

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM PRESENTS:
THE ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 50

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The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson

50

Erev Yom Kippur Prayer (Yom Kippur Eve)

Selichos and Tachanun

On *Erev Yom Kippur* (Yom Kippur Eve) we recite *Selichos* before praying (*davening*) except that in most congregations, it is much shorter than usual. We shorten the *Selichos* because *Erev Yom Kippur* is considered like a Holiday (*Yom Tov*), as there is a commandment (*Mitzvah*) to eat throughout the day¹. We also only recite *Viduy* (*confession*) one time as opposed to three times that we usually recite at *Selichos* because we will say *Viduy* once in the afternoon prayer at *Mincha* and again at the evening prayer *Maariv*². A number of other standard sections of *Selichos* are omitted since we will say them at *Maariv*³.

The *Ashkenaz* version and the (version) *Nusach Sefard* don't recite *Tachanun* (supplication) at *Selichos* nor the rest of the day. Sephardim have the custom to recite the *Selichos* as usual, including *Tachanun*. However, by *Mincha*, *Tachanun* is not recited.

Yom Kippur is the greatest Yom Tov as it is the day Hashem gives us the opportunity to cleanse us from our sins; therefore, even on Erev Yom Kippur we begin celebrating it starting already at Shacharis. Rabbeinu Yonah writes in his classic work Shaarei Teshuvah, that one of the reasons for having a meal on Erev Yom Kippur is in celebration of Yom Kippur itself. Being that Yom Kippur is a Yom Tov in itself and a meal cannot be eaten in its honor on the day itself, we therefore begin celebrating it already on the day before with a festive meal.

Mizmor Le'Sodah

On *Erev Yom Kippur*, *Ashkenaz* and *Nusach Sefard* omit *Mizmor Le'Sodah*⁴, since there will

¹ *Levush* 604:1

² *Roke'ach* 214

³ *Maharil* page 312 and notes. *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Simon* 602:1 and 604:2

⁴ Alternatively it can be pronounced *Le'Todah*

be a fast that night. In the times of the *Beis Hamikdash* when an actual *Korban Todah* would be brought, it wouldn't be offered up for a *Korban* (sacrifice) on this day since the fast would reduce the amount of time to eat the *Korban* and the accompanying 40 loaves of bread; therefore, we don't recite the passage about this *Korban* on *Erev Yom Kippur*. Sephardim recite *Mizmor Le'Sodah* on *Erev Yom Kippur* anyway.

Avinu Malkeinu

On *Erev Yom Kippur* Ashkenaz and *Nusach Sefard* do not recite *Avinu Malkeinu* by *Shacharis* and *Mincha*. Sephardim recite it by both.

When *Yom Kippur* is on *Shabbos* and *Avinu Malkeinu* isn't recited by Ashkenaz and *Nusach Sefard*, then on *Erev Yom Kippur* by *Shacharis*, both agree to recite *Avinu Malkeinu*; but not by *Mincha*⁵.

Lamnatzei'ach... Ya'anacha Hashem Be'Yom Tzara

The chapter of *Lamnatzei'ach... Ya'anacha Hashem Be'Yom Tzara* is omitted on *Erev Yom Kippur* when reciting *Ashrei* and *U'va Le'Tziyone* because it would be inappropriate to call this day a *Yom Tzara* - a day of trouble - since today is celebrated with numerous meals⁶.

AI Cheit and Viduy

Ashkenaz and *Nusach Sefard*, as well as Sephardim recite the *AI Cheit* (for the sin ...) and *Viduy* (confession) prayers by the quiet *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Mincha*. The *Chazzan* does not recite it during the repeat *Shemoneh Esrei*.

The AI Cheit of Mincha on Erev Yom Kippur

The Rabbis instituted to recite *Viduy* (confession) and *AI Cheit* ... (For the sin ...) also on *Erev Yom Kippur*. Although on *Yom Kippur* itself we will recite the *Viduy* (confession) *AI Cheit* ... (For the sin ...) ten times during our prayers in the synagogue, the Sages wanted everyone to recite *Viduy* (confession) *AI Cheit* ... (For the sin ...) at least one time before the holy *Yom Kippur* day itself, lest something happen during the meal on the eve of the fast that may cause one - *Heaven forbid* - to choke and die before having the opportunity to gain atonement through the verbal *Viduy* of *AI Cheit*. For this reason they instituted that each individual recite *Viduy* and *AI Cheit* by the silent *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer of *Mincha* right before *Yom Kippur*. Since

⁵ *Simon* 604:2

⁶ *Chayei Adam* 144:4

it is recited only as a precautionary measure, they did not institute that the *Chazzan* recite it during his *Chazoras Hashatz* (repeat *Shemoneh Esrei*) so not to lengthen the *Erev Yom Kippur* prayer longer than necessary.

Blessing the Children: Birchas HaBanim

Many people have the custom of blessing their children on *Erev Yom Kippur*. The custom is to bless both the boys and the girls individually. There is a separate version for the boys and a separate one for the girls since the grammar needs to address boys in the masculine and girls in the feminine. Besides for this obvious difference, there is also a difference in the wording of the initial blessing itself.

The Blessing for a Son,

When blessing our sons we begin by saying *May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe* and then we continue with the verses of *Birchos Kohanim; Yevarechecha Hashem... Ya'eir Hashem... Yissa Hashem...*

For a Girl,

We begin by saying *May G-d make you like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah*. We then follow with the verses of *Birchos Kohanim* like we do for boys. After this we continue to bless our children with a heartfelt prayer for a New Year filled with blessing. We pray for their health both physically and spiritually, that they be blessed with the ability to make the right choices by using all their faculties for *Avodas Hashem* (Service of G-d).

Praying for our Children's Needs

We pray to *Hashem* bless our children with a source of posterity. We also pray that G-d's *generous hand* provide for them their livelihood in a manner that allows them to earn their income with the ability to also serve *Hashem* freely. One may add any additional prayer in any language in addition to the standard text or in its place. However, since the standard text of this blessing is very thorough and precise, it would be advisable to recite it first and then add any additional prayer one wishes to recite. One who doesn't

understand the Hebrew version of the prayer can use a translation, which can easily be found in the *Machzor*.

Using the verses of Birchos Kohanim in Personal Blessings

The Torah commands the Kohanim (Descendants of Aharon the Kohen Gadol - the High Priest) to bless the Bnei Yisrael with Birchos Kohanim (the Priestly Blessings) consisting of Yevarechecha, Ya'eir and Yissa. Accordingly, the Shulchan Aruch rules that: it is forbidden for anyone other than a Kohen to bless others using the verses of Yevarechecha, Ya'eir and Yissa.

Why then do we use these verses to bless our children right before Yom Kippur?

The Chafetz Chaim gives three answers to this question in his commentary Biur Halacha⁷:

- § If a *Mitzvah* requires intent in order to fulfill the *Torah* command, likewise to transgress it when done through a non-Kohen, then in this case, since one doesn't have intent to perform the *Mitzvah* of *Birchas Kohanim* when blessing his children, it is permitted
- § Since it is done without spreading one's hands in the manner that a *Kohen* does
- § Since the Rabbis instituted that *Birchas Kohanim* should be performed only during the *Chazoras Hashatz*, therefore, one who does this outside of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, is assumed that his intention is specifically not for the sake of doing the *Mitzvah* of *Birchas Kohanim*. This counter-intent of fulfilling it for the *Mitzvah* prevents a non-Kohen from the transgression according to all opinions; even if generally a *Mitzvah* performance is valid without any specific intent to fulfill the *Torah* command

⁷ *Simon 128 D"h De'zar over be'issur*

זור עובר בעשה - עיין במשנה ברורה שכתבנו ונ"ל דכ"ז דוקא למאי דקי"ל דמצות צריכות כונה וכו' ולכאורה לפ"ז יש לתמוה על מנהג העולם שנוהגין לברך אחד לחבירו בין שהוא כהן או זר בעת שמלוה אותו בלשון יברכה וגו' ואף דברכה כזו הוא שלא בשעת התפלה וידוע הוא מה שאיתא בירושלמי פ"ד דתענית לא מציינו נשיאת כפים בלא תפלה הלא זהו בודאי רק תקנתא דרבנן דקבעוהו בתפלה ומדאורייתא אינו תלוי בזה כלל תדע דהלא תפלה גופא לרוב הפוסקים הוא דרבנן וא"כ כיון דמדאורייתא יוצא בברכה בעלמא כשמברך אותם אפילו שלא בשעת תפלה וע"ז אמרה התורה אתם ולא זרים האיך מותר לזר לברך אחד לחבירו בלשון זה וא"כ יש ראייה ממנהג העולם להא דקי"ל מצות צריכות כונה. ואולי יש לומר דטעם המנהג משום דס"ל כהב"ח דדוקא בפריסת ידים עובר הזר בעשה א"נ דכיון דתקנו רבנן שלא לישא כפים בלא תפלה שוב מי שאומר פסוקים אלו של ב"כ בלא תפלה בין כהן בין ישראל הוי כמכוין בפירוש שלא לקיים בזה המצוה דברכת כהנים ולכן שרי:

Kol Nidrei

One of the most stirring moments of the *Yom Kippur* liturgy comes right at the beginning of the *Yom Kippur* prayers. The congregants are standing wearing their white *Kittels*⁸ wrapped in their *Talleisim*; the Holy Ark is opened and two of the congregational leaders take two of the *Sefer Torah* scrolls out and stand with them on either side of the *Chazzan* and then he begins with the words:

With the approval of the Omnipresent (Al Da'as HaMakom) and with the approval of the congregation (Al Da'as Hakahal)¹⁰; by the convocation of the Heavenly tribunal and by the convocation of the Earthly tribunal, we hereby grant permission to pray together with those who have transgressed.

Kol Nidrei (all vows) ...

The above two stanzas are juxtaposed and recited in a solemn setting with the *Chazzan* flanked by two *Sefer Torah* scrolls. The connection between the first stanza that petition for permission to include transgressors of *Torah Law* and the following stanza of the declaration annulling our vows, seems a bit odd and needs explanation.

Firstly, why is it necessary to summon the *Heavenly Tribunal* in conjunction with the *Earthly Tribunal* to allow us to pray alongside our brethren that have gone astray? Why do we need to acknowledge their presence publicly altogether? Finally, what does all this have to do with annulment of vows?

The inception of the Kol Nidrei Prayer

There is one theory that *Kol Nidrei* began during the era of the Spanish Inquisition, when Jews were forced to renounce their religion in favor of the religion of the country. In doing so, they made their vows to be faithful

⁸ A white tunic that is worn on *Yom Kippur*, which resembles burial shrouds, while at the same time representing the purity that reflects man becoming angel like (who don't eat) on this solemn day of fasting.

⁹ Four-cornered, fringed, prayer garment

¹⁰ Some versions have this phrase second and the second phrase first

to their newly accepted religion in the most fearful settings. Many of these “converts”, known as the Marranos, secretly continued to practice Judaism. They used to gather clandestinely on *Yom Kippur* to express their deep remorse in having succumbed to the pressures of converting to the new religion. They gathered together to recite *Kol Nidrei* with permission from the *Heavenly* and *Earthly Tribunals* to declare their oaths to convert as null and void. It is said that the common melody that is used for this prayer is the same somber melody the Marranos themselves used for this prayer.

It's Early History

This theory is erroneous, since the *Kol Nidrei* prayer is already mentioned in the *Siddur* of *Rav Amram Ga'on* who lived in the 9th century, long before the Marranos. In fact *Rav Amram* dismisses the practice of reciting *Kol Nidrei* altogether for other reasons. There is much *Halachic* discussion amongst the *Rishonim* as to the effectiveness of *Kol Nidrei* with regard to annulling vows that were either made in the past or for those that one may express in the future. In the writings of the *Rishonim* it is evident that indeed it was the common practice to recite *Kol Nidrei* right at the beginning of *Yom Kippur* services.

Even earlier in the 8th century, in the times of the *Ge'onim* there is reference that there was such a *Minhag* (custom) in some countries, but not in the local central *Yeshivas* (Talmudic academies) of Babylon in that era. *Rav Natrena'ee Gaon*¹¹ comments that he did not wish to render a *Halachic* decision on its effectiveness since “it has been already a hundred years that the *Yeshivas* stopped dealing with issue of *Nedarim* (vows) [this was apparently due to the troubles they had from the Karaite sect as discussed in the following paragraph].

Emphasizing the Authority

Another theory has it that *Kol Nidrei* is a way of emphasizing the authority of the *Oral Law* handed down by the Rabbis from generation to generation. During the Middle Ages¹² there was a faction of Jews known as Karaites, who denounced their adherence to traditional *Oral Law* in explaining the *Torah*. They rather espoused an approach of distorting *Torah Law* by interpreting the laws of the *Torah* in a very literal manner. Thus, according

¹¹ *Piskei Teshuvos* 122

¹² Circa 8th century

to this sect, annulment of vows is limited to the father of a young girl and/or to the husband, which is explicitly stated in the *Torah*¹³. However, according to traditional *Oral Law*, the *Torah* allows the annulment of oaths and vows through a Jewish court presiding over the circumstance that the oath or vow may have been expressed under erroneous pretense, rendering them null and void. Because of these accusations, the *Ge'onim* stopped dealing with these issues altogether.

Validating the Oral Law

Accordingly, it is possible that *Kol Nidrei* may have been instituted to be performed publicly on the holiest day of the year at a time when the most Jews would be present in the synagogues. Perhaps the fearful setting described above, was to emphasize the importance of validity of the *Oral Law* preserved by the Rabbis and their teachings.

In truth, this theory also seems erroneous since it appears that during the *Ge'onic Era* when the Babylonian *Yeshivas* (Talmudic academies) had their problems with the Karaites they didn't recite *Kol Nidrei*, while other communities did recite it in different parts of the world.

Nevertheless, a Good Lesson

It is however still possible to use this opportunity to learn this important principle from the order of *Kol Nidrei*. It is also possible that Marranos eventually adopted this prayer with the above-mentioned intentions; but they were definitely not the originators of this passage.

Kol Nidrei and the Permission to Pray with Transgressors

As mentioned above, the prayer of *Kol Nidrei* dates back to the at least the 8th and 9th century when *Rav Natrena'ee Ga'on* and *Rav Amram Ga'on* lived. In fact, the *Shitah Mekubetzes*¹⁴ suggests that this custom started about 300 B.C.E. in the time of the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* (the Men of the Great Assembly). It also seems that the opening passage of *With the approval of the Omnipresent (Al Da'as HaMakom)* was added at a much later time, as its earliest mention is in the writings of *Rav Meir* of

¹³ *Bamidbar* 30: 2-17

¹⁴ *Shitah Mekubetzes* - R' Betzalel Ben Avraham Ashkenazi - Born: Egypt, 1520. Died: Israel, 1594. Author of *Shitah Mekubetzes*, a compilation of emendations and *Chiddushim* from the *Rishonim*, which is included in the traditional editions of the Talmud. Teacher of the *Ari zt"l*. Chief Rabbi of Egypt and then a leading *Rav* in Jerusalem.

Rothenberg¹⁵, who lived at the very end of the 13th century. Therefore, it is difficult to draw any conclusion on the combination of these two passages since they were instituted independently of each other. However, each one has its own significance and relevance to *Yom Kippur*.

With the approval of the Omnipresent (Al Da'as HaMakom) ... to pray together with the Transgressors

The *Tur* writes that the reason we recite the passage of *With the approval of the Omnipresent (Al Da'as HaMakom) ... we hereby grant permission to pray together with those who have transgressed*, is to include those individuals who have strayed away from adhering to *Torah Law* during the course of the year, yet have within them an inner spark that still keeps them connected to their people and to their heritage. The *Gemara* in *Kerisos*¹⁶ finds it necessary to include our brethren that are distant from *Torah* observance to be included in our quest for G-d's forgiveness on any public day of fasting. Therefore, on *Yom Kippur*, the holiest day of the year when we all fast and pray to G-d to atone for our sins, we acknowledge and include *those who have transgressed* to join us in our fasting and praying (*davening*).

The *Gemara* compares this concept to the added *Chelbana* spice in the *Ketores* (special incense) used in the *Beis Hamikdash*, our Holy Temple. The *Ketores* consisted of ten sweet fragrant spices, plus the *Chelbana* spice that had a bad odor, which was mixed into the rest of the blend of spices. When they were combined, it blended in such a way that the entire combination was so pleasantly fragrant, that the women who

¹⁵ Maharam M'Rothenberg – R' Meir Ben Baruch HaKohen - Born: Worms, Germany, c. 1215 Died: Ansishein, Alsace, 1293 Notes: One of the last and most influential Tosefists. Student of Rabbi Yechiel of Paris. Rabbi in Wurzburg, Augsburg, Worms, Mayence, Nurenberg, and Rotenberg. The most important German rabbi of his day he was also the recognized Ashkenazic authority of his time. Spent the last 7 years of his life in prison where he died having refused to allow himself to be redeemed for extortionary amounts of money. His body was released for burial only 14 years after his death.

¹⁶ *Daf 6b*

lived within a few miles of the *Beis Hamikdash* didn't need to wear any other perfume. So too, including the transgressors of *Torah Law* with us in our *Yom Kippur* prayers, will only enhance our pursuit of atonement on this holy day¹⁷.

Kol Nidrei: Annulment of Vows

One of the reasons for the *Kol Nidrei* prayer/formula on *Yom Kippur* night is because on this night, the most number of Jews attends the synagogues. Not only do religious Jews attend, but also as mentioned in the passage that precedes this prayer, even *those who have transgressed* join us in our fasting and praying (*davening*).

In "Gesammelte Schriften"¹⁸: The religious consciousness, which felt oppressed at the thought of the non-fulfillment of its solemn vows, accordingly devised a general and comprehensive formula of dispensation, which was repeated by the Chazzan in the name of the assembled congregation at the beginning of the fast of Atonement. This declared that the petitioners, who were seeking reconciliation with G-d, solemnly retracted in His presence all vows and oaths which they had taken during the period intervening between the previous Day of Atonement and the present one, and made them null and void from the beginning, entreating in their stead pardon and forgiveness from the Heavenly Father. This is in accordance with the older text of the formula as it is preserved in the "Siddur" of Amram Gaon¹⁹. The "Kol Nidrei" was thus evidently developed from the longing for a clear conscience on the part of those seeking reconciliation with G-d. The date of the composition of the prayer and its author are alike unknown; but it was in existence at the Ga'onic period.

We perform this annulment formula right at the start of *Yom Kippur* in an attempt to gain a full measure of atonement, from the holy day of *Yom Kippur*. Therefore, any transgression related to a violation of vows that cannot be atoned through the holiness of *Yom Kippur*, is alleviated through the annulment process of *Kol Nidrei*.

¹⁷ See Dissertation of the Ran *Drashos HaRan Drush 1*, Roadmap to Prayer Lesson 32 page 483

¹⁸ Collected Writings, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch zt"l (original in German, Vol. 3, page 361 and on)

¹⁹ This is according to the text that includes the annulment of oaths and vows from the past year

What's even more remarkable about this is that on a certain level, any transgression of *Torah Law* consists of an infringement of the *Bris* (covenant) and *Shevu'ah* (oath) that we undertook to abide by all *Torah Laws*. Thus, the first order of our atonement must come through the annulment of the binding nature of an oath.

Making a Commitment

However, we must understand this annulment only is only symbolic, for in truth, there is no way to annul the general *Bris* (covenant) and *Shevu'ah* (oath) that we undertook originally to abide by *Torah Law*. Rather, we can only acknowledge that we feel remorse and regret not following our commitment and ask *Hashem* to grant us a pardon from this aspect of our transgressions. The *Gemara* refers to this general commitment as *Mushba Ve'omed MeHar Sinai* (One is sworn to uphold the Torah ever since our acceptance of the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*).

Adhering to our Original Agreement

The *Chazon Ish*²⁰ explains that the original oath that *Bnei Yisrael* took upon themselves to abide by the *Torah* is only valid for that particular generation. Rather the *Bris* (covenant) was a commitment on that generation as well as on all future generations; but there is no actual oath that future generations need to uphold. We just refer to it as *Mushba Ve'omed MeHar Sinai* (One is sworn to uphold the Torah ever since our acceptance of the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*) since for all practical purposes we are bound by that original agreement. Hence, we can say that figuratively we are annulling our vows since we didn't adhere to the *Torah* as per our original agreement that is referred to as a vow.

Imploring the Redemption of our People

Rabbi Eli Munk in *The World of Prayer*²¹ treats the subject of *Kol Nidrei* in a very thorough manner. He writes about the Hebrew and Aramaic versions of this prayer and its origin. He discusses the various issues of *Kol Nidrei's* opponents as well as its proponents. He notes how much difficulty this passage endured over the time, and

²⁰ *Yoreh De'ah, Likutim*

²¹ Pages 227-238

is fascinated that it has been embraced by all backgrounds of Jewry. He concludes with the following hypothesis for its survival as well as its fame and reverence.

He brings *Kabbalistic* sources that link this prayer with its relevance to Jewish survival of an oath that G-d expressed as is recorded in the Talmud in *Bava Basra*²². “Alas, that I have sworn (to send My children into exile). Now that I have done this, who can render it null and void?” It is to this oath that we allude to in the annulling of vows of the *Kol Nidrei* prayer/formula. With this subtle allusion, we mean to implore *Hashem* to redeem His downtrodden nation from the present lengthy *Galus* (exile). Perhaps we can add that for this reason, *Kol Nidrei* has been recited with such a melancholy tune since it alludes to our long and difficult years in *Galus* (exile). Some theorize that at least the tune dates back to the era of the Marranos, as its tune fits the mode of that era.

Kol Nidrei: Three Times

The entire passage of *Kol Nidrei* is recited by the *Chazzan* out loud, and by the congregation in an undertone, three times over. It is important that everyone say it in order for the *Halachic* aspect of the annulment to be effective in whatever capacity it is *Halachically* legal²³.

Rabbi Munk notes that we find a similar precedent in the *Mishna Menachos*²⁴ regarding the cutting of the *Omer* (barley offering) on the *Yom Tov* of *Pesach* even on the *Shabbos*, contrary to the opinion the Sadducees sect. They announced the cutting three times over to uphold and lend support to the opinion of the Rabbis in dispute with the Sadducees. Likewise here, reciting the annulment process three times lends credibility to the opinion of the Rabbis regarding the issue of annulling vows.

In addition to being repeating it three times, each subsequent time the *Chazzan* raises his voice a little louder. *Shibalei HaLeke*²⁵ explains that this was done in an attempt to catch the attention of anyone who didn't follow

²² *Daf* 74a

²³ This is discussed in *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah* *Simon* 211

²⁴ *Daf* 65a

²⁵ *Simon* 317

along the initial two readings. The *Maharil* understands that this was done to intensify the awe and reverence people had to this passage. Also, the growing strength in the *Chazzan's* voice indicates our growing confidence that *Hashem* will hear our prayer and grant us forgiveness²⁶.

After the conclusion of *Kol Nidrei*, the *Chazzan* and the congregation recite the verses *Ve'nislach* (and forgive) and *Selach Nah* (please forgive) both from *Sefer Bamidbar*²⁷.

Halachic Time for Kol Nidrei

The *Rama* mentions that since *Kol Nidrei* is technically a formula for annulling vows, it is the custom to complete this prayer before nightfall²⁸. The *Magen Avraham* explains that we do this before nightfall even according to the opinion that *Kol Nidrei* doesn't nullify any vows made in the past and it is mainly to prevent any future non-intentional vows, because it still resembles the process of *Hatoras Nedarim* which is not allowed to be performed on *Shabbos* or Festivals.

Additionally, since the men will be wearing their *Tallis* during the evening prayer, they need to don their *Tallestim* before nightfall as well in order to recite the *Bracha* over the *Tallis*²⁹. The *Be'er Heitev* writes that the custom to wear the *Tallis* at night is because they are white garments which resemble the appearance of the Heavenly Angels. The *Rama*³⁰ writes that the custom for men to wear a *Kittel* (a white tunic) on *Yom Kippur* is also because it resembles the appearance of the Heavenly Angels.

The *Rama* also mentions that we wear a white *Kittel* on *Yom Kippur* because it resembles *Tachrichin* (shrouds). By wearing this garment we are reminded of the seriousness of this special holy day and how important it is to do *Teshuva* (repent) and attain *Hashem's* forgiveness.

²⁶ *Machzor Vitriye* Simon 351.

²⁷ 15:26, 14:19

²⁸ 619:1

²⁹ *Simon* 619 *Mishna Berura* S"K 5

³⁰ *Simon* 610:4

The Kittel of 1945 ³¹

YOM KIPPUR EVE 1945/5706,
FOEHRENWALD DP CAMP, GERMANY

The sun was about to set on Yom Kippur eve, the holiest day of the year. But for us... for us, it felt like Tisha B'Av. Just a few months earlier we were living, if you can call that living, it was actually dying, in the unspeakable horror that was called the Guns kirchen Lager (concentration camp) in Northern Austria. It is impossible to describe the hundreds of dead bodies strewn about everywhere you turned throughout the camp. The hunger, the stench, the death, the insanity was everywhere. The Nazis, may their names and memories be forever erased, dehumanized us, turning us into ravenous sub-humans, desperate for a drop of water. Days would go by between a morsel of bread and paltry sip.

I was 14 years old when we were finally liberated on May 5, 1945. Orphaned, widowed, homeless – completely alone with no place to go – we wandered in what now appears a complete fog. But it all comes back to me as I tell the story.

We – some 5000 of us survivors – ended up in the Foehrenwald DP (displaced persons) Camp in Germany (southwest of Munich), where we spent Yom Kippur, together with the Klausenberger Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam, who tragically lost his wife and 11 children to the German beasts.

As night was falling that Yom Kippur eve, all 5000 of us gathered in a makeshift shul for Kol Nidrei. As is the custom in many communities, the Klausenberger Rebbe stood up on the Bimah (the platform in the center of the congregation) to share a few pre-Kol Nidrei words to awaken our hearts and prepare us for the awesome day ahead of us.

I will never forget what the Klausenberger Rebbe said that Yom Kippur eve 61 years ago. The moment was overwhelming.

With tears in his eyes he began by thanking G-d for saving our lives from the Nazi hell.

He then pointed to his Kittel – the white linen robe that we traditionally wear on Yom Kippur – and began to speak (in Yiddish), slowly, deliberately, and tearfully:

³¹ By Simon Jacobson. The account below was related to me personally by Reb Leibel Zisman, a living witness to these unforgettable events. Leibel was 14 years old at the time, and his birthday is on *Yom Kippur*.

“One of the reasons we wear this Kittel is because it is the traditional burial garment, in which we wrap a body before laying it to rest in the ground, as we do when we bury our parents and those that came before us. Wearing a Kittel on Yom Kippur thus reminds us of our final day of judgment when we will be laid to rest. It therefore humbles and breaks our hearts, stirring us to do complete Teshuvah (return). The white, linen Kittel is a symbol of purity that we achieve through our introspection and efforts to repair all our wrongs.

“Since the Kittel reminds us of the burial shroud of those that passed on before us,” continued the Klausenberger, “why are we wearing a Kittel today? Our parents and loved ones were just slaughtered without Tachrichin (burial shrouds). They were buried, with or without clothes, in mass graves, or in no graves at all...”

Suddenly, the Klausenberger Rebbe began tearing off his own Kittel, literally. “No Kittel!” he cried out in an anguished voice. “Let us be like our parents. Let us remove our Kittels, so that they can recognize us. They won’t recognize us in Kittels, because they are not wrapped in Kittels...”

I have no words to capture the emotions pouring out of the grand Rebbe that first Yom Kippur after the horror.

Everyone gathered in the shul began to weep uncontrollably – men, women, old, young, every single person in the large hall. All our anguish, all our unbearable losses, all the humiliation and senseless dehumanization came spilling out of our guts.

It was an unforgettable sight: 5000 people sobbing. Nit geveint; M’hot ge’chlipet. Not sobbing; bawling. The floor was wet with the tears gushing from all our eyes.

What a stirring hisorerus (awakening) we experienced that Yom Kippur eve, what a remarkable hisorerus – it was unbelievable.

The Rebbe’s words rang in our ears, in every fiber of our broken beings – every one of us had just lost our closest relatives: fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts. We were indelibly scarred. The words rang out: “What do we need Tachrichin for?! Your father, mother, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, zeide, bobbe – they are all lying mangled in mass graves. Or in no graves at all – burned to ashes... What Tachrichin? What clothes? What Kittel?!...”

Picture the scene: The holiest night of the year. The awesome moment just before Kol Nidrei. All the Torah scrolls lifted out of the ark. 5000 broken Jews, left shattered, orphaned without families. The saintly Klausenberger Rav standing on the Bimah, ripping off his Kittel – “We don’t need it...”

What more can be said? Yet, as another Rebbe once expressed himself: "It difficult to speak, but it's more difficult to remain silent."

Today, 61 years later, we are blessed to enter Yom Kippur without the misery that haunted Yom Kippur in 1945, immediately after the liberation from the camps. Yom Kippur today comes amidst many blessings and comforts. We live in freedom and have achieved many levels of success. It's almost impossible to imagine that in just six decades the Jewish people have gone through such a renaissance: With the growth of Israel, advancements in Jewish education and overall prosperity Jewish life today is nothing less than a modern miracle.

In stark contrast to 1945, we now enjoy a sumptuous meal before the holiday together with our intact families. We dress up, don our well-pressed Kittels and enter our synagogues in calm and peace.

But we must never forget, never lose sight of the get caught in the trap so succinctly captured in this week's Torah portion: "Vayishman Yeshurun Va'Yivat. Shomanta, avisa, kasisa" – ("Yeshurun became fat and kicked. You became fat, thick and gross") from comfort and prosperity. Such is the nature of an easy and content life: It creates complacency.

On Yom Kippur we dedicate an entire section of prayer to "Eileh Ezkera" – these I will remember. We recount the troubles that have befallen us since the destruction of the Temple, ending with the heart-rending story of the "ten martyrs" who were barbarically put to death by the cruel Roman Emperor.

Ten great men – the greatest of their time – are never forgotten, and live on in immortality despite (or perhaps because of) their premature, brutal deaths.

A little over 60 years ago not ten but... six million martyrs were massacred for no other reason than their being Jewish, with no Tachrichin, no Kittels, no dignity – with nothing at all.

But we remember. And we don't only remember. We recreate. We channel all our anger, pain and loss into a revolution, doubly and triply reinforced by the fact that we now have the responsibility to fill the void left by those six million and all that they and their offspring would have accomplished.

We don't just remember; we know that regardless of the mystery of life and death, despite the historical extremes from destruction to rebirth – we are all part of one mysterious cycle.

We may never know why six million martyrs suffered such cruel deaths and millions of others endured unspeakable degradation. We will never know why their bodies were never shrouded in white.

But we always know that we – all generations – are bound in one inextricable chain, and we do recognize each other despite our different, even diametric opposite, garments, cultures, backgrounds and levels of commitment. Because beneath it all lies a unifying force that connects us all.

On Yom Kippur – today, or in 1945, or 3278 years ago – we celebrate this inherent unity.

This week we read in the Torah how Moses, 3278 years ago, just a few days before he ascended on high not to return, designated heaven and earth as eternal witnesses to his final words for the Jewish people.

Look up at the sky; look down at the earth. The same clear sky and pure earth that Moses looked at 3278 years ago. The same smoke filled sky and blood drenched earth the Jews suffered in Gunskirchen 62 years ago. The same sky and earth we gaze upon today.

The same heaven and earth heard and absorbed Moses' words over three millennia ago. And they have stood ever since bearing silent witness to G-d's promises.

Yom Kippur is upon us. And heaven and earth are our witness that we are linked today to all generations past – both a gift and a responsibility.

As the sun sets this coming Sunday evening and we put on our Kittels, we have much to cry and sing about – for ourselves, our families, generations past, future generations, from the beginning of time into eternity itself.

Carrying the Sefer Torah around the Shul

After *Kol Nidrei* the *Sefer Torah* is carried around the *Shul* (synagogue). There are various customs as to how many *Sefer Torah* scrolls are carried around. While this is done, everyone in the congregation approaches the *Sefer Torah* and kisses it. There are certain prayers printed in *Machzorim* (Festival Prayer Books) related to this practice.

A very fitting parable is described about this practice:

There was once a king who had a very close advisor who he admired and sought his counsel all the time. One day, the king appointed this advisor as his son's personal tutor and teacher. He was to teach him all kinds of teachings of philosophy and ethics as well as other pertinent subjects relating to the duties of a prince. One day, the prince became upset that he had to do so much extra studying with his tutor, that he embarrassed him publicly in front of his father the king. The king became extremely upset at his son for

causing such humiliation to his closest advisor as well as his disrespect to the king. He immediately summoned his royal guard to take his son away and to lock him up in the king's dungeon.

Many weeks passed by and the prince feeling sorry for himself, wished to have a meeting with his father to ask forgiveness. However, he knew that his father was extremely upset with him and that he wouldn't even see him to talk about the matter. The prince understood that if he would first find favor in the eyes of his tutor and be forgiven first by him, then he stood a chance that the tutor, the king's closest advisor, would himself get the king to forgive him for his misdeed.

The son carried out his plan and it wasn't long before he was back together with his father the king and again under the tutelage of the king's closest advisor.

The Sefer Torah: Hashem's Closest Advisor

The *Sefer Torah* is the King's closest advisor. We, the children of *Hashem* have to kiss the *Sefer Torah* to make up for our disrespect for *Hashem's* holy *Torah*. If at this time we express our remorse and sorrow for not appreciating the *Torah* that *Hashem*, our loving father, gave us so graciously, and we take upon ourselves to return to the path of the *Torah*, by studying it and following its commands, then surely the *Torah* itself will plead for us in front of *Hashem's Throne of Glory* to grant us favor and forgive us for everything on this *Yom Kippur* day.

Questions:

- 1) Why is Selichos shorter on Erev Yom Kippur in many communities?
- 2) What are the various customs regarding reciting *Tachanun* on *Erev Yom Kippur*?
- 3) What are the customs regarding reciting *Mizmor Le'Sodah* on *Erev Yom Kippur*?
- 4) What about reciting *Avinu Malkeinu* on *Erev Yom Kippur*? What about on *Erev Yom Kippur* that is on a Friday?
- 5) What do we add to the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Mincha* on *Erev Yom Kippur*? Why?
- 6) What verses are invoked equally for boys and for girls when blessing our children? Why are we permitted to utilize them?
- 7) About how long ago did *Kol Nidrei* become incorporated into the *Yom Kippur* liturgy?
- 8) Why do we make a point of including transgressors of Torah Law specifically on *Yom Kippur*?
- 9) Why do we perform the declaration of *Kol Nidrei* (annulment of vows) specifically before *Yom Kippur*?
- 10) What does *Kol Nidrei* symbolize according to *Kabbalah*?
- 11) List two laws regarding the manner in which we recite of *Kol Nidrei*.
- 12) What is the optimum time for reciting *Kol Nidrei*?
- 13) What is the reason for wearing a *Kittel* on *Yom Kippur*?

Answers:

- 1) We shorten the *Selichos* because *Erev Yom Kippur* is considered like a *Yom Tov*. We also shorten some of the standard text of *Selichos* since we will say *Selichos* at *Maariv*.
- 2) Sephardim recite *Tachanun* by *Selichos* as well as by *Shacharis* but not at *Mincha*. Ashkenaz and *Nusach Sefard* recite it at *Selichos* but not the rest of the day.
- 3) Sephardim recite *Mizmor Le'Sodah* on *Erev Yom Kippur*. Ashkenaz and *Nusach Sefard* do not.
- 4) Sephardim recite *Avinu Malkeinu* on *Erev Yom Kippur*. Ashkenaz and *Nusach Sefard* do not. When *erev Yom Kippur* is on Friday, everyone agrees to recite *Avinu Malkeinu* by *Shacharis*.
- 5) We add *Viduy* and *Al Cheit*. We do this because the Sages were concerned that one should at least recite *Viduy* once before *Yom Kippur* as a precaution if one would choke on his food at the meal before *Yom Kippur*.
- 6) We say the *Pesukim* (verses) used for *Birchos Kohanim* (the Priestly Blessings). We are permitted to say them because: We don't raise our hands in the manner that *Kohanim* do. It is not during *Tefilla*. We do not have intent to do this for the purpose of fulfilling the *Mitzvah* of *Birchos Kohanim*.
- 7) It goes back all the way to the 8th and 9th centuries and possibly even earlier than that.
- 8) Because the *Gemara* stresses the importance of including all Jews in the public fast even those who have strayed from Judaism. This is learned from the eleventh ingredient in the *Ketores*, which was *Chelbana*, a spice with a bad odor.
- 9) A reason for annulling our vows at *Kol Nidrei* is because any transgression related to a violation of our vows cannot be atoned through the sanctity of *Yom Kippur* alone.
- 10) It symbolizes an oath that *Hashem* made to send the Jews to exile without return.

- 11) We recite it quietly along with the *Chazzan* if we have not yet performed *Hatoras Nedarim* beforehand. The *Chazzan* recites it three times, saying it louder and louder each time.
- 12) We should preferably recite it before nightfall.
- 13) We wear it on *Yom Kippur* when we are fasting and similar to *Malachim*. Additionally it reminds us of the shrouds with which we dress the deceased, in order to remind us of death to move us to repent.