

DAF HASHAVUA

יּוֹם כִּיפּוּר | YOM KIPPUR

YOM KIPPUR ENDS:

London: 7.48pm
 Birmingham: 7.56pm
 Bournemouth: 7.58pm
 Cardiff: 8.03pm
 Dublin: 8.14pm
 Edinburgh: 8.07pm
 Glasgow: 8.11pm
 Hull: 7.56pm
 Leeds: 7.56pm
 Liverpool: 8.04pm
 Manchester: 7.59pm
 Nottingham: 7.57pm
 Sheffield: 7.59pm
 Southend: 7.44pm
 Southport: 8.06pm
 Jerusalem: 7.14pm



THE TRIBE WEEKLY

YOM KIPPUR

20-21 SEPTEMBER | 10 TISHREI

FACE TIME WITH THE DIVINE



BY: **HANNAH BANK**

Tribe Educator,
Hertfordshire region
and Rebbezen BES
@ Yavneh

What makes a guest coming to visit special? It is rarely the gift that your visitor brings. The joy comes from simple fact that they came. Their time and presence say, “you matter to me.”

On Yom Kippur we stand before God asking for forgiveness and hoping to be inscribed for a good year. In addition to this, there is another side to Yom Kippur, an opportunity to enjoy the fact that God wants a relationship with us.

Rabbi Yehudah Amital (a prominent Israeli rabbi, 1924-2010) used this idea about the role of prayer and our relationship with God in an analogy.

Imagine three grown children whose elderly parent lives in a care home in another town. The first child is able to visit regularly, does so and personally brings them the shopping from the weekly list. The second child, further away, sends a cheque every month and sets up an online supermarket delivery. The third child, perhaps overseas, sets up a standing order, ensuring the money arrives automatically without any further effort.

All three children provide for their parent’s needs. Yet if you were the parent, which relationship is the one you are most likely to prefer? The first child does more than fulfil an obligation. They come in person and spends time with their parent. They happen to have brought the essentials, but the relationship itself matters.

During the year when we are busy,

our prayers can resemble the second or third child. We do pray and we keep the routines, but Yom Kippur reminds us that God wants us to connect with Him and spend time with him.

When we pray, we are not simply submitting requests or reciting words. We are entering into a conversation, our “facetime” with God. We turn up, just as the devoted child shows up for a parent.

The prophet Yeshayahu captures this idea in the words

“Seek God when He may be found; call to Him when He is near” (Isaiah, 55:6).

On Yom Kippur, God is especially close, waiting not only to hear our requests but also to welcome our presence. Like the child who makes the journey to visit their parent, our task is to show up and invest in our relationship with God.

Yom Kippur – Story of Yonah (Jonah)

Reorganise the boxes below to tell the story of Yonah and the big fish



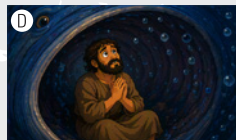
A huge storm threatens to sink the ship. The sailors pray – but Yonah sleeps.



The people of Nineveh listen and do full *teshuvah* – everyone, even the king.



God tells Yonah to go to the city of Nineveh and warn them to do *teshuvah* (repent).



God sends a big fish to save Yonah. Inside, Yonah finally prays.



Yonah struggles with God’s compassion. God teaches him about caring for all people.



Yonah admits the storm is because of him and tells them to throw him overboard.



Instead of listening, Yonah runs away – trying to escape his mission.



Yonah gets a second chance – and this time, he goes.



YOM KIPPUR AS A SABBATH OF SABBATHS

BY: **RABBI MICHAEL LAITNER**

US Director of Education & Head of Research at the Rabbi Sacks Legacy

For British Jews in particular, Yom Kippur will never be the same as it was prior to last year's attack on Heaton Park Synagogue, a horrific event the likes of which we pray never to see again. Today is the first anniversary of that attack and the first *yahrzeit* for Adrian Daulby and Melvin Cravitz of blessed memory. We send ongoing wishes of *nechama*, comfort, to their families and our very best to Rabbi Daniel Walker and the Heaton Park community.

Some years ago, I participated in a fascinating interfaith discussion on the concept of a Sabbath. At a certain point, deliberations turned to the position of the philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-73). On the one hand, Mill was antagonistic towards Christian-focused Sabbath legislation in the UK (think of the old Sunday trading laws, for example) which he viewed as a hindrance to individuals. Yet, conversely, he remained positive about the institution of the Jewish Shabbat

with all that it entails, albeit for Jews only, as "a highly beneficial custom"¹, distinguished from the Christian Sabbath.

Mill's position on Shabbat was pivotal in our discussion of two points. A. Today, which Sabbath would participants choose if they were starting from scratch? B. What can Shabbat, the original Sabbath on the final day of Creation, teach us for our times?

In this special Yom Kippur edition, we invite you to consider the implications of both questions.

Why on Yom Kippur? As you will explore in this edition, Yom Kippur is a day of great holiness, a unique Shabbat – albeit with greater restrictions. It is the day when we can be free of everyday distractions to focus, be more present, on why and how I am Jew, how I am part of a people and something bigger than myself and what this impels me to do. This edition of the Daf explores Yom Kippur through six engaging touchpoints for all Jews, including its connection to

the lived experiences of Shabbat, a true Sabbath of Sabbaths, to take into the year ahead.

Let's go back to that interfaith discussion. Mill would in all likelihood have chosen Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath, for part A. What, though, would he have said today about the second question, had he been in the room? We hope that we have provided some answers in this Daf.

**On behalf of the US,
we wish you and
yours a safe fast and
gemar chatimah tovah,
a good end to the
Yamim Noraim Holy
day period. May
God answer all of our
prayers for the good.**

¹ *On Liberty*, ch.4



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United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

Produced by US Education & Events together with the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue

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OUR TAILOR-MADE MISSIONS

BY: **RABBI BARUCH DAVIS**

Daf Hashavua Editor-in-Chief

Yom Kippur is a day, but it's also a journey, like no other in this world.

In its opening moments, we declare that "light is sown for the righteous", and then we grant permission to those who have left the fold to join us in prayer. As we then move on to Kol Nidre, with its beautiful, haunting tune, our minds are drawn to moments in our history when the fate of entire communities hung in the balance. Perhaps this year we will think about the huge rise in antisemitism that threatens our communities and the State of Israel.

Yizkor on Yom Kippur seems to be extra special, as if we are bringing the souls of our departed loved ones right here to us at this sacred time. We also remember Jewish martyrs through the ages, the Holocaust, Israel's losses and victims of terror, right up to the present day.

In the afternoon, at *Mincha*, we read about the prophet Yonah (Jonah), from whom we understand that we all have a mission in this life, sometimes a

very challenging one! Yonah tried to run away from his mission – to bring the citizens of Nineveh to repentance – but God arranged the storm and the fish. Then Yonah understood that he had to fulfil his God-given mission, even though he continued to question it.

All the many parts of the Yom Kippur services are held together by *Vidui* (Confessionary prayers), parts of which seem designed to shock us. For example, the last paragraph of the private Confessionary prayer that we recite at the end of every *Amidah* says:

"Elokai, ad shelo notzarti, eini kedai... My God, before I was formed, I was of no worth, and now that I have been formed, it is as if I had not been formed. I am dust while alive; how much more so when I am dead!"

Do our lives have no worth at all? And why is this prayer in the first person singular, unlike the rest of *Vidui*? We say *ashamnu*, *bagadnu* – **we** have sinned, **we** have betrayed and *al chet shechatanu lefanecha* – for the

sin that **we** have committed...

Rabbi Joseph B. Soleveitchik, one of the leading rabbis of the 20th century, notes that we actually recite the *Vidui* twice in each of the five Yom Kippur services, the private *Vidui* in the silent *Amidah*, and the public *Vidui* said as part of the Chazan's repetition of the *Amidah*.

He notes several significant differences between the two.

The private *Vidui* is recited after we have finished the *Amidah*, whereas the public *Vidui* is said in the middle blessing of the Chazan's repetition. The language of the private *Vidui* is quite harsh, as we have seen, whereas the public *Vidui* contains singing. Even the song "*Ki Anu Amecha*", for we are Your people, a popular and joyful song, is part of the public *Vidui*.

Rabbi Soleveitchik points out that this shows that congregational prayer has far greater power than private prayer. Only a congregation may interrupt the *Amidah* with the *Vidui*. Only they can sing out optimistically at such a time,

YOM KIPPUR TORAH READING SUMMARY

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

“ Each of us has personal capabilities that are meant be used to fulfil a unique mission that can only be achieved in that time and place.

– Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook

because a congregation united in prayer has huge spiritual strength! God far more readily forgives a congregation united in prayer than individuals.

If so, why then do we recite the private *Vidui*? It is because, even when we are part of a congregation, we still have to assume individual responsibility. Here we come to the powerful, uplifting words of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-State Israel. He explains the prayer “*Elokai ad shelo notzarti*” as follows:

Each of us is born into this world in a specific time and place. Each of us has personal capabilities that are meant to be used to fulfil a unique mission that can only be achieved in that time and place. Indeed, “before I was created, I wasn’t worthy,” because had I been born in an earlier era, I would have been worthless, unable to accomplish my purpose for

both myself and the master plan of the progression of history.

The Strauss brothers, Nathan and Isador, owners of Macy’s Department Store and amongst American Jewry’s greatest philanthropists, visited pre-State Israel in early 1912 with their wives and saw firsthand the struggles with poverty, health and sanitation. When the time came for them to leave, Nathan and his wife Lina opted to remain longer,

filled with a sense of mission – so much needed to be done and he had the means to do it. He established the medical centre on Rechov Strauss in Jerusalem and introduced milk pasteurisation as he had done in the United States, saving the lives of thousands of babies. The city of Netanya was named for him.

Each of us has our own individual mission, which only we can fulfil. These are challenging times for *Am Yisrael*. Most of us don’t have the means of Nathan Strauss z”l, but each of us is blessed with unique talents and circumstances and therefore has a unique role to play, as individuals and as communities. On Yom Kippur, this Sabbath of Sabbaths, we have the time to think what might that be.

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



BEING PRESENT ON YOM KIPPUR

BY: **RABBI MATT MARKS**

Executive Head of Tribe

Both Shabbat and Yom Kippur are referred to by the Torah as *Shabbat Shabbaton*, a Sabbath of Sabbaths. To understand Yom Kippur, begin with Shabbat, the weekly day of rest (*menucha*), when we set our work aside for twenty-five hours. And to understand Shabbat rest, it's helpful to start with a Talmudic puzzle:

The Talmud, the great record of rabbinic law and argument, imagines a marriage with enough servants that no work need be done, where one may simply 'sit in a chair' all day (*Ketubot* 59b). Concerned about this lifestyle, the sages insisted, no one should be left with nothing to do: to stop working is not the same as resting well.

The women of Mechuza, a prosperous Babylonian town, became the Talmud's shorthand for a life of such ease. They refrain from *melacha*, the creative work forbidden on Shabbat, exactly as required. But that is only because they refrain from all work, every day. Their Shabbat looks identical to their Tuesday.

So here is the question: have

they experienced *menucha*, the rest the day is really reaching for, or have they merely rested, downed tools, as they do every day?

If rest were only the absence of work, a person who never works would be resting every day of their life. Plainly they are not. To stop is not yet to rest. *Menucha* is not the gap left behind when work stops, it is something positive we have to do.

Our Shabbat prayers pair *menucha* with *kedusha*, rest and holiness. Not rest and emptiness. This is the real question of the day, what does holy rest look like?

Let me try to answer in the most authentically Jewish way possible, with a meal.

For our fifth wedding anniversary, my wife and I were treated to the chef's tasting menu at La Régence, in the King David in Jerusalem. Dishes were set alight at the table, then covered, so the smoke would infuse the food beneath. This was not food. It was art. We savoured every mouthful, turning each course over slowly, letting it surprise us.

“To stop is not yet to rest. *Menucha* is not the gap left behind when work stops, it is something positive we have to do.

Others in the room were having a different evening. At one table, a man scrolled through the whole meal, checking his shares, scanning for opportunities, chasing the next small hit of dopamine. As each course arrived, it was wolfed down as the next was waved in before the first had touched teeth.

Nearby, another couple photographed every plate, adjusting the angle for the light. Once the photo was captured, they lost interest in the food. They were so present to how the food looked that the taste passed them by.

We had all ordered the same menu. We were not at the same meal.

The chef had laboured over

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.

that menu with intention. Every dish was made to be received a particular way: tasted, lingered over, enjoyed slowly. The man with his phone and the couple with their cameras had broken no rule. They had simply missed what was made for them, the art set before them while they were somewhere else.

Shabbat is connecting to a world made with us, for us, with intention - the way that meal was made. A creation we are invited not to rush past or merely record, but to receive as intended: present to the food, to the people across the table, to the quiet beneath the noise. Holy rest is not the absence of activity. It is being fully present in a world prepared, deliberately.

It is more restful to drive than to walk, but when we walk to our destination we engage in rest in a mode that driving doesn't offer. We are more attentive to the people we meet and to the world we move through, and so, perhaps, to its Creator.

Not absence of driving, but a different way of being.

The most restful hours I know are rarely the empty ones. They are the long Shabbat afternoons around a table no one is in a hurry to leave, the conversation that wanders without checking the time, the book in which you

find yourself so immersed that the world passes you by, the board game with the children that you actually play rather than endure. Each is doing one thing, completely. And in that completeness, something quietyens. We hear ourselves again, and the people beside us, as the inner stillness arrives on its own.

Yom Kippur strips almost everything away so that this becomes possible. No food, no work, no distraction. It clears the table. It removes the courses we eat without thinking, and leaves only what was ever nourishing: honesty, presence, the people beside us, the quiet in which we hear who we are and who we want to become.

Yom Kippur asks us to rest. Not because there is nothing left to do, but because there is everything

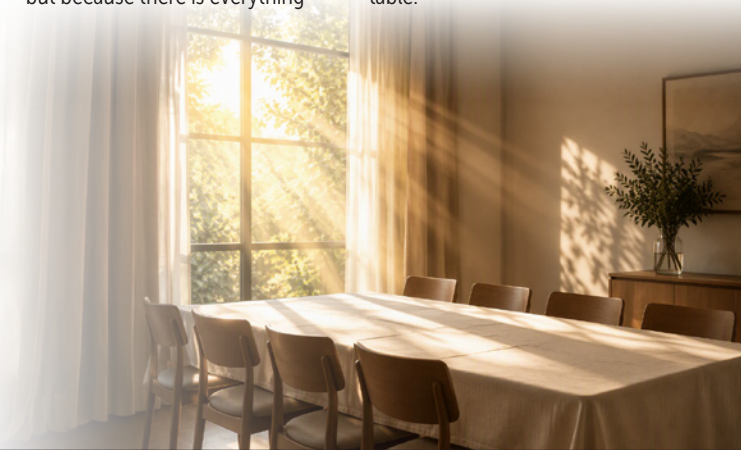
“ Yom Kippur asks us to rest. Not because there is nothing left to do, but because there is everything left to notice.

left to notice. Not because the table is empty, but because, for once, we might think more carefully about who we set it for, and for what reason.

We will all sit down to the same day.

The menu is fixed: the same prayers, the same hours, the same ancient words.

The only thing that differs, the only thing that has ever differed, is whether we are truly there at the table.



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.



SANCTITY REVEALED

BY: **RABBI DR YONI BIRNBAUM**

Finchley United Synagogue

A few years ago, scientists unveiled one of the most ambitious computing projects ever attempted. Named *Spinnaker*, it was designed to imitate the workings of the human brain, boasting a million processing cores and extraordinary computing power. Yet there was an important qualification. Even this remarkable machine could reproduce only a tiny fraction of the complexity of the human mind.

King Solomon expressed the same truth in a single verse: *‘L’adam ma’archei lev, u’mHashem ma’aneh lashon’* – ‘A person’s heart is full of many thoughts, but the fitting response comes from God (*Mishlei/Proverbs* 16:1, and included in the Chazan’s repetition of the *Musaf Amidah*). Our inner world is astonishingly complex. We rarely think just one thought at a time, and even more infrequently know with certainty which thoughts deserve our attention.

Perhaps that is one reason why Yom Kippur feels so different

from every other day of the year. It strips life back to its essentials. Removed from many of the distractions that normally occupy us, we are given the opportunity to focus on a single question: what does a life of *kedushah*, sanctity, actually look like?

Nowhere is this question explored more vividly than through the *Avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol*, the Yom Kippur Temple Service carried out by the High Priest. The *Avodah* is marked by an almost painstaking precision. Nothing is incidental and every detail matters. Yet one feature stands out above all others – the entire service rests on one individual. On the holiest day of the year, in the holiest place on earth, one human being carries the spiritual hopes of an entire nation as he enters the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, the holiest part of the Temple. Why is this the case?

Although Yom Kippur is often described as the holiest day of the year, I wonder if we spend enough time asking what holiness actually means. We sometimes imagine *kedushah* as something

“The purpose of Yom Kippur is not simply to witness *kedushah* but to carry something of it back into our homes, our workplaces and our communities.

mystical, reserved for exceptional people living exceptional lives. The *Avodah* suggests something more powerful. The *Kohen Gadol* is not superhuman. His greatness lies solely in his complete dedication to the task before him. For one day, every thought and every action is directed towards bringing the Divine Presence into the heart of the Jewish people.

The Torah concentrates holiness into one person not because holiness belongs to an elite, but because we understand something best when we first encounter it in its clearest form. Like a beam of light passing through a lens, the *Avodah* brings into focus what is often difficult

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 Yafa, down onto a ship and down into the cabin, where he went to sleep.

God brought a huge, violent storm,

“ Like a beam of light passing through a lens, the *Avodah* brings into focus what is often difficult to recognise in the ordinary rhythm of life.

to recognise in the ordinary rhythm of life.

The challenge is that Yom Kippur does not last forever. *Neilah* comes to an end, the shofar sounds and life resumes its familiar pace. The clarity of the day can easily give way once again to the complexity of *ma'archei lev*, the many pathways of the human heart. Yet perhaps that is precisely why we revisit the *Avodah* each year. Not because we imagine ourselves entering the Holy of Holies, but because it reminds us that sanctity was never meant to remain there. The purpose of Yom Kippur is not simply to witness *kedushah* but to carry something of it back into our homes, our workplaces and our communities.

Seen in this light, one of the most familiar of all Jewish practices takes on a new meaning. When someone close to us passes away, the prayer that becomes most closely associated with mourning is *Kaddish*. It contains no mention of death. Instead, it begins with a declaration of sanctity: *Yitgadal*

ve'yitkadash Shemei Rabba – 'May His great Name be exalted and sanctified.' Why do we say these particular words at this moment?

Perhaps the reason is that every person brings a unique measure of *kedushah* into the world. No two people sanctify God's Name in quite the same way. When someone dies, that unique expression of holiness is no longer present. Something irreplaceable has gone. But our response is not merely to remember what has been lost. It is to resolve that the work of sanctifying God's Name will continue. In proclaiming *Yitgadal ve'yitkadash*, the mourner affirms that although one source of sanctity has departed, the responsibility to bring God's presence into the world now rests with those who remain.

This is the lasting gift of Yom Kippur. On this day we describe the extraordinary sight of a single human being standing before God with absolute clarity of purpose. The *Kohen Gadol* reminds us what is possible when

a life is wholly directed towards something greater than itself – and that it is through this that we come to reveal what sanctity actually is.

Most of us will never experience moments that resemble the *Avodah*. Our opportunities for *kedushah* are quieter than that: a conversation conducted with patience, an act of generosity unnoticed by anyone else, a prayer offered with sincerity, the effort to create a home in which others feel valued, a difficult choice made because it is the right one rather than the easy one.

Yom Kippur does not ask us to become *Kohanim Gedolim*. It asks us to understand what the *Kohen Gadol* was there to teach. Yom Kippur begins by showing us sanctity in one person, on one day, in one place. It ends by inviting us to recognise it wherever we are.

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.



YOM KIPPUR - THE ULTIMATE JOY

BY: **REBBETZEN JACQUELINE FELDMAN**

Bushy & District Synagogue

There is a unique feeling in many houses that arrives on Friday afternoon as Shabbat approaches. The house begins to glow with candlelight, the table is set, familiar smells drift from the kitchen, and somehow the rush of the week starts to soften. For one precious day, we stop chasing the world outside and turn back toward one another. Phones are put away and time itself seems to slow down.

That feeling is what Judaism calls *oneg* - delight.

Oneg Shabbat, experiencing joy on Shabbat, is not simply about comfort or good food, though those are part of it. It is the deep joy of being present. The joy of knowing that for one day, we do not need to achieve, produce, answer emails, or prove ourselves. Shabbat reminds us that our value comes not from what we do, but from who we are.

Whilst at a wedding abroad, we met an American couple who couldn't quite understand the United Synagogue model of traditional Orthodox Judaism. We explained that our communities value lighting candles and enjoying Friday

night and Shabbat together, even if not all our members are keeping every halachic element. This couple remarked how they remembered at the start of their married life and when their children were young that they sometimes lit candles and had Friday night dinner together, but sadly they, and their friends, no longer held on to these traditions.

This reminded me of the Yiddish phrase that was often shared in pre-war America - *shver tzu zein a Yid* - it's hard to be a Jew. That phrase carried the pain of generations who struggled to hold onto Judaism under very challenging circumstances. When Jewish immigrants first arrived in America, many worked in factories or shops that demanded a six-day work week. Every Friday afternoon they would leave early for Shabbat knowing that every Monday morning they would need to find a new job. Their *mesirat nefesh*, self-sacrifice, for Shabbat was so admirable. Week after week, people lost livelihoods to hold onto Shabbat. And yet, many of their children left the path of

“ Shabbat reminds us that our value comes not from what we do, but from who we are.

traditional Orthodox Judaism. Judaism became associated with sacrifice, with “oy.”

But Judaism was never meant to stay in the world of “oy.” It was always meant to lead us toward *oneg*. *Oneg Shabbat* always means the best nosh, *rogelach*, “Shabbat” cereals (Frosties rather than Cornflakes in our home!), all to make sure Shabbat feels special.

Now what does this have to do with Yom Kippur?

At first glance, Yom Kippur does not seem like a joyful day. We fast. We spend hours in shul. We confront our mistakes. Yet the Torah calls Yom Kippur *Shabbat Shabbaton* - the Shabbat of Shabbat, the ultimate Shabbat. Rather than the Day of Atonement being the saddest day of the year, it is in fact the happiest day of the year in which we have the most sublime experience of Shabbat in its holiest sense.

Yom Kippur embodies the joy of return, of being able to begin again, of knowing that no matter how far we have drifted, the gates are still open. Just through the power of

“ Yom Kippur strips away the noise that normally defines us. We are not our jobs, our achievements, or our failures. We are simply souls.

immersing ourselves in the day, our souls are cleansed and our slate is wiped clean. We stand without food or drink, without distractions, just beautiful souls standing before God, exactly as we are, with the tremendous joy of feeling God's closeness to us without any barriers.

Yom Kippur strips away the noise that normally defines us. We are not our jobs, our achievements, or our failures. We are simply souls.

And in that simplicity, there is enormous peace and joy. In the words of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel: *There were no days as joyous for the Jewish people as Yom Kippur (Mishna Ta'anit 4:8)*

I remember once teaching a class where I mentioned that children who are too young to fast on Yom Kippur should be given special treats because it is *Shabbat Shabbaton, the Ultimate Shabbat*. One young woman in her twenties turned to her mother in horror and said, "We were allowed treats?!" She had grown up seeing Yom Kippur only through the lens of seriousness, where sweets were not allowed. But Judaism does not want children to experience Yom Kippur as punishment. And, indeed, many people misinterpret the seriousness of Yom Kippur and the requirement to fast as being a day of sadness. Even within the fasting, there is meant to be warmth, holiness, and yes, joy.

The older I get, the more I think Judaism survives not through fear or guilt, but through joy. People can only transmit

what they love. If Shabbat feels heavy, endless, or restrictive, it becomes difficult to pass on. But when we feel the warmth of Friday night, when Judaism tastes like chicken soup and singing and laughter and being together, then we carry the joy of Shabbat forever.

The same is true of Yom Kippur. Of course it is serious, it asks things of us. But beneath the seriousness is something profoundly uplifting: the belief that we can change, that we are loved, and that every year we are given another chance to come home to ourselves.

That is not "oy."

That is o(y)neg.

“ Yom Kippur embodies the joy of return, of being able to begin again, of knowing that no matter how far we have drifted, the gates are still open.

The phrase *Oneg Shabbat* is actually first mentioned in the Haftarah we read on Yom Kippur morning, in the very last 2 lines: "*V'karata laShabbat oneg*" "And you shall call Shabbat a delight." (Isaiah 58:13)





AGUDAH ACHAT: THE HOLINESS OF COMING TOGETHER

BY: **RABBI NICKY LISS**

Highgate Synagogue and US Director of Rabbimics

One of the most powerful phrases in the *Yamim Noraim* (High Holidays) davening is also one of the most ambitious: “*veyei’asu chulam agudah achat...*”, “and they will be **bound all together as one**, to carry out Your will with an undivided heart.”

It expresses a vision not only of personal repentance but of collective purpose. On the holiest days of the year, we pray that all humanity will be united in the service of God.

The language of the prayer is strikingly universal, but we encounter that universal aspiration through a distinctly Jewish experience and Yom Kippur repeatedly teaches us what such unity looks like within our own community.

Each of us has the opportunity to reflect on our own actions and aspirations. Yet, Yom Kippur repeatedly reminds us that Judaism does not see us as isolated individuals. We confess in the plural e.g. *Ashamnu*, we have sinned. Even if I have not

“ **A kehilla, a community, is only fully formed when we recognise that it encompasses the present, the absent and the remembered.**

committed every wrongdoing listed, I recite it as part of a collective. The responsibilities of the Jewish people belong, in some measure, to us all. A responsibility which also presents us with a beautiful opportunity, to pray on behalf of others, for we are one people.

That is the meaning of *agudah achat*. It does not require uniformity. Jewish communities have always encompassed different personalities, backgrounds and experiences. Some arrive in shul feeling deeply connected; others arrive searching for connection, and others arrive uncertain of where they fit. The prayer is not that we become the same, but that we become united by a common purpose: *la’asot retzoncha b’levav shalem*, to do God’s will with a complete heart.

There is a profound difference between a crowd and a community. A crowd is simply people occupying the same space. A community exists when people feel responsible for one another. A crowd stands near each other; a community stands with each other.

On Yom Kippur we experience that distinction most powerfully. We gather for *Kol Nidrei*, confess together through the *Vidui*, remember loved ones through *Yizkor*, and conclude with the stirring prayers of *Ne’ilah*. We

“ **The holiness of a community is measured not only by the beauty of its services, but by the warmth of its embrace.**

stand shoulder to shoulder as members of a covenantal community bound by faith, history and destiny.

The very word *agudah* suggests binding things together. Just as the four species of the *lulav*, *etrog*, *hadassim* and *aravot* on Succot become one mitzvah when held together, so too a community achieves its highest purpose when diverse individuals are united through shared responsibility and care.

I was reminded of this last year at Highgate Shul. Following the horrors of 7 October, our community “adopted” Emily Damari, who was being held hostage in Gaza. Throughout her captivity, a seat was reserved for her in the synagogue. Week after week, month after month, only her photograph occupied the chair. Yet in a very real sense, she was present among us.

For nearly 500 days, that empty seat reminded us to pray, hope and refuse to forget. Children from visiting schools asked about it, visitors noticed

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it. We had not simply reserved a chair; we had reserved a place. When Emily was eventually released and came to visit, there was an outpouring of emotion and an overwhelming sense of gratitude. We were celebrating not only the return of an individual, but the return of someone who had become part of our communal story. As a member subsequently wrote on the Shul WhatsApp group, “our shul is complete again”.

That simple act captured something fundamental about Jewish life. Emily was not physically with us, yet she remained part of us. Her pain mattered to us, her absence mattered to us, and her return mattered to us. That is what it means to be an *agudah achat*. The suffering and joy of one Jew can become the concern of an entire community. Shabbat, the day she visited, and by extension Yom Kippur, is the day which unites all Jews into *agudah achat* as a uniquely Jewish day.

Perhaps that is what we are truly asking for when we pray for an *agudah achat*: not merely that we gather in the same building, but that we genuinely notice one another. The holiness of a community is measured not only

by the beauty of its services, but by the warmth of its embrace.

And that embrace extends beyond those who are physically present. Every Yom Kippur we become acutely aware of those who should be sitting beside us but are not. We think of family members living far away, friends facing illness or loneliness, and members who can no longer attend as they once did. We also notice the seats left empty by those who have passed away.

Through *Yizkor*, we are reminded that the boundaries of community extend across generations. Those who came before us helped build

the communities we inherit. Their values, sacrifices and commitments continue to shape who we are. Though no longer physically present, they remain part of our story, our memories and our prayers.

The phrase concludes with the words *belevav shalem*, with a complete heart. A *kehilla*, a community, is only fully formed when we recognise that it encompasses the present, the absent and the remembered; those sitting beside us, those we long to see return, and those whose memory continues to inspire us.





LET GO, LET HIM

BY: **REBBETZEN RINA SHINDLER**

Cockfosters & N Southgate Synagogue

A World Cup manager spends years building a team. He throws his all into building the best team capable of winning the ultimate prize of honour in the football world. Days, months, years of hard work and effort coalesce together step by step until the moment when the match starts. As the 90-minute countdown begins, he faces an undeniable truth: He cannot kick the ball, make the pass, or control the referee. The work he has put in is finished. All he can do is sit back, crack his knuckles and call on the wisdom of knowing where his control ends.

During the six days of creation, God created the illusion of us being in control. Sunday to Friday, we walk through the world – exactly as God intended – managing, organising, co-ordinating, producing, problem solving, acting like we own our lives and taking full responsibility for navigating our life. Shabbat is the day where we relinquish this illusory control. Where we embody the truth of God being in control of everything, always. We give a rest to the idea that if I

do not manage every detail, my world will unravel. The ‘resting’ that we do is specifically from work defined as *‘melacha’*. *Melacha* refers to work that is creative, work that implies mastery over the world, work that, when we stop, reminds us that we are not the Creator but created in the image of the divine where our power comes from.

This level of trust is something that develops through practice. I remember being 13 years old, at summer camp, when we were invited to do some trust-building exercises. We had to drop ourselves backward into the waiting arms of our bunkmates. I was asked to let go of any instinct to catch myself and trust that my friends would catch me and keep me from getting hurt.

I remember feeling nervous, but also certain that it was going to be okay. I stood with my back to a group of girls lined up behind me on either side. I felt sure they would catch me. I closed my eyes and let myself fall. There was a fraction of a moment of fear when I was in freefall, completely unable to

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catch myself, before I felt their arms holding me up together. The moment they caught me, that solid sense of trust was so rewarding – but it was a feeling I could not have had without letting go and allowing myself to feel the fear.

When we stop for Shabbat, we give ourselves the space to notice how the sun rises, our hearts keep beating, and how, surprisingly, God sustains the world without our intervention. There is a rhythm to working, to feeling like we control our own outcomes and being productive, and leaving work unfinished can initially feel daunting. As with all spiritual practices, trying it out or experimenting with it whilst taking it slowly and mindfully helps us achieve our aims more successfully in the long term.

Interestingly, the resting of Yom Kippur, the “five *inuyim*,” are also referred to with the

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“ Our faith flourishes when we stop trying to control everything and we remember in whose hands we are being carried.

same root verb as Shabbat, that of ש-ב-ת, *Shevita*, resting. Not only do we rest from the creative activities of Shabbat, but we also let go of still further illusions of self-sufficiency – we do not eat, drink, or engage in specifically human physical comforts and pleasures.

On Yom Kippur, we stand before God, taking responsibility for what is ours to own. To take responsibility for our many actions over the course of the past year, we must be able to clearly differentiate between what is ours to carry and what is not. For Yom Kippur to offer us the atonement and spiritual cleansing we need and want, we must be able to let go of the mistakes that come from trying to control what is beyond us.

The Talmud (*Berachot* 33b) tells us: “*Hakol b’ydei shamayim chutz miyirat shamayim*” - Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for awe of

Heaven.

On Yom Kippur, we take radical responsibility for things we have and have not done. We take ownership of where we went wrong and commit to trying to do better in the future. An important part of this process is acknowledging the limits of our control and letting go of the illusion of self-sufficiency. Our choices are ours and ours alone. Everything else is up to God.

Of course, this resting or letting go or cessation of work and productivity requires us to tap into our faith; faith that we are held, even when it feels a little bit like freefall and we don’t know for sure how things will turn out. Our faith flourishes when we stop trying to control everything and we remember in whose hands we are being carried.

Yom Kippur invites us into the real world - the one God created and sustains, where

we have both the freedom and the responsibility to live up to our maximum potential, living life both inside and above the illusion. May this Yom Kippur bring out in all of us the capacity to let go of that which is not ours and getting in the way of what, ultimately, is.

THE TRIBE SCRIBE

The Jordan Pact

Representatives from the tribes of **Gad** and **Reuven** (Reuben) came to **Moshe** (Moses)...

THIS LAND EAST OF THE **RIVER JORDAN** IS PERFECT FOR OUR SHEEP AND CATTLE.

YES, IT'S SUCH AMAZINGLY LUSCIOUS GRASS! CAN WE LIVE HERE, **MOSHE**?

THAT'S ABSOLUTELY FINE. YOU CAN HAVE THIS LAND. BUT ONLY IF ALL THE STRONG MEN HELP THE OTHER TRIBES SETTLE THE LAND WEST OF THE **RIVER JORDAN**.

OF COURSE! WE PROMISE! OUR FAMILIES WILL STAY HERE, BUT OUR STRONG MEN WILL CROSS THE **RIVER JORDAN** AND HELP.

THEY WILL STAY UNTIL ALL THE OTHER TRIBES SAFELY HAVE THEIR OWN PIECE OF LAND ON WHICH TO LIVE.

Just before **Moshe** died...

BEFORE I PASS AWAY, **YEHOSHUA** (JOSHUA), I WANT TO REMIND YOU ABOUT THE PROMISE OF THE TRIBES OF **GAD** AND **REUVEN**. THEY MAY SETTLE EAST OF THE **RIVER JORDAN**, BUT THEY MUST FIRST HELP THE OTHER TRIBES.

Later, half of the tribe of **Menashe** was also given land east of the **River Jordan**. They agreed to keep the same promise.

Now that **Yehoshua** is the leader, he gathers the tribes of **Gad**, **Reuven** and **Menashe**.

WE ARE PROUD MEMBERS OF **ISRAEL**, AND WE WILL STAND STRONG WITH OUR BROTHERS!

NOW IS THE TIME. YOU MAY LIVE HERE, WHEN THE OTHER TRIBES CROSS THE **RIVER JORDAN** - BUT FIRST, YOU MUST HELP THE REST OF THE NATION SETTLE IN THE LAND.

WE GAVE OUR WORD AND WE WILL STAY UNTIL EVERY LAST TRIBE HAS A HOME.

Those who could not help settle the land all agreed that they would stay peacefully east of the **River Jordan**, trusting that their fathers, sons and brothers would return once the mission was completed.

Keeping our promises builds trust, makes us strong and helps our community. Just like it did for them.

JUST LIKE WE TRUSTED **MOSHE'S** EVERY WORD, SO TOO WE WILL TRUST YOU **YEHOSHUA**. BE STRONG AND HAVE COURAGE!

WE ARE ALMOST READY TO CROSS OVER INTO THE **PROMISED LAND**.

Writer: Rabbi Nicky Goldmeier Cartoonist: Paul Solomons

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