

Temple Beth Abraham



תפילת יצחק
Tefillat Yitzchak:
Guide for High Holiday Services

By Rabbi Jon Spira-Savett

Contents

An Overall Perspective on Jewish Prayer

Glossary of Terms for High Holidays and Services

Choreography of the Service

Praying During the *Yamim Noraim* (High Holidays)

Rosh Hashanah Services: Explanations

Yom Kippur Services: Explanations

Diagram: The Trajectory of a Morning Service

Tefillat Yitzchak, the name of this pamphlet, means "the prayer of Yitzchak." Yitzchak is my Hebrew name. It is also the name of our biblical ancestor Yitzchak (Isaac), son of Avraham and Sarah, whose family features so prominently in the prayers and Torah readings of the High Holidays.

Works of Jewish teaching often bear the name of the rabbi who wrote it. It is my intent to teach increasingly about prayer and especially about particular prayers. As I do, I will continue to publish my handouts and explanations, always under this name of *Tefillat Yitzchak*.

Tefillat Yitzchak: A Perspective on Jewish Prayer **Rabbi Jon Spira-Savett**

Finding meaning in prayer is not one issue, but many. What could participating in a prayer service do for me? How can I find meaning in prayers written a long time ago, in a style and an idiom that is not familiar? Where can I find a meeting point between my *Kavvanah*, the intentions I bring to the service, and the traditional service itself?

Over time I will be publishing writings and teaching about particular prayers, especially the ones we say on Shabbat. For the holidays I want to share some general ideas that I hope are helpful. I approach prayer and all of Judaism from a starting point of *Mussar*, the ethical dimension of Judaism. Prayer can and should be part of what we do to improve ourselves, to shape how we act in the world.

Here are four ways you can orient yourself to prayer generally. Warning: You might think that one angle contradicts another. I see it differently, as three perspectives or lenses on the same thing.

Words About God = Godly Words

Despite all the words in the Torah and the *Machzor* (High Holiday prayerbook), we have no sure knowledge of God. That is what Jewish philosophers have said for centuries. Yet our study and our prayer are of course full of descriptions of God.

Harold Schulweis, a contemporary rabbi in California, teaches a different way of understanding all the descriptions and metaphors about God. He calls his approach “predicate theology”, because he argues that the most intelligible thing in a sentence like “God is merciful” is not the subject, but what comes at the end. When we associate an idea with God, we are saying: this is a Godly quality.

Each time we encounter a sentence in the prayers that characterizes God, Rabbi Schulweis instructs us to turn it around. “God heals the sick” becomes: Healing the sick is Godly. Thus, upholding those who fall is Godly. Being slow to anger is Godly. Liberating those who are oppressed is Godly. Protecting the Jewish people is Godly.

In this perspective, the prayer liturgy is not just for us, but about us. Praying is an ethical experience. The words point us toward the qualities of ourselves that are Godly, and the prayers urge us to use those qualities in our lives in the most powerful way possible.

Facing God

Think about the staging of the sanctuary. It is meant to be a place of majesty. We bow as though before royalty, and of course many of our prayers use the metaphor of God as a king.

It is good for us to bow our heads. Presenting ourselves before God is about humility. I am not the center of the universe. I do not hold all the wisdom that exists. Even collectively, we are not everything the world needs us to be, not yet at least.

Tov l'hodot l'Adonai -- It is good to acknowledge a power larger than the "I". Even if you are not sure if you "believe in God"; even as just a role-playing exercise. It can be a relief! It is good for us to have a time when we can surrender the burden of being self-sufficient, the burden of need to know the answer to every question or problem we face.

At particular moments when we bend and bow -- at the beginning and end of the Amidah, when the Torah emerges, during Aleinu -- imagine the burdens gathering on your forehead, and then dropping off as you bend. Or close your eyes, and take a moment to be humble, to seek guidance from somewhere else.

The Third Eye

In some ways, the community of prayer is artificial. We say the same words simultaneously, we sit in rows. We don't interact in the usual ways (not officially, at least).

But in other ways, the community of prayer is more real than any other community. We say important words in each other's presence. We remind ourselves of our deeper mission. We are aware around us of other people who are praying silently for their needs, who are thinking about *teshuvah*, personal change and the return to the truest self.

There is a mystical tradition in Judaism that we each have a "third eye", which sees everything as God would see. In particular, the third eye sees every other person as *Tzelem Elohim*, the image of God. As the very best that each of us can be. When we are together as a prayer community, try to look at everyone with the third eye. And spend some time knowing that you are being seen by everyone else in the same way, with the third eye.

There is a special time in the morning, when the Torah circles the congregation once before it is read and once after. These are the only times when we do not face east toward Jerusalem, but instead we turn to face the Torah as it makes its circuit. When you do this, you will see for a split second each member of the congregation in the same line of vision as the Torah, superimposed on each other. Pay attention to that --

to the image of each of us as an embodiment of wisdom and commitment, or as people newly renewed or taught by the Torah.

Repetition

The prayerbook may seem long, but a lot of it is not complex. The same themes are pervasive and repeated. The perspectives I have suggested in the first three sections are available anytime. We can learn from this that our purposes during this season are also not complicated: to reconcile with ourselves, with our families, with one another, and with the Holy One. The prayer texts and the prayer experience are here as aids, tools, prompts.

The prayerbook is repetitive, but that can be liberating. We cannot possibly concentrate fully at every moment. But we don't need to, because the same words keep coming back. The opportunity to reflect, to look inward, to bow, to see others is here at any time and in every service. Whenever we are ready, we can find nearby what we need.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAYS AND SERVICES

These are Hebrew words you will hear used often or encounter in the prayerbook.
"Ch" always means the guttural "h" sound, as in "Chanuka."

Teshuvah -- literally, "return". We return to our true souls, to the right path, to God and to one another. *Teshuvah* is the word that is often translated as "repentance."

Cheshbon Nefesh -- "self-accounting" or "reflecting on the soul". This is an important dimension of *teshuvah*. It is the Jewish term for introspection and taking careful stock of our actions and our relationships.

Yamim Noraim -- "Days of Awe, Reverence". *Yamin Noraim* can refer specifically to the ten days from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, or can include the preceding month when we prepare ourselves through *cheshbon nefesh* and prayer.

Machzor -- the name of the special holiday prayerbook. The Hebrew literally means "cycle." The regular prayerbook for Shabbat or weekdays is called the *Siddur*, the "ordering" or "arranging" (i.e. of the prayers).

Kippur -- the word usually translated as "atonement". *Kippur* refers to cleansing from the residue that our wrong actions leave on ourselves and on the community. "Atonement" is an English word, made up of the words "at one" -- coming together.

Chet -- the word usually translated as "sin." In biblical Hebrew, *chet* has the connotation of an arrow that has missed its target and hit something else.

S'lichah -- "forgiveness". Some of the prayers are referred to as *S'lichot*, prayers about forgiveness. In modern Hebrew, *s'lichah* means "excuse me, pardon me."

Viddui -- "confession". In general, Judaism values verbal confession of our wrongs, to one another and before God. Yom Kippur incorporates *Viddui* recitations that mention wrongs for every letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Torah -- specifically, the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), which are written in the Torah scroll. Torah is also a general word for all the teachings of Judaism throughout time.

Talmud -- the collection of discussions that made up the first phase of the "oral tradition", discussing both laws and ideas, through about the sixth century of the Common Era. When we talk about "The Rabbis", we're often talking specifically about the rabbis mentioned in the Talmud.

Amidah -- the standing prayer, which we say individually at our own pace. In our congregation, we wait for each individual to finish before we continue together. People say the words of the traditional Amidah in the prayerbook, their own prayers, or a combination.

Kedushah -- "holiness", also the name of a mystical prayer in the Amidah where we imagine angels praising God near God's heavenly throne.

Aron Kodesh -- the "sacred container", the Ark where the Torah scrolls are kept.

Aliyah -- "going up" to the Torah to say the blessings over a portion of the reading. The section read is also referred to as "an *aliya*."

Mi Sheberach -- "May the One Who Blessed", the first words of the prayer for healing that we say at one point during the Torah reading. We refer to the whole prayer by that name.

Kaddish Yatom -- the Mourners' Kaddish, a prayer recited by people in the first year of mourning a close relative or on the anniversary of the death. In our congregation, anyone who wishes may stand in support, or may recite the Kaddish along with those in mourning.

THE "CHOREOGRAPHY" OF THE SERVICE

Feel free to notice and to try out these traditional "moves" for different moments in the service.

Bowing

The usual way of bowing is to bend the knees, then to lean forward, and then to stand up before reciting the word *Adonai*, which refers to God. We bow this way for the *Barchu* prayer, for the first two *Baruch Atah Adonai* phrases in the Amidah, and for the *Aleinu* prayer. Sometimes, each "move" goes with a word, and sometimes with a single syllable, in order to make sure we are standing straight up when we say the word *Adonai*.

We do the same bow during the silent Amidah when we say the blessing of gratitude, praising God as "the One whose Name is good, to whom it is fitting to thank."

There is another kind of bow which is either just from the waist if standing, or a bow of the head if sitting. We do this at the beginning of the gratitude prayer, and whenever we respond to someone's blessing when they have an *aliyah* at the Torah.

Taking Steps Forward and Backward

Before beginning and right after finishing the Amidah, we take three steps backward and three steps forward. At the beginning, we are approaching God by stepping forward (so we need to step back first). At the end, we are taking leave respectfully (we step forward in order to come back to our place).

At the end of the Amidah, we take these steps as we say the sentence that begins *Oseh Shalom Bimromav* -- "May the One Who makes peace in the heights, make peace upon us and upon all the Jewish people." Between the steps back and forward, we bow left, right, and forward, symbolizing every direction.

Shuckling

Many people move back and forth as they recite or read from the prayerbook, for any or all parts of the service. Shuckling is a way of engaging our bodies and our whole being in the service.

Other Moves

- During the *Kedushah* prayer, when we say the words *Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh* ("Holy, holy, holy is Adonai...") we bounce three times on our toes, in imitation of the biblical image of fluttering angels in the presence of God.
- When the Torah is going around the Sanctuary before and after it is read, we turn our bodies to face the Torah rather than facing east.
- When the *Aleinu* prayer is said during the middle of Musaf, it is customary to prostrate oneself fully, face to the floor. Though few in our community do it, other than the prayer leaders, anyone can do it. (You may want to move to the aisle to have enough room.)
- Not exactly a move: Try saying prayers quietly but audibly to yourself, rather than silently. Even in English, or a couple words of Hebrew that might be familiar. It is the same idea as shuckling, a way to engage the body and the whole of your person in the service.

PRAYING DURING THE YAMIM NORAIM

Together, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the culmination of the season when Jews have traditionally taken stock of their lives. As the summer ends and the colder months approach, most of us direct our attention from leisure and refocus our energy once again toward our work, our studies, and our other serious pursuits. It is not accidental that Jewish tradition times the High Holidays to coincide with this renewal. Before we set off on our various tasks once again, we are directed to stop and reflect one last time—as individuals and families, as a community, and as a people -- on how we have just lived, and on how we hope to live.

Our self-examination is focused on these days by the liturgy. In the *Machzor*, the special prayerbook for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we find elaborated the central theme of the season: *Teshuvah*, repentance and return. *Teshuvah* involves looking back and looking ahead; it requires us to think not only about ourselves and our actions, but also about ethical ideals and qualities of *menschlichkeit* that come from beyond us. The ideas of the *Machzor* form the process of *teshuvah*: introspection, confession, apology, truthful judgment, compassionate forgiveness.

Not everyone finds it possible to concentrate for the many hours on end we spend in prayer. Nor does everyone find it easy to be at home in the language of the *Machzor*, with its images of a God pronouncing "who shall live and who shall die." Yet the High Holidays are, more than any other Jewish occasion, times of prayer. Through the setting of prayer, we feel the support of all those beside us, who are also peering into their hearts. Through the rhythms and melodies of prayer, we put ourselves into a reflective mood. And through the text of prayer, we rivet our attention to the importance of *teshuvah* in our own lives, in the life of the community, and indeed in the life of the world.

In order to pray on the High Holidays, we must be sustained and encouraged through the congregation, the mood, and the liturgy. The last may be the hardest; hence this guide, meant to serve as a bridge toward the most important elements of the liturgy for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

ROSH HASHANAH

In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts of the shofar.

-Leviticus 22:32

On Rosh Hashanah, all the creatures of the world pass before God as though in formation, as it is written, "God has made each of their hearts, and understands all of their deeds" (Psalms 33:15).

-Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:2

Rosh Hashanah has four names, each of which reflects a different aspect of the day. Rosh Hashanah is *Yom Hadin*, the Day of Judgment, the day when our deeds of the past year are held up and shown to us in a critical light. It is also *Yom Hazikaron*, the Day of Remembrance, the day when we remind God of our covenant together and of God's commitment to forgive those who do *teshuvah* -- who remember God's ways. Rosh Hashanah is *Yom T'ruah*, the Day of Sounding the Shofar, the day when we aspire to make our repentance as pure of the sounds of the shofar. And finally, *Rosh Hashanah* means the Beginning of the Year, the day when we commemorate the creation of the world and commit ourselves to continue the perfecting of that creation.

In the services for Rosh Hashanah, the most prominent motif is God as *Hamelech*, the Ultimate One ("King"). We also see God as *Avinu Malkeinu*, "Our Father, Our King", simultaneously far beyond us as the source of the world and close to us as a loving parent. We picture ourselves standing before the Creator of the world, the Source of all existence, the Judge Who embodies perfect justice -- and we must recognize ourselves in the most critical light imaginable. At the same time, we imagine ourselves before the One Who upholds our covenant for thousands of generations, the God Who is slow to anger and anxious to forgive, the One Who comes to our side in our deepest distress -- and we feel support as we begin to approach others in *teshuvah*. The liturgy for Rosh Hashanah moves back and forth between both perspectives. It is intended to move us to probe ourselves honestly and deeply, to go back and repair where we have erred, and to resolve to change for the better.

ROSH HASHANAH IN THE MACHZOR

The core of every Rosh Hashanah service is the Amidah, the set of prayers said silently and standing. In form, the Rosh Hashanah Amidah is identical to the Shabbat Amidah. We begin by mentioning God's relationship to our ancestors, God's power over life and death, and God's holiness (p. 30, pp. 130/132/136, p. 238). We conclude with the hope that our prayers will be heard, with thanks for all that we have, and with a wish for peace (p. 36, pp. 146-150, pp. 278-284).

On Rosh Hashanah, the portions of the Amidah focusing on God's holiness and on the special nature of the day all emphasize the theme of *Hamelech*. In each Amidah, the Kedushah section includes five paragraphs that depict a future when all will unite in righteousness and recognize the authority of God, the teacher of righteousness (p. 32, p. 144, pp. 251-253). The section immediately following continues the theme of *Hamelech*. We state our intention to see ourselves with humility and to spend the day reflecting on the idea that what is enduring is not the single individual but something greater.

One of the messages of the Amidah, repeated in every service during Rosh Hashanah, is that the meaning in our lives comes not in isolation but by uniting with one another to pursue what is good and what is right. True community, in the eyes of the *Machzor*, exists only where people are involved together in the betterment of the world. For the community, *teshuvah* requires that each individual think about his or her relationships with everyone else and ask whether those relationships help or hinder the important purposes of the community.

MAARIV--EVENING SERVICE

The evening service for Rosh Hashanah is the same evening service said throughout the year, with two main differences. First, we include the special Rosh Hashanah Amidah. Second, after Aleinu we recite Psalm 27, the poem for the Yamim Noraim (p. 53). Psalm 27 is about the vulnerability of standing alone. Each of us stands alone at certain moments on Rosh Hashanah, alone with our thoughts and fears, isolated in some measure from people close to us who have hurt us or whom we have hurt. The author of Psalm 27 expresses both the euphoria and courage of standing alone, committed to moving forward, and the fear of remaining alone, unable to find others with whom to share our lives fully.

SHACHARIT--MORNING SERVICE

The morning service begins with *Birchot Hashachar*, the morning blessings, our daily *shehecheyanu* for waking up to find ourselves alive, with our world still around us (pp. 60-61). These blessings are followed by *P'sukei D'zimra*, a series of psalms and songs meant to help us enter the frame of mind to pray in earnest (pp. 90 and following).

The tone for Shacharit, the morning service itself, is announced by the leader's chant of its first word: *Hamelech* (p. 107). We can imagine this point in the service as the moment when God enters our synagogue, to watch us more closely. If Rosh Hashanah is a symphony, then Shacharit is its slow, somber movement. During Shacharit, we are most made aware of the fragility of our own lives, in contrast with the enduring existence of God and the universe. In this mood, we continue through the familiar Sh'ma and its enveloping blessings (pp. 108-123), which note the thread of vitality and purpose through all creation, the covenant of love and Torah that binds God and the people of Israel, and the hope of redemption in our world like the redemption of our people from Egypt.

When the leader chants the beginning of the Amidah, we sing piyyutim, special liturgical poems, that elaborate on the image of God as *Hamelech* and the theme of *Din*, judgment (pp. 138-141).

At the end of the Amidah, the ark is opened and we stand for *Avinu Malkeinu* (pp. 152-155). For many this is the signature prayer of Rosh Hashanah, the symbol of our humility and our honesty on this Day of Judgment. We ask for forgiveness and support beyond what we may deserve. Though we stand in humility, we nonetheless look directly at the Torah, the symbol of God's presence in our community. In this way we extend ourselves toward God in an offer to close the spiritual distance that we have allowed to develop. And gently we remind God that though in relation to the world God is forever *Hamelech*, in relation to us God is still part of a family whose members count on one another for compassion, strength, and forgiveness.

TORAH SERVICE

The rituals surrounding the reading of the Torah are permeated with the symbolism of bringing God into the midst of the community. It is through Torah that we know God and what is good. When we bring the Torah out of its ark and into the congregation, the mood of the service changes dramatically, from an atmosphere of solemnity to an atmosphere of community and celebration. Torah is our common possession, and our most valuable and distinctive possession as Jews. When we read from the Torah, we not only learn and think -- we also, in a way, remind God that we are God's link to the world, the instruments through which God's ideals can be realized. For that reason, when we read Torah, we imagine God taking notice of us, listening to our thoughts, and considering our *teshuvah*.

In the Torah reading for the first day (Genesis 21), God gives Sarah and Abraham their long awaited son. After the initial joy, however, the home becomes a place of conflict because of the behavior of Abraham's other son, by Hagar. Hagar and her son are banished to the desert, but God hears her son and comes to their rescue. God answers his cry "where he is." The predicament of Hagar's son, who is never mentioned by his name in this reading, is the predicament of all of us, especially during the Yamim Noraim. We stand completely exposed; our names and reputations cannot make up for the voids within us; all we have sometimes is a wordless existential cry from the depths of our soul. Yet God intercedes for us and gives us the strength to proceed with our lives, from "wherever we are."

In the Torah reading for the second day (Genesis 22), the two most important relationships in Abraham's life, with his family and with God, make irreconcilable demands on him. Asked to offer the son of his old age to the God Who has given him everything, Abraham is literally speechless. He has no way out, no one to discuss his crisis with. He proceeds, and eventually God reveals that this was only a test; Isaac is

rescued, and Rebecca is born, and together they will continue the story of the Jewish people.

Although we may not be able to empathize with Abraham's particular test, we are faced with similar tests throughout our own lives. There are moments of moral choice when every alternative seems to lead only to pain or to tragedy. There are moments of choice and crises of faith when we feel utterly alone, without anyone to talk with, not knowing what to think or how to go on. If Abraham passed his test, it is not because of the choice he made, but because he made a choice and had to live with its consequences. So too must we make choices and so too must we live with the consequences. Part of *teshuvah* is owning up to our choices and taking responsibility for their consequences; *teshuvah* offers us second chances, opportunities for repair.

On both days of Rosh Hashanah, the theme of the Haftarah is God's loyalty and love for the Jewish people in the face of despair. In the first day's reading (I Samuel 1:1-2:20), Hannah prays to God from her heart for a son. God listens and opens her womb, and she becomes the mother of Samuel, the greatest of the early prophets. In the second day's Haftarah (Jeremiah 31:2-20), God promises to bring the Jews back from their exile. God and Israel speak to one another as parent and child; even when they are estranged, they love one another, and when one does *teshuvah*, the other forgives.

SHOFAR SERVICE

Before the Torah is returned to the ark, the shofar is blown (pp. 202-206). Its piercing blasts call on us to shake off our remaining indifference to the purposes of the holy day. Its pure and unadorned sounds invite us to abandon pretense and to face what is really in our hearts. Its notes, rising toward heaven, announce to God our presence and our willingness to go through the process of *teshuvah*.

MUSAF--ADDITIONAL SERVICE

Musaf begins with the individual recitation of the Amidah. At the heart of the Musaf Amidah are three special sections, each composed of introductory and concluding meditations surrounding a collection of ten biblical verses.

Malchuyot (Rulership; translated pp. 259-263) continues the familiar theme of God as what is ultimate in the world. Its opening prayer is *Aleinu*. *Aleinu* continues the thought of the five paragraphs in every Amidah that envision a future when all the world will unite in righteousness. *Aleinu* weaves together the images of God as Creator, God as Judge, and God as the One to whose justice all will eventually turn. When the world does indeed unite in justice, God will indeed be One, and God's name One. *Aleinu* is about the world's *teshuvah*.

Zichronot (Remembrance; pp. 267-271) focuses on the theme of *chesed*, God's loyalty and love for us because of our covenant together. The opening passage mentions

Noah, and the closing passage mentions Abraham. Both faced the possibility of ultimate human destruction, yet God considered them, and God preserved the future of humanity and of the Jewish people on account of their integrity and their goodness. We ask for similar *chesed* today. Our individual lives, the life of the Jewish people, and indeed the life of the world all contain moments in virtue of which we deserve a secure future. We ask God to remember the covenant between us and to allow us to steer away from destruction and toward a better future.

Shofarot (Shofar Sounding; pp. 275-279) recalls the many moments in Jewish history linked by the symbol of shofar: the binding of Isaac, whose rescue was marked by the sacrifice of a ram; the revelation at Mt. Sinai, preceded and followed by the sound of shofar; celebrations at the Temple in Jerusalem, accompanied by shofar sounds. So too, the messianic age will be heralded by the shofar, according to the prophets. The shofar binds us with our history and with our hopes for the future.

After the individual Amidah, the leader chants the prayer *Hineni* -- "Here I Am" (pp. 236-237). *Hineni* expresses in simple words what we all feel: awe at the gravity of the occasion, humility about our ability to persuade God and others of our sincerity.

When the Musaf Amidah is repeated aloud by the leader, there is a major addition, just before the Kedushah: the prayer *Un'taneh Tokef* (pp. 240-243). This prayer contains all of the traditional imagery and theology we associate with the High Holidays: God sitting on the throne of judgment, the book of each person's deeds open before God, the procession of all humanity before God, the inscription of each person's fate on Rosh Hashanah and its sealing on Yom Kippur, the fleeting and fragile existence of humanity.

Though we may not conceive of God in precisely this fashion, we still preserve the power of the unparalleled, stunning imagery in *Un'taneh Tokef*. Even if God is not the one who is judging our deeds, we must be. They tell the story of our lives and of our world during the past year. Our errors have undermined ourselves, others, the community, the world. If we do not take responsibility for what we have wrought, then our families and communities can only deteriorate. Even if our destinies are not decreed for us on high, we have the opportunity to stand and alter our path. We must choose whether to live worthy or unworthy lives henceforth, whether to strengthen our community and our world or whether to weaken both through unthinking, inconsiderate, or unethical behavior. For the people around us, the unintended consequences of our past action and our future choices may well be happiness or misery, peace or torment, even life or death.

MINCHA--AFTERNOON SERVICE

Mincha for Rosh Hashanah, like Mincha during the rest of the year, consists primarily of the Amidah, the same Amidah said during Maariv and Shacharit.

YOM KIPPUR

Mark, the tenth day of this the seventh month is a day of atonement. You shall observe a sacred occasion and afflict your souls, and offer a fire-offering to the Lord.

-Leviticus 23:27

Yom Kippur atones for transgressions between a person and God. Yom Kippur does not atone for transgression between two people, until the one makes peace with the other.

-Mishnah Yoma 8:7

To the authors of the Bible, evil and wrongdoing were forces that, once unleashed through an action, only disappeared after they revisited the one who erred and brought punishment. *Kippur* was an alternative process by which such a force could be confronted, captured, and dissipated. *Kippur* was not a light matter. In the biblical ceremony for Yom Kippur, the forces unleashed by the sins of the community were symbolically transferred to two animals. One was sent to a point as far from civilization as possible, and the other was killed. During the year, individual wrongs also required sacrifices in the presence of the community.

Teshuvah is essentially the same process. Having unleashed harm or hurt through our actions, we move to confront our deeds. We then grapple with our motives and our desires in order to understand and master them. Only then can we relieve ourselves of the burden of past wrongs, satisfied that we will not repeat them, and only then can God forgive us with the confidence that the year to come will be one in which good things flow from each of us.

The liturgy of Yom Kippur guides us through this process. We name our errors, repeatedly and in detail, confessing them to God and to all those who sit and stand around us. We ask forgiveness as generations before us have been forgiven, naming the attributes of the God who gives us not only the standards against which we judge ourselves but also the strength to improve ourselves and to find inner peace. Our prayers on Yom Kippur are said with urgency. We fast in order to channel all of our concentration into summoning the words and thoughts we need, and we speak as though our lives in the coming year depend on what we say and feel on this day.

YOM KIPPUR IN THE MACHZOR

Many sections of the Yom Kippur liturgy are identical to the Rosh Hashanah liturgy (see above in this booklet):

- the five paragraphs in the Amidah envisioning the unity of the world in righteousness (p. 13)
- the motif in Shacharit of *Hamelech* (p. 14)
- the overall structure of Shacharit and the Torah service (pp. 15-17)
- the prayers Aleinu and *Un'taneh Tokef* in Musaf (p. 19-21)

As was true on Rosh Hashanah, the focal point of the liturgy on Yom Kippur is the Amidah. The theme of its central prayers is *Melech Mochel VSsoleach*, the Ultimate Ruler Who Pardons and Forgives (e.g. pp. 375, 469, 585). In every Yom Kippur Amidah there are two sets of prayers which together form the essence of the Yom Kippur liturgy. They are known as *S'lichot* (prayers for forgiveness) and *Viddui* (confession).

S'lichot is said together during the repetition of the Amidah. *S'lichot* begins with the recitation of the thirteen attributes of God found in Exodus 34:6-7 (e.g., pp. 393, 453, 553). God first recited these words to Moses as God stopped short of destroying the Jews in the desert for making the golden calf. According to tradition, every time God hears us say these words, which describe God as forgiving, God is reminded of that occasion and is moved to forgive us. *S'lichot*, then, is permeated with the notions of covenant and of restoring the broken faith between partners.

S'lichot continues with other prayers and verses that recall moments when God forgave or promised to forgive. At the end of *S'lichot*, we stand and sing the passage *Anu Amecha V'atah Eloheinu* -- "We are Your people and You our God." We remind God that our destinies and our identities are forever linked; if God does not forgive, God's only vehicle for seeing divine ideals realized in the world will have vanished.

Viddui is the last section of the silent Amidah, and follows immediately after *S'lichot* in the repetition of the Amidah. It consists of two confessions, both written in alphabetical acrostic, both expressed in first person plural, both said standing. The first, shorter confession, *Ashamnu*, is said aloud and together (e.g., pp. 367-379, 460-461); the second, longer confession, *Al Chet*, is said either together or silently (e.g., pp. 406-409, 464-465).

Most of the wrongs listed in each confession are interpersonal. By naming one for each letter of the alphabet, we are in effect admitting that there is no area of behavior in which we are blameless. We say the confessions in the plural out of mutual responsibility and out of support for one another. Each of us can derive strength from

the plural language -- it signifies that we are all human and imperfect, and that we all have things to learn and errors to correct.

Ten times on the day of Yom Kippur we say *Viddui*, plus twice the previous afternoon. Each time our attention may be drawn to different items on the list. Each time we have to remind ourselves that we are responsible not only for whatever list of wrongs we could compose for ourselves, but also for every hurtful act we have done and not noticed. We remind ourselves and one another through the *Viddui* that our ethical failings are serious and add up, and that our community will never be all we want it to be unless we can repair the most minute details of our behavior toward one another. And through the continually mounting weight of our repeated confessions, we try to persuade God that we have indeed seen our errors and that we sincerely resolve to live better in the coming year.

MAARIV--EVENING SERVICE

We know the Maariv service for Yom Kippur by the name of its opening ritual: *Kol Nidrei* (p. 352-353). The unforgettable melody of *Kol Nidrei* sets the tone for the entire holiday. Why, however, does this ceremony of annulling our vows belong as the overture to Yom Kippur?

On Yom Kippur we fast and eliminate all pleasurable distractions from our lives. We devote almost the entire day to prayer-to words. Everything depends on the words we say and think: to ourselves, in self-examination; to each other, in confession and in search of forgiveness; and to God. Yet the way we have all used words during the year betrays us; how can our words rise to this occasion? We therefore begin Yom Kippur with *Kol Nidrei*, an admission that we often debase words and use them lightly or insincerely. Words are all we have on Yom Kippur; through *Kol Nidrei*, we try to concentrate on devoting our words for a day to only pure and honest ends.

Maariv continues as on other days through *Barchu* and *Sh'ma*, followed by the Yom Kippur Amidah. After the Amidah, we say *S'lichot* and *Viddui*, and conclude as usual.

SHACHARIT AND TORAH SERVICE

The morning service for Yom Kippur is largely the same as the service for Rosh Hashanah, except for the Yom Kippur Amidah and the prayers of *S'lichot* and *Viddui*.

The Torah reading for Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16) describes the original, biblical ceremony of Yom Kippur. Its highlight is the sending off of the scapegoat, bearing the sins of the entire community to Azazel, a mythical place representing the edge of the inhabited world. The Haftarah (Isaiah 57:14-58:14) penetrates to the heart of the holiday. The prophet, speaking for God, criticizes those who observe the rituals of the holiday as ends in themselves. How can our fasting and praying be taken seriously when so many of us are counting the hours until we can return to life as usual? The tomorrow for which we cannot seem to wait is so full of injustice: the misery of the

hungry and the homeless, the indifference we show toward the poor and oppressed. Only when the community works to end oppression, says the prophet, will God march with us and help us in all our efforts.

After the Haftarah, we say Yizkor (pp. 684 and following), in memory of family and friends, and Jews who have been martyred through the ages.

MUSAF--ADDITIONAL SERVICE

We begin by saying the Amidah silent. It is the same as the Amidah for the evening and morning services. Before the Amidah is repeated aloud, the leader chants *Hineni*, and this recitation includes the prayers *Un'taneh Tokef*, *Kedushah*, and *Aleinu*, all of which are described above in the section on the Rosh Hashanah Musaf. There are two further interpolations in the repetition of the Musaf Amidah.

The first is the *Avodah* service (beginning p. 598). The *Avodah* is a retelling of the Yom Kippur ceremony during the period of the Second Temple, as recorded in the Mishnah. The Temple ceremony was based on the biblical ceremony. During the course of the day, then, we experience every fashion in which Yom Kippur has been observed through Jewish history, from the desert ceremony to the Temple festivities to prayer. On Yom Kippur, the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple, and only on this day did the *Kohen Gadol* pronounce the name of God. Yom Kippur in the Temple was a day of great joy and of tremendous gathering, a day when God and the people of Israel were truly at-one.

The *Avodah* is followed by the beginning of *S'lichot*, the recitation of the thirteen attributes of God (p. 553). *S'lichot* is interrupted by the second interpolation, the martyrology (beginning p. 554-555). This story weaves together the martyrdom of ten sages of the Mishnah at the hands of Rome. Today, we add a commemoration of those who were killed in the Holocaust. On this day when the entire Jewish people gathers together, we remember -- and we remind God -- of how Jews have been persecuted through the ages for our beliefs and for our refusal to disappear. So much have we suffered in the name of God; how can God not forgive us? So faithful have Jews been throughout history; how can we break faith now?

Musaf continues with the rest of *S'lichot* and with *Viddui*, and then with the completion of the repetition of the Amidah.

MINCHA--AFTERNOON SERVICE

The afternoon service begins with the reading of Leviticus 19:1-18, a discussion of what it means to live our lives with holiness. Holiness is not simply piety; it demands concern for the poor and justice as well. As Yom Kippur edges toward its close, it is important for us to leave not only with a sense of completion but also with a gentle reminder of how we must live in the new year.

The Haftarah is the book of Jonah. God instructs Jonah to go to Nineveh --the largest city in the East and the traditional enemy and antithesis of Israel -- and to tell the people there that if they do not do *teshuvah*, they will be destroyed. Jonah tries to run away from God, knowing that God will forgive the people of Nineveh when they repent. But Jonah cannot escape God. He finally goes to Nineveh, and indeed, they do *teshuvah* and God forgives them. In a light fashion, the Haftarah shows us that the attributes of God that we have been reciting all day are indeed a true characterization. If Nineveh, a symbol of evil and distance from God, can be forgiven, surely we can be forgiven as well.

The rest of Mincha is the Amidah and its repetition, including *S'lichot* and *Viddui*.

NEILAH--CONCLUDING SERVICE: "LOCKING THE GATES"

On weekdays, we pray three times; on Shabbat and major holidays, four times; only on Yom Kippur do we pray five times in one day. Neilah, a name deriving perhaps from the metaphorical closing of the gates of heaven, is a special time. We fix our gaze through this whole service on the open ark and the Torah, as if to keep God close as our time for prayer on this day runs out. Since Rosh Hashanah and through Mincha on Yom Kippur, we have asked to be written in the Book of Life; now we ask to be sealed therein.

The Neilah Amidah has only the short confession *Ashamnu*. Throughout the repetition of the Amidah, we ask God to keep the gates open a little longer -- for the sake of our faithful ancestors, for the sake of our sincere prayers. One last time we say *S'lichot*, repeating not once but twice the attributes of the God Who forgives. One last time we say *Viddui*. At the end of the Amidah, we say *Avinu Malkeinu*, drawing yet closer to God as a child draws close to a parent. We close the ark, and let the gates above in heaven close on our final prayers.

Yom Kippur concludes (p. 752) with our declaration of Sh'ma. Saying the Sh'ma affirms our faith that these Yamim Noraim have indeed helped us to change our lives for the better, and that our coming year can indeed be a blessing -- for each of us as individuals, for our community, for the people of Israel, and for the world.

With a long blast from the shofar, Yom Kippur and the *Yamim Noraim* fade into the dusk.

The Trajectory of Morning Prayer

