



Shaare Zion Congregation
HIGH HOLYDAY SUPPLEMENT

September 2009 - Tishrei 5770

*L'Shana Tovah
Happy New Year!!*



V'SHINANTAM - HOME RITUALS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF ROSH H'ASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR

ROSH H'ASHANAH

Rosh HaShanah as the Mahzor (High Holyday Prayerbook) tells us, is the birthday of the world - "Hayom Harat Olam." One would think that the Book of Genesis, which recalls God's creation, would be read on this holiday, but it is not. In fact, the Torah reading recited in the Synagogue recalls the birth of Isaac and the Haftarah the birth of Samuel; both stories recount how barren women gave birth - tales of hope.

Although our liturgy refers to Rosh HaShanah as the birthday of the world, there is a tradition that Rosh HaShanah is not the day the world was created. An early Midrashic source, Pesikta Rabbati, states that the world was created on the 25th of Elul, (the month preceding Rosh HaShanah). Rosh HaShanah, which falls on the first of Tishrei, is then the sixth day of Creation, the day on which humans were created. According to this Midrash, the beginning of humanity is the real beginning of Creation. This Midrash helps us gain insight and focus on the deeper meaning of Rosh HaShanah.

THE SIMPLIFIED STEPS

On Friday evening, September 18th, the first night of Rosh HaShanah, the table is set for the festival to include the following ritual items:

1. Candles and Candlesticks.
2. Kiddush cup and wine or grape juice.
3. Two round loaves of Hallah, covered with a white Hallah cover.
4. Apples and honey.

On the first night of Rosh HaShanah, we organize the rituals in the following way:

1. Light Festival candles before going to Shul.
2. Attend services at Shul at 6:45 pm.
3. Recite Kiddush after coming home.
4. Wash our hands and recite the **Berakhah**.
5. Recite **HaMotzee** over the two Hallot and dip the Hallah in honey.
6. Recite the blessing for fruit over the apple, dip it in honey and extend each other wishes for a good, healthy and sweet New Year.

On the second night of Rosh HaShanah, Saturday evening, September 19th, we also add a new fruit, that is, a fruit we have not eaten since last year. Many people use pomegranates, because the large number of seeds symbolizes our prayer for a long life, filled with many worthwhile days and years.

On the second night of Rosh HaShanah, we follow the same order as the first day and then eat the piece of new fruit after eating the apple and honey.

CANDLE LIGHTING ON ROSH H'ASHANAH

On Friday night, the first night of Rosh HaShanah, we light two candles (or more, if that is your tradition) just as we would on a regular Shabbat evening. The blessing over the candles is:

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו
להדליק נר של שבת ויום טוב

Barukh Atta Adonuy
Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-Olam
Asher Kid-shanu B'Mitzvo-tav Ve-Tzee-va-nu
Le-Had-liq Nair Shel Shabbat V'shel Yom Tov.

Notice that we use the generic word for festival (Yom Tov) in the **Berakhah** and not one of the usual names for Rosh HaShanah such as Yom HaZikaron or Yom Teru'ah.

On Saturday night, the second night of Rosh HaShanah, we wait until **after dark** to light the festival candles. This year, candles are lit after 7:43 pm on Saturday night.

The blessing for the candles on Saturday night, the second night of Rosh HaShanah, is

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצוותיו
וצונו להדליק נר
של יום טוב

On both nights of Rosh HaShanah, we add the **Sheheheyanu** blessing after lighting the candles. This blessing typically is recited when performing a Mitzvah or some significant action for the first time in a year and there is some question whether it should be recited on the second night. The debate is resolved affirmatively and it is universally accepted that the **Sheheheyanu** is recited on both nights. Some rabbis justify the second recitation by suggesting that both days of Rosh HaShanah are a single long celebration. Others suggest that when a person recites the **Berakhah** on the second night, he or she should wear a new article of clothing and the **Sheheheyanu** meets the requirement of thanking God for wearing something new. Still others justify reciting this **Berakhah** because of the new fruit we will eat.

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The text of the Berakhah is:

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם
שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

Barukh Atta Adonuy
Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-Olam
She-he-he-yanu Ve-kee-ye-manu
Ve-Higee-anu Laz-man HaZeh.

KIDDUSH

The **Kiddush** for Rosh HaShanah consists of two blessings, first the blessing over the wine and then the second blessing which attests to the sanctity of Rosh HaShanah. **Kiddush** is recited over a full cup of wine or grape juice. The normal practice is that everyone stands while **Kiddush** is being recited.

On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, we add **VaYekhulu, Genesis 2:1-4**, that introduces Kiddush every Friday night and connects our observance of Shabbat with God's having rested after completing the Six Days of Creation.

Holding the wine glass in one hand, we recite VaYekhulu and then we recite the blessing over the wine.

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם
בורא פרי הגפן
Barukh Atta Adonuy
Elo-haynu Melekh Ha-Olam
Boray P'ree Ha-Gafen

We remain standing and, still holding the wine Glass, we recite the second blessing.

The second blessing of the Kiddush is the text of the festival Kiddush modified to include the themes of Rosh HaShanah. The text of the Kiddush begins by thanking God for having chosen us (אשר בחר בנו) and for having exalted us (ורוממנו) and for having sanctified us and made us unique by giving us the Commandments, the **Mitzvot** (וקדשנו במצוותיו). The same ideas are expressed in the regular Shabbat Kiddush. On Friday night, the first night of Rosh HaShanah, we add the bracketed words and phrases that make specific reference to Shabbat.

HAND WASHING

Before eating bread and especially before eating Hallah on Shabbat and Yom Tov, Jewish law (**Halakhah**) includes a special Mitzvah and ritual for washing our hands. Washing our hands is reminiscent of the time when the Temple still stood in Jerusalem and food could only be eaten in the Temple by people who were ritually pure. Washing or actually immersing in a **Mikveh** was the last stage in achieving ritual purity from all the things that could make an individual ritually impure.

Today, without a Temple in Jerusalem, our rabbis linked our homes to the Temple and our meals to the food eaten inside the Temple precincts. Symbolically the rabbis replaced immersion in the Mikveh with a ritual handwashing.

What do we do? How do we perform the ritual washing? We start by removing all the rings from our fingers. Fill a glass or cup with water and pour the water three times over the knuckles, starting with the right hand. Some pour three times in a row over the same hand; others alternate back and forth - right, left, right, left, right, left. Then, while drying our hands, we recite the **Berakhah**,

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצוותיו
וצונו על נטילת ידים

Barukh Atta Adonuy
Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-Olam
Asher Kid-sha-nu B'Mitz-vo-tav
V'Tzee-va-nu Al N'tee-lat Ya-duy-im

Bless You, O Lord, our God
Sovereign of the Universe
Who has made us holy through His
Commandments
And commanded us concerning the elevating of our
hands.

The very Hebrew word for washing, נטילה, really means to raise, to elevate, emphasizing the idea that the act of washing our hands is spiritual, raising us up and elevating us as we prepare to eat.

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HAMOTZEE

Without even the interruption of conversation, we proceed directly from washing our hands to eating the Hallah. But before we eat the Hallah, we once again start with a **Berakhah** called **HaMotzee**.

On the High Holydays, but especially on Rosh HaShanah, it is customary to use round Hallot, rather than twisted or rectangular ones. Round Hallot are reminiscent of crowns, either the crown with which God rewards the people of Israel who are righteous or the crown symbolizing God's sovereignty over the world, which is one of the major themes of Rosh HaShanah, the theme referred to in Hebrew as **Malkhuyot**.

While **Kiddush** is being recited, the **Hallot** are covered with a white cloth, but just before reciting **HaMotzee**, we uncover the **Hallot** and while holding them together we say,

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם
המוציא לחם מן הארץ

Barukh Atta Adonuy
Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-Olam
Ha-Motzee Lehem Min Ha-Aretz

We then slice the **Hallah** and dip it in honey, thereby expressing the hope that sweetness will enter our lives and the lives of all our fellow Jews. The person who recites **HaMotzee** typically takes the first piece of bread to emphasize that there is a single uninterrupted continuum from washing our hands to eating the **Hallah**.

APPLES AND HONEY

The custom of dipping apples in honey is a very old custom, with roots that reach back perhaps a thousand years or more. The purpose, like dipping the **Hallah** in honey, is to symbolize our hopes for a sweet year.

Procedurally, we core and slice one or more apples, dip the pieces in honey and pass them around the table. Everyone takes a slice and recites the **Berakhah** over fruit,

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם
בורא פרי העץ

Barukh Atta Adonuy
Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-Olam
Bo-ray Pree Ha-Etz

Technically once we have recited **HaMotzee**, this **Berakhah** over fruit is unnecessary and redundant. However, it is considered meritorious to recite many **Berakhot** acknowledging God's sovereignty on Rosh HaShanah and therefore we recite the **Berakhah**. As soon as we have recited the **Berakhah**, we eat the apple and then say

יהי רצון
שתחדש עלינו
שנה טובה ומחוקה

Y'hee Ratzon
Shet-hadesh Alay-nu
Shanah Tovah u-M'too-kah

May it be God's will to renew us for a year that is good and sweet.

The custom of dipping both **Hallah** and apples in honey carries over on Rosh HaShanah to the general custom of eating sweet foods and not eating sour or salty foods. Honey cake, called **Lekakh** in Hebrew and Yiddish, is traditionally eaten, not only because it is sweet, but because the word **Lekakh** in Hebrew also means "a portion." Symbolically, by serving honey cake we hope that we will be blessed with a good portion in the coming year.

Another custom on Rosh HaShanah is to eat long noodles (**Lockshin** in Yiddish) whether in soup or in a kugel and not to eat foods that are sliced and diced and chopped into little pieces. Long noodles symbolize our hope that our lives will be extended and that our days and years will be long.

TASHLIKH

During the afternoon of the first day of Rosh HaShanah, it is customary to go to a river or lake (or any other flowing body of water) and symbolically cast away our sins by throwing bread crumbs into the water, a tradition known as **Tashlikh**.

The **Tashlikh** service involves reciting a selection of biblical verses before throwing our sins symbolically into the flowing water. Among the verses recited is one from the prophet, Micah, who refers to God's "casting Israel's sins into the depths of the seas." The Hebrew word for "casting" is **Tashlikh**, the word that gives its name to the ceremony.

Cote St. Luc, Hampstead, Westmount, NDG and Snowdon are too far from the St. Lawrence and the Back River for it to be practical to do **Tashlikh** at the river. Instead, for generations, Montrealers have gathered at various neighbourhood parks where their sins in the form of bread crumbs are washed away at various fountains. While no substitute for the banks of a river or

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stream, the parks in Cote St. Luc and Hampstead have become a gathering place for members of all our different synagogues to meet and wish each other Shanah Tovah, a good New Year.

This year, because the first day of Rosh HaShanah occurs on Shabbat, **Tashlikh** is deferred to the second day of Rosh HaShanah, that is, to Sunday afternoon.

PRAYERS OF THE HIGH HOLYDAY PRAYER BOOK

Anyone who has ever attended services on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur knows from first-hand experience that High Holyday services are long, even by comparison with a regular Shabbat service that itself can last three and a half hours or more. Part of the length is directly attributable to the text of the service. Plainly put, there is just more Hebrew text, longer Hebrew prayers to recite. But part of the length is also attributable to the additional ritual of Shofar blowing and to the rich, extensive cantorial and choral repertoire that has been created over the past 150 years or more, exclusively for the High Holyday liturgy.

This year, because the first day of Rosh HaShanah coincides with Shabbat, not only do we omit such petitionary prayers like **Avinu Malkenu**, but we also do not blow the Shofar on the first day of Rosh HaShanah either.

One of the ways to gain an appreciation for the lengthy service is to know what is happening and why. Even though there are extensive additions and accretions to the Shaharit service, I will limit my notes to the structure and contents of the Musaf service for Rosh HaShanah and to the Kol Nidre Service, since those are the services when most of us are in attendance.

MUSAF SERVICES FOR ROSH HASHANAH

The word Musaf means additional. It is the service that substitutes for the additional sacrifices that were offered in the Jerusalem Temple on Shabbat and festivals. When the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE and sacrifices were suspended, an Amidah prayer was introduced into the prayer service to substitute for the sacrifices. Central to this Amidah was a verbal recitation of the appropriate sacrifice which had been offered in the Temple on that particular Shabbat or festival.

On Shabbat and festivals other than Rosh HaShanah, the Musaf Amidah has seven blessings. On Rosh HaShanah, the Musaf Amidah has nine blessings rather than just seven. The first two blessings and the last three blessings of the Musaf Amidah for Rosh HaShanah, show little variation from the weekday and Shabbat Amidah. The third and fourth blessing are however distinctive.

Kedusha

The third blessing of the **Amidah** is called **Kedusha**. During the year, when we recite the **Amidah** silently, the **Kedusha** consists of just three short lines that declare God's glory and holiness

You are holy.

Your name is holy.

And each day, holy beings praise You.

Bless you, Adonuy, the holy God.

On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, this third blessing is expanded even during the recitation of the silent **Amidah** with three paragraphs that begin with the word **ובכן (U-vekhen)** which means "therefore." The mediaeval Hebrew poet, **Yehuda HaLevi**, explained that the first **Uvekhen** passage was a prayer for all humanity, asking that all humanity acknowledge God's sovereignty and form a single unit that will fulfill God's will with a perfect heart. The second passage is a prayer for Israel, asking that God restore Israel's glory and give the Jewish people reason not to abandon hope in their national restoration. The final paragraph is a prayer for the righteous, noting that if all humanity acknowledge God's sovereignty and Israel is restored to its former glory, then the righteous will rejoice.

During the repetition of the **Amidah** on Rosh HaShanah, the **Kedusha** is even further expanded. In addition to chanting the biblical verses **Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh** (Isaiah 6:3) and **Barukh Kevod Adonuy Mimkomo** (Ezekiel 3:12), which are the core of the **Kedusha** during the Cantor's repetition of the **Amidah** on both weekdays and Shabbatot, the **Kedusha** on Rosh HaShanah is now further expanded to include not only the three **Uvekhen** passages recited in the silent **Amidah**, but the following five additional sections, unique to Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur:

1. **Yimlokh Adonuy L'Olam** - A declaration of God's Sovereignty from the Book of Psalms.

2. **U'netaneh Tokef** - A powerful prayer, written approximately 1,000 years ago, that describes God's heavenly court where God sits in judgement of all Creation on Rosh HaShanah. Even the angels quake as they pass before God, like soldiers one by one, like sheep counted individually by the shepherd. So God watches as each of us passes by; God counts and considers each living soul, inscribing a verdict for each of us.

3. **B'Rosh HaShanah** - The chorus of this paragraph is well known and we typically chant with the cantor and choir "On Rosh HaShanah it will be written and on Yom Kippur it will be sealed". The Cantor then solemnly intones our potential fate for the coming year "Who will live and who will die? Who will rest and who will be harried? Who will be humbled and brought low and who will be honoured and exalted?"

Judaism, however, is neither fatalistic nor deterministic. Despite our ultimate mortality, our day-to-day fate is in our own hands and despite the judgement that we might deserve on Rosh HaShanah,

it remains in our power to change our fate and avert any divine decree. We therefore remind ourselves, even more than God, that **Prayer, Penitence and Charity can avert the punishment** we might deserve.

4. This assertion that our deeds can change our fate leads directly into the **Kedusha**, the typical text used during the Shabbat Musaf service to declare the sanctity of God's name;

*Holy! Holy! Holy! The Lord of Hosts,
His Glory fills the world.*

The **Kedusha** for Rosh HaShanah emphasizes that God is the living, eternal Sovereign of the universe, whose age is immeasurable, whose holiness and glory are inscrutable, yet who gives us the authority to utter praises to His name.

5. **V'Khol Ma'aminim** is an alphabetic acrostic or **Piyyut** dating from the fifth century and attributed to one of the early religious poets of the land of Israel named Yannai.

Here again the lilting melody encourages congregational singing. The key words, **VeKhol Ma'aminin** mean "Everyone believes" and introduce lines that again emphasize God's eternity and God's role as Judge of all Creation.

*God examines our hidden thoughts.
God redeems us from death.
God is good to all.
God is patient.
God responds to prayer.
God is the righteous judge.*

The Middle Blessings of the Amidah

The second unique aspect of the Musaf Amidah for Rosh HaShanah is that it has nine blessings rather than seven. The middle three blessings are built around three themes or concepts that are specific for Rosh HaShanah; these concepts are called **Malkhuyot**, **Zikhronot** and **Shofarot**. **Malkhuyot** emphasizes the theme of God's universal sovereignty and it is the organizing principle for the fourth blessing. **Zikhronot** is the theme of the fifth blessing of the Amidah and develops the idea that God remembers, with a particular emphasis on God remembering the covenant agreements He established with Noah, with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. **Shofarot** is the theme of the sixth blessing and emphasizes the symbolism of the Shofar: first as a mnemonic to God, reminding Him that Abraham was prepared to sacrifice Isaac; second, as a reminder of the covenant established at Mt. Sinai amid thunder and lightning and the sound of the Shofar; and finally, as a symbol of the Shofar reserved for the end of days, with which God will call all the scattered people of Israel to bring us back to the land of Israel in safety, peace and security.

Each of those three central blessings follows an identical structural organization. Each blessing begins with an opening prayer that introduces the theme. For **Malkhuyot** (God's sovereignty) the opening prayer is **Alenu**, so familiar to us as the closing or penultimate hymn of every religious service. Of

course **Alenu** begins by emphasizing our obligations as Jews to praise God, who is Lord of the Universe, to bow and prostrate ourselves לפני מלך מלכי המלכים, before the King who is King of kings. The second paragraph of **Alenu** reflects a far more universal view of God's sovereignty, expressing the hope that God will one day remove all idolatry and be universally recognized as the one and only Sovereign, the single sole King over the entire world.

The opening prayer for each of these three middle blessings is then followed by ten biblical verses that demonstrate the theme of the blessing. The verses are arranged into three tracts each containing three verses, followed by a single verse from the Torah. The first three verses are selected from the Torah; the next three come from the Psalms (the third division of the Hebrew Bible called Writings) and the last three verses are taken from the Prophets.

After each set of ten verses is read, the blessing ends with a paragraph that recapitulates the central theme and then concludes with a summary formula. The fourth blessing serves a double function because in addition to presenting the theme of God's sovereignty, it also fulfills the mandate of a festival Musaf Amidah to recite the biblical verses that describe the additional sacrifice that was unique for Rosh HaShanah.

This complex structure of the Amidah is very ancient. The Mishnah, the first official codex of authoritative oral tradition and law that was completed shortly after the year 200 CE, already records the unique structure of the Musaf Amidah. The **Alenu** prayer first appears in the Talmud and is attributed to Rav, a third century Babylonian rabbi and scholar. The original function of **Alenu** was simply to introduce the **Malkhuyot**, but medieval sensibilities saw the power of its message, of our fervent belief that one day all of humanity will recognize God as the only ruler and sovereign of the universe.

After each blessing is concluded, the Shofar is blasted. This year, since the first day of Rosh HaShanah coincides with Shabbat, we will of course not blow the Shofar after each of these three blessings. However, on Sunday, the second day of Rosh HaShanah, we will hear the ten blasts of the Shofar after each blessing. These ten blasts follow the pattern,

**Tekiah Shevarim Teru'ah Tekiah
Tekiah Shevarim Tekiah
Tekiah Teru'ah Tekiah.**

Tekiah is a long clear blast of the Shofar. **Shevarim** is a broken blast of three short notes. **Teru'ah** is an undulating blast of nine staccato notes. Together with the thirty blasts of the Shofar sounded right before we replace the Torah in the Ark and forty concluding blasts right before Ein Kelohaynu, the thirty blasts of the Shofar heard during the repetition of the Amidah add up to 100 blasts of the Shofar. This extended tour de force is intended to stir our hearts and emotions and direct our minds and actions to change and repentance while simultaneously moving God from applying His attribute of Justice strictly, by tempering His attribute of Justice with His attribute of Mercy.

YOM KIPPUR

Even more than Rosh HaShanah, the focus of Yom Kippur is in the synagogue. Nonetheless, there are a number of customs that characterize the day before Yom Kippur that are done at home. These customs and rituals include:

1. Kapparat
2. Seudat Mafseket
3. The five abstinences

It is important to remember that Yom Kippur is a holy day and a serious day, a day of reflection and self-examination, but it is not a sad day. Nonetheless, by comparison, the day before Yom Kippur has an almost festive air because of our confidence in God's mercy.

KAPPAROT

The word **Kapparah** (plural, Kapparat) means a scapegoat, in the sense of a substitute who will bear the punishment which we deserve and who will thereby atone for our sins. The morning before Yom Kippur, it was customary to take a chicken and swing the chicken around one's head and the heads of members of the family as a means or symbol of expiating sins. Each time the chicken was swung around the head (feathers flying, squawking very loudly), the head of the family would say, "This is my atonement, this is my scapegoat; let this chicken die and let me and my family enter into a year of goodness and long life." The chicken was then taken to the **Shoychet**, slaughtered, and given as a gift to the poor.

This custom of **Kapparat (Schloggin Kappores** in Yiddish) goes back to the Middle Ages, but runs counter to our sensitivities towards cruelty to animals, let alone being counter-intuitive to how we think as moderns. No longer do most of us believe that we can transfer our sins and our guilt to a chicken or a goat and in that manner be relieved of any culpability for what we have done wrong.

Nonetheless, putting our words into some sort of ritualized behaviour is very powerful and if we seek atonement and expiation, let alone forgiveness from God and reconciliation with God, **Kapparat** has some great underlying potential. Today, it is more common to wrap coins (often multiples of 18, Chai) in a scarf or handkerchief and then swing the coins over our heads. The money is pledged to **Tzedakah**, the act of giving **Tzedakah** being just one of the ways to avert God's penchant for punishing sinners. While it is ideal to **Shlogg Kappores** in the morning, in our house we usually do it just before eating our dinner or **Se'udat Mafseket**.

SE'UDAT MAFSEKET

The final meal before the fast is called **Se'udat Mafseket**. It should be both festive and satisfying. The meal appears to have all the trappings of a festival meal - white table cloth, **Hallah**, - but with one difference. It is not yet **Yom Tov**. Therefore we do not recite **Kiddush** nor do we light the festival candles before we eat. Rather the order of the meal is reversed by comparison to Shabbat or Rosh HaShanah.

1. Wash our hands and recite the **Berakhah**.
2. Recite **HaMotzee** over the **Hallah** and dip it into honey.
3. Eat and recite the weekday **Birkat HaMazon**
4. Light a Yahrzeit candle.
5. Light candles for Yom Kippur.
6. Go to shul for Kol Nidrei

The meal ends while it is still day, since not only is it a **Mitzvah** to start a festival a little earlier than sunset, but also because **Kol Nidrei**, the annulment of vows and promises, is technically a legal procedure, which, according to Jewish law, must begin before sunset.

CANDLE LIGHTING

Candle lighting takes place after dinner, just before leaving for shul. Yahrzeit candles are lit before the Yom Tov candles because once the Yom Tov candles are lit, Yom Kippur has begun and we are no longer permitted to light a fire or even transfer a flame. There is no **Berakhah** for lighting a Yahrzeit candle, although many people recite a private, personal, and spontaneous prayer. Some people light one Yahrzeit candle for all the members of the family; others light a separate candle for each deceased member. The lighting of the Yahrzeit candle symbolizes the presence of the souls of the deceased in our homes, especially at those festivals when we memorialize them by reciting the **Yizkor** prayer.

The **Yom Tov** candles are lit next and after they are lit, we recite the **Berakhah**,

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצוותיו
וצונו להדליק נר של יום הכפורים

Barukh Atta Adonuy
Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-Olam
Asher Kid-shanu B'Mitz-vo-tav
V'Tzee-vanu, LeHadliq Nair Shel
Yom HaKippurim

This **Berakhah** is followed by the **Sheheheyanu Berakhah** (see page 3 for the text)

THE FIVE ABSTINENCES

Once we have lit the **Yom Tov** candles, Yom Kippur has begun and we are no longer permitted to eat or drink. Indeed on Yom Kippur, there are five things we abstain from:

1. Eating and drinking.
2. Washing.
3. Using oils and perfumes that soften the skin.
4. Wearing leather.
5. Engaging in sexual relations.

The restriction on eating and drinking is absolute. From the lighting of the **Yom Tov** candles until the Shofar is blown more than twenty-five hours later to signal the end of the fast, neither food nor liquid, not even coffee or water or a candy or chewing gum, pass our lips. People who are especially careful do not even brush their teeth until the fast is over.

Fasting is obligatory for boys over the age of thirteen and for girls over the age of twelve (the ages when boys and girls respectively assume personal responsibility for fulfilling the **Mitzvot**). **The exception to the rule of fasting** is that those who are sick and under doctor's orders to eat, must eat. Certainly this includes all diabetics, women who are pregnant, the elderly for whom fasting could have serious repercussions and even those who are sick, but whose doctors say they are well enough to fast. Nonetheless, the amount of food eaten should be limited to just the amount that it takes to satisfy the hunger or to meet the diabetics' required intake of food to prevent going into diabetic shock. People who take prescribed medicines must take their pills with water as they normally do. When in doubt, consult your physician.

Bathing for pleasure is not permitted on Yom Kippur. Most rabbis would agree that this restriction includes our daily shower. Showering before Yom Kippur should be adequate for most of us to remain socially acceptable for the next twenty-five hours or so. Washing our hands and face for hygienic purposes is permitted.

Leather shoes were a sign of comfort in antiquity and already two thousand years ago, the rabbis included wearing leather shoes among the restrictions and abstinences for Yom Kippur. Over the centuries, some authorities have argued that the restriction was limited only to leather shoes, to provide yet one more way for us to be physically uncomfortable on Yom Kippur. Other authorities have argued that the restriction applies to all leather products, including belts, pocket books, and other leather accessories, because on Yom Kippur, when all Creation stands in judgement before God, we should not be so arrogant as to use products that require us to slaughter an animal. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, who lived in Cracow in the sixteenth century, noted that while the use of leather on a daily basis is perhaps a necessity, on Yom Kippur we should strive to reach a higher level of concern for God's living creatures and not use leather at all. One day I hope to see members of Shaare Zion dressed in

tuxedos and tennis shoes on Kol Nidre. Who knows? It may even become a fashion statement.

Why this emphasis on abstinence from food and beverage, from bathing and wearing leather shoes? Perhaps it begins with the biblical commandment that on Yom Kippur we mortify the body. Some argue that fasting in some ways purges the body. But others argue that on Yom Kippur, we strive to get so close to God that we forget about our bodies and concentrate exclusively on our souls and the spiritual elements of our lives.

KOL NIDRE

Kol Nidre is perhaps the best known prayer of the entire High Holyday season. Technically **Kol Nidre** is not a prayer in that Jewish prayer is directed to God and functions either to praise God, to thank God or to petition God for something. Instead **Kol Nidre** is a legal formula, taken from the judicial and legal system of ancient Judaism and not from its religious and spiritual dimension.

Nonetheless, **Kol Nidre** remains the most powerful "prayer" of the High Holyday liturgy. People who never come to synagogue crowd into the building. Doors are flung open to allow those who are unable to get a seat to hear **Kol Nidre**. Certainly its plaintive chant, expressed in a minor key, recited softly at first and rising to a powerful crescendo during the third repetition, combined with a wide-open Ark, a Cantor dressed in white like the High Priest in the ancient Temple and a synagogue filled to capacity with all the men and even some women wearing Tallitot, creates a dramatic moment quite unlike any other during the year.

Kol Nidre is a legal formula to cancel vows and promises. The Torah is very insistent that pledges and promises that we make must be fulfilled

מוצא שפתיה תשמר ועשית

Motza S'fatekha Tishmor V'Aseeta

"That which you have said you must make certain to fulfil just as you have vowed to the Lord, you God" (**Deuteronomy 23:24**). So scrupulous is our tradition about honouring our word that we are held responsible for oaths and vows, pledges and promises, that we made without thinking or about which we have even forgotten.

There remain, however, promises and vows that we are unable to fulfill. If the pledge was to a person, only that individual can release us from our obligation. If the promise was made to God (especially if it was made as an oath invoking God's name) the rabbis can offer us an absolution from the vow, if we ask for release from its obligations three times in the presence of a panel of three judges, a Beth Din.

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Effectively this is the central idea of **Kol Nidre**. The Hazzan, flanked by two people holding Torah scrolls, form a Beth Din of three judges. Then the Hazzan, acting as our collective voice, asks for an absolution of all our vows, promises, oaths, pledges, consecrations and prohibitions. The very terms used, **Nidray**, **Esaray**, **Sh'voo-ay** and so on are themselves based on the language of the rabbis in the Mishnah. The rabbis realized that not only were there common words for oaths and promises, but there are also substitute terms and euphemisms like **Konam** and **Konas** that have the same force as a vow or an oath. Thus the **Kol Nidre** opens by listing the various terms used for vows and pledges, as well as some of the better known euphemisms for vows and the general catch-all phrase, **Kinoo-yay**, a word that simply means "euphemisms" for vows.

The formula is recited in Aramaic, the **lingua franca** of the Jewish world from perhaps 550 BCE until 1000 CE, when it was replaced by Arabic in the East and European vernaculars in the West. The author of this version of annulling vows is unknown, although some scholars attribute it to the leading scholar of Babylonian Jewry in the ninth century, Rav Amram Gaon, who was the first scholar to organize the prayers in the Siddur. After listing the various terms used for oaths and promises, the text of **Kol Nidre** says that we regret having made any such oaths and promises and we ask to be released from their obligations. The vows are declared null and void, as if they never existed. The text ends dramatically "Our vows are not vows. Our oaths are not oaths. What we declared prohibited is not prohibited."

Context is very important with **Kol Nidre**. The only oaths from which we are released are those that we imposed upon ourselves, not those that have an affect on other people or that other people imposed on us. Thus if we imposed an oath on ourselves to visit the sick every day for a month or not to eat dessert for three months or to attend Minyan every Tuesday, **Kol Nidre** is effective in releasing us from such an oath. But if we promised a particular individual to visit them daily in the hospital or if we pledged a gift to the synagogue or any charitable foundation, **Kol Nidre** does not absolve us from such past pledges nor does it absolve us from any future ones. And again if we owe an individual money that we borrowed or that we promised to lend them, **Kol Nidre** does not grant us absolution.

Considering the limited cohort of vows and promises **Kol Nidre** can effectively annul, it remains amazing how powerful a pull it has on Jews, young and old, religious or not religious. Clearly the solemnity of the moment, ushering in a great fast that asks us to reflect upon our past and committing us to take seriously our obligations as Jews both to God, community, and family, continues to draw us back to synagogue year after year. Perhaps

with the additional understanding that rather than providing us with a general amnesty and absolution from all our commitments to God and humanity, **Kol Nidre** instead reminds us that what we say obligates us to do and fulfill our promises, we may now take a harder look at our religious obligations to which we commit ourselves each Yom Kippur and try even harder to fulfill our vows and promises.

HAFTARAH FOR YOM KIPPUR AFTERNOON

The Haftarah for Yom Kippur afternoon is the entire book of Jonah. Jonah is unlike any other biblical prophet in several respects. First, he does not leave behind a collection of prophecies. Like Moses and Jeremiah, he argues with God, but unlike them, he not only refuses to accept his mission; he also runs away from it. He refuses to be the instrument of God's salvation, yet proclaims: "**Deliverance is the Lord's!**" (2:10). Ultimately, when compelled to prophesy, Jonah prophesies only to non-Jews, the people of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria and then pronounces only five Hebrew words to those to whom he is sent (3:4). "**In just forty days, Nineveh shall be over thrown.**" And in contrast to the other prophets, he experiences immediate success; his warning calls forth an instant response by the people of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh repent and disaster is averted. This, however, leaves Jonah with a sense of distress, not elation, yet another distinction from other Israelite prophets.

The story of Jonah, which purports to be historic, was accepted as such throughout the Middle Ages. Even Ibn Ezra maintains its authenticity, explaining that Jonah's being swallowed by a "huge fish" took place in a dream. For him, as for the Sages before him, the Jonah of this story is in fact **Jonah the son of Amittai (see Jonah 1:1 and 2 Kings 14:25)**, who prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel (787-748 BCE). But many modern scholars maintain that the story could not have been written during that time. They point to its author's familiarity with passages in later books of the Bible, including the Book of Jeremiah. This prophet lived at the end of the seventh century BCE, more than a hundred years after Jeroboam son of Joash. They also note the strong influence of Aramaic on the language of the story and the use of late Hebrew terms and grammatical constructions, both of which were current during the Second Temple period.

Scholars call attention to apparent Persian influence in two of the practices cited: A decree is issued in the name of "the king and his nobles" (3:7), and beasts as well as human beings are covered with sackcloth as a way of appealing to God (3:8). The author of Jonah was no doubt familiar with these practices. In addition, Nineveh is written about in the past tense, and it was in fact only destroyed in 612 BCE. All this

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makes it quite likely that the story of Jonah was written during the Persian period (538-333 BCE), a time when theological issues were major topics of discussion.

The story of Jonah is much more complex than it appears on first reading. It is by no means a folk tale designed simply to entertain. Nor is it satire intended to poke fun at the prophet. Nevertheless, it does contain elements of irony: Jonah acknowledges that he worships “the God of Heaven, who made both sea and land” (1:9) yet he seeks to escape from God by sea. He criticizes idol worshippers as forsaking “their own welfare” (2:9), but it is these worshippers who in fact first turn to the Lord in the time of crisis (1:14-16;3:8ff) and Jonah does not. Still, Jonah is depicted as a man of principle, prepared to die rather than see the wicked people of Nineveh go unpunished. That is why God, who refuses to let him escape his mission, ultimately takes the trouble to explain His reason to Jonah, thereby acknowledging Jonah’s integrity.

The story is divided into two parallel sections of two chapters each. In chapters one and three, Jonah interacts with the pagan world. In chapters two and four, he engages in a conversation with God. It should be noted that the psalm in chapter 2 was most likely inserted into the narrative of chapters 1 and 3 after that narrative was completed, since it contains elements that are at variance with it. The first chapter, for example, depicts Jonah as depressed and unwilling (or perhaps unable) to pray (note the repetition of *va-yeired*, *va-yeired*, and *yarad* in verses 3 and 6, and the word play on them in verse 5, *va-yeradam*, “he went down and he fell into a stupor”). In the psalm, he is pictured as euphoric, thanking God for having rescued him “from the pit” (2:7). The dissonance, however, actually carries the story further, explaining why God addresses Jonah a second time and why this time Jonah listens.

Word repetitions carry subliminal messages. The word meaning “huge” or “great” (*gadol*), for example, appears in the text 14 times. The storm at sea is “great” (1:4,12); the sailors “fear a great fear” (1:10,16); the fish is “great”(2:1). This builds to a climax (3:2, 3:3, 4:11) in which Nineveh is described as “great in the sight of God” (*g’dolah leilohim*). The characterization of the city as “great” three times suggests that it exceeds everything else in size. Compare, for example, the threefold repetition of the word for “holy” that describes God in Isaiah (*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*) (6:3). The widespread use of rhetorical devices such as metaphors and puns (see, for example, *va-yakei* in 2:11 and *kikayon* in 4:6), as well as vivid language, makes us realize that we do not have ordinary prose before us.

The story contains a variety of messages, including the fact that God controls all of the forces of nature and that it is impossible to resist His call. Classically, Jewish and Christian interpretations have differed as to the story’s central teaching. Jewish commentators have highlighted the power of repentance, manifest in God’s forgiveness of even the wicked of Nineveh who seek to atone. Christians have seen it as a renunciation of “narrow Jewish parochialism, symbolized by Jonah’s unwillingness to help the gentiles turn to God”. (In the name “Jonah” itself - which means “dove” - they see an allusion to the Jewish people, based on a midrashic interpretation of verse 2:14 from the Song of Songs.)

Both interpretations find support in the text, though they are based only on partial readings at best. Jonah does not rail against the gentiles, but only against the evildoers among them. In fact, the pagan sailors in Chapter 1 are described in very sympathetic terms. As for the power of repentance, though it certainly is a major theme in the story, it is not the central one. If it were, the book should have ended with the third chapter.

The central teaching can be found in chapter four, the climax of the story. The second verse explains why Jonah had fled from God, why he had refused to carry out his commission to go to Nineveh: “For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment.” (This verse is also found in Joel 2:13. It is not clear which author borrowed from the other, or whether both drew on a earlier source.) Such words describing God appear in other biblical contexts as well (see, for example, Psalms 103:8, 145:8, and 2 Chron 30:9); the classic formulation, however, is found in Exodus 34:6-7: “**The Lord! the Lord! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and truth, 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.**” Compare the end of this statement to the one in Jonah: Here, God renounces punishment! Jonah cannot make peace with the fact that the wicked could escape punishment. He refuses to be party to the perceived injustice of God’s remission of well-deserved punishment. (And here we have an example of how an early biblical teaching can be modified in later times. In the Torah there is no evidence that repentance [*t’shuvah*] can lead to the remission of punishment).

God does not respond with an intellectual argument. He has to make Jonah realize that he, too, requires God’s grace, undeserved though that may be. By introducing the gourd (*kikayon*) and the worm that destroys it within a day (4:6-7), God makes Jonah feel the transitory nature of all life and rouses his sense of pity for all living creatures. The story ends with a question, one that is addressed not only to Jonah, but also to the reader: “Is the demand for strict justice to override compassion?” It suggests that though repentance is important, ultimately it is God’s concern for all creatures that maintains them in life.

(The Summary of the Haftarah is taken from **Etz Hayyim: Torah and Commentary**. Rabbinical Assembly and USCJ. New York 2001.)

BLESSINGS FOR CANDLE LIGHTING - *FOR ALL OCCASIONS*

- Blessing # 1:** Barukh Atta Ado-nuy, Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-olam, Asher Kid-sha-nu
B'mitz-vo-tav, Ve-Tzee-va-nu, Lehad-liq Nair Shel Shabbat.
- Blessing # 2:** Barukh Atta Ado-nuy, Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-olam, Asher Kid-sha-nu
B'mitz-vo-tav, Ve-Tzee-va-nu, Lehad-liq Nair Shel Shabbat Ve-Shel Yom Tov.
- Blessing # 3:** Barukh Atta Ado-nuy, Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-olam, Asher Kid-sha-nu
B'mitz-vo-tav, Ve-Tzee-va-nu, Lehad-liq Nair Shel Yom Tov.
- Blessing # 4:** Barukh Atta Ado-nuy, Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-olam, Asher Kid-sha-nu,
B'mitz-vo-tav, Ve-Tzee-va-nu, Lehad-liq Nair Shel Yom HaKippurim.
- Blessing # 5:** Barukh Atta Ado-nuy, Elo-hay-nu Melekh Ha-olam, She-he-he-yanu,
Ve-kee-ye--manu, V'hi-gee-anu, Laz-man Ha-zeh.

CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES FOR SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

Friday, September 11	Parshiyot Nitzavim-Vayelech	6:57 pm	Recite blessing # 1
Friday, September 18	Erev Rosh HaShanah	6:43 pm	Recite blessings # 2 and 5
Saturday, September 19	Second Day Rosh HaShanah	7:43 pm*	Recite blessings # 3 and 5
Friday, September 25	Parshat Haazinu	6:29 pm	Recite blessing # 1
Sunday, September 27	Erev Yom Kippur	6:25 pm	Recite blessings # 4 and 5
Friday, October 2	Erev Sukkot	6:16 pm	Recite blessings # 2 and 4
Saturday, October 3	Second Day Sukkot	7:16 pm*	Recite blessings # 3 and 4
Friday, October 9	Shemini Atzeret	6:03 pm	Recite blessings # 2 and 4
Saturday, October 10	Simhat Torah	7:03 pm*	Recite blessings # 3 and 4
Friday, October 16	Parshat Beresheet	5:51 pm	Recite blessing # 1

* CANDLES SHOULD **NOT** BE LIT **BEFORE** TIME INDICATED.

* CANDLES **SHOULD** BE LIT FROM A PRE-EXISTING FLAME.