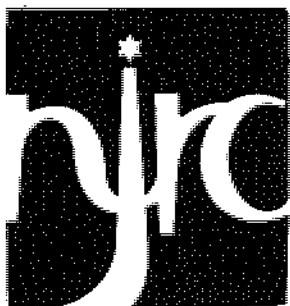


irving greenberg

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## NATIONAL JEWISH RESOURCE CENTER

### "Educating Leaders for Jewish Leadership"

The National Jewish Resource Center was founded in 1974 in the conviction that a new era in Jewish life had emerged after the Holocaust and the rebirth of the state of Israel. The Center offers intensive learning and experiential programs to train people for Jewish communal leadership in the spirit of Clal Yisrael—the unity and totality of the Jewish people. Through retreats, seminars, institutes, publications, and classes, NJRC offers an opportunity to study the Jewish heritage and apply it to contemporary issues facing Jewry.

NJRC focuses on three leadership groups—communal lay volunteers, rabbis/scholars/writers/artists—(spiritual leadership), and organizational professionals (Jewish civil service). Uniquely, it offers these programs across all existing denominations. Staff, participants and program come from every Jewish background.

NJRC runs two types of programs: 'inreach' for those active in the Jewish community who seek renewed purpose, new understanding and deeper personal meaning; 'outreach' for specialized groups of Jews who are leaders in every field but not involved in Judaism or the Jewish community. NJRC offers the opportunity to learn, to experience, to explore values and identity in the context of an accepting, affirmative Jewish group that respects the value and dignity of every type of individual. NJRC's programs are available through individual membership and as a service to organizations, synagogues, and Federations.

NJRC is currently establishing a national Jewish conference center called CLAL (The Center for Learning and Leadership). A year-round program of retreats, Shabbatonim, institutes, summer sessions, family and Jewish marriage encounter weekends will be offered at CLAL. Summer sessions for college students, modeled on the highly successful Brandeis Bardin Institute Program, are being developed.

Among the National Jewish Resource Center's programs are:

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- "Witness to the Holocaust" – teaching films and guides
- "American Youth and the Holocaust" by Mary T. Glynn, Geoffrey Bock with Karen C. Cohen - an assessment of the four leading curricula
- "The Holocaust: An Annotated Bibliography and Resource Guide" - David Szonyi, editor (KTAV Publishing House)

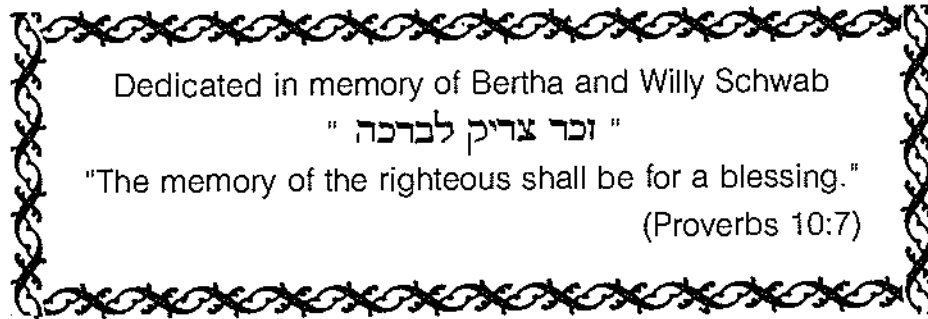
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by

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## INTRODUCTION: DAILY LIFE AFTER DEATH

No human can be a mature person until he encompasses the sense of his own death, or his own non-existence. The terrible sense of shortness of any human life gives urgency and significance to the totality of life. To confront death without being overwhelmed or driven to evasions and narcotizing is to be given life again -- as a daily gift.

Sometimes we experience this gift in an accident, critical illness or the death of someone close. Too often the effect fades as the presence of death recedes and the round of normal life becomes routine reality. In the Jewish calendar, the *Yamim Noraim* (Days of Awe) structure the imaginative encounter with death into annual experience -- in the hope that the experience will never be lost but will recur to liberate life continually.

The Days of Awe are *Rosh HaShanah*-New Year, *Yom HaKippurim*-the Day of Atonement, and the entire ten day period including both -- the *Aseres Yemay Teshuvah* -- Ten Days of Penitence. Starting before and going through this period, the Jew focuses on the vulnerability of life and the limits of the human. We rediscover that "our entire life is God's mercy; by miracle we stand -- but miracles may not happen everyday." (Rabbi Israel Salanter, *Or Yisrael*, p. 44). The image of being on trial for our life which dominates this period poses the question: Is our life justified? Are we grateful and in love with our existence? This makes the period a time of judgment, self-evaluation, self-criticism and guilt. At its climax we reenact death by denying the normal human pleasures. But the deeper result and goal is a new appreciation of life.

The liturgy bursts with life. "Remember us for life, King who loves life; write us in the book of life, for your sake, Lord of Life." "Who is like you, the source of all mercy; he mercifully remembers his creatures for life." (Inserted in the first two blessings of every *Amidah* [standing silent prayer] said during the Ten Days of Penitence.) This period seeks nothing less than the removal of sin and the renewal of love. To know how fragile the shell of life is, is to learn to handle it with true grace and delicacy. Only one who realizes the vulnerability of loved ones can treasure every moment with them. People who confront their guilt and failure in human and divine relationships -- in the context of community oneness and divine forgiveness -- can correct errors, develop new patterns, renew life. "For I do not desire the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his paths -- and live" (Ezekiel 18:23). To turn is to be reborn. To turn is to live -- more than before. This is the focus and purpose of the High Holy Days.

Taken alone, the High Holy Days are onesided. But the *Torah* seeks to present the full range of human emotion and experience. It strives to develop the capacity for encompassing every human experience. The fullness of human life ranges from ecstatic joy to deepest depression. It includes success as well as failure. There is a time for ambition and a time for sense of limit. Some experiences come only with unself-conscious living; others only out of self-criticism and guilt. The *Yamim Noraim*, then, are a 'distortion' unless they are taken together with *Sukkot* and the rest of the Jewish tradition. In the sometimes delirious joy of *Sukkot* with its celebration of harvest, of life-giving water, of goods and the produce of the field, we have the complimentary experiences of affirmation of human pleasure and achievement. *Sukkot* days are the dialectical response to the denial and criticism of the High Holy Days. The two periods together give one the capacity to live through triumph and tragedy -- knowing yet that this too shall pass. When no onesided experience is ultimate, then the participant's immersion and the outsider's perspective can be fused. Life in all its bewildering and uncontrollable variety becomes possible. Every situation becomes real and without predetermination or stereotype; the human becomes fully human.

The encounter with non-existence is set off by the awareness of creation. Whatever is born, dies. By tradition, *Rosh HaShanah* is the 'birthday' of the world or the 'birthday' of man (*TB Rosh HaShanah 10A*). This birthday, i.e., New Year's Day, is not the occasion for a party to wipe out the passage of time in the oblivion of celebration but a time for stock taking. The possibility of non-being leads to the question: What is it all worth, what has been accomplished, by what merit does it still stand?

This is why *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom HaKippurim* are unique in the Jewish calendar. Unlike all the other major holidays, they are not linked to the national history of the Jewish people: in particular, the Exodus. They focus on the cosmic issues -- on Creation and God as creator and ruler of the universe. "To say of the world that it is created is to say that it is not its own ground but proceeds from a will and a plan beyond itself....[To say it is not created is to say that] the world at every moment is the last word about itself and measured by nothing but itself." (Hans Jonas).

Creation, in Jewish tradition, implies also the goodness of the world. "And God saw everything that He had made and, behold, it was very good." (Genesis 1:31). Creation implies that this is a world of purpose, value and meaning. By the standard of creation, men can be judged as whether they are acting in accordance with these values and goals. The theme of judgment flows from our testimony to God as Creator and Ruler.

In the same spirit, the Days of Awe relate to the individual and call for response. God judges all mankind. The individual Jew does not relive the national experience as on *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, *Sukkot*. The individual is to personally stand before judgment, repent and obtain forgiveness and renewed life. Of course in true Jewish style, the individual is not alone. Even while experiencing one's self as a sinner, one is part of a community. The ritual actions use the medium of congregational confession and collective prayer, public *shofar* blowing and concern for society. And the tradition does try to link these days to historical memory. It claims, for example, that the forty days from *Elul* to *Yom Kippur* are the anniversary of the forty days that Moses spent on Sinai to receive the second set of tablets and to win forgiveness for Israel's sin of the Golden Calf and continued life for the Jewish people (cf. Exodus ch. 32-34). *Yom Kippur* thus relates to an historical model and becomes the anniversary of a day of forgiveness and reconciliation. Similarly, on *Yom Kippur*, we mourn for the lost *Azazel* -- scapegoat ceremony and the collective forgiveness it won. This becomes paradigm of the national tragedy of exile.

Whatever the historical associations, however, they are marginal to the High Holy Days. There is no mistaking the fundamental note of individual vis-a-vis God and the 'universalist' theme of Lord as creator and Judge of mankind -- rather than God known through Jewish history. Many prayers focus on all mankind knowing God -- although the God of Jewish history theme is brought into sections of the *Rosh HaShanah* liturgy. (The marvelous dialectic of individual and community, of God of Israel and Lord of Mankind that marks the High Holy Day liturgy and practice is a standing rebuke to most theologies or secular views that insist you cannot have both.) Since the sense of Jewish group identity, historically shaped, has weakened among Jews since the emancipation, particularly in the Diaspora, these universalist and individual oriented days have held their grip on Jews' imagination and loyalty more powerfully than other holy days.

#### I. ELUL - THE MONTH PRECEDING THE NEW YEAR

"My children, give me an opening of repentance no bigger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages will pass." (*Midrash Song of Songs Rabba*, 5:2).

The dominant theme and motif of these days is the trial. We are placed on trial for our lives. The trial image captures the sense of our life being in someone else's hands and the sharpened self-awareness and judgment that flows from the possibility of death at the end. The conscious-

ness of being on trial begins before the actual trial -- so the month *Elul* preceding *Rosh HaShanah* already reflects this anxiety and awareness. It rises to urgency on *Rosh HaShanah* when, by tradition, preliminary verdicts are handed down for open and shut cases. It reaches the peak on *Yom Kippur* when people of mixed condition (like most humans) receive their verdict (*TB Rosh HaShanah 16A, 16B*). Every act suddenly looms large -- for every act we have done is known and recorded and the whole trial could turn on a hair. "Everyone should regard himself throughout the year as exactly balanced between acquittal and guilt. So, too, he should consider the entire world as equally balanced between acquittal and guilt. If he commits one additional sin, he tilts down the scale of guilt against himself and the entire world and causes its destruction. If he performs one good deed, he swings himself and the whole world into the scale of merit and causes salvation and deliverance to himself and his fellow men..." (Maimonides, based on *TB Kiddushim 40A, B*). Therefore, reminders and acts of contrition begin in *Elul*. Increased prayer, charity giving and acts of repentance mark this month in accordance with the tradition that "repentance, prayer and charity overturn the evil (guilty) decision."

Every day in *Elul* the *shofar* is blown in the traditional synagogue (the sounds are called *Tekiah, Shevarim, Teruah, Tekiah* -- see below) to shake people up and remind them of the approaching trial. (*Shofar* is not blown on the eve of *Rosh HaShanah* to distinguish between the custom of blowing to arouse people and the actual Biblical commandment to blow on *Rosh HaShanah*). Additional psalms are said this month -- most notably Psalm 27, which refers to God protecting us in days of trouble. Letters written during this period include the wish that people be written and confirmed in the book of life -- again, a reminder. This, in turn, led to the custom of sending New Year cards to others with these greetings.

One factor that keeps optimism and good spirits during this trying period is the happy prophetic readings (*Haftorot*) of this month. They are the final four of the seven prophetic portions of consolation that follow *Tisha B'Av* (the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple.) They are full of comfort and redemption themes and promises of God's unfailing love and Israel's future joy. This is another noteworthy example of the continuing dialectic of Jewish law and emotion -- when fear of God's judgment increases, prophetic reassurances of God's love, forgiveness and desire to redeem are also increased.

As *Rosh HaShanah* approaches, the intensity of feeling arises. In the week before the New Year, many traditional Jews gather for *Selichot* -- penitential prayers -- pleading for mercy. The first night's service is at midnight, for the remainder of the week they are said at dawn.



The prayers orchestrate the themes of human guilt and God's kindness and forgiving nature.

There is a custom to pray at the graves of righteous people on the day before *Rosh HaShanah*. (We-can-use-all-the-help-we-can-get psychology.) There is a widespread custom to visit parents' graves during *Elul* or, even more prevalently, during the days between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. (Among other customs created to express the urgency of the season is one of fasting on the eve of *Rosh HaShanah* part of the day, or to spend the day learning or asking forgiveness from people we have wronged.)

Bathing, taking haircuts, dressing up in celebration of the holiday are part of the preparation for *Rosh HaShanah* as for other holidays. Despite the awe of the moment, the joy of holiday is not stilled. On the contrary, joy expresses confidence in God's forgiveness and love. Despite the air of fear and trembling, the trial is before a Judge whose most prominent quality is mercy. It is a special *mitzvah* then to preserve and express the joy of this holiday as counterbalance to the trial theme. Were joy to be suppressed, it would represent a failure in appreciation of God's nature -- it would be as if one were standing before a cruel and merciless tyrant in fear (*T. J. Rosh HaShanah* ch. 1, quoted in Agnon, *Yamim Noraim*, p. 57). This counterpoint of joy wells up throughout -- even in the dread moments of *Yom Kippur* when the anxiety of the trial reaches its peak.

Traditional Jews customarily annul oaths on the eve of *Rosh HaShanah*. This refers, of course, not to business commitments or other legitimate obligations, but to customary practices or oaths of observance of which we may be conscious and do not wish to unintentionally violate (compare *Kol Nidre*). The ceremony reflects the sacredness of the given word and the importance of fidelity to it in the religious economy of the Jew.

## II. ROSH HASHANAH - NEW YEAR

By the day of *Rosh HaShanah* the consciousness of being on trial has come to dominate the emotions and thoughts. It is as if the trial opens and the Judge enters and sits on the bench. The liturgy attempts to capture this mood in the prayers and acts of declaring God as Creator and Ruler, most notably in the blowing of the *Shofar*. Thus on *Rosh HaShanah* (when, in the liturgical play, the trial opens) God as Creator and Ruler is the main focus. At this moment it is his judgment and awesomeness that most strikes us. By *Yom Kippur*, the primary

liturgical focus shifts to the trial itself and to God's mercy -- which more than anything else sustains us in the process and judgment. It is as if as the trial wears on, the initial panic or tension lightens and we relax enough to see that the Judge is not an impersonal authority who will judge us relentlessly but rather (what good fortune!) is an old friend and lover who will do all to show us mercy. Nachmanides suggests that in our experience: "*Rosh HaShanah* is a day of judgment -- with mercy; *Yom Kippur* is a day of mercy -- with judgment." In this shift of mood, we move from the original shock and devaluation of self and of life that follows from a critical outburst to the appreciation of the frailties and limits that still leave life so precious and full of value.

### Special Prayers in the Traditional Synagogue

Authentic prayer wells up from and reflects the overriding concerns of the person praying. These concerns flow into the fixed prayers so that phrases reflecting the trial and pleading of life are inserted into the liturgy -- even in places where normally such personal concerns are not expressed. Thus the traditional synagogue added phrases to its liturgy to reflect the spirit of the period. The changes include:

- 1) To say *l'eyla l'eyla mikal birchasa v'sherrasa* (above and beyond any blessings or songs of praise) in every *Kaddish*. It is as if the sense of God's transcendence is heightened when we focus on God as Creator. (We also say *mikal* instead of *min kal* to keep the total number of words in the *Kaddish* unchanged -- probably a kabbalistic influence.)
- 2) To say *hamelech ha-kadosh* (holy king) instead of *ha-keyl ha-kadosh* (holy Lord). In the third *Amidah* blessing, this stresses (i.e. we experience more) God as Ruler. It is a dialectical move, too. To speak of *keyl* (Lord e.g. God's might and impersonal aspect) would be to stress transcendence and remoteness too much. It is more than one could bear while on trial.
- 3) For the same reason, in the eleventh blessing of the weekday *Amidah*, the phrase used is *hamelech hamishpat* (the King of Judgment) instead of *melech ohayv tzedaka u'mishpat* -- (King who desires righteousness and judgment.) God's presence as Judge blots out everything else.

All these changes are made throughout the ten days of penitence. To pray with the regular words is to be so oblivious to the spirit of the period as to show that we are saying empty words, inauthentically, without awareness of God's true nature. Therefore, if one forgot to

say the *hamelech* words, the prayer is considered inauthentic and is repeated.

- 4) Special additional phrases reflecting the mood of the period and personal needs are inserted in the *Amidah* (standing prayer):
  - a) Before the end of the first blessing: *zachraynu l'chayim, melech chafetz bachayim*, etc. (Remember us for life, King who loves us; write us into the book of life, for your sake, Lord of life.)
  - b) Before the end of the second blessing: *mi cha-mocha av ha-rachamim*, etc. (Who is like you, source of mercy; He mercifully remembers his creatures for life.) All year long, requests are not inserted in these blessings.
  - c) Before the next to last blessing (#2 of the last 3): *u'chtov l'chayim tovim*, etc. (Write in a good life for all your covenant people.)
  - d) In the last blessing: *b'sefer chayim*, etc. (In the book of life, blessing and peace, and good fortune, may we and all your people Israel be remembered and inscribed for a good life and peace.)

In most congregations, the last blessing ending is changed to *oseh ha-shalom* (Who makes peace.) God's judgment on evil is not just a threat to man. It also makes peace possible ultimately.

- 5) When the *Torah* is taken out, the congregation adds the prayer of the thirteen qualities of God (cf. Exodus 34:6-7) which stresses God's loving kindness and forgiveness of sin. The *Torah* itself is read on *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* with a special tune reflecting the awesomeness of the period.

#### Other Customs

After services on the nights of *Rosh HaShanah*, greet people with *l'shanah tovah tikatevu v'taychataymu* (May you be written and sealed for a good year). After these nights, we do not say 'be written' any more, since by tradition the righteous get their decision at once. Instead we wish a '*gmar chatimah tovah*' (May your good judgment be confirmed and sealed). Otherwise, we would be 'implying' that the other person is known to us to be not fully righteous and, therefore, still

on trial. Thus, in classic Jewish fashion, we judge ourselves to be on trial through *Yom Kippur* -- but not others. (It is the same response as to suffering. We have the right to say that we personally are suffering for our sins but we have no right to say this about others (Cf. *TB Baba Mezia 58B*).

On *Rosh HaShanah*, a medley of eating symbols stress hope for a good year. Round *challahs* and bread loaves are served (round=circle=endless, i.e. long life). The *challah* is dipped into honey instead of the customary salt. "May it be a good and sweet year" is said after eating it. A sweet apple is dipped in the honey and the same formula said. (In general, people avoid sour or bitter food on this holiday).

Some eat the head (may we be at the head this year) of fish (may we be fruitful and multiply like fish) or lamb (reminding us -- and God -- of Isaac's sacrifice). The Talmud mentions eating vegetables whose name means something nice. Folk imagination picked this up (e.g., eating carrots: carrots in Yiddish = *mehren*, which also means increase). You can try your own variations. Peaches ("May we have a 'peachy' year"); brussels ("May our good fortune sprout"). For the same reason, some people avoid nuts (in Hebrew, nut = *egoz*, almost the same numerical value as *chet* = sin.)

### Blowing of the *Shofar*

"In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion; you shall not work. You shall observe it as a day of sounding the horn" (Numbers 29:1; see also Leviticus 23:24). Although the *Torah* does not refer to *Rosh HaShanah* by the name *Rosh HaShanah*, nor even as the Day of Judgment, it continually refers to this holiday as a day on which we sound the *Shofar*. The *Shofar* is a curved animal horn, traditionally a ram's horn, which evokes the memory of the binding and sacrifice of Isaac (at the end, a ram was substituted).

The primary meaning of the *Shofar* blast is the coronation theme -- a symbolic declaration of faith in God as ruler of the world. "The Lord ascends (His throne) amidst a loud sound. God (rises) midst the sound of the *Shofar*" (Psalm 47.6). The Bible plays this theme down because in ancient Near Eastern divine coronation ceremonies believers thought they gave their God strength to rule through the magic of ritual. However, this is the primary theme of the day. God's coronation is also the theme of the royal or sovereignty section (*mal'khuyot*) -- the first special section of the *Amidah* repetition -- which ends with a *Shofar* sounding. The theme of God's rule, in turn, suggest the trial. (One should not overlook this aspect of the *Shofar* either. It is like a court proclamation: "This court is in session, the Divine Judge presiding! Everyone rise, etc.").

The other major meaning in the *Shofar* blowing is its function as an alarm -- to awaken people to repentance, in the eleventh hour. "Wake up from your deep sleep, you who are fast asleep, search your deeds and repent; remember your Creator...examine your souls, mend your ways and deeds. Let everyone give up his evil way and bad purposes" (Maimonides). Still another major meaning is its reminder of Isaac's sacrifice, the *Akedah*. Isaac's sacrifice, which is referred to repeatedly in the liturgy of the High Holy Days, is the symbol of Jewish self-sacrifice for God's sake throughout the ages. It also serves as a Jewish 'mystery' symbol, a 'vicarious atonement' theme for us in the time of the trial. Jews do not stand in the dock alone, but are accompanied by the generations who have preceded this one. We are sustained by their sacrifices and merits. Despite the focus on sin, the *Yamim Noraim* do not allow the Jew to become isolated in his sin and thereby overwhelmed by guilt. A Jew is anchored horizontally in the living community of Jewry which joins in the confession and, vertically, in community of time, the past (and future) generations of Israel.

The second section of the central prayer of *Rosh HaShanah* is called the remembrance section (*Zichronot*). The prayer passages stress the theme that we are remembered by God on this day and our fate is decided. The stress is that God remembers for mercy and good as well as for judgment. This section's message is reaffirmed in the *shofar* blowing at its end.

In the course of thousands of years of Jewish tradition, the *shofar's* meaning has been embroidered upon in many different ways. By elaboration and association, many themes were introduced -- some more obviously flowing from the main theme, some less so. The *shofar* sings of the Messianic dream (of judgment day, cf. Zephaniah 1:14-16; of the gathering of the exiles, cf. Isaiah 27:13; of resurrection, cf. Isaiah 18:3). The concept of ultimate redemption would seem to be implied in God's reign and love for his creation.

The *shofar* also recalls the Revelation at Sinai; there too a *shofar* was sounded (Exodus 19:19). These themes are stressed in the third section of the *Amidah* called *Shofrot* (or *Shofar Passages*). Again, the section concludes with the sounding of the *shofar*. Other *shofar* meanings expanded upon are: making us tremble in the awe of the day (Amos 3:6); reminding us of the words of the prophets, arousing us to save ourselves (cf. Ezekiel 33:4-5); reminding us of war and of the destruction of the Temple which came out of war so that we pray for peace and for the restoration of the Temple and of our people.

There are so many meanings in *shofar* because the tradition never developed the *Yamim Noraim* monolithically in accordance with the domi-

nant theme of rule and judgment. It really becomes an impossibility to keep all the meanings in mind simultaneously. Different people and different generations focus on the elements that speak most to their own situation. For this reason, too, perhaps, the *shofar* is sounded repeatedly and throughout the service -- a total of 100 blasts in the traditional synagogue. The simplest fulfillment of the act is to keep in mind that we are fulfilling the commandment to hear the *shofar*. Chassidic tradition tells of the *shofar* blower who was so overwhelmed by all the meanings he intended to keep in mind during the ritual that he blanked out. Heartbroken, he burst into tears and then blew. "Never mind all the meanings," said the Baal Shem Tov, "your tears are the main message."

### The Sound of the Shofar

In line with the central dramatic image of *Rosh HaShanah*, the *shofar* strives for two major effects through two sounds: the long, straight smooth coronation blast (*tekiah*) and the broken, panicky alarm at the imminence of the trial (*teruah*). In fact, three sounds are blown on the *shofar*: *tekiah* (one smooth, nine beats long), *teruah* (nine short, frantic, individual beats) and *shevarim* (three broken, groaning sounds, three beats long each). The sounds should be drawn out long enough to make an impression, say three to six seconds for a *tekiah*, three seconds for a *teruah*. The straight sound is associated in the Talmud with the phrases in Leviticus 25:9: "*v'haavarta shofar teruah*" and "*taaveeroo shofar*" (*haaveer*=stretch out a sound). The straight sound precedes and follows the broken sound.

To capture the mood of awe, some Jews blew the broken sound as moans (*shevarim*), others as a high-pitched blasting wail (*teruah*) and some blew both together. After the Temple destruction, Rabbi Avahu of Caesarea established our pattern of blowing all three sounds to reflect the views of all the traditions, i.e., to capture the experiences of all (*TB Rosh HaShanah 33B*). Thus the *shofar* sounds also point to the unity and pluralism of the Jewish people.

Isaac Arama interprets the *tekiah* as the sound of joy, hope and trust in future redemption and the *teruah* as the sound of awe, fear and trembling before present judgment. (*Shevarim* is the middle ground). Characteristically, both aspects are combined in balance. In the same spirit, the *tekiah* is of equal length to the *shevarim* or the *teruah*. When *shevarim-teruah* are blown together, the *tekiah's* length is extended.

After the *Torah* reading, the full range of *shofar* sounds is blown (30 blasts). The blower says two blessings: "Who sanctified us with his commandments and instructed us to hear the sound of the *shofar*" and

*Shehecheyanu*, "Who has kept us alive to this day." Note the language of the blessing is: "instructed us to hear" -- the primary commandment is to hear, i.e., the main concern is to affect the audience with the message. For this reason, the rabbis insisted that we must hear the *shofar* directly and clearly -- neither through an echo (nor through electronic media) nor a melange of different sounds at one time.

The congregation participates in the blowing as if sounding the horn itself. The worshippers remain standing in awed silence. It is also the absolute silence of the moment of coronation. Then the congregants answer *amen* to each blessing. Neither the *shofar* blower nor the congregation speak until the end of all the *shofar* sounding as a sign that they are fully concentrating on the *mitzvah*.

The *shofar* can be blown all day ("a day of sounding the horn" [Numbers 29:1]). However, originally it was blown as early as possible (at sunrise or even at dawn). The shift of sounding the *shofar* to just before *Musaf* came in the period of Roman persecutions when the *shofar* was prohibited and spies checked to see that Jews not blow the *shofar*. (In the good old days, the 'secret police' were out checking only in the early morning hours, so the sounding ceremony was delayed until later).

#### Rosh HaShanah Musaf Amidah (Additional Silent Standing Prayer)

In the traditional synagogue, the middle section of the *Musaf Rosh HaShanah Amidah* is devoted to the testimony of the day. Instead of one middle blessing (for an *Amidah* total of seven) as on *Shabbat* and pilgrimage festivals, there are three blessings (a total of nine). These comprise the three main themes: *Malchuyot* (God is King, Ruler), *Zichronot* (God remembers us in merciful judgment) and *Shofrot* (the *shofar* reminds us of revelation and redemption).

Each section consists primarily of ten Biblical proof texts -- three from *Torah*, three from Prophets, three from later writings, and a tenth verse from *Torah* summarizing the theme. Proof texts and triplicating evidence are symbolic ways of asserting the truth of something definitively, i.e., we are giving definite, clearly established, true testimony. Each section concludes with a sounding of the *shofar* to confirm the theme. (The sounds are *Tekiah*, *Shevarim*, *Teruah*, *Tekiah*; *Tekiah*, *Shevarim*, *Tekiah*; *Tekiah*, *Teruah*, *Tekiah*).

During the repetition of the *Amidah*, the *chazzan* kneels at the *Aleynu* prayer in remembrance of the kneeling in the Temple. The congregation does not join him at this time. However, during the *Yom Kippur* repetition when we 're-enact' the moments of the actual Temple service, the entire congregation participates in the historical 'happening' by kneeling. The kneeling tradition (which, admittedly, is losing currency) is a good example of the importance of avoiding glib generalizations about what is 'Jewish' or what are Jewish modes of worship. Most people are convinced that Judaism -- unlike Catholicism -- opposes kneeling, presumably because it is 'undemocratic' or 'undignified.' In fact, kneeling is a classic form of Jewish worship (cf. the phrase in the *Aleynu* prayer: "we bow, kneel and acknowledge before the King of Kings...") which has simply fallen somewhat into disuse.

If the first day of *Rosh HaShanah* comes out on a Sabbath, then both *shofar* blowing and *tashlich* (see below) are postponed to the second day. In the Temple, the *shofar* was blown on *Shabbat*. After the destruction, it was blown in Jerusalem on *Shabbat*. At Yavneh, the city of refuge and reconstruction after the destruction, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai blew it on *Shabbat*, in the face of bitter opposition, to show that full religious authority to carry on all necessary activities had been passed on to rabbinical authority of every generation and situation. Eventually, as central religious authority broke up, the tradition not to blow on the Sabbath won out -- the Rabbis' prohibiting it for fear that people would carry the *shofar* in the public realm which is not permitted on the Sabbath. Isaac Alfasi (ca. 12th Century) was the last great figure to blow on the Sabbath. It is noteworthy that this Rabbinic restriction overrides the *Torah* commandment to hear the *shofar*. Both this fact and Rabbi Yochanan's Yavneh practices are important lessons that the contemporary religious leadership has full authority to do whatever is necessary to carry on a living and currently vital *Torah* way of life.

#### After the Services

After services on *Rosh HaShanah*, people go out of the synagogue in calm and good spirits, reflecting confidence in God's loving judgment and merciful hearing of the prayers. It is a *mitzvah* to eat, drink and be joyful on this day to express the same confidence. On the other hand, *Hallel* (the jubilant psalms of praise) is not sung on *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. Full scale joyful praise is inauthentic when people stand in such awe and fear and life itself hangs in the balance.



## Tashlich

After *mincha* on the first day of *Rosh HaShanah* the ceremony of *Tashlich* is performed. This custom has typically been dropped or attacked in the course of modernizing the tradition but it is attractive and off-beat enough to be reappropriated today. People go to rivers, oceans, or bodies of living waters and symbolically cast in their sins. *Tashlich* expresses externally the feeling of being freed of the burden of past sins by repentance and God's forgiveness.

This is a late custom (medieval) and already many pre-modern rationalists (such as the Vilna *Gaon*) objected to it on the grounds that it smacked of superstition. Others objected because the social nature of the event -- people congregated at the site -- led to new sins (such as telling evil reports, exchanging gossip, or boy-girl peccadilloes). On the other hand, one might argue that the *mitzvah* of *shadchanus* (arranging marriages) justifies the procedure. (Perhaps in this time, we might see in it a gentle reminder that we must have clean living water running through our cities).

During the *Tashlich* ceremony, various prayers are said, including: "Who is a God like you? Who pardons sin and passes over transgressions of the remnant of his heritage people?...He turns again and has mercy on us.... O may you cast all the sins of your people Israel into a place where they will not be remembered, nor counted nor ever again minded." The whole ritual is a symbol of the miracle of repentance -- that we can lift off the burden of the guilt of the past by turning from it. It is a reminder also not to throw up to people their past errors once they have turned from them. This is an important principle in society and a guide to the way we should handle ex-convicts, immigrants, etc.

One special fact should be noted about the *Rosh HaShanah* dates. The custom of two days observance goes back almost to the very beginning. Therefore, unlike the other holidays, the second day of *Rosh HaShanah* is not considered "an extra day of festival because we are in exile" (*Yom Tov Shenit shel Galuyot*). Thus, in Israel, too, two days are observed. The two days are called '*yoma arichta*,' i.e., 'one long day.' For the same reason, many Reform congregations observe the two days of *Rosh HaShanah*.

### III. ASERES YEMAY TESHUVAH - TEN DAYS OF REPENTANCE

The days between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* move in two directions psychologically from the judgment of the New Year's Day. In one way, the sense of trial intensifies. The Talmud records the tradition that on *Rosh HaShanah* clear cut cases are decided but average people -- whose lives are a mixture of good and evil -- are held over to *Yom Kippur*. Or, as some interpret it, the decision has been made for all, but a ten-day stay of sentence permits appeals and moves designed to overturn negative decisions. Deeply aware of vulnerability, recognizing in rare candor -- out of the honesty confronting death -- the mixture of good and bad in one's self, the Jew intensifies his efforts to undo the evil of the past. The descent into guilt and anxiety continues to its climax of twenty-four hours of living out 'death' on *Yom Kippur*. At the same time, the catharsis and reconciliation that comes out of this season makes itself felt as love and forgiveness come into play. The link between these two directions is the human act of repentance -- turning -- which, with God's grace, brings renewed life. ["Tell me the way of life" (Psalm 16:11). "Tell me the way to life." Said the Holy One Blessed Be He to them: "I give you the ten days of repentance between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*" (*Menorat HaMaor*, Candle 3)].

Three emphases mark this period -- repentance, special prayers, and extra acts of goodness, especially charity. Thus the ultimate goal is not to frighten people but stimulate them to improvement and growth.

#### The Relationship of Death and Renewal

The intense focus on death may appear to be (or runs the risk of turning) morbid. Since death evokes guilt, there is the further risk of turning this period into a guilt trip. However, the true goal of the period is not merely repentance but renewal. It is a move toward an examined life, not masochistic self-flagellation.

The truth is that it is not merely physical death that threatens the humanity of our lives. It is an old truism that we begin to die from the moment we are born. This refers not only to using up our physical body but to the psychic numbing and dying which all humans undergo as they experience life and as they grow older. There is a kind of death in life which attacks all: it consists of routinization, loss of responsiveness, and habituation which deaden our perception and concern. If we stop examining our life and our consciousness, then we increasingly lose the capacity to give unique or appropriate responses to the variety of life, need and experience.

The definition of life is the capacity to respond. The direction of the growth of life in the eyes of Jewish tradition is toward ever greater uniqueness and responsiveness. Inorganic matter does not respond. The higher up the evolutionary scale, the greater the movement from biological necessity to psychic freedom. When we reach the human, we cross the threshold to become what Jewish tradition calls the 'image of God.' The goal of the human -- the divine image -- is the fullness of life. This is to become more and more like God, who responds out of infinity of life, without necessity or determinism but uniquely and appropriately to each person and situation. The normal process of routinization and numbing is the enemy of this growth.

Ordinary consciousness selects and filters from reality to construct a 'stable' reality and consciousness. Our sensory systems have evolved to respond primarily to changes in the environment; to control the flood of impressions we automatically record and tune out everyday patterns. As we learn, our skills become automatic, our movements no longer enter consciousness. Finally, we learn to numb over responses and conscience in the face of cruelty, death, injustice -- because these are traumatic, psychic overload experiences or because we wish to avoid pain. Thus the psyche begins to die in the very normal process of living. Even intense positive experiences -- love, relationships -- become routinized and familiar. There is no way we can avoid these tendencies as we live humanly. How then can we stay alive? Intensely alive? Physically alive?

The answer Jewish tradition gives is that one cannot avoid death or death in life. The only way to overcome death is -- by rebirth. To physical death and annihilation we respond with recreation of life, by birth and children. To psychic death, we must respond with renewal and psychic rebirth. This is the true goal of the High Holy Day season.

The power of sin -- and of bad patterns -- is that they routinize us and convince us there is no change possible. We despair of change and of the capacity to grow or renew. Here, the promise of repentance, and the model of God, challenge this hopelessness. There is a process of rebirth but it needs attention, effort, and help.

The first step is to become conscious of our lives, to overcome the routinization which blocks our capacity to evaluate, correct and change. Setting aside time in *Elul* or during the High Holy Days is the beginning of liberation. Rabbi Israel Salanter and his students would schedule special retreats, periods of meditation, or of self and group analysis for this period. It is a time for families to sit down together,

for husbands and wives to do an inventory and accounting of the year that has passed in their lives. It is a time to express dissatisfaction and to weigh or gather the resources for change. If there has been no time for introspection all year, then at least, in this period, it must be found. Retreats, weekends, and vacations are ideal for this purpose. It is a time for parents and children to render their accounts as well.

Here is where the consciousness of death plays a vital role. The shock -- the gauntlet -- of death reminds that our time is short, too short to waste; too short to let pride or despair trap us in a life pattern we do not savor or respect. The very awareness of total non-being (=death) suddenly puts life into bold relief. No aspect of life can be taken for granted: no features of our personal way are eternal or absolutely necessary. Thus, we can review, fine tune or alter with new consciousness of alternatives.

The most dramatic expression of this concept is on the traditional *Yom Kippur* day when every possible occupation or distraction is suspended -- even the life processes of eating or sexuality are stopped. It is as if all of life is stopped, and now can be chosen anew.

The descent into death also energizes our life forces. The body and the psyche revolt against non-being by reasserting life in all its intensity and distinctiveness. It is no accident that the generation of the Holocaust is the generation that established the State of Israel. Only those who have tasted the dregs of degradation can fully savor the urgency of life and the goodness of dignity in our generation. And like a blind person whose sight is restored, after the gloom of *Yom Kippur* we find the world a riot of color, an outburst of dazzling variety and forms of life.

"The unexamined life is not worth living," said Socrates. "To live the unexamined life is not really living" would be the *Torah's* version. If you are not regularly reborn, you will soon be dead. If you are the same as you were last year, you have died a little in the interim.

The promise of Divine help, the sustenance of a community of life that has been reborn repeatedly -- all strengthen personal efforts to renew ourselves. Audits, rendering personal accounts, resolutions and decisions on new ways are all part of the rebirth of love and of family life in the High Holy Day period.

In Jewish tradition, the concept of ritual impurity is identified with routinization. The ultimate impurity is death, which is the ultimate

routine. Going to *mikvah*, symbolic washing of hands, self-renewal are all rituals which externalize our drive to be reborn. The Jewish tradition sees sin as the enemy of life. The despair of guilt is the evil force that tells us we cannot change or that we cannot perfect the world. Therefore, repentance is the focus of these weeks. But rebirth and renewal is the true goal. Rebirth touches all the positive aspects of life; repentance seeks to overcome and remove the *dybbuks* of the evil we have done.

### Repentance

"Seek God when he is readily found" (Isaiah 55:6): these are the ten days from *Rosh HaShanah* to *Yom HaKippurim* (TB *Rosh HaShanah* 18A).

Kabbalistically, this Talmudic teaching means that God is somehow closer; more rationalistically, it means that man is more apt to turn to God, thanks to the mood of this period. In the face of death and trial, a lot of rationalizations and self-deceptions fall away. People try to review acts and correct the evil deeds of the past year. In particular, wrongs done to fellow men are to be corrected. *Yom Kippur* does not bring forgiveness for these acts unless the injured person gets restitution and forgives the one who sinned against him. Special time should be set aside both for self-evaluation and for seeking out people to make amends. During the year perhaps more personal hurt is inflicted by family members to each other than to any outsiders. Closeness means that it is easier to cause pain and that more opportunities for friction are present. Therefore, it is especially appropriate for families to review basic relationships and living procedures and seek forgiveness, amendment and reconciliation.

According to Nachmanides, repentance is a specific *mitzvah*. "*Vishavta ad HaShem elokecha*" -- you shall (re)turn to the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 30:2). The *Torah* goes on to say, according to Nachmanides' interpretation, "for this *mitzvah*...is not hidden from you, nor is it far out" (Ibid, 30:11), a reassurance to us that despite contrary logic, the past can be undone. *Teshuvah* is one of the most distinctively human acts. It involves change (man is not determined) and the capacity to re-do the past (man's unique memory) -- with the help of God. Maimonides, on the other hand, is reluctant to call *teshuvah* a *mitzvah*. (If it were, then to sin is to get ready for a *mitzvah*!) Maimonides, therefore, stresses that if one sins, confession of error is a *mitzvah* -- for confession paves the way for correction. (See Maimonides' master work, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, ch. 1. On repentance in general, read Maimonides' wonderful treatment, Ibid).

There are three major steps in repentance, according to Maimonides:

- 1) Recognition and confession of wrongdoing. This is the primary step. It is not enough merely to recognize sin; it must be admitted, i.e., articulated. (Note that it is confession of wrongdoing, not asking forgiveness, that is crucial according to Maimonides. Once the basic act of confession is done, God forgives even without being asked formally to do so. Saadia Gaon, however, (in *Emunot V'Deot*, Book 5, ch. 5) includes asking forgiveness as a necessary fourth step in *teshuvah*. Admission is perhaps the most difficult step in repentance -- for there is an infinite human capacity for inertial evil and self-justification. Psychologically, the sinner feels that he/she has gone on a road from which one cannot turn back: because one cannot 'betray' what has already been done; because too much is invested in it; because one will be shamed; because it is too far gone. God's promise is: "You (can and) shall return..." Once the admission is made, the rest is easier. The Talmud suggests that once the step of confession is taken by the sinner, there is divine help in the process of regeneration. "My children give me an opening of repentance no bigger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages will pass" (Son of Songs *Rabba*, ch. 5, sec. 2).
- 2) Regret at having done the evil -- so that one rejects it.
- 3) A commitment not to repeat the wrongdoing. This is crucial to the integrity of the turning. Repentance is not a momentary recoil or tiring but a basic turning to a new way of life and behavior.

The final test of the authenticity of the repentance, states Maimonides, occurs if a person comes into the same situation of opportunity, temptation and will to sin -- and refrains. This is called *teshuvah gemoorah* (complete repentance).

It is an act of great merit to help people repent and to welcome them and encourage them in their new ways. Thus, it is forbidden to remind a penitent of his former acts. One should respond with forgiveness when a person who has sinned against us comes to ask for absolution. "Whose sin does God forgive? He who forgives sins (against himself)" (*TB Rosh HaShanah 17A*). If after repeated requests, a person still refuses to forgive, that person who refuses to forgive is considered a sinner. The Rabbis even set up procedures to make restitution easier

than the law normally required -- or even waived repayment -- in order to help people who sought to turn from a life of crime. Our society should act accordingly.

Such is the power of repentance that it restores the once alienated person to closeness and beloved relationship with God or with the other person. "Yesterday this one (the sinner) was hateful to God, repugnant, removed foul. Today (after repentance) he is beloved, precious, close, a friend.... Yesterday, this one was alienated from God, the Lord of Israel...and today he is attached to the divine presence...." Here the mystery of divine and human response comes into play. Repentance does more than undo the past evil. It brings healing and a new closeness and sympathy. The strength needed for turning and the sympathy needed for forgiveness now combine to knit a deeper fabric of relationship between the two.

The Talmud says that penitents stand where even righteous people cannot. Maimonides explains: he who sinned needs a greater effort to do the right thing, and, in that sense, is greater when he does it. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev similarly interpreted the Talmudic statement that when one repents out of love, the previous evil acts are considered changed into good deeds. The Berditchever's explanation: the sinners' drives and talents, up to now used for evil, will be used for good. The sinner thus has talents for good which the routine righteous person does not possess.

It is a fact that sometimes wrong acts come out of the great passions or abilities or drives of a person. In a sense, the penitent refutes Nietzsche's critique that 'middle class morality' is not true morality because it only reflects prudential fear or lack of enough human passion to want to sin. This is not the *Torah's* vision of the good person.

Basically, repentance is an act of contrition, confession and restitution. However, in medieval times particularly, all sorts of self-punishments, ascetic practices, flagellations, etc., were developed as acts of penitence. Hasidism, in particular, protested these developments as excessive, leading to depression (*atzvut*) and self-abasement whereas God wants the service of joy. *Atzvut* leads to unhealthy wallowing in guilt. As the Gerer Rebbe once said:

He who thinks and thinks again, about the evil that he did, his thoughts are full of the evil that he did...so he is completely sunk in the evil...if you sweep dirt here or there, it always remains dirt...therefore, it is said: "Leave evil and do good" (Psalm 34:15). Leave evil totally. Don't dwell on it, but do good.

Although the focus of these days is on guilt and self-criticism, the purpose is to remove the burden of guilt and end the evil doing -- not to increase or prolong them. Periodic purification is liberating. Guilt is not the superior religious emotion. It is necessary, given human tendencies, but it is to be grown from and overcome with new goodness. Rabbi Israel Salanter and his pupils used this period to draw up resolutions for new patterns of better living and to actually start the process of new living.

### Special Prayers

In addition to the added prayers listed above, the prayer *Aveenu Malkeynu* (Our Father, Our King) -- an alphabetical listing of many human requests and needs -- is said daily, except on *Shabbat*. *Selichot* (penitential prayers) are said every day as well (except on *Shabbat*).

The first day after *Rosh HaShanah*, the third of *Tishrei*, is a traditional fast day -- *Tzom Gedalia* -- with the special prayers (*Aveenu Malkeynu* and *Anaynu*, "Answer us, O Lord on our fast day.") and special *Torah* reading (for *Mincha*, Exodus 32:11-14; Exodus 34:1-10 and *Haftorah*, Isaiah 55:6ff.) *Tzom Gedalia* mourns the assassination of Gedalia, the Governor of the Jews remaining in Jerusalem after the destruction of the first Temple and the Jews' consequential dispersion.

The *Shabbat* between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* is called *Shabbat Shuvah* (after the first word of the prophetic portion "*Shuvah*," which deals with repentance), or *Shabbat Teshuvah* (repentance). Traditionally, a leading figure in the community reads the prophetic portion to underscore its importance. Similarly, even in the days when Rabbis did not give sermons on the *Shabbat*, it became the custom to give a special talk on *Shabbat Shuvah* to arouse the community to repentance or to the spirit of the period.

In time, this motive often became overshadowed in rabbinic display of scholarship and learning. Not unusually, the Rabbi would talk for hours on erudite but obscure themes to which crowds would come and listen in perfect silence -- and utter incomprehension. The Ropshitzer Rabbi once suggested that the purpose of the discourse was to give the innocent, other-worldly Rabbis of those days a chance to sin -- by too much talk and torturing his congregation through boredom -- so he could have something to repent for on *Yom Kippur*. (The funny thing is that people seemed to be deeply affected by these discourses anyway and repented. Perhaps this proved that what the speaker and audience share in background and values is more crucial than what is said between them.)



Since contemporary Rabbis have no need for this special opportunity to show rhetorical or scholarly skills, it would be proper that these talks truly focus on repentance or on preparation for the spirit of *Yom Kippur*. Another worthy custom is to talk about the laws of *Sukkot* and thus to look forward to the joy and commandments that come after the judgment day.

#### Extra Acts of Goodness

It is customary to increase charity and good deeds or to tighten up on observance during this period. While, in one sense, such gifts resemble 'foxhole conversions' (especially since people usually go back to normal after *Yom Kippur*), still the acts express a worthy desire. Kabbalists stressed that excluding the two days of *Rosh HaShanah* and the one day of *Yom Kippur*, there are seven days -- one for every day in the week. By doing things right (good deeds, pray with special concentration, etc.) we set up a model of the ideal Sunday, Monday, etc., to live by the rest of the year.

#### IV. EREV YOM KIPPUR - THE EVE OF THE JUDGMENT DAY

The dread and hope of the Ten Days of Repentance approach a peak on Erev Yom Kippur. We prepare for 'death' and the *Seudah Mafseket* (the pre-fast meal) has some symbolic overtones of the prisoner's last meal. (The sense of imminent death is so strong that traditional Jews say the final confession of sins in *Mincha* before the meal lest they not make it to *Yom Kippur* and die during the meal). Yet just at this moment, buoyed by its trust in God's love, the people Israel also ritually pre-enacts its festive meal of celebration and forgiveness which will be held after *Yom Kippur*. Unlike the pre-*Tisha B'Av* meal which is steeped in the sadness of the period and one notch of mourning higher, leading into the total sadness of *Tisha B'Av*, the pre-*Yom Kippur* meal is a festive and rich meal meant to offset the torment of the Day of Atonement. Thus the day before is meant to balance the asceticism of *Yom Kippur*. This makes clear that there is no intrinsic religious superiority in the deprivation which characterizes the fast day. Denial is only a technique for concentration on spiritual matters. In counterpoint to the denials of the Day of Atonement, then, we celebrate on the eve of *Yom Kippur*. "He who eats and drinks on the ninth of *Tishrei*, the *Torah* considers it as if he fasted on the ninth and tenth of *Tishrei*" (*TB Berachot 5B*). We sanctify life through eating and drinking on this day as we sanctify it through fasting on the next. As Rabbi Israel Salanter once said: "What a wise man can accomplish spiritually eating and drinking on *Erev Yom Kippur*, a fool cannot

achieve fasting on *Yom Kippur*." The meal is eaten after *mincha* and finished before sundown. We add time from *chol* (daily life) to *kodesh* (sacred time) and are plunged into the night of *Yom Kippur*.

The dialectic carries on through the day. In the morning extended *selichot* are said. Yet certain penitential prayers are not said, because this is a festival-like day. The *Aveenu Malkeynu* prayer is not said for the same reason (unless *Yom Kippur* is on *Shabbat*).

There is an ancient custom of *Kapporot* -- purchasing a live fowl and waving it as 'exchange' over the head of family members before it is slaughtered and eaten. Established in Gaonic times (8th-9th Centuries), this custom is undoubtedly a folk attempt to substitute for the scapegoat ceremony of Biblical times. "Let a person not think that this is really his atonement...let him criticize his sins and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, will accept his repentance" (Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, siman 131, para. 1). For those who will settle for nothing less than the original Biblical scapegoat, or whose fresh bird supply is low or whose rationalism quotient is high, money is usually substituted for the live creature. The money is given to the poor and to a charity. (Among those who opposed the custom of *Kapporot* as 'pagan' -- *darkei emori* -- were Rashba, the great medieval Halachist Maimonides, and Yosef Karo, the author of the Code of Jewish Law (*Shulchan Aruch*). The most worthy activity of the day is asking forgiveness of those we have hurt, giving restitution to those we have wronged and forgiving those who have hurt us. One should forgive freely with a full heart. "The way of Israelites is to be slow to anger and quick to be pacified." One who overcomes his natural inclinations (and forgives), his transgression will be overcome (by God and forgiving)" (*TB Yoma 23A*).

Some people immerse in the *mikvah* on this day to enter into the holiday in a spirit of purity and renewal. Special candles are lit in the house ("for *mitzvah* is a candle and the *Torah* is light") and in memory of departed parents. Sabbath clothes are put on before *mincha*. During *mincha*, the confession of sins is recited. It is customary to give charity at this time too.

As on the Sabbath, people dress, light candles in the house, spread out festive table cloths, etc., for *Yom Kippur* itself. On *Yom Kippur* an extra effort is made to avoid conspicuous display of jewelry or wealth; such ostentatiousness is incompatible with the awesomeness -- and equality -- of the moment. There is a widespread custom to wear white clothes -- as a symbol of purity and our hope that even "if your sins are red as scarlet, they will be made white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). Many wear a *kittel* (i.e., a shroud-like white cloak) for *Yom Kippur*. The *kittel* captures the sense of dread and the confrontation with death

even as its whiteness expressed the sense of purity and forgiveness. It also creates equality of dress on a day when all humans stand equally before judgment.

In the last act before the Day of Atonement, the mother and father bless the children, praying for their long life and expressing the love which unites the family. It is as if the family clings together in love in the face of the trial and of death.

#### V. YOM HAKIPPURIM - THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

*Yom HaKippurim* is liberation day. In the jubilee year, the sounding of the *shofar* at day's end "proclaimed liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants" (Leviticus 25:10). Slaves went free and land was restored to its original owners, the families of Israel. Similarly, every year the Day of Atonement brings freedom -- from the crushing isolation of guilt. "For on this day, He atones for you, to purify you; you will be purified from all your sins, before God" (Leviticus 16:30). *Yom Kippur* does more than lift the burden of evil. Forgiveness alone would leave the individual still alienated. This is a day of atonement. Atonement means restoration to the wholeness of community and roots. It means a new reconciliation and a new unification-- of impulse and values, of individual and community, of the human and God.

*Yom Kippur* is a day of dazzling paradoxes. Israel stands before God, united as a community of sinners -- publicly admitting the universal evil in all -- yet expecting and experiencing forgiveness and the purging of guilt through confession and mutual acceptance. Giving themselves over to the realm of death -- from wearing shrouds to giving up normal life functions such as eating, drinking, sexuality -- Jews emerge with renewed meaning in life. All day is spent in prayer and fasting -- as no other day in the Jewish calendar -- yet the *Haftorah's* theme is that God wants no prayer or fasting unless it leads to justice, to freeing the oppressed, and feeding the hungry. In the crunch of the trial, we finally drop all our defenses and rationalizations and throw ourselves on the mercy of the court. Yet we never lose the conviction that we will be pardoned. Despite the relentless, ten times repeated, confession of a staggering list of sins (which blessedly runs out when the alphabet runs out), we experience forgiveness out of personal repentance and the atoning power of the community of Israel and of the day.

This atonement, by divine grace, is above and beyond our own effort, or merit.\*

With the setting of the sun, the catharsis from sin of the people Israel is completed. It stands forgiven, beloved and at one in life before its Maker and covenant partner.

#### Withdrawal from Life

"On the tenth day of the seventh month, you shall afflict your souls" (Leviticus 16:29 and 23:27; Numbers 29:7). Denying the soul its due, in Jewish tradition, means giving up the fundamentals of dignified life-- eating and drinking, washing, anointing or cosmetic lotions, sexuality. (Also given up is wearing of leather shoes, which involves giving up the pleasure of proper support and comfort for the foot). In addition, we stop work and transfers (carrying) -- and by implication, wealth amassment -- as is done on all Sabbath days. (*Yom Kippur* is called the Sabbath's Sabbath and is considered a kind of *Shabbat*). In contrast to *Tisha B'Av*, however, these deprivations are not undertaken as mourning rituals. Despite the anxiety of the trial, *Yom Kippur* symbolizes a rejection of the accepted dependence of our sense of well-being and dignity on these normal acts. It makes clear that in an ultimate sense (only), human well-being and dignity transcend the presence of every day material pleasures. 'Playing dead' gives a perspective on the vanity of conventional life. From this encounter we go back to deepest enjoyment of life functions (on *Sukkot* -- the time of our rejoicing) without giving these pleasures ultimacy any more.

The primary self-denial is that of eating and drinking, even in minor amounts. However, some people are exempted by Jewish law from these restrictions. The exempted are: the dangerously sick (when there is definite or potential threat to life) and a pregnant woman, if she feels an irresistible urge to eat. A doctor need not certify that

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\*This is an admittedly problematic statement. It is Rabbi's view in *TB Shavuot 13A*. It seems to have been the underlying theme and principle of the scapegoat and *Avodah* service in the Temple (Leviticus 16). The trend since the destruction of the Temple has been to focus on individual acts rather than on 'sacramental' forces. This individualizing tendency is all to the good and I heartily support it. The vast majority of rabbis do not, in fact, follow Rabbi's views. Still Maimonides recognizes this sacramental power of grace and atonement which comes from the community of Israel and I am convinced this statement is true on many levels.

the patient needs the food although this is the usual way. In fact, if the dangerously sick patient says he needs the food -- and even if the doctors deny this -- we are commanded to feed the patient. In such cases of eating, regular blessings over food are said and the *yaaleh v'yavo* prayer for *Yom Kippur* is inserted in the grace after meals.

I recommend following the Brisker tradition that dangerously sick patients should be fed normally and fully. Many orthodox Rabbis urge that the feeding be done in smaller than legal size portions, if possible. But as Rabbi Chayim Brisker used to say: "I am not treating *Yom Kippur* lightly, I am treating life-saving seriously." In 1848, during a cholera epidemic, Rabbi Israel Salanter personally instructed the entire community of Vilna to eat. He personally and publicly ate first to show the way, for fear the plague would spread to people in weakened condition from fasting. It was one of his greatest religious moments.

As far as washing is concerned it is cosmetic washing -- for pleasure's sake -- that is given up. All anointing is given up. Where there is dirt or eyefilm or ritual washing is required (such as before prayer or the priestly blessing) or a sick person, regular washing of the necessary area is done. Similarly, a newly married bride washes her face so she will not appear unsightly to her husband and be repellent to him. (Ah, that romantic Jewish law!)

Giving up sexual relations reflects both the enactment of death and the ascetic norms of the day. Sexuality is so basic a human act that giving it up is an "affliction of the soul."

Not wearing leather shoes (exceptions: any kind of sick person or a woman who has given birth within thirty days) is also correlated to the idea that an animal had to die to make the shoes possible. On the day we seek forgiveness and life, products of an act of killing are inappropriate for use.

### Liturgy

The *Yom Kippur* liturgy starts with *Kol Nidre* with its dissolution of vows, in advance (to prevent casual vows and to dramatize the utter seriousness of words). The liturgy is the vehicle through which the *Yom Kippur* miracle of transmutation takes place. Far from being dominated by death, a consciousness of love and affection wells up from the liturgy. There is awe and a feeling of *kavana* (concentration and devotion) but what comes through above all is the sense of devotion

and closeness and warmth which unites the congregation of Israel. On this day, there is also a camaraderie of the congregants that reassures and breaks the tension. As at *Selichot*, it is customary to wear the *Tallit* at night because of the solemnity of *Yom Kippur*. However, the blessing upon donning the *Tallit* is made only by day. Before *Kol Nidre*, there are beautiful traditions: of accepting the commandment to 'love thy neighbor as thyself' and of committing one's self to be "*mochayl*" to forgive all those who have sinned against us. The congregation recites the legal formula that we are permitted to pray with sinners, i.g., with all Israel. Tonight we are one. *Kol Nidre* concludes with the blessing of '*shehecheyanu*' -- who has kept us alive to this day. Judgment threatens but it also makes life possible. Then follow the many special *piyutim* (liturgical inserts) with the focus on forgiveness and God's power as shaper of our destiny.

### Guilt and Confession

Of course, the closeness of the end of the trial tremendously heightens consciousness of one's sins, faults and failures. There is no denying the self critical, complacency shattering (almost masochistic!) overtones of *Yom Kippur*. In a culture striving for permissiveness, this mood is a jarring counterpoint. However, the tradition's answer to such an objection is that guilt in its right time and place is healthy; it is crucial to conscience. "There is no righteous person in the world who always does good and never sins." (*Ecclesiastes* 7:20) This recognition is part of moral maturity. Such insight demands honesty, perceptiveness and a willingness to see the real sins and not to lay upon one's self a universal or destructive guilt. One must focus on actual acts done, concrete errors, not invoke a guilt which cripples all and focuses on nothing specific. Concrete acts can be corrected; bad patterns overcome. Universalized guilt paralyzes and ultimately denies the truly specific bad acts done.

To this end, there is repeated confession of sins on *Yom Kippur*. The sins are listed alphabetically to cover the range of human behavior and to jog memory. Compassionately enough, the confessions are in the plural form (we have sinned) so that the sinner will not be isolated or condemned in guilt. Everyone confesses all the sins and each individual applies the appropriate category to themselves. The sins range from violence or cheating or slander of others to arrogance or unfairness in word and deed. A number of congregations have updated the confession by inserting contemporary deeds and sins. This can be a powerful reinforcement to the confession provided it does not turn into a catalogue of social sins alone. The focus should be on the individual and what the individual can change in personal life and not just on the sins of society. The confession covers the gamut of sins

by going alphabetically from A to Z (*alph* to *tav*). The saving counterpoint is the theme of God's mercy and forgiveness that dominates the service - we dredge up our sins - but in a way we are glad to do this because the sins we remember and repent of are all forgiven. (In the case of sins against fellow humans we must give restitution and ask forgiveness from them before God will forgive.) Thus *Yom Kippur* is at once a fierce jolt and a great relief. For this reason, the theme that threads through the night and is repeated by day (especially in the *Neilah*, the closing prayer) is "the Lord sitting on his throne of mercy" and the thirteen qualities of God -- preeminently gracious loving kindness and forgiveness.

Classically, one of the emotional peaks of the service was the *Mussaf* (Additional Service) *Avodah* (Divine Service) section in which the ancient Temple scapegoat and atonement service was retold and verbally reenacted. Many wept at the recollection of the lost Temple - and for the living reality of Exile, persecution and powerlessness which was the contemporary fate of the Jewish people. In the modern period, this part of the service has lost much of its force under the impact of 'modern' rationalism moralism and dismissal of sacrifices. And, of course, the sense of exile has waned since Jews came to be at home in the modern West. For those free of modern hangups, this part of the service gives a glimpse of the raw power and the sacramental experience of unmerited grace which characterized the Temple worship.

Adding to the emotional peak was the prayer for and tale of the Ten Rabbinic Martyrs of the Roman persecution. The tale of the sacrifice of the ten Rabbis symbolized all the victims of persecution. In a way, they were invoked for the sake of 'vicarious atonement' - the merit of the devotion and martyrdom throughout the ages should win forgiveness for the living people of Israel, their children. In our time, readings and prayers on the European holocaust - most appropriate are readings from the writings of Jews in the Holocaust or survivors - should be added in our own service. Further, no service or trial in Jewish liturgy can be authentic in our time without including the trial of God as well, the '*din Torah mit dem Ribbono shel Olam*'. The awe and seriousness of the *Yamim Noraim* demand this integrity from us. (Cf. *Elie Wiesel, Night, Chapter 5*)

*Yizkor* is also said on *Yom Kippur* because the memory of the dead deepens the solemnity and so that our prayers are for them too. Giving charity is a crucial fulfillment both of *Yizkor* remembrance and of the day. *Hallel* is not said, despite the festival overtone, because the awe of judgment paralyzes the capacity for happy songs of praise.

In the morning, six people are called to the *Torah* (seven if on *Shabbat*) to read the *Yom Kippur* tabernacle ritual. Another is called to read the *Haftorah* with its critique of mere ritual and its demand for justice. In the afternoon, three are called to the *Torah* to read of permitted and forbidden marriages (because in ancient times after the scapegoat ritual was completed and atonement obtained, celebration and marriage arranging went on.) (At this time, the regular year-round tune is used for the *Torah* reading. We are already anticipating the return to normal life.) The third person reads the *Haftorah* which is the book of *Jonah*. The book encompasses the many themes of the day -- repentance, confrontation with death, and, above all, God's love for all his creatures -- even the lowly gourd. God, therefore, wants people to turn to life. (It is noteworthy that the theme is universalistic. *Jonah* is a prophet to the *Gentiles* and they set an impressive example of repentance for Jews.) In chassidic circles, *Mincha* particularly ends on a happy, even triumphant note. The community feels that it is going to make it and forgiveness is very close. We are emerging from the shadow of death to light and life.

A special service, *Neilah*, (the closing) is inserted at twilight and it lasts until the stars come out. The day is ending, and in a kind of runner's second wind, Jews are inspired to a new burst of prayer. Many stand through the entire service. The image that runs through the prayer is that the gates are closing -- the gates of heaven, of prayer, of the courthouse; and some say, the gates of the Temple. We try to get our prayers in before the closing; we hope to enter within the gates of life. The dominant motif of the service is the Lord's thirteen qualities -- the assurance of grace. *Neilah's* final prayer is 'our father, our king' (*aveenu malkeynu*). This prayer is normally not said in *Shabbat*. However, on *Yom Kippur* it is said even if the day coincides with *Shabbat* - because this final and most urgent pleading for our human needs overrides other considerations.

The prophet says: "Those who trust in the Lord shall exchange strength (for weariness)." (*Isaiah 40,31*) *Neilah* ends with a crescendo. The congregation cries out: *Shma Yisrael!* -- Hear, Oh Israel! -- it utters the pledge of loyalty of the Jewish people, for the Lord of judgment is our God; *Baruch shem kvod* -- the call for God's Kingdom and redemption; and the final triumphant cry, seven times repeated: God is the Lord? (Cp. the original setting of this cry, Book of I Kings, ch. 18, v. 39) In the clear light of *Yom Kippur* we have considered the normal idolatries to which we give our lives, and now we know their emptiness, so we shout: God is the Lord? One long loud blast on the *Shofar* ends this day. The *Shofar* blast (the forerunner of the messianic arrival) evokes the cry: *l'shanah ha baah b'yerushalaym* -- Next year in Jerusalem? Next year redemption?



## VI. MOTZAI YOM HAKIPPURIM: The Happiness of The Long Distance Runner

Like the good long-distance runner, the Jew's prayer does not stop at the finish line but keeps running until it runs down. (The mad dash to the exits in most synagogues reflects poor professional training!) If you will, the first things one does after *Yom Kippur* are additional *mitzvot*. *Maariv* is prayed. *Havdala* is said. Those who did not bless the new moon before *Yom Kippur* do it now.\*

After *Yom Kippur* we eat, drink and rejoice. Says the *Medrash*: a (heavenly) voice declares on this night: "Go and eat your bread joyfully, drink your wine in good spirit, for the Lord has accepted your efforts." (*Ecclesiastes*, 9,7) Here again is the dialectical move of the tradition -- from self-abasement, guilt and deprecation of pleasure to renewed joy and good living. Many start building the *Sukkah* that very night. This is done not just to go on to another mitzvah but to point to the joy in the affirmation of success and vitality of life which must counterpoint the asceticism of *Yom Kippur*.

Joy is more powerful than sorrow or denial. In the *Sukkah* and its joy, everyone -- even children -- can participate. This is why the final sealing of the judgment is connected by Rabbinic tradition to *Hoshana Rabba* -- the sixth day of *Sukkot*. In the words of a *medrash*: A city revolted against its ruler. The King set forth to subdue and punish it and the city hastened to request a pardon. At a distance from the city, the elders and great men came and begged forgiveness. "For your sake," he said, "I forgive one half the guilt." At the gates of the city, the masses turned out and pleaded for mercy. "For your sake," he said, "I forgive half of the guilt that is left." When he entered the city and found all the little children gathered with song and dance and joy to appear before him, he exclaimed: "For your sake, I forgive everything!" -- and joined in their celebration. So it is with Israel and God. In *Elul*, the righteous repent and plead for forgiveness and God forgives partially. By *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, the mass of people appear

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\*The aesthetic anticlimax of this and most Jewish prayer services -- which never end at the emotional peak -- has led Rabbi J. B. Soloveichik to suggest that we have a conscious dramatic image. To take leave appropriately after making our best argument would be to act in full self-possession. But the underlying image, Rabbi Soloveichik suggests, is that of people who, suddenly released from the mesmerism of closeness to God, come to the realization that they stand in the presence of an overwhelming transcendent person. We realize the *chutzpah* of our request and demands. Covered with confusion we awkwardly stumble and retreat our way out, 'making fools of ourselves' because of our awe of the person we have been speaking to all this time.

and God forgives more. But when on *Sukkot* even the children appear with joy, dancing and fragrant fruit, for their sake all is forgiven and the *Shechina* -- divine presence -- joins in with them.

Despite the unity and mass presence of the community on *Yom Kippur*, the asceticism and guilt of the day leave the individual in some state of alienation. The brush with death chills the heart a little even in the moment of forgiveness. However, in the joy of *Sukkot*, everyone participates. In this unity and whole-heartedness, the total reconciliation of human and human and God and human can take place.

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#### P O S T S C R I P T

The laws of *Rosh HaShanah* through *Yom Kippur* are collected in Rabbi Joseph Caro, *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, Simanim* (chapters) 581-624 and parallel chapters in Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, *Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*. From these volumes and their commentaries and bibliographical aids, as well as from Rabbi Yehiel M. Epstein, *Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim*, parallel chapters (i.e., 581-624), one can explore these laws in greater detail and check back to the sources or into more complex issues. This guide is meant only as a capsule summary of the laws and an explanation of the spirit underlying them and the effect they are designed to achieve or create.

For further readings in the spirit of the holidays, I recommend Shmuel Yosef Agnon's superb anthology *Yamim Noraim* (Shocken Publishers) (in its abridged English version, called *Days of Awe*). Philip Goodman, *The Rosh Hashanah Anthology* (Jewish Publication Society) and the volumes in the Hebrew language *Sefer Moadim* series have many additional citations of the literature. Of course, the other great sources of the spirit of this period are the *machzor* (prayer book) and the *selichot*.

*Maimonides'* important halachic material is scattered through various sections of his *Mishneh Torah*, including *hilchot teshuvah*, *hilchot shevitat asor*, *hilchot shofar*, *hilchot avodat yom hakippurim* and other sources. The material in the *Talmud* is even more widely scattered but the biggest concentrations are found the *Babylonian Talmud* (TB) *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yoma* (this last volume deals primarily with *Yom Kippur*.)

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