

In memory of all those brutally murdered in the war on Israel,
including the fallen soldiers of the IDF

בס"ד

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VOLUME 39 | #3

DAF HASHAVUA

יּוֹם כִּיּוּפּוּר | YOM KIPPUR

YOM KIPPUR ENDS:

- London: 7.23pm
- Birmingham: 7.30pm
- Bournemouth: 7.24pm
- Cardiff: 7.38pm
- Dublin: 7.47pm
- Edinburgh: 7.37pm
- Glasgow: 7.41pm
- Hull: 7.28pm
- Leeds: 7.29pm
- Liverpool: 7.37pm
- Manchester: 7.31pm
- Nottingham: 7.30pm
- Sheffield: 7.31pm
- Southend: 7.19pm
- Southport: 7.38pm
- Jerusalem: 6.39pm



Torah Reading Summary

Yom Kippur

The Torah reading for Yom Kippur is the description of the Yom Kippur Temple service. The pinnacle of this service was the most intimate moment of Divine-human contact in the year. The High Priest, representing the nation of Israel, 'meets God', Who descends to the Holy of Holies in a cloud. This achieves atonement for the people.

God instructed Moshe to say to his brother Aharon that even he, the High Priest, may only enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, with a bull for a sin offering, along with a ram for a burnt offering. The Jewish people were to bring two goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

Aharon wears four special, white garments. He is to take two goats and draw lots; one is to be offered up in the Temple and the other is sent away to *Azazel*, the desert wastelands.

Aharon is to take a pan of coals and incense into the Holy of Holies, with the smoke of the incense enveloping the covering of the *Aron* (the Ark). This is reminiscent of Mount Sinai, where God 'descended' in a cloud and gave us the Ten Commandments.

Aharon takes the blood of his sin offering and sprinkles it seven times in the Holy of Holies and seven times in front of the curtain outside the Holy of Holies. He repeats this with the blood of the people's sin-offering, one of the goats. Aharon then places his

hands upon the head of the other goat and beseeches God for forgiveness for the sins of the people, 'placing them on the head of the goat'. This second goat is then led out to the desert. Aharon changes from the special white garments to his regular ones and offers up the other offerings of the day.

This entire procedure is carried out once a year. Although Yom Kippur is a Yomtov, the restrictions of Shabbat apply. The High Priest was to atone firstly for himself and his family, then for the priesthood as a whole and then for the nation of Israel.

MAFTIR

The maftir details the regular Musaf offerings for Yom Kippur.

HAFTARAH

These are stirring words from the prophet Isaiah which place great emphasis on the moral fabric of society: "Thus says the high and exalted One... 'High and holy I abide – yet I am with the crushed and humbled'". This is what God wants from us. "Rituals of penance such as fasting have no effect if they are not accompanied by true contrition and a change of behaviour. God judges us by the way we treat others." (Rabbi Sacks' Yom Kippur Machzor, p. 741). The Haftarah ends with more memorable words, this time about *Oneg Shabbat* – Shabbat is a true

delight when we refrain from pursuing our normal weekday matters.

YOM KIPPUR MINCHA

This Torah reading is as different to the morning's Torah reading as one could imagine, the theme being sexual ethics. Judaism is not only to be found in ritual, but in even the most personal aspects of our lives.

MINCHA HAFTARAH

Yonah (Jonah) the prophet is called on by God to go to the city of Nineveh to urge the people to mend their ways. But Yonah didn't want them to repent and be forgiven by God, so he fled. Perhaps he thought that if he left the Holy Land and stopped living like a Jew, God would relieve him of his responsibility. So he went down to the port of Yafo, down onto a ship and down into the cabin, where he went to sleep.

God brought a huge, violent storm, which threatened to wreck the ship. The sailors prayed to their gods to save them, while Yonah slept on! It took the captain himself to go and wake him up. Yonah confessed to the crew that he was the cause of the storm and told them to throw him overboard – he so much didn't want to go to Nineveh! Only when he was swallowed by a big fish and languished there for three days did he relent. A gripping story with many allegories and messages.



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INTRODUCTION TO THIS ISSUE

On Yom Kippur, we immerse ourselves in the world of spirituality, to focus on how we live our lives rather than involve ourselves predominantly with our physical needs.

Whereas on Rosh Hashanah we set aspirations, we consider on Yom Kippur how best to achieve them and to improve on the past.

As a continuation of the theme in the Rosh Hashanah edition, the articles in this edition also seek to address the questions of the 1st century CE rabbinic sage, Hillel, in the Mishna (*Pirkei Avot* 1:14), which are set out below with follow on questions.

IF I'M NOT FOR MYSELF, WHO WILL BE FOR ME?

This focuses on my relationship with myself. Which areas have I identified for personal development? What are my current skills and attributes and, practically speaking, how will I go about improving? Are there books, podcasts, shiurim etc. that can help me? Are there people within my orbit who could mentor or inspire me? Are there experiences I would like to arrange?

IF I'M ONLY FOR MYSELF, WHAT AM I?

This focuses my gaze outwards, both for interpersonal relationships and for my relationship with God. Am I spending as much time as I can with friends and family? Are there opportunities to be more active in my community and on behalf of the Jewish people?

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

This is where things get practical. Yom Kippur is an obvious starting point, just after the beginning of the Jewish year.

We wish you a safe fast and meaningful Yom Kippur. May God answer our prayers for the good of the Jewish people and help us achieve everything positive that we set out to do.

– Daf Hashavua Editorial team



BESEFER CHAIM... NIZACHER

VENIKATEV: FROM BELIEF TO ACTION

BY: **RABBI YONI BIRNBAUM**

Finchley United Synagogue

A number of years ago, I visited the museum on Ellis Island dedicated to the story of the millions of immigrants who arrived in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. One line in an exhibit in that museum has stayed with me ever since. Penned by an unknown Italian immigrant, it reads as follows:

"Before I arrived in America, they told me the streets would be paved with gold. As soon as I got here, I discovered three things. Firstly, that the streets were not paved with gold. Secondly, the streets were not paved at all. And thirdly, I was expected to pave them."

In his classic work, *Sefer HaMitzvot*, which lists all the *mitzvot* of the Torah, the Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1138-1204) states something quite remarkable about the most basic element of Jewish faith:

The first mitzvah is that we are commanded to acquire knowledge of the nature of God's existence, to understand that He is the Original Cause and Source of existence, Who brings all creations

"We achieve 'remembrance' in the Book of Life when we identify with our people and our faith... Yet we long for more than this. We long to be 'inscribed' in the Book of Life with a sense of permanence."

into being. The source of this commandment is God's statement (exalted be He), "I am the Lord your God."

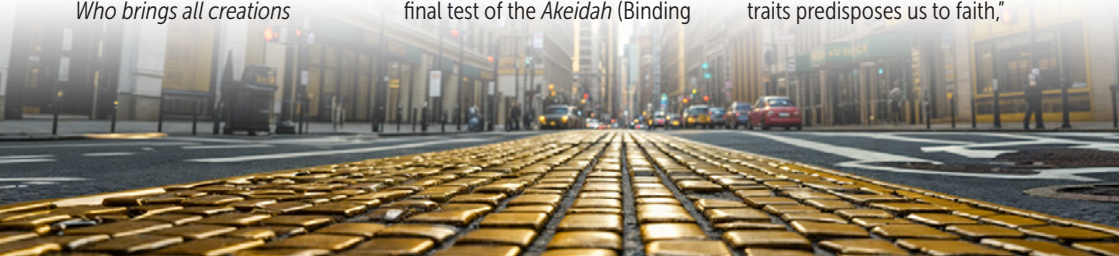
What the Rambam appears to be highlighting here is that the first *mitzvah* is not to 'believe' in God. It is to **acquire knowledge** that God exists, which is something quite different. This involves transforming an abstract belief into a reality, making it as factual as the existence of five fingers on each hand. Put another way, according to the Rambam, we are required to *intellectualise* belief. Understood this way, this *mitzvah* is truly a lifetime's work. It is, quite literally, an injunction to 'pave the streets with gold' ourselves.

The words of the Rambam help explain, as the Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Judah Loew, c.1525-1609) sets out, why it is that only after Avraham passes the tenth and final test of the *Akeidah* (Binding

of Isaac) that God says to him, "Now I **know** that you fear God." The critical word here is *yediyah*, meaning **knowledge**.

Avraham believed in God from the start of his journey. But it was only after all the many long years of the ten trials that he acquired **knowledge** of God. And it was that gift of knowledge of God, the assurance that belief can become knowledge, which he imparted to his descendants after that final test.

This *mitzvah* to acquire knowledge of God is very different to the 'yes/no' we simplistically think of as the answer to the question, 'Do you believe in God?' The answer to that question, for all of humanity, may well be more straightforward than people think. This is because there is significant evidence that human beings are hard-wired to believe in something. "A slew of cognitive traits predisposes us to faith,"



writes Pascal Boyer in the science journal *Nature*, although people “are only aware of some of their religious ideas.” Similarly, Graham Lawton goes so far as to argue in the *New Scientist* that according to some scientists, “atheism is psychologically impossible because of the way humans think.” This explains why, in his view, “even people who claim to be committed atheists tacitly hold religious beliefs, such as the existence of an immortal soul.”¹

With this in mind, we can understand the first Commandment of the Ten as asking us “Do you **know** God exists?” Have you worked on intellectualising that childlike belief, making it a reality in your own life, rather than leaving it in its detached, abstract form? In other words, have you transformed belief into action?

No one suggests for a moment that answering this question is easy; we are all aware of the questions, the dilemmas, the issues. But, like much else in life, if the aim is worth it, then it is worth the struggle.

Throughout his life, Elie Wiesel, the late Holocaust survivor and eminent writer, openly discussed his struggles with faith, and how that had impacted his approach to life. Yet, in one of the last interviews he gave, he was asked what he thought about every day. In response, Wiesel looked the interviewer in the eye and said, “I put on *Tefillin* every morning and I am a *Vizhnitzer chassid*”².

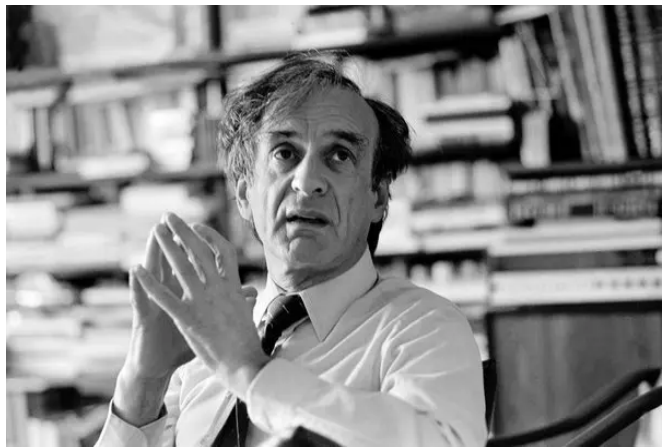
“ As we pray for a year of life ahead, let us recall the power of belief – and the ability we have, through the actions we do, to inscribe it permanently on the very depths of our souls.”

Jews do not give up easily. Understood properly, perhaps this is the depth of meaning behind Elie Wiesel’s words. Living a vibrant, meaningful Jewish life, filled with the colourful and constant flow of daily Jewish observances and unique moments, has the potential to transform the ordinary into the spiritual. It is this which, over time and years of practice, takes that

kernel of belief and makes it real.

Perhaps this concept is hinted at in the phrase, “May we be remembered and inscribed in the Book of Life.” What is the difference between being ‘remembered’ and ‘inscribed’? We achieve ‘remembrance’ in the Book of Life when we identify with our people and our faith on these precious days of the year. Yet we long for more than this. We long to be ‘inscribed’ in the Book of Life with a sense of permanence, itself a reflection of the degree to which we have made our own belief manifestly permanent, making an indelible impression on our own day-to-day lives.

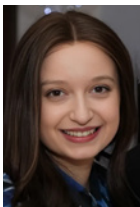
As we pray for a year of life ahead, let us recall the power of belief – and the ability we have, through the actions we do, to inscribe it permanently on the very depths of our souls.



Elie Wiesel. Courtesy of www.nytimes.com

¹ Source: https://www.science20.com/writer_on_the_edge/blog/scientists_discover_that_atheists_might_not_exist_and_thats_not_a_joke-139982

² http://www.thiefriedlandergroup.com/_sub/_friedlander_09/uploads/documents/0735am_hamodia.pdf



ARE JEWS SPECIAL OR IS IT SPECIAL TO BE A JEW?

BY: **LAURIE MAURER**

US Education

In the *Amidah* prayer of all our major festivals, including Yom Kippur, we say the prayer *Atah vechartanu*:

You have chosen us from among all peoples. You have loved and favoured us. You have raised us above all tongues. You have made us holy through Your commandments. You have brought us near, our King, to Your service, and have called us by Your great and holy name. (Koren Yom Kippur Machzor, p. 82)

Were we chosen because we are special, or are we special because we were chosen?

Since 7th October 2023, this question seems to have become more acute. Why is it that the Jewish people seems to be especially targeted, demonised by the rest of the world and singled out for accusation, abuse and judgement to a higher standard?

At a time when we are at risk of being defined by the hatred of others, we could ask ourselves: is it antisemitism that makes me feel Jewish, or am I affected by antisemitism because I have a

strong Jewish identity?

Atah vechartanu provides a possible pathway to answer our questions.

Its opening, *"You have chosen us from all peoples,"* echoes a phrase in the *beracha* (blessing) we recite every morning at the beginning of *Shacharit* before learning Torah and which is also said when receiving an *aliya* (call up) to the Torah: *"asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim, venatan lanu et Torato"* – God has chosen us from all the peoples and given us His Torah. We are the keepers of God's treasured possession, the Torah.

As such, we require a deeper level of audit, to make sure we are protecting, learning, applying and living the Torah properly. This makes it special to be Jewish and is a central feature of the values we embrace on Yom Kippur.

This resonates with the words of the Biblical prophet, Amos, who lived in Tekoa, near Jerusalem, during the First Temple period: *"Only you I have known from all the families of the earth, therefore I will call you to account for all*

“ On Yom Kippur, by refraining from eating, drinking and other physical acts, we are elevated in holiness to the status of angels.”

your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Amos was telling us that it is the Jewish people who has a particular relationship with God. As the guardians of the 'Crown Jewel' – the Torah – which expresses this relationship, we must demonstrate that we are up to this privileged position. Yom Kippur provides an ideal opportunity to 'get into shape' for this spiritually.

"Ahava otanu", God loves us. The machzor we read on this day is replete with references to God as our father, through the love He shows us – unconditional, as a parent to a child.

"Vekidashtanu bemitzvotcha", God has made us holy through His commandments. There are many actions God asks us to perform





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every day and on special occasions, and these commandments help us to connect to Him and our Divine purpose. Judaism believes in elevating the physical world, through performing mitzvot in the right way and at the right time. However, on Yom Kippur, by refraining from eating, drinking and other physical acts, we are elevated in holiness to the status of angels. This helps us to focus on our tasks for this day.

"Vekervantanu Malkein le'avodatecha", You have brought us near, our King, to Your service. In Temple times, the Jewish people would come together for a long day of *Avodah*, the service in the Temple (see the *Mussaf Amida* for the full description). All of this points to a bigger theme, which is that our relationship with God requires us, as set out in the Torah and lived through the mitzvot, to be His ambassadors.

The late Catholic historian, Paul Johnson (1928-2023), puts

it beautifully in *The History of the Jews* (1987): *"All the great conceptual discoveries of the intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they have been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jew has this gift. To them, we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without the Jews, it might have been a much emptier place."*

At the United Synagogue, we feel particularly proud to be contributing to this mission, powering Jewish life through our members, rabbinate, communities, Beth Din, marriage programmes,

burial services, chaplaincy in hospitals and prisons, nurseries, kashrut department, youth programmes and summer camps, multiple *chesed* projects and education. Our vision is creating a community of inspired Jews, with enriched lives, passing our heritage on to future generations.

On this holiest of days, may we all find inspiration for how, over the year ahead, we can live a life that demonstrates that it is indeed a privilege to be a Jew, and to inspire others to feel the same.

“ We are the keepers of God’s treasured possession, the Torah... This makes it special to be Jewish and is a central feature of the values we embrace on Yom Kippur.”



SIMCHA L'ARTZECHA: PRAYING FOR ISRAEL ON YOM KIPPUR

BY: **RABBI ELCHONON FELDMAN**

Bushy Synagogue and Chair of RCUS

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love you be at peace." (Psalms 122:6)

There is something profound, and I would argue heartening, in the knowledge that, at the most solemn and sacred moment of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur, when the Books of Life and Death are open before us, we are encouraged to go beyond praying for ourselves and instead pray for something far greater. As we stand in shul, beating our chests, weak from fasting, fatigued from self-examination, and yet deeply motivated with purpose, we find that the liturgy continuously and deliberately redirects our gaze towards Israel, not merely as a geographical location, but as the spiritual and emotional heart of the Jewish people.

One of the most beautiful

phrases woven into the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur *Amidah* asks for *simcha l'artzecha v'sasson l'irecha* - "joy for Your Land and gladness for Your City" (Koren Yom Kippur Machzor p. 80). This is no casual sentiment. It captures the very essence of Jewish prayer: the idea that personal redemption and national redemption are intertwined. That our joy cannot be complete unless Zion rejoices; that our fasting, our repentance, our hope for forgiveness must be translated into a deep yearning for peace, safety and flourishing in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The liturgy points us there

The *Yamim Noraim* (High Holy Days) are marked by a dual spiritual rhythm. Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgement, a day of requests, when we ask to be written into the Book of Life. Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, a day of forgiveness, when we hope that our honest soul-searching will make us worthy of having that inscription signed and sealed. The question is: what exactly are we asking for?

Our ancestors lived through war, exile, poverty and persecution. Their pleas for life would have been visceral. But never in our history did we put our own very real needs and concerns before our yearning for a return to Israel and peace within its borders. In our generation too, intensified since the October 7 massacre and the subsequent war, our national consciousness has been awakened with heartfelt prayer for Israel: *"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love you be at peace. May there be peace within your ramparts, tranquility in your citadels"* (Psalms 122:6-7).

Every Jewish community worldwide has uttered these timeless thematic prayers with renewed urgency. They have done so at vigils, solidarity marches, and even on social media. Prayers for the return of the hostages, for the safety of IDF soldiers, and for peace in the land of our people. But it is in the synagogue, the house of communal prayer, where these pleas have truly found their voice. It therefore behoves us on the holiest of days, in a space

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dedicated to *tefillah* (prayer), that our supplications for Israel and its people be expressed most fervently. Today, we pray for Israel and its people, with all our heart and with all our soul.

It is this vision of a better tomorrow in Israel which bookends the *Amidah*. We long for a future where God's presence is felt, not just in heaven, but in the world too. And what will that world look like? It will be marked by honour for God's people, confidence for those who yearn for Him, and crucially, "*joy for Your Land, gladness for Your City.*" It is not enough for our God and His people to be elevated; it must happen in the Land He swore to give to us – the Promised Land. Likewise, at the very culmination of the Rosh Hashanah *Mussaf Amidah*, we ask that a great shofar be sounded for our freedom, that the exiles be gathered, and that we be brought back to Zion with joy. The climax of the *tefillah* is the hope of returning not just to a theoretical utopia but to a sacred destiny inextricably linked to a physical homeland.

Fragility, fasting and faith

Yom Kippur strips away all pretence. No food, no water, no distractions. Just us, our frailty



and the words of the *Machzor*. And in that state of vulnerability, we can access something deeply authentic. We often think of prayer as asking for what we lack. But Yom Kippur reframes this: it is not only about what we need, but about who we need to be. Do we care deeply for our people? Are our hearts aligned with our homeland? Do we raise our voices not just for ourselves but for those in danger, those who are mourning, those who wait endlessly for loved ones to return?

In this light, *simcha l'artzecha* is not a distant poetic phrase. It is a call to action. A reminder that the joy of the Land is not automatic, it is something we must work for, hope for, and above all, pray for.

Let us resolve this Yom Kippur not only to ask for our own names

to be sealed in the Book of Life, but to include at the forefront of our thoughts the hostages still in captivity (at the time of writing), the soldiers still on the front lines, the people of Israel still under threat. Let us use the liturgy, particularly the passages about Israel, not as rote recital but as a prompt for meaningful prayer. When we say, "*Bring us to Zion with joy,*" let us visualise it. When we ask for "*gladness in Your City,*" let us be incomplete until it is achieved. And when we emerge from this holy day, may our words be answered for blessing, from up on high to here on earth.

May the coming year bring safety to Israel, healing to those in pain, unity to our people, and above all, *simcha l'artzecha* - joy to our Land.



THE QUEST FOR JEWISH UNITY

BY: **RABBI MICHAEL LAITNER**

US Director of Education, Interim Rabbi at Belmont US

There are two markers in the Jewish calendar, almost exactly six months apart from each other. One is Pesach, when we celebrate the liberation and birth of the Jewish people. The other is Yom Kippur, which marks our personal renewal and a fresh start for the year ahead. Anecdotally at least, these two markers are the most observed in the Jewish calendar.

Both begin with special events, the Seder on Pesach and Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur, with a significant parallel. At the start of the Seder we welcome to the table anybody who wishes to attend.

Similarly, during Kol Nidrei at the start of Yom Kippur, the whole community declares its acquiescence to pray together, whatever kind of Jew we are. Every Jew who wishes to attend is welcomed in. This was not always easy. Imagine how it felt, for example, in the years of the Spanish Inquisition if you were living furtively as a Jew every day and were sitting on Yom Kippur next to a Jew who masqueraded as a Catholic but came to shul as a Jew, nonetheless. Yet, even when not easy, we did and have continued to do so as we have confronted the challenges of every generation.

In our times, Jews who have felt in some way cocooned from the difficulties our community has experienced over the last couple of years sit alongside those Jews

who have had to contend with the challenges of being Jewish in the wider world. We can relate both to the pride and the fears that we may have felt during this time, the wearing or the concealment of a yellow ribbon or a Magen David. We also have to acknowledge differences amongst us in our approaches to the major issues of Israel's war and antisemitism.

Nonetheless, we do come together and declare that Yom Kippur is a day about Jewish unity, despite our differences. On this day, we acknowledge that we can still find ways to come together with communal prayers and shared Jewish practices, even when we disagree about our personal prayers and hopes for the year ahead.

Addressing this requires many of the other characteristics about which we pray on Yom Kippur. On a personal level, the 13 attributes of God, which include kindness, forgiveness, being slow to anger and commitment to truth, which we recite repeatedly in Kol Nidrei and at Neila, are also in part for us to emulate, rather than just to pray for God to act towards us this way.

By doing so, we can retain commitment to our positions, alongside an acceptance of others with whom we differ, towards the ultimate objective of creating a more harmonious society with genuine Jewish values to the fore.

Imagine a society where we

“Yom Kippur is a day about Jewish unity, despite our differences.”

got this balance right and how transformational it could be. And then, if I may suggest, consider what part will you play in achieving this in the year ahead.

More broadly, the ongoing efforts at finding this balance need to be at the forefront of Jewish leadership, be it in communities, internal dialogue, external representation or in the governing and future of the State of Israel.

It's not always easy to balance, but Judaism obligates us to find that common ground and particularly reminds us of this imperative on both Yom Kippur and Pesach.

This year on Yom Kippur, it is especially timely to pray to God for the wisdom, capabilities and humility to understand and apply both obligations, as represented by Yom Kippur and Pesach. With God's help, we will navigate the path ahead with success and be blessed with the best of both values in the year and years to come.

As we all sing at the end of Yom Kippur and at the Pesach Seder, *leshanah haba'ah birushalayim*, next year in Jerusalem!





YOM KIPPUR:

ZEBRAS, FORGIVENESS AND FAITH

BY: **SHIRA JACKSON**

US Education

Why do zebras have stripes? A group of zebras is called a 'dazzle,' as their clustered stripes create a dazzling effect, designed as a defence mechanism. Grouped together, their stripes blend, making it hard to see where one zebra ends and another begins. This confusion deters predators by making the herd appear as one large, unapproachable target.

The Torah reading on Yom Kippur describes the purpose of the service performed by the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest:

"And he (the *Kohen Gadol*) shall make atonement for himself, and for his household, and for the *entire* community of Israel." (*Vayikra* 16:17)

It makes sense that he can cleanse himself of sin and rectify his mistakes; possibly we could extend that to his family too. But the *entire* community of Israel? Over the course of a year, how many mistakes were made by all of the Jewish people? How can one person make all of that disappear?

The answer of course is 'the zebra method,' making ourselves

indistinguishable as individuals, to the extent there is just one enormous being called the Community of Israel, so that our individual mistakes get lost in the crowd.

Concurrently, we *can* still maintain our individuality. While every zebra shares key traits – four legs and black and white stripes – each is unique. Likewise, we each have individual ways of connecting to God. Yet our souls are united in our mission on Yom Kippur; each is an invaluable and integral part of our nation.

Occasionally, I meet people who think they 'don't count' towards the collective, because they're 'not religious.' I went away for a weekend just after the Iran war and I attended a Friday night service in a hotel. Halfway through *Kabbalat Shabbat*, a lady walked in looking a little uncomfortable. I gestured to her to take the seat next to me, whispered "Shabbat Shalom" and offered her a *siddur*. She replied, "Shabbat Shalom, I'm not religious, I'm here to support my friend because he's saying *Kaddish* and

“ While every zebra shares key traits – four legs and black and white stripes – each is unique. Likewise, we each have individual ways of connecting to God. Yet our souls are united in our mission on Yom Kippur.”

that's something very meaningful to him." I could tell from her accent that she was Israeli, and I asked after her family. She said, "Thank God they're all OK, it's a complete miracle... we should probably pray, can you show me where they're up to?" She stood next to me, following in her *siddur*, joining in the parts she knew. Afterwards, we chatted some more and she told me she had hosted 11 strangers in her home last Shabbat who were stranded when there were no flights. As we said our goodbyes, I told her, "you might think you're



“ We have seen this year that missiles and bullets, murderers and arsonists, do not differentiate between different types of Jews. Likewise, our emotions. Every tragic news story we have heard has hurt us to the core, whilst every success has had us bursting with pride.”

not religious, but I think you are.”
“You’re right,” she said, “I’m a good person.”

In the Chazan’s repetition of the *Mussaf Amidah*, the congregation sings “*Ve’chol ma’aminim*, And all believe...” It goes through a list of things that supposedly all those present believe. For example:

All believe that He is a true Judge

All believe that He is good to all

All believe that He answers prayer

All believe that He is perfect in all His work.

Who can honestly say they have not questioned some of these beliefs this year? Some days it felt like God was on our side and we were invincible, and other days we wanted to shout at Him, “How could you?” through our tears of grief and anger. So, do we believe or do we not? Are we ‘religious’ or only sometimes? If, on your

bad days, you feel that your anger or pain are directed at God, and on your good days your thanks and praise, of course you are a believer. Our questions stem from the fact that we do believe; if it is all random, there are no questions. A real relationship has ups and downs; when the relationship flatlines, it means it is dead.

On 29th June, Sergeant Natan Rosenfeld z”l, originally from London, fell in battle in Gaza. His father, Avi, looked heavenward at his funeral in Ra’anana, and cried out, “God, I speak to you now: People who know me know my doubts, they know my fights. When you have grandparents who went into gas chambers and parents who had great sores and pains after the Second World War. We lost six million people. It is hard to sit down and say, ‘Yes, there is a God, and I believe, and I’m convinced.’ But I’m standing here at the moment where I have to make a decision, and my decision is: God, You’re above us, it all has a purpose, a much bigger purpose than we know about. We suffered the Holocaust, the 7th of October, all the families of the soldiers who

fell, and all the hostages who are now dead or are still there; the suffering is beyond belief. God, it’s enough! The people of Israel are good people. God save us, because it’s only You.”

We have seen this year that missiles and bullets, murderers and arsonists, do not differentiate between different types of Jews. Likewise, our emotions. Every tragic news story we have heard has hurt us to the core, whilst every success has had us bursting with pride. It is obvious to us now that there is a deep connection between the souls of all Jews, and that our individual deeds can affect people on the other side of the world.

On Yom Kippur, we return to this unity. Not to erase individuality, but to transcend it. Together, we dazzle. United, we are strong and can share our light with the world. We will share our integrity, our love of life and of each other, the essence of belonging to the Jewish nation. United, we share an infinite connection.

May God continue to make us the most miraculous and inspirational nation the world has ever seen.



Courtesy of www.ejpress.org



FROM THE SHEMA TO THE FIRST NAIL IN THE SUCCAH

BY: **RABBI GIDEON SYLVESTER**

US Israel Rabbi

IF NOT NOW,
WHEN?

As the *Ne'ilah* service reaches its climax and the gates of heaven begin to close, we recite the opening line of the *Shema*, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One". We all know it well, but how is it relevant to *Ne'ilah* in our current situation?

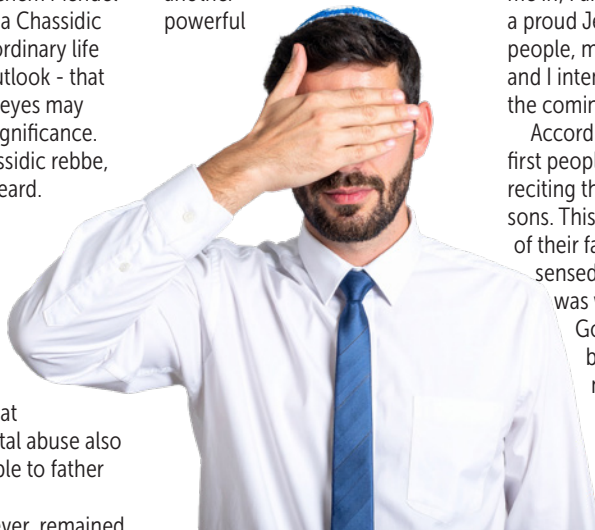
Normally, when we recite the first line of the *Shema* during the morning and evening services, we cover our eyes. That's because we understand that when we pray we are easily distracted, and we want to shut out anything that might diminish our concentration.¹

I heard from the Kaliver Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Taub (1923–2019) - a Chassidic leader whose extraordinary life surely shaped his outlook - that this covering of the eyes may have even deeper significance. Unusually for a Chassidic rebbe, the Rebbe had no beard. He also spoke in an exceptionally high-pitched voice; these were the after-effects of the experiments performed on him by Joseph Mengele at Auschwitz. That brutal abuse also left him sterile, unable to father a family.

The Rebbe, however, remained

a man of faith. He suggested that we cover our eyes as we say the first line of the *Shema* in order to block out the light; even in our darkest moments, when we cannot see any hope, we shouldn't give up but should continue to proclaim our faith. It is what Jews have done throughout our history and it is what we have heard from many of the released hostages and their families, whose deep faith and increasing Jewish observance have sustained them through these agonising times.²

The *Shema* carries with it another powerful



“ Even in our darkest moments, when we cannot see any hope, we shouldn't give up but should continue to proclaim our faith.”

message. At *Ne'ilah*, after our day of soul-searching, we are acutely aware of our imperfections. We also know that, since no one is perfect, we will inevitably stumble in the year ahead. The *Shema* is the moment when we say, "Count me in; I am not perfect, but I am a proud Jew, I identify with my people, my God and my heritage and I intend to be a better Jew in the coming year".

According to a *midrash*, the first people to affirm their faith by reciting the *Shema* were Jacob's sons. This happened at the end of their father's life, when Jacob sensed that his gift of prophecy was waning. He feared that God was abandoning him because his family were not fully aligned with his mission. His sons' affirmation of their faith came as a great relief. It led him to say "*Baruch shem kevod*

¹ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, 61: 5. The practice dates back to Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, see *Talmud Berachot* 13b.

² See for example, Rossella Tercatin, "*Shabbat kept me*": Many hostages and families have turned to faith in the face of trauma, *The Times of Israel*, 2 August 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/shabbat-kept-me-hostages-and-families-have-turned-to-faith-in-the-face-of-trauma/?utm_

malchuto leolam vaed" - Blessed be the honourable name of His kingship forever and ever. We insert this line after the opening verse of the *Shema*, declaring that our faith will live on forever.³

The first line of the *Shema*, containing the words "the Lord is our God, the Lord is One", which the brothers recited and which we now recite, is beautifully explained by Rashi (1040-1105). He tells us that, while we believe in one God (who teaches us loving-kindness, justice and compassion), many do not share our beliefs. But one day our faith will be vindicated; the God whom we worship will be acknowledged by everyone. In the meantime, our recitation of the *Shema* confirms our mission not only to observe God's laws but also to ultimately bring about universal acceptance of God.⁴

The recitation of the first line of the *Shema* leads us towards the end of the service, when the shofar is blown and we relax, knowing that the fast is over. A beautiful midrash captures our feelings. It portrays God calling out, "*Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart; for God has accepted your actions*" (*Kohelet/Ecclesiastes* 9:7). The message is tender and uplifting. We have fasted, we have confessed our misdeeds, God has forgiven us, and now he invites us to enjoy our well-deserved meal.⁵

My teacher, Rabbi Micky Rosen

used to say, "It's not so much how you fast that matters, but how you break your fast". By this he meant that the litmus test of our Yom Kippur comes after the fast. We are all hungry and anxious to eat, but will our meal reflect the commitments we have just made?

Our rabbis tell us to always pursue the first available mitzvah.⁶ So as soon as we have had something to eat, where possible, we begin building our succah — even if that's just knocking in the first nail.⁷ In the following days, we can complete the construction, purchase our *lulav* and *etrog*, invite guests for Shabbat and festival meals, enrol in new educational programmes and upgrade our synagogue attendance.

In this way, our Yom Kippur won't end with the blast of the shofar, or even after our first bite. Our reading of the *Shema* on Yom Kippur will enrich every day of our lives.



³ Talmud, *Pesachim* 56a.

⁴ See Rashi's commentary to *Devarim* 6: 4.

⁵ *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 2:4.

⁶ Talmud, *Pesachim*, 4a.

⁷ Commentary of the Rema to *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, 624: 5

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

YOM KIPPUR

1-2 OCTOBER | 10 TISHREI

WHO ARE YOU, REALLY?



BY: **RABBI TOBY WEINIGER**

St John's Wood
Synagogue

Yom Kippur is not *just* about fasting or saying sorry for what we did wrong. At its core, it's about rediscovering who we really are. For many teenagers – and honestly, for most adults too – one of the biggest questions is: *Who am I?* Am I a student, a footballer, a musician, a friend? And where does being Jewish fit into that?

This question is at the heart of the book of Jonah, which we read on Yom Kippur afternoon. God gives Jonah a mission: go to the city of Nineveh and tell them to change their ways. But

instead of listening, Jonah runs in the opposite direction. He boards a ship heading far away, hoping to hide from God and his responsibilities.

While he's on the boat, a massive storm hits. The sailors, terrified, start praying to their gods and throwing cargo overboard. Finally, they confront Jonah and ask him:

"Tell us – what is your job? Where do you come from? What is your country? Who are your people?"

They're asking him for his identity: *Who are you, really?*

Jonah answers with one short but powerful sentence:

"I am a Jew, and I fear Hashem, the God of Heaven."

According to the Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush Weissner, 1809-1879),

this single sentence answers all of their questions. When he says, "I am a Hebrew," he is telling them everything – where he's from, what his nation is, and even what kind of work he does. Because being a Jew isn't just a religion – it's an entire identity. It shapes where we go, how we act, what we value, and Who we serve. And when Jonah adds, "I fear Hashem," he's saying that his whole life is guided by something higher – God.

Yom Kippur forces us to stop and ask: *Who am I?* And the answer, at its most profound level, is: I'm a Jew and that's not just one part of me – it's all of me.

As contemporary Jewish singer Benny Friedman sings:

♪ *I'm a Jew and I'm proud, and I'll sing it out loud...* ♪

"Ivri Anochi" – I'm a Jew.

Yom Kippur Wordsearch

Find these words in the grid. The words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other.

W	I	J	V	X	I	O	W	E	F	F	O
Y	G	V	O	X	O	K	C	H	Y	H	R
O	Q	Z	R	L	K	O	W	Z	I	Q	T
M	R	K	Z	I	U	H	E	S	N	T	R
K	K	C	C	H	A	E	X	L	V	G	E
I	O	D	M	D	A	N	Z	M	A	X	C
P	L	S	D	B	N	N	O	U	B	H	Z
P	N	C	D	A	W	F	O	C	S	Z	W
U	I	I	N	E	I	L	A	J	H	C	M
R	D	W	X	G	B	S	J	Z	B	I	B
C	R	P	F	A	S	T	I	N	G	F	Y
L	E	T	T	I	K	X	V	C	J	W	L

IVRI ANOCHI

YOM KIPPUR

KOL NIDRE

FASTING

KITTEL

JONAH

WHALE

NEILA

WHITE

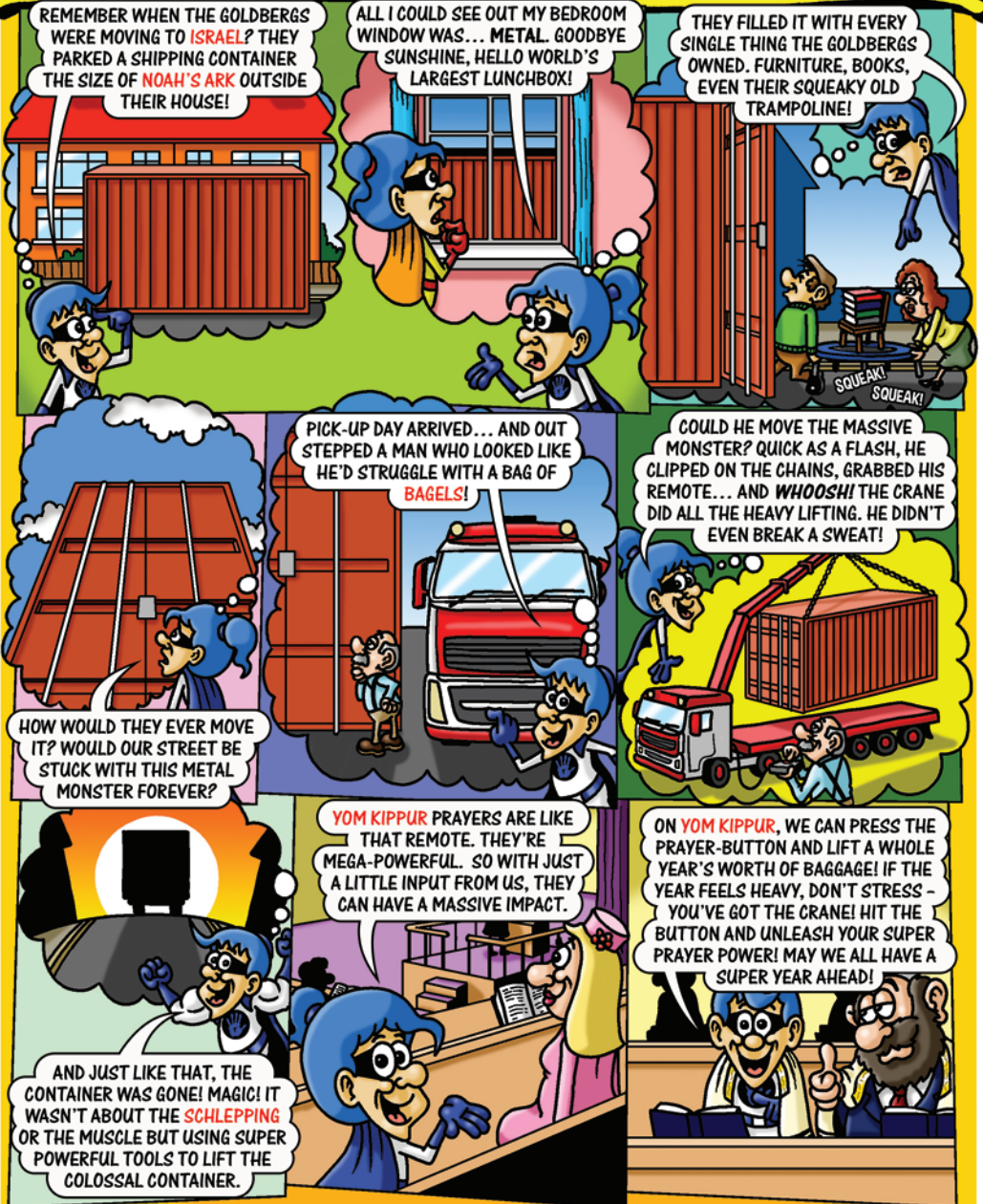
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THE TRIBE SCRIBE

YOM KIPPUR: LIFT OFF!



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