

A Yamim Noraim High Holiday Primer

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Forward

In the summer of 2013, I went to serve the Jewish community of Krakow, Poland as a rabbi, and help out with the ongoing revival of Jewish life. Poles have been discovering their Jewish roots and have been rebuilding life, culture and spirit in major cities throughout Poland. Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich hired me to cater to this once glorious and now small but growing Jewish community. For seven straight years I left my wife and children in Israel and spent the Yamim Noraim in Krakow working mainly in the Jewish Community Center together with its Executive Director Jonathan Ornstein. While it was very difficult being away from family it was inspiring to help rebuild Jewish life in a city so rich with Jewish history.

Over the years the Jewish community has grown, a new kindergarten opened and Rosh Hashana at the JCC catered to hundreds of local Jews as well as Jewish tourists. Working together with the Chabad Rabbi Eliezer Gurary, we prayed together at the Izaak Synagogue and helped young Jews find their way back to Jewish ritual, prayer and tradition.

This year, due to the global pandemic I was not able to return to Krakow and have been teaching from afar, struggling with the situation and trying to adapt as much as possible. Rabbi Schudrich suggested I compose a primer for the period of the high holidays so that Jews throughout Poland can have a deeper understanding of the unique time in the Jewish calendar as well as a greater understanding of the prayer service. The book was translated by Ms. Justyna Konieczny, a non-Jewish volunteer at the JCC and is being distributed throughout Poland. The English version I present here was edited in part by my friend Mr. Jerrold Rapaport and is for any audience interested in exploring the nature of the high holidays as well as gaining a deeper understanding of these days of Teshuva, of repentance.

Introduction

Shalom!

The Yamim Noraim (High Holy days) are the most intense Synagogue holidays of the year. Many new prayers are recited and new practices never before seen in the typical synagogue experience. Even the most experienced 'shul-goers' sometimes are overwhelmed, not truly understanding the specific prayer or struggling with the philosophical foundations of the days themselves.

Some questions might be: Are we supposed to be happy or frightened on Rosh Hashana? Is Rosh Hashana about a day of judgment? The birthday of the world? The beginning of the Jewish year? How are we to understand some of the customs surrounding the lead up to Rosh Hashana? What are the ways to prepare ourselves for the 'day of judgment'? What unique prayers should I be mindful of during the high holidays? And what about Yom Kippur, why does that day even exist? Why is there an additional prayer on this day? What are piyyutim and how do they play a role in the synagogue service?

Due to the myriad of questions relating to the holiday in general and the prayers in particular I have written a primer on the topics of Rosh Hashana, the ten days of repentance and Yom Kippur. I hope this can provide insight and perhaps inspiration to take on the high holidays and see them for what they are—a chance for return and rejuvenation.

Months of the Jewish Year

We begin our journey with a discussion on the Jewish calendar. It is appropriate in that the first mitzvah commanded to the Israelites was none other than setting up a Jewish calendar:

Exodus 12:1-2

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַל־אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לְכֶם לְחֹדֶשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you.

Without dominion over time one cannot truly be free. Time determines our daily activities, our social interactions and our collective consciousness. Thus, mastering time was the first step towards this people experiencing freedom. The most natural determinants of time are the sun and the moon, one which appears daily and disappears each night, while the other waxes and wanes throughout the course of a month. Both of these can be used as the anchor of a system to monitor time and determine when significant events should be commemorated. Thus, in order to establish the holiday of Passover as an annual festival, a calendar must be created and an anchor must be chosen.

For Judaism, the anchors are both the sun and the moon. The sun determines the years while the moon determines the months. This is based on the verse in the beginning of Genesis, chapter 1:

Genesis 1:14

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרַקיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּלְשָׁנִים:

God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years;

The sun measures our daily routines, our prayers, certain mitzvot which are defined by ‘day’ and ‘night’. Shabbat is designated by the setting of the sun and the emergence of the stars. The moon measures each month and governs the holidays associated with the annual cycle. Thus, the Torah when determining daily activities follows the sun, but when presenting each festival gives the lunar date¹:

¹ The exception is Shavuot where no date is presented. That is a topic for another class.

Leviticus 23

אלה מועדי ה' מקראי קדש אשר תקראו אתם במועדם: בחג הראשון בארבעה עשר לחג בין הערבים פסח לה':

These are the set times of the LORD, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time: In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the LORD,

ובחמשה עשר יום לחג הזה חג המצות לה' שבועת ימים מצות תאכלו:

and on the fifteenth day of that month the LORD's Feast of Unleavened Bread. You shall eat unleavened bread for seven days.

וידבר ה' אל־משה לאמר: דבר אל־בני ישראל לאמר בחג השביעי באחד לחג יהיה לכם שבועת זכרון תרועה מקרא־קדש: כל־מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו והקרבתם אשה לה': (ס וידבר ה' אל־משה לאמר: אף בעשור לחג השביעי הזה יום הכפרים הוא מקרא־קדש יהיה לכם ועניתם את־נפשתיכם והקרבתם אשה לה': וידבר ה' אל־משה לאמר: דבר אל־בני ישראל לאמר בחמשה עשר יום לחג השביעי הזה חג הסוכות שבועת ימים לה':

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the Israelite people thus: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts. You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall bring an offering by fire to the LORD. The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Mark, the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall practice self-denial, and you shall bring an offering by fire to the LORD;

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Say to the Israelite people: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month there shall be the Feast of Booths to the LORD, [to last] seven days. The 'first month'-- the 'seventh month'...but who determines what is first and what is last of the year?

The Mishna in Rosh Hashana offers little help when it offers four dates as the Jewish new year!

First, a list of the Hebrew months:

Tishrei²
Cheshvan
Kislev

² The names of the months were adopted from the Babylonian during the Jewish exile in Babylon.

Tevet
Shevat
Adar (Adar I) (Adar II)
Nisan
Iyar
Sivan
Tamuz
Av
Elul

Mishna Rosh Hashana 1:1

There are four new years: The first of Nisan is the new year for kings and for festivals. The first of Elul is the new year for the obligation to give a portion of the animals to the Temple. The first of Tishrei is the new year for years, for shmitta and jubilee years, for planting and for [tithe of] vegetables. The first of Shevat is the new year for trees, according to the words of Bet Shammai. Bet Hillel says: on the fifteenth of that month.

The Rabbis in the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 11a) debate the predominance of Tishrei or Nisan in the calendar:

Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashana 11a

It is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Eliezer says: From where is it derived that the world was created in the month of Tishrei? As it is stated: “And God said: Let the earth bring forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind” ([Genesis 1:11](#)). Which is the month in which the earth brings forth grass and the trees are full of ripe fruit? You must say that this is Tishrei.

Rabbi Yehoshua says: From where is it derived that the world was created in the month of Nisan? As it is stated: “And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree yielding fruit” ([Genesis 1:12](#)). Which is the month in which the earth is full of grass and the trees begin to bring forth fruit? You must say that this is Nisan.

Two Halves of the Year; Tishrei and Nissan as Dual Heads

Although the Mishna offers four different months as ‘beginnings’, two emerge leading candidates to be considered the ‘head of the year’—Tishrei and Nissan. The Bible seems clear on its choice as the verse states in the month of Nisan ‘This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you as we mentioned earlier. But the rabbis deliberated. Why would they not simply accept the Bible’s dictate of Nisan as the head of the year with Pesach as the main holiday? Why also choose Tishrei? When looking at the calendar of festivals it becomes clear that there were two foci in the cycle—Tishrei and Nissan.

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Tishrei Holidays: | 1 Rosh Hashana; 10 Yom Kippur; 15 Sukkot; 22 |
| Atzeret | |
| Cheshvan | |
| Kislev | |
| Tevet | |
| Shevat | |
| Adar (Adar I) (Adar II) | |
| Nisan Holidays: | 14 Pesach; 15 Matzot; 49 days later Shavuot |
| Iyar | |
| Sivan | |
| Tamuz | |
| Av | |
| Elul | |

It appears that before the Exodus, Tishrei was considered a transitional time in the year, perhaps because of the closing of one agricultural year and the beginning of another. Thus, religions and cultures acknowledged that month as a turning point and celebrated some form of ‘new year’ around this time. With the Exodus taking place in Nisan by God’s design, there was a need to shift the ‘head of the year’ to the month of Nisan. What might have emerged was a period in which most of the Israelites were accustomed to the Tishrei new year but had to transition to Nisan and celebrate the new year six months later which would lead to competing traditions and in some cases different new years entirely! But in the end the rabbis set down the law as to which month would be first and what roles other heads of months would have.

Ultimately, the Hebrew calendar settled into a bifurcated cycle where two sets of new year’s reign, focusing on two different dimensions of the calendar—the national/physical and the individual/spiritual. A better way to view the calendar is like this:

| | | | |
|----------|--------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Tishrei | Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur | Nisan | Pesach/Shavuot |
| Cheshvan | | Iyar | |
| Kislev | | Sivan | |
| Tevet | | Tamuz | |
| Shevat | | Av | |
| Adar | | Elul | |

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are considered ‘days of judgment’ when each individual stands before God and is judged on his/her merit. Pesach and Shavuot represent national days of glory when the nation as a whole physically went forth from slavery to freedom, from freedom to serving one God on Mount Sinai.

For this reason, we really have two heads of the year; two points to commemorate a new beginning, one for each individual, the other for the nation as a whole.

Nisan as the Month of Physical Preparation

If we have two new year's, one national and one individual, then it makes sense we would have allotted time to prepare for each event. In preparing for the holiday of Pesach, for the national birthday of the people of Israel, the rabbis instituted four special Shabbats where we read a certain portion from the Torah different than usual. Each special 'haftarah' (additional Torah reading) is meant to add a new component in preparation for the upcoming holiday. Each component requires Jews to consider the physical responsibilities that go into a national holiday:

- Parshat Shekalim (Exodus 30:11) discusses the laws of tzedakah, as every Israelite was required to give a half shekel to support the communal sacrifices.
- Parshat Zachor (Deuteronomy 25:17) discusses the imperative to remember that as a nation there are enemies who seek to destroy us. We must stand up for those in need and defend our people against enemies.
- Parshat Parah (Numbers 19:1) discusses the laws of purity and impurity and what is required of every Israelite as they prepare to come to the Holy Temple for the upcoming festival.
- Parshat Hachodesh (Exodus 12:1) details the Passover holiday and sacrifice required along with all the laws governing how to celebrate Passover properly. It begins with a declaration of the first of Nisan as the day to sanctify the new moon.

Each additional reading adds another vital component to the national preparation for Passover, the first festival of the year and the time when the nation of Israel stands before God ready to sacrifice in order to become His chosen people.

Elul as the Month of Spiritual Preparation

The month leading up to Tishrei also has special customs associated with it, but these are not nationally based, rather individually. Four customs emerged among practicing Jews:

1. Blowing the shofar daily (except for Shabbat)
2. Reciting a special psalm (27)
3. Waking up early and reciting special prayers called Selichot
4. Asking people for forgiveness and engaging in introspection

Shofar

As we will learn, the Shofar blowing is the essential component of the Rosh Hashana services, it is a positive Biblical commandment. The Torah does not directly provide the reasoning for this command, but some suggest the notion of 'a wakeup call'. After 'sleeping' during the course of the year, the Shofar

wakes us up to think about ourselves and our connection to God. The loud sounds reverberate in our heads and we snap into attention. A custom developed at least one thousand years ago³ to sound the shofar every day during the month of Elul. This custom is accepted throughout the Jewish observant world⁴ and it is an important reminder that Rosh Hashana is upon us and we should engage in ‘teshuva’—repentance.

There are various customs as to how many sounds are blown but they all take place generally in the Synagogue after daily prayers⁵. There is one more element to this custom and that is the shofar is not sounded on the last day of Elul. Thus for 28 days (Shabbat excepting) it is sounded but there is silence on the 29th day, and the following day, Rosh Hashana, the mitzvah of the shofar is in full force. The non-mystical interpretation of this custom is to separate between sounds of the shofar that are customary and sounding the shofar as part of the Biblical command. The mystical explanation says it is in order to confuse the Satan so he won't be able to be an obstacle against Israel on the actual day of the Shofar—Rosh Hashana.

Psalm 27

A Hasidic siddur from the 18th century quoted the custom of reciting this special psalm from the first day of Elul. The psalm is about David vacillating between having complete and firm faith in God and struggling to still feel God's presence amidst his enemies and suffering. The psalm concludes with David speaking to himself, encouraging himself to keep struggling, keep searching for that pure faith in seeing God in the land of the living.

This psalm is recited in Ashkenaz synagogues at the end of Shacharit and Arvit, while in Sefardic and Chabad traditions it is recited Shacharit and Mincha.

Selichot

Here is the text from the Midrash of Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer about the days at Mount Sinai:

Rabbi Joshua, son of Korchah, said: Forty days was Moses on the mountain, reading the Written Law by day, and studying the Oral Law by night. After the forty days he took the tablets (of the Law) and descended into the camp on the 17th of Tammuz, and he broke in pieces the tablets, and slew the sinners in Israel. He then spent forty days in the camp, until he had burnt the calf, and powdered it like the dust of the earth, and he had destroyed the idol worship from Israel, and he

³ It is recorded in 'Pirkei D'rabbi Eliezer' (46), a midrashic work from the 9th century but the tradition is that it goes back even further to Tannaitic times.

⁴ Although still today there are Sefardic sects who do not practice this tradition (Rabbi Mashash Mayim Chaim 2b)

⁵ Although the Remu (OC 581) brings down a custom that the shofar was sounded in the evenings as well.

instituted every tribe in its place. And on the New Moon of Ellul the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Come up | | to me on the mount" ([Ex. 24:12](#)), and let them sound the Shophar (trumpet) throughout the camp, for, behold, Moses has ascended the mount, so that they do not go astray again after the worship of idols. The Holy One, blessed be He, was exalted with that Shophar, as it is said, "God is exalted with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet" ([Ps. 47:5](#)). Therefore the sages instituted that the Shophar should be sounded on the New Moon of Elul every year.

This is an early source for the notion that on the First of Elul Moshe ascended the mountain once again to seek forgiveness on behalf of the nation of Israel. He descended the final time on Yom Kippur with the second set of tablets and a new relationship between God and the nation. This period of 40 days frames the month leading up to the days of awe as well as the ten days from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippurim.

As Jews our collective consciousness regards these 40 days in the same way Moshe regarded them ascending Mount Sinai for the last time and not leaving until a new set of tablets were in his hand and a writ of forgiveness was handed down from God. We begin the 'high holy days', starting from the beginning of Elul with the same intensity and determination as Moshe.

And what was Moshe doing during that time on the mountain? Saying Selichot! They are recitations which invoke a special short prayer which describes all the attributes of mercy before God. This is found in Exodus 34:

וַיִּפְסַל שְׁנֵי לַחַת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֵׁינִים וַיִּשְׁכֵּם מֹשֶׁה בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּעַל אֶל־הַר סִינַי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ שְׁנֵי לַחַת אֲבָנִים: וַיֵּרֵד ה' בְּעָנָן וַיִּתְחַצֵּב עִמּוֹ שֵׁם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה': וַיַּעֲבֹר ה' עַל־פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא ה' ה' אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חַסֵּד וְאֱמֶת נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאֵלִפִּים נֹשֵׂא עוֹן וְנִפְשָׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקְהָה לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בְּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים:

“Moses carved two tablets of stone, like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets with him. The LORD came down in a cloud; He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed: “The LORD! the LORD! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

Selichot are a collection of prayers in which the prayer called ‘God, God’ is at their center. Each time we recall the attributes of mercy we hope and pray that

God will continue to have mercy on His people, on the world and that we will be able to have a fresh start.

There are various customs about the Selichot. Sephardic Jewry has developed their own prayers, poems and songs which they recite every day (except Shabbat) during the month of Elul as well as during the ten days of repentance (from Rosh Hashana through Yom Kippur). Ashkenazic tradition shortens the Selichot recitation to the 'week before Rosh Hashana'. This means that they start the Saturday night before Rosh Hashana (unless the holiday falls out in the first three days of the week, then they move it back one week earlier).

Ideally the best time to recite Selichot is in the middle of the night (towards the end of the night as the dawn is about to emerge—this symbolizes the period of day closest to God). But the general custom is to begin after midnight on the first Saturday night and to rise one half hour earlier than usual for prayers during the subsequent days. The prayer is filled with different moments when we scream out to God and ask for forgiveness. Some argue that more important than understanding every detail of the poems is simply closing your eyes and calling out to God in humility. 'Being there' is an essential motif for these prayers; the Selichot give us the opportunity to call out at the top of our lungs and be in touch with our most primeval feelings.

Reciting Selichot before Rosh Hashana is good practice for Yom Kippur, as we recite many of the same prayers at the Maariv service of Yom Kippur as well as during Neila at the end of the holiday. If one cannot get to the Synagogue they can still recite *some parts of the Selichot. They must omit the sections of reciting the name of God (the prayer 'God, God) but the rest of the prayers they may recite. Especially important are the last three piyyutim (religious poems to recite) which are an acrostic of asking God to answer our call:

1. 'Aseh lemaan'—an acrostic asking God to act on behalf of our forefathers, God's name, etc.
2. 'Aneinu Hashem aneinu'—an acrostic asking God to answer us.
3. 'Mi she'ana l'Avraham...'—an acrostic which goes through Jewish history and sees how God answered the call of our great Biblical personalities, and then a prayer that God answers us as well.

Each day the Selichot ends with the recitation of psalm 6, otherwise known as the prayer of Tachanun—falling on one's face before God.

Selichot for the high holidays are not found in regular prayer books and not with the Polish translation. But there is one with an interlinear English translation published by Sefaria.com:

https://www.sefaria.org.il/Linear_Selichot_Nusach_Lita%2C_First_Day.1?lang=bi

Introduction to Rosh Hashana

The Torah in Leviticus 23:23 introduces a new holiday which on the face of it is quite mysterious. It doesn't give any historical context and it doesn't present any specific mitzvot that one can look at to help explain the nature of the day. Here is the text:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן זָכוֹן תְּרוּעָה מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ: כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אִשָּׁה לַה':

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the Israelite people thus: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts. You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall bring an offering by fire to the LORD.

The next section relates more to the sacrifices of the day. It is found in Numbers 29:1:

וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם: וַעֲשִׂיתֶם עֲלֶיהָ לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַה' פָּר־בֶּן־בָּקָר אֶחָד אֵיל אֶחָד כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה שִׁבְעָה תְּמִימִם: וּמִנְחַתָּם סֹלֶת בָּלוּלָה בַשֶּׁמֶן שְׁלִשָּׁה עֶשְׂרֹנִים לִפְרִי שְׁנֵי עֶשְׂרֹנִים לְאֵיל: וַעֲשִׂרוֹן אֶחָד לִכְבֹּשׁ הָאֶחָד לְשִׁבְעַת הַכִּבְשִׂים: וּשְׁעִיר־עִזִּים אֶחָד חֲטָאת לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם: מִלְּבַד עֲלֵת הַחֹדֶשׁ וּמִנְחַתָּהּ וְעֲלֵת הַתָּמִיד וּמִנְחַתָּהּ וְנִסְפֵיהֶם כַּמִּשְׁפָּטִים לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ אִשָּׁה לַה':

“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded. You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the LORD: one bull of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs, without blemish. The meal offering with them—choice flour with oil mixed in—shall be: three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. And there shall be one goat for a sin offering, to make expiation in your behalf— in addition to the burnt offering of the new moon with its meal offering and the regular burnt offering with its meal offering, each with its libation as prescribed, offerings by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.”

In the first section the holiday is called a ‘shabaton zichron truah’ (Shabbat memorializing the sound of the shofar), while the second time it is simply called a ‘yom truah’ (day of sound of the shofar). Both times, the Torah also provides the date—the seventh month, the first day. Thus, in order to understand the holiday, we have to analyze these two aspects of its description in the Torah: the special sound of the shofar and the date.

Let's begin with the date. We mentioned earlier that the first of Tishrei (called the seventh month) in the Torah is the beginning of a group of holidays—Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Atzeret. We noted that Tishrei (which comes out around September/October) represents a conclusion as well as beginning of the agricultural year⁶. It was natural, then, that there would be some celebration. In fact, it was possibly most natural for people in ancient times to consider that to be the beginning of the new year, a time of gathering the last of the year's fruits and planting the next year's grain, a time of celebration, a time to rejoice in the bounty that the earth had provided.

Jewish tradition takes this one step further. The Talmud Rosh Hashana mentioned above has one rabbi proposing that in Tishrei the world was created; thus, the world celebrates a renewal at this time. What better way to announce the anniversary of the creation of the world than with a calming, soothing sound of the Shofar, or trumpet, to accompany it? Indeed, at other times in the Torah a tekiah (one steady soothing sound) expresses the calming, even celebratory nature of an event.

But in fact, that is NOT the sound which defines the day of Rosh Hashana! The Bible teaches us that the day is a 'yom truah', a day of the special shofar sound. What is the sound that the truah makes? The Talmud has a debate in Rosh Hashana 33b as to whether the sound refers to three high-pitched shevarim (broken blasts) or a series of nine short quick staccato bursts. Either way, they are not calm, not soothing, but rather shrieking, crying, compared to the wailing of a mother looking for her lost child. They can also appear alarming, waking you up and shocking you into action. Why in defining this 'New Year', this anniversary of creation, should the symbol be the truah sound, an alarm?

This question is punctuated by a passage in the Torah which describes the various sounds on the trumpets blown by the priests in order to call the nation together or to disperse them.

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: עֲשֵׂה לְךָ שְׁמֵי חֲצוֹצְרוֹת כַּסֶּף מִקְשָׁה תַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם וְהָיוּ לְךָ לְמִקְרָא הַעֲדָה וּלְמִסְעֵי אֶת־הַמַּחֲנֹת:
וְתִקְעוּ בָהֶן וּנְוָעְדוּ אֵלַיךָ כָּל־הָעֵדָה אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: וְאִם־בָּאֶחָת יִתְקַעוּ וּנְוָעְדוּ אֵלַיךָ הַגְּשִׁיאוּם רְאִשֵׁי אֲלֵפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
וְתִקְעֶתֶם תְּרוּעָה וּנְסָעוּ הַמַּחֲנֹת הַחַנּוּם קִדְמָה: וְתִקְעֶתֶם תְּרוּעָה שְׁנִית וּנְסָעוּ הַמַּחֲנֹת הַחַנּוּם תִּימָנָה תְּרוּעָה יִתְקַעוּ
לְמִסְעֵיהֶם: וּבְהַקְהִיל אֶת־הַקְּהָל תִּתְקַעוּ וְלֹא תְרִיעוּ: וּבְנִי אֶהְרֹן הַכֹּהֲנִים יִתְקַעוּ בַחֲצוֹצְרוֹת וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְחֻקֹּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:
וְכִי־תָבֹאוּ מִלְחָמָה בְּאַרְצְכֶם עַל־הַצָּר הַצָּר אֶתְכֶם וְהִרְעַתְּם בַּחֲצוֹצְרוֹת וּנְנֹכַחְתֶּם לְפָנַי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּנְוָשַׁעְתֶּם מֵאִיְבֵיכֶם:

⁶ In ancient Egypt it relates to the beginning of a season called *akhet* after which the Nile river had flooded its banks and the planting season could begin. For more information see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_calendar

וּבְיָוִם שְׂמֵחַתְכֶם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֻדְשֵׁיכֶם וּתְקַעְתֶּם בְּחִצְצֹרֹת עַל עֲלֹתֵיכֶם וְעַל זִבְחֵי שְׁלֵמֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִפְרוֹן לִפְנֵי
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

"The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Have two silver trumpets made; make them of hammered work. They shall serve you to summon the community and to set the divisions in motion. When both are blown in long blasts, the whole community shall assemble before you at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; and if only one is blown, the chieftains, heads of Israel's contingents, shall assemble before you. But when you sound short blasts, the divisions encamped on the east shall move forward; and when you sound short blasts a second time, those encamped on the south shall move forward. Thus short blasts shall be blown for setting them in motion, while to convoke the congregation you shall blow long blasts, not short ones.

The trumpets shall be blown by Aaron's sons, the priests; they shall be for you an institution for all time throughout the ages. When you are at war in your land against an aggressor who attacks you, you shall sound short blasts on the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God and be delivered from your enemies.

And on your joyous occasions—your fixed festivals and new moon days—you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being. They shall be a reminder of you before your God: I, the LORD, am your God."

The parsha teaches us that two sounds were blown by the priests, the tekia and the truah. When they needed all the people to come together, they blew the calm, soothing tekia; when it was time to depart, disperse, they blew the truah. When there was a war and the Israelites had to get to their battle stations—truah; but when there was a festival, like 'Rosh Chodesh' (the new month)—tekia, celebrations before God.

So why is Rosh Hashana called 'yom truah' not 'yom tekia'? Why does the Torah frame this holiday in terms of 'alarm, battle, disperse' and not, 'calm, gather, rejoice'?

Perhaps the Torah is delicately hinting to the Israelites, to us, that this holiday in the eyes of all other cultures and religions would be one of joyous, mundane, festivities, which celebrates the bounty of man's accomplishments in nature. But for God's chosen people, the day which celebrates the creation of the world must be transformed into a day of reckoning, a day of judgment for those who believe in the mission to call out in God's name for truth and kindness. The beginning of the year carries with it great responsibility for those who accept

upon themselves to be role models to the world. We must ask ourselves—are we worthy?

The rabbis in the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 16a) make this very point:

“The house of Rabbi Yishmael taught that the world is judged at four periods throughout the year: On Pesach it is judged on wheat; on Atzeret judged on the fruit of the tree; on Chag (Sukkot) it is judged on water; But on Rosh Hashana Man is judged and his fate is sealed on Yom Kippur”.

For this reason I believe Rosh Hashana takes on a dual and even dichotomous nature: we rejoice in a new year and greet each other by reciting ‘Le’shana tova tekatevu’ (you should be written in the book of life for a good year), but we also tremble in our prayers as we ask God for forgiveness; we seek our friends and enemies to ask forgiveness from them (and forgive those who ask from us), yet at the same time we rejoice with family and friends in wonderful Yom tov meals; we blow the shofar by sounding both types of blasts—we begin and end with the calming, rejoicing tekiah, but in the middle we sound the alarm with the truah; and while we share lovely foods which symbolize our hopes for a sweet new year, we also go to the sea and symbolically throw away our sins and ask God for expiation.

This is the essence of the two pieces of information the Torah provides us regarding this holiday—a date which reminds us of the creation of the world, and the universal significance of that fact, as well as the sound of the shofar which warns us to prepare ourselves for judgment, for revelation!

Erev Rosh Hashana

As we mentioned, the month before the holiday and then the week before, gradually increase in intensity towards preparation for the impending festival with the sounding of the shofar, the reciting of the special psalm and the recitation of Selichot. There was even a Polish tradition, quoted by the Remu (OC 581:2) for pious Jews to fast for the 'ten days of repentance'⁷ This custom, however, is no longer followed; even the custom to fast on erev Rosh Hashana alone is only followed by a select few (by fasting until midday).

While during the week the recitation of selichot the prayer lasts around a half an hour or so, on erev Rosh Hashana it is twice or three times as long. After morning prayers there is a custom to do 'hatarat nedarim' (annulling vows) in front of a Jewish tribunal of three men. It consists of standing and reciting a paragraph annulling the vows one made throughout the year. The judges hear the statement and respond that the vows are 'free' and the individual can begin his new year with a clear conscience. Usually the man in the synagogue does the 'hatarat nedarim' on behalf of his wife and children.

Another custom on erev Rosh Hashana is for all males to go to the mikvah (ritual pool) in order to purify themselves before the new year. The Biblical obligation to go the mikvah falls on the wife who goes once a month, however Remu writes (OC 581:4) that the custom is incumbent on men at this time.

It is also appropriate to buy special clothing for Rosh Hashana, or at least to make sure that suits and dresses are washed and prepared in the best way for the chag. The Shulchan Aruch writes specifically that one should take a haircut before the chag as well as shave and shower. The Remu (581:4) cites a custom for Jews to go the cemetery on erev Rosh Hashana and to beseech mercy from God at the graves of the righteous, as well as a custom to give extra tzedakah on this day. The day of erev Rosh Hashana is also filled with culinary preparations; it is after all a festival and food is an important symbol on the eve of the holiday.

⁷ Although there is a technical problem that one cannot fast on the two days of Rosh Hashana as well as Shabbat in between and Erev Yom Kippur. So, four days are made up in the four days leading up to Rosh Hashana.

Rosh Hashana Night

Candle Lighting

The first to accept the holiness of any holy day in Judaism is the woman who lights the candles. An obligation to fill the house with light on Shabbat and festivals dates back to the Talmud though the first time we read of the custom of reciting a blessing is some centuries later, dating to Rabbi Amram Gaon from the 9th century. On a regular Shabbat two candles are generally lit with one blessing:

Baruch ata Ado-naj Elohejnu melech haolam
asher kideshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel szabat.
(Blessed are you God, king of the universe, who sanctified us with His mitzvot, commanding us to light the candle of Shabbat).

On Festivals (including Rosh Hashana) the blessing is the same except for the last two words. Instead of ending with 'the candle of Shabbat', it ends with 'the candle of Yomtov'. However, sometimes Rosh Hashana falls out on Friday night. In this case both Shabbat and Yomtov are included:

Baruch ata Ado-naj Eloheinu melech haolam
asher kideshanu be'mitzvotav vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel szabat veshel Yomtov.
(Blessed are you God, king of the universe, who sanctified us with His mitzvot, commanding us to light the candle of Shabbat and Yomtov).

In addition to the regular blessing, at the beginning of festivals the bracha of 'shehechianu' is recited. It is a blessing acknowledging the unique moment in time, the onset of a new holiday which takes place only once a year. The blessing is as follows:

Baruch ata Ado-naj Eloheinu melech haolam
Shehechianu wekimanu wehigianu lazman haze

(Blessed are you God, king of the universe, who gave us life and granted that life meaning, bringing us to this festival time).

Seder Rosh Hashana

The custom at the Rosh Hashana dinner is to include special foods which have significance for the upcoming year. The meal begins with a special kiddush for the festival (and an additional bracha of 'shehechianu' we mentioned earlier) followed by the blessing on the challa. There is a general custom to have round challa on this holiday due to the symbolism of the circular nature of our year, our lives. Judaism sees in the circle a reminder of beginnings and endings,

and of the notion of returning to an original starting point One makes the bracha:

“Baruch ata Ado-naj Eloheinu melech haolam Hamotzi lechem min haaretz”

Blessed are you Lord our God, king of the universe who brought forth bread from the earth

Afterwards, the custom is to dip the bread not in salt as we do throughout the course of the year, but in honey for an added sweetness to start off our meal. At this point an array of additional fruits and foods are brought out to the table and are eaten in honor of the special event. What foods are brought out?

The Talmud Bavli in Keritut 6a states the following:

Abaye said: Now that you have said that a sign has meaning and is significant, a person should be accustomed to eat, at the beginning of the year (Rosz Haszana), gourd, fenugreek (seeds from a special plant), leeks and dates.

Rashi explains that these foods either are quick to grow or are sweet. Rabbi Josef Karo codifies this tradition stating in Shulchan Aruch (OC 583):

One should be accustomed to eat on Rosz Hashana leek, beets, squash, fenugreek, and as well, any foods which connote in other languages growth, abundance, success, and everyone in their own country should say it in their own language. When they eat the fenugreek, which in Aramaic is the word ‘ribia’ which also connotes plentifulness, they should recite a mini-prayer: May it be Your will that You increase our merits. And when they eat leek, which is ‘karti’ in Aramaic which also connotes cutting off or defeating, they should recite: May it be your will that our enemies are cut off. When they eat beets, which in Aramaic is ‘silka’ also connotes ending or departing, they should recite: May it be Your will that our enemies disappear. When one eats dates which in Aramaic is tamri, it also connotes ending, they should recite: May our enemies cease from threatening us. When they eat squash which in Aramaic is ‘kara’ also connotes tearing up, they should recite: May it be Your will that You tear up our (negative) decrees and call out our merits.

Rema writing from Krakow adds that the Polish custom is to eat sweet apples dipped in honey and recite: May we have a new year filled with sweetness. One should recite the special blessing on the apple (despite having already made the encompassing blessing over the bread; see below). As well there is a custom to eat pomegranates and recite: let us have as many mitzvot as the seeds of a pomegranate. It is also the custom to eat fatty meat and all types of sweets.

As for the order of eating these additional foods the rabbis explained that though usually when one makes the beracha on the bread, one fulfils the

obligation for making any other blessings during the meal, this does not apply to the fruits that you bring into your meal. Therefore, after 'hamotzi', the blessing on the bread, we make an additional beracha 'haetz' (on the fruit of the tree), and that fulfils all the rest of the fruit eaten during the meal.

Which fruit is eaten first? Naturally we would say the apple and honey, after all it is the symbol of Rosh Hashana! Yet, according to Halacha (Jewish law) that is not the case. There is a hierarchy in Jewish law about which foods to eat first based on the prominence of those foods in the Jewish culinary or ritual experience.

Bread (and wheat derivatives) comes first, because bread according to psalms is most sustaining. Wine follows because wine according to psalms (104) 'gladdens the hearts of mankind'. Following bread and wine, fruits connected to the land of Israel take preference; thus, the first blessing on the fruit should be made on the dates, followed by the special prayer, then the pomegranate and then the apples. Vegetables (blessing of 'ha'adama' on that which grows from the earth and not on trees) eaten with the meal do not require a special blessing, nor does the fish (its blessing 'shehakol' is a general blessing for meat, fish, dairy, liquids), as they are included with the original blessing of Hamotzi.

Other customs are to eat fish and even a head of a lamb. There is also a custom not to eat walnuts because the Hebrew word 'egoz' if added up in numerology equals to the word sin.

The seders of Rosh Hashana are a joyful, sweet experience and where the table includes age-old customs as well as new, creative ideas for symbols, all in order to enjoy together with family and friends (I recall in America there started a custom to eat raisins and celery in order that they should have a year which will bring a 'raise in salary!'). The essence of each meal is to include special foods, beautiful songs about the new year, words of Torah and the joy of sitting with family and friends on this Yomtov.

The Special Fruit on the Second Night

Even though Rosh Hashana in the Torah is recorded as a one-day event, Jewish tradition has extended it to two days as a result of a certain question they had concerning the calendar. As a result, there are two 'seders' at night, two days of blowing the shofar (unless one of them is Shabat!) and two full days of celebration/prayers. Thus, on the first night at kidush we recite the blessing on a new festival, 'shehechianu', but there arose a debate about the second day: Did they consider it a new holiday and therefore require a new blessing of 'shehechianu' or is it an extension of the first day in which a special blessing is not recited?

Sometimes the rabbis decide one way, sometimes they decide the other way; other times they take a compromise position. In our situation the rabbis said that the best solution is to make the blessing of 'shehechianu' but not on the new holiday, rather on a new fruit one has not eaten in a year. For this reason, Jews throughout the world will be tasting Chinese apples, cumquats, Rumbatan and other exotic fruits, as well as any regular fruit which one has not tasted over the course of the year. With this new fruit in mind, women are able to make the special blessing of 'shehechianu' when lighting candles and men will think of that fruit when making kidush on the second night.

Rosh Hashana Prayers

Rosh Hashana is not a day which we spend completely in the synagogue; rather we spend part of the day praying and part of the day feasting! As opposed to Yom Kippur which only has one location—the benches in the synagogue—Rosh Hashana has two foci, the synagogue and the home. Thus, while prayers take longer (due mainly to the blowing of the shofar), they do not compare to the 'all day prayer' experience of Yom Kippur.

On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, because of all the additions to the prayers, Jews generally pray from a special Machzor. Two Machzors for Rosh Hashana have been translated into Polish and can be bought at several websites and Jewish book stores in Poland. Here is a sample of some of the sites to access:

1. <https://austeria.pl/kategoria-produktu/literatura-religijna/page/2/>
2. <https://sklepikjudaica.pl/modlitewniki--spiewniki,k18,l1.html>
3. <https://www.znak.com.pl/ksiazka/machzor-na-rosz-haszana--95329>

If you can read English (or Hebrew) you can access the entire Machzor on the following site:

https://www.sefaria.org/Machzor_Rosh_Hashanah_Ashkenaz%2C_Annulment_of_Vows?lang=bi

Rosh Hashana night prayers are virtually indistinguishable from any other Yomtov: Mincha prayers for before the holiday, then Arvit with the blessings of the Shema and the Shema. Right before the 'Shemone Esreh' there is a custom in many communities to recite a verse from Psalms (81:4,5) which is associated with the holiday:

תקעו בחדש שופר בפסח ליום חגנו: כי תקח לישראל ה' הוא מ'שפט לאלהי יעקב:

Blow the horn on the new moon, on the full moon for our feast day. For it is a law for Israel, a ruling of the God of Jacob;

⁸ The same discussion takes place regarding the same blessing over the blowing of the shofar. Since this mitzvah happens once a year the shehechianu is recited on the first day. As for the second day there is a debate amongst the Ashkenazim and Sefardim where the Ashkenazim will recite the blessing again while the Sefardim will not.

The rabbis in the Midrash remark that the only holiday in which the moon is 'hidden' is Rosh Hashana because it occurs on the first of the month and the moon is barely visible.

Rosh Hashana Day

The main component of the prayers at the Synagogue is the Shemone Esreh, which literally means eighteen. This is an ancient prayer comprised over two thousand years ago by the rabbinic sages. It originally consisted of eighteen blessings one recites standing (another name of the prayer is Amidah which means to stand) before God in meditation. At a certain point an additional blessing was added but the name 'eighteen' stuck despite it being nineteen blessings. In order to understand the uniqueness of the prayer on Rosh Hashana I would like to give an overview of the Shemone Esreh.

The Shemone Esreh consists of the introduction, the main body and the conclusion of the prayer. In EVERY Shemone Esreh throughout the year the introductory three blessings-- avot (patriarchs), gevurot (divine might), kedusha (holiness), and the conclusionary three blessings, avoda (service in the Temple), hoda'a (thanksgiving), shalom (peace)—are the same. What changes from weekday to Shabbat, from shabbat to festival and from one festival to the other is the main body of the prayer. The graph of weekday and Shabbat prayers looks like this:

Weekday

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| <u>1-3 Introduction</u> | <u>4-16 Supplications to God</u> | <u>17-19 Conclusion</u> |
| 1 Patriarchs | 4 Knowledge, 5 Repentance, 6 Forgiveness | 17 Temple Service |
| 2 Divine Might | 7 Redemption, 8 Blessing, 9 Health | 18 Thanksgiving |
| 3 Kedusha | 10 Ingathering of exiles, 11 Justice, | 19 Peace |
| | 12 Against the enemies 13 Righteous, | |
| | 14 Jerusalem, 15 David's Kingdom, | |
| | 16 Hear our Prayer | |

On Shabbat and regular Yomtovs (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot) the prayer changes in that there are no supplications; instead they are replaced by one blessing called "the holiness of the day".

Shabbat and Festivals

| | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <u>1-3 Introduction</u> | <u>4 The Holiness of the Day</u> | <u>5-7 Conclusion</u> |
| 1 Partiarchs | | 5 Temple Service |
| 2 Divine Might | 4 The Holiness of the Day | 6 Thanksgiving |
| 3 Kedusha | | 7 Peace |

Rosh Hashana, as we mentioned before, is part festival and part ‘high-holy day’. Therefore, while it follows the format of the festivals during the Shacharit (morning) shemone esreh:

Rosh Hashana Shacharit

| | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <u>1-3 Introduction</u> | <u>4 The Holiness of the Day</u> | <u>5-7 Conclusion</u> |
| 1 Patriarchs | | 5 Temple Service |
| 2 Divine Might | 4 The Holiness of the Day | 6 Thanksgiving |
| 3 Kedusha | | 7 Peace |

It changes the format of the middle section during the Musaf (additional) prayer:

Rosh Hashana Musaf

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|-----------------------|
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The rabbis explain the importance in adding these extra blessings to Rosh Hashana in the following Talmudic Passage:

Rabba said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Recite before Me on Rosh HaShana Kingship, Remembrances, and Shofarot. Kingship, so that you will crown Me as King over you; Remembrances, so that your remembrance will rise before Me for good. And with what? With the shofar. Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashana 34b

One can see these as three distinct themes of the day, with each one requiring a separate blessing; however, another way is to view it is that there is only one main objective of the holiday—kingship. If we understand the day as the anniversary of the creation of the world, then it would follow that on this day God should be acknowledged, thanked and coronated. It would be incumbent on all of mankind to call out to God on this day. Yet, it is only the Jewish people who are standing up in front of the world and proclaiming His glory—malchuyot (kingship).

While we take this position with great pride, we shudder at the question of whether we are worthy. It is hard to be a role model. You need to be of stalwart character, morally and spiritually pure. But how can we as sinners, truly take on this formidable task? The answer comes in the second stage—remembrances—where we remember our great patriarchs and matriarchs, the foundation of our people; we remember our prophets and prophetesses who inspired us for generations to be better. We ask God to remember our righteousness and the merits of our grandparents who lived and died serving God. We engage in memory on this day more than any other, and we rely on

the greatness of our past to help us propel to the future--zichronot (remembrances).

Finally, we engage in this whole process with a shofar, an ancient symbol with many aspects. The major reminder of a shofar is the story of the akedat Yitzchak (the binding of Isaac) and the willingness to sacrifice one's life, one's entirety, for God. The shofar wakes us up, helps us pray and makes us (and God) remember our past, our pain, our struggle, as well as reminding us to keep building to the future.

Structure of Rosh Hashana Morning Service

On Rosh Hashana in the Synagogue services begin with Shacharit and a longer repetition of the Shemone Esreh. Afterwards a special prayer is recited (though not on Shabbat) called 'Avinu Malkenu' (our father our king). Inspired by the short prayer of Rabbi Akiva during a period of drought in Israel, this prayer consists of forty-four lines beginning with the words 'avinu malkenu' and asking God for all the things one wants at this time. It begins with a confession, 'we have sinned before you' and in the middle there is a critical section of asking God to write us in the book of good life, redemption, livelihood, merits, and of course forgiveness and atonement.

Afterwards the Torah is brought out (two Torahs are read, one for the special portion for Rosh Hashana and a second for the maftir which describes the sacrifices offered on these days) and each of the two days of Rosh Hashana we read part of the story in Genesis 21 of the birth of Isaac, the sending away of Hagar and Yishmael and finally the binding of Isaac. Each day a different portion is read from the prophets. On the first, Samuel 1:1 which tells the story of the birth of Samuel and his mother, Channa's decision to give him as a gift to the Temple. This connects us to the theme of sacrifice which we read about Abraham and Isaac. On the second day we read a passage from Jeremiah 31 which speaks of the enduring love God has for his people and the prophecy of the return of Israel to her homeland.

The mitzvah of the day occurs at this juncture—the mitzvah of Shofar. As mentioned, this is a biblical command and though the Torah does not provide an explanation for the mitzvah, many theories have been offered. Some suggest it is a spiritual alarm, to awaken our spirits and prepare us to coronate the king; others say it reminds us and God of the first time a ram is mentioned in the Torah—the ultimate sacrifice of Isaac; an additional aspect relates to the notion that on Rosh Hashana, one of the holiest days of the year, we try to connect to God with all means possible—we pray with words, we read from the Torah, we sit, stand, bow and bend—and then we make one final prayer—the sound of the shofar.

The shofar is sounded at different times in the service. The first section is called 'tekiyot de'meyushav' (shofar while seated). They take place before we

begin the musaf service, the additional Shemone Esreh. It begins with the recitation of psalm 47 seven times and then the one who blows the shofar makes two blessings; the first to fulfil the communities' obligation to hear the shofar and the second the bracha of Shehechianu. Then thirty sounds are blown from the shofar and the Musaf service begins. During the standing Musaf another set of sounds is blown (tekiot demeumad) and at the end of the service, a final set. Altogether we hear one hundred blasts from the shofar.

On Shabbat the shofar is not used.

The final prayer is Musaf. First a silent amida is recited and then during the repetition the congregation will respond to certain prayers and join in. During one prayer (Alenu) the congregation follows the leader in prostrating completely on the ground, acknowledging God as the one true king.

The conclusion of the morning services is similar to a regular Shabbat or holiday where concluding prayers are sung and the entire community wishes each other 'leshana tova tekatevu' (may you be written in the book of life).

Tashlich

A custom developed to go to the sea after the Rosh Hashana day meal and recite certain verses from Micha which are meant to symbolically cast away one's sins into the sea. The source is found in Micha 7:18-20:

מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ נִשְׂא עוֹן וְעָבַר עַל־פְּשָׁע לִשְׂאֵרֵיit נִחַלְתּוּ לֹא־הִחַזִּיק לְעַד אַפּוֹ כִּי־חָפַץ חַסֵּד הוּא: יָשׁוּב יִרְחַמְנוּ יִכַּבֵּשׁ עֲוֹנֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בַּמַּצְלוֹת יָם כָּל־חַטֹּאתֵם: תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לַגְּעֹלָב חַסֵּד לְאֲבֵרָהֶם אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתָּינוּ מִיְמֵי קֶדֶם:

Who is a God like You, Forgiving iniquity And remitting transgression; Who has not maintained His wrath forever Against the remnant of His own people, Because He loves graciousness! He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins Into the depths of the sea.

The general custom is to go to a body of water, preferably one which has fish in it and to recite these verses. It is meant to do a symbolic act and then try to make those gestures a reality during these days. The connection to the sea is explained by Remu in his book Torat Haolah:

The depths of the sea allude to the existence of a single Creator that created the world and that controls the world by, for example, not letting the seas flood the earth. Thus, we go to the sea and reflect upon that on New-Year's Day, the anniversary of Creation. We reflect upon proof of the Creator's creation and of His control, so as to repent of our sins to the Creator, and so he will figuratively "cast our sins into the depths of the sea"

There has always been a variance in customs regarding throwing actual pieces of bread into the sea during this time. Some throw pieces of bread and even

shake off the bread from their garments symbolizing ridding oneself of all sins; others simply go to the water and recite the verses, yet others do not do this custom at all.

The general practice today is that when the first day of Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbat (like this year) Tashlich is moved to the second day.

The afternoon of Rosh Hashana is dedicated to family, the Yomtov meal, Tashlich and resting. There is, however, a custom not to sleep during the day of Rosh Hashana as it might symbolize a ‘sleepy unproductive year’!

As the evening approaches a second new day of Rosh Hashana is about to begin. The second meal which takes place this year on Saturday night will have a unique Kiddush in that we recite YKNHZ—an acrostic for five different blessings at this kiddush:

Y Yayin—wine

K Kiddush--making the bracha on Yomtov

N Ner--we make the blessing on a candle like every Saturday night when Shabbat is over

H--Havdalah we make a blessing on Havdalah, separating Shabbat from the rest of the week

Z--zman we make the final blessing of Shehechyanu for a new holiday

The second night meal, as stated, includes a new fruit and all the same special foods and symbols. The second day of Rosh Hashana is generally similar to the first. However, this year on the first day there will be no shofar but on the second day we will fulfil the mitzvah of shofar.

Rosh Hashana has the distinction of being the culmination of an entire month of preparation and the moment when God and His nation unite. But at the same time Rosh Hashana is the beginning of an additional process called ‘aseret yemei teshuva’ (ten days of repentance).

Thus, while as the holiday concludes and we hear the final sounds of the shofar we already begin thinking about the next stages of our High Holy experience, which leads us to the next chapter...

Aseret Yemei Teshuva (Ten Days of Repentance)

א"ר כרוספדאי א"ר יוחנן שלשה ספרים נפתחין בר"ה אחד של רשעים גמורין ואחד של צדיקים גמורין ואחד של בינוניים צדיקים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר לחיים רשעים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה בינוניים תלויין ועומדין מר"ה ועד יוה"כ זכו נכתבין לחיים לא זכו נכתבין למיתה

R' Krospodai said in the name of R' Yochanan: Three books are opened on Rosh Hashana. One of absolute sinners, one of absolute tzadikim, and one of beinonim (in-betweeners). ... Absolute tzadikim—are written and sealed immediately for life. Absolute sinners—are written and sealed immediately for death. Beinonim are held in the balance and stand from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur. ... If they are worthy—they are written for life. If they are not worthy—they are written for death. Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashana 16b

The rabbis of the Talmud divide people neatly into three categories but because people naturally do not consider themselves to be either outright tzadikim (righteous) or outright reshaim (evil), they really were suggesting to us that as beinonim (in the middle) we should view Rosh Hashana--the day of judgment--not as the end but part of a process, a process which begins in the month of Elul and reaches one peak on Rosh Hashana but then is heightened for the period between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

The first two days of Tishrei, Rosh Hashana (1,2), the following day which is a fast day, Tzom Gedaliah (3), the subsequent six days including a special Shabbat called Shabbat Shuva (4-9), and finally Yom Kippur, the tenth day—all these comprise the ten days of repentance, the 'aseret yemei teshuva'.

Teshuva

Teshuva is a word with several connotations. Most commonly it means repentance, the physical act of seeking atonement for one's sins. The sin can be either to God or to Man, one must engage in teshuva in order to cleanse oneself. Teshuva, however, means much more. Literally, it means a 'return', coming back to an original state one veered from due to the normal vicissitudes of life. Teshuva asks us to look inwards, to introspect and to attempt to recalibrate our lives.

Teshuva is a process which takes place daily; we recite a blessing three times daily in which we ask God for guidance in helping us find our way back to ourselves, the best version of ourselves:

“Bring us back our father to Your Torah, bring us closer our king to Your service, and return us to complete teshuva before You, Blessed are You God who desires Teshuva”

The daily experience of teshuva is a quick reminder to think about our lives, our connection with God, our relationship with people around us and to ask ourselves if we can be better than we were yesterday.

While a natural inclination is to engage in this endeavor daily, Tzadikim and mystics chose the end of every month to truly do introspection and stay up late at night engaging in meditation and praying to cleanse ourselves to prepare for a new month approaching. Rosh Chodesh, then, is a mini-Rosh Hashana where the intention is to check oneself, at least monthly, to guard against veering away from God, from oneself.

The most heightened experience of Teshuva takes place in the forty days beginning with the month of Elul, reaching one climax on Rosh Hashana itself, and then intensifying that during the ten days of repentance until the final day the judgment is sealed—Yom Kippur. This is the meaning of the rabbinic dictum that during these ten days our fate is held in the balance and we must be extra careful, extra observant, extra kind to our fellow man in order to achieve the desired result—expiation and return!

Tzom Gedaliah

The day after Rosh Hashana is a fast day—Tzom Gedaliah. According to the prophets, after the Babylonians destroyed the Temple and exiled the Jews, they still left some Jews in the country governed by a righteous leader from Judah named Gedalia, son of Ahikam. According to some sources Gedaliah was assassinated by another Jew, Ishmael, son of Netaniah, on Rosh Hashana itself; other sources say he was murdered on the third day of Tishrei. Either way, as a result of that murder the remnants of the Jews of Judah disappeared. This fast day is commemorated from dawn on the day following Rosh Hashana and ends in the evening. Special ‘Selichot’ are recited as well as Torah reading and additional prayers commemorating the event.

Shabbat Shuva

The Shabbat in between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is called Shabbat Shuva (and sometimes Shabbat Teshuva). The reason for the special designation is that as the one Shabbat in between the two holiest days of the year, that holds greater significance. A special Haftara is recited on this Shabbat which begins with the words שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ in which the prophet Hosea pleads with the Jews to return to God from their many sins. Aside from the special Haftara it is celebrated as a regular Shabbat with all the serenity and Shabbat spirit that is expected, as well as a higher level of observance and seriousness due to the impending holiest day of the year.

Seeking Forgiveness

During the whole year, but during the ten days of repentance in particular, one should try to ask forgiveness from one's compatriots for any wrongs they have done throughout the year. Maimonides in his major work on Jewish law—Mishne Torah (volume 1 chapter 2:9) has this to say about seeking forgiveness:

Teshuvah and Yom Kippur only atone for sins between man and God; for example, a person who ate a forbidden food or engaged in forbidden sexual relations, and the like. However, sins between man and man; for example, someone who injures a colleague, curses a colleague, steals from him, or the like will never be forgiven until he gives his colleague what he owes him and appeases him.

Thus, during the ten days of repentance people seek out those they have wronged and attempt to appease them. The common practice is for the one wronged to indeed forgive the sinner provided the request for forgiveness was sincere.

Kaparot

Some traditions in Judaism gain universal approval, while others remain prominent only in certain circles. Apples and honey on Rosh Hashana are ubiquitous; Kaparot, less so. The custom of Kaparot involves one symbolically transferring one's sins to a bird (rooster for a male and hen for a female). Certain passages from the Torah are read and then the animal is raised above the person's head and swung around three times while the individual recites texts that 'this is my exchange, my atonement—the rooster (hen) will go to death but I shall go to a good long life'. The animal is then slaughtered and donated to the poor with the hope that the individual will internalize the message of trading their lot for the animal's.

The idea of kaparot seems quite in line with the ten days of repentance—we are searching for ways to atone for our sins, we are being nicer, giving more tzedakah, seeking forgiveness--kaparot is another facet of this endeavor. It comes from the word 'kaparah' which means atonement, found in the very source of the description of the day of Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:30):

כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהוֹר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטָּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ:

For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the LORD.

The first source for the custom of using an animal for a symbolic rite is found in the 9th century during the period of the great rabbis called 'geonim' (geniuses). Some claim that it goes all the way back to Talmudic times though there is no specific reference to it in the Talmud.

Over the years, however, there has been a growing group of rabbinic leaders who rejected this custom for different reasons. Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman (Ramban, Spain 13th century) called this custom ‘the ways of the Emorites’, suggesting that the custom was adopted from pagan rituals. He therefore flatly rejects it. Maimonides ignores the subject completely, and his follower, Rabbi Joseph Karo writes in his Shulchan Aruch (OC 605) that the custom is one of foolishness (minhag Shtut⁹) and should be rejected.

However, the Remu in his gloss on the Shulchan Aruch supports the custom stating that it is ‘the custom in our states and one should not change the custom’. Rabbi Shnier Zalman of Liadi (18th Century Russia, father of Habad Hasidim) also brought this custom in his Shulchan Aruch and supported it.

Rabbi Chaim David Halevi (20th century Sefardic chief rabbi of Tel Aviv) introduced the concern of ‘tzaar baalei chaim’ (the prohibition to cause harm to animals) into this discussion. In his compendium ‘Mekor Chaim’ he wondered:

“Why specifically on the holiest day of the year should we be cruel to animals for no need and to slaughter them mercilessly, at a time when we stand before God to beg for our own lives?”

Today, mainly in Hasidic and ultra-orthodox circles the custom still continues, while in more modern Orthodox communities the custom has changed to substitute money for fowl. Instead of raising the live rooster over one’s head one raises money that will go directly to the poor.

During the ten days of repentance there are small but significant changes to the Shemone esreh, such as inserting the concept of God our king in place of God our Lord to reflect the important notion of kingship during these holy times. In general, one uses this time to heighten observance, kindness, tzedakah and spirituality.

⁹ According to some manuscripts, in the one extant today those words were eliminated.

Introduction to Yom Kippur

The Torah in Leviticus 23:26-32 presents the holiday of Yom HaKippurim:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: אֶךָ בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים הוּא מְקַרְא־לְקֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְעִנִּיתֶם אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם וְהִקַּרְבְּתֶם אִשָּׁה לֹה': וְכָל־מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ בַעֲצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי יוֹם כִּפּוּרִים הוּא לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: כִּי כָל־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַעֲנֶה בַעֲצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְנִכְרְתָה מֵעַמִּיהָ: וְכָל־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה כָל־מְלָאכָה בַעֲצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְהִאֲבֹדְתִי אֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִקֶּרֶב עַמִּיהָ: כָּל־מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּכֹל מִשְׁבְּתֵיכֶם: שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן הוּא לָכֶם וְעִנִּיתֶם אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם בְּתַשְׁעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֹב מִעֶרֶב עַד־עָרֹב תִּשְׁבְּתוּ שַׁבְּתֵיכֶם:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: But, the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall practice self-denial, and you shall bring an offering by fire to the LORD; you shall do no work throughout that day. For it is a Day of Atonement, on which expiation is made on your behalf before the LORD your God. Indeed, any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin; and whoever does any work throughout that day, I will cause that person to perish from among his people. Do no work whatever; it is a law for all time, throughout the ages in all your settlements.

The Mishna in Taanit (ch. 4:8) states the following:

“There was no happier day in the Jewish calendar than Yom HaKippurim...”

The Talmud (Taanit 30b) supports this teaching in saying ‘Yom Kippur is a day of joy because it has the elements of atonement and forgiveness’. Apparently, the holiest day of the year, the most ‘frightening’ day of the year, is actually, in rabbinic eyes, the happiest one! We generally do not consider Yom Kippur as full of joy, yet when we think about it deeply, it is the happiest day indeed. After all, God designated a day as one of absolute atonement—all that the Israelites must do is show up!

Yes, it is a day of fasting, as well as four other major prohibitions such as washing, anointing, leather shoes, intimate relations; and yes, it is a day we spend almost exclusively in the Synagogue praying. However, that does not mean to say that the day itself is sad, frightening, or negative; rather, it is a day set aside for an intense spiritual experience with the result of it being, atonement and a fresh start for all God’s nation.

The essential question to be asked is why Yom Kippur exists at all? It seems like an aberration from all other holidays. Major holidays in the Torah take place in the middle of the month—like Pesach and Sukkot--while Rosh Hashana naturally begins on the first day of the month as it points to the celebration of the creation of the world. Shavuot too has a specific reason for

its placement, namely, 49 days after Pesach. The only question is about Yom Kippur on the 10th. Why?

Additionally, the Torah says very clearly what happens on this day—atonement; the Torah NEVER says WHY God grants this to His people! What did they do to deserve a ‘do over’? I believe an answer might come from a return to our original calendar of the year:

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Nisan Holidays: | 14 Pesach; 15 Matzot; 49 days later Shavuot |
| Iyar | |
| Sivan | |
| Tamuz | |
| Av | |
| Elul | |
| Tishrei Holidays: | 1 Rosh Hashana; 10 Yom Kippur; 15 Sukkot; 22 |
| Shemini Atzeret | |
| Cheshvan | |
| Kislev | |
| Tevet | |
| Shevat | |
| Adar (Adar I) (Adar II) | |

We divided the year into two sets of six months—the Nisan holidays and the Tishrei holidays. We also noted that the Nisan holiday begins with God designating this month to be considered the first of the year for the nation.

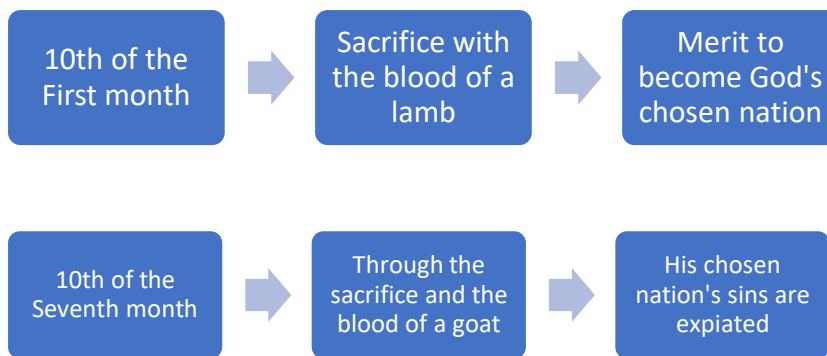
If that is the case, I believe there is a new way to view these two poles of the year and how God relates to His nation through them. I think the two halves of the calendar are not parallel (they do not present two sets of a six-month experience with no effect one on the other); yet, they do not conflict with each other either. Rather, I believe that the relationship between the first half of the year and the second is causal and complementary. If the individual succeeds in the first six months one is guaranteed success in the second half! Let’s look at a graph of the calendar with some additions to the significant dates:

| | | |
|-------------------|---|-----------|
| Nisan Holidays: | 1 Rosh Chodesh 10 Command to ‘sacrifice for God’ | 15 Pesach |
| Tishrei Holidays: | 1 Rosh Hashana 10 Yom Kippur ‘atonement by sacrifice’ | 15 Sukkot |

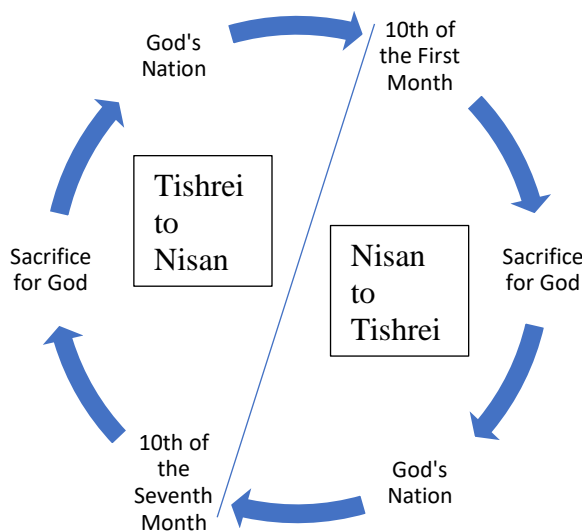
The first mitzvah for the Israelites to establish a calendar system and as well to celebrate ‘Rosh Chodesh’ (the new moon of each month), takes place on the first of the month of Nisan. It is in essence God telling the nation that ‘your religious life begins today; follow my rules and you will be blessed’. But then, nine days later God intensifies His expectation stating that if the people truly want to become ‘the Nation of God’, then a major sacrifice is in order even the willingness to give up one’s own life.

This idea that a major sacrifice must be undertaken in order to show God (and perhaps oneself) that one truly is committed to serving God and having the blood of an animal represent that symbol of self-sacrifice, is evident in the story in Egypt. The children of Israel are commanded on the 10th day of the first month to 'go all in', to be willing to endanger their lives in order to show fealty to God. That test of their loyalty takes place on the tenth day of the first month; I believe Yom HaKippurim is God's response. On the tenth day of the seventh month, providing the Israelites fulfilled their covenant to follow in God's ways and even be willing to give up their lives for God—they receive a gift from God, atonement for their sins!

Here is the equation:



A different picture of the same idea is as follows:



What emerges is a cyclical, causal relationship which shows the very essence of the covenant between God and His nation. If the people show fealty—an act which defies logic, an act of love and faith in God, then God will give

atonement—an act which defies logic, and act of love, and faith in the people! For this reason, as long as the Jewish people participate in the Passover seder, sacrifice the animal even when it is uncomfortable, put mezuzas on their doors even if the enemies will be angered, then God will compassionately respond in kind, 'bedamayich chayii' through the blood you shall live, through this sacrifice the nation will go on.

For this reason, Yom HaKippurim is the happiest day in the calendar. For if God on this day is offering atonement, it means that six months earlier His nation still identified as the people of God and still showed up ready to sacrifice for their faith, therefore God on this day is answering our call.

Erev Yom Kippur

Just as on Erev Rosh Hashana there was a special feeling in the air and certain customs emerged, so too with Erev Yom Kippur. Rabbi David Brofsky presents the following customs on Erev Yom Kippur (<https://www.etzion.org.il/en/laws-and-practices-erev-yom-kippur>)

1. Asking for Forgiveness. We already mentioned that during the ten days of repentance it was customary to seek forgiveness from others. On erev Yom Kippur that activity is intensified. The Talmudic source for this is TB Yoma 87 where Rav, having wronged Rav Chanina visited him on the day before Yom Kippur for thirteen years to ask for forgiveness! If one has wronged a fellow and that individual died, there is an instruction to go to the grave and ask forgiveness there. I imagine an alternative suggestion would be to internalize the loss and try to change one's character so as not to offend the next individual.
2. Immersion in a Mikvah. There is an ancient custom for men to immerse in the Mikvah on Erev Yom Kippur. Some rabbis even suggest a bracha is recited, but the majority reject this position.
3. Viduy and other Prayers on Erev Yom Kippur. Viduy is the Biblical word for confession. In fact, the actual mitzvah of repentance from the Torah revolves around the word viduy. When we hit our hearts with our fists over Yom Kippur and reflect on our sins, we are doing viduy. The Talmud (Yoma 87b) writes that one should do this act of viduy already on Erev Yom Kippur and that is what we do when we pray mincha, the afternoon service before Yom Kippur begins. Rabbi Abraham Danzig, an 18th century rabbinic scholar born in Gdansk, wrote a compendium of Jewish law called 'Chayei Adam'. He also composed the powerful prayer called Tefila Zaka, a long, emotional prayer of confession to God that one recites right before the beginning of Yom Kippur.
4. The Mitzvah to Eat on Erev Yom Kippur.

R. Chiyya bar R. Difti taught: It says, "And you shall afflict yourselves on the ninth" (Vayikra 23:32). Now on the ninth do we fast? Do we not fast on the tenth? Rather this is to tell you that anyone who eats and drinks on the ninth, the Scriptures consider it as if he fasted on the ninth and the tenth.

There are several interpretations as to the reason behind this directive. Some suggest it has to do with preparation for the fast. One must fortify oneself with food and drink so that on the following day one concentrates on God and repentance rather than on break-fast. An opposite approach is found in the rabbinic commentators who suggest that eating a lot right before the fast actually makes the fast harder! When the Torah suggested fasting on the ninth and tenth it actually meant a two-day fast! But since that is dangerous for most people the rabbis instituted an obligation to eat which would make the

fast even harder! A third approach suggests the same idea—that the ninth of Tishrei and the tenth are part of a joint two-day festival with God. But on the ninth we celebrate by eating, by enjoying the bounty God bestowed, while on the tenth we celebrate by refraining from worldly pleasures.

The 'Seuda Mafseket' literally means the meal which ends the period of eating. In general, on Erev Yom Kippur an early Mincha is recited and then a festive meal is shared by the family in preparation for the upcoming holy day. After the meal one changes one's shoes, lights Yomtov candles and goes to the Synagogue early to prepare for Kol Nidrei.

Yom Kippur Kol Nidre

Dating back as far as 1200 years, this Jewish prayer written in Aramaic has managed to withstand the opposition to its recitation and has become a symbol for the beginning of Yom Kippur. The prayer, which declares all individual vows and oaths to be null and void, (in accordance with the regulations of Halacha which allows for the invalidation of vows under certain conditions) was contested by the great rabbinic sages in North Africa and Bavel called the Geonim. Their concern was that if people knew that once a year there was a sweeping annulment of vows, people would make promises indiscriminately and make a mockery of Jewish law. In the end, however, the custom prevailed however it was always stipulated that this process of annulment only referred to individual voluntary vows applying only to oneself, not to another person. (Indeed, Rabbis over the years have had to defend the anti-Semitic accusation that Jews ignore financial responsibilities towards non-Jews and care only about themselves).

The prayer is preceded by another unusual one:

“By the authority of the Court on High and by authority of the court down here, by the permission of One Who Is Everywhere and by the permission of this congregation, we hold it lawful to pray with sinners. ”

This statement is attributed to Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg who lived during the 13th century and sought to invite the Jews who were marginalized from the Jewish community due to their sins. Some suggested that this was a result of the fact that in the Middle Ages there was a strong central Jewish authority in each city and one who hurt other Jews was excommunicated and scorned from the community. Rabbi Rothenberg felt that Yom Kippur should be a day for all Jews to stand before God.

At the beginning of Kol Nidre the ark is opened and the Torahs are removed and brought to the bimah (platform in the center of the Synagogue where the Torah is read). Sometimes the Torahs are given to rabbis and leaders of the congregation and they circle the Temple reciting the verse from Psalm 97:

אור יָרַע לְצַדִּיק וְלִישְׂרָיִלֵב שְׁמִתָּה שְׁמַחוּ צַדִּיקִים בְּה' וְהוֹדוּ לְזִכַּר קְדֹשׁוֹ:

Light is sown for the righteous, radiance for the upright. O you righteous, rejoice in the LORD and acclaim His holy name!

The Kol Nidre is solemnly sung three times by the Chazan (leader) with ascending power and sound. The tune's origin is debated among scholars, however, according to historian Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, it was comprised from Ashkenazi (South German) cantillation motives of the Prophets, probably composed in the late Middle ages (15th century).

Yom Kippur Evening

Women light candles for Yom Kippur just like any other Shabbat or festival. The bracha is:

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של יום הכיפורים
Baruch ata Ado-naj Eloheinu melech haolam
asher kideshanu be'mitzvotav vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel Yom
Hakippurim.

(Blessed are you God, king of the universe, who sanctified us with His mitzvot, commanding us to light the candle of Yom Kippur).

In addition to the regular blessing, at the beginning of festivals the bracha of 'shehechianu' is recited. It is a blessing acknowledging the unique moment in time, the onset of a new holiday which takes place only once a year. The blessing is as follows:

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה
Baruch ata Ado-naj Eloheinu melech haolam
Shehechianu wekimanu wehigianu lazman haze

(Blessed are you God, king of the universe, who gave us life and granted that life meaning, bringing us to this festival time).

Kittel--Wearing White

There is an ancient custom to wear white during Yom Kippur—men wear a garment called a kittel while in some communities, women dress in white dresses. The reasons offered are contradictory! On the one hand, white reflects purity, rejuvenation, rebirth, as we find from the verse in Isaiah 1:18:

לְכוּ־נָא וְנִבְקְהָה יְאֹמֶר ה' אִם־יִהְיֶה חֲטָאֵיכֶם כַּשָּׁנִים כַּשָּׁלֵג יִלְבִּינּוּ אִם־יִאֲדִימוּ כַתּוֹלַע כַּצִּמְרֵךְ יִהְיוּ:

“Come, let us reach an understanding, —says the LORD. Be your sins like crimson, They can turn snow-white; Be they red as dyed wool, They can become like fleece.”

On the other hand, the custom is that Jewish men and women are buried only in white shrouds and on Yom Kippur one should feel that their lives are hanging in the balance. In truth both approaches are correct and we should feel the awe and fear on the day of judgment; at the same time we should feel the festive nature of a day dedicated to rebirth, renewal, return!

Yom Kippur Maariv

The evening service begins like other holiday evenings. The tune of the prayers is the same as Rosh Hashana, plaintive and solemn. The Shma is recited followed by the Shemone Esreh with the special blessing focusing on atonement, forgiveness and catharsis. The verse which is recited right before the Shemone Esreh reflects the unique nature of the day:

כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהָר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטָּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ:

For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the LORD.

Vidui--Confession

On Yom Kippur Jews recite the confession before God ten times: once at Maariv, twice at Shacharit, twice at Mincha, twice and Musaf, twice at Mincha and once at Neila. This special formula consists of two sections in which we confess our iniquities before God: Ashamnu (we are guilty) and Al chet (for the sin of...). This is the essential component of the Yom Kippur liturgy. The introduction to the prayer is quite striking:

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ תְּבֹא לְפָנֶיךָ תְּפַלְתֵּנוּ וְאֵל תִּתְעַלֵּם מִתְחַנְּתֵנוּ שְׂאִין אֲנַחְנוּ עֲוֵי פָנִים וְקוֹשֵׁי עֲרָף לֹאֲמַר לְפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ צְדִיקִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא חָטְאנוּ אָבֵל אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ חָטְאנוּ :

Our God and God of our fathers, let our prayer come before you and do not ignore our supplication. For we are not so brazen-faced and stiff-necked to say to you our God, and God of our fathers, “We are righteous and have not sinned.” But, indeed, we and our fathers have sinned.

One of the most striking aspects of this introduction (and the entire prayer of confession) is that it is written in the plural. WE have sinned, WE are guilty, WE have rejected... Even on the holiest day of the year and the seemingly most private day when we personally ask for expiation from our sins and attempt to

rebuild our own relationship with the Almighty, we nevertheless use the formula set up by our sages—when we pray we do it as a collective!

I think there are two reasons for this formulation: first, we remind ourselves that between the individual and the community, although both are essential and it is a balance, nevertheless in ritual the communal sacrifices are more powerful. The Torah presents the imperative of communal sacrifices in terms of a constant offering to the Lord. The sense of constancy is essential in Temple service and it is upheld by the obligations of the community.

The same applies to prayer. Substituted for sacrifices, prayer is best done with a quorum—a minyan. One goes to a prayer hall, a sanctuary and prays together with men, women, children, an entire community together. That is not to say that one may not pray alone; rather, the ideal prayer is in a communal setting. Moreover, prayers are recited in the collective—“we pray for our needs before You God”... Thus, even when the prayer is a personal confession of one’s private iniquities, it is done together with the people of Israel.

The second reason for collective prayer and in our case collective confession is to approach God not as one individual but as a nation. As a nation we have history, we can rely on the founders of our nation, our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As a nation we have a stronger case to stand before God-- the individual’s repentance is contingent, the community’s repentance is always assured. For these reasons when we stand up to confess our sins before God, even though we will and should be concentrating on ourselves we should still remember our connection with our community.

אֲשָׁמְנוּ בְּגִדְנוּ גְּזַלְנוּ. דְּבָרְנוּ דָּפִי .

We have trespassed [against God and man, and we are devastated by our guilt]; We have betrayed [God and man, we have been ungrateful for the good done to us]; We have stolen; We have slandered.

This prayer is an acrostic and represents the short version of confession. We recount our sins with one word of the alphabet and gently strike our chest with our fist as we recite each word. The symbolism is evident—we have remorse for each of the sins we have committed, and we seek forgiveness.

The prayer continues with a realization that there is really nothing to say before God, no excuses to offer, nothing behind which to hide—after all, God knows all! So all that is left to do is humbly strike our hearts as we go through each sin.

מה נאמר לפניך יושב מרום. ומה נספר לפניך שוכן שחקים. הלא כל הנסתרות והנגלות אתה יודע :

אתה יודע רזי עולם. ותעלומות סתרי כל חי: אתה חופש כל חדרי בטן ובוחן כליות ולב: אין דבר נעלם ממך. ואין נסתר מנגד עיניך: ובכן יהי רצון מלפניך יהוה אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו. שתכפר לנו על כל חטאתינו. ותסלח לנו על כל עונותינו. ותמחל לנו על כל פשעינו:

על חטא שקטאנו לפניך באנס ובוצון:

ועל חטא שקטאנו לפניך באמוץ הלב:

על חטא שקטאנו לפניך בקלי דעת:

ועל חטא שקטאנו לפניך בבטוי שפתים:

על חטא שקטאנו לפניך בגלוי ובסתר:

ועל חטא שקטאנו לפניך בגלוי עריות:

על חטא שקטאנו לפניך בדבור פה:

What shall we say before You, Who dwells on high; and what shall we relate to You Who dwells in the heavens? For everything, both hidden and revealed, You know.

You know the mysteries of the universe, and the hidden secrets of every individual. You search all our innermost thoughts... There is nothing hidden from You, and there is nothing concealed from Your sight. And so may it be Your will our God and God of our fathers, that You pardon us for all our careless sins, and that You forgive us for all our deliberate sins, and that You grant us atonement for all our rebellious sins:

For the sin we committed before You under compulsion. And for the sin we committed before You by callously hardening the heart. For the sin we committed before You inadvertently. And for the sin we committed before You with an utterance of the lips. For the sin we committed before You openly and secretly. And for the sin we committed before You in sexual immorality. For the sin we committed before You through [misuse of our power of] speech.

Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is recorded twice, focusing on all aspects of human fallibility. Forty-four confessions cover sins between Man and God, but more focus on the sins of interpersonal actions than directly sinning against God. Perhaps the Sages were teaching us that how one treats one's fellow is more important than spiritual shortcomings. Three times during the prayer we take a break and recite a refrain:

ועל כלם אלוה סליחות. סלח לנו. מחל לנו. כפר לנו:

And for all of these, God of pardon, pardon us, forgive us, grant us atonement.

A disproportionate amount of sins relate to one's mouth: 'for the sin of slander, gossip, scoffing, ridiculing, evil speech, inappropriate business dealings, falsely denying, lying, profanity, and insincere confessions'. This reflects an understanding of the difficulty we face in controlling our speech, guarding our tongues and trying to maintain a holy vessel for our souls.

The confession comes at the end of every Shemone Esreh and is repeated during the Chazan's repetition or at any time the Chazan confesses. At the conclusion of every Shemone Esreh a powerful prayer is added which reflects the seriousness of the day and our desire for atonement:

אֱלֹהֵי. עַד שֶׁלֹּא נִוצַרְתִּי אֵינִי כְדָאֵי, וְעַכְשָׁו שֶׁנִּוצַרְתִּי כְּאֵלוֹ לֹא נִוצַרְתִּי. עֶפֶר אֲנִי בְּחַיִּי. קֵל וְחֹמֶר בְּמִיתָתִי. הָרִי אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ
כְּכֵלִי מְלֵא בּוֹשָׁה וּכְלִמָּה יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי שֶׁלֹּא אֶחְטָא עוֹד. וּמֵה שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ מְרַק בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ
הַרְבֵּימִם. אֲכַל לֹא עַל יְדֵי יְסוּרִים וְחֲלָיִם רָעִים :

God, before I was formed, I was unworthy [to be created]. And now that I have been formed, it is as if I had not been formed. I am like dust while I live, how much more so when I am dead. Here I am before You like a vessel filled with shame.

May it be Your will, my God, and the God of my fathers, that I shall sin no more, and the sins I have committed before You, cleanse them in Your abundant mercies; but not through suffering and severe illness.

At the end of the prayers people generally say goodbye to each other by reciting:
"Leshana tova tekatev ve'techatem"—May you be inscribed and sealed in the book of life

The evening of Yom Kippur after services are reserved for quiet introspection. Since Synagogue ends quite early sometimes the rabbi gives a class on the laws of Repentance and the like. Otherwise people should find some aspect of the Bible or Jewish sources which teach about the notion of repentance, atonement, forgiveness and the day of Judgment.

Yom Kippur Day

Most Jews spend almost the entire day of Yom Kippur in the Synagogue. On Yom Kippur day there are not three but FOUR prayers, an additional one is added at the end called Neila. Each prayer is filled with supplication, calling out to God, intense introspection, confession, Torah study, meditation and the shared joy and intensity of communal days of awe. The melodies are soul-stirring as well as nostalgic since many of the tunes are hundreds of years old and have been passed down from generation to generation.

Shacharit is similar to Rosh Hashana's with added poetry called piyyutim inserted at different places before and after the Shma as well as during the repetition of the Shemoneh Esreh. The poems focus on many themes, including

the notion of God's kingship, God's judgment, man's fallibility and the eternal Mercy of a compassionate God.

Piyyut--Asher Ometz

One of the more powerful piyyutim centers on the relationship between humans and celestial bodies. It is called 'asher ometz tehilatecha'. It is such a beautiful poem with intense meaning and significance that I will bring it here:

וּבְכֵן לְנוֹרָא עָלֵיהֶם בְּאַיְמָה יַעֲרִיצוּ :

אֲשֶׁר אָמַץ תְּהִלָּתְךָ: בְּאַיְלֵי שָׁמַיִם. בְּבִרְקֵי נֹגַהּ. בְּגִדְוֵי גְבוּהָ. בְּדַמּוּמֵי דְקָהָ. וּקְדוּשָׁתְךָ בְּפִיָּהֶם: וְרִצִּיתְךָ שְׁבַח: מֵהוֹמֵי בְרִגְשׁוֹ. וְעוֹרְכֵי שְׁנוֹעַ. זוֹעֲקֵי תַחֲנֻנָּה. חוֹכֵי תְנִינָה. וְהִיא כְבוֹדְךָ :

אֲשֶׁר אָמַץ תְּהִלָּתְךָ: בְּטַפְסְרֵי טְהוֹרָה. בְּיַדְדוֹן יִדְדוֹן. בְּכְרוּבֵי כְבוֹד. בְּלִגְיוֹנֵי לְהַבָּה. וּקְדוּשָׁתְךָ בְּפִיָּהֶם: וְרִצִּיתְךָ שְׁבַח: מִמְּעוֹטֵי יָמִים. נִשְׁוִי טוֹבָה. שְׂבַעֵי רְגֹזוֹ. עֲגוּמֵי נֶפֶשׁ. וְהִיא כְבוֹדְךָ :

אֲשֶׁר אָמַץ תְּהִלָּתְךָ: בְּפִלְאֵי שְׁמוֹת. בְּצַבָּאוֹת עִירִין. בְּקַדוּשֵׁי קָדָם. בְּרִכְבֵּי רַבּוֹתֵימָם. וּקְדוּשָׁתְךָ בְּפִיָּהֶם: וְרִצִּיתְךָ שְׁבַח: מִשׁוֹקְדֵי דְלַתוֹת. שׁוֹפְכֵי שֵׁיטָה. תּוֹבְעֵי סְלִיחָה. תְּאֵבֵי כְפָרָה. וְהִיא כְבוֹדְךָ :

Here is the translation from Rabbi Sacks' Machzor the Koren edition.

Even though Your mighty praise is
Among the angels of heaven, / the beings that flash divine light,
The hosts on high, / and the still small voice—
For your sanctity is in their mouths

Yet You desire praise
From those who call out to You in roaring throngs/ who lay out their
cries
Who shout their prayers/ and await Your grace—
For this is Your glory.

Even though Your mighty praise is
Among the angels so pure, / the hastily fleeing angels,
The cherubim who honor You, / and the heavenly legions with their
swords-
For your sanctity is in their mouths

Yet Your desire praise
From mere mortals, with their numbered days,/ whom all good has
abandoned, filled with anxiety, / and deeply grieved in their souls
For this is Your glory

Rabbi Lord Sacks describes the poem (written by Rabbi Meshullam Ben Kalonymus, a tenth century German scholar and communal leader), as

“surprising us with a theological paradox. God is surrounded by angels who constantly sing His praises, yet it is from us, mere humans, that God desires praise. Somehow, despite our finitude, God’s greatest desire is to hear us, mere physical beings, turn to Him in praise.” Kalonymus inferred from his understanding of Torah, Jewish law as well as the miracle of the survival of the Jewish people throughout history that God has chosen Man over the angels. It is thus up to us, Man, to respond in kind, to sing and act His praises in this world thereby fulfilling God’s ultimate goal.

Piyyut--Le’el Orech Din

Another powerful poem is from an unknown author and it describes the God who sits in judgment on this day:

לְאֵל עוֹרֵךְ דִּין: לְבוֹחֵן לְכַבּוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְגוֹלֵה עֲמוּקוֹת בְּדִין: לְדוֹבֵר מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְהוֹנֵה דְעוֹת בְּדִין: לְנִתְיָק וְעִשָׂה
 חֶסֶד בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְזוֹכֵר בְּרִיתוֹ בְּדִין: לְחוֹמֵל מֵעֲשָׂוֵי בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְטַהַר חוֹסֵי בְּדִין: לְיוֹדֵעַ מַחְשְׁבוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְכוֹבֵשׁ כְּעֵסוֹ
 בְּדִין: לְלוֹבֵשׁ צַדִּיקוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְמוֹחֵל עֲוֹנוֹת בְּדִין: לְנוֹרָא תְהִלּוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְסוֹלֵחַ לְעַמוּסָיו בְּדִין: לְעוֹנֵה לְקוֹרְאָיו בְּיוֹם
 דִּין: לְפוֹעֵל רַחֲמָיו בְּדִין: לְצוֹפֵה נִסְתָּרוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְקוֹנֵה עֲבָדָיו בְּדִין: לְרַחֵם עַמּוֹ בְּיוֹם דִּין: לְשׁוֹמֵר אֲהָבָיו בְּדִין: לְתוֹמֵךְ
 תְּמִימָיו בְּיוֹם דִּין :

to the Almighty Who apportions judgment; Who examines hearts on the day of judgment; Who reveals depths [of the heart] in judgment; Who speaks uprightly on the day of judgment; Who utters knowledge in judgment; To Him Who is steadfast, and yet deals kindly on the day of judgment; Who recalls His covenant in judgment; Who has pity on His works on the day of judgment; Who purifies those who trust in Him, in judgment; Who knows the thoughts of man on the day of judgment; Who suppresses His anger in judgment; Who is clothed in righteousness on the day of judgment; Who forgives iniquities in judgment; Who is awesome in praise on the day of judgment; Who pardons those borne by Him, in judgment; Who answers those who call upon Him on the day of judgment; Who exercises His compassion in judgment; Who scrutinizes secrets on the day of judgment; Who acquires His servants, in judgment; Who has compassion on His people on the day of judgment; Who preserves those who love Him, in judgment; Who supports His perfect ones on the day of judgment.

The poem is an acrostic with every other verset changing from the word ‘din’—judgment, to ‘badin’—in judgment. It describes God as the One who examines hearts on the day of judgment as well as revealing secrets through judgment; Who remembers His covenant on the day of judgment but has compassion for His creations through judgment; Who knows our thoughts on the day of judgment but conquers His anger through judgment. It concludes with saying that on this day God has mercy on His nation, guards His loved ones and supports His innocent on the day of judgment.

Piyyut--Anu Amecha

Another poem offers us a different perspective on the attitude we muster up towards God on this holiday. Much of the prayers are remorseful expressing our unworthiness, asking God to forgive us and to remember the merits of our forefathers. However, sometimes we remind God of our unyielding position as His nation, standing up for God throughout history and suffering terribly as a result. On some level we remind God not only of our forefathers but of ourselves!

כי אנו עמך ואתה אלהינו. אנו בניך ואתה אבינו: אנו עבדיך ואתה אדוננו. אנו קהלה ואתה חלקנו: אנו נחלתך ואתה גורלנו. אנו צאנך ואתה רוענו: אנו כרמך ואתה נוטרינו. אנו פעלתיך ואתה יוצרנו: אנו רעייתך ואתה דודנו. אנו סגלתיך ואתה אלהינו. אנו עמך ואתה מלכנו: אנו מאמיריך ואתה מאמירנו :

For we are Your people; and You are our God. We are Your children; and You are our Father. We are Your servants; and You are our Master. We are Your congregation; and You are our Portion. We are Your inheritance; and You are our Destiny. We are Your flock; and You are our Shepherd. We are Your vineyard; and You are our Keeper. We are Your work; and You are our Creator. We are Your dear ones and You are our Beloved. We are Your treasure; and You are our God. We are Your people; and You are our King. We are Your distinguished ones; and You are our Distinction.

A gentle reminder to the creator that out of all of humanity, billions of people in the world and we stand up and affirm the truth of the oneness of God, the veracity of the Torah and the eternity of the Almighty. The author reminds God over and over of the relationship created from Abrahamic times until this very moment when we continue to call ourselves God's flock and He, our shepherd.

Then a second paragraph of just a few more couplets but quite striking ones.

אנו עזי פנים ואתה רחום וחסנון. אנו קשי ערף ואתה ארך אפים. אנו מלאי עון ואתה מלא רחמים. אנו ימינו כצל עובר ואתה הוא ושנותיך לא יתמו :

We are brazen-faced; and You are merciful and gracious. We are stiff-necked; and You are slow to anger. We are full of iniquity; and You are full of compassion. Our days are like a passing shadow; and You are the same and Your years will not end.

At this point the unknown author pulls back from the celebratory depiction of the relationship between Israel and God saying, 'we are unworthy, but You are everlasting grace'. It is a reminder to ourselves that though we should not ignore our unique position in the world we are nevertheless imperfect as individuals as well as the nation which is supposed to represent God in the world. We resort to pleading for God's compassion, His eternal forgiveness and

humbly recognize our fleeting place in the world. This is the perfect segue to the sections of confessions.

Yom Kippur--Torah Reading

Two Torahs are taken out of the ark, one reads the portion of the day while the second reads of the special sacrifices offered on Yom Kippur. The first Torah is opened to the 16th chapter of Leviticus which begins with the statement:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי־ה' וַיִּמְתּוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אַחִידְךָ וְאֶל־בָּנָי בְּקִלְעֵת אֱלֹהֵי־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבַּיִת לַפְּרֻכָּת אֶל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרוֹן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בְעֵינֶיךָ אֲרָאָה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת: בְּנֹצֶת יָבֵא אַהֲרֹן אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּבָר בֹּר־בָּקָר לְחַטָּאת וְאַיִל לְעֹלָה:

The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of the LORD. The LORD said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover. Thus only shall Aaron enter the Shrine: with a bull of the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.—

The Torah continues to outline the ceremony of the Yom Kippur in the Temple but begins with a sad tale which reminds us of the perils of initiative when done without divine consent. During the consecration of the Tabernacle, Aharon's two eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, wanted to offer their own incense in the Temple but were prohibited. They ignored the process and the chain of command and chose to offer a sacrifice which they were not commanded to do—they were killed by God. Perhaps the rabbis included this as a warning for future generations—Judaism allows for self-expression, creativity, and freedom of inquiry—up to a point!

Yom Kippur is a time of extreme introspection and individual reckoning; but we still act as part of a community, we follow the age old traditions, we sing the nostalgic tunes of generations past and we join together with our brothers and sisters, standing before God and praying for a happy and healthy new year.

The Maftir is taken from Numbers 29:7 which discusses the various laws of Yom Kippur such as the types of sacrifices and the laws relating to restricting one's physical needs on this day. The Haftara (additional reading from the prophets) is taken from Isaiah 57 in which Isaiah exhorts the nation for fasting on Yom Kippur but treating people poorly. If one excels in the mitzvahs to God but ignores the mitzvahs to the poor, the weak, the lonely, then their prayers are hollow, their repentance empty.

Yizkor

Rabbi Sacks notes that the first record of praying for the memory of the dead goes back over two thousand years to the Maccabees. In the second book of Maccabees, Judah makes a prayer for fallen fighters and makes a collection for the Temple on their behalf. We have not stopped memorializing since.

Jews remember. We remember our history, as well as our sins before God in efforts to repent; we remember the unique Biblical personalities who acted righteously and ask God to remember them for us, and we remember those evil ones about whom we are commanded to never forget. It is therefore quite natural that at times of festivities, when family gathers, when rituals return to our consciousness, we remember those who are no longer physically with us anymore. Jews who seldom go to Synagogue will nevertheless be sure to appear for Yizkor (prayer of memory). Sometimes a Synagogue is a place to meet God; sometimes it is a place to meet old friends; but on very special occasions it is a place to commune with one's past, with loved ones—letting them know of one's welfare and connection to our Jewish roots.

An unusual custom takes place on Yizkor four times during the Jewish calendar (the three festivals and Yom Kippur). In the middle of services, the leader makes a one-word announcement—YIZKOR! Immediately, throngs of worshipers head for the door and wait outside until it's over. You see, in order to recite Yizkor you have to be part of a club—a dreaded club. Only orphans recite Yizkor. And so, after the hustle and bustle of most of the community leaving the sanctuary, a select few sit in silence ready to recite a simple prayer asking God to remember our loved ones.

יִזְכּוֹר אֱלֹהִים נִשְׁמַת אָבִי מוֹרֵי (פב"פ) שֶׁהִלְכָה לְעוֹלָמוֹ בְּעִבּוֹר שְׁפָלֵי גִּדְרֵי אִתְּמוֹ צְדָקָה בְּעֵדוֹ בְּשִׁכְרֵי זֶה תְּהֵא נִפְשׁוֹ צְרוּרָה
בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים עִם נִשְׁמוֹת אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב שָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה וְעִם שְׂאֵר צְדִיקִים וְצְדִיקְנִיּוֹת שְׂבָגוּ עָדוֹן וְנִאֲמַר
אָמֵן :

May God remember the soul of my father, my teacher, (Mention his Hebrew name and that of his father) son of who has gone to his world, because I pledge [without vowing] to donate charity for his sake In this merit, may his soul be bound up in the bond of life, with the souls of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah, and with the other righteous men and women who are in the Gan Eden (Paradise) and let us say Amen

יִזְכּוֹר אֱלֹהִים נִשְׁמַת אִמִּי מוֹרְתִי (פב"פ) שֶׁהִלְכָה לְעוֹלָמָהּ בְּעִבּוֹר שְׁפָלֵי גִּדְרֵי אִתְּמוֹ צְדָקָה בְּעֵדָהּ וּבְשִׁכְרֵי זֶה תְּהֵא נִפְשָׁהּ
צְרוּרָה בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים עִם נִשְׁמוֹת אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב שָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה וְעִם שְׂאֵר צְדִיקִים וְצְדִיקְנִיּוֹת שְׂבָגוּ עָדוֹן
וְנִאֲמַר אָמֵן :

May God remember the soul of my mother, my teacher, (Mention her Hebrew name and that of her father) daughter of who has gone to her world. because I pledge [without vowing] to donate charity for her sake. In this merit, may her soul be bound up in the bond of life, with the souls of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and

Leah, and with the other righteous men and women who are in Gan Eden (Paradise) and let us say, Amen.

And so, with male and female close relatives. There is also a solemn Yizkor prayer for those martyred sanctifying the name of God, for those who perished during the Holocaust, as well as those who died fighting Israel's wars for independence and survival.

Interestingly, the word Yizkor does not mean 'please remember'; rather, it means 'He Will Remember'! The mourner who spends the rest of the day pleading with God to answer and send blessings their way—for Yizkor there is no pleading. It is a factual statement—God Will. There is no world and no religion in which its God will not remember those who passed and bind up their soul in His eternal light. Therefore, this prayer is a statement from a broken vessel to the infinite about a 'kadosh' (holy person).

Yom Kippur Musaf--Piyyut Unetane Tokef

During the repetition of Musaf for Yom Kippur we engage in two public rituals: one, when we recite together this haunting poem called 'Unetane Tokef' and the second when we prostrate during the recitation of the Temple service. In both we have a moment of intense togetherness in an otherwise private experience.

Throughout the high holidays we traverse on two planes—the personal, private and the public, communal. While we clearly respect the notion of praying together as a nation/city/community/synagogue, we nevertheless engage in a very personal dialogue with God about our year that was, our failings and perhaps successes as well; as well, we plead for us and our families (first) for the year to come—health, wealth, peace, life! Our call to God is internal despite standing next to our neighbors. Yom Kippur is about the raw emotion and vulnerability that one is ready to show God. In submitting to Him we humbly recognize our unworthiness, yet we still ask—in private.

But in very few instances we are willing to open up not to God alone but to those around us, and to engage in a communal cry for life, for life. It is truly a frightening moment when you think about reciting that prayer last year with your neighbor and then to realize that this year your neighbor is no longer. The fear of the day of judgment for me reaches its pinnacle in the recitation—actually it's not a recitation, rather it is a wailing, a shrieking, a realization that there is only the here and now to seek our welfare. This is Unetane Tokef!

It is made of three sections: the first introduces the notion of God on His throne passing judgment in its most final state. His throne is established in truth and in truth He sits and judges, reproves, writes, signs, counts, reckons and remembers ALL. He opens the book of memories of each of our lives and it is read ALOUD! In each is each person's insignia. And with the sound of the great shofar as well as a silent still voice, the angels will be alarmed, they will

shudder and call out that the day of judgment has arrived—everyone will come before God to be counted, judged, on this day!

This first section the congregation recites followed by the chazan (leader). The second section, though is recited closer together. The leader recites a few words and the people respond; he shares a bit more and the people return to the haunting chorus, a reminder of the gravity of this day: בְּרֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתָּבוּן, וּבְיוֹם צוּם יִסָּמְדוּ. 'On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed'.

And then together we solemnly sing all the permutations of the year ahead:

כַּמָּה יַעֲבֹרוּן, וְכַמָּה יִבְרָאוּן, מִי יִחְיֶה, וּמִי יָמוּת, מִי בְּקִצּוֹ, וּמִי לֹא בְּקִצּוֹ, מִי בְּמֵיִם, וּמִי בְּאֵשׁ, מִי בְּחֶרֶב, וּמִי בְּחֵזֶה, מִי בְּרָעָב, וּמִי בְּצָמָא, מִי בְּרַעַשׁ, וּמִי בְּמַגָּפָה, מִי בְּחִנְיָקָה, וּמִי בְּסִקִּילָה, מִי יָנוּחַ, וּמִי יָנוּעַ, מִי יִשְׁקֹט, וּמִי יִטָּרַף, מִי יִשְׁלוֹ, וּמִי יִתְיַסֵּר, מִי יַעֲנִי, וּמִי יַעֲשִׂיר, מִי יִשְׁפֹּל, וּמִי יָרוּם.

“how many shall pass away and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die, who in good time, and who by an untimely death, who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who by strangulation and who by lapidation, who shall have rest and who wander, who shall be at peace and who pursued, who shall be serene and who tormented, who shall become impoverished and who wealthy, who shall be debased, and who exalted.”

How can we not shudder to our core when we read this year of the words ‘who by plague’? We glossed over it last year without a thought and then in frightening prophetic form we ask ourselves, who by plague? Who by pandemic? How many will incur an untimely death? How many will be tormented, impoverished? Who will survive, who will rise up?

And then we reach the climax of this dreadful poem—the entire congregation physically and mentally drained, scream at the top of their lungs...

וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וְצַדִּיקָה מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רֵעַ הַגְּזֵרָה But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severity of the decree.

The moment is cathartic; there is clarity in our otherwise confused existence—through repentance, prayer and good deeds we can change our fate! Perhaps not completely, as the prayer does not say they ‘avert the evil decree’; rather, they ‘avert the severity of the decree’. Nevertheless, we all scream out with no inhibitions, we join together in utmost solidarity that there is a path back, a way to avert the horrors we just read about our perspective futures. And then, a sobering moment concludes this chilling segment—coming to terms with our ephemeral existence.

אָדָם יְסוּדוֹ מֵעֶפֶר וְסוּפוֹ לְעֶפֶר. בְּנַפְשׁוֹ יְבִיא לַחֲמוּ. מִשׁוּל כְּתָרִס הַנִּשְׁבֵּר, כְּחֻצִיר יָבֵשׁ, וְכֻצִּיץ גּוֹבֵל, כְּצֵל עוֹבֵר, וְכַעֲנָן
כָּלָה, וְכָרוּחַ נוֹשֶׁבֶת, וְכַאֲבָק פּוֹרֵחַ, וְכַחֲלוֹם יְעוּף

We come from dust, and return to dust. We labour by our lives for bread, we are like broken shards, like dry grass, and like a withered flower; like a passing shadow and a vanishing cloud, like a breeze that passes, like dust that scatters, like a fleeting dream.

What a way to end this intense prayer for life, for our existence! We conclude by reminding ourselves of our finitude, our smallness in the big picture of God and the universe. We are but a fleeting dream and as much as we believe ourselves to be the center of all, we are but a moment in eternity. But God... And here we once again join together and scream with the entire community the final truth: **וְאַתָּה הוּא מֶלֶךְ אֵל חַי וְקַיִם** But You are the king who lives eternal...

Yom Kippur Musaf: The Avodah (Temple Service)

The height of the Yom Kippur experience in Biblical times was the service of the High priest in attaining atonement for himself, his family, and the entire nation, through sacrifices, incense and the scapegoat. All of Israel in Jerusalem and throughout were anxiously watching the intense service from dawn to dark and awaiting the sign that atonement had been granted. His day is crammed with activities, rituals, purifications, clothes-changing, sprinkling, smearing, offering—all the way until the end of the day. During this grueling process he made a special prayer to God and even uttered the holy ineffable name of God ten times that day. The Talmud related that every time the Kohen Gadol uttered the name of God, all who heard it fell down on their faces. This idea is expressed in the Machzor during the repetition of the Musaf service in the following paragraphs:

וְהַפְּהִינִים וְהַעֵם הַעוֹמְדִים בְּעֻזָּה. כְּשֶׁהָיוּ שׁוֹמְעִים אֶת הַשֵּׁם הַנִּכְבָּד וְהַנּוֹרָא מִפְּרֵשׁ יוֹצֵא מִפִּי כֹהֵן גָּדוֹל בִּקְדוּשָׁה וּבְטָהֳרָה.
הָיוּ כּוֹרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים וּמוֹדִים וְנוֹפְלִים עַל פְּנֵיהֶם. וְאוֹמְרִים בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד :

And the priests and the people who were standing in the Temple Courtyard when they heard the glorious and awesome Name [of God] explicitly pronounced from the mouth of the High Priest⁹² with holiness and with purity, they bowed, prostrated themselves, offered thanks, and fell upon their faces and said, “Blessed [is His] Name, His glorious Kingdom is forever and ever.”

As a rule, Jews almost never fully prostrate themselves; our bowing is from the waist but not on our knees. Other religions have instituted genuflection or full-blown prostration on a daily basis, however for Jews it feels very foreign. Yet, on Yom Kippur we fully submit ourselves before God. When we recite ‘וּאֲנַחְנוּ כּוֹרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים’ (we bend and prostrate) in the Alenu prayer on (Rosh Hashana and) Yom Kippur as well as the three times during the ‘Avoda’ when we hear

the name of God, we find a spot in the Synagogue and completely prostrate before God. There is a custom not to place our heads or knees on the stone floor, thus a towel is usually placed at the knees and forehead for the prostration.

While it is a strange feeling to completely prostrate in the Synagogue, it is also quite exhilarating as we all as a community engage in complete submission to God for those moments during the service.

When the 'Avoda' is complete and the high priest emerged unblemished (if he sinned during that time he would not make it out of the Holy of Holies alive) there was a celebration unlike ever seen during the course of the year. It is at this time that the face of the high priest shone like the sun and the children of Israel rejoiced at the idea of knowing they had received atonement from God. A piyyut in the service reflects this amazing moment:

Musaf Yom Kippur: Piyyut Mareh Kohen

אַמֶּת מֵה נִהְדָּר הָיָה כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל בְּצֵאתוֹ מִבֵּית קֹדְשֵׁי הַקֹּדְשִׁים בְּשָׁלוֹם בְּלִי פְגַע :

How truly glorious was the High Priest as he left the Holy of Holies, peacefully, unharmed.

כֹּאֲהֵל הַנִּמְתַּח בְּדָרֵי מַעְלָה. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּבָרְקִים הַיּוֹצֵאִים מִזִּיּוֹ הַסּוּיֹת. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּגִדְל גְּדִילִים בְּאַרְבַּע קְצוּוֹת. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּדַמוֹת הַקֹּשֶׁת בְּתוֹךְ הָעֵנָן. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּהוֹד אֲשֶׁר הִלְבִּישׁ צוּר לַיְצוּרִים. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּנֶרֶד הַנִּתּוֹן בְּתוֹךְ גִּנַּת חֶמֶד. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּזֶר הַנִּתּוֹן עַל מַצַּח מְלֶךְ. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּחֶסֶד הַנָּתּוּן עַל פְּנֵי חֶתָן. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּטַהַר הַנִּתּוֹן בְּצַנִּיף טְהוֹר. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּיוֹשֵׁב בְּסֶטֶר לְחִלּוֹת פְּנֵי מְלֶךְ. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן

כְּכּוֹכַב הַנִּגַּה בְּגִבּוֹל מִזְרַח. מִרְאָה כֹּהֵן :

As the canopy of the heavens stretched out on high, was the appearance of the High Priest. As the glitter of light emanating from the brilliance of

the angelic creatures, was the appearance of the High Priest. As the beautiful [blue] thread in the fringes of the four corners of a garment. was the appearance of the High Priest. As the rainbow in the clouds, was the appearance of the High Priest. As the garment of majestic splendor with which the Creator attired His creatures was the appearance of the High Priest. As a rose planted in a beautiful garden, was the appearance of the High Priest. As a crown set upon a king's forehead, was the appearance of the High Priest. As the grace reflected in the face of a groom, was the appearance of the High Priest. As the purity of the pure mitre, was the appearance of the High Priest. As he [Moshe] who was concealed, pleading before God, was the appearance of the High Priest. As the bright star shining in the east, was the appearance of the High Priest.

In Synagogues around the world a melody of excitement has permeated in the last decades, to the point where this song and melody is played at Jewish weddings. While the pinnacle of the Yom Kippur experience occurs during Musaf, the fast day continues with two more prayers and more intense services to come.

Yom Kippur: Mincha

Mincha on Yom Kippur begins with Torah reading and an interesting one at that. In the morning the Torah reading is as expected—the laws of Yom Kippur—however in the afternoon we read of a strange portion, Leviticus chapter 18, otherwise known as the section on ‘arayot’—sexual misconduct. Perhaps it is brought to remind us that though we have spent the last hours acting like angels and focusing entirely on the spiritual, nevertheless we must be reminded that we are physical beings, with needs, desires, yearnings, all of which we must constantly keep in check if we truly want to attain holiness.

The Haftara we read is the book of Jonah. This story tells of the prophet Jonah who defies God when told to go to Ninveh and warn them to do Teshuva (repentance) before it would be too late. Jonah did not like the idea of a terrible nation of Ninveh having the capacity to return to God. God teaches Jonah that all of God's creatures can find their path back to God and to themselves. There are many layers to this story and several versions of Teshuva represented by different personalities. Indeed, reading this book on the afternoon of Yom Kippur is a fulfilling experience and continues one on the path of the day.

Yom Kippur: Neila

Our Sages added an additional prayer to the holiday of Yom Kippur. Unlike any other day of the year which has either three prayers (weekday) or four prayers (Musaf on Rosh Chodesh, Shabbat, Festivals), Yom Kippur has five! Maariv, Shacharit, Musaf, Mincha, Neila.

Neila refers to 'neilat hashearim' (closing of the gates) which symbolizes the end of the holiest day of the year and the last moments to seek forgiveness from God. The prayer begins with psalm 145 (Ashrei) and is followed by the silent Shemoneh Esreh and the repetition. One major difference is that until this point in the service whenever there was a prayer to ask God to inscribe on in the book of life, the word כתבו (write) was used; however, at this point, with only minutes until the sun finally sets the word is changed to חתמו (sign and seal) in the book of life.

There is a feeling of desperation that pervades the Shul and our prayers turn into wails and pleas. The content loses significance, as the notion of simply screaming out to God takes over. For this reason, the Neila prayer invokes the Selichot during the repetition of the Shemoneh Esreh. Seven times we recall the holy Biblical passage 'Hashem, Hashem' (God, God). This passage recalls the moment when Moshe sought forgiveness from God for the nation which sinned against Him.

There is a unique paragraph that is added to the Shemone Esreh and the repetition and it is called 'ata noten':

אתה נותן יד לפושעים, וימינך פשוטה לקבל שבים. ותלמךנו יהנה אלהינו להתנדות לפניך על כל עוונותינו, למען נחיה
מעשק ידנו, ותקבלנו בתשובה שלמה לפניך פאשים וכניחוהים למען דבריך אשר אמרת

You reach out Your hand to transgressors, and Your right hand is extended to receive those who [truly] repent. You have taught us, O God, to confess before You all our iniquities so that we may refrain from the injustice of our hands; so that You will accept us in perfect repentance before You, [as You would accept] fire-offerings and sweet savours, for the sake of Your word which You spoke.

These words, which date back to at least the 9th century come as a conclusion of the day's feelings and activities. We call out to God and acknowledge the compassion in granting us this day, the gift of being able to seek forgiveness and the realization that without God we would sink into corruption. We recite these words knowing that the day has come to a close and all that is left to do is call out to God in the most basic and primal way possible:

שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד

“**Hear Yisrael**, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.”

(Shema Yisrael, Ado-nai Elohainu, Ado-nai echad)

This fundamental verse from the Torah is recited by the leader once and repeated by the congregation.

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

Blessed [is His] Name, Whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever.

(Baruch shem kevod malchuto leolam vaed)

This is a statement that Jews recite quietly in between the Shma and the subsequent paragraphs. It is meant to exalt the name of God upon hearing it but it is said quietly so as not to interfere with the flow of the entire paragraph of the Shma. On Yom Kippur, however, where this idea is essential, the phrase is not whispered but screamed out with all our might. At Neila we recite this phrase three times in succession.

ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים

The Lord, He is God.

(Ado-nai hu haElohim)

This final utterance is recited seven times after the chazan. It is a reference to a Biblical story of Elijah the prophet who brought the Israelites to Mount Carmel and gave them an ultimatum—either choose God or the idolatry, Baal. After a miraculous display of seeing the hand of God, the children of Israel call out these words—“The Lord is our God”.

The recitation here at the last seconds of Yom Kippur is meant to condense our thoughts and actions of the entire day into three words—God is our Lord. In doing so, we reaffirm our position as the nation of God, who will sacrifice for God, die for His name, but more importantly, Live for His name to the best of our abilities.

With these words the services come to a close and the kaddish (the prayer of sanctifying God’s name) is recited one final time. In the middle of the kaddish a single sound of the shofar is blown, a tekiah gedola, a long triumphant sound which marks the end of the day but the beginning of a new year.

Addendum to Yamim Noraim Primer

The Months of the Year and Their Holidays

*There is a difference between holidays inside Israel and those outside of the land: With the exception of Rosh Hashana which is two days everywhere, every other holiday is celebrated as one day in Israel but two days outside of Israel. Thus, every time there is a (/) it refers to the 'second day of the lands of the exile'.

Tishrei

1 and 2 – Rosh Hashana
3 – Tzom Gedaliah – the fast of Gedaliah
10- Yom Kippur
1-10 – Ten Days of Repentance
15-23 Holiday of Succot
15/16- Succot
21-Hoshana Raba
22/23-Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah

Cheshvan

1—Rosh Chodesh—mini festival/mini Rosh Hashana

Kislev

1 Rosh Chodesh
25- 2 Tevet Chanukah

Tevet

1 Rosh Chodesh
10- Fast of the 10th of Tevet

Shvat

1 Rosh Chodesh
15- TU B'Shvat – the New Year for Trees

Adar

1 Rosh Chodesh
13- Fast of Esther
14- Purim
15-Shushan Purim in Jerusalem
(or other walled cities from the time of Joshua, in Israel)

Nissan

1 Rosh Chodesh
15-22 Holiday of Pesach
15/16 Pesach
(16, count the omer for 49 days until Shavuot)
21/22 Last Day of Pesach
26- Holocaust Remembrance Day

Iyar

1 Rosh Chodesh
4- Yom Haizkaron --Memorial for fallen Israeli Soldiers
5-Yom Ha'atzmaut-- Israeli Independence Day
18- Lag BaOmer (33rd Day of the Omer)
28- Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem reunification day)

Sivan

1 Rosh Chodesh
6/7 - Shavuot

Tammuz

1 Rosh Chodesh

17- Fast (begins the “three weeks” period until 9 Av)

Av

1 Rosh Chodesh (start 9 days)

9- Tisha B’Av – Major fast day

15- TU B’av –Day of rejoicing and love

Elul

1 Rosh Chodesh

No holidays but we blow the shofar every day
to prepare ourselves for Rosh Hashana