדוּשׁ אַתָּה.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, הַמְּלֹךְ הַקְּדוּשׁ.

The עמידה חזון שליח ציבור continues with אֶתְּהָ קְדוּשׁ on the next page.